

# ROOTED & RISING



IN CRISIS  
WE GATHER

Convening Report  
Nairobi, March 2026

# ROOTED & RISING



IN CRISIS WE  
GATHER

Convening Report  
Nairobi, March 2026

## Our Partners



Institute on  
GENDER, LAW, AND  
TRANSFORMATIVE PEACE  
CUNY SCHOOL OF LAW

# *Contents*

Executive Summary	4
Roots: Background and Context	8
Seeds: Objectives	11
Cultivators: Participants	12
Branches: Program Highlights	14
Ecosystem: Key Themes & Discussions	24
Growth: Outcomes & Impact	32
Rooted in Legacy, Rising Together: Conclusion	40
Appendix	44
Acknowledgements	48



# Executive Summary

From 1–5 March 2026, Nairobi became a gathering place for feminist leaders from across the world—at a time when gathering itself feels increasingly urgent, and increasingly rare.



*Nobel Peace Prize laureates Shirin Ebadi, Laymah Gbowee and Oleksandra Matviichuk with Nyaguthii Cbege, Board Chair of the Green Belt Movement; Wanjira Mathai, Chair of the Wangari Maathai Foundation; and Maria Butler, Executive Director of NWI.*

*Rooted & Rising* brought together women working on the frontlines of conflict, climate crisis, and social injustice to honor the legacy of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai and to strengthen collective feminist leadership for the challenges ahead.

Participants came from over 35 countries, including Yemen, Palestine, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico, Ukraine, Iran, and Liberia. They gathered as Sister-to-Sister fellows and alumni, grassroots activists, civil society leaders, philanthropists, each bringing lived experience shaped by crisis, resistance, and ongoing struggle. We were led by Nobel Peace Prize laureates Shirin Ebadi, Oleksandra Matviichuk, and Leymah Gbowee, and joined by Wanjira Mathai, daughter of Nobel Peace Prize laureate and NWI co-founder Wangari Maathai.

Rooted and Rising was co-created with the Wangari Maathai Foundation, the Green Belt Movement, The Institute on Gender, Law and Transformative Peace at CUNY, and engaged with many more Kenya-based civil society, grounding the convening in both global movements and local realities. The convening unfolded against a rapidly shifting and deeply unstable global context. On the very first day, news broke of the United States and Israel launching a war on Iran, and rapidly engulfing the broader Middle East region. This escalation of violence sadly underscored the urgency of feminist leadership in a moment defined by war, repression, and the erosion of democratic space.

As Nobel Peace Prize laureate Leymah Gbowee highlighted:

*“We are living in a time that demands courage, honesty, and collective responsibility.”*

In this context, coming together was not incidental. It was an act of activism, resistance, and collective power.

Throughout the week, solidarity was not spoken about in abstract terms. It was practiced. Participants showed up for one another across difference and distance, engaging directly with the realities of war, repression, displacement, and resistance, and asking what it means to act in solidarity now - practically, politically, and collectively.

As Oleksandra Matviichuk shared with participants:

*“Ordinary people do extraordinary things. Ordinary people can change history.”*

The program brought together intimate dialogue and



*Leymah Gbowee at the Rooted & Rising convening*

public engagement. Participants engaged in small-group conversations with Nobel laureates, joined over 250 activists and civil society leaders for Tea & Feminist Dialogue, and walked together through Karura Forest on Wangari Maathai Day, honoring her legacy while confronting the ongoing threats to land, environment, and community.

Across these moments, something deeper took shape: relationships were strengthened, new partnerships were formed, and pathways for continued collaboration began to emerge. The convening also contributed to wider public discourse through targeted media engagement, amplifying feminist perspectives on peace, climate justice, and human rights.



*Nobel Peace Prize laureates at Rooted & Rising*

As Shirin Ebadi reminded participants in closing,

*“when we put our hands together, there is a powerful sound... if our crowd keeps growing, our voice will become louder and reach everyone.”*

At its core, the convening reaffirmed a simple but urgent truth: in a world where movements are under increasing pressure, we cannot sustain the work alone. Care, connection, and collective resilience are not secondary, they are the conditions that make movement possible. And together we are unstoppable.

**Rooted in legacy. Rising together in a time of crisis.**



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*



# Roots: *Background & Context*

*Rooted & Rising* built on Nobel Women's Initiative's Sister-to-Sister Young Feminist Leadership Program, which over the past five years has been delivered online.



*Sister-to-Sister alumni with Wanjira Mathai.*

The virtual format enabled the program to reach a wider and more diverse group of young women leaders, including those in very difficult and conflict-affected contexts, ensuring that even those working under conditions of war, repression, and limited mobility could participate and connect.

At the same time, the experience of the past years has reaffirmed a fundamental truth: there is no replacement for coming together in person.

