



United Nations  
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# WANGARI MAATHAI

## AND THE GREEN BELT MOVEMENT



UNESCO Series on Women in African History





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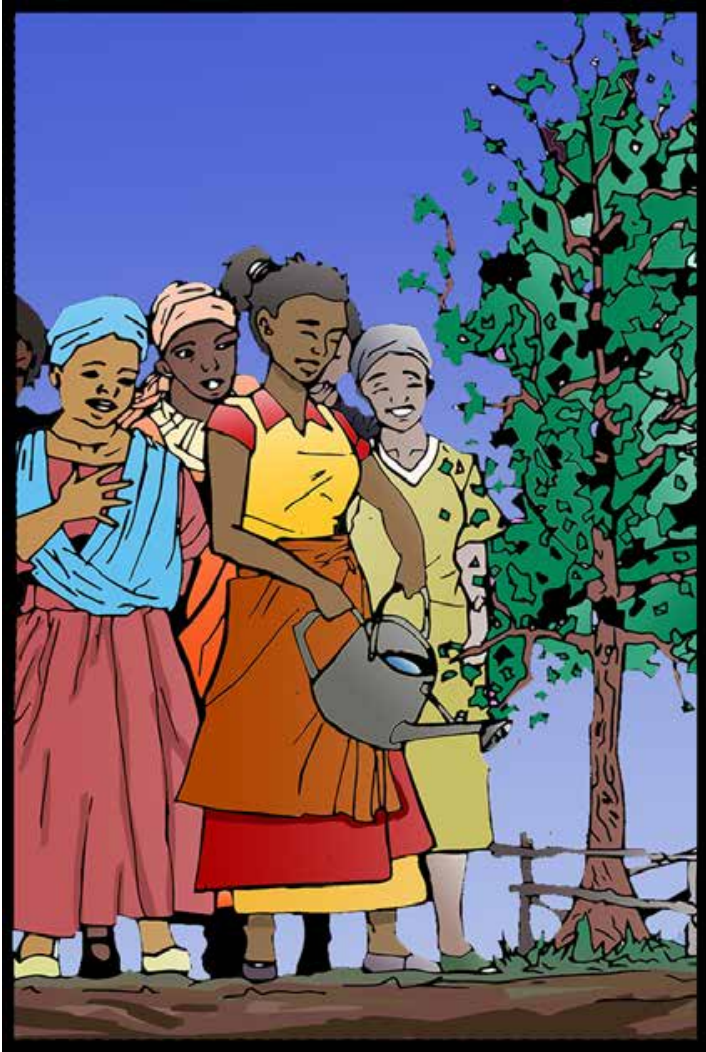
Comic strip  
Illustrations: Eric Muthoga  
Script and text: Obioma Ofoego

# Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement

## Foreword

The following comic strip is an interpretation of certain periods of the life of Wangari Maathai. The illustrations are based on historical and iconographic research on Wangari Maathai and the twentieth century Kenya. They do not claim to be an exact representation of the events, people, architecture, hairstyles, or clothing of the period.





## **1. The Green Belt Movement**

1977. In a modest classroom in rural Kenya, a young university professor plants the first seeds of the Green Belt Movement ...



Not so long ago, sisters, it was not like this.





For in those days, the trees of the fields would clap their hands, as they swayed in dance to the song of the sky. And the soil was moist and true, nourished as it was by laughing rivers. Firewood was plenty, and children had abundant food to eat.







