

Wasting the Climate: Kyoto Protocol agency supports incinerators

What is the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)?

The CDM is an arrangement that allows countries who have committed to reduce greenhouse gases under the Kyoto Protocol fulfill some of their obligations by support projects in less industrialized countries, instead of reducing that amount of emissions in their own country. One rationale given for this arrangement is that it would be cheaper to implement emission reductions in less industrialized countries than in more industrialized countries. For each CDM project there is a host country where the project will actually be located and a more industrialized country that will receive the project's carbon credits.

The CDM's waste projects

The CDM has approved three municipal waste incinerators in recent months. According to the CDM project database, these are the first such projects.

In November 2007, the CDM approved a project with two new municipal waste incinerators near Delhi, India (TIMARPUR-OKHLA Waste Management Company Pvt Ltd's (TOWMCL) integrated waste to energy, Project 1254). In May 2007, the CDM funded a gasification incinerator project for municipal solid waste in Bali, Indonesia (PT Navigat Organic Energy Indonesia Integrated Solid Waste Management (GALFAD), Project 0938). In April 2007, the CDM funded a refuse derived fuel incinerator for municipal solid waste in India (Shriram Energy Systems Ltd (SESL) 6 MW Municipal Solid Waste Based Power Project at Vijayawada & Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, Project 0959).

Since the CDM went into force it has also approved dozens of landfill projects around the world, which claim to capture some of the landfill gases and burn them to reduce the amount of methane released by the landfills. It is important to remember that the most effective way to stop methane generation from landfills is to stop putting organics like food waste in landfills and dumps! The efficiency of landfill gas capture is highly debated, with reported capture rates as low as 20%.

Where the money comes from and who makes decisions

Funding for the CDM comes from many sources, including countries party to the Kyoto Protocol, the World Bank Group, and private institutions. The CDM has an Executive Board that is made up of ten people representing countries that have signed the Kyoto Protocol.

General criticisms of the CDM

A number of organizations from civil society have raised concerns that carbon trading itself is not appropriate and ineffective. Some of the criticisms of the CDM and other trading schemes include:

- Trading in greenhouse gases means that somebody owns those gases. Trading systems turn air itself into a commodity, and give participating companies and countries more rights to that air than everyone else.

- Carbon trading allows companies and countries to continue to use fossil fuels, destroy forests, and pollute communities. With carbon trading, these companies and countries can even claim to be reducing emissions while continuing to pollute. Almost all the carbon credits are generated by polluting companies, while communities that follow climate-friendly practices such as preserving local forests or defending their lands against oil exploitation are ignored, according to research by the Durban Group for Climate Justice.
- Many CDM projects are actually false solutions such as large-scale tree plantations and schemes to reduce emissions from factories through back end solutions, and do not address the real sources of climate change.
- CDM projects must show that they are avoiding greenhouse gas generation, yet it is difficult to discern when the CDM projects are not “business as usual.”
- A recent study found that the main type of CDM projects paid up to 50 times more for the emission reductions than the actual costs alone. Factories and the carbon traders ended up with the excess profits.

For more information, please see:

The Durban Group for Climate Justice and the Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading at
www.carbontradewatch.org/durban/index.html

Carbon trading information from Corner House, UK at www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/subject/climate

CDM website at cdm.unfccc.int/index.html

Sources:

Carbon Trading: a critical conversation on climate change, privatisation and power; *Development Dialog* journal no. 48; September 2006. Available at <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/summary.shtml?x=544225>

Larry Lohman; “Carry on Polluting”; *New Scientist* magazine; issue 2580; 2 December 2006.

Michael Wara; “Is the global carbon market working?”; *Nature* Vol. 445; 8 February 2007.

