

Commiphora africana**Burseraceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Ammess; **Digo:** Chibambara; **Gabra:** Hammeessa; **Giriama:** Musishwi; **Kamba:** Kitungu, Ndungu (fruit); **Luo:** Arupien, Arupiny; **Maasai:** Osilalei; **Marakwet:** Chotwa; **Pokot:** Katagh, Mindarotwo, Mundorotwo; **Samburu:** Lcheningiro; **Somali:** Hammes sagara; **Swahili:** Mbambara, Mkororo, Mponda, Mturituri; **Taita:** Mwagari, Mwagori; **Turkana:** Ekadeli.

DESCRIPTION: A spiny deciduous shrub or tree to 10 m.

Without leaves for many months, branchlets thorn-tipped. BARK: Grey-green, peeling to show green

below, when cut a sap which hardens to a yellowish

resin is produced. LEAVES: Soft, hairy and bright green, compound with 3 leaflets, edge wavy, fragrant when

crushed, central leaflet much longer than the other 2.

FLOWERS: Small, red, in tight clusters, often on

thorns, on the bare tree. FRUIT: Pink-red, soft, about 1 cm, pointed, stony seed inside.

ECOLOGY: Widely distributed in the drier parts of Africa from Senegal east to Somalia and south to South Africa. Mainly in the low, drier parts of Kenya where it is common in *Acacia-Commiphora* bushland. Soils varied, but mainly red clay, sandy clay and on rocky ground. Rainfall: 400–1,000 mm. Agroclimatic Zones IV–VII.

USES: Firewood, carving, furniture (stools, headrests), utensils (wooden spoons, milk containers), water troughs, edible fruit, edible juicy young root, edible resin (chewed), drink (tea from bark), medicine (roots, bark, resin, fruits, twigs), fodder (young shoots for camels and goats), ornamental, resin (gum for arrows), live fence, toothbrushes, insecticide, beads.

PROPAGATION: Large cuttings.

SEED: Propagated only by cuttings.

MANAGEMENT: Slow growing; lopping.

REMARKS: Leaves contain bitter tannin and so they are not browsed by cattle, but important fodder for camels and goats. It comes into leaf just before the rains. Good for live fences and as beehive posts. The roots of young

plants are chewed for their sweet taste and to quench thirst (Kamba, Maasai, Pokot). Resin eaten (Maasai, Pokot, Turkana). The bark is used to make a red tea (Pokot, Turkana). Stems used as toothbrushes (Rendille, Kamba).

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Katende et al., 1995; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002; von Maydell, 1990.