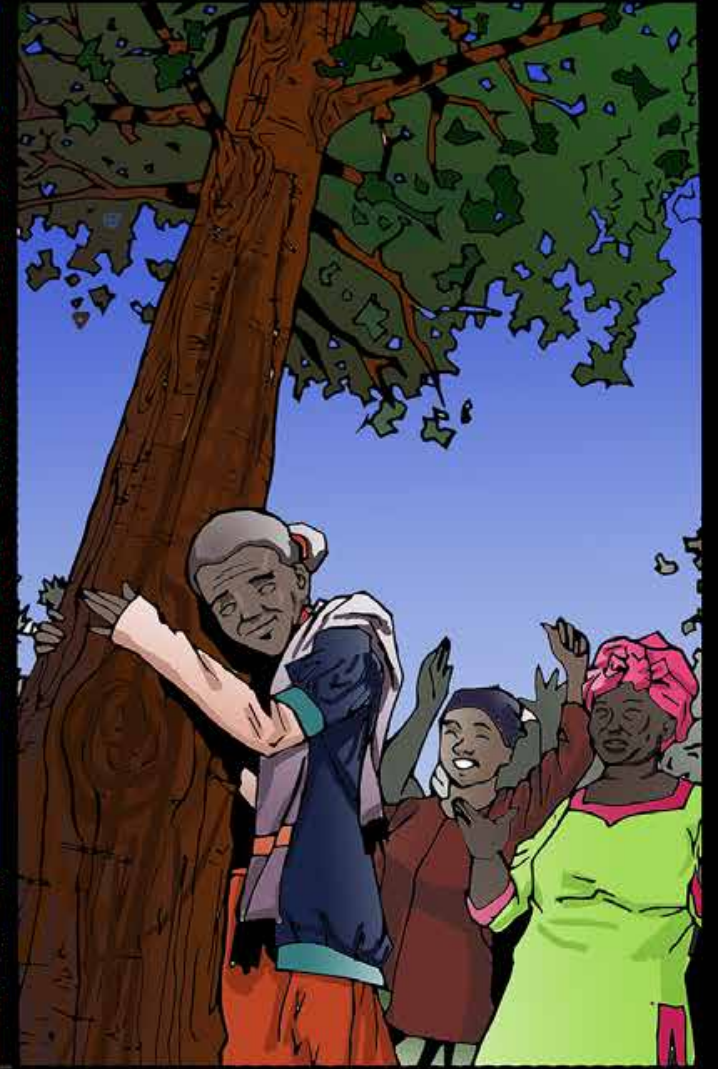
Our forests have been chopped down, and lush greens have turned sickly yellow. Our rivers are suffocating, and the soil has slowly cracked dry, like a dead leaf. And so animals and humans alike are forced to wander further and further away from home in search of food.



But I say no more!  
We women must take  
things into our own hands, as our  
mothers did before us. It is our land.  
We own it, and it is up to us  
to take care of it.

We can plant trees,  
wherever there is good soil. And  
though it may be slow, though it may  
be hard, these trees will rise, inch by  
inch, one by one, to stand tall over  
us and our children.

