
"Clever" schemes are not the solution to climate change

Almost everyone agrees that humanity is facing many threats, among which the greenhouse effect. There is also general agreement on the main causes of the greenhouse effect: use of fossil fuels and deforestation. International agreements to address those two causes have until now proved -to say the least- inadequate. Fossil fuel consumption is still increasing and deforestation continues unabated. The economic interest of the ever more powerful corporations is still more powerful than the survival instinct of humanity.

Moreover, economic interest continues to actively seek for new niches for money-making and seems to have found a pot of gold in disaster itself, such as exemplified by the "carbon offset market". The idea is simple: you emit CO₂, we store it and we charge you for the service. How do we store it? Simple: in planted trees. But here ends the simplicity. If this "carbon market" idea is allowed to flourish, then there will be millions of hectares of land covered by carbon sink plantations all over the world. This entails a large number of implications of which we will highlight but a few. Firstly, that all that land will not be available for food production, in a world where the numbers of people facing hunger is increasing -and are counted by the millions. Secondly, that many local communities will be driven away from their land and their means of subsistence will be substituted by tree plantations that no-one will be even allowed to cut, thus increasing the numbers of the hungry. Thirdly, that many forests will be destroyed to make place to more profitable carbon sink plantations, thereby increasing the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere and the greenhouse effect which plantations are supposed to counter, while at the same time depriving more people of their livelihoods. Fourthly, that forests -which constitute enormous carbon reservoirs- will continue to be increasingly depleted, both by the activities which currently affect them and by the added pressure of communities being displaced by plantations and other "development" activities. And finally, that all this will only serve the purpose of those who benefit from the current fossil fuel-dependent economy.

"Clever" schemes such as the carbon offset market are aimed at avoiding real changes to the current environmentally destructive and socially inequitable model. But the problem remains. Unless deforestation is halted and unless fossil fuels are substituted by other forms of energy, humanity will continue suffering the consequences of climate change.

Instead of promoting such schemes, governments and corporations should support the efforts of local communities currently fighting -against governments and corporations- to defend their forests. They should create the conditions to achieve forest conservation, instead of acting in the opposite direction. They should -at least- begin by complying with the numerous relevant international agreements which they have happily signed but never implemented. In the meantime, the fate of the world's forests lies in the success of the struggles being carried out by countless indigenous, traditional and other local communities. To them, our support.

