

Annual Report 2023–2024

Better Environment Today
Chilengedwe Chabwino Lero



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Carl Bruessow

This past year has seen MMCT engage in a process of profound change to become an organisation fit for a new purpose.

The MMCT grand objective is to develop its skills and upgrade its capacity to manage the Mulanje Mountain Forest Reserve and facilitate natural resource based sustainable development within the Mount Mulanje Global Biosphere Reserve.

MMCT has changed its name, its governance, its planning and operational systems and is now starting to upgrade its technical staffing. The assistance of the **African Parks Network (APN)** in coaching the MMCT change process, through its incubation programme is well acknowledged and sincerely appreciated.

The catalyst of this MMCT change process was the government sector's development of the **Mount Mulanje World Biosphere Reserve – Integrated Management Plan (2019 – 2030)** that was coordinated by the Department of Forestry and launched by the Minister of Forestry & Natural Resources in 2020. This comprehensive multiple resource management plan can realise a diversity of sustainable commercial, community and conservation outcomes for the future benefit of Mount Mulanje. This coordination of a substantive range of activities at Mount Mulanje calls for an independent organisation that can develop the capacity to carry out such an innovative role. MMCT has been called to serve this purpose by many of its partners and collaborative local stakeholders.

Of increasing concern at Mount Mulanje are the mining actions of Akatswiri Mineral Resources which is apparently seeking to exploit rare earth minerals within the Chambe Basin and bauxite on the Lichenya Plateau. These initiatives have not followed the prescribed legislative environmental processes and will prejudice existing and planned developments in the water, tourism and energy sectors with their sustainable benefits for community development and improved conservation activities. The local communities and stakeholders have been sidelined, and local dissatisfaction is increasing, with potential for the situation to become a severe conflict.

The beginning of 2024 saw MMCT come together with other key government and academic partners to finalise Malawi's submission to UNESCO for the nomination of Mount Mulanje as a **World Heritage Site**. This nomination seeks this highest global status to recognise Mount Mulanje for its intangible cultural heritage and in so doing, seeks to confirm and reinforce the heritage pride of the Mountain within the traditional cultures of our local communities. The submission process was kindly and gratefully supported by the African World Heritage Fund. The submission was communicated and was positively received by UNESCO with no further additions or amendments requested. UNESCO and ICOMOS have expressed their concern that the

Akatswiri mining actions could jeopardise this World Heritage listing, unless the Malawi Government clearly declares its intent to protect the Mountain's ecological integrity.

The initiative to develop the **Blantyre-Mulanje Water Fund** is steadily progressing with the completion of a pre-feasibility study showing positive indications. A start is now being made to a full feasibility study. This work is supported by the Nature for Water Programme of the US-based Nature Conservancy and is facilitated by Pegasys Consulting and Water for People in Malawi. The Likhubula Valley is the project's principal pilot watershed catchment area, from where both Blantyre and Southern Region Water Boards draw water for distribution. This Water Fund initiative has a broad range of stakeholder involvement and will seek to establish a Payment for Ecosystem Services scheme - to improve mountain conservation work. The existing water supply systems, as well as this payment scheme could also be negatively impacted by Akatswiri mining activities.

Mt Mulanje has gained a centrepiece position in the new and recently described global ecoregion, entitled the South-East African Montane Archipelago (SEAMA). This ecological determination was published in the journal *NATURE*, March-April publication and consolidates a range of similar mountain habitats in southeast Malawi and northern Mozambique. The eco-region, though already classified as endangered, will form a substantive basis for an initiative to have the area given trans-boundary status, probably best achieved as a UNESCO Trans-boundary Biosphere Reserve. A recent increase in trans-boundary collaboration in both countries, between MMCT and Mozambican organisations, bodes well to develop this future relationship. A Mt Mabu international research expedition documentary by BBC-TV's Jonah Fisher, highlighted the collaborative effort.

Continued climate shocks experienced at Mount Mulanje through two years of cyclones and this year's el nino drought are causing severe negative impacts to the Mountain's ecology. Limited relief support, increasing food insecurity and no reconstruction to repair the piped water and smallholder irrigation schemes are now forcing more locals to harvest the Mountain's resources as a principal coping mechanism.

This year, MMCT is seeking significant growth for its social enterprise, **MEGA Magetsi**, so that it can provide a more substantial service to Mulanje village communities. MEGA has been promised to be prioritised to receive a Power/Purchase Agreement from ESCOM to underwrite the long-intended Anzana (formerly Virunga) major investment, in both electrical generation and distribution capacity. The proposed investment exceeds US\$20 million and will principally develop an additional 6MW of hydro-electric power on the Lichenya River. This project could be jeopardised if the Malawi Government grants a license to mine bauxite on the Lichenya Plateau.

The support of the **RedLAC-CAFÉ-BRIDGE** Project is much appreciated, to initiate the start-up of another MMCT social enterprise. **Inde-Mulanje** will provide benefits to many thousands of smallholders, by providing a market for their new high-value crops and natural product harvests. The project is receiving great interest from a number of other partners who wish to support specific operations of the processing facility.

Ecological research work at Mount Mulanje is steadily increasing with the cooperation of other partner organisations. Recent funding approval by the BGCI Conifer Initiative will enable the continued partnership of the Chicago Botanic Gardens and Morton Arboretum to investigate the use of living-green firebreaks, as a replacement for existing annually cleared firebreaks. This work will possibly be extended by successful applications to new funders. A new partnership with the African Natural History Research Trust has enabled a three-year project to carry out an extensive entomological survey to determine the presence and establish a taxonomic description of many possible endemic insects. The new SEAMA ecology platform will probably also catalyse further research interest here. The research facility on the Lichenya Plateau is to be constructed this year, with agreed financing from the African Mountain Research Foundation.

MMCT is also facilitating the construction of an environmental education hostel on Lichenya Plateau (alongside the research facility) that will host youth group visits to the Mountain. This signature project aims to be completed by next dry season and is being financed by a wide variety of donor organisations.

Programme Officer

Raheela Ahmed



BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION, RESEARCH AND MONITORING

1 Introduction

It has been a busy year for The Biodiversity Conservation, Research and Monitoring (BCRM) programme that involved collaborating with diverse partners to conduct innovative biodiversity research projects on Mount Mulanje. Study topics ranged from examining factors that affect Cedar seedling survival, utilising drone technology for ecological monitoring, ethnobotany, developing a proposal to assess insect populations, and exploring a living-green firebreak concept. We also continued to work closely with local communities across the Mountain to carry out various activities under the Darwin Initiative's "Improving Community, Sustainable Natural Resource Management of Mount Mulanje" project.

MMCT continued to support fire management and law enforcement activities across the mountain, working closely with the Department of Forestry and committed local community groups. The key areas of focus during this reporting period are discussed below.

2 Enrichment of Vulnerable Habitats – A Progress Summary

2.1.1 Mulanje Cedar Seed Collection

In June 2023, MMCT supported the Forestry Research Institute of Malawi (FRIM) to collect Mulanje Cedar seed from mature, coning specimens from the Chikangawa Plantation, established in the 1980's. The team consisted of nine seed collectors, five lab technicians, and two seed processors. Seed (2.7kg) was successfully harvested, then pre-processed and tested for viability and subsequently stored at the FRIM laboratory. The amount of seed collected has the potential to produce 180,000 seedlings.