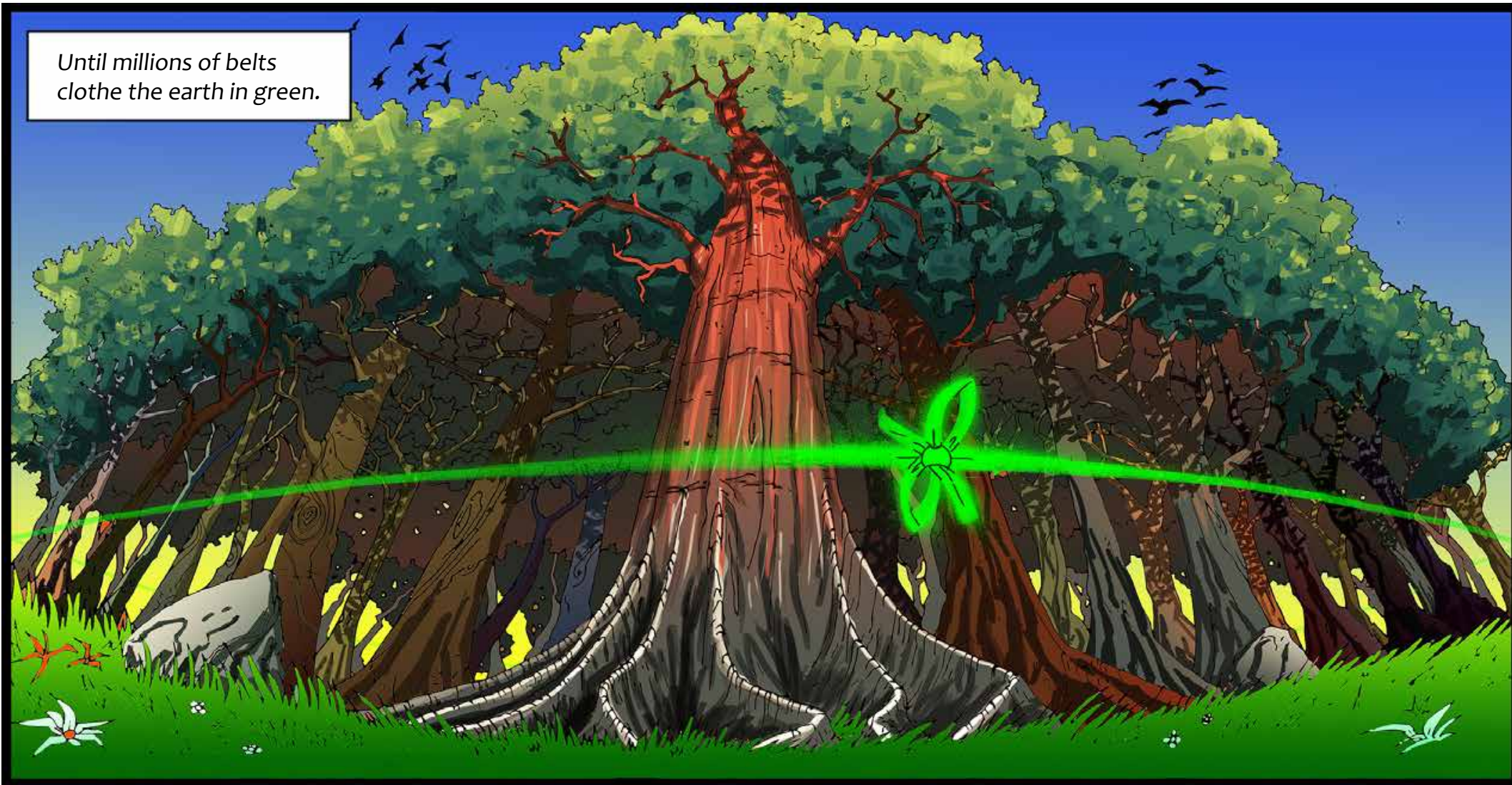
And so the women follow  
Wangari Maathai, and begin  
to plant trees.



And little by little, the word spreads from mouth to mouth, from community to community, from region to region...



Until millions of belts  
clothe the earth in green.

