

Generations of STEM: Wangari Maathai

Nobel Peace Prize Winner

An environmental champion and activist for conservation as well as women's rights, Wangari began with an education in biology and a PhD in Veterinary Anatomy. Raised in Kenya, she attended school in a variety of villages until high school, when she was selected for the Kennedy Airlift—a program bringing promising students to the US for study. She continued her studies, eventually returning to Nairobi as an assistant lecturer. She was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a PhD, and the first to become chair of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy.

Wangari founded the Green Belt Movement, focused on reforestation and planting trees in Kenya. She encouraged women to participate and help with planting and civic responsibility. Wangari believed that planting trees would help combat rural hunger, water crises, and desertification. She faced difficulties in her country for being outspoken and transcending traditional gender roles, but was recognized internationally as an important contributor to society. Her work with the environment, human rights and women's rights earned her the Nobel Peace Prize, becoming the first African woman to earn the prestigious award.



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