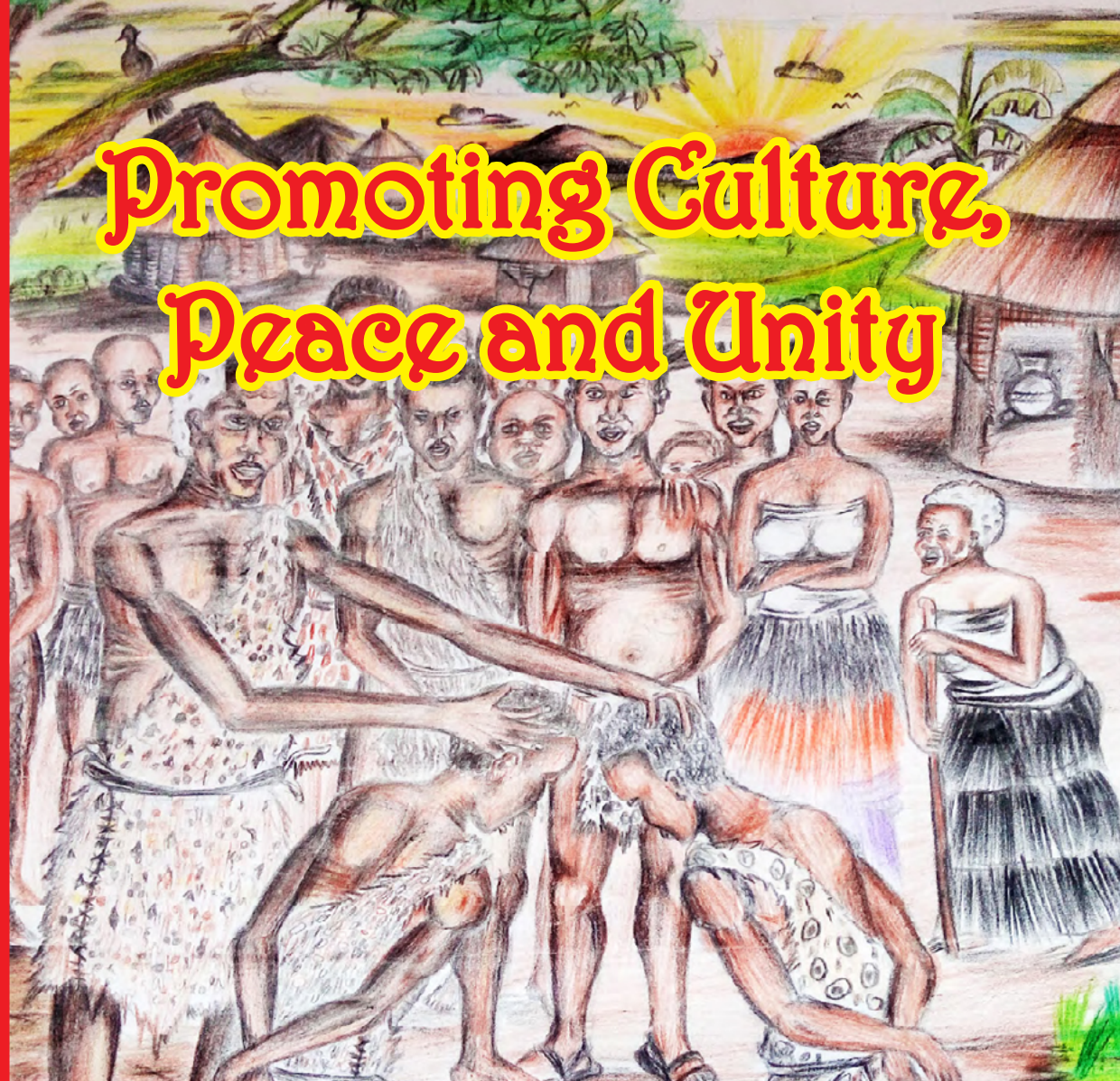


Promoting Culture, Peace and Unity



*Young Ugandans and Kenyans demonstrating the value
of social cohesion April, 2020*



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1. Introduction

Uganda and Kenya are culturally diverse countries, each with over 40 ethnic groups. Such cultural diversity is a source of wealth and inspiration, but has also often been used to cause social and political conflicts. Yet communities living in the East African region have always had their own mechanisms to manage differences. These age-old mechanisms, including negotiation, reconciliation and mediation, are meant to foster unity and peaceful co-existence among people belonging to diverse cultural communities.

