



# the Mpingo Conservation Project

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## **CONSERVING MPINGO, THE MAGICAL MUSICAL TREE OF TANZANIA**

Mpingo is one of the most expensive timbers in the world. However stocks are declining because it is being harvested faster than it can re-grow. The forests in Tanzania need to be carefully managed so that harvesting can continue in years to come. The Mpingo Conservation Project will support Participatory Forest Management, enabling communities around the harvested areas in Kilwa Districts to benefit from the tree now and in the future.

Mpingo is the Swahili name for East African Blackwood, *Dalbergia melanoxylon*. In Africa, it is used to make utensils and tools, and traditional carvings such as those made by the Makonde people, so popular with foreign visitors. It is exported to Europe and the United States to manufacture musical instruments especially clarinets and oboes, for which its oiliness and texture make it the finest material. A new market is the export to China and Japan for making floors.

The tree used to be a common sight in the open miombo woodland which covers large areas of southern Africa, but now it occurs much less and only grows in commercially viable quantities in southern Tanzania and northern Mozambique. It takes around 70 to 100 years to reach timber size which makes it harder to harvest regularly without reducing stocks.

Although there is little danger that mpingo will become biologically extinct it is vulnerable to both commercial and local extinction. The supply of high quality wood is limited and will be exhausted if exploitation of mpingo continues in an uncontrolled manner. Today at least 50% of mpingo harvested in Tanzania is believed to be felled illegally. If action is not taken soon there will soon be no harvestable wood left in Tanzania which will mean a loss of income to local economies.

The Mpingo Conservation Project believes that mpingo offers a unique opportunity for integrated conservation and rural development across large areas of its habitat in Tanzania and Mozambique. The project's aim is to use mpingo as an economic tool to advance the conservation of miombo woodland and allow communities to develop. In particular it seeks to achieve this through promoting sustainable and socially equitable exploitation of this natural resource. Conservation of the natural habitat will be achieved by ensuring that local people living in mpingo harvesting areas receive a fair share of the worth of mpingo and other miombo products, therefore providing them an incentive to utilise their resources sustainably.

The project is initially working in Kilwa District, helping the local authorities to develop the Participatory Forest Management (PFM) programme in their district. Kilwa District, and Lindi Region in general, are one of the poorer parts of Tanzania. The Mkapa Bridge over the River Rufiji is an important step towards the economic development of the region, bringing trade and tourism to a previously inaccessible area of Tanzania. As the regional economy develops it is important that rural communities participate in and profit from this progress.

Participatory Forest Management (PFM) is a process for empowering local communities, assigning them ownership of the land and forests in their villages. The techniques have been developed in Tanzania over the last ten years, primarily focusing on ecosystem services provided by catchment forests and license-free tree species. Now PFM needs to tackle the sustainable management of high-value timber stocks. The project intends to develop this new aspect of PFM in an area where such timber stocks, and mpingo in particular, are still significant, and therefore capable of providing a long-term financial return to rural communities.

## UHIFADHI WA MPINGO, MTI WA MAAJABU NA MUZIKI TANZANIA

Mpingo ni mojawapo ya miti yenye dhamani kubwa sana Dunian. Ingawa idadi yake inapungua kwa sababu imekua ikivunwa kwa kasi kulinganisha na muda unaochukua kuota. Misitu hapa nchini Tanzania inahitaji kusimamiwa kwa uangalifu ili kuendelea kuwepo kwa miaka ijayo. Mradi wa Kuhifadhi Mpingo Sutasaidia usimamizi wa misitu shirikishi ili kuwezesha jamii inayozunguka maeneo yavunwayo mpingo katika Wilaya ya Kilwa kupata faida itokanayo na mti huu na kwa sasa na kwa siku zijazo.

Mpingo ni jina la kiswahili linalotumika kumaanisha mti unaotoa mbao nyeusi ujulikanao kwa kitaalamu kama *Dalbergia melanoxylon*. Mti huu unatumiwa na wenyeji kutengezea vifaa kama vyombo vya kulia chakula na vya kilimo, na pia kutengenezea vinyago kama vile vinavyotengenezwa na watu wa kabila la wamakonde, kwa hiyo mti huu ni maarufu sana kwa watu na hasa wageni. Inasafirisha kwenda nchi za Ulaya na Marekani, kutengeneza vifaa vya muziki hasa vifaa kama clarinet na oboe, ambapo sura yake nzuri inafanya kuwa bidhaa bora kwa matumizi hayo. Soko jipya ni usafirishaji wa mpingo kwenda nchini China na Japan kwa ajili ya kutengenezea sakafu.

