African Blackwood Conservation Project—2015

In last year’s newsletter we reported on the unexpected and untimely passing of Sebastian Chuwa, who inspired the formation of the African Blackwood Conservation Project because of his avid interest in the conservation of the embattled African blackwood tree. Through his public educational outreach and numerous tree planting initiatives he influenced many of his fellow countrymen to assist in efforts to insure the future viability of the species as an ecological and economic resource for both Tanzania and the international community. During the past year the work of the ABCP has been continued through the efforts of its new directors, Elizabeth Chuwa (Sebastian’s wife), their four children—Margaret, Michael, Flora and Cyril—and Elizabeth’’s brother, Dismas Macha.

In addition to mpingo conservation Sebastian and Elizabeth organized grassroots initiatives directed towards protection and conservation of the Mt. Kilimanjaro watershed, which is of vital importance to the ecology of much of northern Tanzania. Decades of excessive tree cutting and decreasing rainfall accumulation from water runoff are affecting agricultural and household needs on the mountain, as well as those of the widespread population in the surrounding lowlands.

To remedy the situation they influenced local groups to start nurseries for reforestation on the mountain. They held training sessions to introduce conservation education into the local school curriculum and started student nurseries in schools of the area. A healthy ecosystem on Kilimanjaro assures that activities related to water needs, timber, livestock, agriculture and electricity will be met in communities over a wide area.

Renovation at the Moshi Mpingo Plot

An initial project of the ABCP was construction of its original nursery shelter at the Moshi Mpingo Plot at Mijongweni, built in 1997 with private contributions. It was doubled in size in 2002 with funding from Sebastian’s Associate Laureate award from the Rolex Awards for Enterprise. In 2006 it was rebuilt, through a grant from the Cottonwood Foundation, with steel posts replacing its former wooden supports. This year, workmen were hired for another renovation, replacing any remaining wood in the framework with structural steel members (photo on left). In order to insure continuing structural stability, each joint between the horizontal and vertical members was welded and reinforced with a bolted-on plate.

Mijongweni, the village where the nursery is located, is south of Moshi and Mt. Kilimanjaro, on a semi-arid lowland plain. This is the perfect environment for mpingo, but the tree has difficulty in getting established because of its vulnerability to environmental stresses during its seedling stage. Therefore to insure a good survival rate, a nursery shelter that offers protection from the direct sun during the midday heat gives the most optimal growing conditions for mpingo. Similarly, though the adult tree is drought tolerant, at the seedling stage it requires a regular supply of water and it is recommended that seedlings be kept in the nursery for the first eighteen months, after which they are better able to survive on their own.

Sebastian, through experimentation over many years, developed a specific methodology for germination, nurturance and transplanting of mpingo that gave him a high success rate of survival. He taught his methodology to many individuals and community conservation groups, who are also seeing a high success rate. This is countering a long-standing notion of many Tanzanians that the tree will only grow in the wild.

Most of the seedlings grown at the plot are mpingo, but...
the ABCP has always made available a variety of tree species for domestic use. Fast growing fuelwood trees and shade trees for coffee plantations and residential use are two important needs of the people of the area. Following are descriptions of other species distributed from the nursery this year.

*Kigelia Africana* is popularly called the sausage tree because it has a huge pendulous fruit up to 2 feet in length and weighing up to 15 pounds. The fruit can be used as an herbal medicine or for an alcoholic beverage and is consumed by numerous species of animals. When this fruit is in season, care must be taken in parking a car, so a falling 'sausage' does not dent the car or crash through the windshield.

*Adansonia digitata*, the baobab, is one of the most distinguishable and photogenic trees in Africa, because of its massive trunk and uniquely structured wispy crown. Its fruit and leaves are consumed by humans and wildlife. *Polyalthia longifolia* is an evergreen that is used for medicinal, decorative and woodworking purposes. *Acrocarpus fraxinifolius*, or Pink Cedar, is used as a shade tree in coffee plantations and to renew badly degraded soil. Similarly, mpingo, in addition to its fine wood, provides an important ecosystem renewal through its ability to fix nitrogen. As a legume, it acts as a natural fertilizer and, through its roots and leaf litter, enriches the soil wherever it grows.

