

'Nature Based Solutions'

A corporate smokescreen

More than 1,500 corporations have made 'net zero' emissions commitments in recent years.¹ Many of these corporations also commit to using 'nature based solutions'² to achieve their goal.

They include fossil fuel corporations BP, Shell and Total, tech giants Microsoft and Apple, retailers Amazon and Walmart, banks and investors HSBC, Bank of America and BlackRock, airlines KLM and Delta and industrial food corporations JBS, Nestlé and Cargill.

None of these corporations has pledged to stop burning fossil fuels or change their core business model.

Meanwhile, the climate crisis unfolds at great scale and speed. In February 2023, climate scientists confirmed the urgent need to transition away from dirty energy systems, if we are to stay below the 1.5 degree global warming threshold.³ That means: halting new exploitation of oil, gas and coal; cutting fossil fuel emissions at source; and transitioning to sustainable and renewable alternatives. It means 'real zero' emissions, not 'net zero'.

Fossil fuels



Tech giants



Retailers



Pharmaceuticals



Industrial Food



Aerospace



Airlines



Banks and investors



Other corporations and business organisations



Example 1: Shell



By 2030, Shell intends to offset 120 Megatonnes (Mt) in emissions a year, which represents about 85% of current annual CO2 emissions of all citizens and companies in the Netherlands. As of August 2022, Shell is or had been involved in 30 'nature based' offset projects, in 17 countries.⁴

An analysis of Shell's pathway to 1.5 degrees shows that it is essentially the same as its 2 degree pathway, but with an added plan to "extensive scale-up of nature-based solutions", specifically planting trees over an "area approaching that of Brazil".⁵

Stated ambition

pathway to 1.5°C

involves

extensive scale-up of
'nature based solutions'
to plant trees on land

nearly the size of
Brazil



Example 2: Nestlé



Nestlé is the world's largest food and beverage company, a major global buyer of palm oil and producer of industrial meat and dairy, all of which make major contributions to deforestation and climate change. In 2019, Nestlé recorded more than 1000 cases of deforestation per day from its palm oil sourcing.⁶ Nestlé's palm oil suppliers have also been accused of fuelling land conflicts, exploitation and child labour.⁷ During the 2022 food crisis, Nestlé paid out £8.5bn to shareholders in the form of share buybacks, while raising prices by up to 7.5% on its products.⁸

Nestlé positions itself as a responsible and sustainable brand, and has become interested in carbon offsetting via regenerative agriculture and 'nature based solutions'. It has developed a "Net Zero Roadmap". In this, it hides the emissions that will result from projected growth of 68% in its sourcing both of dairy and animal products and of commodity crops between 2020 and 2030. While the Roadmap highlights emission reductions of 50% by 2030, the company will rely heavily on carbon offsetting to achieve 'net zero' operations by 2050. Nestlé estimates that it will need to offset 13 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

Stated ambition

Offset the equivalent of

13 million tonnes

of carbon dioxide emission each year with
'nature based solutions'

could require

planting trees on at least

4.4 million hectares*

of land every year

*44000 KM²



That means planting
trees on area of land
larger than
Switzerland
every year

Beyond the smokescreen, real solutions do exist

Communities deeply connected to their territories, including Indigenous Peoples, peasants, fishers and pastoralists, have always been in the front line of struggles against extractive projects and the impacts of climate change. These communities, and especially women within them, are the defenders and guardians of the world's remaining biodiversity, yet they face the most repression and violations of their human and collective rights. They are also the ones who feed the world.⁹ Their practices, diverse knowledge and worldviews can provide decentralised solutions to the climate crisis, based on ecological, and autonomous governance of their own land and territories.

Agroecology for food sovereignty and community forest management are examples of these real solutions and strengthening them is crucial to achieving both climate justice and food sovereignty.

'Nature based solutions' and natural carbon removal initiatives are not designed to achieve this. They have been engineered to benefit industrial food and farming corporations and high polluting countries, by allowing them to evade action, and turn nature and carbon into commodities.

Endnotes

- 1 Tom Murray (2020). "Net Zero Is The New Business Imperative." Forbes, Sep 23, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/edfenergyexchange/2020/09/23/net-zero-is-the-new-business-imperative/>
- 2 Friends of the Earth International (2021). Nature based solutions: a wolf in sheep's clothing. <https://www.foei.org/publication/nature-based-solutions-a-wolf-in-sheeps-clothing/>
- 3 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2023. AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>
- 4 Milieudéfense. 2022. How Shell is using nature based solutions to continue its fossil fuel agenda. Accessed June 2023. <https://en.milieudéfense.nl/news/shells-pipe-dream>
- 5 Carbon Brief. 2021. Analysis: Shell says new 'Brazil-sized' forest would be needed to meet 1.5C climate goal. Accessed June 2023. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-shell-says-new-brazil-sized-forest-would-be-needed-to-meet-1-5c-climate-goal/>
- 6 Swiss info. 2020. Nestlé identified over 1,000 cases of deforestation per day in palm oil areas. Accessed June 2023 <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/nestl%C3%A9-identified-over-1-000-cases-of-deforestation-per-day-in-palm-oil-areas/46035408>
- 7 Global Witness. 2021. Household brands and global financiers including BlackRock linked to clearance of tropical rainforest, human rights abuses in Papua New Guinea. <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/press-releases/household-brands-and-global-financiers-including-blackrock-linked-clearance-tropical-rainforest-human-rights-abuses-papua-new-guinea/>
- 8 Open Democracy. 2022. Global food companies pay shareholders £15bn as millions face poverty. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/food-companies-profit-cost-of-living-crisis-nestle-unilever-archer-daniels-midland-mondelez/>
- 9 ETC Group. 2017. "Who Will Feed Us? The Industrial Food Chain vs the Peasant Food Web". <https://www.etcgroup.org/content/who-will-feed-us-industrial-food-chain-vs-peasant-food-web>

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