

CDM-EB93-AA-A02

Concept note

Increasing the voluntary cancellation of certified emission reductions

Version 01.0

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1. Procedural background

1. At its ninety-second meeting (EB 92), the Executive Board of the clean development mechanism (CDM) (hereinafter referred to as the Board), in the context of CDM-MAP 2017 objective 2(b) “Enhance the use of the CDM for voluntary purposes”, requested the secretariat to further elaborate the proposal for work related to the promotion of the voluntary cancellation of certified emissions reductions (CER).

2. Purpose

2. The purpose of this concept note is to provide information about proposed activities to be undertaken in 2017 towards increasing the voluntary cancellation of CERs, including through the online platform for voluntary cancellation of CERs. The proposal is based on the two project ideas presented to the Board at EB 92, namely the voluntary cancellation of CERs for product integration and branding and the promotion of the CDM to sports associations, Fortune Global 500 companies and international organizations, with feedback from the Board from EB 92 taken into account.
3. In addition to this concept note, the Board will consider, at its ninety-third meeting, a concept note on options for improving the user friendliness of the platform, addressing how the content, design and messaging on the platform itself can be modified to encourage more completed cancellations of CERs by visitors to the platform.

3. Key issues and proposed solutions

4. The following activities are proposed to be undertaken in 2017, each of which is elaborated in the sub-sections that follow:
 - (a) Integration of voluntary offsetting in the check-out pages of companies selling on-line services, such as travel or hotel bookings;
 - (b) Outreach and promotion efforts towards specific groups identified as having a high potential to use offsetting with CERs as part of their climate action commitment, including:
 - (i) A dedicated outreach campaign to major sport event organizers and sports clubs;
 - (ii) Direct high-level outreach to the Fortune Global 500 companies;
 - (iii) Promotion of climate neutral organizations and meetings, based on the United Nations brand, to international organizations and meeting organizers, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Energy Agency (IEA), International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), international trade fairs, etc.;
 - (iv) Promotion of personal offsetting through a social media campaign, with a focus on groups of people who are more likely take action to reduce their personal climate footprint (target groups would be defined by factors such as income level, education, age, etc.).

3.1. Integration of voluntary offsetting in the check-out pages of companies selling online services

5. Rationale:

- (a) 68 per cent of flight tickets and hotel nights are purchased online, equalling roughly 2.6 billion flight tickets and 7.8 billion hotel nights per year, corresponding to transactions worth well over half a trillion USD annually;¹
- (b) The online travel booking industry is dominated by fewer than 20 large companies such as Expedia, Kayak, Priceline, Hotels.com and Travelocity. Most hotels and airlines also offer direct online purchase, but their individual number of bookings is smaller than those of online booking companies;
- (c) Several studies² suggest that many travellers are aware of the negative impact air travel has on the climate, with typically 20–30 per cent of interviewed travellers expressing interest in options to reduce this impact. Climate impact is among the top three environmental concerns expressed by international travellers in relation to their hotel stays abroad (with water and waste being the top concerns);
- (d) Experience from other United Nations and civil society campaigns in promoting environmental or social responsibility services (e.g. donations to provide food to the hungry, provide education to children or protect animals and natural habitats) shows that they are more successful when campaigns are linked to the purchase of products or services that the consumer has a personal interest in acquiring. This approach is well documented by market researchers and is sometimes described as “Self-fulfilment combined with a good conscience”;³
- (e) Most online travel companies (for both flight tickets and hotel nights) provide a similar user experience, where the selection of ticket/hotel is followed by a check-out page where the ticket/hotel is booked and paid for by credit card;
- (f) The check-out page represents the place where self-fulfilment (ticket or hotel night) can easily be combined with “a good conscience” (voluntary cancellation of CERs). The fact that the check-out page is also where the user is taking out his/her credit card to make the payment (for the ticket/hotel nights) minimizes the perceived extra effort for cancelling CERs.

6. Implementation:

- (a) The online travel company check-out page will automatically display the climate footprint of the ticket or the hotel nights that the user is about to buy;

¹ STATISTA Dossier: Online travel market (2015); Eurostat Statistics on ICT use in tourism (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_ICT_use_in_tourism>).

