

# COMMUNITY MUSEUMS SAFEGUARDING UGANDA'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



*Bigwala trumpet music and dance, Male-Child-cleansing ceremony, Madi bow-lyre music and dance, Empaako naming ceremony, Koo-gere tradition and Bark cloth-making.*

2021



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# 1 Introduction



The notion of cultural heritage is considered to be constantly evolving given the need for it to survive and be embraced by new generations. Today, cultural heritage, unlike in the past, is considered to include several dimensions such as the “software” (the non-physical aspects of culture); usually manifested through oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, festive events, knowledge and skills used to produce traditional crafts.

The inscription of the above elements on the UNESCO lists was an initiative of the respective communities. They identified these elements as very important, but threatened by extinction. Nomination files were collaboratively prepared by the communities, the state party and the National Commission for UNESCO (UNATCOM) and other relevant authorities.

It is important to note that after the inscription of the above ICH elements, many factors and actors; their roles and responsibilities came at play. The inscribed elements became heritages for the entire humanity and their safeguarding guaranteed to a certain extent through publicity, visibility and funding from the International Assistance specifically, the Fund for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The roles and responsibilities of the state party are clearly defined to include among others, to take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the ICH elements present in its territory; apply or domesticate the conventions; periodically provide reports on the implementation of the conventions relevant to the ICH elements and develop relevant infrastructure to support cultural tourism related to ICH elements.

While fragile, intangible cultural heritage is an important factor in the process of safeguarding and promoting our cultural identities and diversities in the face of growing globalisation. Understanding and appreciating the intangible cultural heritage of Uganda’s diverse communities does not only help to promote intercultural dialogue, it also provides spaces and opportunities for mutual respect and empathy for other people’s ways of life.

Although at a slow pace, some of Uganda’s cultural heritage aspects, both tangible and intangible are being recognized at the global level. The tangible elements that have attained international recognition include the Kasubi Royal Tombs, the Rwenzori Mountains National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable

National Park. The currently recognized number of ICH elements from Uganda at the international level double the number of the tangible elements. These include the Empaako Naming Ceremony among the Banyoro and Batooro, the Bigwala Trumpets and Music of the Basoga, Madi Bow-lyre Music Instrument of the Madi community, the Koogere Oral Tradition of the Batooro and Basongora, the Bark Cloth Making among the Baganda and the Child Cleansing Ceremony among the Lango people. Details of each element are presented under chapter three.

To members of the local community, inscription of the ICH elements on the UNESCO list implies development – in terms of infrastructure, social services industry, employment and income generation through cultural tourism.

It is however, important that communities take into account the likely negative externalities associated with ICH elements that have attained a global spotlight. Some of the common risks related to inscribed elements include the de-contextualization of the ICH elements –where ownership, significance and interpretation could be viewed differently by different communities; disconnection between the ICH elements and their native communities and altering, simplification or parading of ICH elements to cater for tastes and preferences of foreign visitors.

This publication which is accompanied by a film, highlights the role of the community (s) and museums in the safeguarding of the six ICH elements. Unlike the publicity materials produced for the individual elements during the inscription, this publication and film combine all the six elements and highlights the role of the community and the local museums to collectively safeguard the ICH elements. It is expected that the film and publication will enhance the appreciation of the ICH elements in question within the local communities, within agencies such as the media, government and policymakers; tourism operators as well as religious institutions.

To make this publication simple for the readers to navigate, it has been structured around four key thematic areas: the UCOMA project supported by UNESCO under which this publication is produced, the six ICH elements, information about UCOMA as an organisation and the recommendations.

## 2. The UCOMA project supported by UNESCO



Since May 2020, the Uganda community museums Association (UCOMA) has been implementing a project whose main goal is to strengthen the capacity of community museums as spaces for learning to promote inscribed ICH. One of the main activities of the project was to produce a publication and film as an important strategy to collectively raise the profile of the six ICH elements not only in their communities but also at national and international levels. Five community museums of the Kigulu Cultural Museum, Koogere Foundation, Cultural Assets Centre, Madi Community Museum and Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi Community Museum were part of the project. Details about each of these museums are described in chapter four. The project has enhanced networking and collectiveness among the five community museums in the safeguarding of our important but diverse cultural heritage resources.

The project also revealed that the ICH elements were a source of respect and prestige; the communities treasure them with pride as unifying factors. These elements help the different communities to identify themselves, the Madi for instance, are spread in Uganda and South Sudan but they are all united by the bow-lyre instrument and music which is shared across borders.

During the implementation of the project, it became clear that sustaining the safeguarding of the ICH elements by community museums required significant resources both financial and human. Therefore, community museums need to engage in cultural enterprises that generate income and also continue to engage young people probably as interns at the museums if they are to sustain efforts to safeguard the elements.

### 3. The Community Museums safeguarding the UNESCO inscribed ICH elements





### 3 (a) The Bigwala gourd trumpet music and dance of the Busoga kingdom



*Bigwala Trumpet music and dance troupe organising to perform*



*A set of Bigwala music and Dance*



The Bigwala music and dance is a practice among the people of Busoga in Eastern Uganda across the River Nile, which probably dates back 300 years ago. Sources say that it started in Busiki Chiefdom (currently Namutumba district), at Bubago Village in Nsiinze Sub-county. One of the family members, Mr. Lugolole, migrated to Nabirere village, in Bugweri Chiefdom, now the current seat of the element and from there, it spread to other areas of Busoga, such as Bumpingu, Naluko, Nakisenhe and Nasuti.