2.1.2 Mulanje Cedar Restoration – 2023–2024 Season

During the 2023–2024 annual Save Our Cedar Campaign, 36,140 trees (30,031 Mulanje Cedar and 6,109 indigenous tree species) were planted, across six locations, covering 27 hectares on the Mountain. This generated employment for 480 casual labourers throughout the campaign. MMCT successfully raised US\$13,000 from corporate and individual donors, with 91.9% of funds directed towards procuring seedlings from eight local community tree nurseries, as well as paying for

	Restoration Zone	Land area (hectares)	Cedar	Other Indigenous Species	Total Seedlings Planted
1	Lichenya	7.5	6,000	3,851	9,851
2	Chambe	5.7	5,281	1,898	7,179
3	Madzeka	4.5	6,000		6,000
4	Sombani	4.5	6,000		6,000
5	Chisepo	2.9	3,810		3,810
6	Thuchila	2.5	2,940	360	3,300
		27.6	30,031	6,109	36,140

Table 1 – Number of seedlings planted and land area enriched during the 2023/2024 planting season

tree planting labour, thereby directly supporting sustainable livelihoods in communities around the Mountain. [CLICK HERE FOR FULL REPORT.](#)

3 The Darwin Initiative – ‘Improving Community Sustainable Natural Resource Management of Mount Mulanje’

3.1 Fuelwood Production & Miombo Restoration

The Darwin Initiative – Improving Community Sustainable Natural Resource Management of Mount Mulanje is a three-year project aimed at promoting sustainable use of plants and fungi from 7,500ha of Miombo woodland, supporting the restoration of this dry-woodland forest type, and encouraging small holder farmers to adopt agroforestry techniques that include incorporating indigenous fuelwood species into their planting schemes.

In November 2023, a focus group discussion under the guidance from Botanic Garden Conservation International (BGCI), was held with local seed collectors, resulting in the identification of eight indigenous tree species suitable for fuelwood production and Miombo restoration. These species were selected for their medium-fast growth, calorific value / wood density, and their ability to coppice. (See Table 2).

A two-day training workshop that focused on seed production protocols (i.e. seed collection, extraction, processing, testing, treatment and storage), as well

as seedling production techniques (i.e. seed pre-treatment, sowing, and seedling management), was then delivered by FRIM. Participants included members from the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens, the Department of Forestry, WeForest and MMCT.

Seventeen local seed collectors (11 male, 6 female) from two forest co-managed areas (Gibson and Nakhonyo), as well as Thuchilla (outside a co-managed area), were trained in tree identification, mapping, and assessing the seed maturity cycle for the target species. Ecological data was recorded using the data collection tool – KOBO Collect (See Figure 1). Throughout 2024, seed propagation trials were established to assess and monitor different seed germination techniques. Seedlings will be propagated at the MMCT nurseries and distributed to project partners during the 2024–2025 planting season.

	Target Target Miombo Tree Species Miombo Tree Species
	Botanical/ Local Name
1	Azzeria quanzensis (Masambamafumu)
2	Bridelia micrantha (Msopa)
3	Burkea africana (Mkalati)
4	Dichrostachys cinerea (Dulakwangwa)
5	Pericopsis angolensis (Mwanga)
6	Sterculia quinqueloba (Msetanyani)
7	Breonadia salicina (Ntonya/ Chonya)
8	Faurea saligna (Thethere)

Table 2 – Target Miombo Tree Species

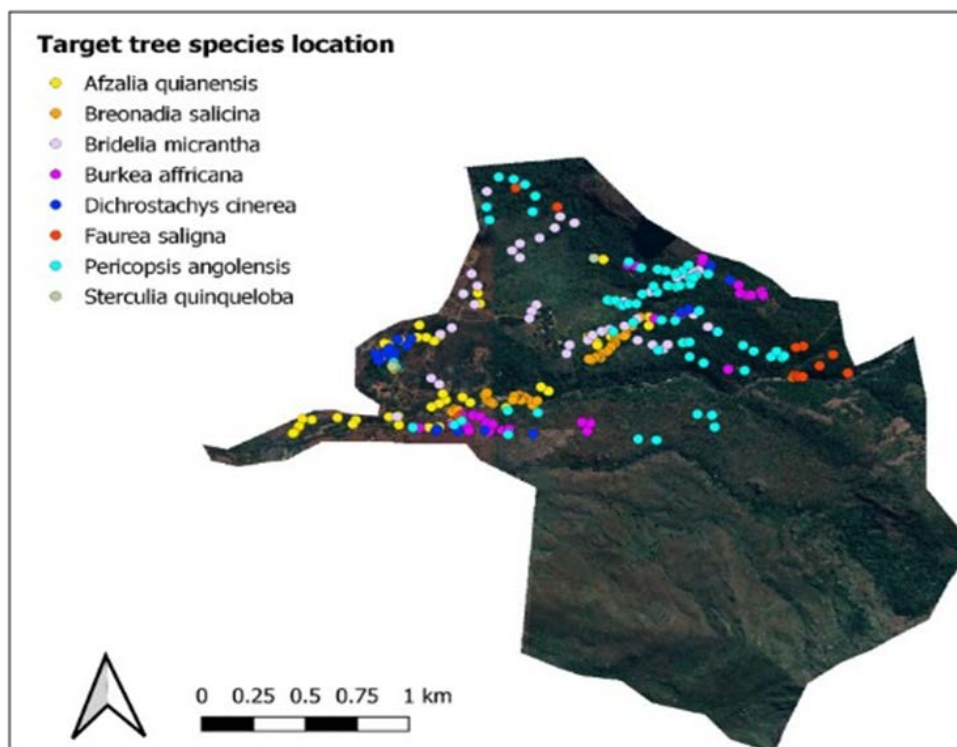


Figure 1– Map that shows location and monitoring of the target tree species in the Likhubula area

3.2 Public Awareness

One of the key outputs of the Darwin Project was to raise awareness on the importance of sustainable management practices for biodiversity and people. A public awareness strategy was developed, using a Behavior-Centered Design methodology. In October 2023, a baseline Knowledge, Attitudes and Perception (KAP) survey was conducted, with 1,009 people (504 from Tchete and Kazembe co-management areas, and 505 from outside the co-managed areas). Outcomes indicated that most respondents had heard of the Forestry Act, had access to a radio and were aware of the important benefits of the Reserve. Interestingly, very few people were involved in community or private woodlot schemes (1%), while 64% of respondents expressed concern about individuals marrying into local families with the purpose of gaining access to fuelwood, then leaving when the resource has been depleted. A mid-term KAP survey, sampling the same population and parameters used in the baseline, was conducted in May 2024, with a final survey scheduled for March 2025. All 3 survey results will be compared to assess the impact of the Public Awareness Campaign.

To raise awareness of the Forestry Act and to dispel myths, a radio programme was developed and broadcast between January and April 2024. These programmes covered a variety of issues,

ranging from the right of ownership when growing indigenous trees, charcoal licensing, permits for wood processing industries, and the use / trafficking of indigenous timber from private lands.

4 Wildfire Threat Reduction

The primary cause of fires on Mount Mulanje is due to human activity related to poachers scavenging remnants of already logged Cedars, hunting for bush meat (mice, klipspringer, rock hyrax, monkeys), vandalism, and agricultural encroachment. In addition, the presence of invasive alien species (IAS) such as Bracken Fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Himalayan Raspberry (*Rubus elipticus*), and dried annuals, are highly flammable during the May–November fire season. Fire management is an essential activity used to protect the Mountain's watersheds, diverse habitats, and Mulanje Cedar restoration zones. Each year, MMCT collaboratively works with the Department of Forestry, and local communities, to maintain a complex network of firebreaks, spanning over 700 kilometers. This is followed by controlled burning in certain areas, and monitoring by dedicated fire-standby teams. In 2023, of the 712.2 kilometers of firebreaks, 710.35 were cleared and maintained, providing seasonal work for 980 people over two months. Seventeen teams were then deployed for fire standby duties between August–December.

5 Law Enforcement

Between July–October 2023, 12 community volunteer patrols took place, and two planned patrols were conducted in the Ruo area. Ten arrests were made during this period, and several items were confiscated (timber planks, bags of charcoal and equipment), and a lorry was intercepted. MMCT has continued to provide ad-hoc logistical support to the Department of Forestry, throughout 2023–2024. In August 2023, MMCT and WeForest coordinated a Law Enforcement Technical Working Group meeting, where key action points were identified. These included providing more training to community volunteers, synchronizing stakeholders' law enforcement activities, and improving data collection protocols for evidence.

