
Myth No. 6: Plantations are necessary to supply the growing need for paper

The need for paper is not growing. We should not confuse consumption levels with need. In rich countries, we already use far more paper than we need, and the vast bulk of it is wasted. The real need is to reduce demand for paper, to use this precious resource more efficiently and to encourage recycling systems that ensure paper fibres are reused over and over again. Of course, there are countries and communities where paper consumption is currently well below what is required for education and democratic engagement, and they have a right to use more. Schools need books, voters need ballot papers. No one is suggesting that paper does not have benefits. No one is suggesting that its use is all bad and must be eliminated. However, unread magazines, junk mail, excessive packaging and pointless photocopying are all wasteful and should be limited. Without producing any more paper than at present, but sharing it more evenly, everyone on earth's needs for paper could easily be met. By replacing virgin tree fibres with alternatives like recycled paper or agricultural residues, fewer trees would be required for paper production, not more. We certainly do not require more tree plantations to supply fibre for paper.

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