Bigwala (Plural), Kigwala (Singular), is a trumpet music that is played using gourd like pieces, performed by a team of 5-15 players; every player produces a different melody. However, the playing of this music significantly reduced in all other places, save for Nabirere, where a troupe exists to date.

It is mainly performed during royal celebrations to announce the arrival and departure of the chief, coronation functions and of recent on social gatherings. The fruit is picked when fully grown, shaped into a trumpet, assembled and blown to produce five different melodies which are:

1. 'Endumirizi' - (highest tone)
2. 'Endeesi' - (high tone)
3. 'Endeeta' - (medium tone)
4. 'Endasaasi' - (low tone)
5. 'Empala' - (lowest tone)

Making the instrument starts with the picking of ripen and or dried fruits from a pumpkin-like climbing plant. They are cut and shaped in different sizes and shapes. They are joined according to sizes, to produce different melodies. Using the leaves of a rough plant, 'Ekiseenho', and of recent, the sand paper, the cut pieces are made smooth and with the help of water, they are joined to form a desired instrument.

To produce the low tones and have the different shapes, another fruit, 'Namulewu', from another pumpkin family but edible is applied in the middle or at the end of the music instrument. When the pieces are fully connected and the five melodies catered for, the group eats a meal that comprises of millet

and matooke as food and simsim or groundnut paste as source, depending on the economic status, a goat or a cock is slaughtered. After the meal, the team leader faces the Bunyoro (West) and blows one of the instruments made, thus launching the troupe. Why Bunyoro? Most of the royal chiefs of Busoga came from Bunyoro.

After the launching blow, the players form a circle and begin the performance moving around. This trumpet music is accompanied by a set of drums; the Long drum ('Omugalabe'), small drum ('Enduumi') and the big drum. They sing songs that talk about marriage, drought, harvest and social life in general.

The women join the circle, placing themselves in between the men playing the Bigwala, answering the song, dancing and sounding the ululation, making the performance vibrant and very interesting. This Bigwala are blown by men only and only after a meal, as it requires some energy.

This music was inscribed by UNESCO in 2012 on the list for the elements that need urgent safeguarding. The Bigwala play a key role in maintaining Busoga's collective memory, cultural values and social unity. Involving the performance by 5 or more gourd trumpet players, each producing a single tone blown in hocket to produce a melody, community member of all ages participate freely singing, dancing and forming a circular movement around the other instrument players; drums, xylophones and long drums, etc. The gourds are a form of entertainment that attract big crowds and they are the only form of entertainment played for pleasure, unlike others that can be played even during sad moments.

Ever since its inscription, a number of activities have been done to promote the element and one of these is to encourage the planting of the Kiwala and Namulewu plants. Further research indicates that the Kigwala plant has other uses that include: the roots can be used as medicine given to women under labour pain, it is believed to facilitate the labour process; dried fruits can be used as shakers during music performances; they can be used to carry water; cut pieces can be used as plates and farm manure can be produced from leaves.

The Bigwala music is facing the challenge of competition from other economically viable plants, to which the Basoga have put most emphasis, abandoning the Kigwala Plant.

Kigulu Cultural Museum proposes to boost the promotion of the element through a number of ways including but not limited to: distribution of the seeds to potential growers; publicizing and promoting the medicinal part of this plant; advocating for the schools to include the Bigwala trumpet music

into their curriculum; transmitting the music to the youths through social media; Facebook, Instagram, posters, flyers, bill boards, etc; introducing an annual culture day; and incorporating the Bigwala trumpet with other forms of traditional music.

However, there are other communities in Uganda, the Baganda, the Banyoro, the Madi, and others who play Bigwala Trumpet music although the cultural attachments are varied.

### 3 (b) The Male child cleansing ceremony among the people of Lango



The Male Child only gets out of the house covering his head with a winnower



As part of the ceremony, a special meal is prepared and eaten at the doorway as soon as they come out of the house



For the 3 days the boy stays with his mother in the hut, he has to sit on her just like a newly born baby



The male child cleansing ceremony, sometimes called, returning the boy child into the house ('dwoko atin awobi iot), is a ceremony among the people of Lango, in Northern Uganda that is performed to rectify an anomaly of impotence among themselves.

The Lango people are Nilotes who migrated from Ethiopia, just like the Karimaajong, Masai, Kalenjin and others and settled in the central plains of Northern Uganda. Due to their hunting and fighting skills, the Lango people captured Luo women and turned them into wives, where these Luo women taught their children the Luo language, something that has made the Lango to forget their 'Ateker' language and are now among the Luo speaking communities yet they are not of the Luo origin.

As a fighting community, they treasured the producing of children as very important and any anomaly that hindered reproduction was addressed there and then, without more soldiers being born, survival would be impossible.

According to the Lango people, anomaly among men was caused by any of the two;

- i. People with evil intentions could use spirits to kill the manhood of the boy leading to impotency.
- ii. Innocent human error by his mother or any other lady touching the genitals of the child before it makes 3 days, may be while bathing the kid; it is an abomination for the mother to touch the genital of a baby boy, especially in the first 3 days.

The parents/community identified the anomaly when the child's organ exhibited dormancy, never erecting, the boy not showing interest in girls (during puberty) and sometimes the boy/man mentioned it. Such boys/men were summoned and their sexuality details probed.