² Attitude to aviation and climate change, Commission for integrated transport (2007); Air travel attitudes and behaviours: The development of environment-based segments, Journal of Air Transport Management (2013); The Impact of Environmental Certification on Hotel Guest Ratings, Cornell University (2014).

³ Meeting the needs of the consumer - Marketing theory, Sage Journal of Marketing (Dec. 2014).

- (b) The checkout page will include the option to cancel this climate footprint by clicking a “Go Climate Neutral Now” (or similar) button, which automatically adds the cost for cancelling the corresponding amount of CERs to the total cost for the ticket/hotel night;
- (c) When payment for the ticket/hotel night is confirmed, the costs for the cancellation of CERs in the voluntary cancellation platform is also automatically charged by the booking company to the customer (added to the total bill);
- (d) When this option is selected by the user, their receipt will include the text “this travel/hotel stay is now climate neutral as you have contributed to climate protection projects developed under the United Nations’ supervision” (or similar);
- (e) The connection between the check-out procedure and the voluntary cancellation is proposed to take place through an administrative arrangement between the online booking company and the secretariat;
- (f) The administrative integration would mean that, based on a memorandum of understanding with the secretariat, the online travel company collects and summarizes the total number of offsets purchased, and then on regular basis (daily/weekly/monthly) cancels the corresponding amount in the voluntary cancellation platform. This minimizes the need for any technical adjustments to the voluntary cancellation platform or registry. Regular auditing is an option for ensuring transparency.

7. Conditions and assumptions:

- (a) It is unlikely that offsetting through companies selling online products will be successful if users are sent to the external voluntary cancellation platform where they will confront a new set of choices and information (price, country, project type) to digest and react to. Instead, this proposal allows for the user to be presented with a “one-click” solution because the connection between the check-out page and the voluntary cancellation of CERs occurs as an automatic background service;
- (b) It is also unlikely that offsetting through companies selling online products can handle fluctuating CER prices, so the price for cancelling CERs must be fixed so that the online travel companies, as well as their clients, know with certainty what the offsetting cost will be. Based on previous Board discussions about how to maintain a fair and equal selection of CERs from different countries and projects, it is proposed that:
 - (i) The CER price, when sold through companies selling online products, is fixed above the CER price set by the project developers in the platform. Currently, the highest requested price in the platform is set at USD 5 per CER. As the typical air ticket or hotel stay generates a climate footprint between 1 and 3 t CO₂ eq, a fixed price of for example USD 10 per CER would add between USD 10 and 30 to a ticket or hotel cost that is in the range of several hundred USD;
 - (ii) In order to ensure that all projects on the platform benefit equally from this arrangement, the CERs would be randomly generated from among all

projects in the platform, alternatively selected on a rotational basis from all projects.

- (c) An important aspect of engaging the customers is that the customer is then informed about his/her actual travel and/or hotel climate footprint. For shorter air travel or hotel stays, the calculated climate footprint could likely be below 1 t CO₂ eq. If the check-out page and the platform are linked through administrative integration (as described above), fractions of CERs from several transactions could be added together by the booking company to create larger amounts in the daily/weekly/monthly summary and cancelled later by the travel company (rounded up to the next CER);
- (d) In order to minimize transaction times, the climate footprint for air travel and hotel stays could be pre-calculated and pre-loaded into the booking platforms. For air travel, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) air travel calculator provides reliable information that could be used for the pre-calculation. For hotel stays, the basis could be calculated using standard indicators for hotels of different classes in different locations, or – when available – the corporate climate footprint calculations provided by the hotels;
- (e) It may not be possible to acquire reliable climate footprint indicators for all hotels in all locations. In those cases, when information is not available, an industry standard estimate with an X per cent safety margin could be used. Alternatively, the hotel could be excluded from offering climate neutral hotel stays. This may, in fact, be an incentive for hotels to begin measuring their climate footprint, which would be a positive co-benefit along with the hotel using the CDM for offsetting through online hotel booking services;
- (f) Most online booking systems offer both direct payment when the flight ticket/hotel room is booked, or deferred payment for a later date, for example at check-in to the hotel. To simplify the system and avoid having to deal with later cancellations, it is proposed that, at least initially, only tickets and hotel stays that are paid at booking are offered the offsetting option;
- (g) The first step in this effort is to initiate a discussion with the major online booking companies to explore interest in collaboration along the model outlined above. Assuming a ten percent success rate (share of customers who opt to make their hotel booking climate-neutral) with only one booking company (Expedia is used here as an example), this would translate to 4.7 million hotel nights offset with CERs. Assuming a 50 kg CO₂ eq climate footprint per hotel night, this would translate to an annual demand of 235,000 CERs from the voluntary cancellation platform.

