

THE WOMAN WHO PLANTED TREES

Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmentalist, was awarded the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize. Thanks to the work of this woman who has planted 30 million trees, Kenya is now a greener and more pleasant country. But what has planting trees have to do with peace?

Maathai is a pioneering academic. Her role as an environmental campaigner began after she planted some trees in her back garden. This inspired her in 1977 to form an organisation –primarily of women – known as the Green Belt Movement aiming to curtail* the devastating effects of deforestation and desertification. Her desire was to produce sustainable wood for fuel use as well as combating soil* erosion. Her campaign to mobilise poor women to plant trees has been copied by other countries.

It was while she was president of the National Council of Women in 1976 that she introduced the idea of planting trees and continued to develop this into a broad-based, grassroots organization* whose main focus is the planting of trees with women groups in order to conserve the environment and improve their quality of life. The Green Belt Movement has assisted women in planting trees on their farms and on schools and church compounds. However, it has also campaigned on education, nutrition and other issues important to women and in 1986 established a Pan African Green Belt Network involving people from many African countries in the initiative.

In many parts of Africa, conflict often springs from competition for water and fertile land. As deserts expand and populations soar,* such competition can become violent. The war in the Darfur region of western Sudan, for example, has its roots in the struggle between black farmers and Arab pastoralists over a slab* of increasingly arid soil. By reforesting Kenya, Ms Maathai has made it less likely to go the way of Sudan. And the way she did it –by paying peasant women to plant seedlings in their own villages– empowers women, and so promotes peace even more.

Ms Maathai's work, though admirable, is only distantly related to the prevention of war. Skirmishes* over pasture are common, but there is little evidence that environmental factors cause full-scale wars. Darfur is in flames more for political reasons. A group of guerrillas rebelled against an oppressive regime, which responded by slaughtering the rebels' ethnic kin. Planting trees in Darfur would not have saved its people.

Although the physical completion of the Green Belt plan is "far from realization", the biggest impact has been the sense of hope and power in the lives of the ordinary women who comprise 90% of the members. They can hardly read or write. Yet they often join the movement to help their family –to pay their children's school fees, to buy their clothes or to build a house. And the women respond so quickly to a common cause that soon they see this as a way to help the community at large –and the nation. They want to make a contribution.

From the press. Adapted

curtail: reduir / reducir

soil: terra / tierra

grassroots organization: organització de base / organización de base

soar: disparar-se l'augment / experimentar un importante incremento

slab: tros / trozo

skirmishes: escaramusses /escaramuzas

Série 4 - A

PART ONE: READING COMPREHENSION

Choose the best answer according to the text.
[0,5 points each correct answer]

1. Kenya is now a greener country thanks to...
 - a) the Nobel Prize award.
 - b) its pleasant peace.
 - c) pioneering commercial tree trading.
 - d) Maathai's environmentalist project.

2. The Green Belt Movement is...
 - a) a Pan African institutional movement.
 - b) an elitist organisation of women.
 - c) an environmentalist and educational organisation.
 - d) a research project on deforestation.

3. War in the Darfur Region has its origins in...
 - a) oppressive regimes that are destroying the environment.
 - b) the sharing of fertile land.
 - c) the fight among black Muslims.
 - d) the conflict between farmers and pastoralists over fertile soil.

4. Maathai started planting trees to...
 - a) increase the number of gardening jobs in her home town.
 - b) produce more wood to build more schools and churches.
 - c) pay for the education of wealthy women.
 - d) stop the destruction of land and forest.

5. Reforesting Kenya is also a way of...
 - a) helping women become more independent.
 - b) becoming more like Sudan.
 - c) bringing women into politics.
 - d) promoting the construction business.

6. Women's incorporation to Maathai's project has...
 - a) helped them learn read and write.
 - b) given them a greater sense of social concern.
 - c) become a national problem.
 - d) had a negative family impact.

7. Planting trees...
 - a) has nothing to do with peace.
 - b) prevents people from killing each-other in all African countries.
 - c) helps solve all kinds of political conflict and trouble.
 - d) may help some African families to have a better life.

8. Which of these sentences is true?
 - a) The Green Belt plans have not been completed yet.
 - b) 90% of the women in Kenya cannot read nor write.
 - c) The Green Belt initiative has been successfully adopted all across Africa.
 - d) Most of the Kenyan people belong to the same ethnic clan.