Where it is assumed the boy's genitals were touched by the mother, then the ceremony of "Taking the baby back to the house" was performed and procedure was:

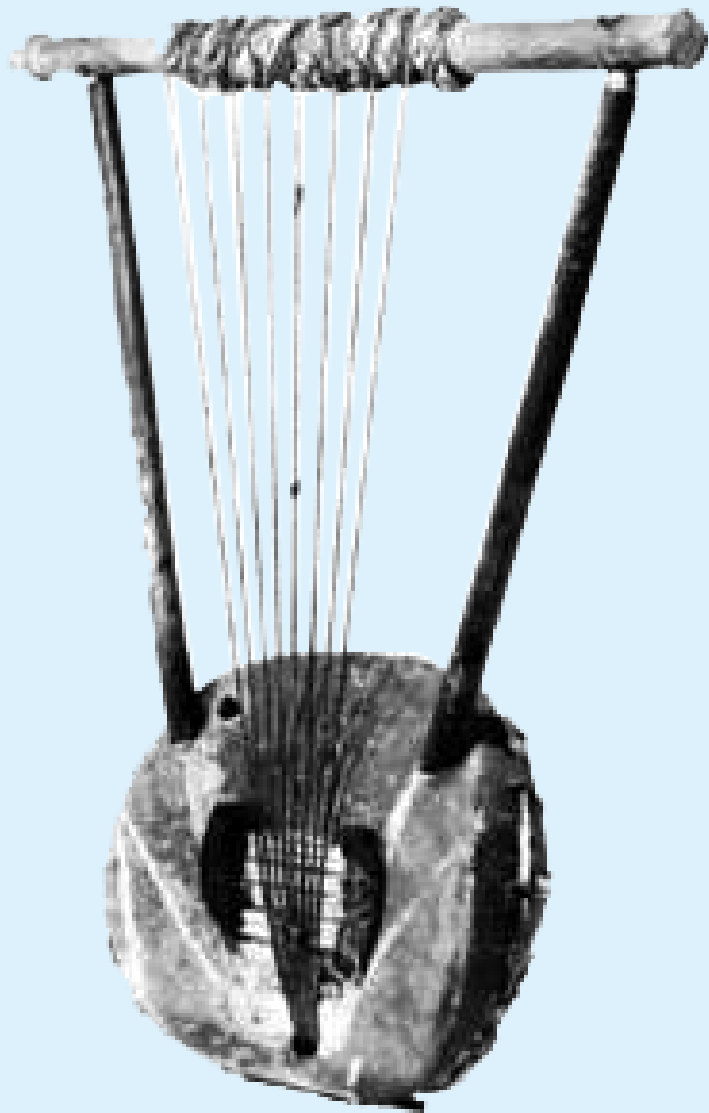
- i. Identify a typical Lango home, preferably the homestead of the child/boy/man to be cleansed
- ii. The mother (if still alive) or an aunt would go back to the house with the child/boy/man, depending on the age, poorly dressed, in most cases, in pajamas. They stay in the hut for 3 days and the child/boy/man would sit on the laps of the mother/aunt, just like the baby boy is held at infancy.
- iii. If the child/boy/man has to move out, may be for a bath and or latrine facility, he has to cover his head with a winnow (Odero); it is used to separate husks from grain, as such it is assumed to filter dirt from the child/boy/man being cleansed.
- iv. On the 3rd day, a ceremony to bring out the child/boy/man is performed. A dish of grounded pigeon peas (Apena), mixed with sim-sim and shea butter and millet bread is prepared. Millet brew (Kongo Lango) for a few elders to attend is also prepared and served to welcome the child/boy/man from the birth chambers.
- v. Before coming out, the child/boy/man is smeared with the grounded pigeon paste on the fore head, chest and shoulders in a ceremony called 'Gwello' meaning, free him from inhibiting.
- vi. With the feasting, the cultural rite is over, the child/boy/man presumed to have been cleansed, is expected to have normalized/cured from the inhibitions associated with touching the genitals of the baby boy ('Mulo Atin).

In addition to restoring the child's manhood, the ceremony promotes reconciliation and the social status of the child is pronounced.

Due to limited practices the viability of this element is being affected and with the fact that many of the bearers are aging and the practice increasingly performed in secrecy for fear of excommunication hindering its promotion.

Lango Cultural Foundation has started radio talk shows through which this information is made to reach out to the youths and hope to start a community museum whose space can be used to promote the element.

### 3 (c) The Ma'di Bowl lyre ('Odi') music and dance



*The Bowl lyre music and dance instrument (O'DI)*



*A special meal is prepared by women while the men are making a Bowl Lyre, an O'di*



*The owner of the newly made Bowl Lyre shakes it first, giving it respect, and plays it first.*

The Madi bowl lyre music and dance or 'Odi' is documented at the Madi Community Museum located at Metu Trading Centre, Pameri Parish, Metu Sub County in Moyo District, West Nile region. The practitioners are however, from Adjumani, Moyo and Nimule in South Sudan.

The Madi bowl lyre music and dance or 'Odi' is a cultural instrument originally associated with Madi people of Uganda and South Sudan. The instrument was inscribed on UNESCO list of ICH in need of urgent safeguarding in 2016. As a cultural practice of the Madi people of Uganda and South Sudan, it is passed on to young people by the community's elders. The songs and dances involved in the tradition are performed for various purposes, including weddings, political rallies, to celebrate good harvests, educate children, resolve conflict or mourn the passing of loved ones. The instrument is also played to celebrate victory (after winning a tribal war).

