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attachment to, this threatened region is enacted. Through their rites and communities of protest, they commit to defending country that they have come to know and experience as sacred.

As an intriguing dimension to this story, the sacrality attributed to the region by inhabitants from diverse backgrounds, is extended to uranium itself – a reality reminiscent of other sites of environmentalist/Aboriginal solidarity, such as that which transpired at the now stalled Jabiluka project in Kakadu National Park opposed by the Mirrar. In these cases, far from being evil or malign, uranium is considered sacred – which is true so far as it remains untouched, “pure.” In such circumstances dialogue occurs between local mining, beleaguered indigenes attempting to maintain obligations toward country, and non-indigenous environmentalists who believe that unearthing uranium constitutes the violation of an environmental taboo. For both, uranium’s unearthing is dangerous – amounting to *desecration*. Possessing a mixture of science and Aboriginal religion, they hold the view that uranium should not be tampered with, it must “stay in the ground” – its disturbance, removal and milling presaging disaster, sickness and ruin.

KOLE is one of many new intercultural alliances evidencing post-colonialist sensibilities in Australia. With their proactive ecologism effected under indigenous cultural and religious authority, the political and spiritual dimensions of their opposition to existing practices are inseparable. For non-indigenes, a level of custodianship is conferred. Activist Rufus describes his experience at the camp in 1999:

Every day we would sit around the fire and Uncle Kev would describe his vision of the future, or what he thinks are the steps we need to take to create the future that we want to live in. His ideas were progressive in the sense that anyone who comes out here to this bit of land and feels the spirit of the old lake and dances on the land, they’re welcome. And you feel the call to defend it (Interview with the author, May 2000).

Dwelling beside the Lake on and off since its inception, doing “whatever it takes to look after the land,” young environmentalists Marc and Izzy have become “Keepers of Lake Eyre.” According to “Uncle Kevin,” says Marc,

Lake Eyre is calling, and it’s calling us back. The old spirits are calling us to come and protect the country and look after the country. So we need to be there to make sure nobody comes in and stuffs up the country. So basically we sit on our hill that overlooks Lake Eyre. We keep an eye on Lake Eyre (Interview with the author, May 2000).

Such activists have come to identify closely with threatened nature – establishing, through ethical action, a legitimate right to belong.

*Graham St John*

See *also*: Aboriginal Dreaming (Australia); Australia; Mother Earth.

## Kenya Green Belt Movement

The Green Belt Movement (GBM) is an innovative, community-based, development and environmental organization with a focus on community mobilization and empowerment for sustainable development and especially for environmental conservation. The movement seeks to improve the livelihoods of communities, alleviate poverty, and promote the rights of women, and it has done so by focusing especially on tree planting and environmental conservation. Professor Wangari Maathai founded the GBM in 1977. Her work and the movement received international acclaim when in 2004, at the age of sixty-four, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Maathai initiated the movement under the auspices of the National Council of Women of Kenya, where she interacted much with rural women. During these interactions she realized that women were faced with a problem of insufficient fuel wood after years of woodland destruction to pave the way for cash-crop farming. It was therefore easy to craft together Green Belt Movement and work with rural women on a project that addressed their immediate need for fuel wood.

### Wangari Maathai on Reforesting Kenya

*Editor’s note: This excerpt from the 2004 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize shows that her nature-related spirituality is an important part of her identity and motivation.*

All of us have a God in us, and that God is the spirit that unites all life, everything that is on this planet. It must be this voice that is telling me to do something, and I am sure it’s the same voice that is speaking to everybody on this planet – at least everybody who seems to be concerned about the fate of the world . . .

Poverty and need have a very close relationship with a degraded environment . . . to break the cycle, one has to start with a positive step, and I thought that planting a tree is very simple, very easy – something positive that anybody can do.

Quoted in: Suzuki, David. *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering our Place in Nature*. Vancouver, British Columbia: The Mountaineers, 1997, 227.