3.2. Outreach and promotion

8. The following sections describe proposed outreach and promotion efforts to increase the voluntary cancellation of CERs.

3.2.1. Major sport event organizers and sports clubs

9. Rationale:

- (a) Sports events attract some of the largest audiences in the world, both in person and through television and other media. The exposure of major sports events (e.g. football, motorsports, ice hockey and cricket) is typically counted in tens of millions of viewers, and for some specific events, such as the World Cup or the Olympics, in billions of viewers;⁴
- (b) Large sports events, such as the Olympics or Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) events incur substantial climate footprints, which can be measured, reduced and offset, thereby generating increased demand for voluntary cancellation of CERs;
- (c) Cooperation with major sports organizations by integrating climate action, including the offsetting with CERs, as a standard component of their operating procedures offers a unique opportunity to reach out to very large audiences;
- (d) The climate secretariat has established contacts with several sports organizations and, as a major milestone, FIFA joined the Climate Neutral Now initiative in 2016. This provides a good entry point for pursuing wider cooperation within the sector.

10. Implementation:

- (a) Experience shows that active partnership with key organizations is a more effective approach to encourage action and initiate concrete activities than a general invitation to simply offset the climate footprint associated with their activities. To this end, two mutually supportive approaches are proposed for engaging the sports sector:
 - (i) Reaching out through online and direct contacts to the 20 largest sports organizations encouraging them to take the climate neutral pledge to measure, reduce and offset their climate footprint through CERs;
 - (ii) Exploring the potential for starting a sports–climate partnership among leading sports organizations to jointly set goals and communicate to their audience and athletes their commitment to climate neutrality, including the use of CERs as the preferred type of offset for making their sports events climate-neutral.
- (b) Review the current policies, strategies and initiatives among the targeted sports organizations to determine those that could either align/support or hamper outreach and cooperation in order to identify sports organizations that have the best potential to engage on this topic;
- (c) Define and design outreach messages, materials and tactics for approaching different sports organizations;
- (d) Initiate high-level contacts between the secretariat and the heads of the targeted organizations to elaborate and explore potentials for cooperation;

⁴ Total Sportek: 25 World's Most Popular Sports (<<http://www.totalsportek.com/most-popular-sports/>>); Top 10 Televised Events of All Time (<<http://www.watchmojo.com/video/id/11627/>>).

- (e) Organize a senior-level meeting in Bonn with key sports organizations to discuss and agree on the best way to collaborate in promoting climate neutrality and offsetting messages. It is envisaged that resulting activities would be organized and funded by the sports organizations but supported and advised by the secretariat, particularly to ensure consistency with and adherence to offsetting types recognized under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (i.e. CERs).

11. Conditions and assumptions:

- (a) An increasing number of high profile sport organizations are showing signs of interest in taking action on climate change, including by making sports events climate neutral through the use of offsets. While a few sports and environmental initiatives have been identified by the secretariat, none of them have an explicit focus on climate or official link to related to the United Nations that could overlap or hinder the proposed activities;
- (b) While the offsetting of sports events could contribute to significant new demand for CERs, the potential for outreach to individuals should not be underestimated. A portion of the messaging and materials provided to sports organizations should therefore also include examples of positive messages on climate neutrality that they could transfer to their audiences as part of the collaboration;
- (c) The first step in this effort is to research and informally contact the 20 largest sports organizations to discuss the potential for them to engage in climate action and cooperate with the secretariat to further promote climate action and offsetting with CERs within the sport sector.