The "Odi" instrument is made of tortoise shell which acts as sound chamber, three short sticks act as the frame work that brings the shape, five - seven strings (made from sisal, nylon or animal tissues), skin or hides are used to cover the tortoise shell and two small horns obtained from duiker, antelope or gazelle are fixed on top of the short sticks.

The production of the instrument is marked by several rituals and blessed by special meal. The pebbles and pieces of soft broom taken from the quarrelsome woman's compound are placed inside the base of the bowl lyre to act as shakers and produce sound similar to that of a quarrelsome woman. A special name is given to each Odi instrument made, such as; 'Odu', 'Tenyitia', 'Nya-Lobe', 'Nya-Tulungwa' 'Nya-Voro' 'kareo' 'Kare-Moi' and 'Nyi-Tema'. The makers of the instrument have to pray to their ancestors to ensure that the instrument produces audible and melodious sound and a special meal that comprises of *Lendrukpwe ilurule anyu iddi si rii*" – (pounded pease pasted with simsim), "*Dukwi linya*" – (millet bread) and "*Iza okpolo*" – (smoked meat) is prepared and served before a new instrument is used.

The instrument is shaken before and after playing to show respect to the "Odi". The person shaking it will always say short phrase in Ma'di ti; 'Odi otu a ku' meaning 'don't deny me your melodious sound'. The instrument is played by both men and women.

The traditional practice is a tool for strengthening family ties and clan unity, as well as educating the young generations about their community's history, values and culture.

The type of music accompanying Bowl lyre are traditional folk songs and are always in local language of Madi (Ma'di ti) that kept the dance original for Madi people up to now

The Ma'di bowl lyre is currently faced with some challenges. There is a poor attitude by some youths towards playing bowl lyre instrument as their interest is largely captured by modern music instruments. Inadequate funding from government towards supporting community museums which play an important role in safeguarding our heritage. Currently there are a few elders with production and playing skills which threatens the survival of the instrument. There are restrictions by the Uganda Wildlife Authority on the killing of tortoises, duikers, antelopes and gazelles whose body parts are used in the production of Ma'di bowl lyre music and dance instrument.

Amidst the above challenges, the Madi community museum will continue to devise means of safeguarding the instrument and its values. It will consider engaging elders to use other materials such as wood in place of tortoise shell as trees are readily available to provide wood required to make Odi. The museum management have planned training of young people through school heritage clubs in making of Odi and playing it so that the culture transmitted to the young generations. The museum will continue to keep and display Odi in the museum to quickly help visitors and children who cannot easily access it from the community.

The museum also organizes annual music festival of bowl lyre Music and Dance for the heritage clubs in schools, this keeps alive the culture of 'Odi' in the community. The museum will continue to ensure that the 'Odi' is also played during public gatherings to increase its publicity especially among the young generation.

In future, the Madi community museum will write a book about the 'Odi', describing how it is made and its importance. This is intended to make the instrument sustainable and viable in the community. Madi community museum will also translate this book in the local language so that it communicates to all people Madi sub-region.



### 3 (d) The Empaako naming ceremony among the Banyoro, Batooro, Batuku, Batagwenda and Banyabindi



*Clock wise: The child to be named is handed over to its grand parents. 2. If the child is a baby girl, the grand mother names it. 3. A special meal is prepared and the father and mother of the baby are special visitors*

The Empaako Naming Ceremony is practiced by the Batooro, Banyoro, Batuku, Batagwenda and Banyabindi. The Empaako is a naming system whereby children are given one of the twelve names shared across the communities in addition to their given and family names. Addressing a person by her or his Empaako name is a positive affirmation of social ties. It can be used as a greeting or a declaration of affection, respect, honour or love. Use of Empaako can defuse tension or anger and sends a strong message about social identity, unity, peace and reconciliation.

The 12 Empaako names and their meanings are:

- ACAALI** - Someone who resembles another one in nature and who easily relates to others
- ADYERI** - Someone who is very friendly and affectionate with a larger-than-life heart
- AMOOTI** - One who genuinely respects other people, thinking and speaking good of them
- ABWOLI** - Someone with diplomatic relationship
- AKIIKI** - Someone who holds National Community and family interests with great love
- APUULI** - One who has powers, abilities and skills to attract other people
- ATWOKI** - One who embraces or punishes; as the case may be, others either physically or spiritually
- OKAALI** - This one is only for the King, Omukama, meaning someone with the highest responsibility as a leader
- ARAALI** - One who saves others and perceived to have the power of thunder
- BBALA** - One who loves other people unconditionally
- ABBOKI** - One who cherishes the role of parents, teachers, counselor, elder, mentor and a leader
- ATEENYI** - One who understands and loves wrongdoers without cording them.

Whenever a child is born, it is taken to its grandparents, by the father and

mother for naming, 3-4 days after birth depending on the sex of the child. If it is a girl it is named after 3 days and after 4 days for a boy.

The occasion is graced by members of the family including uncles, aunties, neighbours and family friends, who gather to perform some rituals that involve preparing a special meal and slaughtering a goat for the chief guest- the baby!

