

LoopLife project – Olav Soldal

Case organisation: [Closing the loop](#)

Headquarters: Amsterdam, Netherlands

Started in: 2015

Visited on: 23.11.2018

Closing the loop is a company that aims to alleviate the negative impacts of electronic waste in developing countries by collecting scrap phones in Africa and shipping them back to Belgium for proper recycling. In that way around 95% of valuable metals like gold and copper can be recovered. As an example, the company states that around 600 recovered phones can produce one gold wedding ring. Further, the harmful substances in the electronics are not released into the environment, opposed to the current practices in African countries, which lead to serious human health problems and environmental damage. The company, as suggested by their name, is implementing circularity on the phone production chain at the last stage of the phone's life cycle. They help to realise sustainable development goals by creating labor in African countries, reducing environmental harm and contributing to sustainable production by producing secondary materials. Ethically they have a great mission, and they are taking on the responsibility that many corporations don't live up to yet. As such, Closing the loop provides a service for society by collecting, sorting and recovering vital natural resources and returning them back into the loop.

However, one critique could be that this is at the lower spectrum of the waste hierarchy and only targets the most valuable materials in the phone such as rare earth minerals. Several other valuable materials, such as metal and plastic are often lost in the recovery process. Further, one could argue that this responsibility ought to lie with the companies extracting, manufacturing and selling these products in the first place. Another issue is the short-mindedness within the phone industry in general, where phones are often produced for single-use and are not designed for reassembly. This critique might not be justified at Closing the loop, as the phones they handle are mostly secondary phones, resold in poor African countries many years after they went out of production. As such, repair options are few and reserve parts don't really exist anymore. A final critique that could be directed at the company is that their business operations are somewhat inefficient and indirectly contributes to increased emissions, by shipping materials such a long distance, while also taking these valuable materials out of the countries that could greatly need the added revenue they generate.

Winner of Circular award 2018 (<https://www.circulairondernemen.nl/library/closing-the-loop-wins-circular-award-2018>)

