

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

**Enhancing the conservation of biodiversity in Mbololo forest in the Taita hills
through Participatory Forest Management.**

By

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Introduction

Mbololo forest is one of the major forest patches that make up the Taita hills forests that belong to the eastern arc forests globally recognised for their biodiversity richness. In spite of its small size (about 220 ha) it is home to quite a number of endemic species (14 plants including *Saintpaulia teitensis* and 9 animal endemics) in the Taita hills forest, some found only in it.

The overall aim of the project is to enhance the conservation of biodiversity in Mbololo forest. This is to be achieved by improving its management through the introduction of Participatory Forest Management (PFM).

The following were the major activities planned for;

- I. Establishment of a Forest Management Association (FMA).
 - o Meetings with the Mbololo Community Environment Committee and the Mwambirwa Community Environment Committee to discuss the process of conversion to a Forest Management Association.
 - o Drafting of Articles of Association for the FMA.
 - o Election of interim officials of FMA.
 - o Application for registration with the Registrar of Societies in Nairobi.

- II. Capacity building of the FMA
 - o Creation of a secretariat (offices & staff)
 - o Creation of various management committees
 - o Training of board and management committee members of management of an association.
 - o Training of board and management committee members and secretariat on forest and biodiversity management practices.

- III. Operationalising PFM
 - o Developing/formulating operational plans for the themes or proposed activities.
 - o Implementing the operational plans.

Implementation of Activities

1. Establishment of FMA
 - Three meetings were held with the Mbololo Community Environment Committee and the Mwambirwa Community Environment Committee. The first meeting was to bring the committees together to discuss the merge of the committees into one Forest Association. The members of the two committees agreed to form one body which they called MWAMBO Forest Association. The name was derived from MWA – Mwambirwa and

MBO – Mbololo. In addition, they decided that MWAMBO FA should have two branches – Mbololo branch and Mwambirwa branch, with each having a management committee and an overall committee whose membership is composed of representatives from the two.

- The second meeting involved the drafting of the articles of association. This process was facilitated by the District Forest Officer (DFO), the assistant DFO and myself. The process took three days to accomplish.
- The third meeting involved the election of interim officials of the overall management committee of MWAMBO FA. This was very important because the application for registration cannot be made without a list of interim officials and their signatures.
- The application for registration was lodged with the Registrar of Societies in the Attorney Generals chambers through the District Forestry Officer.

2. Capacity building of MWAMBO FA.

- A secretariat was established and an office for the FMA put in place. This has helped in the coordination of several activities that have given rise to new project activities being funded. With the assistance of the secretariat and EAWLS, a user group of MWAMBO FA managed to get funding for the rehabilitation of a section of Mwambirwa forest which had been burnt. In addition, a livelihood generation project was initiated which included bee-keeping, butterfly farming and silkworm farming.
- There are management sub-committees for each of the livelihood projects working in tandem with the overall management committee. In addition, MWAMBO FA is a member of the Taita Taveta Wildlife Forum (TTWF) which is a local institution bringing all natural resource managers and users together. Its main aim is to promote environmental conservation through sustainable utilisation. Through TTWF, MWAMBO FA is seeking assistance to establish an eco-tourism enterprise within the area. A proposal has been submitted to the Tourism Trust Fund which is supported by the European Union. A management sub-committee for this enterprise is in the process of being established.
- A training seminar was held for the overall management committee on the management of an association. This was a two day event.
- A workshop was also held for the overall management committee on forest and biodiversity management. This also included topics on the new Forest Act 2006 and the provisions made for community participation in managing their resources. Also the Environmental Management and Coordination Act 1999 was covered.

3. Operationalising PFM.

- The formulation of operational plans was carried out. The plans have given rise to the projects mentioned above – the rehabilitation being carried out by a member group of MWAMBA Forest Association. The member group has raised 92 000 indigenous seedlings which are being planted in a section of Mwambirwa forest. Currently, over 20 000 tree seedlings have been planted and the balance will be done in the short-rains period expected from mid-October to December. This is a result of the “Habitat restoration/utilisation” theme’s operational plan. The livelihood generation projects are a result of the operational plans for the following thematic

areas – catchment management, forest conservation and protection, and biodiversity conservation. The proposal sent to Tourism Trust Fund is a result of the operational plan on the eco-tourism thematic area. If funded, this will go along-way in improving income generation and poverty alleviation while enhancing forest/biodiversity conservation of the people living around Mbololo and Mwambirwa forests. The benefit to the people will be through direct earnings for the eco-home owners, the tour guides and the market created for farm produce, cultural artefacts and for other services such as transport among others.

Conclusion

The grant from Ruffords' Foundation and the Swedish African Violet Society have served as a catalyst for several other funding to the area in support for conservation. The conservation of Mwambirwa and Mbololo forests and their associated biodiversity has been greatly enhanced due to the capacity built of the community in managing their resources and in seeking support from other donor institutions. The preparation of the proposal for the rehabilitation of Mwambirwa forest was made possible by this grant. The user group (Sigha Sigha Support Group) received USD 19 409 towards its activities. The same applies to the other activities being carried out.

Finally, I would like to thank the Rufford's Foundation for the assistance provided that made it possible to assist the community in realising some of their conservation and poverty alleviation goals through the utilisation of the available natural resources in a sustainable way.