Global Forest Coalition

Uganda landscape | Photo: alinanikitaeva • Envato Elements

TREES FOR GLOBAL BENEFIT UGANDA:

A CASE STUDY ON THE FAILURES OF CARBON OFFSETTING

Companies purchasing carbon credits as offsets are guilty of greenwashing and inflicting adverse impacts on local communities

By D.K. and Marvin Kamukama

INTRODUCTION

Since 2003, thousands of farmers in Uganda have planted over two million trees as part of Trees for Global Benefit (TGB), a carbon offsetting programme whose designers claim to be a model of climate mitigation and social and economic development. However, research shows that the project, run by the Environmental Conservation Trust of Uganda (ECOTRUST) and facilitated by Plan Vivo, is one of a growing number of global greenwashing exercises that are not only failing to reduce the amount of carbon being released into the atmosphere but also inflicting adverse environmental, social, and economic impacts on the local communities involved.

In July 2022, a Global Forest Coalition (GFC) member organisation visited communities involved in the project in Hoima and Kukuube districts in Western Uganda. Participants raised serious concerns about food security, economic hardship, and other negative impacts, particularly on women and other marginalised groups. Desk research further identified several companies, predominantly in Sweden and other Scandinavian and European countries, including France, Poland, and Germany, purchasing carbon credits through the TGB programme, directly contributing to the negative impacts on local communities.

Trees for Global Benefit

POSITIVE INNOVATION OR CLIMATE AND CARBON COLONIALISM?

TGB describes itself as an "innovative forest-based landscape restoration initiative that integrates biodiversity conservation outcomes with climate change adaptation and mitigation outcomes within the context of landscape reforestation linked to improved livelihoods and sustainable landscapes."

Since 2003, ECOTRUST says it has signed contracts with over 15,000 farmer households across 14 districts in Uganda, planting approximately 2.3 million trees. According to the **latest project report**, these trees have sequestered over two million tonnes of CO2, which ECOTRUST has sold as credits on the voluntary carbon market to national and international companies and individuals over the past 18 years.

However, we can safely conclude from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) findings in their **AR6 reports** that there is no further room for offsets. The more we use offsets, the more we are delaying the immediate emission reduction target by 2030, and moving towards a point where the temperature increase will offshoot 1.5. Offsets are a barrier to real climate solutions.

The TGB project was initiated in the Bushenyi District of South-Western Uganda and has since expanded, operating across four main sites: the Murchison Falls National Park in the Northern Albertine Rift, which includes Hoima and Kikuube districts, the Queen Elizabeth National Park in the escarpment areas of the Albertine Rift valley, and districts neighbouring the Mt. Elgon National Park and the Rwenzori mountains bordering Congo, a UNESCO heritage site. Under the Plan Vivo standard, there is no requirement for new assessments or registration to be carried out for the project's expansion to new districts.

Presence of TGB Project in Uganda

Source: Trees for Global Benefit Uganda: A Case Study on the Failures of Carbon Offsetting Report

In essence, ECOTRUST signs contracts with small-scale farmers to plant and grow certain species of trees on their land for 15-25 years in exchange for payments for the "carbon" being sequestered in the trees. ECOTRUST acts as the broker for a farmer's "cooperative", aggregating and then selling carbon credits on the international market.

A recipient of the **2013 SEED Award**, the project has received considerable praise from international actors in the carbon offsetting market. Plan Vivo Foundation says the project "operates as a market-based solution that reduces unsustainable exploitation of forest resources and the decline of ecosystem quality while diversifying and increasing incomes for rural farmers and their families." It claims to provide economic benefits through direct payments to farmers for planting trees and contribute to "income stability, food security, and fuel security" at the community level. It also mentions that tree planting is turned into sustainable forestry or agro-forestry.

But do these claims hold up to scrutiny? What are the experiences of the local farmers and landowners who have signed contracts with ECOTRUST? Do they understand the processes involved and the concepts that they are taking on the burden of sequestering CO2 being released into the atmosphere by companies, mainly in the global North? Has the project helped decrease deforestation in the areas it is being implemented? Has it helped local communities with access to wealth, employment, and food security? Or has it led to further inequity and sowed divisions and conflict within communities? What has the impact been on women and other marginalised groups?