3.2.2. High-level outreach to the Fortune Global 500 companies

12. Rationale:

- (a) Fortune Global 500 is the common reference to the 500 largest companies in the world in terms of financial turnover. These companies generated USD 27.6 trillion in revenues and USD 1.5 trillion in profits in 2015. Together, Fortune Global 500 companies employ 67 million people worldwide and are represented by 33 countries.⁵ They represent a diversity of sectors, ranging from oil, gas and mining to manufacturing, telecommunications, transport, health care and retailing;
- (b) Due to the size of these companies, engaging them in Climate Neutral Now and the voluntary cancellation of CERs comes with three direct benefits. First, by offsetting their own climate footprint, partially or completely, they can directly increase demand for CERs. Second, by pledging to achieve climate neutrality and by using CERs to achieve this, they set an example for other companies in their sector to follow, and ideally also suppliers and customers. Third, similar to what is proposed for outreach to the sports sector, they may be willing to champion sector initiatives that would seek to bring together key companies to jointly set targets and work to measure, reduce and offset their emissions;

⁵ <<http://beta.fortune.com/global500/>>.

- (c) The secretariat has a unique convening capacity and the ability to directly reach out to the top executives of very large multinational companies. Undertaking this outreach can also be helpful for the secretariat's own efforts to build momentum and support for climate action.

13. Implementation:

- (a) Initial screening and research about Fortune Global 500 should be carried out to identify how climate neutrality and offsetting with CERs may align with existing plans and commitments. Companies that may be involved in activities that are not aligned with United Nations guidelines for private sector interaction would be excluded (e.g. companies engaged in weapons manufacturing or human rights abuses, or companies lobbying against climate action);
- (b) Based on the findings from the initial screening, tailor individual invitations for the top executives of targeted companies inviting them to become climate neutral, including through the voluntary cancellation with CERs;
- (c) Follow-up with calls or meetings to finalize their commitments.

14. Conditions and assumptions:

- (a) The climate secretariat has already established contacts with some of the Fortune Global 500. Some of them, such as Microsoft and Aviva, have already undertaken the climate-neutral pledge, including (partial) offsetting with CERs. Based on this, it is essential to not simply send invitations; they should be tailored to the potential audience and be followed up by calls to address remaining issues and questions. As these are very large corporations, the decision-making process is lengthy and it is anticipated that the outreach effort would only generate commitments leading up to the end of 2017;
- (b) Since the Fortune Global 500 represent a diverse group of companies with different levels of awareness and different approaches to climate change, it is expected that not all companies will respond positively. However, even with a smaller group of dedicated companies agreeing to pursue climate neutrality, including offsetting, the impact on the cancellation of CERs can be substantial.

3.2.3. Promote climate-neutral organizations and meetings

15. Rationale:

- (a) One of the successful strands of work undertaken in 2016 in support of the increased voluntary cancellation of CERs was the support in making the entire United Nations system climate neutral. The United Nations Secretary-General supported this effort, both by offsetting his own office and all his travel and by taking the policy decision that all United Nations organizations shall be fully climate neutral by 2020. In 2015, 32 of the 66 reporting United Nations organizations had already become climate neutral. The total annual climate footprint for the United Nations system in 2015 was about 2 million t CO₂ eq,⁶ which would either need to be reduced or offset to achieve the agreed 2020 climate neutral goal;

⁶ <<http://www.greeningtheblue.org/news/un-reports-its-greenhouse-gas-emissions-2015>>.

- (b) United Nations organizations are actively seeking to address the integration of climate considerations across all their programmes of work, including travel, procurement, office operations and meetings. An area with a high potential for further reduction and offsetting is the large number of meetings that all United Nations organizations conduct regularly. The climate neutrality of recent UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties and other high profile United Nations climate meetings have acted as a driver in this regard;
- (c) In order to maintain momentum, two specific activities are proposed:
 - (i) Consolidation and promotion of the United Nations climate-neutral approach in other large international organizations with similar type of activities, such as the OECD, IEA, ICC and others. In particular, the approach of making larger meetings climate neutral is seen as attractive to many organizations;
 - (ii) Continued support, in the form of providing advice on climate footprint estimation and offsetting to interagency groups and the Secretary-General's office to ensure continued top level support.