The *Rooted & Rising* convening was created as the culmination of the latest iteration of the Sister-to-Sister program. It was an opportunity to bring participants of this cohort together with alumni from past years physically after only virtual engagement. It intentionally extended beyond the program itself, bringing together a broader community of Nobel Peace Prize laureates, partners, grassroots activists, civil society leaders, students, and staff, to broader feminist coalitions and solidarity.

The decision to hold *Rooted & Rising* in Nairobi was both intentional and symbolic. The convening marked 20 years since Wangari Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and since she, alongside Nobel Peace Prize laureates Shirin Ebadi and Jody Williams came up with the idea for Nobel Women's Initiative while sharing tea in Nairobi.



*Nobel Peace Prize laureates Oleksandra Matviichuk and Leymah Gbowee.*

Returning to this place, where both her activism and the vision for NWI took root, grounded the convening in history while connecting it directly to the present. The convening took place at a time when the challenges facing feminist movements are intensifying. Across the world activism, democracy, human rights and women's rights especially, are increasingly under attack.

War and militarization are on the rise, while the climate crisis, despite its escalating impacts, remains insufficiently addressed or wilfully ignored by global leaders. For many working on the frontlines of these issues, the work can feel overwhelming, the challenges insurmountable, and the path forward deeply isolating.

It is in this context that the act of coming together takes on renewed significance. Wangari Maathai, who received the Nobel Peace Prize twenty years ago and whose legacy grounded the convening, consistently emphasized the power of individual and collective action, reminding us that change begins with what each of us is able to do, however small it may seem. And Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oleksandra Matviichuk emphasized during the convening

*“often people don’t know what to do because they feel they are a drop in the ocean. But if each of us does something, drop by drop, we will be an ocean. An ocean of peace.”*

The convening provided a space for participants to recognize the big impact of seemingly small, individual actions, and the collective power we hold. When people come together, share experiences, and act in solidarity, the work becomes not only more possible, but more sustainable. *Rooted & Rising* was therefore more than a gathering. It was a space to reconnect and re-energize, to strategize and build coalitions across borders, and to remember that no one is carrying this work alone.

In a world shaped by fear and uncertainty,  
it was also a space to cultivate hope.

As Wangari Maathai once said,

*“when we plant  
trees we plant the  
seeds of peace and  
hope.”*



*Nobel Peace Prize laureates Wangari Maathai, Jody Williams and Shirin Ebadi having tea in Nairobi over 20 years ago.*



*Rooted & Rising participants planting a tree in Karura forest.*



# Seeds: *Objectives*

*Rooted & Rising* was designed as both a leadership space and a convening, with the aim of strengthening feminist leadership, advancing climate justice and eco-rights, and building sustained networks for collective action in a time of deepening global crisis.

The *Rooted & Rising* convening aimed to:



Strengthen young women leaders' capacity for feminist leadership in peace, climate, and environmental justice



Provide an in-person convening opportunity for Sister-to-Sister alumni following five years of online programming



Deepen participants' practice of feminist leadership rooted in climate and environmental justice



Build a strong cross-regional network of young feminist climate activists



Create opportunities for mentorship, movement-building, and collective advocacy



Celebrate and advance the legacy of Wangari Maathai, centering African and Indigenous leadership



Strengthen participants' connection to NWT's mission, community, and impact



# Cultivators: *Participants*

The *Rooted & Rising* convening brought together a diverse group of feminist leaders from 35 countries across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

Participants included Sister-to-Sister fellows from the 2025 cohort and alumni from previous years, Nobel Peace Prize laureates, grassroots activists, civil society leaders, youth leaders, philanthropists, and NWI board and staff. Participants represented a wide range of expertise, including human rights, peacebuilding, climate justice, women, peace and security, migration, and grassroots organizing, reflecting the interconnected nature of the challenges addressed throughout the convening.

The diversity of participants created a dynamic, intergenerational space that bridged lived experience, movement leadership, and emerging voices, and shaped the depth, urgency, and relevance of the discussions throughout the convening.

The strong representation from the Global South ensured

that discussions remained grounded in lived realities, particularly in contexts affected by conflict, repression, and climate injustice. Across the convening, what emerged was a community rooted in shared values, mutual respect, and a collective commitment to advancing feminist leadership for peace and justice.

A full list of participants is included in the appendix.



*Rooted & Rising participants planting trees at Karuru forest*



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*



# Branches: *Program Highlights*

The *Rooted & Rising* convening combined intimate dialogue, public engagement, and high-level institutional exchange, creating a dynamic program that connected local realities with global conversations.



*Participants visiting Wangari Maathai's favorite tree spot at Kereita forest*

## Karura Forest Visit: Honoring Legacy, Confronting the Present

A defining moment of the convening took place on 3 March, Wangari Maathai Day, with a visit to Karura Forest, one of Nairobi's most important green spaces and a site deeply connected to Wangari Maathai's legacy.

Participants walked together through the forest she fought to protect, reflecting on the courage of Wangari Maathai and the women who stood alongside her against land grabbing and environmental destruction. The visit was both symbolic and urgent. At the time of the convening, Karura once again faced threats from development and tree clearing, underscoring that the struggles she led are far from over.