Throughout the reporting period, the Governance for Solutions Project coordinated through multiple stakeholder meetings to address law enforcement issues. In February 2024 a Forestry Law Enforcement Coordination Team was established to provide a discussion forum for all stakeholders engaged in the management and protection of forest resources. During its inaugural meeting, a law enforcement strategy was presented and discussed at length. A second meeting was held with Traditional Authority Leaders, for input and feedback on the strategy. In May and August 2024, GFS supported two Court Users Committee meetings. The aim was to provide a platform for law enforcement stakeholders and representatives from the judiciary to examine current investigations,

sentencing protocols, and the role of traditional leaders in the delivery of criminal justice.

6 Enrichment of Vulnerable Habitats & Biodiversity Research

6.1 Mulanje Cedar Management Trials

Edge Fellow, Ibrahim Mitole, continued to collect data from restoration trials established in 2019 across five locations. Ten 20m x 20m trial plots were established in 2019 to understand the impact of weeding on Mulanje Cedar, in different sites across the Mountain. Five plots were weeded annually, whilst the other plots were used as controls. The weeded trial plots are: Lower Nathaka, Upper Nathaka, Chambe, Lichenya, and Limbe Clusters where Mulanje Cedar trees were planted in 2018. The plots in Limbe and Lichenya, however, were abandoned in 2021 because they had been disturbed and were no longer representative sites (new seedlings were planted on the sites and tree tags removed from the trial plots). Four data sets were collected between 2019–2024. The data includes height, root collar diameter, internode length, vegetation type and species composition surrounding the planted Cedars. Table 3 presents preliminary data on Cedar seedling survival. General observations indicate that Cedar seedling survival is high, yet growth rates are low in plots where vegetation was not cleared. (See Table 3).

Site	Plot	2019 (%)	2021 (%)	2022 (%)	2023 (%)	2024 (%)
Lower Nathaka	Vegetation Cleared	67	39	38	38	Not analysed
Lower Nathaka	Vegetation not cleared	91	84	84	44	Not analysed
Lower Nathaka	Vegetation Cleared	52	16	16	16	Not analysed
Lower Nathaka	Vegetation not cleared	28	24	20	13	Not analysed
Malevoni	Vegetation Cleared	81	64	58	38	Not analysed
Malevoni	Vegetation not cleared	91	81	81	72	Not analysed
Limbe	Vegetation Cleared	93	0	0	0	0
Limbe	Vegetation not cleared	80	0	0	0	0
Lichenya	Vegetation Cleared	91	28	13	0	0
Lichenya	Vegetation not cleared	97	8	0	0	0

Table 3 – The Impact of Weeding on Cedar Seedling Survival Rates (2019–2024) © Ibrahim Mitole, Edge Fellow.

6.2 Mulanje Cedar Companion Species Trials

Eight trial plots were established in January 2022, where Mulanje Cedar seedlings were planted next to in-situ companion plants. The study purpose was to investigate the impact of planting Mulanje Cedar seedlings next to plants from families that included Asteraceae, Fabaceae, and Ericaceae. It was hypothesized that these may provide the seedlings with positive mycorrhizal communities. The trials were established within four mountain sites, two in the northern area (Elephant Head & Chinzama) and two in the south (Kangazani and Chanzama). The sites were selected based on the presence of species from the above families, as well as having slightly open / disturbed areas with low tree layers that are suitable for Mulanje Cedar seedling survival (preferably forest edge or forest clearings). Twenty-four companion plants from the target families and 24 from other families were selected, along with 15 Mulanje cedar seedlings. These were planted in five clusters around each plant. (See Table 4).

Site	Plot	2022 % survival	2023 % Survival	2024 % Survival
Chanzama	Vegetation not cleared	96	58	30.3
Chanzama	Vegetation Cleared	83	56	3 (Burnt)
Chinzama	Vegetation not cleared	100	77	9.9 (Burnt)
Chinzama	Vegetation Cleared	97	54	0 (Burnt)
Kangazani	Vegetation not cleared	89	47	27
Kangazani	Vegetation Cleared	80	54	0
Thuchira	Vegetation not cleared	100	51	32
Thuchira	Vegetation Cleared	100	62	34

Table 4 – Preliminary Survival Data for Cedar Seedlings planted with Companion Species (2022–2024) © Ibrahim Mitole, EDGE fellow

6.3 Ecological Monitoring Using Geospatial Technologies

In 2022, the Malawi – Liverpool Welcome Programme, a research institution based in Blantyre, supported Mulanje Cedar restoration efforts in the Chambe Basin. The basin was planted with 11,629 seedlings, covering 8.81 hectares. For the past two years, Patrick Kalonde, a PhD student at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine has been conducting aerial surveys to monitor seedling survival using training pattern recognition algorithms to automatically quantify trees, as well as assess carbon storage potential. Results of the study are expected to be published in 2026, at the end of his PhD studies.



*Figure 2 – Patrick Kalonde, PhD student, during Chambe Basin Drone Survey
© Patrick Kalonde*

6.4 Investigating Insect Biodiversity on Mount Mulanje

During 2024, MMCT in collaboration with the African Natural History Research Trust and local partners.

Malawian counterparts have been developing a research proposal to conduct a three-year study, examining the Insect Biodiversity of Mount Mulanje. This study will provide valuable insights into the insect species endemic to the Mountain, thereby significantly contributing to the Mountain's biodiversity knowledge base and that of Malawi's. This project is scheduled to start in 2025.

6.5 Improving Horticultural Practices, and Examining Living-Green Firebreaks

In June 2024, the Morton Arboretum, Chicago Botanic Gardens, Botanic Gardens Conservation International and MMCT jointly applied to the Global Conservation Consortium for Conifers (GCCC), for a grant to develop a horticultural training workshop, and to test the viability of a living-green firebreak concept. The workshop will be designed to improve horticultural practices to increase the post-planting survival of Mulanje Cedar seedlings. In addition, trial plots will be established at Thuchilla to investigate the use of fire-tolerant species as a secondary protection measure against wildfires.

If the application is successful, fieldwork is scheduled to take place in January 2025.

6.6 Global Biodiversity Standard – March 2024

During March 2024, MMCT and WeForest supported a team of experts from The Center for Ecological Restoration-Kenya (CER-K), to establish, monitor and assess twenty-three 10m x 40m plots using the Global Biodiversity Standard (GBS) Framework. Survey parameters monitored plant, bird and entomological populations.

6.7 Mount Mabu, Ethnobotany

In June 2024, MMCT were invited to be part of an international team of experts to map and assess the biodiversity of Mount Mabu, Mozambique. Dr Arie Glass, Medical Director for the Mulanje Mission Hospital, Carl Bruessow, MMCT Executive Director, and Raheela Ahmed, Restoration Ecologist, were tasked with assessing the traditional knowledge of plants and their uses for primary healthcare. Twenty-eight plants were identified, having a medicinal value. Voucher specimens were collected in the field and sent to the Instituto de Investigação Agrária de Moçambique (IIAM) for verification. A technical report is currently being prepared, that will be published in 2025.



7 Regenerative Agriculture

7.1 Inde-Mulanje Holistic Land Management

In September 2023, MMCT procured a one hectare plot in Michenga Village (See Figure 4), and started the construction of a community-based, natural products processing facility. MMCT was also awarded a grant of US\$25,000 by the East African Regenerative Network (EARN), to support a holistic restoration and agriculture project located on the site.