The youth (below 30 years of age), who constitute over 70% of the national populations in both countries, have however rarely had opportunities to harness the benefits of cultural diversity as a source of social cohesion. In view of this, and with financial support from Culture at Work Africa, the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda in collaboration with the Community Peace Museums and Cultural Heritage Foundation in Kenya, implemented a project to nurture an appreciation by young people, as the leaders of tomorrow, of their role in contributing to social cohesion. Specifically, the project aimed at promoting Cultural Heritage and Peace Clubs as spaces for learning, inter-cultural dialogue and exchange of knowledge to foster

co-existence and social cohesion among young people.

Youth from 140 Cultural Heritage Clubs in Uganda and 100 Peace Clubs in Kenya were guided to document their perspectives and the mechanisms that foster social cohesion in their respective communities through a painting and essay writing competition. 462 young people participated and the 13 winning entries of the 2019 cross-border cultural heritage competition are reproduced here.

The cultural aspects illustrated by young people in this publication are still valued and practiced by a number of communities to manage and resolve conflicts at different levels, whether within families, in villages or beyond. This publication therefore reflects the need to engage youth in both Uganda and Kenya to reflect on their role in managing diversity, and as champions of tolerance and peaceful co-existence in their respective communities.

2. Illustrations of cultural aspects that promote peace and unity

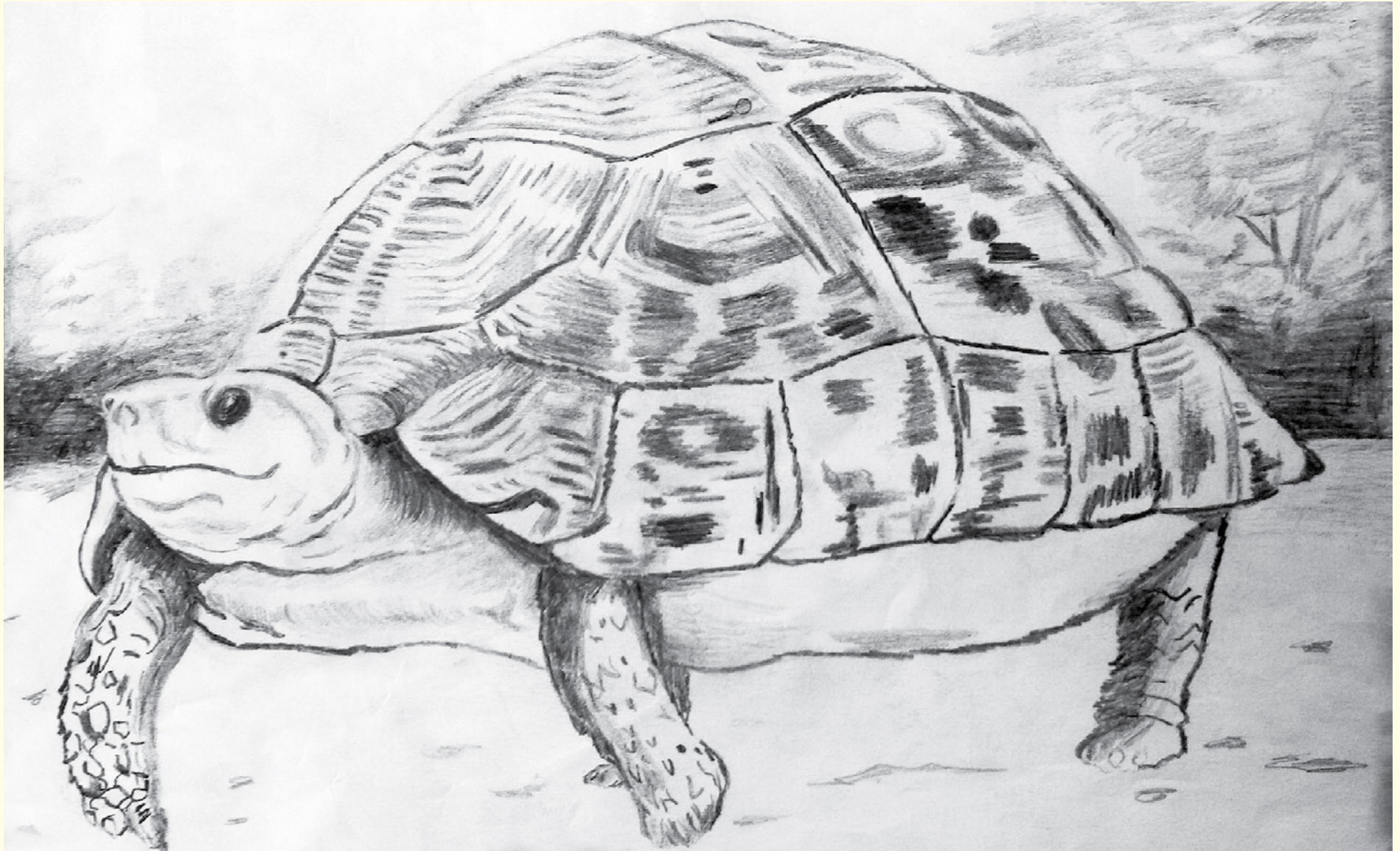
1. Traditional way of constructing a house



