

'Olympic Forest' in Africa: IOC to plant 3,55,000 trees in UN's Great Green Wall initiative

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As the countries prepare to participate in the Tokyo Olympics, delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic, the committee overseeing the mega event has decided to plant 3,55,000 trees in the Sahara desert to combat desertification. The forest will come up in western Africa and will be part of the United Nation's Great Green Wall initiative.

The initiative aims to restore nearly 8,000 kilometre stretch of land, roll back the [effects of desertification](#) and turn the area into forest and farmland for local communities.

"Addressing climate change is one of the IOC's top priorities, and we are fully committed to reducing our emissions in line with the Paris Agreement," IOC President Thomas Bach said in a statement. The initiative had earlier received \$14 billion funding from France, the African Development Bank and the World Bank.

WHAT IS DESERTIFICATION?

Desertification is a process triggered by low rainfall, rising temperatures and global heating of the planet, making the land surface barren and infertile. While the process is [triggered by climate change](#), the rising human population and concretisation of areas have also played a significant role. According to National Geography, 40 per cent of the world's surface accounts for these drylands with low or variable rainfall.



The rate of desertification has increased in recent times due to rapid urbanisation, excessive farming, and mining activities, which has stripped the topsoil of the needed minerals and resources to support plant life. More than 100 countries including India are facing the brunt of desertification.

The initiative was launched by the United Nations as part of its Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, designed "to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide." Upon completion in 2030, the wall will be the "largest human-made living structure on the planet."

Nearly 100 million hectares of degraded land will be restored with trees and plantations. [The forest will have](#) the capacity to remove 250 million tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere and create nearly 10 million new jobs in the African region, the UN had said.

The planting of the 'Olympic Forest' will begin in 2022 in nearly 90 villages on the border between Senegal and Mali. In the first phase, nearly 120 hectares of degraded land will be used to plant the trees, which is estimated to treat 200,000 tons of carbon dioxide over a period of 25 years. "The Great Green Wall is already providing food security and building resilience against climate change while bringing hope to residents of the Sahel and the world," Susan Gardner, Director of UNEP's Ecosystems Division said.

Source:<https://www.indiatoday.in/science/story/tokyo-olympic-forest-ioc-unep-desertification-environment-1817968-2021-06-22>