In this context, the visit became a moment of collective reflection and renewed commitment, linking past victories to present-day challenges, and reinforcing the importance of continued vigilance, advocacy, and solidarity in defending land and environmental rights.



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*

## Tea & Feminist Dialogue

The convening created space not only for internal dialogue, but also for broader public engagement and in depth community dialogue through the Tea & Feminist Dialogue event, which brought together more than 250 activists and civil society leaders from across Nairobi and beyond.

The event was named in honor of a pivotal moment more than 20 years ago, when Nobel Peace Prize laureates Wangari Maathai, Shirin Ebadi, and Jody Williams first envisioned the Nobel Women’s Initiative while sharing tea in Nairobi. Returning to this format, the dialogue created an intentional space for open, cross-sector exchange—bringing together convening participants and local civil society in a setting grounded in conversation, connection, and shared purpose.

Discussions engaged directly with the pressing challenges facing movements today, including shrinking civic space, climate injustice, conflict, and the erosion of women’s rights. Participants reflected on the role of feminist leadership in responding to these crises, while also sharing strategies, lived experiences, and pathways for collective action.

Importantly, the dialogue bridged global and local perspectives—connecting international participants with Kenyan activists, community leaders, and organizations working on the frontlines of environmental justice, governance, and social change. This created opportunities not only for exchange, but for relationship-building and continued collaboration beyond the convening. More than a public event, the Tea & Feminist Dialogue functioned as a space for collective reflection and shared strategizing, reinforcing the importance of bringing movements together across contexts to learn from one another and to act in solidarity.



*Participants of Tea & Feminist Dialogue*



*Participants of Tea & Feminist Dialogue*



*Participants of Tea & Feminist Dialogue*



*Participants of Tea & Feminist Dialogue*

## Kereita Community Visit

We visited Kereita Forest and engaged in rich dialogues with local communities, hosted by Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO), alongside WRI, the Wangari Maathai Foundation (WMF), and partners including GROOTS Kenya and local women's groups.

Discussions centered on women's leadership, community resilience to climate change, conservation, financial empowerment, participation, sustainable farming, and household energy use, as well as the importance of movement-building and sisterhood. We heard powerful reflections on women's leadership at the grassroots level, including their roles in school committees and how everyday decisions, such as those related to school meals, are intrinsically linked to broader national policy processes, including those in Parliament.

Local women leaders shared insights into the realities of planting and dairy farming, the growing impact of inflation on rural communities, and the challenges of competing with larger companies, factors that significantly shape local markets, pricing, and livelihoods. Conversations also underscored the importance of engaging men as allies in dismantling barriers, advancing gender justice, and supporting women's rights at both household and community levels.

As one local woman leader noted,

*“When we talk about women's rights,*

*they cannot be an afterthought or placed under A.O.B. on the agenda.”*

These grounded exchanges informed and enriched the broader convening, highlighting the critical link between local leadership and global advocacy.

## Engagements and Strategic Dialogues

Alongside the core program, the convening facilitated a number of high-level engagements, strengthening connections between grassroots movements, institutional actors, and global advocacy spaces.

These included:

- A visit to the **United Nations offices in Nairobi**, creating space for dialogue on global policy frameworks and advocacy pathways



*Rooted & Rising participants on UN visit*



*Rooted & Rising participants visiting the Chief Justice Martha Koome*

- An engagement with the **Chief Justice Martha Koome**, offering an opportunity to reflect on justice, accountability, and the role of institutions in advancing rights
- A **high-level reception hosted at the Norwegian Ambassador's residence**, bringing together diplomatic actors, partners, and participants to strengthen relationships and visibility
- A **roundtable on Ukraine**, creating focused space for dialogue, solidarity, and strategic engagement on ongoing war and accountability efforts focusing in particular on raising awareness in Kenya, where Russian

disinformation has grown and recruitment of men for the Russian army is an issue, and about how Kenya and Ukraine can collaborate.

- Two **dialogues on Sudan**, bringing together young women activists from Sudan and South Sudan with local experts to engage in deep dialogue and strategy about possible action and support

These engagements complemented the convening's core focus, connecting grassroots leadership with institutional platforms and expanding opportunities for influence, partnership, and advocacy.



# Ecosystem: *Key Themes and Discussions*



*Participants taking part in small group discussion*

## Feminist Leadership in a Time of Global Crisis

Across the convening, discussions were grounded in a shared recognition: we are living through a period of deep, overlapping global crises. Participants reflected on escalating armed conflicts, shrinking civic space, rising authoritarianism, and intensifying attacks on women's rights and bodily autonomy. At the same time, humanitarian systems are under strain, and funding cuts are having devastating consequences for the world's most vulnerable communities.

