

South Africa's recycling sector gets tech boost

PET plastic producer responsibility organisation (PRO) Petco is rolling out the BanQu technology further to recycling buy-back centres across the country in a move set to "revolutionise" how recyclable materials are traded, tracked and traced in South Africa.



Source: Supplied

According to Petco, the “digital platform helps buy-back centres accurately record and track their recycling transactions” with waste pickers as well as trace the origins of the recycling while “providing a real-time business management tool enabling them to better understand and manage their businesses”.

The company is driving the rollout of the BanQu technology in a project called Up which commenced in 2021 and is funded by The Coca-Cola Foundation.

The system has 10 live centres in Gauteng, Limpopo, Western Cape and the Eastern Cape, with more than 1,400 waste pickers registered to date. It is expected to roll out to 100 buy-back centres across the country over the next year.



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Trade, track and trace recycled material with ease

The BanQu system allows the buy-back centres to capture the quantity of recyclable material bought from waste pickers, as well as the price paid for it and where it was collected. The waste pickers, in turn, receive an SMS receipt for each transaction and can keep track digitally of their income earned through sales to various buy-back centres.

Petco CEO Cheri Scholtz said because informal waste collection was based largely on cash transactions, the majority of the estimated 52,000 waste pickers in South Africa typically had no record of their earnings and remained largely unbanked and unable to access the kinds of services available to those who were self-employed or had a record of employment in the formal sector.

“The benefit of the technology was that both waste pickers and buy-back centres were able to build up permanent digital financial records which could be used to access credit to grow their businesses,” Scholtz said.



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Scholtz added that the system would also “provide a more accurate view” of the waste pickers’ significant contributions to the recycling value chain and circular economy.

“Recording and analysing aggregate data at collector and buy-back centre level will be a step change in understanding market dynamics, pricing and collector behaviour, and ensuring more equitable earning for the informal sector,” said Scholtz.

BanQu founder and CEO Ashish Gadnis said the company used “secure blockchain technology to track and trace recycled material across the recycling value chain, ensuring price transparency for both buyers and sellers”.

“The platform works on any device that can connect to the internet and is cloud-based. Nothing is saved to a device, nor are smartphones necessary. BanQu was built to empower smallholder farmers in our food supply chains and the informal waste collectors who are the true heroes of the circular economy. This incredible partnership brings major scale to that vision,” Gadnis said.

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