Two MMCT staff members attended a 10-day Permaculture Design Course in Kitongo, Tanzania, where they gained invaluable knowledge and expertise on landscape design, water harvesting, earthworks, soils, planting strategies, aquaculture, local organizational structures, economic strategies and much more. The training is being applied to transform one hectare of degraded farmland into a self-sustaining, demonstration food forest and restoration site. Swales were landscaped across the site to capture and store surface water. Throughout the landscape, indigenous tree species are being planted as a source of coppice firewood. Fruit trees and a live-green hedge have also been established, and a tree nursery, constructed. Over five years, it is hoped that a canopy of trees will cover the land, providing fruits, medicines, and raw materials for natural products, throughout the year. [CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE.](#)



8 Other Projects

8.1 World Heritage Site Nomination

Since November 2023, MMCT has been part of a collaborative National team that is developing a comprehensive dossier to nominate Mount Mulanje as a World Heritage Site. The dossier was submitted in January 2023 and is currently in review by the World Heritage Commission, an international UNESCO panel.



Programme Officer

Moffat Kayembe

FOREST CO-MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS



1 Introduction

Forest degradation caused by illegal activities from surrounding communities remains one of the primary threats to the Mountain's biodiversity, the loss of which, negatively impacts the flow of ecosystem services that communities depend on. By reversing these trends of degradation, promoting regeneration, and protecting biodiversity, the flow of ecosystem services can be enhanced, thus providing livelihood benefits for local people.

To reverse forest degradation, the Forest Co-Management and Sustainable Livelihoods Programme focuses on community engagement at various levels, facilitating livelihood support both within and outside the Mount Mulanje Biosphere Reserve (MMBR), and promoting stakeholder participation at all levels—District, National, and International, and includes collaboration with donors and implementing partners. Key stakeholders include:

- Mulanje and Phalombe District Councils and relevant government departments including the Department of Forestry
- MMBR boundary communities (located within the 5–7 km buffer from the Reserve boundary) including local leadership, local development institutions (ADCs and VDCs) and Village Action Committees (VACs)
- Mainstream security institutions (Police) and local community policing forums
- District Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working in similar thematic areas
- National Academic Research Institutions and Media Houses
- Other interest groups (traditional healers, faith and business communities)

Across its stakeholders, the programme works with a diverse range of people, regardless of gender, economic status, political affiliation, or ethnicity. More importantly, the programme focuses on empowering women and other vulnerable groups. A 60% female participation rate is deliberately advocated, especially in decision-making positions, to amplify women's voices in livelihood and forest management activities. This approach is particularly relevant in the Southern Region, where the matrilineal marriage system is practiced. In this system, women hold greater power over natural resources but often have limited influence over household economic decisions.

This report outlines the progress made over a 12-month period from July 2023 to June 2024 and focuses on the following key areas:

- Partnerships
- Community-Led Forest Management & Governance,
- Forest Restoration
- Community Livelihood Support



2 Partnerships

The programme recognizes that it cannot accomplish all tasks alone. It collaborates with other partners for financial support and/or technical expertise to effectively implement its activities.

Table-1 lists the organizational partners and project donors who have supported the implementation of these activities.

No	Partner	Partner's Role
1	WeForest	An international organization that MMCT has partnered with since 2020, the WeForest collaboration focuses on co-financing livelihood and forest management activities, including community governance of forest co-management initiatives. The focus has primarily been in the Likhubula Valley in Mulanje District, although their work is gradually expanding to Phalombe District.
2	World University Services of Canada (WUSC) – Partner Innovation Fund.	The programme has partnered with this organisation since 2022. WUSC focuses mainly on providing worldwide expertise to address technical gaps that are filled through volunteer postings. Currently, the program has one volunteer working on procedures and systems. In addition to providing volunteers, the organization is financially supporting a 2-year project aimed at helping vulnerable women become self-reliant. Their past livelihoods have relied on the unsustainable commercial collection of firewood from the Mountain. The support includes financial assistance to help them establish their own small businesses.
3	Plan International Malawi.	This international organization focuses on children and girl-child rights. The programme is implementing an initiative called the 'Conservation Livelihoods in Malawi Biospheres (CLIMB) Project,' which is financed by Jersey Overseas Aid (JOA) through Plan. This 3-year project, which began in 2022, will phase out in March 2025. It focuses on Agriculture and Food Security, Forest Management and Governance, and Knowledge Management (Citizen Science).
4	Water for People.	Over the past three years, the Blantyre Water Board has sourced water from the Likhubula River to commercially supply the people of Blantyre. However, when coupled with a degraded catchment basin, this has exacerbated low water levels in the River. Water for People has partnered with MMCT in a programme that seeks to consult and facilitate the possibility of establishing a water fund for the Likhubula River Catchment. If feasible, the Water Fund would support the management of the Likhubula catchment, through nature-based solutions.
5	The District Councils and relevant Government Departments.	The Councils, through relevant government departments (such as Agriculture, Forestry, etc.), provide policy guidance and technical personnel who offer a series of training sessions in various fields.

Table 1 – Implementation Partners

3 Community-led Forest Management and Governance

Threats to MMBR resources primarily stem from human activities around the mountain. These include illegal harvesting in the form of timber sawing, charcoal burning, firewood collection, and more; harmful forest fires, allegedly started by illegal harvesters, smokers, hunters, arsonist etc; and forest encroachment through farming, residential development, and livestock grazing. Solutions to these challenges must involve the local communities as well, through appropriate engagement processes in forest management and governance. Interventions and activities are aimed at safeguarding existing biodiversity and restoring forest and ecosystem services. Progress is being made through the establishment of forest co-management and governance. Achievements include:

- 47 village Natural Resources Management Committees (VNRMC) were re-vitalized and trained as local level natural resources management governance institutions,
- Two Forest Blocks were demarcated for GVH Kazembe people as Kazembe Forest Block and GVH Tchete people as Tchete Forest Block in T.A. Nkanda and Mabuka, respectively,
- Kazembe Forest Block has 2,833 households with an estimated population of 12,749 people managing 524.2ha of Miombo woodland in MMBR Buffer Zone,
- Tchete Forest Block has 2,082 households and an estimated population of 10,410 people managing 753.6ha of Miombo woodland in MMBR Buffer Zone
- Two Forest Block Management Committees (FBCs) were established as Kazembe and Tchete FBCs. These are superstructures of VNRMCs established at the GVH level. Committee Members of FBC are elected representatives from VNRMCs.
- Two forest Co-Management Block Agreements were signed between Kazembe and Tchete community and the government through Forest Department.

The key forest management actions currently undertaken by the community under the forest co-management agreement include:

- Conducting village-based awareness campaigns on the importance of forest resources, the dangers of forest degradation, and the role of the community in forest management.
- Performing scheduled and random forest block patrols in the forest blocks to monitor and prevent illegal activities.
- Engaging in firefighting efforts through firebreak maintenance and suppression of incidental fires.
- Confiscating any illegal forest products found within the forest blocks.
- Reporting to the Forest Department and Police for any actions that go beyond their capacity to address.

The current benefits of people's actions through the forest co-management arrangement and agreements are:

- Improved cooperation between forest staff, local communities, and their leaders.



Mulanje District Commissioner exchanging a signed Forest Co-management Agreement with the Kazembe Forest Block Committee Chairperson.



Benefits of intensive forest protection: growth of regenerants at Mbewa Sub Block within Tchete Forest Block.

- Resurgence and visible growth of regenerants (*Brackstergia* spp.) in co-management sites where trees were cut approximately 10 years ago,
- A reduction in fire incidents, such as harmful forest fires and smoke from charcoal burning,
- A decline in illegal forest activities, possibly attributed to frequent community-based awareness campaigns, the apprehension and arrest of illegal harvesters during patrols, and the confiscation of illegal products.
- 7ha were planted, and this is an annual activity. Planting materials, particularly *Khaya anthotheca*, are supported by the MMCT Nursery, while other species are propagated by communities in community-based nurseries. Precautionary measures are taken to avoid introducing any invasive species into the co-management areas.
- Two community-based nurseries have been established in Matwika and Kambenje villages.
- Climate change impacts have posed a significant challenge to the activity. The two consecutive seasons (2022–2023 and 2023–2024) have been affected by Cyclone Freddy and the El Niño phenomenon, respectively. The impact has been substantial on food security, resulting in two negative consequences:

However, this intervention requires:

- Adequate funding for facilitation, capacity building, and ongoing coaching.
- Motivation for community-based patrollers, as most work on a volunteer basis. A volunteer incentivization program needs to be developed.
- Support for patrollers in terms of basic protective wear, especially during night patrols and in harsh weather conditions.
- Continued capacity building as new practices emerge.
- Compromised community participation in tree planting activities, which are carried out on a voluntary basis. While the community members are eager to participate in tree planting, their priority has shifted to piecework to generate household income for survival.
- Escalation of illegal forest activities in the MMBR. The MMBR is often seen as a coping mechanism during times of acute food and economic insecurity.
- Given these challenges, it is essential to consider bridging interventions that balance conservation efforts with community livelihood needs, ensuring that activity implementation is not compromised. The most common interventions include “Food for Work” or “Work for Cash” programs in forestry management-related activities.