These realities were not discussed in abstraction. Participants brought firsthand experiences from contexts including Ukraine, Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, Gaza and Kenya highlighting the human cost of war, repression, and political neglect. From the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure in Ukraine to the systemic exclusion of women and girls in Afghanistan, conversations underscored how crises are lived unevenly, with women and marginalized communities bearing the heaviest burden.

Nobel Peace Prize laureates emphasized that feminist leadership in this context requires both clarity and courage. Shirin Ebadi noted that opposing war is not enough, we must confront its root causes, including the

erosion of democracy and accountability. Oleksandra Matviichuk reinforced that justice cannot be contingent on political power or military outcomes, but must remain universal and people-centered.

As one participant reflected,

*“hope in this room was not naive. It had already looked directly at escalating conflict, shrinking civic space, and the erosion of women’s rights—and chose to keep building anyway.”*

Across sessions, participants returned to a central question: what does it mean to lead with integrity, dignity, and responsibility in a world where systems of power are failing?



*Participants engaging in discussion*

## Solidarity as Practice

One of the most consistent threads throughout the convening was the understanding that solidarity must move beyond language into practice.

Participants engaged directly with one another's realities, listening to sisters navigating war, displacement, repression, and loss. Conversations addressed the devastating winter endured by Ukrainians due to attacks on civilian infrastructure, the ongoing resistance of women in Iran despite brutal crackdowns, and the gendered impacts of conflict in Sudan and Gaza. These exchanges created space not only for sharing, but for collective responsibility.

As Oleksandra Matviichuk emphasized:

*“Solidarity isn’t just words. Solidarity is infrastructure that saves people.”*

This framing resonated deeply. Solidarity was understood not as symbolic alignment, but as something that must be built, resourced, and sustained through advocacy, visibility, accompaniment, and concrete support.

Participants explored what it means to show up for one another across contexts: politically, by amplifying each other's struggles; practically, by sharing resources and

networks; and emotionally, by holding space for grief, anger, and resilience. In this sense, solidarity became both a strategy and a daily practice—one rooted in relationships and accountability.

As Sister-to-Sister fellow Lilian N. Mbuthi from Kenya reflected:

*“Solidarity is not a feeling. It is a practice — a daily, disciplined, joyful practice.”*



*Sisterhood and solidarity*

## Climate Justice, Land, and Eco-Rights

Grounded in the legacy of Wangari Maathai, the convening affirmed the deep interconnection between environmental justice, peace, and women’s leadership.

Discussions highlighted how climate change is not only an environmental issue, but a driver of conflict, displacement, and inequality. Participants explored how resource scarcity intensifies tensions, how extractive industries continue to displace communities, and how militarized responses to environmental crises often deepen harm rather than resolve it.

As one participant noted,

*“war is the ultimate environmental disaster,”*

underscoring the inseparability of environmental destruction and conflict.

Sessions examining the intersection of militarism and climate injustice brought forward powerful examples—from land dispossession and foreign military presence to the exploitation of natural resources under the guise of development. Participants emphasized that feminist approaches to climate justice must center local knowledge, community leadership, and long-term sustainability.

Engagements with grassroots organizations further grounded these conversations in lived realities. Women leaders working on land conservation, sustainable agriculture, and community resilience demonstrated that solutions already exist—and that those most affected must be at the center of decision-making processes.



*Nobel Peace Prize laureates in Karura forest*

## Civic Space, Repression, and Resistance

A recurring theme throughout the convening was the global contraction of civic space and the increasing risks faced by activists and human rights defenders.

Participants spoke to the criminalization of dissent, restrictions on media and civil society, and the personal risks associated with organizing and advocacy. From internet shutdowns in Iran to the targeting of protest movements and the erosion of democratic institutions in multiple contexts, discussions highlighted a shared global pattern of repression.

As Shirin Ebadi emphasized,

*“democracy cannot grow where women are denied their rights—women’s freedom is the foundation of a just and peaceful society.”*

At the same time, the convening elevated resistance. Participants reflected on the power of protest movements, community organizing, and grassroots mobilization in challenging injustice and creating alternative futures. Even in highly restrictive environments, activists continue to organize, document, and resist—often at great personal



*Interpreter Shirin Ershadi and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi*

cost. These conversations reinforced the need for stronger protection mechanisms, sustained international attention, and deeper collaboration and solidarity across movements. They also underscored that resistance is not only reactive, but generative—creating new pathways for justice, participation, and accountability.

One participant emphasized:

*“Going into human rights work you know you may be bound to be arrested. But if you don’t have solidarity, you can’t even share information to organize support.”*

## Intergenerational Feminist Leadership

The convening created a rare and powerful space for intergenerational exchange, bringing together Nobel Peace Prize laureates and emerging feminist leaders in direct dialogue.