**Clarinet for Conservation**

Clarinet for Conservation (C4C) is a group of resourceful and dedicated US musicians who travel to Tanzania for two months every summer to teach playing of the clarinet to Tanzanian students. Its members are also dedicated conservationists and as a secondary mission, they arrange educational experiences for their students centered around environmental activism. Since clarinets are made from mpingo, they organize tree planting activities for the species, making students aware of the near-threatened status of the tree and the importance of conserving it in its homeland. Consequently, each year when they depart, they not only leave behind newly trained musicians to entertain and inspire others, but newly planted mpingo to replenish the ecosystem.

C4C was founded by Michelle von Haugg in 2009, when she traveled to Tanzania as a lone teacher with a dozen clarinets. This year, in its sixth season of outreach, she was joined by fourteen other travelers, including teachers for string instruments and even a chemist who taught first aid and nutrition classes. The organization has expanded from its original teaching venue at Korongoni Secondary School, and offers clarinet classes for 25 students at TPC Secondary School, viola, violin and cello classes for 11 students at Korongoni, and basic music and recorder instruction for 21 primary school students. The donation of two trumpets led to the inclusion of a brass ensemble teacher.

To emphasize the importance of conservation, weekly field trips are organized. Because many African children do not have the opportunity to see the places that make their nation one of the world's most-chosen tourist destinations, some of the field trips take them to its places of natural beauty, like the majestic Materuni Falls. One group visited Makao Farm, part of the Kilimanjaro Animal Center for Rescue Education and Wildlife. Another toured Iko Eco, a Moshi-based recycling program, to learn about the importance of recycling. In addition, 16 tree-planting field trips resulted in the planting of over 600 African blackwood trees.

Many mpingo trees planted were from the ABCP nursery in Mijongweni. On a trip to Kiviwama Nursery, operated by Samweli Mochuwa, in the heart of Moshi, students from Korongoni Secondary School helped in transferring several hundred mpingo seedlings from the ABCP mpingo plot to be stored at the nursery for future tree planting events. The tree seedlings were distributed to a variety of locations, primarily around schools, where they can be properly protected and nurtured.

In a collaborative effort, Dismas Macha accompanied the C4C teachers and students on several trips. One such trip was to Oldonyo Sambu Primary School northwest of Arusha. The villagers in this area are primarily Maasai, indigenous people...
who have become known globally because of the beautiful beaded jewelry fashioned by their artists and their unique style of chanting and dancing. Various cultural tourism venues allow visitors access to their villages and homes, or bomas. The students of Oldonyo Sambu are eager to begin a tree planting initiative and to participate in the conservation of mpingo, the national tree of Tanzania. Dismas, a trained botanist, showed the students how best to plant the seedlings and demonstrated follow-up procedures to better insure their survival.

Mimi Stith

Mimi Stith is a PhD student at Boston University who is working towards a doctorate degree in anthropology. As a Fulbright scholar she is currently exploring possibilities for a project centered around grassroots environmentalism in Tanzania. In preliminary investigations she became familiar with the work of Sebastian Chuwa and the ABCP. She has since made several trips to Moshi, holding discussions with Dismas and Elizabeth, visiting the Moshi Mpingo Plot and meeting with other conservationists who are working to improve environmental conditions in Kilimanjaro Region.

Ms. Stith’s early schooling was in the USA and Dar es Salaam. She earned an undergraduate degree in philosophy from Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia and a Master's degree in quantitative methods in the social sciences from Columbia University in New York City. She has worked at the Museum of Natural History in New York, the Kokrobite Institute in Ghana, and was research assistant in a spatial and qualitative analysis of development projects in West Africa.

Her mother, Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, is a medical doctor educated at Harvard Medical School who has pioneered in finding innovative solutions to problems of youth violence, advocating that it be treated as a public health issue rather than a criminal one. Focusing on preventive methods, she has led public education campaigns, published a book and developed a school curriculum addressing the problem that is used throughout the nation.