After 25 years of working with the Green Belt Movement, the founder/coordinator of the movement, Professor Wangari Maathai, was elected to parliament after the December 2002 elections. She was then appointed Assistant Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Wildlife. The renowned environmentalist has gained world acclaim through her selfless contribution to local, national and global issues on environmental concern. She has been working very closely with other global greens and by the time of her appointment to the government, she was (and still is) a member of Mazingira Green Party which she helped to found. The Green Belt Movement is currently nurturing the Society of Greens project, through which it is working hard to capture the prevailing environmental awareness in Kenya.

The primary energy behind the movement is rural women, who work to save and protect their immediate natural environment and especially biological diversity of plants and animals threatened with extinction. Although women are the main driving force, men and children are also involved in the planting and caring of trees, especially on school compounds. Even then, men plant trees more as an economic investment for the future, while women and children plant trees to meet the currently felt needs of communities. These needs include wood-fuel, fencing and building materials, fruits for better health – especially for children – shade and aesthetic beauty. Traditionally, trees and nature in general were highly valued in African religion. In my community, with which I am very familiar, use of biodiversity was a specialized discipline where men and women had distinct relationships with all the various life forms. For instance, when building or fencing, branches of trees or coppices of coppicing trees were cut by men, but not the whole tree. Women would only collect dead dry wood for firewood. *Ficus* spp. is especially valued for spiritual purposes and would not be cut down under whatever circumstances. A variety of other species were regarded as peace trees and therefore conserved for these purposes. Parts of these trees would be used in peace building, especially during tribal or clan conflicts.

Unfortunately, these cultural environmental ideals were lost during the colonial period when traditional religion was effectively phased out and replaced with the conventional religions. Most Kenyans today are Christians, and members of the GBM constituency are almost 100 percent Christian. It is for this reason that GBM uses the biblical story of creation to reach out to the hearts of communities and show them that God, after all, created human beings after all the other members of the living and non-living community because human beings could not survive without them. All vegetation, animals and birds, waters and the atmosphere can do very well without human beings. But human beings cannot live without each of these. This approach helps in enabling people to

understand that even though the Bible says that human beings were given *dominion* over the rest of the creation, they must be disciplined in using the resources they have been endowed with since their eventual exhaustion means eventual death to human beings. And this effectively prepares people for a change in mindset from dominion to stewardship of God's creation. This again introduces a new jurisprudence where human beings consider themselves as co-creations of God with vegetation, animals and birds, and relearn to accord them due respect. This new jurisprudence is rooted in the indigenous way of life where people respected nature and viewed themselves as part of the greater whole of the universe. They controlled the way they extracted resources from their immediate environment and had their way of life (including spirituality) woven closely together with the environment. Although global warming is not a well-known issue or motivation among the rural women, trees also contribute as a carbon sink for greenhouse gases.

The religious teaching of the Green Belt Movement is informed by the fact that close to 90 percent of Kenyans are Christians, these having closed their eyes to their culture and embraced Christian spirituality completely. The dominant Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian denominations are promisingly receptive to the teachings on environment and actually preach this in their churches. They also encourage their adherents to participate in activities that heal the Earth like planting trees in church compounds and on their farms. However, there has been marked indifference in some of the evangelical churches, who view the Green Belt Movement as controversial because it encourages people to think about the Earth as they think about heaven! Again this attitude is slowly waning as people are confronted by the harsh ecological realities of their actions embodied in constant droughts and famines, floods and landslides. All of these calamities are contributing to much destruction and loss of life.

#### **GBM Approach to Development**

The community-based approach of GBM enables it to address all people in the community, and in that way development efforts become a truly communal effort. Project implementation is done in close partnership with communities, which are provided with the financial and training back-up they need to improve their capacity. GBM also monitors, evaluates and reports on the progress of the project to donors and friends. Members of local communities provide labor, local expertise, knowledge and follow-up, which are valuable aspects of community involvement in project management. Communities are also partly responsible for the sustainability of projects.

#### **Vision and Mission**

The vision of the Green Belt Movement is to create a value-driven society of grassroots people who consciously

work for continued improvement of their livelihoods. The mission is to mobilize community consciousness for self-determination, equity, justice, environmental conservation and improved livelihood securities (food, shelter, education, health, employment, and human rights), using both civic and environmental education and tree-planting projects as the entry point.

