



RESPONSE TO ARTICLE “THE DEMISE OF THE  
LARGEST AND OLDEST BAOBAB TREES”

13<sup>th</sup> June 2018

In a paper published in the journal Nature Plants in June 2018<sup>1</sup>, a causal link was made between the death of several very old baobab trees in southern Africa and climate change. As the members of the African Baobab Alliance, an organization established to promote the growth of the baobab industry for the benefit of baobab harvesters across Africa, we have been asked to give our opinion.

This article has had wide-reaching publicity and we are concerned that it has created the false impression that baobabs as a whole are threatened, and that this could have a negative impact on the thousands of rural African harvesters who depend on the sale of baobab fruit to sustain their livelihoods. Many years of work have been devoted to establishing baobab fruit supply chains that are fair trade, organic and sustainable, and it would be catastrophic if this work was undone.

Whilst we have no doubt that climate change is a very real phenomenon, and that the resultant increase in the frequency and severity of droughts in Africa has had serious negative impacts on vegetation, this does not in itself imply that the baobab population in Africa is under threat. We are very saddened to hear that the five individual baobab trees described in this paper have collapsed or died in the last decade. However, they were all selected for study because of their great age, and it is also therefore true that they were probably close to the end of their natural lifespan. This may have been exacerbated by exceptionally dry conditions, but it should not be interpreted to mean that baobabs as a whole are endangered.

The African baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) is a highly adaptable and widespread tree that occurs in a range of different habitats and climatic zones across the continent. Several country-level studies undertaken within the last decade (e.g the research conducted in Zimbabwe by Bio-Innovation Zimbabwe in 2014) have consistently concluded that baobab populations are healthy and sustainable.

Like all vegetation in African, baobab trees are potentially threatened by climate change. However, the threat is no lesser or greater than for other African tree species. Furthermore, the consumption of baobab fruit products contribute to their long term conservation and sustainable management by giving rural communities powerful economic incentives to look after them. The members of the African Baobab Alliance would like to therefore reassure baobab enthusiasts that they are free to continue consuming baobab products, safe in the knowledge that the baobab population is healthy.

For further information on the African Baobab Alliance, please see the following:

[www.africanbaobaballiance.org](http://www.africanbaobaballiance.org)

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<sup>1</sup> “The Demise of the Largest and Oldest Baobabs” Patrut, A. et al, Nature Plants June 2018