

## 2.2. Individual company initiatives

### 2.2.1. Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola produces by far the largest volume of plastic of any company globally - 2.9 million metric tonnes - and also, unsurprisingly, the most plastic waste.<sup>1</sup> In 2019, as a signatory of the EMF New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, Coca-Cola finally disclosed its plastics footprint: 200,000 bottles per minute, and around one-fifth of the world's PET-bottle output.<sup>2</sup> Coca-Cola also ranked top of the plastic-polluting companies in the Break Free From Plastic audits in 2018 and 2019; 12,000 Coca-Cola products were found in litter clean-ups in 37 countries.<sup>3</sup> A recent Tearfund report also found that Coca-Cola was the worst polluter it assessed, responsible for 200,000 tonnes of plastic pollution per year - the equivalent of 33 football pitches every day, or 4.6 million tonnes of GHG emissions from burning, across the six countries investigated.<sup>4</sup>

In Coca-Cola's 2018 Business and Sustainability Report, the company set the aim to collect the equivalent of 100% of their packaging sold by 2030.<sup>5</sup> However, it is unclear exactly how the company intends to achieve this collection target globally, and there is no mention of calling for legislation to mandate over 90% separate collection of plastic bottles. Although it seems Coca-Cola Western Europe and Coca-Cola European Partners have reluctantly committed to supporting 'well-designed deposit return systems across Western Europe, where a successful proven alternative does not already exist,<sup>6</sup> - and, recently, Coca-Cola USA said similar in the survey As You Sow<sup>7</sup> - this is not a coherent company policy, nor one that spans all markets, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4.

Previously, Coca-Cola has perceived such legislation as a risk to its business, and has proactively lobbied against packaging regulation around the world. A leaked 2015 Coca-Cola strategy document revealed plans to 'fight back' against proposed regulation in Europe, and investigative research uncovered the company's extensive lobbying against the initial plans for a deposit return scheme (DRS) in Scotland (see section 4.7).<sup>8</sup> Evidence also shows that Coca-Cola still actively opposes mandatory collection and DRS in some locations; for example, the US state of Georgia (as recently as 2019)<sup>9</sup> and Kenya.<sup>10</sup>



Credit: Les Stone

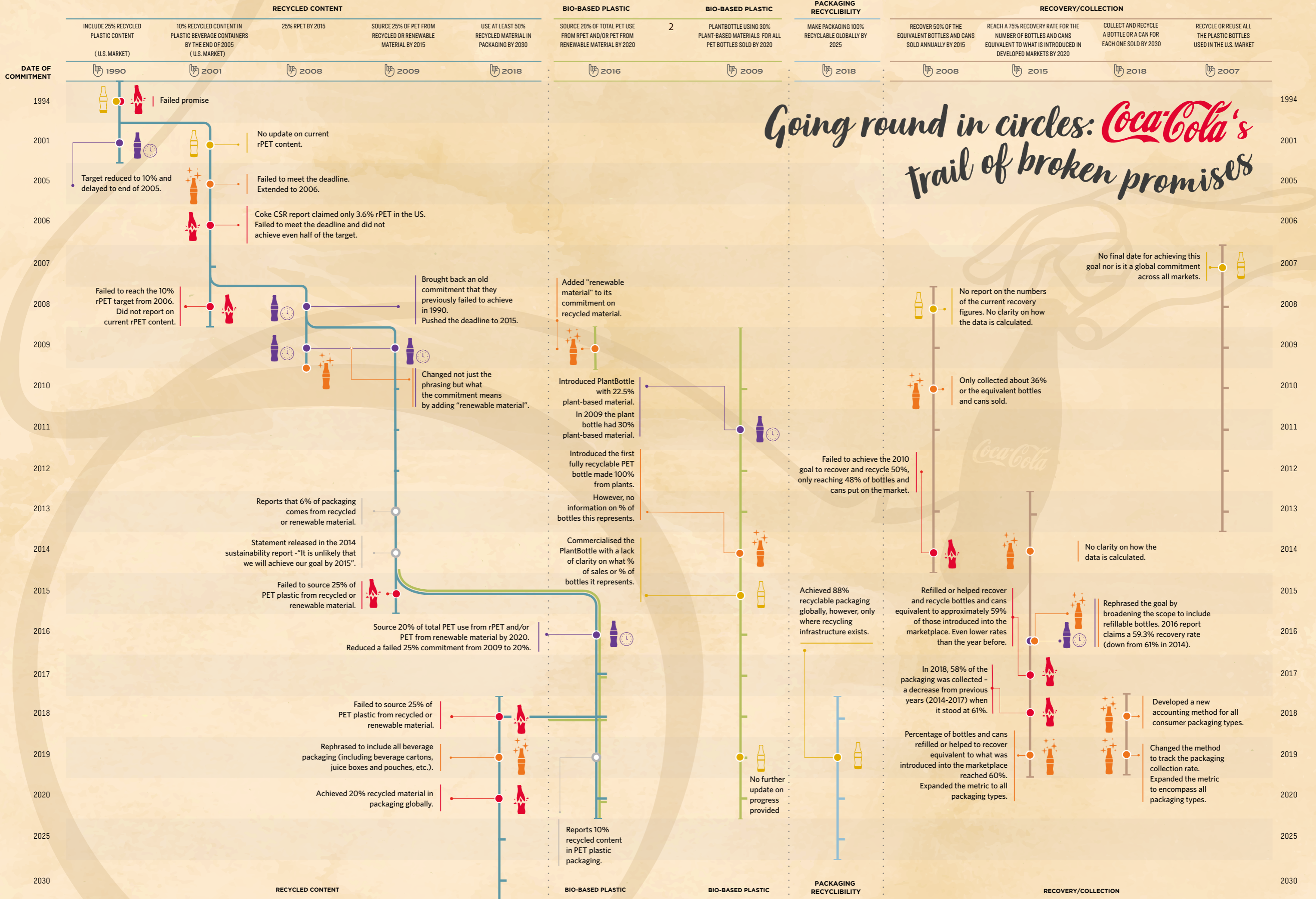
Confusingly, Coca-Cola uses different language for reporting collection rates, stating that 60% of its packaging - including that made from plastic, aluminium and glass - was collected in 2019.<sup>11</sup> This figure has marginally increased compared to previous years (2015-17), when it stood at 59%.<sup>12</sup> However, Coca-Cola is not totally transparent about how this figure is calculated, nor how it breaks down into individual packaging types or by country.

Coca-Cola also commits to using at least 50% recycled material in its packaging by 2030.<sup>13</sup> Currently, the company reports that recycled content makes up 10% of its total plastic-packaging volume.<sup>14,15</sup> However, Coca-Cola has had targets on minimum recycled content in bottles as far back as 1990, and, so far, has failed to meet them. In its 2008/9 Sustainability Review, the company's target for rPET in their bottles was 25% by 2015; no progress towards the goal was mentioned.<sup>16</sup> In its 2010/11 Sustainability Report, the company maintained its goal of 25% but redefined the target to 'recycled or renewable' content by 2015. The 2014/15 report claims Coca-Cola used 12.5% recycled or renewable content, but its 2016 Sustainability Report does not even mention the goal. Today, some of the company's brands are sold in bottles made with rPET, but it is unclear how Coca-Cola plans to achieve its new target of 50% recycled material across all its packaging by 2030 - or whether it simply intends to shift the goalposts again.



Coca-Cola plastic pollution in the environment

Credit: David Mirzoeff



# Going round in circles: Coca-Cola's trail of broken promises

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