

Discover Newsletter for colleagues in Africa

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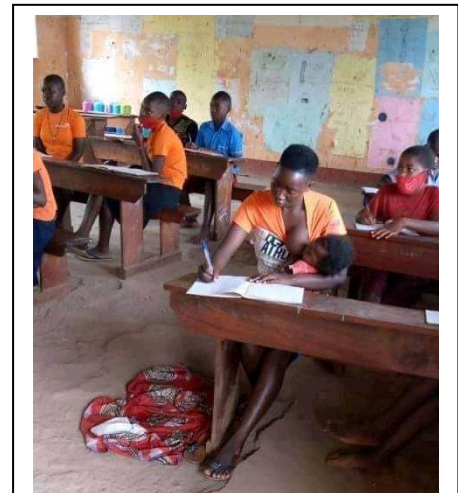


Women's empowerment helps us all!

The late Wangari Maathai is remembered for her massive tree planting campaign in Kenya. "Green Belt" began as a few women planting trees but grew to become a large network of 600 community groups that cared for 6,000 tree nurseries.

Her marriage to a young Kenyan politician ended catastrophically. She said, somewhat provocatively, "I should have known that ambition and success were not to be expected in an African woman. An African woman should be shy, submissive, incompetent and totally dependent. A highly educated, independent African woman is bound to be dominant, aggressive, uncontrollable – altogether a bad influence."

Today, in much of Africa, the lockdowns and restrictions have made a bad situation for many women even worse – the incidence of domestic violence has increased and there have been very many teenage pregnancies. Perhaps domestic violence has increased because women, rightly, have stood up to their domineering male partners. And maybe teenage pregnancies have occurred through teenagers having nothing to do and young men forcing themselves onto young women.



Not all teenage mothers are so determined to continue their education as this young woman in Maliba, Uganda!

Queen Rania of Jordan said many years ago, "If you educate a woman, you educate a family, if you educate a girl, you educate the future." Do you agree? In my experience, an educated mother provides her family with healthy food, cares for their education and encourages them to take an interest in many topics and thus to develop enquiring minds. In such circumstances, not only the husband and father has a more fulfilling life, but the whole community benefits. The growing children learn to engage with issues in the wider neighbourhood.

The connection between the environment and women's lives is very strong. Wangari Maathai was convinced that women experience the worst impact of a degraded environment. "They lack wood fuel, water, food and fodder. They are poor, with no cash income. They find themselves in a vicious cycle of debilitating poverty, lost self-confidence and a never-ending struggle to meet their most basic needs."

How can we help African women to escape from such a situation?

Watch this powerful interview of Teresa Gitonga who plants trees on Mount Kenya with groups of women. It is an inspiring account of how women are the first to benefit in the home from tree planting, and, in doing so, grow massively in self-confidence and thus take the first steps towards better lives: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dme9_gcmNw&t=1s

In summary, give women honour in your community. As you "grow trees", i.e. as you plant them and care for them, make sure many women play an active role in decision-making and action.

Keith Lindsey