
[International, regional and national initiatives are promoting tree plantations for the carbon business](#)

This article is part of the special bulletin “Tree Plantations for carbon business”.
[See here the complete bulletin.](#)

At the international level, corporate lobbies and major conservation NGOs push States and international negotiations to push for tree plantations as a legitimate compensation mechanism for carbon emissions.

The Africa Carbon Markets Initiative

One example is the Africa Carbon Markets Initiative (ACMI) launched in 2022 during the UN Climate Summit. The initiative aims to accelerate the growth of Africa's voluntary carbon markets, channelling “billions of climate financing into Africa” and establishing “carbon credits as one of Africa's top export commodities.”(1)

In its roadmap, ACMI points to tree plantations in cropland and other so-called “forestry and land use” projects as those with the greatest potential for generating carbon credits. It also identifies 10 countries as the most relevant to this type of project: Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Republic of Congo, Angola, Zambia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Mozambique and Sudan. The initiative also claims that there is “significant potential to scale up carbon credit generation with smallholder farmers,” which currently live and work on around 80 percent of Africa's agricultural land.(2)

The ACMI is sponsored by several international donor agencies and philanthropic organisations and has “corporate non-profits” such as Verra and Conservation International on its Steering Committee. The fact that the initiative is underpinned by analyses conducted by McKinsey, a US-based consulting firm with vested interests in expanding voluntary carbon markets in Africa, is worthy of note.(3) The firm has also strongly influenced the Africa Climate Summit, where carbon offsetting and financing has also been pointed out as major direction.(4)

Hundreds of African civil society organisations have denounced carbon markets as the new scramble for Africa, exposed the western interests foregrounded by such “climate positive” agendas, and called for the rejection of the polluter schemes.(5)

The African Forestry Impact Platform

The financial sector and investment firms are major drivers of the current expansion of tree plantation ventures in the global South for offsetting carbon emissions of the Global North. One example is the US\$ 200 million pledged by Norway's Norfund, Finland's Finnfund, and the UK's British

International Investment to the African Forestry Impact Platform (AFIP, which is actually a private fund rather than a platform), following a commitment made during COP 26 to expand the “sustainable forestry” sector.(6)

AFIP was launched by New Forests (which is different from the New Forests Company mentioned in [What are the main types of tree plantation projects for carbon business](#), on this bulletin). The entity is the world’s second-largest forestry manager and investor, and is owned by Japanese financial groups Mitsui and Nomura Holdings, closely related to the fossil fuel industry.(7) AFIP’s “nature-based solutions” plan is to develop industrial tree plantations aimed at carbon markets, hence guaranteeing large amounts of funding from “development” finance institutions. As a result, AFIP recently bought Green Resources, as mentioned in [What are the main...](#), on this bulletin.

The Trillion Trees initiative

Another example is the Trillion Trees idea, which was launched in 2018. Since then, it has been endorsed by economic and political elites represented by the World Economic Forum, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and major conservation NGOs such as WCS, WWF and BirdLife. The naive and dangerous initiative of massive tree planting as a solution to climate chaos fits very well with the interests of several of the world’s largest corporations and billionaire donors and has inspired them to get on board.(8)

Oil companies say thanks

Distractions such as Trillion Trees are very effective at diverting attention from the need to curb fossil fuel emissions. It is worth remembering that not long after the Trillion Tree idea appeared, [Eni](#) and [Shell](#)—the two largest buyers of carbon credits in Africa (9)— announced that they would set up their own tree plantations to offset their emissions. The Colombian company Ecopetrol has joined the Trillion Tree campaign, [pledging](#) to plant 20 million trees and offset 2 million tons of carbon between 2020 and 2030.

The proposal has inspired significant criticism within the scientific community since it was launched as likely the most effective way to limit the rise of carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere, diverting the attention from the imperative need to reduce fossil fuel emissions.(19) Nevertheless, this criticism is overshadowed by the widespread favourable media coverage a result of the financial support raised by the authors (11) of the misleading idea that “massive afforestation and the resulting timber industry can create hundreds of millions of jobs and wealth in the global South.”(12) With the growth of carbon markets, initiatives within the scope of the trillion trees illusion are increasingly associated to carbon offsetting.(13) In 2023, more than one third of the corporations promising to plant trees under the [1t.org](#) campaign were doing so to offset emissions.(14)

Initiative 20 x 20

Initiative 20 X 20 is being developed in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its goal is to protect and restore 20 million hectares. It encompasses several tree plantation projects developed to generate carbon credits for the voluntary carbon market. Calling for “finance for restoration and conservation to bring about net-zero carbon emissions across the region,”(15) it is supported by national

governments from the Global North (donations from Germany, Norway, and Luxembourg), corporations such as Cargill and Nestlé (through Nespresso), carbon market companies such as South Pole and EcoSecurities, among others. Once again, the net-zero illusion encourages movement in the wrong direction by strengthening and benefiting from the misleading idea of offsetting fossil fuel emissions by planting trees.

