



Ramsar's long-time partner Danone-evian awarded "Best Corporate Offsetting Program 2016" for its Livelihoods Carbon Fund

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Bernard Giraud, Senior Sustainability Adviser at Danone and Co-Founder of the Livelihoods Fund replants a mangrove seedling as part of a mangrove restoration project in the Casamance in Senegal funded by Danone and the Livelihoods Fund

This year, the Livelihoods Carbon Fund was voted "Best Corporate Offsetting Program 2016," based on a poll of 1,000 firms in the carbon market, to designate key players in the sector.

Interview with Bernard Giraud, President of Livelihoods Venture:

What does this award mean for Livelihoods?

This award for the Best Corporate Offsetting Program 2016 is, above all, recognition of the efforts made by our investors and partners to use the carbon economy as a lever for improving the livelihoods of rural communities.

Today, Livelihoods has nine on-going projects delivering tangible results in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These projects are improving the lives of one million people and will sequester about 10 million metric tons of CO₂ over 20 years.

The award also celebrates a fairly rare phenomenon: companies working together and joining forces to carry out large-scale projects and develop impactful solutions. Firms as diverse as Schneider Electric, Michelin, Danone, Hermès, La Poste, Groupe Caisse des Dépôts, SAP, Firmenich, Crédit Agricole S.A. and Voyageurs du Monde have invested in the Livelihoods Carbon Fund.

The lessons we learned from the Livelihoods Carbon Fund allowed us to launch a second fund in 2015: the Livelihoods Fund for Family Farming. This fund is less directly geared toward reducing the carbon footprint, but will obviously contribute a great deal in that area, by assisting around 200,000 farms to make the change to sustainable agricultural practices and by transforming the supply chains of its investors, Danone, Mars Inc., Firmenich and Veolia.

Why were these funds created?

With the Carbon Fund, we started from the premise that the food-producing ecosystem - i.e. the immediate environment of rural populations (water sources, wood and soil) - has to be preserved at all costs, if those local residents are to have decent lives.

Livelihoods projects have successfully triggered a positive cycle:

through mangrove restoration, to foster the return of biodiversity;

by creating agroforestry systems that enable small farmers to produce more to feed their families, and sell foodstuffs to boost their incomes;

and by providing alternative energy solutions to limit the use of wood for cooking, thus reducing women's exposure to toxic fumes and the time spent gathering wood.

The companies took the risk of pre-financing these projects by endowing the Fund with €40 million. Their investments improve the lives of rural communities and help the environment, while reducing the firms' carbon footprints.

In addition, the Livelihoods Fund for Family Farming has a more direct connection with the activities of its partner companies. For example, it aims to transform the water supply chain for Veolia, the cocoa supply chain for Marc Inc. and the milk supply chain for Danone.

In all three cases, we are developing farming practices that truly help small farmers improve their yields without depleting natural resources. This commitment is crucial. In the future, more people will need to be fed, farmers will need to make a much better living from their work, and companies will need to obtain supplies while ensuring optimum quality – all without jeopardizing the environment. The Livelihoods Fund enables us to deal with the economic, environmental and social aspects at the same time.

What partnerships are being set up by Livelihoods to develop this project?

All our projects are implemented by NGOs. This is not about imposing an alternative model. On the contrary, we provide them with long-term support. For example, we have made a 20-year commitment to a mangrove restoration project.

It is important to know that Livelihoods is not in competition with other funding sources. In Burkina Faso, for instance, we have partnered with the Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency), and in Guatemala, we have signed a partnership with the national government. Our work complements what is being done by stakeholders as a whole.

Lastly, we should remember that companies don't just contribute money; they can also provide expertise. For example, Hermès employees have used mangrove resources in Indonesia to produce textiles, and Danone's personnel regularly assist NGOs with marketing matters.

Livelihoods is not merely a donor. The projects we choose are not "ready to go". We construct them carefully over the long term with our private, public and NGO partners, in consultation

with the local populations.

In 2008, the Danone Group together with the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) created the Danone Fund for Nature to restore degraded ecosystems, redevelop local economies, and combat climate change. In 2011, the Danone Fund for Nature opened to outside investors and evolved into the Livelihoods Fund as it is known today.

*The Livelihoods Fund in 2006, partnered with Oceanium a local NGO in Senegal to restore a highly degraded mangrove forest. This project undertook large scale replanting of mangroves in approximately 500 villages in the Sine Saloum Delta in the Casamance along the west coast of Senegal resulting in the largest mangrove reforestation project in the world. In 2015 Oceanium was awarded the **Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for Innovation** in recognition of this achievement.*

The Ramsar Convention and Danone - Evian enjoy a 18 year long standing relationship, that begun in 1998 and was the first partnership agreement between a global environmental convention and the private sector. Each year since 1998, Danone-evian has supported the Convention to promote World Wetlands Day, celebrated on 2 February each year to raise awareness about the vital role of wetlands.

Source:

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Environmental Finance magazine and its sixth annual Voluntary Carbon Markets Rankings*

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