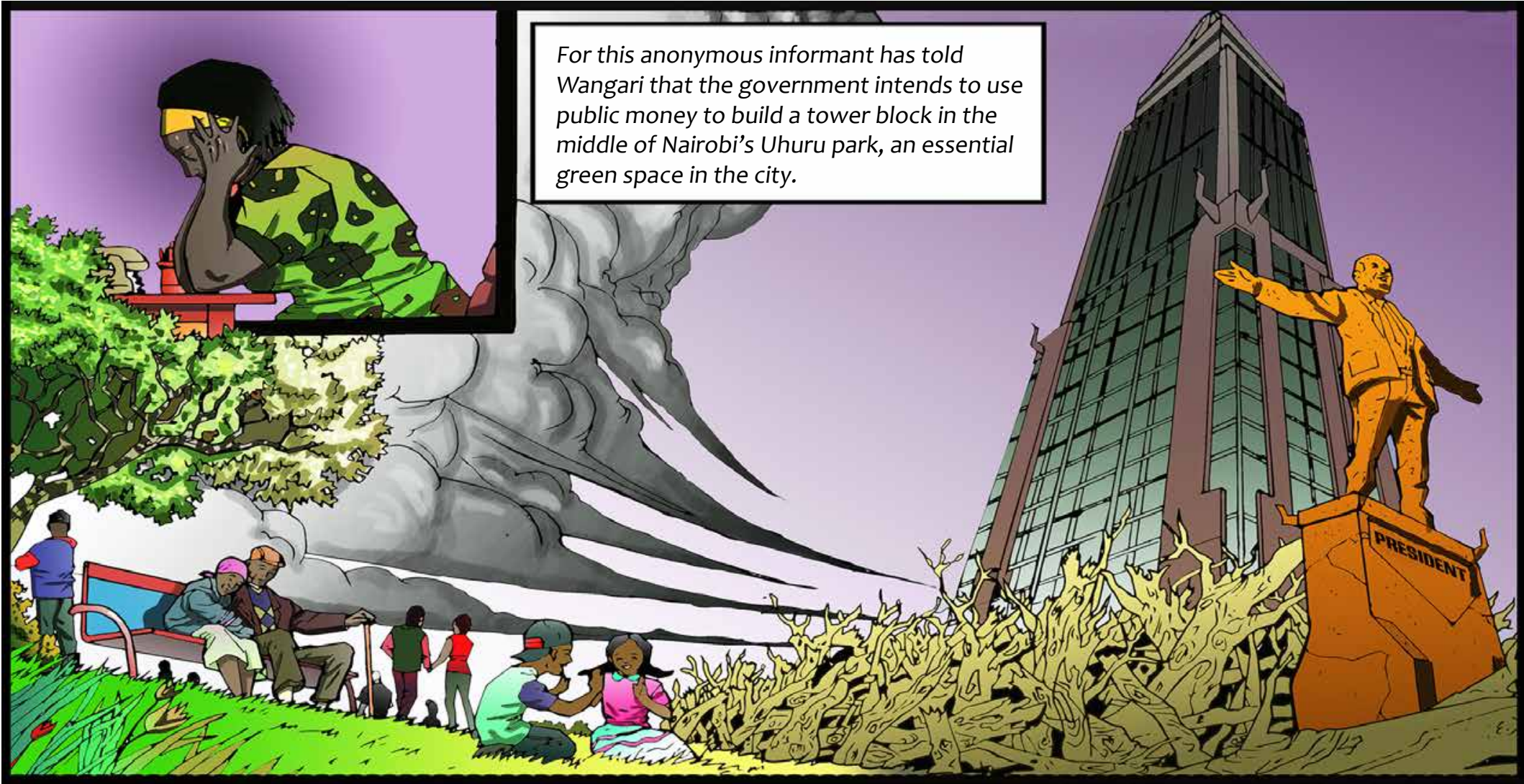




## 2. Uhuru Park



For this anonymous informant has told Wangari that the government intends to use public money to build a tower block in the middle of Nairobi's Uhuru park, an essential green space in the city.









*Determined not to allow this sale of public land to go ahead, Maathai takes up her pen and begins to send letters to governments, to the local and international press, and to institutions the world over.*





*Think of the millions of Kenyans of tomorrow, our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. May they have no cause to accuse us of standing idly by as their inheritance was auctioned off to the highest bidder. Those who have ears, let them hear: we must fight to protect Kenya's environment!*





The months and years roll by, and the women continue the fight from the confines of Wangari's own home.





Until one fine day...

The government has given in! The Green Belt women pulled it off!





But though the sun shone today, the struggle was far from over...



### ***3. Karura Forest***

A landgrab more terrible than Wangari Maathai had ever dared to imagine is afoot. For certain officials are plotting to give away publicly owned land to individuals, in return for political support. The prize? The majestic Karura Forest on the edge of Nairobi, the lung of the region, home to diverse ecosystems, and a crucial buffer against wind erosion...







The following day...

We are here to  
plant trees.

This is public land, and  
we're entitled to plant  
trees on public land!

