

## **Statement from ECOTRUST on BBC Radio 4's *The Carbon Offset Trap***

The BBC's [The Carbon Offset Trap programme](#), broadcast on 2 April 2025, presents a one-sided and misleading picture of the [Trees for Global Benefit \(TGB\) programme](#). ECOTRUST did not respond before broadcast because the BBC's request was sent to an unmonitored email address and was only picked up after the programme aired. It misrepresents the Trees for Global Benefit (TGB) programme and the lived experiences of the Ugandan farmers who lead it.

The programme repeats false claims first published in a Swedish tabloid and already discredited by farmers, local leaders and independent reviews. It failed to speak to the farmers most affected by this coverage, ignored publicly available evidence, and painted a misleading picture of a Ugandan initiative that is internationally recognised for its impact and integrity.

### **A locally led and transparent programme**

TGB is not a corporate or donor-driven model. It is a farmer-designed and farmer-led scheme. Smallholders across western Uganda work with local experts to integrate trees into existing farming systems. Farmers decide what to plant, where, and how. Every land-use plan is developed with the household, documented through maps and drawings, and endorsed by the landowners and spouses.

The programme promotes agroforestry—trees grown with crops, not instead of them. Banana, cassava, beans, coffee, fruit trees and native timber species thrive side-by-side. Every farmer retains full ownership of their land, trees and harvest.

### **On consent and participation**

Claims that farmers did not understand their contracts or were misled are contradicted by ECOTRUST's model of engagement. All contracts are accompanied by locally understandable explanations, including diagrams and verbal translation in local languages. The land-use plan—a drawing developed with each household—is the key reference point, and farmers are paid based on its implementation, not the legal contract alone.

Participation is entirely voluntary. Free, prior and informed consent is a foundation of the programme. Land-use plans are communicated using local languages and visuals. Farmers receive payments only after their land-use plans are implemented and verified—and they can leave the programme at any time.

To suggest that these farmers were tricked or coerced does a disservice to their knowledge, agency and years of collaborative effort.

## **On payments, food security and gender**

TGB promotes agroforestry, not monoculture plantations. Tree species are chosen specifically to integrate with food crops. Project audits have confirmed the presence of diverse agroforestry systems, with bananas, cassava, maize and beans thriving alongside trees. The land-use plan avoids over-shading and allows for selective harvesting.

Contrary to the programme's claims, households jointly approve these plans, and the project design supports inclusive benefit sharing. Women participate in decision-making and are active in Savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) and other community based groups and cooperatives that manage finance and enterprise development.

Payments are performance-based and follow a standard monitoring schedule. Even during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020–21, ECOTRUST managed to reach over 90% of participating households. For many, these payments were the only source of cash income during that time.

The suggestion that TGB is causing hunger overlooks the lived reality and agency of the farmers who designed and lead this programme. Agroforestry is a proven strategy for improving food security and climate resilience. TGB has enabled thousands of farmers to invest in better housing, education, nutrition and business. It has sparked more than 40 farmer-led cooperatives engaged in honey production, coffee, fuelwood, nurseries and savings groups.

## **On carbon monitoring, tree loss and verification**

The programme claimed that farmers are cutting down trees for charcoal or reverting land to crops. This misrepresents the facts and lacks the necessary context. TGB's carbon accounting model incorporates conservative estimates and a risk buffer to account for unexpected losses. Selective harvesting is allowed under the model, and deforestation in Uganda is primarily driven by commercial agriculture, not smallholder tree planting.

TGB has undergone multiple independent third-party audits since 2002. It is currently being re-verified under the [Plan Vivo Standard](#). This process is led by an accredited and independent validation and verification body. It includes field visits, document checks, and financial reviews.

As Plan Vivo has confirmed, media allegations [are being reviewed](#) as part of this 2025 audit. Previous audits have consistently found TGB to be fully compliant. We expect the same outcome.

Claims that ECOTRUST influenced or interfered with the process are categorically false. All translators used during audits are appointed by the verifiers, not ECOTRUST. Conflict-of-interest screening is standard procedure.

## **On the BBC's conduct**

We are disappointed that the BBC—a public broadcaster with a duty to accuracy and fairness—chose to broadcast a programme lacking balance and context. The team failed to interview the farmers quoted in the original Swedish coverage, many of whom have publicly rejected how their words and images were used. It failed to request basic documentation, or follow up on existing, publicly available reports. It platformed long-time opponents of carbon markets without seeking balance or verification.

By repeating a narrow and partial narrative, the BBC has risked undermining a credible, community-led approach to restoring degraded land and building long-term climate resilience.

We call on the BBC to correct the record and uphold the principles of fair and balanced journalism. And we stand firmly with the Ugandan farmers who have had their dignity, expertise and agency misrepresented by this broadcast.

**Environmental Conservation Trust of Uganda (ECOTRUST)**

3 April 2025