Participants reflected on the importance of learning across generations—both honoring the experiences of those who have led movements over decades, and recognizing the urgency, creativity, and leadership of younger feminists. These conversations were not without tension. Discussions surfaced differences in approaches to leadership, accountability, and movement-building, particularly in the context of rapidly changing digital and political landscapes. At the same time, there was a strong emphasis on mutual learning. As Leymah Gbowee noted, mentorship is not about hierarchy, but about sharing power—

*“getting off some of your power so someone else can have it.”*

Sustaining movements requires intentional investment in the next generation, alongside a willingness to adapt, listen, and evolve. Intergenerational collaboration emerged not only as a value, but as a necessity for building resilient and future-facing movements.

## Care, Sustainability, and the Future of Movements

Alongside political analysis and advocacy strategy, the convening placed a strong emphasis on care for oneself and for the collective. Participants spoke candidly about the emotional and physical toll of activism, particularly in contexts marked by violence, instability, and prolonged crisis. Feelings of anger, grief, exhaustion, and overwhelm were widely shared.

As participants reflected, movements cannot be sustained without care. The ability to continue organizing, resisting, and leading depends on the capacity to recover, to reconnect, and to support one another. The convening reaffirmed that care is not separate from the work—it is what makes the work possible. In a global context where activism is increasingly difficult and often dangerous, sustaining people and movements is itself a form of resistance.

As one participant put it:

*“It’s not just about what we fight against, but how we sustain ourselves in the fight.”*



*Participants in a small group discussion with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oleksandra Matviichuk*



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*



# Growth: *Outcomes &* *Impact*

The *Rooted & Rising* convening generated impact across multiple levels—strengthening relationships, deepening political analysis, amplifying critical issues, and reinforcing the sustainability of feminist movements. These outcomes reflect not only what took place during the convening, but what participants are carrying forward into their work and communities.

## Strengthening Connections Across Borders

One of the most immediate and visible outcomes of the convening was the strengthening of relationships across regions, movements, and generations.

For many participants, this was the first time meeting in person after years of virtual engagement. For others, it marked the beginning of new cross-regional connections. Over the course of the week, relationships were built not only in formal sessions, but in informal moments—on buses, over meals, and in shared reflection spaces. These interactions created the foundation for new partnerships and collaborations across movements and geographies. Participants identified shared priorities, exchanged strategies, and began exploring joint initiatives—linking work on climate justice, peacebuilding, and human rights across Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and Latin America.



*Participants strengthening connections*

Concrete pathways for collaboration began to emerge. Participants working on environmental justice explored cross-regional exchanges connecting grassroots defenders. Those engaged in conflict-affected contexts—including Ukraine, Sudan, and Gaza—identified opportunities for coordinated advocacy, knowledge-sharing, and mutual support. Sister-to-Sister alumni and current fellows also initiated plans for continued regional engagement, including the East Africa gathering, to sustain relationships beyond the convening.

Engagement with local organizations and community leaders in Kenya further strengthened these partnerships, grounding global connections in lived realities and opening space for longer-term collaboration with grassroots movements.

These connections are foundational to movement-building. As participants emphasized, trust, familiarity, and shared experience are essential for sustained collaboration—particularly in a global context where movements are under increasing pressure.

As one participant reflected:

*“Some things cannot be planned into an agenda. They just happen when the right women are in the same room.”*

At the same time, there was a clear recognition of the urgency of working together. As one participant put it:

*“If we don’t unite, no one is coming to save us.”*

The convening reinforced that networks are not simply about contact—they are about connection, trust, and the ability to act together over time.

In this sense, *Rooted & Rising* functioned not only as a convening, but as a platform for ongoing collaboration, strengthening the relationships and partnerships needed to sustain movements now and into the future.



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*

## Deepening Solidarity

Beyond connection, the convening enabled participants to actively practice solidarity in meaningful and concrete ways. Participants engaged directly with one another's contexts—offering political support, sharing strategies, and identifying ways to collaborate across borders. This included:

- Engaging with Ukrainian realities and identifying avenues for continued advocacy and visibility
- Sharing analysis and support related to conflicts in Sudan and Gaza
- Strengthening collective understanding of repression and resistance in Iran and Afghanistan

These exchanges created a shared sense of responsibility and reinforced that participants are part of a broader, interconnected movement.

Participants left not only with a deeper understanding of each other's work, but with a clearer sense of how to support one another—politically, practically, and emotionally—now and in the future.

## Understanding the Roots

The convening created space for participants to engage in deep political analysis and strategic reflection.

Through dialogue with Nobel Peace Prize laureates, peer exchanges, and thematic sessions, participants:

- Strengthened their understanding of the root causes of conflict, including militarism, authoritarianism, and democratic erosion
- Explored the intersection of climate justice, land rights, and peacebuilding
- Examined the structural barriers to women's leadership and participation
- Identified opportunities for more coordinated advocacy and movement-building

This contributed to a stronger shared political framework, grounded in feminist principles and informed by diverse lived experiences.

Participants emphasized that this level of reflection is increasingly rare—but essential. It enables movements to move beyond reactive responses toward more strategic, long-term approaches.

