

Report on african person of significance:communi ty to global activist,innovator,a...

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Wangari Maathai Wangari Muta Maathai, a Kenyan politician and environmental activist, was born in April 1940. Maathai attended her college education in the United States. She graduated from Benedictine College in 1964 with a degree in biology and later completed her masters at the University of Pittsburgh in 1966. In 1971, Maathai received a Ph. D. at the University of Nairobi, becoming the first woman in the larger Central Africa region to earn a doctorate (Ball & Heather 122).

Maathai started working with the National Council of Women of Kenya in the 1970's. She travelled to the rural areas where she sought to address the issues affecting rural women. Lack of firewood, clean water, and food were among the most pressing needs for these women. Maathai identified deforestation as the main cause of these challenges. She developed the idea of starting a movement that would help village women to plant trees, at this time, as a way of conserving environment. Consequently, she founded the Green Belt Movement in 1977 that planted over 30 million trees by the early 21st century (Ball & Heather 124). Apart from planting trees, the movement addressed social, political, and environmental issues in Kenya and the wider Central African region.

Together with other leaders from the movement, Maathai established the Pan African Green Belt Network. The aim of this organization was to educate world leaders on the need to carry out environmental conservation projects in their country. The movement's activism led to establishment of other such movements in African countries such as Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Tanzania. In her bid to protect the environment, police officers whipped Maathai during a demonstration to oppose the seizure of public land in Karura forest, located

in the Northern part of Nairobi. She also joined mothers of political prisoners to fight for the release of these prisoners. As a result, 51 political prisoners were released (Ball & Heather 125). Maathai further opposed the building of a skyscraper in Uhuru Park. This park has been, and remains, an oasis of green in Nairobi city. In 2003, Maathai was appointed as the assistant minister in the ministry of environment. She introduced the same empowerment strategies applied at Green Belt Movement. These strategies involved restoring forests, protecting the existing ones while rehabilitating damaged land.

Maathai was also a human rights activist. She was an advocate for AIDS prevention and women issues. She represented these issues at meetings at the UN National Assembly. She was a columnist for international publications such as Los Angeles Times and The Guardian and used these platforms to educate the world on the need for environmental conservation, women empowerment and fight against HIV/AIDS (Ball & Heather 126). In 2009, she published a book, Challenge for Africa. The book criticized African leadership and expressed the need for Africans to seek solutions to their challenges without relying on the western countries.

In 2004, Maathai became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in promoting democracy, development and peace. On 25 September 2011, Maathai succumbed to ovarian cancer while receiving treatment at a Nairobi hospital.

Works Cited

Ball, H. & Heather, B. Women Leaders Who Changed the World. New York, NY: Rosen Central, 2012. Print.

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