

Going Carbon Neutral - CARE Netherlands

Inspired by other NGOs and committed to achieving carbon neutrality for its own operations, CARE Nederland sought to offset its reduced footprint in a way that fulfilled the CARE mission. "We want to offset the impact of climate change on the lives of the poor," said Roelof van Til, Disaster Risk Reduction Coordinator for CARE Nederland. Surveying the offerings of two Dutch offset providers, he observed that projects in developing countries did "not sufficiently work with or on behalf of the people most affected by climate change." Instead, the projects engaged with communities in or near parks or other relatively well-protected areas, which appeared to benefit more from tourism than carbon sequestration. "If they have not the poorest and most vulnerable as the focus of offset policies, then where else can we go?" van Til asked.

CARE Nederland decided to explore ways to facilitate mechanisms that can help the people most affected by climate change benefit from carbon trading. CARE country offices possess the local expertise and maintain the relationships with government officials needed to implement successful offset projects. Their assessments of opportunities for pro-poor credit generation, coupled with standards like for instance the CCB, will guide CARE Nederland's strategy for developing land use, land-use change and forestry projects. Such ventures "need very experienced people in the field to deal with these issues – but we have them, so that's the good news," said van Til. Partnerships with offset providers and businesses may be leveraged to pre-finance these projects. However, van Til anticipates the associated credits will earn a Gold rating from the CCB and yield a premium on the voluntary carbon market.

Given the extended timeframe associated with land use, land-use change and forestry offset projects, developers must consider a duration for up to 60 years. CARE Nederland is specialized in reconstruction, thus emphasizing the role of local partners and capacity building as strategies toward sustained development. Even CARE country offices cannot guarantee their presence so many decades into the future. In recognition of this focus, CARE Nederland plans to transfer control of offsets projects to a provider interested in selling the credits once they become viable, ensuring also the appropriate local institutional frameworks. While van Til acknowledges that this venture may expose CARE Nederland to criticism, the opportunities to use existing carbon markets as a means to channel funds to the poorest communities most affected by climate change are too powerful to ignore.

Roelof van Til hopes that CARE Nederland's efforts might serve as a model for other CARE members. "Our first concern at this moment is quality of work – not quantity," he said. If CARE International centralizes funding, guarantees sustainability, develops private sector investment guidelines, and allows flexibility among CARE members and country offices, the projects could proliferate rapidly.