

HOW TRACEABILITY, STANDARDS AND REGULATION BUILD TRUST IN PLASTICS RECOVERY

Plastics recovery systems need more than collection and recycling capacity. They also need trust. Buyers, regulators, producers, investors and communities need to know where recovered material came from, who handled it, what quality it meets, and whether claims about recovery, recycling or recycled content can be checked.

The Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution (SMEP) Programme experience shows that traceability, standards and regulatory alignment can help build this confidence. Traceability can provide evidence about material flows and recovery claims, standards can establish shared expectations for quality and consistency, and regulation can create the incentives and accountability needed for these systems to work at scale (SMEP 2024, World Bank 2025).

The key question is not how to collect more data. It is how to use the right data to make plastics recovery systems credible, investable, enforceable and practical to implement.

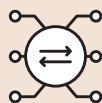


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SMEP (2024), *The SMEP Programme: execution and impact*. Annual review report (April 2023 to March 2024).

World Bank (2025), *Extended producer responsibility for plastic packaging in selected ASEAN member states*. Washington, DC.

IN BRIEF



Traceability helps recovery, recycling and recycled-content claims to be checked.



Standards define the quality, safety and consistency that recycled materials need to meet.



Regulation gives traceability and standards practical force, especially through extended producer responsibility (EPR), registries and reporting systems.



Data systems should be useful and proportionate, not just create more reporting.



Credible systems must reflect real infrastructure, market conditions and the actors already handling material.

WHAT THE SMEP PROGRAMME EXPERIENCE SHOWS

Traceability can create value beyond the material

GIVO's experience in Nigeria shows that traceability data can have commercial value as well as environmental value. Data on where plastic is collected, what types of packaging are recovered and which communities are participating can help producers understand both recovery performance and market reach. In low-margin commodity markets, this kind of verified data can become an additional revenue stream, as well as supporting plastic credits, ESG reporting and investor confidence.

Standards build confidence in recycled materials

Ghana's experience shows why standards matter across the whole value chain, from collection and sorting through to flakes, pellets and final products. This is especially important where recycled plastic may be used in packaging that comes into contact with food. Standards help buyers and regulators trust that recycled materials are safe, consistent and commercially usable, but they need to reflect real infrastructure and local market conditions.

Regulation helps credible systems scale

SMEP-supported projects in Kenya, Ghana and Nepal show that plastics standards and traceability do not implement themselves, and they are unlikely to scale without regulation, EPR frameworks, registries, reporting systems and enforcement. Ghana's emerging EPR and e-registry work points to the importance of linking standards, traceability and regulation into one workable system, rather than treating them as separate policy tools.



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PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Start with what the data needs to prove

Traceability should have a clear purpose, such as proving how much plastic was recovered, where it came from, whether collectors were paid, whether recycled content claims are credible, or whether EPR reporting requirements have been met.

Treat data as part of the value proposition

Traceability can support market access, plastic credits, ESG reporting, investor confidence and producer decision-making. In low-margin commodity markets, useful data can strengthen the commercial case for recovery.

Build standards across the value chain

Quality and safety need to be managed from collection and sorting through to processing, labelling, flakes, pellets and final products, not just at the point of sale.

Align regulation, EPR and standards

Regulation should turn standards into practice and ensure traceability systems support recovery targets, producer responsibility and credible reporting. Treat them as one system, not separate policy tools.

Make traceability practical for the people using it

Systems need to work for collectors, aggregators, recyclers, regulators and producers. If data requirements are too complex, expensive or disconnected from daily operations, they are unlikely to scale.



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LEARNING CONTRIBUTORS

This briefing draws on the second session in the SMEP Programme Plastics Webinar series, held on **13 May 2026**. It reflects learning from SMEP-supported projects and a moderated discussion with **Victor Boyle-Komolafe** from GIVO, Nigeria, **Judith Osei-Kumi** from Ghana's Environmental Protection Authority, **Marxine Waite** from the Environmental Coalition on Standards, and contributions from the webinar audience.

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WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

Collectors, aggregators & recyclers

Use data to show where material came from, how it was handled and what value was created. Systems should be simple enough to use in daily operations.

Donors & programme designers

Fund the systems that create confidence, including data infrastructure, verification, testing capacity and market development, not just collection equipment.

Policymakers & regulators

Align EPR, standards, registries and enforcement so that recovery, recycling and recycled-content claims can be checked and trusted.

Producers & brands

Invest in traceability, verification and standards if they want credible recycled-content, recovery or plastic credit claims.

Standards bodies & technical agencies

Ensure standards reflect real infrastructure, testing capacity and market conditions, so they improve quality without excluding smaller actors.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Credible plastics recovery systems are not built by collecting more data. They are built by linking useful data to standards, regulation, markets and finance. Traceability should make recovery claims easier to verify, recycled materials easier to trust, and recovery systems easier to invest in, regulate and scale.



“ The data that is generated from the operations is more important than the material itself. ”

Victor Boyle-Komolafe
GIVO Africa



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