

Going Carbon Neutral at IIED

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International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

Background

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are contributing to climate change – the evidence is now clear. Efforts to reduce GHG emissions through government action at the international level, through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol, have led to modest action in some countries. However, responsibility for reducing emissions also lies with private companies, non-government organisations, communities and individuals.

IIED Activities

IIED recognises its responsibility to reduce its GHG emissions. An initial estimate of our emissions for one year, January to December 2003, is 372 tonnes of carbon dioxide. Of this, work travel comprises 69% (almost all from air travel), commuting to and from IIED offices 4%, utilities (gas and electricity) 26% and waste 2%.

We are encouraging voluntary activities amongst IIED staff to reduce emissions. These include: more cycling; replacing face-to-face meetings with tele/video conferencing; and travelling by train instead of flying to European destinations. Using a 'green' electricity supplier is also being investigated. In future we expect to monitor such activities to ensure that they have the desired effect. However, we also need to offset our unavoidable GHG emissions.

Most ways to offset carbon focus solely on reducing GHGs (usually through sequestration of carbon by planting trees). However, IIED believes that such carbon sequestration projects can also be a means to directly benefit local livelihoods in sustainable ways. IIED has therefore decided to purchase offsets from Plan Vivo in order to become 'carbon neutral' by supporting projects which also provide local sustainable development benefits.

Plan Vivo

The Plan Vivo Network is a group of international projects, sharing common standards, which provides certified carbon offsets. Projects focus on rural communities and include activities to restore ecosystems, prevent land degradation, conserve biodiversity, protect watersheds and promote sustainable livelihoods. Without investment from Plan Vivo, projects would not otherwise be financially viable. The project IIED is supporting is:

Nhambita Community Carbon Project, Mozambique: This project aims to offset 50,000 tonnes CO₂/yr by 2007, and 100,000 tonnes CO₂/year by 2010. The project works with the Nhambita community and local farmers next to the Gorongosa National Park. It aims to reduce deforestation by introducing sustainable land use systems, improving forest management and agricultural practices, and providing alternative income opportunities. Activities include improving fallow, planting firebreak and fruit orchards and intercropping with nitrogen fixing tree species. Farmers benefit from food, soil improvements, fuel wood, fodder and timber.

Source: <http://www.eccm.uk.com/planvivo/>

What Next?

IIED is interested in collaborating with likeminded organisations seeking to offset GHG emissions through projects with a local sustainable development component. Collaboration could involve creating a larger buyers' pool for such offsets. Or it could involve providing organisations selling such offsets with suitable projects linked to the work of IIED and its partners. Another issue to consider relates to the methodology for calculating and securing carbon and sustainable development benefits. Certification under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol is expensive and difficult for small-scale projects in poor countries. Creating robust defensible guidelines outside the CDM rules could increase the scope for development benefits.

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Further information: "*Becoming Carbon Neutral While Supporting Sustainable Development: A Challenge for Development and Environment NGOs*". Discussion Paper. IIED. September 2004