

Congo launches large-scale tree-planting programme

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People take part in a tree planting project in Yie, 60km north of Brazzaville, on November 6, as part of a reforestation programme. The Republic of Congo has embarked on a vast tree-planting programme to guard against the twin scourges of deforestation and soil degradation that plague many African states.

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The country is one of ten central African nations that make up the Congo basin, which holds the world's second largest [tropical rain forest](#) after the Amazon Basin in South America.

The region has been hit hard by the pressures of deforestation, as limited

access to electricity forces people to cut down trees to serve their heating and lighting needs, with coal fueled stoves still dominant in food preparation.

Congo's 1.83 billion euro (\$2.5 billion) plan calls for one million hectares of trees (almost 2.5 million acres) to be planted within ten years and should, according to the forest ministry, create 50,000 new jobs.

The initiative comes from a country that has in the past been tipped as a continental leader in environmental conservation.

Congo's President Denis Sassou Nguesso was in 2009 named the African Union's lead [climate change](#) spokesman ahead of the much-hyped Copenhagen [climate talks](#) that ultimate failed to produce a breakthrough deal.

The Republic of Congo, whose territory is between 60 and 65 percent forest, also has the lowest deforestation rate (0.07 percent per year) of the ten Congo basin states.

The problem is far more acute in the neighbouring [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), where UN's environment programme (UNEP) says deforestation is intensifying due to growing [energy demand](#).



Congolese President Denis Sassou Nguesso (3rd L) waters a newly planted tree in Yie, 60km north of Brazzaville, on November 6, as part of a reforestation programme. The Republic of Congo has embarked on a vast tree-planting programme to guard against the twin scourges of deforestation and soil degradation that plague many African states.

But at the launch of the programme on Monday, where volunteers -- and the president -- planted 160,000 trees, Congolese officials said they wanted to take [preventive measures](#) to guard against depletion of the country's natural resources.

The aim of the tree-planting plan "is to relieve pressure exercised by mankind on natural forests by reducing deforestation and the degradation of the soil," Minister of Forestry Economy Henri Djombo said at the event in Yie, 60 kilometres (37 miles) north of the capital.

The Brazzaville government will contribute 300 million euro to the project, while donor nations and other organisations have been asked for 1.5 billion euros.

"It's a whole programme to struggle against poverty and climate change. This is a position that our country defends throughout the world and which I think does us honour," Sassou Nguesso said at the launch.

"I have just planted eight trees for the first time," said Jennifer Tindila, 20, who travelled with her grandfather Philippe Matoko, 73, to take part in the event.

"I am moved because I have contributed to the development of my country," added the young law student, who wore a T-shirt proclaiming

"For a green economy, plant more trees."

Walking hand in hand with her grandfather, Jennifer carefully avoided the small holes where various types of tree were being planted, including local hardwoods and fruit trees on a 100 hectare site.

"To plant a tree is to make the economy last", grandfather Matoko said. "A tree is a gift, a wood which you shouldn't compare with petrol, which can run out."

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