You can't  
do that.





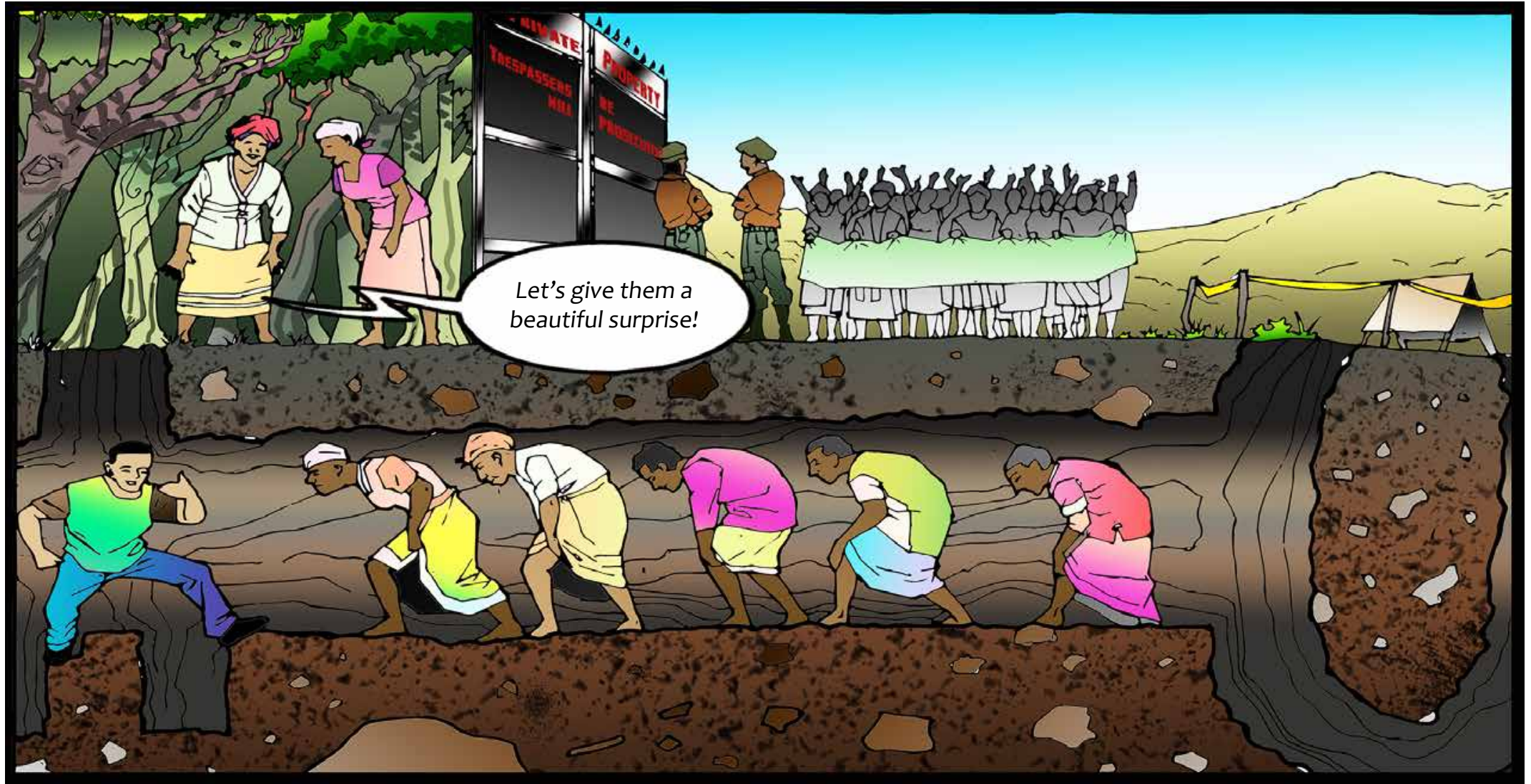


But if at first you don't succeed...