4 Forest Restoration

- Forest restoration can be achieved through protection, as mentioned earlier, or through planting. This section outlines the progress made in planting tree species and other vegetative materials to replace lost cover, aiming to meet various objectives. The following strides were made:
- 32,409 trees were planted within the MMBR Transition Zone, focusing on riverbanks, hill slopes, and homesteads.
- 270 hectares (Kazembe Forest Block: 77.066ha, Tchete Forest Block: 145.384ha, and Kukada: 47.5ha) were identified for protection through Assisted Natural Regeneration. These sites were degraded due to charcoal burning and firewood collection; however, stumps remain that have the potential to regenerate into desirable vegetative cover.
- 41.3 hectares (Kazembe Forest Block: 5.9304ha; Tchete Forest Block: 35.376ha) were identified for enrichment planting. These sites, which were kiln spots for charcoal burning, have damaged stumps that cannot regenerate naturally and require planting.

5 Community Livelihood Support

Community Livelihood Support aims at:

- Facilitating livelihood opportunities that promote the sustainable use of mountain resources,
- Facilitating livelihood opportunities that help to reduce harvesting pressures within the MMBR,
- Encouraging social protection measures within communities,
- Considering possible climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, where applicable.

MMBR conservation relies heavily on people's satisfaction with how their livelihoods needs are met while advancing the conservation agenda. These needs are addressed through livelihood support. Some interventions promote the sustainable use of MMBR resources through forest-based enterprises, while others reduce the pressure on direct resource harvesting (both timber and non-timber forest products) by initiating livelihood activities outside the MMBR. Achievements in the reporting period include:

- A total of 110 beehives were distributed to 118 households to initiate group businesses, with contributions from various partners: MMCT (50 beehives), WeForest (50 beehives), and CICOD (10 beehives).
- MMCT plans to develop and commercialize potential products from indigenous fruits commonly collected from the MMBR through the Darwin Initiative Project titled "Maximizing Conservation and Community Benefits from Plants of Mount Mulanje".

5.1 The WUSC – Partner Innovation Fund Project

- 200 vulnerable women (98 from GVH Khamula in Phalombe and 102 from GVH Chipoka in Mulanje District) were supported to initiate small-scale businesses, shifting their focus away from complete dependence on unsustainable MMBR resource harvesting (such as commercial firewood collection) towards more environmentally sustainable businesses.



- Two commercial fruit tree nurseries have been established in Chipoka and Tchete villages to propagate and improve fruit tree seedlings for commercial purposes. A total of 93 women are participating in the initiative, with 15 from Tchete and 78 from Chipoka.

5.2 The Darwin Initiative Project

This is the third Darwin Initiative project being implemented with MMCT. The project runs from April 2022 until the end of March 2025, and is titled: *"Improving Community Sustainable Natural Resource Management of Mount Mulanje"*. The project has worked to develop sustainable livelihoods options from indigenous plants and fungi from Mount Mulanje Biosphere Reserve as alternatives to current practices that damage mountain ecosystems, reducing biodiversity and livelihood options. The project partners have worked to develop new marketable products from indigenous plant resources. A Community co-operative, sustainable harvest training with collectors and a social enterprise have been established to support the new market opportunities. The group has also worked with FairWild to develop the business model, policies and contracts to be able to achieve certification across the supply chain as markets grow. Two lead organisations of the project are MMCT and Botanic Gardens Conservation International.

Building on the Focus Group Discussions held in each of the 27 project villages, four fruit target species and one species group of chanterelle mushrooms were selected. Fourteen resource assessment fieldwork days took place in September, November, and December 2023, as well as, January and February 2024. Using KoboToolbox, digital maps of the populations of these species, with yield information have been generated. This fieldwork was led by knowledgeable local collectors from various villages, joined by Co-management Block Chairpersons, MMCT staff and Forestry Officers.

In September 2023, 345kgs of *Parinari curatellifolia* (Maula) fruit was purchased by the project from collectors in GVH Mandanda. These fruits were processed into a variety of trial products, and the seeds were given back to ten women from Mandanda who attended a training day in hygienic seed kernel removal. Five kgs of clean seed kernels were later purchased from this group by the project in March 2024, and used in product development.



Figure 1 – Wild Fruit Purchases in the Village

In January 2024, 35kg of *Garcinia buchananii* (Ndundira) were purchased. In January and February 2024, 292kg of *Flacourtia indica* (Nthema) were purchased from community collectors by the project. In February 2024, consultants from FairWild visited the project site, and two days of fieldwork were completed, particularly to assess the sustainable harvesting protocols of the chanterelle mushroom species.

selected from each village, based on their interest for this training. A Lead Collector was voted for in each village, and each collector received a Collector Identity card to be used in all further purchase events.

In April 2024, the Project Coordinator, Kate Chanthunya, attended the Natural and Organic Expo in Cape Town as a Trade Visitor. Networking connections in the natural product industry were made, and interest in Miombo indigenous fruit products was high. We believe that with time and effort, a consistent demand for semi-processed products will be established, which will impart confidence to the trained community collectors, while encouraging a reliable supply.



Figure 2 (Above) – A Sustainable Harvest Training Session In February, June and July 2024.

Training sessions in Sustainable Harvesting methods were held in each of the 27 project villages, with a total of 274 people being trained. Approximately ten people (80% women) were

Construction of Inde-Mulanje, an Agro-processing Centre for Darwin Initiative products and other value-added products made from raw materials, sourced from Mulanje smallholder farmers and beekeepers, started in November 2023. The establishment of this social-enterprise factory is funded by the BRIDGE Project and is in Michenga village, a rural area on the eastern slopes of Mount Mulanje. This is the first community-orientated processing centre to be established in the area, and will promote crop diversification and alternative livelihoods in this traditional tea-growing area.

5.3 Project CLIMB

- 75 households (32 female, 43 male) were supported with a solar-powered irrigation pump at Kukada village in GVH Kukada in Mulanje District on a 15ha land. More irrigable land needs more support that will increase beneficiaries towards food security.
- Funds are identified to rehabilitate the main delivery pipe that was damaged by Cyclone Freddy in March 2022. Kambenje irrigation scheme covers villages of Chole, Kambnje, and Mukhalepo villages, in GVH Kukada.
- 40 households (15 male, 25 female) in Matwika village of GVH Matwika, T.A. Nkanda, were supported with 200 goats under a “pass-on” programme. Each household received 5 goats (4 does and 1 buck).



- MMCT is in the process of establishing a ‘Community Microfinancing Revolving Fund (CoM-ReF)’, which will be managed by a Fund Manager. The fund will provide financial support to eligible individuals and groups to start environmentally friendly and sustainable businesses. These businesses will serve as a source of income, encouraging a shift away from the unsustainable extraction of MMBR resources.

5.5 Social Protection Measures

When an apprehended culprit is handed over to the police and subsequently offered police bail, the culprit may take retaliatory (reprisal) actions, including death threats and physical assaults, against members of conservation groups.

