

Photo report "Bwala Five Five" - scavenging to survive

Olivier Ervyn

Olivier Ervyn is a Belgian documentary photographer who has dedicated his latest work to West Africa. The photos of the "Bwala Five Five" tip are part of a larger project focused on people at work and the risks they will take to scrape a meagre living. At the same time, he is preparing one project on African churches in Europe and another on the new forms of poverty in developed economies.





In 2012, 49 million tonnes of electrical and electronic waste were dumped around the world – about 20 kg for each person on the planet. These figures come from a report by the "Solving the e-waste problem" consortium of manufacturers, NGOs and UN agencies. The same study predicts that by 2017, e-waste will increase by one-third. It would be naive to think that these tens of millions of PCs, tablets and smartphones will be recycled in the countries where they were bought. The most worn-out will likely end up in landfill in Third World countries. Ghana has made a specialty of this kind of activity and has many other sites apart from Agbogbloshie, the rubbish tip made famous by the pictures of teenagers setting fire to it so as to recover the metals from electronic goods. "Bwala Five Five" is the code name chosen by the fifteen-odd women and children who gather at dawn on at the municipal landfill in Koforidua, a city of 130 000 inhabitants, waiting for the first dustcarts to roll in, hoping they will dump enough hard plastic objects and cans to resell. Plastic fetches 0.20 euros per kg, base metal only 0.08 euros. ●

