

Re-thinking carbon offsetting in terms of solidarity

ENERGIES 2050

Carbon offsetting enables businesses and other actors in developed countries to 'compensate' for their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by supporting GHG mitigation projects elsewhere, notably in developing countries. But is 'compensation' enough by itself? Here, ENERGIES 2050 proposes a different take on carbon offsetting through its ethiCarbon initiative, which applies a more holistic and long-term approach, encouraging climate solidarity between actors in developed and developing countries.

Businesses have an important role to play in developed countries' efforts to achieve their emissions reduction commitments. Depending on the country, this role may be driven by mandatory targets and/or voluntary initiatives. Mitigation activities include those implemented at their sources, and those using carbon offsetting as an additional option to make up for a part of their residual emissions. Carbon offsetting occurs through the purchase of credits generated by GHG mitigation projects, which are sold on the voluntary or mandatory carbon markets. For example, the Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS) and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) which is governed by the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC). At COP20 in Lima, revisions to the CDM will continue to be discussed, along with the creation of new instruments such as a New Market Mechanism, which could facilitate GHG mitigation projects/programmes on a wider scale.

A key issue is that carbon offsetting projects, even if they support national sustainable development strategies, are often implemented on a project by project basis, generally without plans to connect the 'offsetter' and the beneficiary in a long-term partnership. Indeed, this can create a very detached relationship between these two actors, thus missing a great opportunity to create a form of 'climate solidarity'. In response, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) ENERGIES 2050, has founded an innovative global carbon initiative called ethiCarbon. This initiative provides a comprehensive and ethical approach to reducing GHG emissions through a combination of carbon offset projects,

and solidarity and sustainable development activities. The ethiCarbon initiative concerns all types of stakeholders - including from the private sector and civil society - that need or wish to compensate some of their GHG emissions, whilst simultaneously engaging in a long-term vision that puts solidarity at the heart of tackling climate change.

For carbon offsetting projects - as for all climate change mitigation efforts - careful monitoring, verification and reporting are crucial for ensuring a transparent process. Transparency helps build confidence and avoid double-counting of GHG emission reduction activities. Taking this into account, ethiCarbon has developed a carbon calculator to assess the GHG emissions of many activities, including business activities, travel, households, events, tourism and consumption, amongst others. Through the ethiCarbon initiative, an actor can choose to 'offset' its impact through the purchase of certified carbon credits (e.g. CDM, VCS, Gold Standard), and then go one step

further to 'balance' its impact by supporting carbon solidarity activities. Meanwhile, all credits purchased and all support received are tracked and transparently reported.

The innovation of ethiCarbon lays in the willingness to create a personal link between the 'offsetters' and the beneficiaries of the carbon solidarity projects. Indeed, the aim is to encourage participants to take on board the concept of 'real concern -

real care', as part of a collaborative approach to tackling climate change. It is also a case of re-thinking 'carbon' as an opportunity for generating financial flows of high quality, particularly in terms of ethics and solidarity.

While governments may be leading the climate negotiations, business has an undeniably important role to play in the implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation. It is time to go beyond 'compensation' by accompanying carbon offsets with capacity building for host communities, in an effort to help provide everyone with the tools and knowledge to act in the long term. Interested parties are more than welcome to participate in the launch of ethiCarbon in 2015, and beyond ■



MORE INFO

ENERGIES 2050 is a non-profit non-governmental organisation (NGO) working on the 'Great Transition' towards a more humane, plural and united society, bringing peace and respecting the common goods of humanity. Website: www.energies2050.org Email: contact@energies2050.org ENERGIES 2050 at COP20: <http://energies2050.org/news/energies-2050-a-la-cdp20-lima-1-12-decembre-2014>