Beyond the fact that carbon offsetting is not the answer to climate change, these other important questions on justice, equity, and local economic, health, and social impacts of these projects require scrutiny. Discussions with community members in the districts of Hoima and Kukuube revealed significant problems with the project that suggest it has failed to achieve its objectives and is causing more harm than benefit and must therefore be rethought.

Voices from the Ground:

"YOU CAN'T EAT MONEY!"

In July 2022, a GFC member organisation travelled to Hoima and Kukkube districts in Western Uganda, where we spoke with over 100 community members, including 60 women. The research was conducted in the communities of Kigaaga A, Kigaaga Parish, Kabale Sub-County in Hoima District, and in the communities of Kyakayemba Village, Kidoma Parish, and Kiziranfumbi Sub-County in Kikuube District. Interviews were carried out in one-on-one settings, including visits to TGB plantations, and group consultations with community members.

Meetings were held with the project's sub-county volunteer coordinators, who then organised meetings with groups of participants. At Kigaga Sub-County, 70 participants took part in a group discussion. At subsequent sites, coordinators were asked to bring together smaller groups (up to a dozen people), including older and more recent male and female participants. A separate meeting was held with a group of non-participants at each site. The volunteer coordinators introduced the team, except for the first group meeting at Kigaaga. The sessions were facilitated in the local language by one team member and followed a standard format: a short introduction to the research was followed by a discussion of the project's benefits, any adverse impacts of the project, and any distributional impacts observed. Visits were also made to individual participants to view their plots and discuss their engagement in the project.

The clear message from all communities was that the project was not delivering its promised benefits, and participants were growing increasingly bitter and desperate. All respondents said they felt trapped by the 25-year contracts they had signed and were not receiving the money and security they had expected. No longer able to farm food on agricultural

A community meeting in Kigaaga village Kabale sub county Hoima, comprised of TFGB participants and non-Participants discussing the implications of TFGB on food sovereignty and community livelihoods

Photo: Marvin Kamukama

Ugandan Village

Source: Pexels.com Photo: Timon Cornelissen

land, now assigned to grow trees to "capture" carbon and offset the CO2 being released into the atmosphere by companies, they told GFC they were now facing economic hardship and food insecurity. As one female farmer from the Kyakatemba community in Kidoma Parish, Kiziranfumbi Sub-County of Kikuube District said: "At the inception of the project, we thought it was going to benefit us. Later we realised it was instead compromising our food sovereignty."

As women in the region often lack the same access to land ownership and alternative employment as men, they have borne the brunt of these adverse impacts. In terms of economic justice, women have fewer opportunities to become financially independent since they are culturally responsible for unpaid domestic and care work. Women also collect wood, and water and grow food, which makes them crucial actors in the community's food security. This unequal sexual division of work has very negative impacts on women's opportunities in the region, including less time to develop other remunerated work and high levels of burnout and physical demand.

Access to power and control of resources is also limited for women. When different companies arrived in the region to build the Hoima international airport and exploit oil and gas through massive extractive projects, they forced the people of the community off of their lands. Beyond the significant impacts on their livelihoods and customary practices, this land grabbing resulted in inadequate compensation for many women, since the money from the compensation would often go to male account holders who actually own the land. There is no evidence of any gender action plan to compensate women, who are responsible for the continuation of life and preservation of food security. Not asingle woman in the communities visited is in charge of any of the carbon credit projects. Most of the coordination, contract signing and decision-making is controlled by men, which undermines women's ability to make choices and decide on the particular uses of the resources.

Over the past decade, **other studies into the TGB project have uncovered similar problems**. GFC's recent research suggests that rather than resolving these problems, ECOTRUST continues to expand the project—and its adverse impacts—to even more communities across Uganda.