"The Basoga and many other cultural communities in Uganda used to construct their homes by using local materials such as grass, poles, soil or clay, and banana fibres. Through teamwork, men could go and help a friend to construct his house after which they could go and still do the same work for another person. This cultural practice promotes love, unity and togetherness in the society. When boys turn sixteen years old, they are instructed to set up their small huts and leave their parents' main houses because they are considered to be adults. Construction commonly involves men as they are the ones responsible for constructing houses in Busoga although sometimes, men are supported by their wives to collect or prepare construction materials. Although this practice has reduced in urban areas, it is still practiced in peri-urban and rural areas where people cannot afford to buy modern construction materials."

By Rachael Mirembe, a student in Senior 3 at Berkeley Secondary School, Iganga District, Uganda.

2. Kocha (The tortoise)



"A *kocha* is a tortoise among the Munyoyaya of Tana river. A *kocha* does no harm. The creator did not give the *kocha* any claws to scratch or poison to kill. Like the tortoise, human beings are not born with weapons in their hands or poison in their bite. A *kocha* has a hard shell yet it does not fight. When attacked, it will withdraw its head back into the hard shell and wait for calm to return. The *kocha* is an example of a peace animal that's highly respected among the Munyoyaya. It promotes peace and unity because it shows how human beings should live without violence.

"Since the Munyoyaya are a pacifist ethnic group, they use the *kocha* as a symbol of non-violence. Other neighbouring ethnic groups like the Wailwana and Waata of the Tana river belt also use the same animal as totem to promote non-violence amongst the community."

By Tecla Kalekye, Form 1 White at Kisumu Girls' High School, Kisumu County, Kenya.

3. Bull fights



"Bullfighting is a cultural practice that has become famous in western Kenya. It is mainly practiced by the residents of Kakamega County, specifically in Shinyalu and Ikolomani constituencies. Bullfighting events led to the establishment of a stadium in Ikolomani constituency for bullfighting known as Malinya stadium. Bullfighting events are usually conducted on Saturdays and public holidays and they bring thousands of fans from Isukha, Idakho and Batsotso who are the sub-tribes of the Luhya community residing in Kakamega county in Kenya. The owner of the winning bull is honoured and given prizes which can include money. The villages where the winning bull comes from in Kakamega usually sing songs of praise as they escort the bull back home. It brings people together as a community social event. People have to respect the winning bull and thus the community. People become friends hence promoting peace and unity through this traditional sport. Besides bringing people together, bullfighting has become a tourist attraction in Kakamega since many people both local and foreign, assemble during the bullfighting events."