16. Implementation:

- (a) Provision of continued support and advice to other United Nations organizations, including the Secretary-General's office, to pursue climate neutrality, in particular with regard to offsetting, using CERs;
- (b) Provision of support to the United Nations Interagency group on greening the United Nations and climate neutrality to develop materials and reach out to other large international organizations to promote the same, in particular with regard to climate-neutral meetings.

17. Conditions and assumptions:

- (a) The new United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Antonio Guterres has already identified climate action as a priority. However, as he has many other pressing priorities on his desk, the UNFCCC Executive Secretary is well placed to highlight the issue and request support, as may be needed, for this work;
- (b) Outreach to other international organizations by promoting climate-neutral meetings and offsetting with CERs can to a large extent be based on existing materials and information. However, with regard to climate neutral meetings, more targeted materials need to be developed, together with other United Nations agencies. In this regard, the climate secretariat's input would focus on the use of CERs as the preferred offset method;
- (c) According to the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMDLAP),⁷ there are between 150 and 100 large-scale (i.e. 5,000+ participants) meetings and another 800 medium-scale (500–5000 participants) meetings organized annually. A rough estimate of the climate footprint of large-scale meetings is 10,000 t CO₂ eq, while medium-scale meetings are typically around 2,500 t CO₂ eq. If all of these meetings were offset

⁷ IAMDLAP is a forum and network of managers of over 80 international organizations employing conference and language service providers – mainly translators and interpreters.

they would create a CER demand of close to 3 million CERs. This does not include commercially organized meetings and events, which represent a potential for demand an order of magnitude higher.

3.2.4. Promote personal offsetting through a social media campaign

18. Rationale:

- (a) Social media is the premiere marketing and advertising channel in almost all countries. With the proliferation of mobile phones and other mobile devices, it is estimated that today more than 2.3 billion people are regular users of social media. Among these, Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform, with 1.59 billion users, followed by Snapchat with one billion users, and other platforms such as QQ (853 million), WeChat (697), Instagram (400 million), Twitter (320 million) and LinkedIn (100 million);⁸
- (b) Many social media platforms allow advertisers and marketers to reach out to specific segments of the social users with very high precision. For example, people who live within a specific part of a city, are members of a specific organization, have a certain type of job within specific types of companies or organizations or have certain levels of income or hobbies can be selected for outreach within some social media platforms;
- (c) There are specific segments of the global population that are more inclined to react and act positively to messages encouraging personal responsibility and action to reduce personal climate impact. Such segments are often indicated (but not defined) by factors such as:
 - (i) An above average level of awareness of environmental issues, often combined with education levels above primary school;
 - (ii) Residence in countries where the public environmental debate is well established;
 - (iii) Younger generations, which are often more aware about climate change issues than older generations;
 - (iv) Basic economic security/income above what is required to meet the immediate daily needs.
- (d) Experience from the secretariat's social media campaigns indicate that a large number of individuals can be reached through social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter at a low cost. A recent (December 2016) campaign promoting awareness about climate action and climate neutrality through eleven different ads such as web cards (digital advertisements, typically including a picture and a catchy message) and videos, reached 5.5 million people, resulting in more than

⁸ <<http://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>>.

160,000 clicks (i.e. the person reading the ad clicked on it). This corresponded to an average cost of USD 0.08 per click. Some important insights include:

- (i) The social media platforms differentiate the costs for clicks depending on both the type of ad (web card or video) and the country where the ads are exposed, for example social media ads in the United States of America are five to ten times more expensive than in European or Asian countries;
- (ii) The ads need to be tailored to the target audience and require careful design and ideally testing on a smaller scale before full-scale launching;
- (iii) The links embedded in the ads have to go to a “landing page” where the user will find what they expect to find in a language that they can understand. For ads that promote the voluntary cancellation of CERs, they should be sent to a landing page where they:
 - a. Can understand why they should cancel CERs;
 - b. Can easily estimate or calculate their climate footprint;
 - c. Can immediately cancel the corresponding amount of CERs.
- (iv) The number of clicks required to reach the intended end destination (the voluntary cancellation platform) should be minimized since – as a rule of thumb commonly used in online marketing – you will lose at least 50 percent of your audience for every extra click they are required to do.
- (e) In consequence, a social media campaign promoting voluntary cancellation should ideally send the audience directly to the voluntary cancellation platform. However, since only one of the three requirements above are currently met on the platform’s current front page (ability to immediately cancel CERs), a redesign of the front page or a dedicated landing page for the platform would need to be developed;
- (f) The above experience suggests that investment in social media outreach in 2017 would have the potential to significantly increase visitors to the platform, especially if social media is used to send individuals directly to the platform where they can learn about the rationale for offsetting, instead of first sending them to the Climate Neutral pages to get this information.