According to ECOTRUSTS's latest **annual report on the TGB project**, in Hoima, only 51% of farmers (146 out of 287 monitored) met their target—meaning the rest did not receive the expected payments. In Kikuube, the success rate was slightly higher at 63% (170 out of 267 monitored). According to ECOTRUST, "the farmers [sic] poor performance in Hoima and Kikuube was a result of the drought resulting in farmers [sic] failure to plant and meet their targets." Regardless of the cause, the project appears indifferent to the struggles and suffering of small-scale farmers who had not seen the benefits they were promised by ECOTRUST when it convinced them to sign up for the project.

Tables 1 and 2 below show the performance rates of farmers in each of the districts, broken down by which year of the project their plantations are in, as published in the TGB annual report.

Year of Monitoring	Qualified	Not Qualified	Total
0	6	15	21
1	45	52	97
3	42	14	56
5	29	44	73
10	24	16	40
Grand Total	**146**	**141**	**287**

Table 15 showing performance of monitored farmers in Hoima

Year of Monitoring	Qualified	Not Qualified	Total
0	2	2	4
1	168	95	263
Grand Total	**170**	**97**	**267**

Table 16 showing performance of monitored farmers in Kikuube Districts

ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

Many of the participants we spoke to said they were suffering from economic hardship and food insecurity. They said the money received from TGB contracts was insufficient to support their families, and they had converted land previously used for food crops to grow trees. As one local NGO representative told GFC: "You can't eat money."

Underlying issues uncovered through this research suggest ECOTRUST failed to effectively inform participants of the technicalities of the project, including payment schedules and details and even what specifically ECOTRUST was paying them for. Delays in payments and transfers made through alternative methods other than traditional bank deposits were also common issues raised by participants.

Banana Plantation in Western Uganda
Photo: Imagexphoto • Envato Elements

Participants said the initial payments upon signing the contract with ECOTRUST did not cover the cost of planting the trees. Typically, it seems the initial payment is less than half the planting costs, as most farmers seem to hire workers to help with the time- and labour-intensive task of tree planting. Delays in subsequent payments also mean many producers go into debt to maintain their trees, which includes the purchase of pesticides.

These and similar problems were uncovered in earlier case studies. According to **a 2012 study** by the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) and the Ugandan Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD), those community members who had decided not to participate in the project stated that their cost-benefit calculations showed that growing coffee or bananas was more profitable and more flexible than growing indigenous trees and that their incomes were greater than their neighbours who had converted their land to grow trees as part of the TGB project.

"The most worrying statements came from a group of relatively well-off non-participants who said they were distressed when their poorer participating neighbours got into difficulties because they had reduced their acreage devoted to food production too much and got into debt when carbon payments were delayed," the study said.

According to ECOTRUST, the payment schedule is communicated to participants and stipulated in a contract or terms of agreement (in English) between the trust and the land owner and family members. However, GF

research suggests many of those that signed agreements with ECOTRUST were not fully aware of the details. A lack of follow-up communication and grievance redressal process meant participants felt left in the dark (see below section on Transparency and Communication).

The TGB project is run as a cooperative, with ECOTRUST purchasing carbon credits from small-scale farmers and then selling those on the market. According to a contract seen by GFC, ECOTRUST makes performance-based payments to landowners or "producers" over 10 years based on the Terms of Agreement. As ECOTRUST states:

The 25-year carbon contracts are linked to performance milestones that trigger payments over a 10-year period. This is based on a robust system for monitoring farmers and trees and on a cost-effective payment transfer system for thousands of farmers who achieve their contractual targets. TGB payments to farmers are made in year 1, 3, 5, 7 and 10, when they achieve the reforestation targets set out in their contract and land-use plan (which also serves as a business plan). In the first three years performance focuses on survival of the trees; after three years the focus shifts to tree parameters such as breast height, crown width and total height. Performance-based payments ensure that restoration objectives are achieved as part of the sustainability strategy.

ECOTRUST also flaunts that as the TGB project is under the Plan Vivo Standard, it can make ex-ante (front-loaded) carbon payments at the time of planting. These Ex-ante payments, ECOTRUST claims, build farmer confidence in the program and enable them to "invest early in multiple enterprises and avoid cutting down trees over the 25-year rotational period." However, what is not always clear to farmers is that these ex-ante payments are not directly paid to the producers, but rather deposited into an endowment fund which is then used to make annual performance-based payments to farmers who achieve contractual targets.

