



MEDIA RELEASE – Embargoed until 19 January 2010

The world's first sustainably harvested African blackwood generates new income for Tanzanian forest communities.

Some of the world's poorest people have opened up a new source of revenue by selling the world's first sustainably harvested African blackwood from their forests.

The timber harvest was carried out under the strict criteria of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and is destined for woodwind instrument manufacturers in the UK. The harvest is the first step in a new campaign called *Sound and Fair* which aims to realise a sustainable trade in African blackwood through a fully-certified chain of custody linking village communities in Tanzania to woodwind instrument musicians in the UK.

The timber was felled in late 2009 in a Village Land Forest Reserve managed by Kikole village, in Kilwa District, south-eastern Tanzania. Kikole received a payment of around £1,200 in return for 15m³ of African Blackwood. Previously the community would only have received around five pence per log. In all Kikole were able to realise an income nearly 400 times more than they would have received previously on the 63 logs which were sold. Kikole intend to spend the money they have raised on improving the road to the village, improving market access for impoverished farmers and providing local employment.

Mr Mwinyimkuu Awadhi, Chairman of Kikole village, comments: *"In 2009 the communities of Kikole Village we have realized for the first time the benefits from selling our own timber. All the money was paid to the villages unlike in the past where by this money would have gone to the government. We the villagers now have full control of our forest resources and we will benefit even more when we do more harvesting in the near future."*

Local resident, Mwanaisha Likoko adds: *"Changes have come to our village through the forest we own and manage under our control, the money we have received will be used within our village to improve our social services."*

Kikole's forest reserve was established in 2006 after the District Council approved a management plan which the community had prepared setting out how they intended to manage the forest sustainably. In 2009, Kikole became the FSC certified, community-managed forest in Africa, via an FSC-group certificate managed by the Mpingo Conservation Project, the Sound and Fair campaign's Tanzanian partner.

Neil Bridgland, Sound and Fair Campaign Manager says: *"This harvest represents a sea change for forest communities in Southern Tanzania. For the first time, they have security over their natural resources and can reap the benefits from them. The challenge now is to persuade UK classical music instrument manufacturers and users to accept FSC certified timber as standard so creating the necessary demand for African blackwood that will enable the roll-out of Kikole's success across Southern Tanzania."*

Jasper Makala, National Coordinator of MCP in Tanzania says: *"Community forestry is not just about giving local people a stake in how the forests are managed, but ensuring they can reap the benefits. This is both social justice and effective conservation."*

From Kikole village, the wood will soon be taken to an FSC certified sawmill, where it will be sawn into billets for export to the UK. Dr Azim Fazal, Director of the sawmill, Sandali Wood Industries, says: *"This is a proud moment for us. Now we hope that Western buyers will embrace FSC certification and start discouraging enterprises who harvest and process irresponsibly."* On arrival the wood must then be properly seasoned (dried out), a process which takes at least one year. It is expected that the first FSC-certified blackwood instruments will be available in the UK from summer 2011.

Ends



Notes to Editors

1. The harvest took place in line with the provisions of the Forest Act 2002 which exempts forest-adjacent communities from government royalty fees for logging. This enables communities to charge logging companies what they would previously have paid to the government. The Village Land Forest Reserves (VLFRs) which are required to do this are set up as part of a process called Participatory Forest Management (PFM). There are currently 550 registered VLFRs across Tanzania. Kikole were the first village to take that important next step of selling their timber.

3. African Blackwood (also known as mpingo)² is a slow growing tree which is highly prized for making clarinets, oboes and bagpipes. It 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.

4. 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.

5. The Forest Stewardship Council's is an international, not-for-profit, membership-based organisation that brings people together to find solutions which promote stewardship of the world's forests. FSC'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. MCP has been awarded certificate no. SA-FM/COC-002151 by FSC; it covers 2,420ha of forest at this initial stage.

Background on the Sound and Fair Campaign

The Sound & Fair campaign aims to realise a sustainable trade in African blackwood through a fully-certified chain of custody linking village communities in Tanzania to woodwind instrument musicians in the UK. By safeguarding a hugely valuable natural resource, Sound and Fair will help lift some of the world's poorest people out of poverty.

The Sound and Fair campaign is funded by the Environment Africa Trust via a grant from Comic Relief.

Mpingo Conservation Project (MCP) is the Tanzanian partner responsible for managing village FSC-certification. Fauna & Flora International, the environmental organisation, is a UK partner.

Further Information

For more information on the Sound & Fair campaign see www.soundandfair.org

Images and further and interviews available on request from:

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For technical information on blackwood and its exploitation please see www.mpingoconservation.org.

High resolution images can be downloaded directly from <http://www.mpingoconservation.org/hi-res-img/index.html> (click on right hand image to get highest resolution version)