One of the unique attributes of the Green Belt Movement is that it is a value-driven organization committed to the principles and values of sound environmental management. Such values are well articulated by the Earth Charter, which resulted from the efforts of many sectors of civil society in the years after the United Nations "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Many of the principles of the Earth Charter reflect the values and ethical philosophy of GBM. That is partly why GBM was happy to accept an invitation to promote the Charter in the African region. The values of GBM include: working to achieve accountability, integrity, commitment, transparency, reverence for life, and intergenerational responsibility. Others are the spirit of volunteerism and service to the common good, a deep desire for self-fulfillment and dignity, and a love for a greener, cleaner environment. Through its educational seminars, the organization also encourages a strong motivation for self-betterment, a thirst for self-knowledge and self-empowerment, and a desire to improve oneself. Other values include a personal commitment and dedication to serve communities. These values are not new; they are also shared by many organizations committed to development and societal transformation.

#### **Core Projects**

To achieve its vision and mission, GBM developed a program that incorporates Four Core Projects:

##### *Tree planting on public lands*

The objective of this project is to inculcate, within community members, the culture of planting trees as well as protecting local biological diversity of plants and animals and commonly owned resources such as forests, green open spaces, riparian and road reserves, wildlife and sites of cultural significance.

##### *Promotion of food security at household level*

The objective of this project is to assist communities in analyzing and understanding the threats to their food security as well as learning and practicing simple agricultural techniques. This would enable them to consistently provide adequate farm-sourced food of high nutrient value and variety to their households. The project aims at enhancing farmers' knowledge of local biodiversity, indigenous dietary principles, indigenous crops and their role in food security, organic farming and other techniques for improving productivity and food processing.

##### *Advocacy and networking*

The objective of this project is twofold. First, to bring actions of poor governance and abuse of the environment into the national and international limelight; secondly, to rally resistance against such anti-environmental actions and thereby stop violation of environmental rights. There is a strong synergy between advocacy and civic and environmental education, and therefore GBM adopts an integrated approach in the implementation of the two projects. When individuals and communities understand the causes and consequences of injustices (through civic and environmental education) they are driven to advocate a more equitable order – be it social, economic or political. Advocacy and networking is done both at the local and international levels. Within Africa, a Pan African Green Network has been formed, partly to promote green consciousness in the region. GBM has reached 36 organizations in 15 African countries where it is hoped that a strong environmental movement will eventually emerge, especially in Eastern and the Horn of Africa regions.

##### *Civic and environmental education*

The objective of this project is to raise awareness concerning primary environmental care so as to enhance knowledge, attitudes and values that support sustainable grassroots socio-economic and ecological welfare. The aim is to make people more responsible in matters affecting their livelihoods as well as those of the wider community. The course emphasizes the responsibility of the current generation to those in the future, the need for a self-regulatory jurisprudence and the principles articulated in the Earth Charter. This project also attempts to show the connection between culture and spirituality and environmental conservation.

#### **Successes**

The GBM has empowered local communities to implement activities such as mass action events to protest destruction of forests, privatization of open public green spaces in urban centers and the destruction of watershed areas. GBM has recorded much success in advocacy work, especially in saving public open lands including Karura Forest, Uhuru Park, Gevanjee Gardens and Kamukunji grounds in Kenya. Local green belt womens' groups have also saved many local open spaces in the rural areas. GBM's persistent and consistent advocacy work partly contributed to the government's decision to introduce an Environment Management and Coordination Act (1999), which is a new law to protect the environment. A Forest Bill has been drafted and a Land Commission, which has finished its report and handed it over to the president, was established to look into Kenyan land laws and make recommendations.

At the end of 1998, GBM commenced an organizational development process and produced a strategic plan

(2000–2002). With that, Phase I (1977–1999) was closed. Phase I had facilitated the establishment of 6000 women tree nursery groups throughout the country, especially among farming communities. The groups mobilized over 100,000 rural women, who in turn mobilized their communities to plant trees, especially on their farms.

