



MEDIA RELEASE – Embargoed until 30 April 2009

First FSC certified community-managed natural forests in Africa

New FSC certificate for African Blackwood heralds a brighter future for rural Tanzanians and ethical woodwind instruments

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 woodlands – 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 US \$19 (£13) per log compared to 8 cents (5 pence) 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 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



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 partners & other organisations involved

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

Environment Africa Trust

Environment Africa Trust (EAT) supports organisations working in Sub-Saharan Africa that encourage sound environmental management and biodiversity conservation through a strong community economic development focus to achieve sustainable livelihoods. EAT is a UK Registered Charity (no. 1025443) aiming to support appropriate projects operated by self-sustaining organisations in sub-Saharan Africa. It emphasises African partners taking the lead to define their needs and aspirations and the ways in which EAT can provide assistance. EAT recognises the growing interrelationship and interdependence between the environment and development fields, and aims to support African projects which share this recognition and work to bring about a productive and sustainable combination of both to the benefit of communities. www.environmentafricatrust.org.uk

Fauna & Flora International

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide – mainly in the developing world – FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity. Since the early 1990s, FFI's SoundWood programme has been promoting the use of responsibly sourced timbers in musical instruments as part of the Global Trees Campaign – see www.globaltrees.org for more detail. www.fauna-flora.org

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

Funders

MCP, EAT and FFI would like to take this opportunity to thank their 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.



Further Information

For more information on blackwood and its exploitation please see www.soundandfair.org.

Additional pictures, interviews and audio available on request from:

UK: Neil Bridgland – press@environmentafricatrust.org.uk / +44 (0) 7910 902 189

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

Interesting facts about African Blackwood – a remarkable timber and an important resource

- Blackwood is used for instruments such as clarinets, oboes, flutes, recorders, penny-whistles and bagpipes. Between 7,500 and 20,000 trees are felled for musical instruments each year.
- African Blackwood is in the same genus of trees as the rosewoods (*Dalbergia* species), many of which, such as Brazilian rosewood, Indian rosewood, Honduras rosewood and cocobolo, have been highly prized in musical instrument making.
- Like many rosewoods, it has a high oil content, which protects woodwind instruments from the degrading effects of spit and moisture carried in the breath of the player.
- Its fine timber is used for traditional carvings such as those made by the Makonde tribe in Southern Tanzania and Mozambique.
- One of the most expensive timbers in the world, sawn billets exported for the musical instrument trade are worth around \$16,000 per cubic metre.
- It is illegal to export unsawn blackwood logs from Tanzania. Instead it is exported in billet form: squared off pieces of exactly the right size for an instrument, otherwise known as instrument blanks, which can be put straight on to a lathe.
- Global trade in blackwood is estimated at 150-200 cubic metres per year, mostly from the only two nations with significant stocks – Tanzania and Mozambique.
- Approximately 10% of world consumption is in the UK and Eire, by far the greatest proportion of this is used for highland bagpipes in Scotland.
- More timber goes into the construction of a set of highland bagpipes than any other blackwood instrument. Four times more than is required for a clarinet, and over five times more than that required for an oboe.
- A large volume of blackwood harvested is wasted at the saw mill when it is made into billets for export to make musical instruments. The amount of wood that is wasted varies between 80 and 95%.
- Woodwind instruments are hollow tubes and as such around 60% of the timber ends up as dust and chippings on the floor. One company in Europe makes use of this waste, ground up and bound into a resin to make other instruments.
- The best estimates are that it takes 70-100 years to produce a tree of the ideal size for sawmills – around 35cm in diameter.
- Hardwoods such as African Blackwood are extremely dense and they will sink in water
- African Blackwood is one of the strongest woods available; of 87 timbers assessed in UK instrument making, it holds the top rank for bending strength.
- Blackwood is also known under these trade names: East African Ebony (also ebene de Mocambique, ebenier du Senegal) ebbhout, grenadilla, zebrawood, African ironwood.
- Although the word ebony is thought to have originally referred to blackwood – the Ancient Egyptians probably obtained it from Ethiopia – today true ebonies trees are in the unrelated genus *Diospyros*.
- African Blackwood also grows in parts of India, it is assumed it was introduced there following historic trade routes between the subcontinent and Eastern Africa.
- Local people say the sap burns like petrol. Many do not use blackwood for fires as, being full of oils, it burns so hot that it damages pots and pans.

