

Barbets' Duet

*Barbets are tropical birds related to woodpeckers & toucans.
Some Afrotropical barbets sing in duet, creating the sound of one voice.¹*

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NOTES OF MEETINGS IN JULY & AUGUST 2006 *Vermont, USA; Nairobi, Kampala & Kisumu, East Africa*

Dear all:

I want to thank you for spending time with me when I was in East Africa and Vermont (where I saw Anne Outwater, normally in TZ). I also want to thank everyone for endorsing the Barbets idea. I don't know where it will lead, or how far we will get, but we seem to be on to something important. The excitement we all feel seems to come from two sources: the value of African knowledge & the opportunity to build on that knowledge in a self-reliant and economically beneficial way.

Who's who (alphabetical order)

I have addressed this email to everyone I spoke with at length in July and August about this idea. Nearly everyone included in this email is someone I met through SID, East Africa, for which SID should be thanked! More specifically:

Abdul Ndifuna: Kampala resident; micro-biologist & environmentalist, works in the Uganda Bureau of Standards, from eastern side of Uganda (Busoga?)

Anne Outwater: Dar resident, from USA, author of Dar "Nature Notes"; currently writing up her PhD on causes of death in Dar; working with young men from coastal fishing villages.

Charles Onyango-Obbo: Nairobi resident, Nation Group managing editor, from Mbale, Uganda.

Dick Nyai: Kampala resident, writer, politician, from Arua, Northern Uganda.

Fred Gori: Nairobi resident, trained environmentalist, doing PR work with Nation Group, from Western Kenya.

Oby Obyerodhyambo: Nairobi resident, actor, director & playwright, working in HIV/AIDs, started Abila - a small project in Kisumu, Kenya, and helped develop the current Barbets thinking.

Sammy Muvelah: Nairobi resident: economist, investment manager at Zimele Asset Management, Nairobi. Interested in developing a financial instrument we could use.

Sophia Apio Kerwegi: Kampala resident, botanist, director of the National Chemotherapeutic Laboratory, from north Uganda (but I can't remember exactly where). Sophia was interviewed as part of the SID scenarios work, but not in the team.

¹ Photos: red and yellow barbet, Tarangire, Tanzania, <http://www.birdingafrica.net/page69.html>. See "A review of duetting, sociality and speciation in some African barbets (capitonidae)" in *Condor* 85:323-332 © The Cooper Ornithological Society 1983.
<http://Elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Condor/files/issues/v085n03/p0323-p0332.pdf>

The people copied on this email are folks who helped develop the Barbet thinking over the past year or two, but were not involved in the conversations in July and August. Aidan Eyakuze is from Tanzania, currently managing the SID East African scenarios project. Arthur Muliro, Kenyan, is based with SID in Rome and the person who introduced all of us to each other by beginning the scenarios work. Duncan Okello manages the SID East Africa office and various projects in Nairobi. Gladys Kirungi looks after SID in Uganda and is also acting as a postbox for Dick Nyai. Andre Zaaiman is a South African colleague who is interested in starting a Barbet site in the Karoo. Bill Colquhoun and DeAnne Julius are friends and business colleagues I met through Shell here in London. Bill was involved in Shell's chemical businesses and DeAnne is an economist who has worked with various multinational companies in the UK.

Between us we have a fantastic collection of knowledge, talents and skills from both the Western and African traditions.

Key points

Knowledge exists, but there is also a generation gap, with younger Africans less knowledgeable than their elders.

In Kampala, we discussed the knowledge being lost and the fact that many of the younger generation take no interest in the knowledge of their elders. One idea we had was that younger people are brought into the project by asking them to use new information technology to record the environmental health and biodiversity of learning centres, while the older people are asked to share the knowledge they have with the younger ones.

Learning centres: The idea of learning centres is a strong one that people can easily imagine.

Anne Outwater is developing a small fishing/monitoring project and can see that being a learning centre. In Kampala, Dick Nyai, Abdul Ndifuna and Sophia Apio and I discussed the Barbets idea for an hour or so. Each person drew on the example of his/her own home place or her work in villages to imagine how things might develop. In Nairobi, Charles Onyango-Obbo talked about his village which has been heavily polluted by sulphur, thanks to mining in the area. He thought that could be a learning site. Oby has started Abila, a small project in Kisumu which he describes as a demonstration centre. Abila was the inspiration for learning centres. Oby argues that people only adopt new practices when they can see they are useful.

Sophia Apio illustrated the potential of learning centres with several examples from her own work in herbal medicine. When she visits a village, she starts by asking people what illnesses they have and how they treat them. She also asks how these illnesses were treated in the past. These questions discover existing knowledge and re-discover disused knowledge of medicinal plants. In exchange, Sophia shares the knowledge she has by treating people with remedies she knows.

Preconditions and principles for participating as a learning centre need to be defined.

This issue came up several times. Sammy Muvelah raised it first, saying it was important to establish clear preconditions for participation. He included the following:

- A capacity for agreement
- Continuity of people involved
- Opportunity for 'quick wins' to show the value of the idea
- Clear property rights, or the ability to agree on them.

In Kampala, other preconditions were identified.

