



Mpingo Carvings Investigation 2001 – a Brief Summary

Mpingo Carvings Investigation 2001 was the fifth expedition from the Mpingo Conservation Project. It focused on the big carvings market at Mwenge in Dar Es Salaam, but also examined some other outlets in Dar, Morogoro and Arusha. Here is a brief summary of its findings.

Market Forces

Consumers – the source of demand

Everyone agreed that most sales are to tourists. 70% tourist sales was the modal response, elicited from 16% of traders. Comparative popularity of different categories of carvings was gauged exclusively from the qualitative responses given.

Category	Frequency
Animals	5
Maasai	9
Functional	4
Ujamaa	2

Trends in Price Movements

50% of respondents said that final prices (as charged to the consumer) had undergone a secular decrease over the past five years and 50% said they had remained constant. Nobody said they had increased.

It is not immediately clear whether prices of carvings as charged by carvers to traders have risen. 28% of traders concurred, but 35% said they have fallen. It may be that carvers who sell on to traders have managed to increase prices eating into traders' margins, whilst those who sell direct have suffered from sagging demand.

Other Final Price Determinants

76% of those interviewed identified June-August as peak sales period. The season picks up in April and ends in December, shadowing the "dry season". Although sales wind down from September, three stall owners and two carvers mentioned a mini-peak in December. Carvers take a share of seasonal excess profits, as 57% of them mentioned demand as a cause of price increases. However, the percentage variation is small; indeed, carver 37 said that there is "no seasonal variation".

63% of traders placed orders from time to time; in such instances, they would approach a specific carver with their requirements. These tend to be more expensive, though the time scale imposed on the carver and the artistic quality required would also influence the price.

Analysis: Data Patterns

Quality Variation

Prices of the candlestick holders varied least between stores, as a superficial observation of comparative quality would have given one to expect. Given the vastly different degrees of finish exhibited by Ujamaa carvings, we expected these to be the most variable, and we found that the most variably priced piece was the medium sized Ujamaa.

Ujamaa pieces are relatively time intensive. *Ceteris paribus*, the carvers should be paid according to the time a piece takes.

In general, larger pieces are less detailed and therefore quicker to make per unit wood used. In other words a carver specialising in large pieces will go through more wood than one who concentrates on miniatures.

Prices and Mark-Ups

Smaller pieces had a much higher worth per unit volume. This might be explained by the fact that they took longer to carve per unit volume, so reflects carver costs.

Maasai carvings stand out as rendering markedly less value to market players. Given that Maasai pieces are not labour intensive, it seems that they are marked-up less.

In the event of supply restrictions goods of higher worth are likely to be sold more.

Spatial Variation

To simplify the analysis we looked at the affect of proximity to the road only, by comparing prices of representative pieces. Small and medium candlestick holders were chosen as their prices varied least between stores.

Av. Modal Price (kTSh)	Near road	Away from road
Small carvings	2.5	2.3
Medium-sized carvings	4.4	3.6

It appears that there is a significant spatial variation.

Recommendations: Pressing Needs

Improving Marketing

Mwenge is the largest mpingo outlet in East Africa, and as such has considerable potential as a tourist attraction and revenue earner. Improved promotion could form part of the government's strategy to increase tourism outside of the Northern reserves.

The publicity of the market in the Dar area could easily be improved: most tourists have not heard of it. Possibilities include advertising in lodgings, employing touts to guide tourists to market, or handing out fliers to new arrivals at the airport. Adverts could be placed in the international woodcarving magazines, and could even attract more tourists to Tanzania. Cultural tours of the market should be available on request.

Attracting tourists is ultimately the remit of the Mwenge Association rather than government, and it must be stressed that this policy must be supplemented if over-exploitation is not to be encouraged.

Ensuring Sustainability

Demand Side Measures

Sales tax should be made to vary inversely by time taken carving, to shift demand towards labour-intensive carvings. For example, Ujamaa and abstracts should be taken less than animals and Maasai.

Educate consumers. Government could put posters up at the market indicating which purchases are wood-intensive, or, alternatively, specify that any fliers must contain this information.

Supply Side Measures

The oft-used alternatives are abundant and unthreatened. Supply shifting can be encouraged by increasing the harvesting tax on mpingo, and by raising awareness of mpingo amongst carvers and consumers. A re-planting programme could also be considered, although the long rotation time would negate any immediate benefits.

The Team

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