One of the major achievements of GBM in Phase I was mass planting of twenty million trees. Other achievements include the fact that many women no longer need to walk long distances to collect firewood since it is now produced on their own farms. Some women have also adopted energy-saving cook-stoves to promote family health and energy conservation. Such technologies particularly reduce respiratory tract diseases. The planting of many fruit trees has contributed to the betterment of nutrition and health, especially among children. Therefore, a firm foundation has been laid on which GBM will further achieve community development. For their extension work during Phase II, women will continue to be financially compensated by GBM, but this will be done through purchase of seedlings surviving after transplanting on public lands. This will generate some income for the women extension workers.

#### **Conservation of Local Indigenous Biodiversity: The Current Focus**

GBM decided to focus on planting of trees on public lands because these can easily be conserved to become *in situ* seed and gene banks. Also, the GBM emphasizes the benefits of conservation of biological diversity and effective carbon sinks. Since much of the local biological diversity is on public lands such as forests, local hills, riverbeds, highways, etc., it becomes necessary to educate the public that, contrary to popular opinion (influenced by system of governance), public lands, and the biological diversity in them, are a common heritage. These resources should therefore be protected and conserved and not allowed to be extracted or privatized by greedy and corrupt individuals at the expense of the common good of communities and future generations. To address the threat of lost biological diversity, soil erosion and seeds of food crops, GBM has encouraged women groups to form community networks, which are a culmination of many years of training and empowering communities, to take charge of their environment and their livelihoods. The networks represent a unique way of empowering communities so that they can protect forests and sources of biological diversity near them, collectively. Training of these networks has encouraged many communities to get involved in the protection of sites of interest near them, such as sacred forests, watersheds, catchment areas, indigenous food crops and wildlife. Kaya Forests on the Kenyan coast are one example of such sacred forests. The local people protect the forests with the assistance of the government, but the essential principles underlying the protection bid

are cultural/spiritual. The local people still practice their spiritual and other cultural activities in the forests and these form the basis of the protection of the forests. Besides these networks, GBM also trains local leaders like the clergy (mainly from the Anglican and Presbyterian churches), progressive farmers, and teachers, so that they can work alongside the women networks. Activities of these networks also contribute toward poverty reduction, especially since poverty has become both a symptom and a cause of environmental degradation.

During Phase I, and despite GBM's persistent appeal to plant indigenous trees, plants and food crops, many farmers opted for exotic species of trees. This was because they perceived indigenous trees as having a disadvantage of delayed material benefits, due to slow growth. Communities also felt that some indigenous trees create large canopies that take up too much arable space on farms. Besides, farmers felt that indigenous trees are not as easily commercialized as the exotic trees introduced during the colonial era for quick commercial exploitation. Even then, this disadvantage is compensated by the value of the rich biological diversity, which indigenous species encourage under their canopy. Therefore, indigenous trees have a higher environmental conservation benefit. GBM continues to concentrate on planting them on public lands.

GBM has a great capacity to mobilize large numbers of community members to work for the environment on a voluntary basis, and indeed it is impossible to compensate women groups for all the extension work that they do. But much of that work is done through the spirit of volunteerism by the networks and tree nursery groups. In mobilizing thousands of people in the rural areas, GBM commits a lot of energy to environmental conservation and improvement of livelihoods.

Each network is being encouraged to establish a Community Environment Fund (CEF), which will sponsor environmental activities. Activities will include the local demonstration center, renewable energy-saving technologies, purchase of seeds and vegetative stocks, exchange visits, farm work and provision of water and other inputs. The network would also be able to facilitate training and exchange of information and advice among other actors. The CEF could also serve as a source of capital for innovative economic initiatives started by the members of the network. This would be cheaper than bank loans, which are often inaccessible to women and the poor without collaterals.

#### **Conclusion**

Individuals and communities can change their world by the little they can do to contribute to the greater whole. Green Belt Movement was recognized as a case of good practice in Johannesburg during the United Nation's 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Through the film, *A Quiet Revolution*, the work of the

Green Belt Movement was further acknowledged, along with other initiatives in the world, for its capacity to mobilize the masses and their human resources to focus on changing their world for the better. In the decades to come the profile and influence of Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt model will certainly grow and spread even more widely as a result of the international attention brought on by the Nobel Peace Prize.