Depending on the sex of the child, the mother sits with the child in the doorway facing inside the house if it is a boy or outside if it is a girl. The girl faces outside because she is expected to leave the house when she is ready for marriage while a boy faces inside because he is expected to stay and bring a wife and children to the family.

After giving both the family name first and the Empaako, presents are given to the named child in form of hens, goats, cows, etc. as an economic start up. In the likely event that family members disagreed on an Empaako, the one who donates most is given priority to give the name.

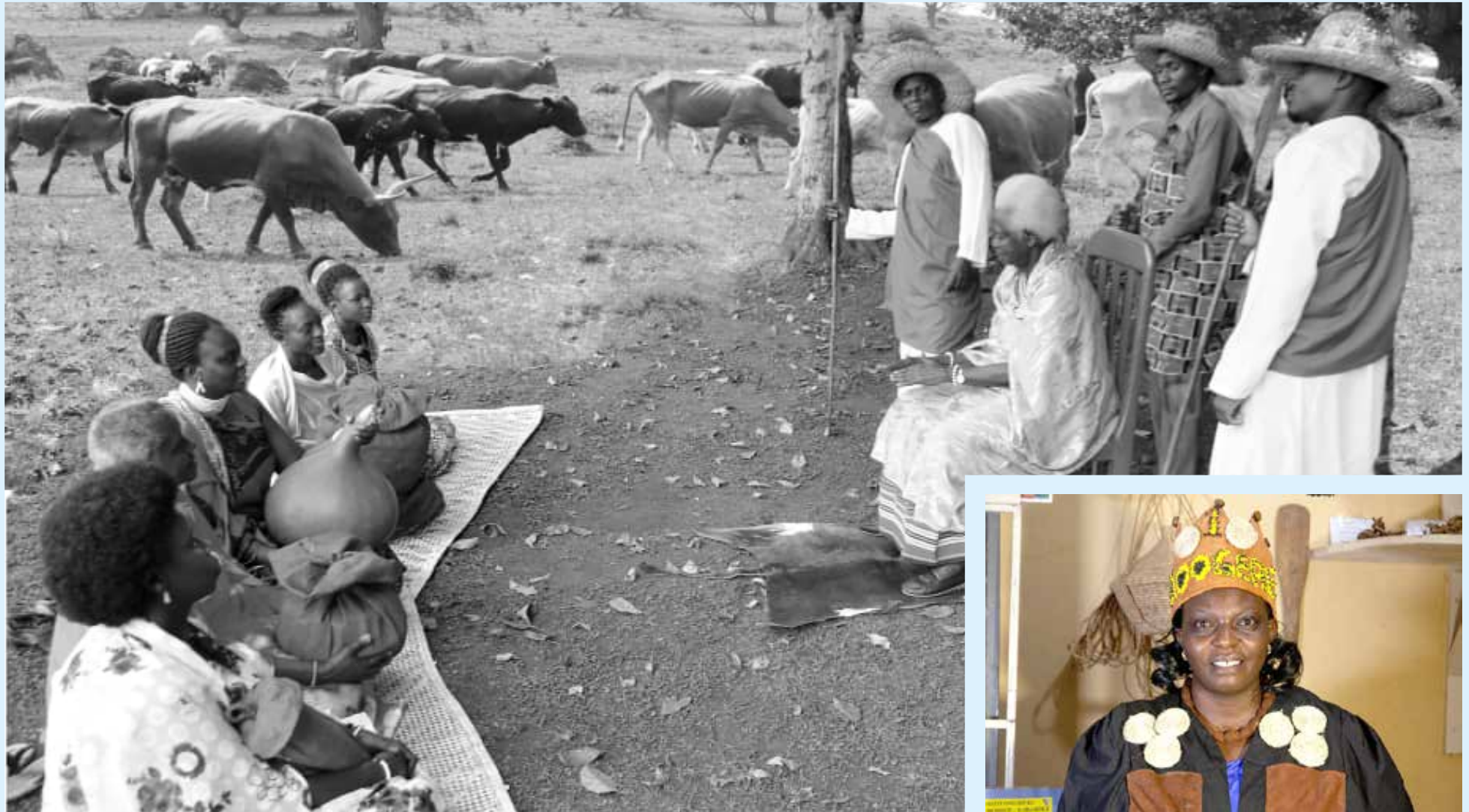
The Empaako name is a source of prestige and respect to members. In Bunyoro and Tooro people welcome visitors by their Empaako names. The ritual has an economic value as it creates a startup capital for the new member of the family (child). The planting of a banana ensures food security to the family and community. The empaako is used as a welcome gesture among the Banyoro and Batooro especially to none natives. It was and still is a sign of peace and love (this is why people still eat together during the naming ceremony).

The inscription of the empaako naming ceremony by UNESCO in 2013 has not only popularized the use of the empaako names but has also increased its appreciation by young people. The pet names are still being used although the ceremonial part of it has declined given that to some people, it is costly because a meal for several people has to be prepared and, in some cases, a goat has to be slaughtered.

The Uganda Rural Development and Training through its community museum has given free airtime over the radio on which elders feature to explain the history and importance of the Empaako and its associated values.



### 3 (e) The Koogere Oral Tradition of the Basongola, Banybindi and Batooro peoples



*Koogere is said to have had a large herd of cattle and kept many utensils for milking*



*Alice Besemera emerged the first Koogere after a competition*



The Koogere oral tradition is treasured among the communities in present-day Bunyoro and Tooro kingdoms, and in Busongora (Kasese district).

