

R9 A1: Greenwashing: the hidden face of carbon offsetting

Proposers

écolo j

Motion text

Over the last few years, we've seen many claims from countries, governments, institutions - like the European Union - and even from private businesses (Pepsi, Amazon, fossils fuels companies such as Total Energies, Exxon, Shell, and so on) pledging to achieve "net zero carbon emissions" by 2050 or 2040 for "bolder" claims.

But what does "net zero" actually mean exactly ?

Net zero stands for no more carbon emissions into the atmosphere than they are already producing. To achieve this goal, they can drastically diminish their activities, or continue as they do and "compensate" it by paying carbon offsets. They can buy large amounts of offsets, like they would with shares on the stock exchange market, from companies specialized in carbon offsetting. They pledge the money in order to finance all sorts of projects, such as wind farms, solar panels fields, biogas factories, protect forests from being cut down or for planting new trees.

There are mandatory offsets that big corporations with massive carbon emissions have to buy to stay under the maximum amount they can emit per year. It was decided and set up in the Kyoto protocol in 1997. It was then updated in the Paris agreement in 2015. The conditions are strict, and not every project can be funded. They are also the voluntary offsets, which compose the majority of the market. Even individuals such as ourselves are encouraged to buy into these plans when making purchases with certain companies (e.g. when buying a plane ticket with an airline, you can pay an additional fee to compensate for your flight emission).

Contrary to the former, forestry is one of the most popular choices in this case, because the price can go as little as 10\$ for a ton of CO2.

Unfortunately, these plans, however well meaning, have gained in numbers, but also in controversy. In some cases, the projects were funded, but then the forests were heavily logged anyway. In others, the forest was never under threat of logging and was already considered a reserve. One instance is in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (USA), where an offset market was created by Nature Conservancy (one of the specialized companies) in 2011 to "protect" 2000 acres of forest. Chevrolet was the first to fund

it, but Disney funded the project from 2014 to 2022.

It gave the media empire the image of a carbon reducer leader. But the area was already protected before the market was set up, and there had been little to no danger of over-harvesting in the region. The bought offsets were thus meaningless. There are so many more examples of this kind, and not just in the United States of America, but all over the world, including in the Global South and in Europe.

“To actually make a difference, carbon offsets have to take more carbon out of the atmosphere or prevent more emissions that would otherwise have happened without them. This is called additionality. Without it, the credits are not offsetting anything.”

Another huge problem is the disrespect to indigenous tribes and their lives in the “protected” territories. They are not even consulted about the future of their territories like the case of the communities of the Pira Paraná River, in Colombia where companies have imposed a multi-million dollar deal on them. In other cases, the tribes are chased from their homeland

Last but certainly not least: the biggest risk we incur since these schemes’ creation is that people and companies will emit more carbon emissions because they think they are compensating with the offsets, ignoring the real solution.

Climate change is the biggest fight our world and future generations will have to overcome. We cannot continue as it is. While we each have to limit our impact, these efforts are compromised and rendered null by big industries emitting more carbon into the air than an entire population would in their entire lifetime.

The Federation of Young Europeans Greens requires our government officials :

- Proper and demanding laws, regulations and control on carbon offsetting. Not just for mandatory ones, imposed by governments, but for voluntary ones as well. They compose the largest part of this market and are proven ineffective and even harmful to our collective efforts.
- More transparency about where the money comes from, the financed projects, and who is responsible for it. Every project should come with a detailed environmental study about the present situation, the solutions and also the positive (or not) impact of carbon compensation in link with it.

Sources :

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Reason

Hello !

I reworked my text and it's much better now. Christina told me by ail that I could

submit the new text.
Hope you like it better too.
Thanks :)