*Gathuru Mburu*

#### Further Reading

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See also: African Religions and Nature Conservation; Christian Environmentalism in Kenya; Earth Charter; Sacred Groves of Africa.

## Khoisan Religion

The Khoisan peoples of southern Africa are click language-speaking foragers and herders, who have been in the region and have interacted with each other culturally and genetically for thousands of years. As a result, any clear ethnic, cultural or linguistic distinctions between the two groupings that comprise them – the hunting-gathering band-organized Bushmen (or San) and the cattle-keeping, clan-organized Khoekhoe (or "Hottentots" as they used to be called, pejoratively) – have become difficult to draw. A number of the Bushman groups speak either Khoe or Khoe-derived languages, such as the Hai//om of Namibia, who speak Nama (a Khoe language), or the Nharo (Naro) of Botswana, whose San language has pervasive Nama influences. A number of historical Khoekhoe groups of the Cape, who have now all disappeared, lost their cattle through ecological and political pressures and assumed a hunting-gathering economy and mode of production. Conversely, some Bushman groups of northern Namibia and Angola have acquired cattle. In the past, San also used to work as servants and herders for cattle-keeping Khoekhoe.

Religion is one of the cultural domains of the Khoisan peoples that reveals how closely interrelated the San and Khoekhoe have become over the course of their long-standing association. Here similarities and convergences outnumber differences, the latter reflective, in significant

ways, of the two diverse socio-economic patterns of the herders and foragers. Thus, Khoekhoe ritual and myth include a concern with cattle; for instance, myths tell of how cattle were acquired by the Khoe people's ancestors (and lost to the Bushmen) and fresh cattle dung was used in death purification ceremonies by the Nama (who had a strong concern with taboos and ritual danger). Khoekhoe myths also tell of early chiefs and warring clans, a theme absent from Bushman myth and belief wherein the concern is more with game animals and ritual aspects of hunting. The large, meat-rich game animals, the eland, gemsbok or giraffe, are the animals that are most prominent in San rock paintings and they stand at the symbolic and ritual center of the initiation ceremonies of numerous Bushman groups, as well as the trance-curing dance, as the source of *n/om* (the healing potency employed by the shaman-curer).

Despite such divergences in content and emphasis, however, the two people share one religious system. This is evident, more than anywhere else, in the two groups' supernatural beliefs and in their myths and folklore, which, in her recent comprehensive catalogue of Khoisan folktales, the German folklorist Sigrid Schmidt treats as one oral tradition. The preeminent figure on the Khoisan mythological landscape is the trickster, who may be a human-like being – such as Haiseb (or Haitsi-aibib) of the Nama or Paté of the Nharo – or he may bear the traits of an animal. He may assume these either sporadically, when he transforms himself into an animal – for instance, into a mantis, such as Kaggen (Cagn) of the /Xam – or his animalian traits may be a permanent aspect of his being, such as the pan-Khoisan Jackal, who is especially prominent in Khoe folklore. The Khoisan trickster was an ambiguous blend of mischievous or evil prankster, culture hero, protector and even god. In the last capacity he stood opposed to the Khoisan-wide creator god, whom the Nama called Tsui-//goab ("Wounded Knee") and the Nharo N!adi (or Hise) and for whom the !Kung had as many as eight different names, each associated with different attributes. He is associated with the sky and the rain and, according to a widespread traditional Khoisan belief, his "village in the sky" is the destination of the souls of the dead.

The principal protagonists of the trickster were the people of the mythological past, who were either the early humans or animals with human traits and capabilities. They were beset by such social problems and moral shortcomings as food, greed, marital strife and in-law tensions. These converged in the widespread "woman-as-meat" story plot, that is, of a man coming to realize that his wife is a game antelope – that he has "married meat" – and subsequently killing and eating her for her meat, with the collusion of his relatives. This Khoisan-wide story is an expression of the symbolic equivalence of hunting with sex and marriage. The moon and other stellar bodies were frequently personified in Khoisan myths and were