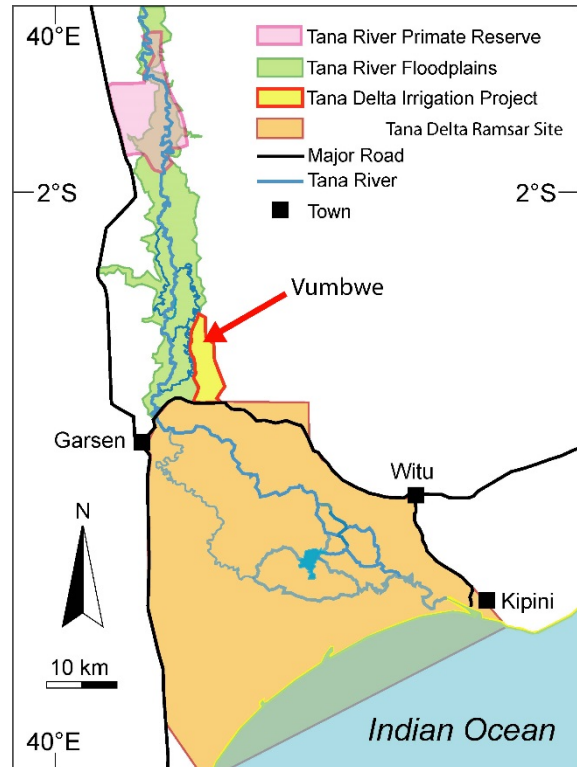


**The ICCA
Consortium**

Vumbwe village, Tana Saving our Forests and Lakes

Our village of Vumbwe is tucked away in the north-eastern corner of the Tana Delta Irrigation Project about 50 km inland from Kipini where the Tana River flows in to the Indian Ocean. We are mainly Pokomo (300) and a small group of Wataa (25) but the village lands also regularly accommodate nomadic livestock keepers mainly from the Wardei community. The Pokomo are Bantu speakers and have been recession farmers in the floodplain since at least the Middle Ages after a migration that they themselves trace to “the Congo”. The Wataa are an Oromo speaking group of hunter-gatherers. The surrounding rangelands have traditionally been exploited by Cushitic speaking semi-nomadic Orma (referred to as Galla in the nineteenth century literature and who probably arrived in the 17th century) or nomadic

(Wardei, Somali Galje’el clan) pastoralists that have arrived later in successive waves. There are also some recent Somali migrants fleeing the civil strife there. Currently the area is mostly frequented by the Wardei who have started to settle in the Halubva floodplains some 5 km west of the current location of Vumbwe village and who, during extreme flood events, find refuge close to Vumbwe.



The village of Vumbwe itself sits on somewhat higher ground where the inhabitants settled during the large floods of 1961 when they had to move out of the Halubva floodplains. Since then most

households kept two “shambas” (fields), one on the lower lying Haloubva floodplains and one on the higher ground around Vumbwe. This method of cultivation at different altitudes to the river is very typical for floodplain cultivation as a risk reduction strategy maximising the chances of achieving a harvest that can at least feed the family in extreme conditions and a large harvest under average conditions. All this changed in the 1990s when flood heights were reduced by the building of the 5 hydropower dam cascade upstream and the village lands were to a large extent embanked by the Tana Delta Irrigation Project (TDIP), funded by the Government of Japan.



The traditional communal lands were thus “handed over” to a parastatal: the Tana and Athi Rivers Development Authority (TARDA), modelled on the highly controversial Tennessee Valley Authority and applied to almost all African river basins. The locals are since then considered as illegal squatters on their own land. Six other villages are in the same situation (Lebrun et al. 2010) and have lost access to a large part of their cultural landscape described in Hamerlynck et al. (2010).

By continuing to cultivate their fields at Halubva, which requires a long walk and a crossing of a river branch that can be hazardous when the river is swollen during the rainy season (which is also the time of cultivation), the villagers have managed to survive. They have also been quite creative in using the drainage water of the irrigation scheme to water their fields at Vumbwe even though the water is laden with agricultural run-off products and deemed unfit for human consumption. Because of the exclusion of the Vumbwe are from natural flooding there is no longer groundwater recharge and most of the wells in the village are brackish or even saline. For drinking water the village is therefore strongly dependent on the Lango la Simba branch of the river that flows to the east of the village but even that branch is only flooding when the irrigation scheme is taking in water and there is overspill to that branch.



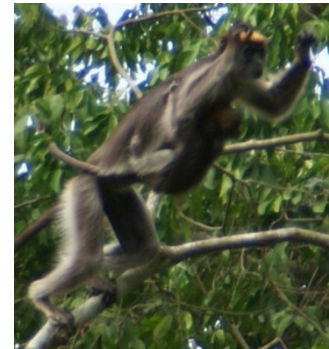
It is also along this branch that the main fishing areas, especially Lake Chamaso are situated and that there still is some gallery forest. When the irrigation scheme’s inflatable dam burst a few years ago there was no more flow here and the forest suffered but now the connection has been restored. The

lakes, that have hippos and a varied bird life, are especially important for lungfish that, mainly the Wataa spear. This fishing technique is captured in the “Shomani Nswi” song that the villagers perform in the video. The gallery forests are of high biodiversity value, or at least were until they were overharvested for timber and charcoal by outsiders, often brandishing licences granted by government authorities without any consultation with the villagers. The main target species is *Newtonia erlangeri*, locally known as Mukami. There is a beautiful specimen in the centre of the village where it provides the shade for all village meetings and events. The tree has a second species mixed in with it (probably a vine?) and, according to the village elders, thus symbolises the intertwining of the different communities that use the village lands.



The village would like to declare their lakes and forests along the Lango la Simba channel as an ICCA. They want to restore the forest by negotiating increased water flow and stronger flood peaks so that more groundwater recharge can happen to the forest. They also want to increase groundwater infiltration into the forest by digging some trenches from the lakes into the forest. Such trenches would also break up the roads that the charcoalers and loggers are

using to destroy the forest. They would still allow access for sustainable harvesting of poles and traditional medicinal plants. They hope that the threatened Red Colobus monkey (Hamerlynck et al. 2012) that they believe their ancestors brought on their migration from the Congo will come back to the forest as will other species like elephants. They would like to build a small hut on poles with a view on the lake so that tourists can come and enjoy the area with them.



A recent ruling by the High Court of Kenya has changed the outlook for the community in the realisation of their plans. High Court Judge Lady Justice Mumbi Ngugi noted that there was need to have one agency to oversee the development of the Tana River Delta and that the short, medium and long range land use development plans for the Tana River Delta will have to be developed with full participation of the communities as well as government agencies and other stakeholders with an interest in the area. TARDA, one of the respondents to the suit, was requested to share its short and long term land use development plans with communities and stakeholders. The judge also called for periodic evaluations of the plans.

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