National policies

Many national governments and lawmakers have done their part to promote tree plantations as a way to offset carbon emissions. Examples include:

In New Zealand, the state emissions trading scheme rewards landowners who invest in pine monocultures. This is a central piece of the government's roadmap to emissions reduction. Such government support has driven a sharp increase in such monocultures; this has dissolved communities and caused huge social and cultural losses.⁽¹⁶⁾

Paraguay's Proeza project guides the State's institutional policy for forestry and is based on the expansion of industrial eucalyptus plantations to meet the country's National Determined Contributions (NDC).⁽¹⁷⁾ Projects have been financed by the Green Climate Fund and carried out through the Arbaro Fund, whose plantations have been exposed for abuses and harm to communities in the South American and African countries where it operates.⁽¹⁸⁾

India's parliament approved the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Bill in 2023, which lowers restrictions for establishing tree plantations on certain types of land. This could trigger a considerable expansion of afforestation and reforestation projects under the guise of planting trees to help the country achieve its net-zero emissions target by 2070. Estimates indicate that India would have to change the way nearly 60 percent of its land is used in order to meet those goals.⁽¹⁹⁾

These are just a few examples of national government initiatives that promote and encourage industrial tree plantations as a way of hitting their offsetting targets. As the number of countries with initiatives to regulate their national carbon markets grows, it is safe to expect the number of national policies going into this direction will continue to rise, especially in the global South.

(1) [Africa Carbon Markets Initiative, 2022. Roadmap Report by ACMI](#), pp. 8 and 25.

(2) *Idem*, p. 37.

(3) Power Shift Africa, 2023. [The Africa Carbon Markets Initiative: a wolf in sheep's clothing](#).

(4) REDD-Monitor, 2023. [Africa Climate Summit: "It looks like a trade conference on carbon credits"](#).

(5) Real Africa Climate Summit, 2023. [Over 500 civil society organisations issue an urgent call to reset the focus of the Africa Climate Summit](#).

(6) Reuters, 2022. [Norfund, BII, Finnfund invest \\$200m in African forestry fund](#).

(7) The Oakland Institute, 2023. [Green Colonialism 2.0: tree plantations and carbon offsets in Africa](#).

(8) REDD-Monitor, 2020. [One trillion trees. A naive and dangerous distraction from the need to leave fossil fuels in the ground](#).

(9) Africa Carbon Markets Initiative, 2024. [Carbon Markets in Africa \(online\), section 2.3 "Who are the key players in the VCM"](#).

(10) One of the main scientific articles supporting the idea ("The global tree restoration potential," published in *Science* in 2019) does not even mention fossil fuel emissions as a problem. Later that same year, the magazine published four technical comments and three letters with criticism to the

article, which can be accessed at [Science, volume 366, issue 6463, 2019](#).

(11) REDD-Monitor, 2019. [Remember the headlines: Tree planting is our “most effective climate change solution”?](#)

(12) Trillion Tree Declaration, 2018. [A trillion trees to fight the Climate Crisis](#).

(13) Examples include [the carbon offset donation section of Trillion Trees Australia](#) and [the pledge by City Forest Credits](#).

(14) Financial Times, 2023. [The illusion of a trillion trees](#).

(15) Initiative 20x20, 2024. Members. <https://initiative20x20.org/members>

(16) The Guardian, 2023. [New Zealand falls out of love with sheep farming as lucrative pine forests spread](#).

(17) Global Forest Coalition, 2023. [“The Devil’s Totality”: Paraguay’s Struggle Against Agribusiness and Monoculture](#).

(18) WRM, 2022. [Arbaro Fund: A Strategy to Expand Industrial Tree Plantations in the Global South](#).

(19) Dooley, K., et al., 2022. The Land Gap Report, p. 25. <https://landgap.org/>