

Briquette project wins student Sh800,000 Maathai prize

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[Wangari Maathai](#)

June 19, 2015

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AT a casual glance, Claire Nasike is just an ordinary girl from a humble background.

But last week, she took many by surprise when she won this year's coveted Wangari Maathai Scholarship Fund award. She recounted how her late grandmother influenced her keen interest in environmental conservation.

The annual award is worth Sh800,000 in education funds.

The ceremony took place at the Greenbelt Movement offices at Adams Arcade in Nairobi.

Nasike, 24, beat thousands of other applicants to win the coveted award in memory of Nobel Laureate Prof Wangari Maathai.

She said her late grandmother was a renowned herbalist who put discipline, education and environment first.

Her mother worked in Nairobi and she therefore lived with the grandparent in Budalang'i, a flood-prone area in Western Kenya.

It is while with her grandmother that keen interest in environment developed.

"I would not be standing here today were it not for my late grandmother's who raised me with some amazing knowledge of herbs which greatly influenced how I look at the environment," she said last week.

"We would go out to the forests to gather different species of plants and concoct them into life saving drugs. For me, environment equaled life and that is how my love for the environment was conceived," she says.

The annual award comes with a certificate and Sh800,000 token towards the winner's school fees.

She said her mother is also a source of inspiration as she works hard to support her and her young brother.

Nasike, a second year student at the Technical University of Kenya pursuing degree in environmental resource management, challenged young people to jealously guard the environment.

"We all depend on environment for our needs to be met, we must jealously guard the environment," she says.

Nasike heaps praises on the late Prof Wangari Maathai for her contribution towards conserving the environment.

Prof Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her contribution to "sustainable development, democracy and peace.

She died in September 2011, at the Nairobi Hospital of cancer aged 71. The Wangari Maathai Scholarship Fund is an environmental innovation fund set up in October 2012 in her memory to encourage young people stay committed to conservation.

The Rockefeller Foundation and Kenya Community Development Foundation also fund the kitty.

Abigael Ndinda won the award in 2013 while Sylvia Jemutai won last year.

Nasike impressed judges for her efforts in Port Victoria village where she mentors girls aged 12-15 years on conservation through making of briquettes from charcoal dust collected from shores of Lake Victoria, as well as promotion of ecological farming.

She said her initiatives focused on women because they are “the backbone of any society.”

Green Africa Foundation founder Isaac Kalua congratulated Nasike saying she is doing the country proud.

He said the rate at which forests in the country are being depleted is not sustainable.

Kalua warned that if the trend is not checked, climate related problems would continue haunting the country.

“We have about 8.7 million households in the country out of which 5.6 million households use 10 kilogrammes of firewood for household energy every year,” he said.

“We are depleting 5.6 million trees daily, which is completely unsustainable. We must wake up and do what we are supposed to do.”

Kalua decried the unabated developments on wetlands saying it will does not augur well with conservation.

He described the riparian space as a “thorny issue” saying the country needs to wake up.

“The law on wetlands is very clear and must be adhered to. It provides that if someone is building near riparian with a river which is two metres wide, a space of two times to that of the river must be left,” he said.

Kalua warned those not adhering to the law.

He said were it not for Wangari Maathai’s dedication and selflessness, most of the biodiversity would have been depleted.

Kenya Forest Service in 2012 estimated that 6.2 per cent of the country’s total land is covered with forests.

Greenbelt CEO Aisha Karanja said even though the government was flushing settlers out of forests, more still needs to be done

- See more at: <http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/briquette-project-wins-student-sh800000-maathai-prize#sthash.E8sCQaed.dpuf>