



the Mpingo Conservation Project

[Registered NGO No. 832]

Plot 102, Block F, Kivinje Road, Kilwa Masoko, TANZANIA

Mail: P.O. Box 49, Kilwa Masoko Tel: +255 (0)23 201 3093

<http://www.mpingoconservation.org/> Email: enquiries@mpingoconservation.org

MEDIA RELEASE – Embargoed until 30 April 2009

First certified African Blackwood heralds a brighter future for rural Tanzanians

Begins

Some of the world's poorest people have achieved international recognition for responsible forest management and a golden opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty through selling responsibly harvested timber for musical instruments.

Two communities in Tanzania, working through the Mpingo Conservation Project (MCP)¹, have obtained the first certificate for community-managed natural forest in Africa. This landmark achievement will enable the communities to earn 250 times more from their forests – by managing them responsibly – than they have done previously.

The certificate is awarded by the international body, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)², which promotes responsible management of the world's forests.

The main timber that will be harvested and sold internationally by the Tanzanian communities is African Blackwood (also known as *mpingo*)³, a slow growing tree which is highly prized for making clarinets, oboes and bagpipes. The FSC certificate will enable communities to earn upwards of TSh 25,000/- (roughly \$19) per log compared to 100/- (\$0.08) they received before the MCP began working with them.

Under the system of Participatory Forest Management (PFM), which is enshrined in Tanzanian law, communities can take over ownership and control of their local forests from the government, allowing them to profit from timber sales, as long as they manage the forests sustainably. However, with illegal logging widespread, there is a need to differentiate timber coming from community forests from other sources if communities are to receive a fair price; the new FSC certificate does that.

A small collection of villages in Kilwa District, south-east Tanzania, have been working with the Mpingo Conservation Project since 2004 to achieve this historic first for African people, offering new hope for the twin goals of poverty alleviation and forest protection on the continent.

Mr Mwinyimkuu Awadhi, Chairman of Kikole village, comments: *“Previously we just used blackwood without thought, but we have learnt that it is a valuable resource. Now we see that we can utilise our stocks to benefit us all as villagers.”*

Local farmer, Mwanaiba Ali Mbega (female), adds: *“When we started this project we began to see the benefits that could arise from managing our forests. Now we have reached the stage of certification we are confident we are going to bring long term benefits that we will be able to pass on to our grandchildren.”*

The first timber will be harvested by the villagers in May/June this year. The wood must then be properly dried, a process which takes at least one year, and it is expected that the first FSC-certified blackwood instruments will be available sometime in 2011.

In this time of global economic crisis, it is important to remember that even small consumer choices can make a huge difference to poor communities in the developing world, providing them with an opportunity for a hopeful and sustainable future.

Ends



The mark of responsible forestry
SA-FM/COC-002151
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council A.C.

Notes to Editors

1. The Mpingo Conservation Project (MCP) aims to conserve endangered forest habitats in East Africa by promoting sustainable and socially equitable harvesting of valuable timber stocks, and with a particular focus on mpingo – the African Blackwood tree – which is used to make clarinets, oboes and bagpipes. For more information on MCP and its partners, please see below.

2. The Forest Stewardship Council's forest certification standard is recognised as the global gold standard for responsible forest management. Most FSC-certified forests are commercially-owned temperate or boreal forests; few are in the tropics, and even fewer are community-owned. See below for more information on FSC. MCP has been awarded certificate no. SA-FM/COC-002151 by FSC; it covers 2,420ha of forest at this initial stage.

3. The African Blackwood tree has long been over-harvested across the continent to obtain its dark, lustrous heartwood. The wood is greatly prized for its strong structural qualities by local wood carvers and international manufacturers of woodwind instruments. Although African Blackwood is still relatively abundant in South-East Tanzania, illegal logging is widespread and very poor, forest-dependent communities generally receive little benefit from logging on the land around their villages.

Background on the Mpingo Conservation Project

The Mpingo Conservation Project was set up in 1995 and aims to conserve endangered forest habitats in East Africa by promoting sustainable and socially equitable harvesting of valuable timber stocks. The project focuses particularly on *mpingo*, the African Blackwood tree, which is used to make clarinets, oboes and bagpipes. Wide-scale illegal logging has caused stocks of blackwood to drastically decline over the last 30 years, decimating populations in Kenya and much of northern Tanzania. MCP is working to give local communities an economic incentive to manage their forests responsibly by securing them a premium on timber harvested sustainably. This unique approach will make a significant difference to their livelihoods and help alleviate extreme poverty in some of the poorest communities in East Africa. www.mpingoconservation.org

MCP works with Fauna & Flora International and Environment Africa Trust in the UK, and WWF, the Forestry & Beekeeping Division and Kilwa District Council in Tanzania. MCP would like to take this opportunity to thank its major sponsors over the last 5 years which have led up to this major achievement: the Conservation Leadership Programme, the Darwin Initiative, and Comic Relief.



The Forest Stewardship Council

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international, not-for-profit, membership-based organisation that brings people together to find solutions which promote stewardship of the world's forests. The organisation has created a respected system that develops internationally recognised standards for responsible forest management and an international accreditation program for independent third party Certification Bodies which certify forest managers and forest product producers to FSC standards. To close the responsible circle of production, FSC has a logo and product label that helps consumers worldwide recognise organisations and products that support responsible forest management.

FSC's mission is to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests. From a simple idea, FSC has grown from its initial inception to become a global success. To date, over 50 million hectares of forests have been FSC certified.

www.fsc.org

Further Information

For more information on blackwood and its exploitation please see www.mpingoconservation.org. Additional pictures and interviews available on request from:

Jasper Makala – press@mpingoconservation.org / +255 (0) 784 938 097