

# Greenhouse gas emissions offsetting **MYTHBUSTER**

Some people are still a bit **confused** about **greenhouse gas emissions offsetting**. If you find you're being asked the same questions about offsetting time and again, and are looking for some **quick fool-proof answers**, then help is at hand. The Greening the Blue MYTHBUSTER sets out **the FACTS about offsetting**, so you can go forth and explain every aspect of climate neutrality and **amaze your friends and colleagues** with your full(ish) grasp of the subject. **Enjoy!**



**GREENING  
THE BLUE.**





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For more information about the United Nations approach to offsetting visit [www.greeningtheblue.org](http://www.greeningtheblue.org)

# MYTH 1

Offsetting is cheating.  
We can only avoid climate  
change by reducing  
greenhouse gas emissions  
at source.



# FACT:

Every offset represents a real reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Offsetting helps to deliver emissions reductions through investments in greenhouse gas reductions to compensate for those that can't be eliminated at source. In the last 10 years UN verified offsets via the Clean Development Mechanism – the UNFCCC-supported financing mechanism through which greenhouse gas emissions are

reduced – has saved 1.60 billion tonnes of carbon emissions – five times the annual emissions of France.

Offsetting is best considered as the third step of the 1. Measure, 2. Reduce and 3. Offset approach.

Where emissions cannot be entirely eliminated, offsetting provides a means of demonstrating a commitment to greenhouse gas management while business models are adapted.

# MYTH 2

Offsets are  
too cheap!



## FACT:

There are many different types of project types in the Clean Development Mechanism, offering a range of benefits and features. The price of offsets varies accordingly, allowing the user a variety of options.

## MYTH 3

Offsets represent  
an unnecessary  
expenditure.

We should focus  
our spending on  
delivering our  
core mandate



## FACT:

'Do no harm' is a principle that is recognized the world over. The UN has a responsibility to minimize negative impacts resulting from its work, whether it's disposing of waste cleanly and safely, or reducing and offsetting its greenhouse gas emissions. It's a normal part of day-to-day operations.

# MYTH 4

Offsets  
do not  
result  
in real  
emission  
reductions



## FACT:

The Clean Development Mechanism reduces greenhouse gas emissions by investing in projects in developing countries that would not have been possible otherwise. Each project is rigorously monitored and emissions reductions are verified both by UNFCCC and independent teams to guarantee that each Certified Emission Reduction represents a real tonne of reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

# MYTH 5

Offsetting is  
just  
about  
planting  
trees



## FACT:

There are hundreds of different ways to offset emissions - from providing clean cook stoves and wind farms, to methane capture from waste dumps and efficient public transport systems in cities. Tree planting ('afforestation and reforestation' in the jargon) constitutes only a small number of Clean Development Mechanism projects. Every offset project helps to transition the world towards a low carbon future and most of them deliver additional benefits such as cleaner, healthier environment, increased job opportunities or off-grid electricity - thereby improving the lives of individuals and communities the world over.

## MYTH 6

Arranging to measure and offset our emissions is an administrative nightmare



## FACT:

Offsetting for UN organizations is easier now than ever before.

Almost all UN entities are now measuring their greenhouse gas emissions on an annual basis and a growing number are already climate neutral. Information about how they've done this, from an administrative and financing perspective, is available from UNEP and UNFCCC.

# MYTH 7

Most  
offsetting  
projects  
are scams



## FACT:

The UNFCCC is responsible for certifying offset projects to ensure they meet internationally agreed standards and Clean Development Mechanism projects are only allowed to issue offsets after emission reductions have been confirmed and verified via a robust verification process of both quality and quantity. The UN is committed to purchasing only the highest-quality Certified Emission Reductions issued by the UNFCCC under the Clean Development Mechanism.

## MYTH 8

Governing bodies and external stakeholders would be appalled if we went climate neutral



## FACT:

On the contrary! UN stakeholders – including donors as well as experts working in the field of environmental sustainability – are increasingly calling on the UN to take full responsibility for the environmental impact of its global operations. Offsetting, where emissions cannot be reduced at reasonable cost, complements the UN's greening efforts and demonstrates our willingness to be accountable for our environmental footprint.



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# MYTH 9

Offsetting is a short-term solution. In the longer term there won't be enough offsetting projects to meet demand (as everyone will have reduced their emissions already) and prices will be too high



# **FACT:**

**Climate change needs to be addressed now. Offsets are a way of helping to do this, not only at home, but the world over.**

**As the world transitions to a low-carbon global economy, there will be fewer opportunities for offsetting which means there will be less demand for carbon credits, thereby helping to keep prices at a reasonable level.**

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# JARGON BUSTERS



**CDM:** The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is the only offset initiative recognized by the United Nations. It is also the world's largest initiative with almost 8,000 projects registered in 107 developing countries. Certified Emissions Reductions (CERs) from the CDM can both be used by parties to the Kyoto protocol to help them meet their emission reduction targets, and by anybody voluntarily to support emission reductions globally.

**CERs:** Certified Emissions Reductions (CER) is the name given to offsets generated by the CDM.

**UNFCCC:** The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

# JARGON BUSTERS



**Offsets:** Offsets is a generic name for any type of emission reduction units generated by any offsetting mechanism. In principle, one offset should correspond to one tonne of reduced greenhouse gas emissions, but different offset mechanisms may have different qualities in their offsets. CDM has the world's most stringent standards to ensure that the offsets really are verifiable, and have the highest environmental integrity.

**Offsetting:** Offsetting is the process of investing in emission reductions outside your own company, organization or country. The emission reductions achieved (the offsets) are therefore representing additional emission reductions. Offsetting should not be used instead of, but in addition to, emission reductions at home.