

Wangari Maathai

1940 – 2011



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What did she discover?

Wangari Maathai was a biologist and a political, social and environmental activist born in Kenya in 1940. She was incredibly passionate about environmental issues and actively encouraged citizens to engage in preserving, and improving, their local environment.

Maathai studied Biology at university in the United States and became the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a Ph.D. She then became the first woman in these regions to become chair of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy and associate professor.

She worked with the National Council of Women of Kenya to encourage citizens to plant more trees, to provide a source of fuel and to battle deforestation. In 1977, Maathai founded an organization called The Green Belt Movement which aimed to educate world leaders on environmental improvement and conservation.

Wangari Maathai was also an advocate for human rights, particularly women's rights, and AIDS prevention in Africa. She was appointed assistant minister of environment, natural resources and wildlife after being elected to Kenya's National Assembly. Two years later she was the first African woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her activism and environmental work, as well as her work to improve women's rights.

Something to think about...

Why is environmental conservation important?