This poses a significant barrier to community participation in conservation efforts. To address this challenge:

- An interface meeting was held between the local leaders, VNRMCs and Community Policing Bodies, Forest Department staff, and the Police (Community Policing Coordinator) to share concerns on Police bail and reprisal actions. Identified the way forward as:
 - Granting bail is a legal matter under Malawi law and depends on the assessment of the case. The Police alone cannot alter the law.
 - Reprisal actions are criminal acts and must be reported to the Police.
 - Identify a dedicated officer within the Police to handle cases of reprisal.
- Suggestion boxes are placed at the GVHs of Matwika, Kazembe, Mandanda, and Tchete in Mulanje district to allow community members report any acts of reprisal, offer suggestions for improving forest management and report any illegal activities to the authorities for action.

5.6 Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Measures

The people living around the mountain rely on rainfed agriculture, which is becoming increasingly risky due to the impacts of climate change, including droughts, floods, and pest and disease outbreaks. The last two consecutive seasons were severely affected by Cyclone Freddy and the El Niño phenomenon, respectively, which significantly compromised crop production. The effects of food insecurity are still being felt today. The boundary communities view the mountain as a coping mechanism, resorting to illegal resource harvesting, which leads to forest degradation.

The forest protection and restoration interventions mentioned above help promote the growth of vegetative cover, which in turn has the potential to act as a carbon sink. Additionally, the sustainable livelihoods activities taking place both inside and outside the MMBR offer valuable adaptation measures, increasing people’s resilience to climate shocks. However, more adaptation measures are

needed in areas such as soil and water management, food systems and nutrition, and post-harvest food management.

In conclusion, setting aside land for conservation is a decision made by the boundary communities, regardless of national laws. It is, therefore, essential for the program to strike a balance between conservation goals and community needs. These community needs can largely be addressed through effective community engagement and sustainable support for livelihoods.

Project CLIMB



Monitoring & Evaluation Officer

Henry Chinthuli



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

1 Introduction

The Programme continues to provide technical support for increased understanding of the local context in which MMCT and its partners are implementing its programmes and activities. This involves the systematic collection and analysis of information to determine whether the expected outcomes and impacts are achieved, gives timely feedback and ensures that appropriate actions are taken to improve the effectiveness of programme delivery. The M&E programme guides other Programmes towards achieving the organisation's goals, while fostering the mainstreaming issues of Gender, HIV&AIDS and General Wellness in all planning, implementation and reporting. This annual report outlines progress for the period July 2023 to June 2024. Major activities included developing an Implementation Plan for the new MMCT Strategic Plan, monitoring of some programmes' activities and providing technical support to partnership projects.

2 Summary of Progress

2.1 Develop an Implementation Framework for MMCT's New Strategic Plan

The M&E Programme led the process of developing an Implementation Plan for new MMCT Strategic Plan (2021 to 2026). The process involved a three-day intensive discussion with all technical Staff to understand and document what actions would need to be taken to put this new strategy into practice, essentially describing how to execute the new Plan and overcome potential barriers to achieve the desired outcome. Each Pillar was thoroughly

unpacked, examining its objective, scope, necessary resources, timelines and responsibilities. The Plan improves project coordination and efficiency, enhances accountability and progress tracking, as well as helps in the identification and management of potential issues. The Implementation Plan has guided the development of the Annual (June 2023 to July 2024) and Periodic (July to October) Work Plans., Informed and assisted by the African Parks Network (APN) Incubation Programme, some key tools were developed to support the internal restructuring of MMCT, in keeping with its desire to assume responsibility for the long-term management of the Mulanje Mountain Forest Reserve. One such tool was the elaboration of a 5-year Business Plan that harmonised the MMCT Strategic Plan and MMBR Integrated Management Plan, as well as all elements contained in the Implementation Plan.

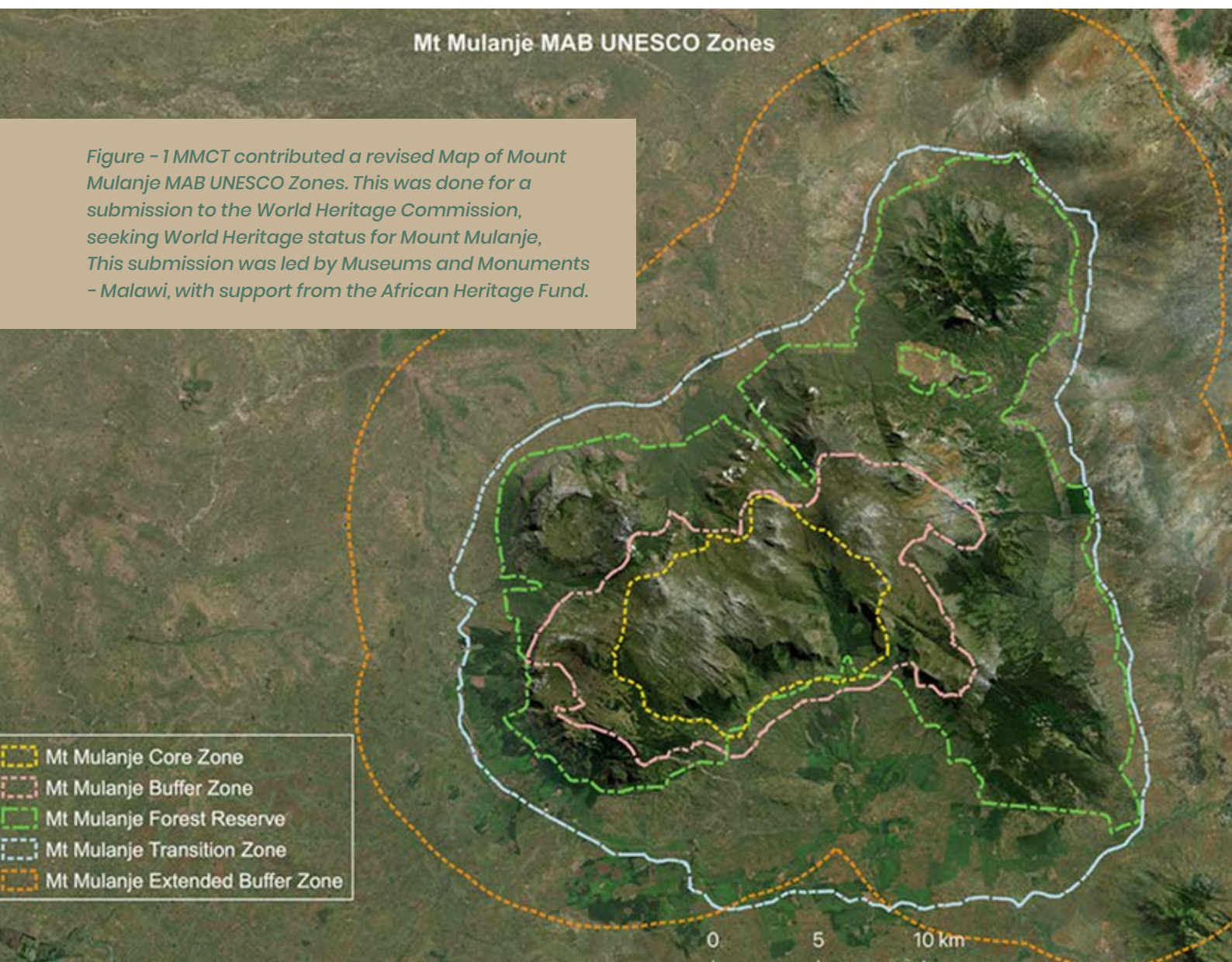
The Business Plan was developed by an external consultant and subsequently reviewed internally, a process that was led by the M&E programme.