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Dr. Charles Stith, Mimi’s father, is a professor, author and diplomat. Appointed by President Clinton as US Ambassador to Tanzania from 1998-2000, his able leadership during the time of the 1998 embassy bombing in Dar es Salaam was instrumental to its ongoing operations during the following difficult recovery period.

At Boston University he founded the African Presidential Archives and Research Centre (APARC). Through its African Presidential Roundtable, organizational gatherings of former African heads of state and western diplomats were held, with the objective of promoting political and economic liaison between Africa, the US and the European nations. Ms. Stith played a part in planning and managing press conferences, creating communications strategies and editing communiques. She also assisted in the compilation and editing of the APARC “The State of Africa Report,” a commentary on political leaders and events within Africa.

Roots and Shoots Graduation at Mabilioni

In October Michael and Cyril Chuwa were invited to attend a graduation ceremony for Roots and Shoots members at the Good Shepherd Seminary school in the town of Mabilioni southeast of Moshi. To celebrate the graduation, students planted trees on the school grounds donated from the ABCP nursery that Michael and Cyril had transported to the site.

Several local officials addressed the students about the importance of conservation for the well-being of future generations and Michael gave a talk about the work of the ABCP in its sponsorship of educational and replanting programs for African blackwood.

Roots and Shoots is a youth conservation organization founded by Jane Goodall in 1991, through the inspiration of a group of teenagers who shared with her their deep concern about problems in their local communities. The program that resulted teaches young people the acquisition of long-range vision and problem-solving capabilities in confronting societal and environmental problems. To graduate from the program,
members from a group or school follow a precise methodology involving a 25-week plan of action.

The first requisite is to pinpoint a problem area in their neighborhood or village and devise a plan to address it, typically consulting with local leaders and experts to investigate possible solutions. A following phase, lasting about five months, is the actual campaign, utilizing ideas and methods discussed in confronting the problem itself. Upon completion, results of the project are registered with the international headquarters, finalized by a graduation ceremony and celebration at the end of the campaign. A world-wide database of such projects has been collected and groups can communicate to share experiences and ideas. Students in over 130 countries have learned the art of inventive direct involvement through skills developed in Roots and Shoots.

Students from Good Shepherd and St. Stephens Seminary, and Sanya, Nyerere, Magare, St. Teresa, Mbagao, Vudoi and Moshi Secondary Schools attended the ceremony, received their completion certificates, and participated in the tree planting activities.

### Good Gifts Donations Are Used to Sponsor Outreach to Church and School Groups

The ABCP is careful to choose replanting sites where seedlings stand a good chance of survival. It has developed a wide network of schools and civil and religious institutions on whose grounds the trees can be protected. As a school principal, Elizabeth has connections with school officials throughout all of northern Tanzania. Tree planting initiatives in schools not only plant trees, but serve to instill in children a respect for their surrounding ecosystem and a knowledge base for future conservation oriented activity. Good Gifts funding sponsored outreach to several such institutions this year.

Fr. Prosper Siyayako is a dedicated environmentalist who is instituting educational and direct action conservation projects among the Catholic churches and parishioners of the Kibosho Mission, urging them to plant trees for environmental recovery. Fr. Cherehani, pastor at Don Bosco Seminary in Mwanga, is involving his students in a tree planting effort on the school grounds. Sister Mary, headmistress at St. Teresa of Avila, an all-girl's secondary school in Same, is also including conservation and tree planting as part of her program.

### Good Gifts Catalogue

The Good Gifts Catalogue has been a leader in the area of socially-responsible gift giving. Founded in 2003 and based in Great Britain, its catalogue offers an impressive selection of items that, in some cases, can make the difference between a family having a nourishing meal or no food at all. The Good Gifts Catalogue has been funding the ABCP since 2009, helping it to implement several important tree planting initiatives, and has been responsible for the distribution of tens of thousands of mpingo seedlings.