- Parts of the tree are used in traditional medicine, where “*there is no replacement for blackwood for medicinal purposes*”. It has the following uses:
 - **In childbirth:** during labour blackwood leaves are pounded and used as an antiseptic on the hands of the midwife. Traditionally newborn babies are washed in an infusion or immersed in the smoke of its leaves. For seven days after the birth the baby must also be given one teaspoon of pounded blackwood leaves mixed with cold water to drink. This medicine makes the baby strong, and is believed to prevent any deformities and stop future stomach problems.
 - **Relief of menstrual cramps:** pounded blackwood leaves are mixed with cold water and taken a few days prior to the start of a period.
 - **Relief of tooth ache:** locals chew the bark.
 - **Reducing swelling:** leaves are boiled and placed on the affected area.
 - **Treating cuts and wounds:** the leaves and wood are used to do this.
 - **Stomach ache:** roots and leaves are used to alleviate stomach pains.



Frequently Asked Questions about African Blackwood

Blackwood: Facts and Uses

What is blackwood?

East African Blackwood is a small tree; its scientific name is *Dalbergia melanoxylon* and it is called *mpingo* in Swahili.

Where is blackwood found?

African Blackwood grows from Senegal to Ethiopia, and down to South Africa, however most commercial harvesting occurs in Tanzania and Mozambique.

Why focus on blackwood?

Blackwood is the national tree of Tanzania and is one of the most valuable timber species in the world. Its export price can be as high as USD \$18,000 per cubic metre. If harvested by communities in a sustainable way, it could provide reliable long-term income to communities, giving them an economic incentive to conserve and protect their forests. It also has the potential to be a flagship species for conservation.

How large does the blackwood tree grow?

Mature trees are typically between 4.5m and 7.5m high, with an average girth of 1.2m.

How long does it take to grow?

Blackwood does not reach a harvestable size until an estimated 70 to 100 years (typically when the tree trunk reaches a girth of around 1m).

What instruments are made from blackwood?

Blackwood is the wood of choice for high quality clarinets, oboes, wooden flutes and bagpipes. Musical instrument manufacturers often know blackwood as 'grenadilla'.

Are there any other uses of blackwood?

Blackwood has several other uses, it is traditionally used for carving by several tribes in East Africa, in particular the Makonde, whose tribal lands straddle the Tanzania-Mozambique border, are renowned for their blackwood carving. Today blackwood is used for carvings sold to the tourist trade. Local people also use blackwood to make pestles, knife handles and supports for buildings and in house construction. The tree also has some uses in traditional medicine.

What is the yield from sawn blackwood?

Blackwood is a smaller tree than most timber species. Trees rarely grow straight and fault free; bends, lateral twists and deep fluting are all common, as is heartrot which disproportionately affects larger trees. The smallest fault can cause wood to split when it is put on a lathe to make an instrument, hence wastage rates when sawing billets for export is very high. Yield rates at the best sawmills are generally less than 20%, and in the less efficient ones yields can be under 5%. Confusion over forest regulations also means that large branches are often left in the bush. Carvers do not suffer the same problems as sawmills, as skilled carvers are able to follow the grain and incorporate the twists and turns of the wood into their work.

What volumes of blackwood are traded?

It is estimated that the annual global demand for blackwood to make musical instruments is in the range 150-200m³. Due to the small size of the tree, its twisted growth patterns and high levels of wastage this equates to at least 20,000 trees felled each year to meet the demands of the musical instrument trade. Estimating the consumption of wood to supply the carving industry is harder, but is thought to be equivalent to that for musical instruments. The demand for musical instruments is fairly static, whereas that for carvings grows proportionately to the tourist industry.

Blackwood: the Problem and the Solution

What are the main threats to blackwood?

The main threats to blackwood are uncontrolled logging and deforestation. It is estimated that in 2004-05, 96% of timber logged in south-eastern Tanzania was illegally felled. Since then the Tanzanian government has taken various steps to improve the situation, and some loggers have been arrested, although the impact of this is on rates of illegal logging is not yet clear. Yields tend to be lower in sawmills using illegal wood as the raw resource is less valuable to them. Although blackwood is still common in south-eastern Tanzania, if harvesting continues at its present rate it could soon become commercially extinct, as has already happened in Kenya.

How much do local people benefit?

In Tanzania, communities have historically received negligible benefit from timber growing on their land. When logging companies arrive, they will typically pay local youths TZS 2,000/- (less than \$2) per log. By comparison with agriculture this is relatively good money (most people in the area subsist on less than \$1 per day), and so the loggers tend to be welcomed enthusiastically. An even smaller fee of 100/- per log is paid to the village council. This is tiny compared to the licence fee of around 25,000/- (\$19) per log which the logging company is meant to pay the government, though evasion is common. Under a new government policy communities are able to take control of their forest resources through a process called Participatory Forest Management, which entitles them to keep the 25,000/-, two hundred and fifty times more what they have received in the past. The Mpingo Conservation Project is assisting communities to take advantage of this, but it is a difficult process that can take considerable time to complete.

What proportion of the final sale price of an instrument goes directly to the rural community where the tree is grown?