The tradition describes the reign of a great woman ruler and entrepreneur called Koogere who was a chief of Busongora chiefdom. An exceptionally wise queen, Koogere amassed wealth, fame and glory in a kingdom whose mainstay was a cattle economy. She led her kingdom to greatness and glory. A story is said of how people could be stopped at a roadblock to let Koogere's huge herds of cattle cross from one village to another unhindered. Therefore, Koogere was as rich and powerful as she was wise and knowledgeable.

Koogere was made a chief of Busongora following the unfortunate event of King Isaza Nyakikooto who went hunting and admired the skin of a leopard which he directed his servants to kill and immediately he asked the servants to dress him with the skin. Later, the skin dried became tight on him causing breath failure and he almost died. The people who were around him could not help him as he had killed all the elders. The King consulted his Aunt Koogere and she went around to look for how to sort out the situation. A gentleman told her that he has the mother who would advise, Koogere went to the lady who said that they should take King Isaza Nyakikooto to the river to immerse himself into water and later the skin got softened. Koogere then used a sharp knife called (Omuhyo gw'orumwiso) and removed the skin. This is how Koogere became the famous woman being the first chief of Isaza Lya'Busongora.

Koogere is regarded as the only female chief in Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom with exceptional knowledge, wisdom, and administrative skills. Kitara was perhaps the biggest African empire in south of the Sahara, stretching from Bukedi present day Eastern Uganda to Karagwe in Northern Tanzania and Ituri and Buleega both in the present-day Eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo.

There is narration in Koogere epic that bring out images of women's intelligence and heroism, and the democratic nature of Basongora society in ancient times. Koogere also saved King Isaza Nyakikooto Rugamba N'aabato when she interpreted the riddles that had been sent by King Nyamiyonga (known as king of the underground) who wanted to challenge Isaza Nyakikooto. In

this story, Koogere used her wise knowledge in tasks where the male servants and even the king himself had failed such as in the interpretation of numerous prescribed riddles below;

1. Entera bwire: the king was supposed to tell the meaning of Entera bwire which is Enkoko (a Cock).
2. Omuguha guboha amaizi which means a rope that binds water ((Ensano, flour)
3. Ekihindura omukama kurora enyuma, what makes a king look behind – (Enyana); a calf.
4. Akaigi kakingira enaku: a door that would create brotherhoodness – (Omukago). This would happen when two friends who would cut each other's node part and place a piece of coffee into one's blood and then swallow, this is brotherhoodness.
5. Entamba bujune: what heals sorrow – (Amaarwa), local beer
6. Akatahingurwa what one can't pass by without looking at it (omwisiki murungi) – a beautiful girl.

There are sayings and narrations in this story which bring out images of plenty and abundance as blessings for hard work especially with regard to rearing of cows. These include such sayings as: "Busongora bwa Koogere, nambere ikamwa niboroga, amagita gatera amaata, amata geser'ente". Which literally means Busongora of Koogere where cows moo as they are milked, where butter splashes against the drinking gourds, and where milk quenches the thirst of the cows) signifying the fact that Busongora was booming cattle rearing society even day.

This tradition provides the constitutional foundation as well as the ideological structure and vehicle for the cultural values and belief systems which exist in Busongora and other parts of the former Bunyoro-Kitara Empire. For instance, among the Banyakitara that wisdom is inherited through a mother, wives are called "Nyinabwenge" (mother of wisdom), and women are considered as the custodians of wealth of the homes.

The practitioners and custodians of this epic story are mainly elders, sages, story-tellers, poets, traditional musicians, artistes and indigenous families, as well as people who live close to the sites associated with the epic. Modern writers, language promoters, women groups, cultural civil society organizations are also vehicles for transmitting the Koogere epic. It gives a basis of value and belief system which survives in these communities to-date. It is an engine which carries the communities' beliefs and value systems from generation to generation.

Koogere oral tradition was inscribed in 2015, as one of the intangible cultural heritage elements for urgent safeguarding because of its relevance. Koogere oral tradition is a source of identity to the communities concerned which include Basongora, Batooro and Banyoro. It is also an essential and inspirational part of social philosophy and folk expression. It encompasses sayings and narrations focusing on images of plenty and abundance as blessings for hard work, highlighting the importance of wisdom and evoking female magic and heroism. The Koogere story further facilitates reflection, meditation, relaxation, generation of ideas and inter-generational transfer of information, among others. It embodies and propagates the core belief and values of the concerned communities.

Considering the nature of element (oral tradition) there is a need to transmit the oral tradition to other generations for it to stay alive in this instance, the Koogere Foundation Uganda in conjunction with Koogere community museum started an annual youth meeting code named Akaswa ka Tooro (the

anthill of Tooro), through which the youth gather to share about the Koogere Oral Tradition.

Koogere Foundation has set up social media platforms such as Facebook and *WhatsApp* through which those that cannot go for the annual retreat are able to learn about the oral tradition. Further still, Koogere Foundation often holds monthly radio talk shows, where a large community is routinely reached. The museum is well linked with the community, they have a troupe that regularly performs at functions, some of the managers work as spokes persons at traditional functions during which information about Koogere tradition is transmitted. The elders often display information about the oral tradition through the museum.

The promotion of the Koogere oral tradition is however without challenges. The old people who know about the story are dying off and therefore living a gap. Some of the young people are taking Koogere oral tradition as out dated. There is still a gap in adopting the oral tradition into modern social spaces and audience.