2.2 Ensure that Data Storage and Retrieval Systems are in Place

With the support of a GIS Expert (WUSC Volunteer), MMCT has developed a geo-spatial database and Earth Ranger to support the management of the Mount Mulanje Biosphere Reserve. During this report period, data has been generated, and maps created on forest cover and change over time, cedar restoration sites (2015 to 2022), CLIMB Project Villages, an updated topographic map for the MMBR, and land use cover maps, including tea and eucalyptus cover, to guide future delineation for implementation of livelihoods initiatives in the MMBR buffer zone. Areas were measured and

surrounding planted sites in Sombani (Matambale, Namisile and Malosa pools) Lichenya (Makhutula 1, 2, 3 and Chilemba) Madzeka. All these data and maps have been safely stored in the Geospatial Database and uploaded onto Earth Ranger. The Database has also been secured with a password and can be retrieved from a computer, specifically set aside for data management.

MMCT contributed a revised Map of Mount Mulanje MAB UNESCO Zones as shown above. This was done for a submission to the World Heritage Commission, seeking World Heritage status for Mount Mulanje. This submission was led by Museums and Monuments – Malawi, with support from the African Heritage Fund. MMCT, with technical support from the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) has participated in an evaluation of the management of the MMBR as a protected area. The purpose was to analyse management efforts, using IMET (Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool). Developed within the framework of the BIOPAMA programme



a map created of the additional 2023 firebreaks surrounding planted sites in Sombani (Matambale, Namisile and Malosa pools) Lichenya (Makhutula 1, 2, 3 and Chilemba) Madzeka. All these data and maps have been safely stored in the Geospatial Database and uploaded onto Earth Ranger. The Database has also been secured with a password and can be retrieved from a computer, specifically set aside for data management.

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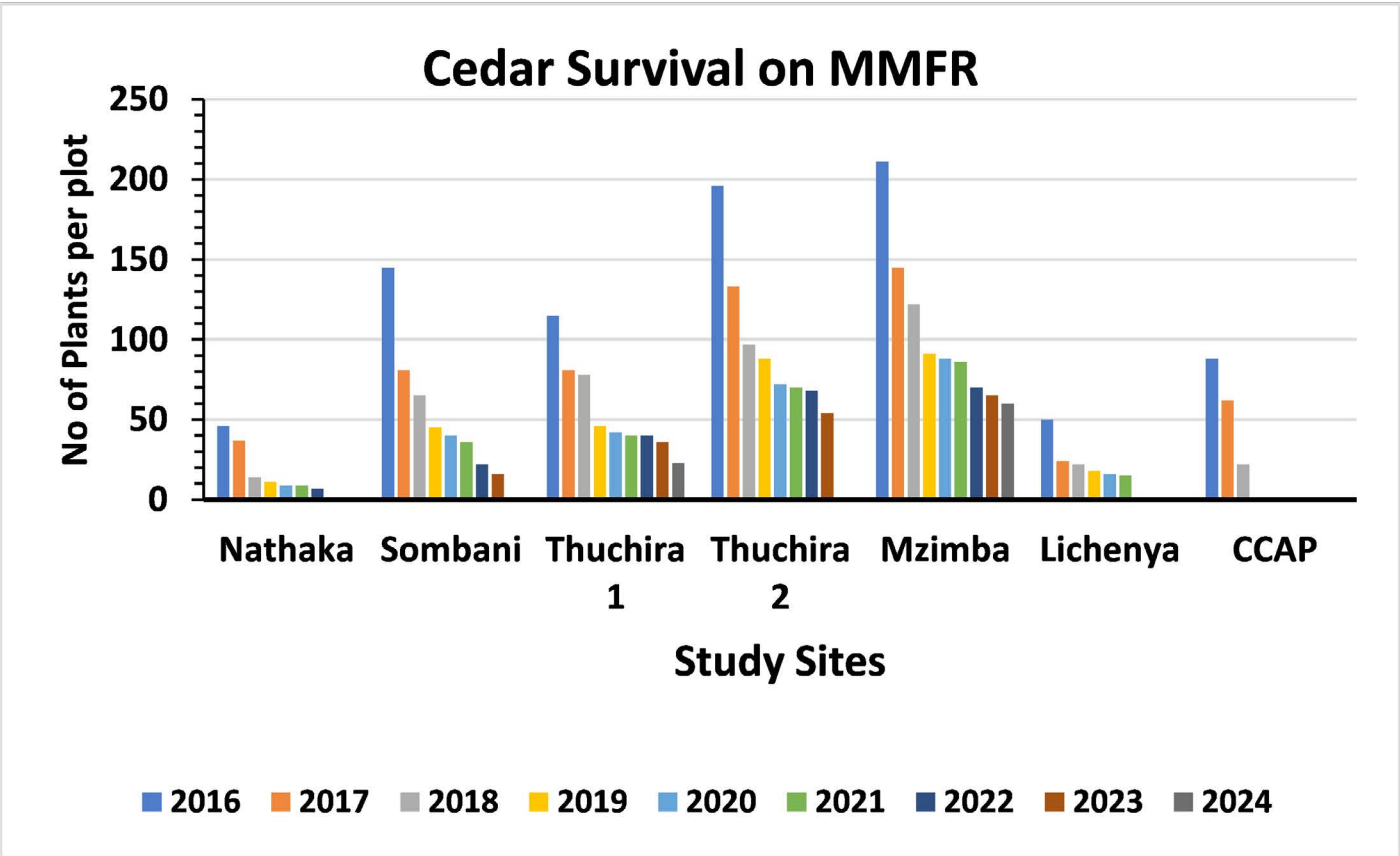
MMCT, with technical support from the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) has participated in an evaluation of the management of the MMBR as a protected area. The purpose was to analyse management efforts, using IMET (Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool). Developed within the framework of the BIOPAMA programme (Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management, Intra-ACP EDFII). To date, MMCT has completed its first IMET Analysis of the MMBR, an initiative that will continue for five years and in keeping with the MMCT Strategic Plan (2021- 2026). The process took a bottom-up approach where MMCT and its partners (i.e. Forest Department, Department of Parks and Wildlife, African Parks Network), together with some village representatives, conducted a two-day, in-depth assessment and analysis of the effectiveness of management practices of the MMBR. Results revealed areas that required improvement, something that was highly appreciated by stakeholders.

2.3 Mainstreaming Gender in Programme Activities

The M&E Programme encouraged gender mainstreaming in all MMCT project activities. Capacity building on gender issues and integration was supported by partner organisations (i.e. WUSC [World University Services of Canada] and PLAN Malawi International). Topics included: promoting workplace interaction, identifying existing biases and knowing how to overcome them, resulting in improved work performance, team cohesion and objective feedback. Such interactive sessions have helped to raise awareness of the impact and importance of unconscious biases on relations with other co-workers, partners, stakeholders, project participants.

3 Monitoring of MMCT Programme Activities

MMCT activities were visited to check progress against targeted values with corresponding indicators and provided feedback through monitoring and periodic progress reports. This annual report shares a summary of progress during 2023-24.



3.1 Assessing 2023/ 2024 Cedar Survival Within the MMFR

M&E, along with Forestry Department Staff, assessed cedar survival in seven of twelve study plots established in 2016. Five plots were dropped as they had been completely destroyed by forest fires within the first two to four years of their establishment. It is noteworthy that in 2024, one plot set within the cedar trial plots at Thuchira was burnt by arsonists. The study plots were established to track cedar survival over time and considered microhabitat factors such as: effects from handling during planting, shade, aspect, soil depth, moisture and competition with other surrounding vegetation. The assessment found 254 live cedars in 2023 and 2024, against the baseline of 1326. This representing a survival rate of 19%, and a decline from the previous year (i.e. 23%). This drop was largely due to the impact of arsonists, when compared with other planted sites having a good survival rate exceeding 52% (i.e. Chambe and Plot 6 at Sombani), where arson was not a factor.



be attributed to delays in approval of the March to June 2024 Workplan and Budget. As a result, the Mountain experienced severe fire damage (i.e. almost entirely burning the plateau areas).

4.0 Providing Technical Support to Partnership Projects

M&E technical support was provided to the CLIMB Project during a bi-annual review & planning meeting. A monitoring tool was distributed to all (43) project villages, inviting them to hold village meetings and respond to a fulfilment status survey prior to the review. A total of six sessions were held, where village representatives gathered to share project progress. Community feedback indicated that the review promoted: cross-village learning and increased community access to technical information (Provided by extension agents).