- Clear incentives, i.e. a reason to participate and to share knowledge – this could be financial returns or recognition of knowledge and participation.
- People who have knowledge.
- An ability to share knowledge.
- An agreement to protect knowledge.

Two key questions came out of the Kampala discussion:

- What are the principles for participation as a learning centre?
- How do you choose a learning site?

Abdul Ndifuna raised a third issue:

- At what scale would a learning site operate? An individual's own property? A village? A district?

Clear property rights are needed & intellectual property needs protection.

Sammy Muvelah noted that for any market mechanism to work, there must be clear property rights. These rights do not need to follow the Western model of property rights, but need to be clearly understood and agreed.²

There is also an issue of intellectual property rights. This came up in Sophia's work with medicinal plants. She had been publishing her findings on traditional medicinal plants and their chemical properties. However, this knowledge was often taken by others who patented it and took it out of the public domain. Sophia has therefore stopped publishing her work. Her work raises an additional question about rights: how can African knowledge be protected from theft and exploitation?

The Barbets' Duet will discover a variety of new products to sell.

When I first imagined the Barbets' Duet, I was looking for a way to pay people who maintain or increase both wild and agricultural biodiversity – both of which are not rewarded by markets today. However, after our discussion with Sophia, it is clear we may also discover new marketable products – like the 'weed' Sophia showed us that makes an anti-viral tea. How can these markets be developed in a way consistent with the wider goals of the Barbets' Duet: to increase biodiversity and environmental health while also increasing social equity and rural incomes?

Financial instruments to support biodiversity can be developed.

Sammy Muvelah said he would help us design an appropriate financial tool, and thought it would not be that difficult, although I suspect it may be harder than he imagines. As we spoke, Sammy immediately began thinking of analogous financial products that might serve as a model for what we want to achieve. As I meet people here in London, I will ask about any useful financial products developed elsewhere. The Katoomba Group website (see below) has already started thinking along similar lines.

Moving forward

Various ideas on what to do next came up, as follows.

Kampala: on-line discussion of two questions:

1. What are the principles of participation as a learning centre?

² In my book, *Feeling for Stones*, African property rights are described as 'mosaic rights' – because different people have rights to different things on the same hectare of land at different times for different purposes. Western societies, on the other hand, use 'column rights', where land is enclosed with fences. The person who owns the land inside the fence owns everything that has been enclosed, including everything above and below the surface – hence a 'column' of rights.

Column rights have been good at increasing production of selected crops and at increasing individual wealth. However, mosaic rights seem to be better at maintaining biodiversity and better at achieving social equity. While modern industrial markets are based on 'column rights', it is possible that ecological markets will need to invent a system of mosaic rights. It is my hope that the Barbets' Duet will discover whether a modern system of mosaic rights markets can be created and used to increase biodiversity, environmental health and rural incomes.

2. How do we choose a learning site, including what pre-conditions need to be met in order to be chosen?

I will start this discussion off with a separate email.

Fred Gori – Nation Group column on African knowledge

According to Fred, the Nation Group would welcome a proposal for support. They already support the Aberdares Park fence and are keenly interested in environmental issues.

In the meantime, I suggested to Fred that they start a regular column which makes African knowledge respectable. This could include stories submitted by readers of how things are done in various parts of East Africa, including an explanation of why they are done that way. Fred asked if I would be willing to write something, and I suggested writing a piece on different systems of property rights, especially a comparison of mosaic rights and column rights. Oby and Fred will be meeting in Nairobi sometime soon.

Abdul Ndifuna – more conversation

Abdul was rushed without warning into the meeting with Sophia Apio and Dick Nyai, as he had not been able to check his email. He and I will try to get together again to discuss ideas in more detail.

Test the basic ideas with others in East Africa

I have attached a two-page description of the Barbets' Duet idea as it now stands. At the moment, it has my name and email at the top, but please feel free to circulate it to others and also feel free to put your own name and email at the top, if it makes sense to you. However, if you make a major changes, can you send a copy to the rest of us?

Test the basic ideas with people in the UK and USA

I will be testing the basic thinking with people here in the North, both in the UK and when I am next in the USA, which might not be until the end of the year. I hope to talk with people working in climate markets and in business, as well as a few NGOs interested in this area.

Katoomba Group

One group I have heard about is the Katoomba Group. Their website is very interesting, but they seem to be approaching this issue from the lofty heights of international organisations. I have asked to meet with Justin Mundy who is a member of the group and also works with Climate Change Capital here in London. With any luck, I will be able to arrange a meeting with him when Aidan Eyakuze is in London in late September.

Their website is: <http://www.katoombagroup.org/whoweare.htm> Please let me know what you think.

In conclusion

Zimele Asset Management was founded eight years ago by Tony Dzuya, whom several of us knew. He died shortly after the company began. One of my personal worries about starting the Barbets' Duet has been creating something that is overly dependent on one person for its survival. I asked Sammy Muvelah for his advice, based on the experience of Zimele. He said it was important to choose partners carefully, to work with people who were interested for the long term, who could be trusted and were strong autonomous individuals, capable of moving things forward on their own. By those standards, we are already off to a good start.

Thanks again,

*Barbara Heinzen
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London*