## Rising Voices

The convening significantly elevated the visibility of key issues, movements, and leaders at both national and global levels through targeted media outreach aligned with the convening’s objectives, laureates’ priorities, and partner advocacy efforts.

This strategic approach focused on engaging key media outlets to amplify urgent issues, including:

- Oleksandra Matviichuk’s work on Ukraine and the human cost of war
- Shirin Ebadi’s advocacy on Iran, including repression, women’s rights, and democratic accountability
- The interconnected themes of climate justice, peace, and feminist leadership

Media engagement also supported local partner advocacy, particularly around the protection of Karura Forest, bringing renewed attention to ongoing threats and reinforcing the continued relevance of Wangari Maathai’s legacy.

This resulted in:

- 29+ media placements across television, digital, radio, and print
- Coverage by major Kenyan outlets including NTV, KTN, Capital FM, and The Star
- Strong narrative framing around Wangari Maathai’s legacy, climate justice, and women’s leadership

Broadcast interviews and media engagements positioned Nobel Peace Prize laureates and feminist leaders as key voices on urgent global issues, providing space for deeper public engagement. At the same time, digital and social amplification extended the reach and lifespan of the convening beyond the event itself.

Overall, this visibility ensured that Rooted & Rising was not only a closed convening, but contributed meaningfully to broader public discourse, strengthening the positioning of feminist leadership within global conversations on peace, climate justice, and human rights.



*Executive Director of NWI, Maria Butler, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oleksandra Matviichuk and Board Chair of Wangari Maathai Foundation, Wanjira Mathai at a media interview with TV47, Nairobi.*



*Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oleksandra Matviichuk at a media interview with Nation FM, Nairobi.*

## Rooting in Community

Engagements with local organizations and communities ensured that the convening remained grounded in lived realities.

Participants connected directly with grassroots women leaders working on:

- Land conservation and environmental protection
- Sustainable livelihoods and agriculture
- Community resilience and climate adaptation

These exchanges reinforced the importance of centering local knowledge and leadership and highlighted the critical role of grassroots movements in advancing sustainable and just solutions.

They also created opportunities for ongoing collaboration and support between global and local actors.  
Rising in Transformation & Renewal

Beyond collective outcomes, the convening had a profound impact at the individual level.

Participants described the experience as transformative, shaping how they understand their work, their role within movements, and their connection to others.

As one participant shared:

*“There are rooms that inform you, and then*

*there are rooms that transform you.”*

Participants spoke of leaving the convening:

- More connected
- More grounded in their purpose
- More accountable to their communities and to one another

This renewed sense of clarity and commitment is a critical outcome, particularly in a context where activism is often isolating and demanding.



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*

## Rooting Care and Renewal

A key learning of the convening was the recognition that sustaining movements requires intentional investment in care and well-being.

Participants emphasized that the current global context, marked by crisis, repression, and burnout, makes it increasingly difficult to sustain long-term engagement. The convening created space to reflect on these challenges and to reimagine how movements can support the people within them.

This included:

- Creating space for rest, reflection, and emotional processing
- Recognizing the importance of joy, connection, and creativity
- Reframing care as a collective responsibility, not an individual burden

This outcome reinforces a critical insight: movements cannot succeed if the people within them are not sustained. Care, therefore, is not separate from movement-building. It is essential to it.



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*

## Participant Feedback and Reflections

An evaluation survey was shared with all participants following the convening, and feedback from respondents reinforces the depth of impact experienced—highlighting both individual transformation and strengthened collective capacity.

Overall, the convening was received extremely positively, with 100% of respondents rating their experience as excellent (89%) or very good (11%). All respondents also indicated that the convening was aligned with its purpose of strengthening feminist leadership for climate justice, eco-rights, and peace.

The evaluation indicates meaningful outcomes across several key areas:



### 1. STRENGTHENED LEADERSHIP AND CONFIDENCE

95% of respondents reported feeling more confident in their feminist leadership as a result of the convening, reflecting the impact of dialogue, mentorship, and shared learning.

*“This experience strengthened my confidence in my leadership and clarified how I want to show up in my work moving forward.”*



### 2. PRACTICAL TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

Nearly 90% of respondents indicated that they gained practical tools, strategies, or insights that they plan to apply in their work, particularly in relation to advocacy, movement-building, and cross-regional collaboration.

*“I am leaving with real relationships and concrete ideas for collaboration that I will carry into my work immediately.”*



### 3. NEW CONNECTIONS AND COLLABORATION

100% of respondents reported forming meaningful new connections across regions and movements, with the vast majority indicating that they anticipate future collaboration with others they met during the convening.

***“The connections I built here are not just contacts—they are relationships I know I can rely on moving forward.”***



### 4. SAFE AND VALUES-ALIGNED SPACE

100% of respondents reported feeling safe, respected, and able to participate fully, highlighting that the convening embodied feminist values of inclusion, care, and mutual respect.