Challenges notwithstanding, the Koogere oral tradition is still viable due to the fact that it is still appreciated in communities concerned through storytelling, music dance and playing instruments.

In terms sustaining the viability of the tradition, Koogere community museum has initiated a sustainable plan of conducting annual youth retreats where the youth are trained on relevance and ways of safeguarding the oral tradition.

### 3 (f) The Skill and Art of Bark Cloth Making Among the Baganda



1. Using a mallet to make a bark cloth out of a bark of a tree. 2. Plucking a bark off a tree to make a bark cloth. 3. Dry bark cloth ready for sale



The skill of bark-cloth making is the handiness of transforming the bark of a mutuba tree (**Ficus natalensis**) into a piece of cloth-like material that can be used to make various items to perform many other functions such as adornment at cultural celebrations. The skill is an ancient craft of the Baganda, one of the largest polities in present day central Uganda. Traditionally, craftsmen of the Ngonge clan headed by Kaboggoza the hereditary chief craftsmen have been manufacturing bark cloth for the Buganda royal family since the reign of King Walusimbi Kimera (1374 - 1404) and for the rest of the community. The name Kaboggoza was attained due to the sound made by the banging using the three types of mallets namely; the *esaaka*, the *eteenga*, and the *ettula* which also form the three processes through which the final product is made.

The bark of a tree, *Mutuba* is peeled off and hit several times, using the mallets to make a cloth like material termed as bark cloth. After peeling off the bark, the exposed segment is covered with banana leaves for a period of four days after which these are removed. In seven months, the tree reclaims its bark for another harvest.

The Baganda developed the skill and spread it to some of the nearby communities like the Basoga, Banyoro, Batooro, and the Madi. It is evident that these communities also use the bark cloth in the same way as the Baganda although not developed to the same level of sophistication.

The cultivation of the trees is a crucial aspect of the process. Only a few species of *mutuba* trees are suitable for the production and these must be pruned regularly in order that the trunk can grow straight to produce large pieces of bark. The mutuba trees also have other uses. For instance, they are intercropped with banana and coffee plants to provide shade and fertilization by way of the falling leaves.

Traditionally, bark cloth making was significant because the final product could be used to make clothes to wear, bed sheets, and upon the death of a Muganda person, the body would be wrapped with a number of bark cloth sheets depending on the social status of the deceased. Even when the coffins were later introduced, bark cloth is still used continuously. To date, even the

number of bark cloth sheets used at burial have to be mentioned because they signify the status the deceased enjoyed in society. The more the number a body was wrapped in, the higher the importance that was associated with that person before death. Some people leave behind specifications in their wills as to how many sheets of bark cloth they should be wrapped in at burial. In some cases, bark cloth would be part of the bride wealth gifts the would be husband had to donate to the bride's parents, thus the current description of the mother's and paternal auntie's cloths- *olubugo lwa maama and olubugo lwa Ssenga*. Bark cloth is also an important decorative item in Kasubi tombs and many other cultural functions among the Baganda. Presently, various value additions have been added to the bark cloth in form of table mats, belts, bags, caps and decoration or adornment of clothes, baskets and others. Universities have also started using the product in some of its fine art lessons.

Traditionally, there were norms and customs linked to the production of bark cloth. For instance, the skill was limited to men only. The belief was that women were too weak to engage in the beating of the bark through the three processes. Women were neither allowed to climb the *mutuba* trees nor get close to the *ekkomago* (the place where the bark cloth was under production) especially during their menstrual periods. They only participated indirectly through providing for the men's needs such as roasting and serving plantain to working men as well as other necessities such as local brew for drinking. It was believed to cause damage to the product by weakening of the material hence creating tiny holes to the product. To avoid such perceived damage, women needed to stay away from production areas during such periods.

The significant decline of bark cloth production due to the tendency of the young people moving to urban areas, reinforced by the effects of modernization has motivated efforts to devise means of preserving knowledge and passing it on to the youths. Having identified the skill as part of the highly cherished representation of human creativity among the Baganda people, in 2005 it was added to the master list of skills that show traditional creativity. It was recognized by UNESCO as a masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage of humanity. In 2008, UNESCO inscribed the skill of bark-cloth making as an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) element, a measure to revitalize and pass on

the knowledge to young people. A workshop was for instance held in 2007 and thirty-two youths enrolled for the training. Thereafter, two youths carried on with the practice and occasionally make production of bark cloth. However, efforts to interest other young people in the skill have not been as fruitful due to the limited economic implications. The family of Kaboggoza and *Mzee Ssonko* in particular still produce bark cloth albeit on order that mainly comes from the Buganda Kingdom in preparation for the various cultural celebrations such as the coronation and the commemoration of the same of the Kabaka. It is through such preparations that the youths get a chance to learn about the production of bark cloth.

Other celebrations where chances of transmitting such knowledge include instituting of the heir, at burial of a muganda person, through the yearly cultural exhibitions organized by the Buganda Kingdom and such cultural heritage clubs introduced by the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU).