By Samson Luseka, Grade 6 at Musemo Primary School, Kakamega County, Kenya

4. Ajon (local beer)

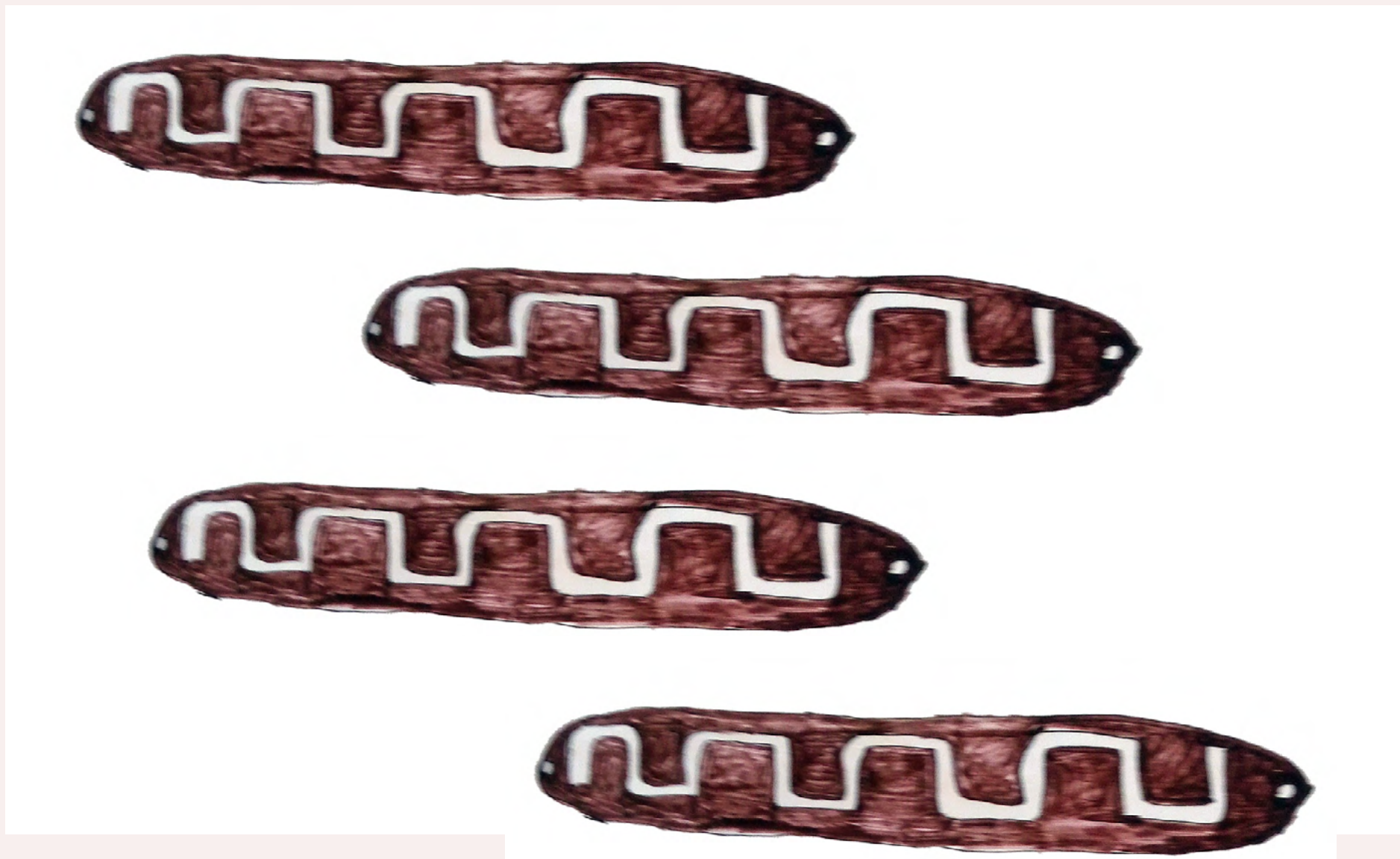


"Ajon is a drink of peace and unity among the Iteso. Ajon helps in uniting different people and clans. It is an opportunity for people to get together, share ideals and core values. It is through it that developmental ideas are crafted; knowledge of each other and of core values are shared at the place of ajon. One could say ajon is the beginning and the end of every celebration in Teso region