***“For the first time in a long time, I felt both supported and re-energized to continue this work.”***

Beyond quantitative feedback, qualitative responses underscored the importance of the convening as a space for both personal and collective renewal. Respondents described the experience as energizing, grounding, and transformative, reinforcing their sense of purpose and connection to a broader global movement.

***“This was a space to breathe, to reflect, and to remember why we do this work.”***

These reflections point to a deeper outcome: not only strengthened skills and networks, but a renewed sense of possibility, connection, and collective purpose.



# Rooted in Legacy, Rising Together: Conclusion



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*

*Rooted & Rising* took place at a time of profound global uncertainty—when movements are under increasing pressure, and the work of feminist leaders is becoming both more urgent and more difficult.

Across the week, participants came together not only to reflect on these challenges, but to respond to them. They built relationships, deepened analysis, and began shaping pathways for collective action. They showed up for one another across borders and experiences, demonstrating that solidarity is not abstract. It is something we practice, sustain, and carry forward.

As one participant reflected,

*“there are rooms that inform you, and then there are rooms that transform you.”*

*Rooted & Rising* was such a space.

The convening reaffirmed that the power of movements lies not only in strategy or advocacy, but in connection, in the ability to come together, to listen, to act, and to remain accountable to one another.

As Nobel Peace Prize Shirin Ebadi reminded participants,  
*“when we put our hands together, there is a powerful sound... if our crowd keeps growing, our voice will become louder and reach everyone.”*

This is the work ahead.

Rooted in Wangari Maathai’s legacy, and grounded in the relationships built in Nairobi, participants left not only with new ideas, but with a shared commitment to continue building, supporting, and rising together.



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*





*Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Wanjira Mathai, and Executive director of NWI Maria Butler at Rooted & Rising*



*The NWI Staff team at Rooted & Rising*



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*

# APPENDIX

## Community Agreements

*Rooted & Rising* was grounded in the Feminist Principles that guide the Nobel Women's Initiative: sharing power, transparency, mutual accountability, radical love, affirmation of human rights, respect, and solidarity.

### AGREEMENTS

This convening is a shared political and relational space. Its strength depends on the care, integrity, and accountability each of us brings. These Community Agreements are collective commitments to help us embody our feminist principles in practice.

#### *Share Power*

Sharing power means modeling alternatives to patriarchy and hierarchy in how we gather. We agree to:

- Be present and punctual, recognizing that time is a shared resource and honoring it is a form of respect.
- Participate fully while ensuring no voice dominates.
- Make space intentionally for voices that are less heard.
- Practice equitable participation in dialogue and decision-making.

#### *Practice Transparency*

Transparency strengthens trust and political clarity.

##### **We agree to:**

- Speak honestly and from your own lived experience.
- Communicate clearly and directly.
- Engage in dialogue rather than debate.
- Offer thoughtful disagreement constructively, without personal attack.

#### *Commit to Mutual Accountability*

Mutual accountability requires self-awareness and collective responsibility.

##### **We agree to:**

- Take responsibility for the impact of your words and actions.
- Remain open to feedback and learning.
- Address harm with care and integrity.
- Bring concerns to organizers if something feels unsafe or misaligned.

### *Embody Radical Love*

Radical love is political. It sustains movements and strengthens courage.

#### **We agree to:**

- Check in with yourself and others.
- Support a space free from harassment, intimidation, or discrimination.
- Approach differences with curiosity and humility.
- Offer solidarity and care to fellow participants.



*Participants of Rooted & Rising*

## Participants

*Rooted & Rising* brought together multiple circles of sisterhood across generations, geographies, and movements.

### *Nobel Peace Prize Laureates:*

- Shirin Ebadi (2003, Iran)
- Leymah Gbowee (2011, Liberia)
- Oleksandra Matviichuk (2022, Ukraine)

### *Sister-to-Sister Alumni:*

- Mirella Nicoll Tay Márquez (Peru)
- Viola Kataike (Uganda)
- Nazgul Usenzhanovna Dolotkeldieva (Kyrgyzstan)
- Jamella Ashley Chesney (Guyana)
- Wiem Trabelsi (Tunisian)
- Jeanette Mwendwa Gitobu (Kenya)
- Juliet Grace Luwedde (Uganda)
- Aisha “Ayesha” Mehmood (Pakistan)
- Lauritta Boniface (Nigeria)
- Ringisai Susara Campbell (Australia)
- Jacqueline “Jacko” Cruz Aguila (Mexico)
- Jessica Marvata (Jordan)
- Grace Chilongo (Malawi)
- Mitzi Jonelle Lim Tan (Philippines)
- Maryam Boujarfaoui (Morocco)
- Summer Salah Mohammed Shaheen (Palestine)
- Daniela Alba (Colombia / United States of America)
- Ruqia Abdullah Hadi Al-Gholi (Yemen)
- Bailon Menendez Karen Anahi (Ecuador)

