

# *Boost integrity of carbon offset projects to combat climate change effects*

Nature-based carbon credit schemes in Kenya and Africa are helping to channel much-needed resources from the Global North to protect and restore ecosystems that are critical in combating climate change.

In the face of mounting questions about their effectiveness, we should not heed calls to abandon nature offsets. Instead, we should back efforts to strengthen their integrity and benefits.

Kenya hosts several groundbreaking nature-based carbon offset projects, including the Chyulu Hills, Kasigau Corridor, and Mikoko Pamoja initiatives. The country also has the world's first large-scale grasslands soil carbon project in northern Kenya which President William Ruto lauded at an international climate summit last year.

The government estimates Kenya could generate Sh65 billion annually by 2030 from carbon offsets, including nature-based ones. No doubt, we need to seize this huge opportunity for nature and people.

However, some climate campaigners are calling for nature offsets to be dropped entirely from the global arsenal against the climate crisis. They argue that most offset schemes are selling "hot air" emission reductions that have no or little impact on the climate.

They also accuse corporates of using offsets as a 'licence' to keep pumping harmful carbon into the atmosphere while positioning themselves as climate-friendly. Such criticisms are undermining confidence in nature offsets.

Organisations involved in implementing, certi-



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fying or buying carbon credits strenuously dispute these claims. They assert that nature-based carbon offsets are misunderstood and misrepresented while the underlying methodologies and best practices are evolving and becoming more robust.

Admittedly, not all nature offset projects may be delivering the benefits they claim. Similarly, some corporates may be misusing offsets by not pursuing feasible emission reductions. Still, eliminating nature-based offsets, especially in Africa, would amount to throwing out the baby with the bath water.

In the race to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and avoid the worst climate change impacts, we need all the tools we can mar-

shal against climate change. This includes protecting and restoring carbon-absorbing forests, grasslands and other ecosystems. High-quality nature-based offsets can help deliver this.

We should back ongoing efforts to enhance the integrity and benefits of offsets to nature and people. For instance, the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM), an independent governance body for the voluntary carbon market, recently published new stricter standards to evaluate the integrity of carbon offsets.

ICVCM describes high-integrity offsets as having effective programme governance to ensure transparency, accountability, continuous improvement and the overall quality of carbon credits. The offset projects must also have credible emission reductions, and robust social and environmental safeguards while delivering positive sustainable development impacts.

It is in Kenya's interest that credible nature-based carbon offsetting thrives. It offers a huge opportunity to unlock funds to protect and restore nature and improve people's lives. Despite their global importance for climate, biodiversity and livelihoods, key ecosystems in Africa receive limited support for their conservation and sustainable management.

Yes, we need to cut emissions from fossil fuels, but we also need to protect and restore nature to absorb carbon from the atmosphere. Science confirms that if funded adequately, nature can provide at least a third of the solution to climate change. High-quality carbon offset projects can help realise this critical nature's potential.