To ask what proportion of the final sale price of an instrument goes direct to a rural community in Tanzania is somewhat misleading because it ignores the tremendous amount of value-added along the way (instrument makers are highly skilled people) and the large amount of waste incurred at the sawmill. A manufacturer in the UK will pay in the region of £25 for a set of billets to produce a clarinet, which is likely eventually to retail for at least £500 but often £2,000 or more. If the price of the wood was doubled, this would only make a small difference to the final sale price of an instrument, but when passed back to rural communities in Africa, would allow them to charge £30 or more per log of blackwood, a further substantial increase which would make a very big difference to them.

So are musicians to blame for the problem?

No. No musician should feel guilty about the origins of their instrument unless they knew they were buying an unethical product at the time of purchase. However there can be no doubt that musicians have unwittingly been part of an unsustainable and sometimes unethical trade network which has negligible benefits for African communities at the other end.

So are carvers to blame for the problem?

The production and trade in carvings contributes to the problem, however the trade in carvings is much more complex and diverse than the musical instrument trade, with many more stakeholders. This is why the Mpingo Conservation Project is focusing its initial efforts on developing a sustainable supply for musical instruments before tackling the carvings industry.

How does this relate to the larger picture of deforestation?

Selective logging of valuable timber species is the start of a long process which can lead to deforestation. By the time larger trees have been felled, communities may have become dependent on the income from illegal logging, despite this being a small sum in relation to the commercial value of the timber.

As their timber resource diminishes due to unsustainable harvesting, communities may go on to fell smaller trees and less valuable species, thus eliminating the potential for further income from timber, and making the forest close to worthless for several generations to come. In addition, if the area is close to an urban centre the remaining trees may be clear felled to make charcoal, effectively deforesting the area.

Tropical deforestation is a major contributor to climate change, so illegal and unsustainable logging is indirectly contributing to one of the greatest challenges of our time.

Should I buy an instrument made from blackwood?

If you need a new instrument, then you should. Instruments that are officially certified as having been made from sustainably managed blackwood from community lands will not be available for a few years, however until then we suggest that you:

1. Ask your retailer if they know where the wood used to make your instrument comes from.
2. Urge him or her to pass your concerns back to the manufacturer and to ask them what strategies they have in place to ensure future instruments are not made at the expense of poor African communities and the global environment.
3. Finally, point them in the direction of our project and website for further information on the issues.

Should I buy blackwood carvings?

Traditional wood carving in East Africa is a wonderful art form, and worthy of your support. As with musical instruments, though, that does not mean you cannot inquire of the origin of the wood used to make the carving. Like any industry, carvers will respond to the demands of customers and you can help make a difference each time you put such questions to a carvings retailer.

About the Mpingo Conservation Project

What is the Mpingo Conservation Project?

The Mpingo Conservation Project is a charitable non-governmental organisation set up in 2004 and based in Tanzania. It promotes the sustainable use of East African Blackwood and forest conservation. This is an innovative approach that aims to promote habitat conservation and local development, for the long term benefit of local communities and their environment.

Where do we work?

The Mpingo Conservation Project works in Kilwa District, in south-eastern Tanzania.

What are our goals?

Our aim is to use blackwood as an economic tool to advance the conservation of its natural habitat: miombo woodland. This will be achieved by ensuring that local people living in blackwood harvesting areas receive a fair share of the worth of blackwood, thus providing them an incentive to manage the forest habitat in an environmentally friendly manner.

What does the Mpingo Conservation Project do?

The Project works in practical conservation, community development, research and raises awareness about blackwood conservation in Tanzania and the UK.

What is Participatory Forest Management (PFM)?

PFM is a strategy to achieve sustainable forest management by encouraging the management or co-management of forest and woodland resources by the communities living closest to the resources. It is characterized by forest-adjacent communities acquiring power rather than just benefits, and assuming owner/user rights and management of the resources.

What is Forest Certification?

Forest Certification is a system to ensure that forest management complies with international standards and best practices of sustainable management and fair treatment of local people. All such systems involve regular inspections and audits by accredited bodies to ensure the rules are properly adhered to.

Products made from timber originating from certified forests can be labelled as such in order that consumers can make an informed choice to purchase products that have been ethically sourced. Certified timber can both command a price premium and have access to markets closed to non-certified products.

What is the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)?

The FSC is the best known and most rigorous certifying body. Governments, NGOs and timber companies are all represented on its board. Its principles incorporate environmental, ecological, social and economic elements. The FSC's tree tick mark label can be seen on much garden furniture sold in Europe and the US.

Who are our partners?

The Mpingo Conservation Project works with Fauna & Flora International, and the Environment Africa Trust in the UK, and with WWF, the Forestry & Beekeeping Division and Kilwa District Council in Tanzania.