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TAKING ROOT: The Vision of Wangari Maathai

AWARD-WINNING NEW FILM TELLS STORY OF NOBEL PRIZE WINNER

TAKING ROOT: The Vision of Wangari Maathai, a new film by Lisa Merton and Alan Dater, tells the inspiring story of the Green Belt Movement of Kenya and its unstoppable founder, Wangari Maathai, who, in 2004, became the first environmentalist and first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

After teaching for 15 years at the University of Nairobi, Professor Maathai discovered the core of her life's work by reconnecting with the rural women of her childhood. Their daily lives had become intolerable: they were walking exhaustive distances for firewood, clean water was scarce, the soil was eroding, and their children were suffering from malnutrition. One hundred years of colonialism and neo-colonialism had devastated the forests they'd lived with for centuries.

"Why not plant trees?" Maathai thought. Trees provide shade, prevent soil erosion, supply firewood, building materials, and produce nutritious fruit. In 1977, Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya and began teaching women about the connection between environmental problems and their daily problems.

Through the 1980s and '90s, women involved in the Green Belt Movement found themselves working successively against deforestation, poverty, ignorance and systemic economic imbalances. They endured violent suppression, a hunger strike, and risked personal injury. By 2002, they helped to bring down Kenya's 24-year Moi dictatorship.

Through chilling first person accounts and TV-news footage, TAKING ROOT documents dramatic political confrontations of the 1980s and '90s. *Cinema verité* footage of the tree nurseries, and the women and children who tend them, captures the real work being done by people to improve their lives and restore the vitality of their land.

TAKING ROOT captures a world-view in which nothing is perceived as impossible. The film also brilliantly demonstrates the undeniable links between environmental action, human rights and economic justice. Brian Miles of *Nashvillescene.com* describes the film as "...proof that one small voice of dissent can shake nations."

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