"At dusk, after the day's labour, the Iteso (people from the Teso sub-region of Eastern Uganda) gather in the compound of a fellow tribesman and share ajon which is made from millet and sorghum and it is usually drunk from a big clay pot and the process of taking it is called *aimat ajon*. From different corners of the village, men sit around the pot, discuss various issues in society and find solutions. However, women are exempted from drinking ajon with men. Despite this, drinking ajon together promotes reconciliation and friendship, uniting people of different backgrounds, occupations and political ideologies. Peace is a ripple effect of drinking ajono among the Iteso".

By Karagwa Ann Treasure, Senior 4 at Mt. St. Mary's College Namagunga, Mukono District, Uganda.

5. Leketyo (traditional belt)



"A *leketyo* is a woman's belt among the Pokot and other Kalenjin groups. It is worn by expectant mothers to protect unborn babies. Thus, it saves life. It is also a cultural object for peace that the woman uses to separate those, especially men, who are fighting. She puts it in-between the men who are fighting. Then they stop fighting out of respect for a symbol that saves life.

"A *leketyo* is still used in the same way as was the case in the past. However, old *leketyo* belts are diminishing. Pokot women have started small community indigenous classes where they teach beadwork and the making of new *leketyo* belts."

By Sanare Oyie, in Grade 5 at Building Hope School - Narok County, Kenya.

6. Aipudun (the child-naming ritual)



"In the Teso region, new born babies are initiated into the clan by conducting a ritual ceremony called *aipoo etal*. It is after this that the child would be regarded as a full member of the clan. Whenever a new baby is born, the mother and the baby are kept indoors for a week or more as the rest of the community members (mostly elders) are preparing for the naming ritual. On the naming day, the baby's grandfather mentions the name which the grandmother then mentions as she administers a drop of locally brewed beer into the baby's mouth while calling out the name which has been mentioned.

"If the baby seems to enjoy the local beer, it means that the baby agrees with the name. This is followed by jubilations hence bringing peace and unity in the community."

By Ojakol Samuel, in Senior 6 at Soroti Community Secondary School, Soroti District, Uganda.

7. Ndata Kimbu (peace staff)



"A *ndata kimbu* is a peace staff named after the chameleon's toes which resemble the staff. The chameleon is a peace animal among the Akamba. The *ndata kimbu* is also used as a walking stick by the elders. The symbolic staff is placed in between fighting men as a call to return to calmness. The fighting parties then exchange this staff in a reconciliation ceremony presided over by respected elders. Respected community elders (both men and women) carry this staff as a symbol of authority. The staffs are usually made from sacred peace trees.

"Among the Akamba, young boys are usually blessed to become junior elders during a ceremony called *Enkang oongudisin* literary meaning 'the coming (home) of the walking sticks (or peace staffs)'. This is a ceremony when warriors must drop their weapons and hold the peace staffs made from the peace tree. Then they are anointed with milk by their mothers symbolising rebirth. The practice of using the peace staffs that the Akamba call *ndata kimbu* is relevant even up to now. The peace staffs are also used by other ethnic groups in Kenya for similar practices. The use of the staffs among the Akamba is also promoted through indigenous peace ceremonies called *kuekeania* in Kikamba. The *kuenkeania* ceremony includes forgiveness. Peace staffs are also used during the *enkang oo-nkiri* (meat ceremony/initiation camp), which is performed in a selected camp that contains ten to twenty houses. The selected houses are from the wives of the initiating junior elders. This camp is located in a convenient location near the home of a friendly age mate. The age-set is allowed to have as many meat camps as they need throughout the region."

By Alfonse Mutisya Mukusyo, in Grade 7 at Miw'ani Primary School, Machakos County, Kenya.

