
[The carbon spin doctors: How the World Bank explains emissions trading to journalists](#)

“Carbon emission trading, a vehicle for development. Is this a story that's worth telling? I think it is,” Sergio Jellinek, a “communications advisor” at the World Bank told a room full of journalists at the Carbon Expo in Cologne last week.

Organised by the World Bank, the International Emissions Trading Association and Koelnmesse (Cologne Trade Fair), Carbon Expo was supposed to be “the Coming of Age of the Global Carbon Market”. In fact only a few hundred people coughed up the 980 Euros entrance fee. Most of them seemed to know each other on first name terms. One in seven people were journalists.

The first day of the Carbon Expo included an “interactive workshop for journalists”. Charles Cormier, a senior training specialist on carbon finance at the World Bank opened the workshop with an introduction to the topic.

Cormier's powerpoint presentation explained that climate change was real, and that the details are described in the third report of the IPCC. “That's the International Panel on, er, well anyway it's the IPCC,” he explained less than helpfully.

Later on, I met Cormier at the World Bank's Prototype Carbon Fund (PCF) stall in the Carbon Expo. I asked him for an interview about Plantar, an industrial tree plantation project in Brazil funded by the PCF. Plantar is by far the largest PCF project in terms of the amount of carbon emissions the project is supposed to save. “I don't know anything about Plantar”, he replied.

At the workshop for journalists Sergio Jellinek explained that the World Bank was offering to help journalists “in terms of getting the story right”.

“You set the tone of the debate. It's a debate we want to be involved in,” said Jellinek. “You are the masters of the decoding process,” he added.

In his presentation, Sanjay Suri, a journalist with Inter Press Service, described carbon trade as “trading in what might have been” and pointed out that this is the first market ever created with the aim of obliterating itself. He asked whether this new commodity was simply a way of opening a new market for Northern companies to supply supposedly clean technology to the South.

The World Bank's Charles Cormier then gave a short presentation. Cormier accepted that carbon trade “is a very strange concept. It's a trade in emissions that won't be emitted in the future.” He added that “In itself it' s a little bit of an experiment at the global level.”

The fastest growing contributor of greenhouse gases, the airline industry, “was a little bit left out of Kyoto”, according to Cormier.

Cormier explained that the Carbon Expo would be carbon neutral. The organisers had calculated how

much greenhouse gas would be emitted by the trade fair and by the visitors in travelling to the fair. To “compensate” for these emissions Carbon Expo would buy carbon credits from a tree planting project in Tanzania.

Cormier's argument could be summed up as follows: global warming is happening, so we have to do something. Therefore the trade in carbon has to happen.

The next presentation was from Richard Kinley from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Kinley explained that under the Kyoto Protocol, “most” of a country's reductions in greenhouse gas emissions should be domestic reduction. Kyoto's flexible mechanisms (emissions trading, clean development mechanism and joint implementation) can account for up to half of a country's reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

According to Kinley the criticism that the Kyoto Protocol is not a solution to climate change is not fair. “Kyoto was never meant to solve the problem,” he explained. Kyoto is intended to be a first step. “Kyoto is important because it sends signals,” said Kinley.

Kinley said he liked very much Sanjay Suri's description of emission trading as “trading in what might have been”. He said, “This is probably the first time in history that a new commodity has been created. It's not quite up there with money, but it's quite unique.”

Next up was Franck Lecocq, a World Bank economist. He enthused about the new market in emissions and said that this year emission trading is likely to be twice as big as last year.

I asked Lecocq how he would respond to Sanjay Suri's question about whether carbon trading was little more than a way of opening up a market for Northern companies selling technology to the South, while allowing companies to continue polluting in the North. I asked why the World Bank is involved at all, particularly since the World Bank's mission is supposed to be to alleviate poverty, and not the creation of new commodities.

Without blinking, Lecocq brought up another slide in his powerpoint presentation. The slide explained that the World Bank's goal is to relieve poverty and that climate change will affect the poor. Therefore the World Bank is promoting trade in carbon emissions. “I forgot to show this,” he said.

None of the presentations at the World Bank's workshop explained how carbon trading would address the issue of climate change. Neither did they explain why the World Bank is using tax payers' money to sponsor the creation of a new commodity which will primarily benefit Northern industry.

This was left to Ken Newcombe, Senior Manager of the World Bank's Carbon Finance Business. In a press conference immediately following the workshop for journalists, Newcombe said, “The World Bank is reducing the risk for private investors.”

Outside Carbon Expo, activists held a banner reading “Stop Plantar”. One carried a kitchen sink labelled “Not a tree” and another held a plant in a pot labelled “Not a sink”.

The demonstration was organised by non-government organisations CDMWatch and SinksWatch. Among the protesters were two Brazilians from Minas Gerais where Plantar's plantations are. Juarez Teixeira Santana of the Rural Workers Trade Union in Minas Gerais said, “We have been fighting against the destruction caused by industrial tree plantations in our country for years. Yet now we are being told that these destructive projects are ‘clean development’ projects that protect the climate.

They are neither.”

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