



DEA WEHRLI

Project Manager
E[co]work

When Dea and her colleagues at the ETH Zurich tried to be a zero waste office, they realized that it is far too complicated. They decided to do something about it themselves and a while later they co-founded and set up a Zero Waste store: *Chez Mamie Zurich*. So you can believe Dea when she says, "Let's not just talk but take action!"

Dea does not seem put off by trying something new anyway: after studying Environmental Science at the ETH Zurich she later won a Mercator Fellowship - a 12 month programme to explore foreign policy and international cooperation - and she chose to spend several months each at ISWA in Vienna, UNEP in Osaka and SOFIES in Mumbai, the international sustainability consulting firm. It was during this fellowship that Dea saw first hand the extreme hazardous and toxic methods used in electronic waste (e-waste) recycling.

According to the Global E-Waste Monitor 2017, co-authored by ISWA, India generates about 2 million tonnes (MT) of e-waste annually. Approximately 95 per cent of that e-waste in India is processed by small enterprises. Working with very little infrastructure or oversight the practices can be rudimentary, polluting and with poor extraction rates.

Together with Deepali and Ibrahim from Sofies, as well as Michael from Empa, the Swiss Federal Research Institution on Material Science and Technology, Dea recognized the opportunity to bring change to the informal e-waste sector through a self-sustaining business approach. The innovative concept is similar to a co-working space for office workers, but providing proper tools, training and equipment needed to disassemble e-waste instead of desk space and cappuccinos. The cleverly named E[co]work project aims offer space for work, storage and repairs on a pay-per use basis. The service also provides business support to micro-entrepreneurs as well as training in health and safety.

Dea adds that "Micro-entrepreneurs have much experience and are very skilled, but they are often marginalized by the 'formal' stakeholders. With E[co]work we want to connect both sides to fulfill tax and regulations requirements and to enable the micro-entrepreneurs to remain business owners while at the same time reduce unsound and polluting work practices."

Last year, E[co]work won the community prize "Coeur de publique" in the "Together we are better" competition organised by the SWISS Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Secretariat for Economic Affairs and Dea and her team are now rolling out a demonstration pilot project in Delhi, India.

If all goes well, E[co]work could be a worldwide replicable model of an innovative and affordable co-working space for micro-entrepreneurs in the e-waste recycling sector. Beyond this, however, is the potential to bring skilled, well-established informal e-waste dismantlers long needed social and economic benefits: a solution they needed, that didn't exist yet.