8. Okutta Omukago (blood pact)



Okutta omukago is a cultural ritual among the Baganda from the central region of Uganda. This is done between men to cement a well-established relationship. After getting a coffee bean, each party to the pact smears blood from a cut on each other's hand or navel. The two parties share and swallow a coffee bean in the presence of close relatives and friends. On completion of swallowing the coffee beans vows such as "Your enemy is my enemy and your blood is my blood" are made. It is believed that this bond can only be broken by death.

"After this ritual, they also have to share a meal to thank the ancestors. This ritual is important as it cements brotherhood and a relationship between the two families of the men. It is from this ritual that the Baganda coined a proverb which says "*Abataka abagalana b'ebalima akambugu*" (it takes two close elders to dig out a stubborn weed). The ritual also promotes and preserves culture because it prevents incest. It tends to bring the two families closer, and brings mutual understanding between their children."

By Kato Jude, in Senior 6 at Sacred Heart Kiteredde Secondary School, Kyotera District in Uganda.

9. Mukwa (the rope)



"The drawing depicts a woman carrying a gourd tied with a *mukwa*, a leather belt used as a burden strap. This is softened by being drawn through a hole in a piece of wood. A *mukwa* is used by Akamba and Agikuyu women to strengthen the belly after giving birth. Women also wear it on their waist when they are breast feeding, giving life to the next generation. A *mukwa* connected the womb of the mother and earth, just like a baby is connected to its mother by the umbilical cord. The *mukwa* represents motherhood among the Akamba, which is much respected. It is also a symbol of prosperity and fertility connecting the living with the spirit world from where the children come. No one will fight when a mother removed the *mukwa* and holds it high above her head or drops it on the ground between two fighting people or communities."

"Currently many cultural communities in Kenya also use the *mukwa* in the same way it was used by the Akamba to stop conflict. They include the Agikuyu, Aembu, Tharaka, Achuka, Ameru and Mbeere. There has been however a slight modification of the *mukwa* belt. Since there are no more leather belts being made, the communities have started using sisal ropes or belts depending on the availability of materials. It serves the same purpose in reconciliation and in stopping conflicts."

By Regina Kalondu Muthusi in Form 3 West at Katheka Kai Secondary School, Machakos County, Kenya.

10. Alitisiza (ritual for making peace)



"The *alitisiza* is a ritual for making peace between two clans. Lack of peace can be caused by war, murder and even the rape of a girl. If there is such a conflict, they cannot marry or dance together. If the two clans decide to end this conflict, a day and place are chosen. Both clans will each bring a goat or sheep, local beer (*kpete*) and a spear. Each party shares their grievances after which they all agree to end the conflict. An elder from each clan will bend the blade of his spear, declaring that if anybody after the ritual begins to fight, misfortunes will find him. This is followed by an exchange of spears between the two elders. Each one gets a calabash of beer, pours a little on the ground for the ancestors before he drinks. Two goats are slaughtered and their blood and meat is boiled and eaten by all clan members present and this marks the end of the conflict. Remember, on this day the elders will ensure that rain does not come by 'cursing' the clouds. This is a common practice even today among the Lugbara."

By Kizito Henry Alpido, Senior 1, Micu Secondary School, Arua District in Uganda.