Is the production of bark cloth still viable? The answer to such a question depends on a number of factors. The truth is that sustainability of the practice is questionable. However, if measures are put in place to interest and train young people into the skill; providing general information to the public through radio and television programmes; designing brochures, fliers and posters; organizing periodic exhibitions and school competitions, the skill

of bark cloth making has a chance of preservation and revitalization. To safeguard the skill of bark cloth making, there is need to decipher negative beliefs attached to using bark cloth through advocacy, lobbying government institutions to take interest in promoting the activity of bark cloth making, and training the school going children about the potential value in carrying out the production of bark cloth. Lastly, finding market for the products that come from bark cloth material would go far into interesting more people to take on the practice. As such, the Uganda Martyrs' University Community Museum at Nkozi plans to engage in some of these activities to keep the skill of bark cloth making alive for the next generations.

The biggest challenges in this bark-cloth production is the declining number of the *mutuba* tree species. Partly, this has been brought about by land fragmentation as these trees cannot be effectively cultivated on small pieces of land where growing food crops is a priority. Atop of that, the mutuba tree takes four to six years to produce quality bark for the final product and seven months to regenerate new bark for another round of harvest. The other challenge is that cutting of trees for fuel is also high while those which survive are not well tended to yield quality bark. Also, the young people do not find the activity of bark production as attractive and the market is irregular, besides having limited skills to add value to the bark cloth.

## 4. Recommendations



To ensure that the 6 ICH elements listed by UNESCO are sustainably safeguarded, and information about them effectively transmitted to the young generations, community museums suggest the following:

There is a need for sustained capacity building for all community museum managers in Uganda to identify, document and publicise ICH elements through museum spaces.

Where certain ICH elements transcend national borders such as the case of Uganda and South Sudan, efforts should be made by both countries to promote collective safeguarding measures for the ICH elements in question, in this case, the Madi bow-lyre music and instrument.

In light of the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic, it will be important to conduct a study on its impact on the safeguarding of the ICH elements both locally and internationally. Relatedly, a study should be undertaken to establish how some of the ICH elements can be empowered to become viable

economic entities so that the bearers are able to generate income which they can use to safeguard such elements.

An annual event at national level where all the inscribed ICH elements can be showcased in a common space is recommended. Such events can help in the fostering of an appreciation of cultural differences and in the promotion of inter-cultural dialogue.

Lastly, sustaining and safeguarding of the ICH elements by community museums requires sufficient resources both financial and human. It is therefore recommended that community museums should engage in cultural enterprises that generate income and also continue to engage young people through school heritage clubs. The government of Uganda should also increase its funding to the cultural sector, particularly to the museums so that they can effectively identify, document and display ICH elements through museums spaces.



## 5. About UCOMA and the five implementing museums

UCOMA whose mission is “to bring together member Community Museums to enhance professionalism and protect their interests so that communities in Uganda value and promote their cultures” was established in 2010 and its membership is open to all community museums in Uganda. The association was registered with Uganda’s National NGO Registration Bureau in 2011. UCOMA has a Management Committee and a General Assembly, the decision-making body of the Association. Since 2011, it has been involved in a number of initiatives related to publicity for community museums (through a website, maps, flyers, and exhibitions) and capacity building activities for its members. The Association has also developed and implemented Quality Assurance Standards for its members.

To implement the UNESCO supported project which aims at strengthening the capacity of community museums managers to safeguard ICH elements, the Association has been collaborating with the following community museums.

### a. Kigulu cultural museum



Kigulu cultural museum showcases artefacts of the Kisoga culture including articles used; those curved out of clay, wood and iron; foods eaten, ways of dressing and general social behaviours; economic, political and religious(worshipping) life and the medicinal plants, all used by our ancestors.

The starting of this museum was inspired by the Busoga Tourism Expo of 2012 that was held at Jinja Secondary School. The princes of Kigulu Chiefdom, one of the 11 Chiefdoms that make up Busoga Kingdom, appointed a Committee to govern this Museum. The museum is located on a 3-acre piece of land at Bulubandi, along Nakigo road, in Iganga Municipality, in the house formally for the Saza Chief of Kigulu.

The museum’s vision is; ‘To restore Busoga Cultural values. And its mission is; ‘To collect, preserve, protect, promote and develop Kisoga culture for future generations’.

### b. URDT – Cultural Assets Centre and Museum



The Museum was established to foster an appreciation of the cultural diversity in Bunyoro. It brings together different cultures and forms a living encyclopedia of Bunyoro heritage located within the premises of the Uganda Rural Development and Training Centre found in Kagadi district.

### c. Koogere Foundation and Museum



The Koogere Community Museum, attached to Koogere Foundation. The museum was set up to promote the culture of the communities in Tooro Kingdom, develop cultural tourism and conduct research and documentation of the Tooro culture. The museum is located in Fort Portal city in Kabarole district.

### d. Madi community museum



The museum is located at Metu sub-county headquarters Moyo District. It preserves and showcases the cultural resources of the Madi community. It is the first of its kind in Madi sub region and it showcases among other cultural objects, the Madi bowl lyre music and dance (O'di), an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) element inscribed by UNESCO in 2016.

### e. Uganda Martyrs University Museum-Nkozi



Uganda Marty's University Community Museum was established to provide space for the students in the school of African studies to have access to aspects of African cultures. The museum is motivated by the desire to preserve and promote African culture, as well as to facilitate research on its significance in the present African and world development contexts. The Museum is housed by the African Research and Documentation Centre Library and serves students from various university faculties, as well as other local and international visitors and researchers.

# Appreciation

The information in this publication was gathered during the pre-visits to both the implementing museums and the bearer communities of the 5 ICH elements.

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