

## African Proverb of the Month October, 2010

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*Ate alé mwiono hisumbelo lya manyonyi.* (Bembe)  
*Mti ulio juu ya mlima (mbugani) ni pahali pa mkutano wa ndege.* (Swahili)  
*Un arbre sur la colline dans une savane est une place de rencontre pour les oiseaux.* (French)  
*A tree on a hill in the savannah is a meeting place for birds.* (English)

Bembe ( [Democratic Republic of Congo - DRC](#) , [Tanzania](#) ) Proverb

### Background, Explanation, Meaning and Everyday Use

A savannah or savanna (grasslands with some plants and trees) is considered as a place where most animals would like to be. Carnivorous animals such as lion, leopard and cheetah will frequently visit the savannah because this is where they can easily catch their prey. Herbivorous animals such as antelope, buffalo, wildebeest and zebra take it as a gift from the Creator as their only source of fresh grass. Snakes, frogs and flies also dearly recognize the benefit of this place. Besides being their food reserve, most of these animals enjoy the savannah because they can easily see both their enemies and prey from a distance due to the shortness of its vegetation that is comprised mostly with grass. This gives them time to take action quickly.

Birds feel unsafe to rush into these grasslands as they are also targeted by some of the animals mentioned above. They would like a higher place such as a tree on a hill where they can first rest on its branches in order to watch before getting down. When a danger occurs, birds will first rush to a nearby tree to see what exactly is happening. Besides that, both birds and trees are seen as foreigners in the savannah due to their migration habits and their size respectively. According to the Bembe culture a tree belongs to a forest. Birds have developed a strong relationship with trees since they use trees branches to built their nest and lay their eggs. So they must know each other well.

### Biblical Parallels

*Psalms 1: 3:* "They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper."

*Matthew 25:34-35:* "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'"

### Contemporary Use and Religious Application

In this Bembe proverb a tree can symbolize any person who has settled in a foreign land for a

while and birds symbolize visitors from where he or she originated. This proverb is use to advise people like me (a Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC] citizen living in Kenya) who live in a foreign land not to be selfish and rude to visitors from home, but to be kind enough by helping them with guidance and hospitality, even if it's something you cannot afford. So do what you can. For example, most visitors from my area in DRC who come to Nairobi, Kenya for business, transit or for medication would feel safe to consult me first in order to get a nice taxi driver, an affordable hotel and or hospital because I am the only one close to them who is familiar with this place. They trust me.

This proverb also reminds us of the priority of promoting ecology, the environment and stewardship of the land. It is used as the June, 2011 proverb on the theme of "Planting Trees" in the *2011 African Proverbs Calendar* that has the overall theme of "Climate Change, Ecology and the Environment."

**NOTE:** This proverb is No. 35 in the booklet *A Collection of 100 Bembe Proverbs. A Collection and Interpretation of Bembe Proverbs in Bembe, English and French* by Allan Babunga, Nairobi: Privately Printed, October, 2010. This is one booklet in the series of

***Endangered African Proverbs Collections***

. It is posted as an Ebook on our website at:

<http://afriprov.org/index.php/resources/e-books.html>

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