

Uses of *Parinari curatellifolia* fruit in Mbozi Plateau, Tanzania

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● Research background

The area from Central Africa to Southern Africa, where the annual rainfall is between 500 and 1,400 mm and the average temperature is between 18 and 24°C, is covered with open woodlands (*miombo*) occupied by Caesalpinioidea trees (White, 1984). Although the Mbozi Plateau in southwestern Tanzania is also a part of this vegetation zone, the vegetation of this area is characterized by *Parinari curatellifolia* trees as the main constituent species. On the Mbozi Plateau, the *miombo* woodlands have been cut in order to provide land for coffee and maize cultivation. Nevertheless, some trees remain in the fields. Many of these trees are *P. curatellifolia*, called *ivhula* by the Nyiha people.

● Research purpose and aim

Branches of the *ivhula* tree are utilized for fuel, and its shade is good for coffee trees. These roles can also be played other species, however, so these are not the reasons why these trees are selectively left standing.

Although *ivhula* trees play an important role in ancestor rituals, many people have recently converted to Christianity and few continue to perform such rituals. The use of this tree in ritual is therefore not sufficient reason to leave it standing. Through the course of this research, it became clear that at one time the fruit of this tree was frequently used for food. As part of this study, which sought to determine why *ivhula* have been left standing in fields, I examined how its fruit had been used and why it was no longer being used.



Picture 1 *Ivhula* trees still standing in the fields.
(*Parinari curatellifolia*)

● Fieldwork results and achievements

Prior to 1980, the fruit of the *ivhula* was eaten frequently. From August to October of each year, the fruit began to ripen and fall from the trees. During these three months, mothers had their children gather the fruit nearly every day. The gathered fruits were pounded with a pestle and water was added to make *ikambi*. They state that this *ikambi* allayed their hunger so much that they did not bother to eat their staple foods.

Juice squeezed from *ikambi* was also drunk. This juice could also be used with maize or finger millet flour to make porridge. It is said that infants fed with this porridge enjoyed good health.

The seeds of the *ivhula* were dried, split with a block of wood and an axe (see Picture 3), and the kernels were removed. The taste and appearance resembles that of groundnuts. At one time, these kernels were ground into powder and vegetables were seasoned with the powder. These uses are seldom seen any longer, because the trees became infested with pests in the 1980s and hardly bore any fruit. Another reason for the declining use of the fruit is that, as agricultural production became stable, new kinds of food were introduced into rural areas.

- Implications and impacts on future research

It is evident that, until the 1980s, *ivhula* fruit played an important role in the food of the Nhiya people. This appears to be the most likely reason why the *ivhula* trees remained uncut.

In interviewing the Nhiya people about their use of *ivhula*, I asked them, “When did you stop eating *ikambi*?” Some replied, “We haven’t stopped yet. If we get fruit, we make *ikambi* and eat it.” This implies that *ikambi* is not considered to be a food of the past. Nevertheless, many of the children said that they had never eaten *ikambi* and that they disliked the smell of the fruit.

In recent years, some of the *ivhula* trees have recovered from the pest infestation and appear likely to bear fruit again. Every year, however, these trees are cut in small amounts for firewood. I believe that an examination of the modern roles of *ivhula* in terms of its use as edible fruit and as fuel is needed.

Reference

White, F. 1983 *The vegetation of Africa: a descriptive memoir to accompany the UNESCO/AETFAT/UNSO vegetation map of Africa*. UNESCO. Paris.



Picture 2 Pounding *ivhula* fruit with a pestle.



Picture 3 Splitting the seed.

The seed is placed on the edge of an ax and is then struck with a block of wood to split it.