Consider selections from the Good Gifts Catalogue in your Christmas giving this year. A gift from the catalogue will never be unwanted, unneeded or unused. Good Gifts help bring people out of poverty, educate children and provide infrastructure items that can build careers in marginalized societies. A Good Gift can help clear a mine field, supply a bushel of Rwanda-developed super-growing 'Magic Beans', or protect endangered species and ecosystems, Browsing the site is an educational experience in itself and a study in hope that solutions to our common problems can be found in reaching between borders and mutually sharing the precious and abundant resources of the world in which we live.
For Generations to Come

The spectacles of geography, environmental beauty and wildlife, including the magnificent array of species found only on the Africa mainland, are unrivalled anywhere in the world. Although *Dalbergia melanoxylon* grows in other countries, only the trees found in east Africa are sufficiently abundant and can fulfill the demanding specifications for musical instruments. To our knowledge, the ABCP may be the only organization existing whose primary focus is directed towards replanting projects for mpingo. Since it takes several generations to reach harvestable maturity, there has been much reluctance to address the problem of its near-threatened status.

Nevertheless, many years ago, Sebastian Chuwa decided that he would start just such an effort, and began with sprouting 200 seedlings in his own nursery. In this act of faith he inspired the people of his country and people internationally to join in the effort, knowing that it would have little benefit and little result for themselves, but hopefully would be a gift to their children and their children’s children. We continue his work with the hope of seeing this cherished dream fulfilled.

Fr. Chereheni (left) and Michael with students at Don Bosco Seminary in Mwanga with seedlings for planting on school grounds.

Preserving ecosystems that support wildlife such as this giraffe on the Serengeti Plain is part of the ethic promoted by the ABCP.

Cyril Chuwa presents mpingo seedling to student at St. Teresa Secondary school. Headmistress Mary Semvua is at center front.

**AFRICAN BLACKWOOD CONSERVATION PROJECT**

- Please accept my tax-deductible donation to ABCP in the amount of: $___________

---DONATIONS MAY ALSO BE MADE ONLINE FROM THE PAYPAL LINK ON THE ABCP HOMEPAGE---

- Please print the following information or leave blank to use address label on back ---

**DONATION FORM**

(100% OF FUNDING COLLECTED IS SENT TO SUPPORT THE PROJECT IN AFRICA)

Mail this form and donation to:

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P.O. Box 26
Red Rock, TX 78662 USA

Please make check or money order payable to ABCP.

A version of this newsletter with color photos can be viewed on the ABCP website at www.blackwoodconservation.org.
A Reflection on Tanzania’s Environment, People and the Future

The future of an environmental, economic and cultural resource such as Dalbergia melanoxylon is dependent on diverse factors, many having to do with conditions within its homeland in Africa and others having to do with Tanzania’s ability to deal effectively with pressure from other countries interested in utilizing its natural resources. On the positive side is the fact that the country itself has a post-colonial history of peace. Its population is tolerant of differing ideas, religions and opinions and has remained relatively untouched by the conflicts seen in other African countries. Since independence the country has established a legal and social framework supporting community-based forest management, devolving authority over its natural resources from the central government to the village level. Local communities are therefore directly involved in protecting the resources that are necessary for their well-being.

On the down side, perhaps the greatest problem regarding conservation issues in Tanzania is its widespread poverty, a condition that can produce a multitude of social ills. Illegal tree harvesting, poaching and corruption exist in many countries, but the likelihood is certainly greater in one with the low living wage and gross domestic product of Tanzania. It is to their credit that its people are nevertheless concerned about their natural resources and eager to protect them. Both local NGOs and international groups find a receptive population, willing to assist in establishing programs to save its vital resources. The past 20 years have seen a burgeoning of conservation-oriented groups. In 1998 the government launched a campaign to plant 100 million trees before 2000 and surpassed the target. International conservation groups such as the World Wildlife Fund and the African Rainforest Conservancy have established an ongoing presence within the country. Tanzania was one of the earliest countries to be selected as a participant in REDD, the UN sponsored program to reduce global carbon emissions.

Despite the difficulties inherent in confronting global deforestation and overuse of natural resources, there is also a growing awareness among people everywhere that our human-caused problems can be confronted with human implemented solutions. Every year, in working with our colleagues in Africa, we are reminded again of their common goal to protect their precious resources through direct action and educational means. The people of Tanzania are justly proud of the magnificent country they are part of and eager to preserve it, not only for their own people, but for those of the whole world.

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