



Case Study: Pioneering Regional Extended Producer Responsibility

How investment in collaborative research is creating momentum and unlocking additional funding for system change in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean

Summary

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face disproportionate burdens from plastic pollution, and often lack the scale and resources to implement effective waste management solutions. While Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) – which requires producers to contribute to the costs of managing waste – has been successfully implemented in many larger economies, traditional national models can be difficult to implement in small and remote island states.

To address this challenge, Common Seas was a leader in developing the concept of Regional EPR for SIDS: uniting neighbouring islands under a shared framework to pool resources, harmonise regulations and create sufficient scale to engage producers and attract investment.

Supported by funding from the UK Government through UK International Development, Common Seas worked with international experts and regional stakeholders to test the concept and build a robust evidence base. **The resultant research transformed regional EPR into a credible proposition, with backing from more than 40 organisations, including government departments and partners.**

“The IOC recognizes that a regional EPR approach offers a timely and pragmatic solution, enabling collective action, sustainable financing, and greater negotiating power for SIDS in global markets”
**Raj Mohabeer, Director in Charge,
Indian Ocean Commission**

This research led to a partnership with the Indian Ocean Commission and a shortlisted USD 2 million proposal through the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund.

Strategic early-stage investment has successfully created the foundations for larger partnerships, additional funding and long-term systems change.



A disproportionate challenge: Why EPR struggles in SIDS

SIDS face a severe and growing plastic pollution crisis. Despite contributing less than 2% of the world's mismanaged plastic waste, these isolated regions bear a vastly disproportionate ecological and economic burden.



A heavy reliance on imported goods, combined with geographic isolation, small populations, and lack of domestic waste processing infrastructure make waste collection, recycling and disposal costly and difficult. At the same time, many islands are affected by marine debris and plastics transported from distant markets by ocean currents.

While EPR has successfully financed waste management in many countries, national schemes have struggled to gain traction in SIDS. Individual island nations lack the market size to negotiate with multinational brands, the administrative capacity to police compliance, and the waste volumes to justify significant infrastructure investments. Systemic change requires a fundamental shift in how circular solutions are scaled for remote geographies.

The initial investment

Common Seas pioneered a new approach to Extended Producer Responsibility, designed for SIDS and remote geographies.

Instead of treating isolated island nations as standalone markets, a regional framework coordinates neighbouring islands under a unified system. By aggregating waste volumes and harmonising regulations, the model can unlock economies of scale, attract producer participation and support more sustainable financing for governments.

Funding from the UK Government, through UK International Development, enabled Common Seas to test whether this concept could work in practice. Working with a strong advisory board including WRAP, GIZ, UNEP Cartagena Convention and the Global Plastics Policy Centre, Common Seas undertook technical research and stakeholder consultations to assess the feasibility in principle.

The result was a robust evidence based technical research report and an ambitious Vision Paper. This transitioned regional EPR from a promising idea into a credible proposition, identifying clear mechanisms to address legal structures, governance systems, financial and material flows.

Importantly, this process secured backing from more than 40 government departments and cross-sector organisations across SIDS regions.



What changed: Building regional momentum

The value of the initial investment extends far beyond the publication of this foundational research. By creating a robust evidence base and generating stakeholder support, the project established the foundations for follow-on partnerships and investment.

1. Turning theory into action in the Indian Ocean

Building directly upon the research, momentum accelerated rapidly through a formal partnership with the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) states (comprising Comoros, La Réunion, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles).

Together, the partners have initiated a feasibility study adapted to the local logistics, governance, and waste systems of the five IOC member states. This study will provide a blueprint for developing regional waste governance across the Indian Ocean region.

2. Unlocking multilateral funding in the Caribbean

Simultaneously, the concept is attracting interest from donors and partners in the Caribbean.

A coalition comprising Common Seas, Unite Caribbean, and WRAP developed a USD 2 million proposal to design a regional EPR framework for four Eastern Caribbean Islands. Backed by key stakeholders from the region, the proposal advanced through rigorous evaluation rounds to be shortlisted for the final stage of the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund's (CBF) Advancing Circular Economy (ACE) Facility. This demonstrates growing confidence in the concept and potential for wider implementation.

Why it matters: From research to regional action

The value of this work lies not only in the high-quality research, but also the foundations and momentum developed.

UK Government investment, through UK International Development, has enabled regional EPR to move from concept to credible proposition, with the evidence and support to form an investable architecture for attracting new partners and donors.

Local actors in the Indian Ocean and Caribbean SIDS can now confidently move forward, aligning resources for practical feasibility studies on a pathway toward sustainable, producer-financed waste management and stronger regional collaboration.

For funders, this demonstrates how **strategic early-stage funding can reduce risk, attract follow on support, and create conditions for long-term impact.**