Ay! It is too high.









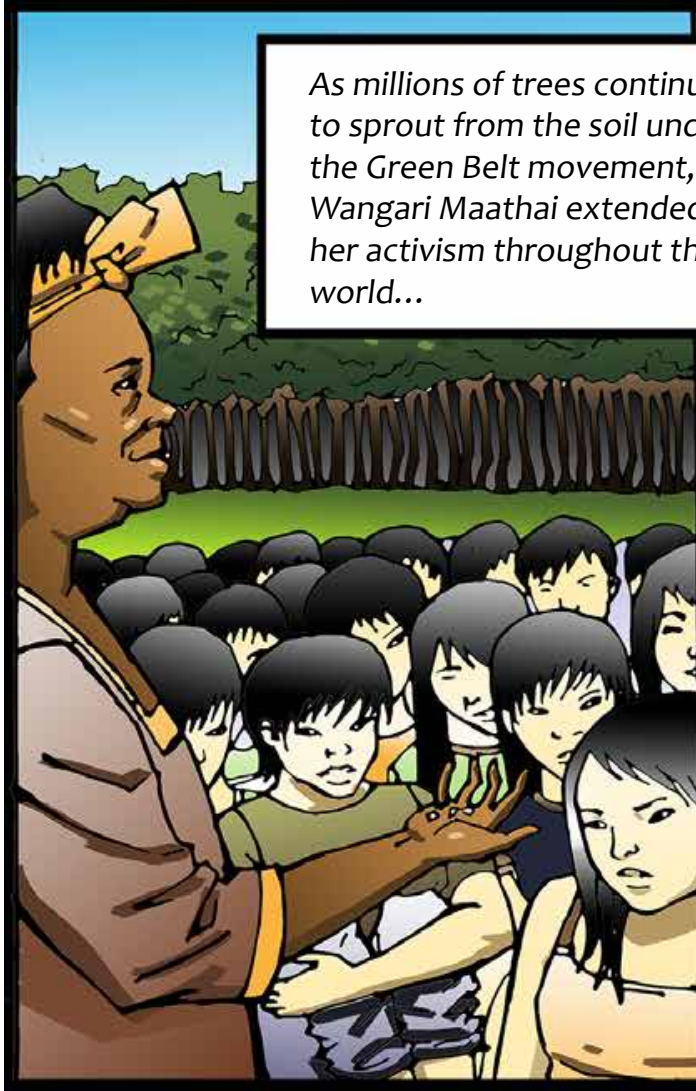


People quickly got wind of what the women were doing, much to the government's dismay.

These women! It is not worth it!



As millions of trees continued to sprout from the soil under the Green Belt movement, Wangari Maathai extended her activism throughout the world...



and the world has recognized her legacy.



*Visit and share the website*  
*[www.unesco.org/womeninafrica](http://www.unesco.org/womeninafrica)*





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### **Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement**

Wangari Maathai (1940–2011) was a Kenyan scholar and environmental activist. She founded the pioneering Green Belt Movement in 1977, which encourages people, particularly women, to plant trees to combat environmental degradation. Her holistic approach eventually led her to link environmental responsibility to political struggles of governance, human rights and peace. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

### **Women in African History**

By way of various artistic and pedagogical resources available online, this UNESCO project highlights a selection of historical female figures, from Africa and of African descent, who have distinguished themselves in the history of the continent in areas as diverse as politics (Gisèle Rabesahala), diplomacy and resistance against colonization (Njinga Mbandi), defence of women's rights (Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti) and environmental protection (Wangari Maathai).

The selection of women figures proposed in the framework of this project is not exhaustive and represents only a small part of the contribution of African women, known and unknown, to the history of their countries, Africa and all mankind.

**For additional pedagogical resources, please visit the web site [www.unesco.org/womeninafrica](http://www.unesco.org/womeninafrica)**

**The UNESCO Project *Women in African History* was realized with the financial contribution of the Republic of Bulgaria.**



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