Mti huu wa mpingo ulikua ukipatikana sana katika uwazi wa miti ya miombo inayopatikana kwa kiasi kikubwa kusini mwa bara la Afrika, lakini kwa sasa unaota kwa kiasi kidogo na kwa ajili ya biashara tu kusini mwa nchi ya Tanzania na kaskazini mwa Msumbiji. Muda wa mpingo kuota na kufikia uwezo wa kuvunwa na kuzalisha mbao ni kati ya miaka 70 hadi 100 na hivyo kupelekea kutowezekana kuvunwa mara kwa mara bila kupunguza idadi iliyopo.

Ingawa hakuna hatari kubwa kibiolojia kwamba Mpingo unaweza kuisha kabisa, lakini kuna hatari kwa mti huu kuisha hasa kwa upande wa kibiashara na kijamii. Usambazaji wa mbao itokanayo na miti ya dhamani ina kiwango chake na inawezekana kuisha kabisa kama mpingo utaendelea kukatwa bila uangalifu mzuri. Leo zaidi ya asilimia hamsini (50%) ya mpingo inayovunwa Tanzania inasadikiwa kuvunwa kinyume cha sheria. Kama hatua hazitachukuliwa haraka iwezekanavyo kuna hatari ya kutakua na miti ya mpingo inayoweza kuvunwa itakayobaki hapa Tanzania na hii inamaanisha kwamba, itasababisha upungufu wa kiuchumi kwa wenyeji.

Mradi wa kuifadhi mpingo (MCP), unaamini kwamba mpingo unaweza kutoa nafasi ya pekee kwa uhifadhi wa jumla na maendeleo ya vijiji kupitia eneo lake kubwa nchini Tanzania na Msumbiji. Madhumini ya mradi ni kutumia mpingo kama chombo cha kiuchumi kuongeza uhifadhi wa miti ya miombo na kuruhusu jamii kuendelea. Na hasa unatafuta kufikia lengo hili kwa kuongeza matumizi endelevu na unaoendana sambamba na jamii katika utumiaji wa maliasili hii. Uhifadhi wa maeneo yanayopatikana mpingo unaweza kupatikana tu kwa kuhakikisha kwamba wanakijiji wanaoishi katika maeneo yavunwayo mpingo wanapata mgao unaofaa kwa mapato yatokanayo na mpingo na mazao mengine ya miombo, kwa hiyo itawafanya wanakijiji kutumia mali asili yao kwa maendeleo endelevu.

Mradi kwa sasa unafanya kazi katika Wilaya ya Kilwa ukisaidiana na utawala wa Wilaya katika kuendeleza mpingo wa usimamizi wa misitu shirikishi ndani ya wilaya. Wilaya ya Kilwa, na Mkoa wa Lindi kwa ujumla ni kati ya sehemu mojawapo maskini hapa nchini Tanzania. Daraja la Mkoa, kuvukia mto Rufiji ni hatua muhimu kuelekea katika maendeleo ya kiuchumi ya mkoa na litaleta biashara na utalii katika eneo hili la nchi ambalo zamani halikuweza kupitika kwa urahisi. Uchumi wa Mkoa Ukikua ni muhimu sana kama wenyeji wa maeneo haya wanashiriki na kufaidi maendeleo haya.

Usimamizi wa Misitu Shirikishi (UMS) ni njia ya kuiwezesha jamii, kuwamilikisha ardhi na misitu iliyoko katika vijiji vyao. Mbinu hii imeanzishwa hapa nchini Tanzania zaidi ya miaka kumi iliyopita, kimsingi ikitazama huduma inayotolewa katika maeneo ya misitu yasiyo ya asili na aina ya miti yasiyo na leseni. Na sasa njia hii ya usimamizi misitu shirikishi inahitaji kuangalia uangalizi endelevu wa miti yenye dhamani kubwa. Mradi unakusudia kuendeleza wazo hili jipya la usimamizi wa misitu shirikishi katika maeneo ambayo idadi ya miti yenye dhamani kubwa, na hasa mpingo, bado ni muhimu sana, na kwa maana hiyo itaweza kutoa kipato cha muda mrefu kwa vijiji husika.

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**Photographs are available.**

For high-resolution JPEGs please email [enquiries@mpingoconservation.org](mailto:enquiries@mpingoconservation.org)

## Some Musical Instruments made from Mpingo



Clarinet  
*(oboe is similar)*



Bagpipes  
*(traditional Scottish and Irish)*

## From Tree to Carving

