
Myth No. 11: Tree plantations help to address climate change by neutralizing carbon emitted from fossil fuels

At a very fundamental level, dealing with climate change involves making a dramatic and immediate reduction in the amount of fossil fuels that we extract and burn. The idea of using tree plantations to neutralise these emissions is counterproductive as it effectively provides a false excuse to keep on combusting more coal, oil and gas. As long as there is room for more plantations (regardless of their impact on communities and ecosystems) then business interest want us to believe that we can keep on building more oil refineries and coal mines.

At the same time, it is impossible for us to quantify how much carbon a given plantation is capable of sequestering. This means that all the methodologies of assigning exact quantities of 'tonnes of carbon' absorbed from plantation to exhaust pipe are nonsense. The only thing that we can say with any scientific certainty is that tree monocultures are much less effective at storing carbon than primary forests.

Ironically, the communities that are typically evicted in order to create tree plantations are often ones that were leading low-carbon, sustainable lives. Using tree plantations to offset the emissions of Northern individuals, companies or countries is a form of 'carbon colonialism' – a new form of the land-grabbing that has characterised colonial history.

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