As and when the carbon finance comes in, ECOTRUST claims that for every $10 USD that carbon buyers pay, $6 goes to the farmers as a return for their investment. However, ECOSOC's latest figures and audit report bring this into question (see the section below on 'Carbon Offsetting Doesn't Work: Time to End the Practice of Greenwashing'). Each farmer then contributes 10% of that carbon income to the ECOTRUST-managed community carbon fund (CCF), which is then used to support farmers in addressing any external shocks and provides start-up grants for multiple forest-based enterprises for sustainable forest management, it says.

A farmer in Kigaaga, showing researchers how his coffee has dried up because of canopy generated by trees which were planted in the radius of 7 and due to lack of land in some of the participating community people.

Photo: Marvin Kamukama

However, almost all participants said ECOTRUST payments had been delayed, or they had not received the expected or planned amounts. ECOTRUST can only make the performance-based payments after a formal monitoring visit to ensure farmers have met their contractually agreed targets, which many failed to meet over the past year, as mentioned above.

Another issue raised by participants was that even if they had met their targets, the time taken for monitoring and approval was increasingly long, potentially because of the continued expansion of the project into new areas. Participants also said ECOTRUST often makes payments through its mobile money application and usually to the male member of the household. GFC heard of situations where husbands did not inform their wives and children of these payments, leading to increased tensions and, in some cases, domestic violence.

In Kigaaga Village, TGB project coordinator told GFC that despite being relatively new to the area, around 100 farmers had already joined the project. According to the Coordinator, ECOTRUST had selected the area to counteract the negative environmental impact of the forthcoming oil refinery and airport in Hoima. A local farmer in Kigagga in Kikuube District, however, said the biggest challenge was that there was little evidence the payments made by ECOTRUST would be enough to provide economic security or financial independence for those taking part. He said that many of the farmers in the area were poor and easily sucked into the project by the promise of "free" money to plant the trees.

In the areas where GFC conducted its field research, women were generally more responsible for small-scale farming than men. While both men and women are involved in farming, men often have other sources of income, such as working as casual labourers on local construction or mining projects, whilst women tend to work on farming more directly.

Under the law, women in Uganda have equal access to property rights. However, in practice, land is generally in the name of the male member of the household. This presents specific issues with the TGB model. Although the project stipulates that contracts must be signed by all household members, in effect, men have more control over the decision to enter the project and the running of the project once they have signed the contract. Women are also still primarily responsible for unpaid care work, cooking, collecting firewood and other household work.

Rural Landscape in Uganda Photo: imagexphoto · Envato Elements.

FOOD INSECURITY

A central failing of the TGB project, beyond the fact that climate offsetting does not work, is its lack of recognition of the dynamic nature of rural economies and that land use preferences might alter over the duration of the contract. The chief issue of the communities involved in TBG who spoke to GFC is food security or the lack of it. Almost all participants GFC spoke with in Hoima and Kukuube districts said they were facing food security issues.

As one local NGO member said: "The main problem that people have is food—people have grown these trees thinking they will get money that would actually help them. But in the long run, when trees grew and developed a canopy, they could no longer grow coffee, annual crops, maize, and beans; these would no longer grow, and they couldn't have food. For them, that was a big problem, that even in their homes, they couldn't have food.

Person checking Coffee
Photo: Og Mpango • Pexels.com

"When communities lose their indigenous seeds, breeding them and start using agrochemicals, this compromises their food security. Food security is a subset of food sovereignty. The canopy of trees coupled with climate change has compelled them to use seeds that they never used before just to be able to get some yields to feed their children," they added.

Before joining the TGB project, farmers said they had control over their crops. They could decide which trees and food crops to grow and when and how to rotate them. Under the contracts with ECOTRUST, they are tied in for at least 15 years. The money they receive from ECOTRUST is insufficient to purchase food, and as the trees grow, they cannot grow other crops in between. Not only does this impact those farmers directly involved in the project, but also access to food in the wider community. With more land dedicated to sequestering carbon being bellowed out by companies tens of thousands of miles away, local communities face increasing challenges in food sovereignty and poverty. Many of those interviewed said they would cut down all the trees and abandon the project if they had the opportunity.