19. Implementation:

- (a) A social media campaign designed with guidance by external online marketing expertise. Key components required for a successful campaign would include:
 - (i) The definition of target groups. The following groups are proposed:
 - a. Individuals in social segments who are identified as inclined to taking personal responsibility for their environmental footprint and therefore to offset the same;
 - b. Individuals who hold professional decision-making positions in small and medium-sized companies who may decide to offset the climate footprint of their company. In both cases, it is proposed to limit the

scope of users to certain countries and sectors to first test this approach;

- (ii) The development of dedicated web cards and/or videos promoting the platform, specifically designed to be attractive to the target groups;
- (iii) The creation of dedicated “landing pages” for users who click the web cards/videos, explaining the rationale for offsetting, ideally at the voluntary cancellation platform itself (N.B. this would mainly transfer already existing messaging from Climate Neutral Now to the platform, with some tweaks to accommodate the specific target groups);
- (iv) Testing of the ads on a limited scale on different social media platforms;
- (v) Taking the test results into consideration, launch of the campaign on a social media platform, such as Facebook, supplemented with supporting outreach on Twitter and other social media platforms;
- (vi) Monitoring and tracking of results in terms of how many users have been reached, how many have clicked on the links to the landing page/platform, and how many have completed a voluntary cancellation transaction at the platform.

20. Conditions and assumptions:

- (a) The social media campaign should send the users to the platform with a minimum number of clicks, as additional every click required will typically reduce the numbers of users arriving to the final destination web page by at least 50 per cent;
- (b) Consequently, the landing page where users are sent from the social media platform needs to either be the front page of the platform, in which case it has to be redesigned, or the prominence of the platform has to be increased significantly in the existing Climate Neutral Now landing pages;
- (c) As social media campaigns are charged “per click”, the campaign can be designed in two stages with a smaller test round of new materials, at limited cost, to be followed by a larger campaign with more investment once the test round has confirmed that the approach works;
- (d) Based on previous experiences, attracting 500,000 visitors to the platform would require a social media investment of approximately USD 50,000. Estimated costs of around USD 30,000 would also be incurred for the professional design and testing of the online ads. Assuming that 20 per cent of visitors follow through with cancellation of at least 5 CER per person, the result would be 500,000 CERs cancelled at the platform.

4. Impacts

21. The proposed activities described in this concept note aim to increase the voluntary cancellation of CERs, in particular through the voluntary cancellation platform. A key performance indicator is the number of CERs cancelled through the platform. Activities described are intended to achieve a significant increase in the number of CERs cancelled by the end of 2017, with further increased demand post-2017. By the end of 2017, and if

successful, the activities described herein should have increased the number of visitors to the platform by 1,000 per cent, resulting in cancellations of up to at least one million CERs throughout 2017.

5. Subsequent work and timelines

22. The proposed activities would all be initiated immediately upon approval of the Board, with an update of progress to be provided at the ninety-fifth meeting of the Board, and with a full report about outcomes to be presented to the Board at its first meeting in 2018.

6. Budget and costs

23. The proposed activities can be carried out within the budget contained in the 2017 management action plan as approved at EB 92 (USD 361,500).
24. The secretariat recommends that the Board provide feedback and approve the activities proposed in this note as described.

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Document information

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
01.0	6 February 2017	Published as an annex to the annotated agenda of EB 93.
Decision Class: Operation		
Document Type: Information note		
Business Function:		
Keywords: CERs, communications, increasing CER demand, voluntary cancellation		