

ENGLISH only

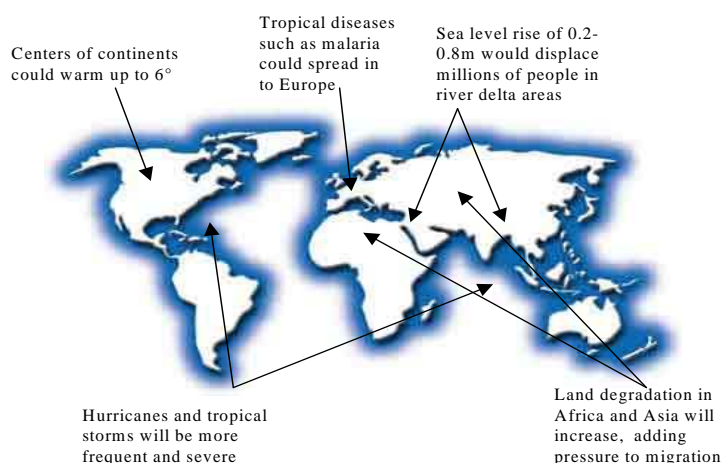


Carbon offsetting, Climate Change, Desertification, Biodiversity and Security- a Synergies Project

OCEEA together with UNCCD are proposing a project aimed at combating climate change, desertification and eradication of biodiversity, which would at the same time provide local populations with a source of employment and income. The activity could be financed through carbon credits, offsetting carbon emissions caused by, for example, international conferences.

The link to Security and Development

Human induced climate change resulting from the greenhouse effect is probably the greatest current environmental threat. Greenhouse gases emitted to the atmosphere from human activities trap energy radiating from the earth, increasing the temperature of the earth's atmosphere. This can result in large scale environmental changes that can worsen existing environmental problems. Some of the possible impacts of such a temperature rise are:



"This is not some distant worst case scenario... it is sober prediction, based on the best science available" - Kofi Annan

Water scarcity, desertification and natural disasters have all been identified as environmental risks to security in the OSCE area by the EnvSec (OSCE/UNEP/UNDP) initiative. Climate change has the potential of exacerbating all of these problems, as well as creating new ones. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, one of the biggest effects of climate change could be ensuing large scale migration.

Carbon-emissions and conferencing – potential to offset

In an era where CO₂ has been identified as the principle greenhouse gas, more and more organisations (e.g. World Bank, World Economic Forum) are looking to erase the 'ecological footprint' they leave on the Earth as a result of their activities.

The OSCE, as an intergovernmental organisation, is the sponsor and organiser of numerous conferences through out the year. Although not immediately apparent, these conferences generate a lot of CO₂ - notably through the consumption of fuel on the planes carrying conference participants to the venue. For example, a conference/seminar in Almaty, Kazakhstan, attended by 150 delegates, of whom 130 have arrived by plane from Western Europe, generates ca. 300 tons CO₂. Opportunities exist to offset this ecological footprint.

One way to partially offset such amounts of CO₂ is by planting trees. These store carbon from the biosphere in their trunks, so that the build-up of carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere will slow. In the above example, depending on the tree species, ca. 12,000 trees must be planted to offset the Almaty conference's carbon emissions. The cost for the offset is equivalent to around 25 Euros per participant.

Reforestation: Beyond Offsetting Emissions

Planting trees goes far beyond simply combating greenhouse gases and slowing climate change. They provide numerous avenues to improve **security** and **economic development** in degraded areas:

- Trees protect nutrient rich top-soil from being carried away by erosion through wind and rain. As such they are a vital instrument in the fight against landslides and desertification, an identified security threat and a main reason for environmentally induced migration.
- Trees also have the unique capacity to completely revitalise areas where farming is currently impossible due to a high concentration of salt in the ground (e.g. Aral Sea basin). Over the years, they absorb the salt in the soil, making the earth usable again and providing impoverished regions with renewed economic productivity and diversified income from agriculture.
- By planting trees and managing them in a sustainable manner, local, and perhaps marginalised, communities are given employment opportunities. Trees can be planted on the smallest tracts of land, thereby involving small holders and peasant farmers, who get a source of income from: 1) the value of the carbon the trees are storing for as long as the trees are kept (carbon credits), 2) any fruits the trees might bear, 3) possible intercropping and 4) responsible logging.
- Planting local tree species add to the ability of the local ecosystem to sustain life and halt the eradication of biological diversity. Equally, by promoting biodiversity for all to enjoy, transboundary activities in this area can serve as confidence building measures between conflicting states.

Proposal for a future project

OCEEA and UNCCD propose to proceed jointly with interested governments and local land owners to identify areas suitable for tree planting projects, using the mechanisms established under the auspices of the relevant UN Conventions (UNFCCC, UNCCD, UNCBD), and referring to the ENVSEC assessments for site selection. The proposed project would buy and plant saplings on the land, assist farmers to create a management plan with monitoring requirements, monitor carbon sequestration and reimburse land owners.

The bottom line ->Enhanced Security: The project would achieve the multiple result of combating climate change and desertification, enhance biodiversity and provide a source of income for local communities. In some cases the project will also reinvigorate degraded soil and/or diminish the risk of landslides and erosion. The OSCE and its participating countries could support such a project through funds raised by way of a 'carbon neutral' conference initiative.

“We plant seeds of peace now and for the future. When I plant a tree, I plant a seed of peace and hope and give a future to my children. I use trees as a sign of hope. They are alive, they keep going, don't give up. The environment is an important aspect of peace, because when resources are lacking, we fight to take them back.” – Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize 2004