Communities in unison agreed coffee, bananas, and other seasonal crops were much better than the incentives received by TGB. The programme is against the concept of food sovereignty which communities had historically and culturally practised, they said. TGB is claiming to benefit the

world and the communities in which the trees are being grown; it appears it is achieving neither.

A recent study on the TGB project by the Chair in Decarbonization, a strategic research unit at the École des sciences de la gestion (ESG) at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), found that "analysis did not show a significant relationship between participation in the TGB programme and food security." However, it noted that the findings were not surprising given that the study involved participants with significantly higher incomes and landholdings than community members not involved in the project.

The report stated that: "Overall, our findings suggest that, while the programme has delivered benefits, it has not been as transformative as expected. We find the programme to be delivering positive but declining returns for TGB participants while generating limited positive feedbacks [sic] and spillovers with non-participants."

The above research was undertaken over 10 years between 2009 and 2019 in three sub-counties across two districts in southwestern Uganda: Bitereko sub-county in Mitooma District and Ryeru and Kichwamba sub-counties in Rubirizi District. The location of the studies could account for some of the differences in responses and findings, which counter the information received by GFC in its recent field research.

Another critical element regarding food security is that due to the amount of land required for farmers to participate (a minimum of five hectares), the project remains largely inaccessible to poorer families, and the benefits (if any) remain centred in already more affluent households. This issue is further explored below in the section on equity. However, GFC research showed that some farmers had managed to join the project without meeting this minimum land requirement, thereby compromising their land area for food production.

As previous studies showed, the relative benefits of different land use depend entirely on a farmer's specific circumstances, which may change over time. Thus, farmers are unaware of the contractual consequences of changing land uses, so they and their children become bound to lengthy contracts, significantly limiting their ability to manoeuvre in the future. It was evident through recent field research that some farmers in Kigaaga Village in Hoima District have converted all available land, including in their house compounds, to growing trees in the expectation of making more money. This is an unsustainable model and leads to increased food insecurity among those involved in the project. Simply put, people cannot achieve food sovereignty by converting their prime land for growing food to growing trees.

Bunch-of-bananas-grow-together
Photo: Rimidolove • Envato Elements.

TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION

The TGB annual report states that ECOTRUST held 43 induction and training meetings in 2021—including three in Hoima and four in Kikuube districts—to encourage new participants to sign up for the project. "Participants are informed that, by joining the programme and growing trees, they can help mitigate the impacts of global warming and climate change," the report says. "The probable members are also informed that the program will enhance their resilience to the impacts of climate change as well as improving their livelihoods through carbon sales and the co-benefits of tree growing."

In essence, the meetings seem more like sales pitches than genuine attempts to listen to the grievances and concerns of farmers or seek their input into the design and delivery of the programme. ECOTRUST also says it holds "farmer-led" and annual feedback meetings. However, it said it reduced feedback meetings in 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Despite these outreach efforts, through discussions with TGB project participants, it is clear that many lack detailed information on the project and feel they cannot engage with ECOTRUST to request information or air grievances or complaints. It was also clear that many key decisions are made at levels inaccessible to the farmers actually implementing the project on the ground and often against their best interests.

A fundamental failure in this regard is the level of information and detail in the contract signed by ECOTRUST and farmers or "producers". For example, the agreement signed by farmers does not provide essential information such as what would happen if either the producers or the buyers reneged on their agreement and what would happen if trees were lost through malicious acts or natural disasters. Furthermore, farmers were frustrated that the contract was only available in English. It was also evident that some farmers did not seem to have a copy of the agreement, and it was frequently unclear to them how much they would be paid and when.

A focused group discussion in Kigaaga village Kabale sub county Hoima, composed of growers of TGB and non-growers discussing the impacts of contracts signed between ECOTRUST and community participants with the research team.
Photo credits: Marvin Kamukama

Rural area in Uganda

Photo: Imagexphoto · Envato Elements.

