

Saba comorensis

(Boj.) Pichon

Apocynaceae

LOCAL NAMES

English (rubber vine); Swahili (mpira,mbungo)

BOTANIC DESCRIPTION

Saba comorensis is a strong forest liana up to 20 m long on other trees. Stem lenticillate and exuding a white sticky latex when cut.

Leaves ovate or elliptic, base rounded or subcordate, apex obtuse or rounded, 7-16 x 4-8.5 cm, glabrous.

Flowers fragrant, borne in many short stalked terminal or axillary corymbs. Corolla tubular, throat yellow, petals white.

Fruit subglobose 4-8 cm long and 3.5-6 cm wide, pitted, greenish when young, turning orange-yellow after ripening. Fruit pulp yellow.

Seeds numerous, brown-black and coated with orange-yellow pulp.

The specific epithet refers to the Comoros Islands.

BIOLOGY

S. comorensis does not fruit every year; moreover flowering time is not regular among populations. In Tanzania the species flowers between February and November. Fruit maturing is from December-May. The seed is dispersed by birds and monkeys.



Saba comorensis fruit (Patrick Maundu)



Saba comorensis (Patrick Maundu)



Saba comorensis (Patrick Maundu)

ECOLOGY

S. comorensis is very abundant in undisturbed forests, coastal areas and around the Great lakes region of Africa. The liana is very rare in open areas. It commonly associates with *Antiaris toxicaria*, *Milicia excelsa*, *Khaya nyasica*, *Pachystela brevipes*, *P. msolo*, *Sterculia appendiculata*, *Sorindeia madagascariensis*, *Trema orientalis* and *Ficus* spp.

BIOPHYSICAL LIMITS

Altitude: 0-1 250 m

Mean annual temperature: 20 deg C

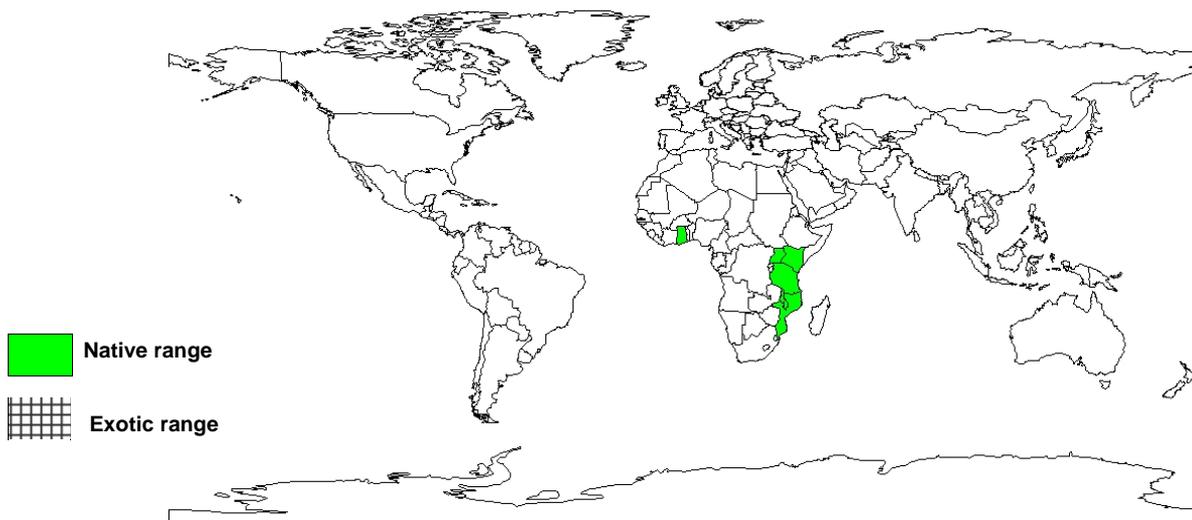
Mean annual rainfall: 900-2 000 mm

Soil type: Grows on a variety of soils (gritty sandy clay loams - dark grey compacted loamy soils)

DOCUMENTED SPECIES DISTRIBUTION

Native: Comoros, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda

Exotic:



The map above shows countries where the species has been planted. It does neither suggest that the species can be planted in every ecological zone within that country, nor that the species can not be planted in other countries than those depicted. Since some tree species are invasive, you need to follow biosafety procedures that apply to your planting site.

PRODUCTS

Food: The fruit pulp is edible, commonly found in market places. A refreshing sour drink can be made from the fruit. There is an export potential as the fruit does not rot easily.

Apiculture: The flowers provide nectar.

Timber: Stems are used in hut building.

Latex or rubber: The stem yields latex which is used as an inferior rubber.

Medicine: Bark decoction used in treating rheumatism. Fruits sucked for oral thrush in Kenya.

SERVICES

Erosion control: This vine is riparian and prevents river bank soil erosion.

Ornamental: A beautiful liane for shady gardens, flowers beautiful and fragrant.

Boundary or barrier or support: Can serve as a live fence.

TREE MANAGEMENT

The vine coppices on cutting the main stem.

GERMPLASM MANAGEMENT

Mature fruit never falls and must be collected once yellow in colour. For easy germination the seeds need de-pulping by hand and cleaning in water.

The germination success rate is well over 90% and starts 12 days after sowing. Germination is uniform and hypogeal. Passage through animal gut greatly improves germination.

FURTHER READNG

FAO. 1983. Food and fruit bearing forest species. 1: Examples from Eastern Africa. FAO Forestry Paper. 44/1. Rome.

Maundu PM et al. 1999. Traditional food plants of Kenya. National Museums of Kenya.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Orwa C, Mutua A , Kindt R , Jamnadass R, Simons A. 2009. Agroforestry Database:a tree reference and selection guide version 4.0 (<http://www.worldagroforestry.org/af/treedb/>)