- Ifrah “Juno” Abdullahi Mohodin Hassan (Somalia/UK)
- Esther Mutheu Mutuku (Kenya)
- Mbuthi Lilian Njeri (Kenya)
- Hillary Semeyan Lenantoiye (Kenya)
- Hina Khattak (Pakistan)
- Norwu Kolu Harris (Liberia)
- Langa Jabhisane Pinky (South Africa)
- Cassandra Neebin Lauren Spade (Canada)
- Saum Esendi Idd (Kenya)
- Esther Nkatha Muthaura (Kenya)
- Grace Joseph Ojukwu Ikarak (South Sudan)

### *Nobel Women’s Initiative Staff:*

- Maria Butler, Executive Director
- Daina Ruduša, Head of Programs
- Fabiola Pascal, Finance and Operations Manager
- Nicole Musimbi, Sister-to-Sister Program Coordinator
- Amy Lira, Partnership Coordinator
- Dildar Kaya, Advocacy Coordinator
- Bill Omondi, Communications Coordinator
- Liba Beyer, Senior Logistics and Events Lead
- Jacquelinne Cadena, Finance and Admin Assistant

### ***NWI Board Members:***

- Nermeen Shaikh, broadcast news producer, Democracy Now! Co-Host
- Negina Yari, Executive Director of Window for Hope, elected Board Member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

### ***Wangari Maathai Foundation:***

- Wanjira Mathai, Chairperson
- Agnes Nailantei, Programs Manager
- Jilna Collis, Event and Logistics Coordinator

### ***Greenbelt Movement:***

- Dorothy Aseyo, Executive Director
- Nyaguthii Chege, Chair
- Caroline Giathi, Communications & Advocacy Officer
- Rachael Muna, Project Officer

### ***Partners and Other Participants:***

- Mikaela Luttrell-Rowland, Managing Director, Institute on Gender, Law, and Transformative Peace at CUNY
- Karina Fernandez-Saito, CUNY student
- Lina Mazioui, CUNY student
- Arielsela Holdbrook-Smith, CUNY student
- Kavitha Mediratta, CUNY
- Nuula Varpila, Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa
- Hawa Jembell, Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa
- Hafsat Abiola, Project Dandelion

- Lynne Twist, NWI Philanthropy Circle coordinator
- Becky Austen, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Susan Byrd, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Simone Talma Flowers, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Julia Wells, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Dyan Triffo, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Eileen Hamra, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Meenakshi Budhraj, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Olivia Parsons, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Kathi Seifert, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Sheryl Winarick, NWI Philanthropy Circle member
- Anne Voss, Pitzer College
- Shirin Ershadi, Interpreter for Shirin Ebadi

### ***Local Vendors and Consultants***

- Jilna Collis, Logistics and Event Coordinator
- Eric Onyego, Media Consultant
- Glynn Mwavali, Travel Agent
- Carolyne Gitonga, Hotel Serena
- Michael Njoroge, Ground Transportation
- Joseph Ochieng, Photographer
- Miriam Kendi Njue, Photographer
- Billy Graham, Visual Identity and Design



# Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere gratitude to all participants and partners whose contributions made this convening possible. The Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI) warmly thanks Pivotal Ventures, Leymah Gbowee, and the Nobel Women's Initiative Philanthropy Circle, alongside all donors and supporters whose commitment sustains our work and enables spaces such as the Rooted & Rising convening. We also gratefully acknowledge the continued support of Norad, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, the Oak Foundation, and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kenya for their valued partnership with NWI, including their support for this convening. We are deeply appreciative of the many participants and invited guests who joined across the convening's engagements, contributing their time, expertise, and perspectives to the richness of the dialogue.

Our thanks also go to the partners, service providers, and collaborators whose efforts made this gathering possible, as well as to the organizations and community members in Kenya whose generosity and engagement grounded the convening in local realities.

We are especially grateful to:

- Wangari Maathai Foundation
- Green Belt Movement

- Institute on Gender, Law and Transformative Peace at CUNY
- Sister-to-Sister fellows and alumni
- Serena Hotel management and staff
- Friends of Karura Forest
- Karura Forest Environmental Education Trust
- Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO) and Kereita Forest partners
- Local civil society organizations and community partners in Kenya
- Event and logistics teams, facilitators, interpreters, and communications teams

This report was written by Daina Ruduša, Head of Programs, with contributions from NWI staff Dildar Kaya, Nicole Musimbi, Bill Omondi and Liba Beyer. Thank you to the convening notetakers Karina Fernandez-Saito, Lina Mazioui, Arielsela Holdbrook-Smith and their coordinator Jacqueline Cadena for their thorough notes. The report was edited by Maria Butler, Executive Director of NWI. Photos by Joseph Ochieng and Miriam Kendi Njue. Graphic design and visual identity by Billy Graham, Kanzi and Maya.



*Nobel Peace Prize laureates Shirin Ebadi, Leymah Gbowee and Oleksandra Matviichuk with Executive Director of NWI Maria Butler*