Lack of access to advice and information from non-project sources increased the risk that potentially vulnerable people might take decisions not currently in their best interests or reduce their ability to adapt their land use to changing circumstances in the future.

The **latest audit of the project** confirms the findings regarding a lack of understanding among farmers of what they have signed, stating: *"Site visit interviews with producers/ farmers indicated that a majority had an actual copy of their contract, however many were unclear on the actual details of the contract."*

ECOTRUST, it seems, continues to engage new farmers without addressing these important issues around communication and transparency. According to ESPA and UCSD, ECOTRUST did not distribute pamphlets or other detailed information on the project to prospective participants. According to participants GFC spoke with, ECOTRUST provides little support to help farmers effectively consider and assess potential long-term implications of signing up for the project, leading to negative impacts down the road.

The ESPA–UCSD study also suggested ECOTRUST was intentionally withholding certain information regarding grievance procedures under the contract: "The contract does not address what happens if trees are lost through no fault of the farmers (e.g. drought or fire or malicious action by others). There is a reluctance on the part of ECOTRUST to be too explicit about the process (which essentially requires evidence that the loss was not brought about by a farmer's negligence and that it is of serious scale) in case farmers take advantage of the process," the report stated, citing personal communications with the ECOTRUST executive director.

EQUITY AND WIDER COMMUNITY IMPACTS

Regarding equity, two main issues were forthcoming from conversations with participants and consultation of previous studies on the TGB project. Firstly, as the project requires a certain amount of land ownership, the project excludes poorer members of the community or incentivises the purchase of additional land (potentially through borrowing) for poorer farmers to participate. As the 2012 study by ESPA and UCSD states:

Important issues raised by the study include the fact that a tree-planting project inevitably excludes farmers who do not have sufficient land or capital to engage in tree-planting. Without a clear goal to improve local-level equity (and not just the livelihoods of participants), the project therefore cannot be sure that it will not increase disparities by providing a new income-generating activity to people who tend, on the whole, already to be better-off than their neighbours.

Community in Uganda
Photo: imagexphoto • Envato Elements

Another concern, addressed briefly above, is that there is minimal scope for local community participation in the design and implementation of the project. Decisions are taken at national and sometimes international levels regarding carbon credits and offsets. Often these may not be in the best interests of the farmers on the ground. One example of this is the various requirements dictated by the needs and regulations of the international carbon market. These include requirements on specific tree species to be grown, even if they may not be the most economically viable or profitable in the long term.

Instead of making decisions based on the best interests of farmers and local communities, pressures from global capital mean ECOTRUST is motivated and accountable to international carbon markets, in this case, the Plan Vivo standard. These issues have been well analysed and raised in numerous studies, including the **2017 study by Carton and Andersson**, and the **2017 paper by Fisher et al**. As stated in multiple studies, ECOTRUST is seen as more accountable to carbon credit purchasers than local smallholders and is presented as an opportunity for farmers with almost no space for negotiation.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, TGB is designed as a Program of Activities (PoA) under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Essentially, this allows for scaling out and replication in new communities without requiring further registration. This can lead to problems, as detailed in this report, as conditions — and impacts and consequences— can differ from one community to another. Despite these concerns, GFC research indicates that ECOTRUST continues to expand the TGB project across Uganda.

Carbon Offsetting Doesn't Work:

TIME TO END THE PRACTICE OF GREENWASHING

As TGB is primarily a carbon offsetting project, it is inherently flawed. It is motivated by and dictated to by the global carbon market. It supports corporate public relations initiatives that are contrary to actual climate mitigation solutions and the interests of those small-scale farmers convinced to take part.

Carbon offsetting does not work. Offsetting means emissions are still being generated, not reduced and avoided, and offset somewhere else, allowing companies to continue their unsustainable practices. Projects based on market-based approaches, including carbon offsets, are typically envisioned and designed in the Global North and implemented in the Global South. Thus, they are a form of climate and carbon neocolonialism and commercialisation of nature. Carbon offset projects often assume each tonne of carbon is interchangeable and disregard questions of where or when carbon is removed or stored. Nowadays, land-based carbon offsets projects typical rely on tree planting schemes, as is the case of this project, which adds the problem of permanence: carbon dioxide stored in trees will sooner or later be released back into the atmosphere, including through fires and pests, which are now more frequent and extreme due to climate change.