This participatory M&E approach also empowered villages by fostering a competitive spirit in project implementation. The sharing of community challenges and lessons learned will hopefully help to improve performance in the next project implementation phase.

M&E, under the direction of MMCT and the South Pole Carbon Project, assessed 9 Stove Production Groups (SPGs) in Chikwawa District, on their production status. The results informed the implementation of subsequent activities including, encouraging communities to mobilise locally available resources for kiln construction, deploying stove experts from Mulanje to train 9 SPGs in kiln construction, stove curing and training in market

3.2 Monitoring of Firebreak Maintenance & Clearing (2023 and 2024)

The Department of Forestry (FD), with financial support from MMCT, carries out essential management activities within the Mulanje Mountain Forest Reserve (MMFR) to protect its unique ecosystems. Among the activities, it ensures that forest fires are reduced to a minimum, by maintaining a network of firebreaks. M&E monitors the quality and work performance of firebreak clearing within a given two-month contractual period. In both 2023 & 2024, work started late (i.e. July), as compared with previous years (normally starting in May). This was due to financial constraints and budget delays within the Trust. M&E brief contractors on their assignments before deploying them to their designated work areas. Six groups were assigned to 712.29 kms of firebreaks in 2023 and 710.35 kms in 2024. However, only 145 kms were able to be contracted out due to financial constraints. This resulted in the worst fire season in the history of firebreak maintenance by MMCT, since operations started in 2004. The can

mix (4Ps), general record keeping, serial numbering and the issuance of sales receipts; all in line with the carbon credits protocol. Awareness creation was realised through a mini-launch patronised by traditional leaders from both East and West banks of the Shire River (Livunzu and Mthumba respectively), District Forestry Officials and CBO Volunteers, as stove promoters who were identified at the project inception by the project coordinator. Thereafter, a Baseline Kitchen Performance (KPT) Test was conducted to determine the fuel (wood fuel, charcoal, dung etc) consumption using traditional cooking technologies. More work needs to be done on widen the Remaining, is the widening of the market scope by enhancing relationships with prospective buyers in both Chikwawa and Nsanje Districts, specifically the small-holder sugar cooperatives and the Catholic Directorate of Diocese of Chikwawa.

M&E worked with two external Consultants, who were hired to conduct Baseline Studies for the Darwin and JOA-funded projects. These projects were "Improving Community Sustainable Natural Resource Management of Mount Mulanje" and "Conservation Livelihoods in Malawi's Biospheres", respectively. External reviewers provided secondary data guided by the sampling framework and assisted in mobilizing respondents for the study.

5.0 Programme Priorities & Way Forward

- 5.1 Jointly develop core metrics with all MMCT Programmes, to ensure effectiveness of the new direction the organisation wants to take, based on the 5-Year Business Plan, as well as the Implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- 5.2 Continue to develop Village Profiles to understand the socio-economic status of communities, thereby assisting MMCT programmes to develop appropriate responsive activities.
- 5.3 Continue to monitor projects and provide timely feedback to management for efficient and informed decision-making.
- 5.4 Continue to provide technical support to partner-based projects (e.g. CLIMB, DARWIN, and WUSC), while monitoring progress on the integration of Gender and HIV&AIDS considerations in MMCT programmes and there implementation.



Finance & Administration Manager

Alinafe Parks Stesha

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION



1 Introduction

During this financial period, both the administration and technical staff were busy implementing various activities for the period, July 2023 to June 2024. For this period, several challenges were experienced during the implementation of both finance and technical staff activities due to the transition process that MMCT and African Parks Network had entered into (a 10-year agreement).

2 Summary of Progress

2.1 Financial Audits

During the financial year, MMCT Auditors carried out field-audit work for the period July 2022 to June 2023. The audit was conducted during November 2024 and the report is yet to be released in February 2025.

Previously audited financial statements for the years 2020 to 2022 were presented to the MMCT Board of Trustees for approval.

2.1.1 Signed Project and Service Agreements.

All existing signed projects were continued and activities implemented. Various project reports including financial reports and activity progress narrative reports were shared with the signed partners to monitor project progress.

2.1.2 Procurement of Assets.

During this period, the Finance and Administration Department (FAD) procured two new laptop computers to replace those used by the Finance & Administration Manager and the Administrative Secretary.

A new Laser jet printer was also procured, replacing an old one that was incurring high costs in servicing and toner replacements.

2.1.3 Staffing and Human Resources.

During the period, MMCT recruited new staff to the organisation, filling the positions of security guards (4), gardeners (2) and driver (1). Advertisements for the positions were posted, and shortlisted candidates were invited to an interview. The successful candidates were called and confirmed in their positions and offered contracts by the HR officer. Previously, MMCT contracted its security services to Khama Security, a Mulanje-based company, however, following an MMCT office break-in, a decision was made to revoke the contract in favour of inhouse, full-time contract security staff.

2.1.4 Internal Reviews of Finance and Administration functions

The Board of governors commissioned an internal review for the finance and administration functions through appointment of Andy and Thom Associates. The review was conducted, feedback and recommendations for the report were shared with the Board of governors and staff for improvements.

2.2 MMCT Phalombe Offices

During the period, MMCT secured a new tenant to occupy its rental office space, located at Phalombe Boma. The new tenant signed a six (6) month lease agreement. Two tenants' lease agreements expired during the period, following the end of the tenants' projects. There were also plans to improve the drainage systems around the Phalombe office compound due to the high frequency of flooding the rainy season. This problem has persisted in recent years.

2.3 Business Plan, Budget Template and SOPs

As a requirement of the agreement between MMCT and African Parks Network (APN), under its incubation program, MMCT has adopted a 5-Year Business Plan model, a 5-Year Business Budget Template and a number of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) which were developed to suit the operational needs of the organisation. This was achieved with the support of the APN and input of the MMCT program officers.

2.4 The Use and Repairs of the MMCT Vehicle Fleet

During this period, routine vehicle maintenance and repairs were carried out for all new and older vehicles in the MMCT fleet. However, there have been increasing repair costs, due to the aging of the fleet.

Fuel costs for period have been well monitored due to control measures implemented and controlled by the budget. Incurred costs were strictly those budgeted for and the use of vehicle logbooks to record trips was strictly adhered. This has eliminated unnecessary and unapproved trips.

3 Challenges in Finance and Administration Activities

The FAD monitors all implementing programmes and associated activities, while providing feedback through reports that have been shared during the year. Nevertheless, there are remaining issues that require attention, for future progress to be made in the next implementation year.

3.1 Care and Responsibility of MMCT Vehicles

There is a need for increased awareness on the part of all MMCT staff for greater care and responsibility when using MMCT vehicles, to minimise vehicle repairs and maintenance costs.

3.2 Adequate Drainage at MMCT Phalombe Offices

With extreme weather conditions and flash-flooding on the rise, associated with run-off from the Mountain, there is urgency to improve the drainage system of the Phalombe Office compound to improve and protect the building and its surrounding landscape. This urgent need requires adequate funding that needs to be sourced accordingly.

3.3 Timely Implementation of SOPs

With the late implementation of the SOPs, there is risk that staff override the internal control procedures, with the result being reflected in the audited financial statements of the organisation and associated audit management letter.

4 Programme Priorities & Way Forward

- 4.1 Operationalise the Financial SOPs (i.e. Finance, HR and Procurement).
- 4.2 Produce and share monthly financial management reports with all stakeholders, for greater transparency, so that they can monitor the progress and financial performance of the organisation.
- 4.3 Ensure that timely financial statements are produced, year-end audits are conducted and audited statements are signed by the Board of Governors.



The Mulanje Cycad is unique to Mulanje & Milange, planted here by CSOs, USFS and local Traditional Authority in Milange. This is our SEAMA collaboration celebration..
- Carl Bruessow





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