In addition, carbon trading and offsets have proved to be a very ineffective way of reducing emissions and halting the production of fossil fuels, and very often lead to land grabbing, conflict with the communities and corporate abuse. They inherently favour those with economic power and tend to further entrench inequalities faced by groups like women and Indigenous Peoples. **Research shows** that whenever forests become more commercially attractive, for example through forest carbon offsets markets and plantations, there has been a tendency for forest tenure and access rights—in the rare cases where tenure rights are present—to shift from women to men.

Published operational costs from the latest **annual report** of ECOTRUST show that nearly $480,000 USD of carbon sales from trees planted by Ugandan farmers in 2020 went into the running costs of the project rather than to the farmers growing the trees that produce the carbon credits—this included over $280,000 of carbon credits going to "staff

Greenwashing

Photo: Kristian Thomas , Ann H, Macarena Iglesias Gualati

time." This compares to $682,889 distributed to farmers in 2020 and an additional $33,415 allocated in the form of seedlings.

Under the Plan Vivo standard, 60% of carbon credit sales must go to the farmers. The latest audit of the TGB project raises concerns about the information provided and whether ECOTRUST is meeting this minimum target. According to the **audit**, "incomplete information was provided to verifiers to confirm this requirement. It was not clear from the files provided if, for instance, payments to SACCOs [Savings and Credit Co-Operative Societies] included issuance numbers, files were linked to external files with no supporting data, and files did not cover the entire verification period."

During the last published annual reporting period (2020), the project says it sold tCO2 285,694 to various buyers. Most of these purchases were through **Zero Mission** and **My Climate** (see Table 3 below). Most companies purchasing carbon credits through Zero Mission are based in Sweden or elsewhere in Scandinavia and Europe, including companies in France and Germany. Key companies purchasing TGB carbon credits over the past two years include fast food and retail food chains, dairy and food processing companies, as well as entertainment, fashion, real estate, aviation, and automobile companies. Interestingly, purchasers also included sustainable development and climate solution consultancies. A complete list is available on the Mer Markit website through **this link.**

Vintage	Name of purchaser/ source of funds	Number of PCVs purchased	Price per certificate	Amount achieved
2016	**ZeroMission P.O. 521**	**433**	**Internal Reporting only**	**Internal Reporting only**
2016	Classic Africa Safaris (UCB)	71		
2017	Kaffeekoop GmbH	209		
2017	ZeroMission P.O. 520:	2697		
		2906		
2018	ZeroMission P.O. 520:	2070		
		2070		
2019	Myclimate	20,000		
2019	KUA	54		
2019	International School of Uganda	276		
2019	ZeroMission P.O. 520:	2081		
		22,411		
2020	**ZeroMission P.O. 482 Arla Foods & others**	51,143		
2020	**ZeroMission P.O. 463:**	869		
2020	**ZeroMission P.O. 476:**	98,914		
2020	**ZeroMission P.O. 504:**	1,850		
2020	C-Level	1811		
2020	**COTAP**	3,287		
2020	Myclimate	50,000		
2020	Myclimate	50,000		
		257,874		
		285,765		

Table 6 Sales for the reporting period January to December 2020

Young woman holding Climate change protest sign

Photo: Reinasmyth · Envato Elements

These companies are guilty of greenwashing and exporting their climate responsibilities to poor African communities in Uganda. Companies should instead address their own practices to ensure a reduction in carbon emissions whilst supporting genuine social, environmental, and economic development programs in poorer communities, particularly those bearing the brunt of climate change.

Trees for Global Benefit does not achieve what it claims. Rather, it should be labelled Trees for Climate Greenwashing. All the information is there. The corporate, capitalist capture of climate change mitigation is a risk to the planet and must be stopped. The greenwashing of carbon offsetting programmes must end and real, gender-just, community-led and governed solutions must be supported. This will not only contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation but also to social, gender, and climate justice, and equity among the world's poorer communities.

Global
Forest
Coalition