11. Tolukoka (preventing escalation of conflicts)

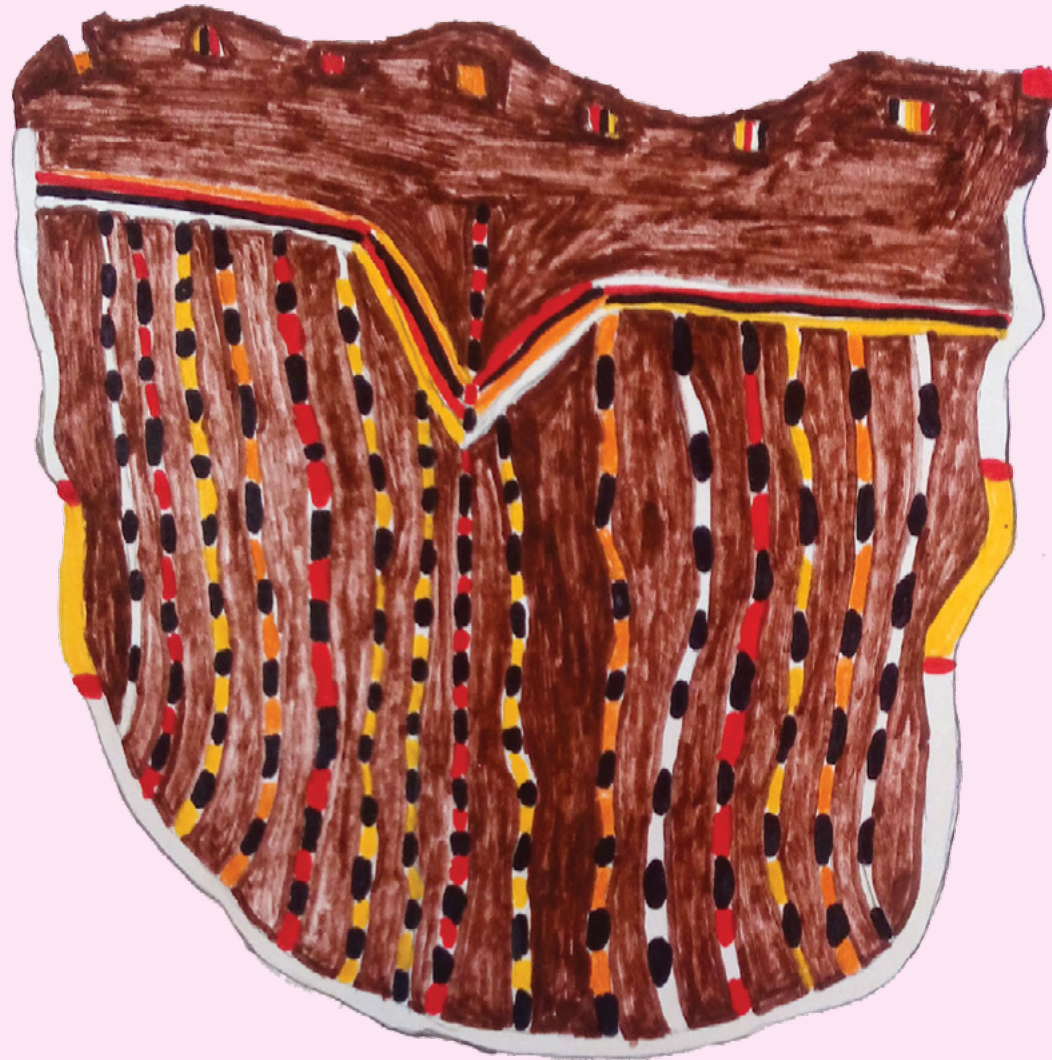


"In the Madi community, *tolukoka* means preventing escalation of conflicts or coming together to resolve a disagreement. Conflicts which may arise because of land ownership, leadership and sharing wealth are followed by conflict resolution mechanisms like the joint mingling of millet bread. This is done by two senior women, one from each of the clans in conflict. Eventually, members of the concerned clans will eat, pray, work, celebrate and mourn together. The joint mingling of millet can also be done by wives in the same household to provide the cohesion, stability and peace needed in polygamous families. This practice marks the climax of any peace settlement and is an ongoing custom.

"In the Madi sub region, *tolukoka* is still widely practiced and usually initiated by elders, clan leaders and religious leaders among others.

By Asite Francis, Senior 6, Moyo Secondary School, Uganda.

12. Olkila (a beaded leather skirt)



"The *olkila* is a beaded leather skirt or a shoulder cape worn by women in the Masai culture. It is a peace item that women would lay down on the path of Maasai moran (warriors) wanting to go to war. It is highly respected as warriors wouldn't go any further in fear of being inflicted with a curse. The *olkila* is decorated with beautiful bead patterns. Many Africans say, 'Peace is Beauty' and the object that brings beauty brings peace too.

To sustain the use of *olkila* skirts, Maasai women have started small community indigenous classes where they teach young people beadwork and how to make the *olkila*."

By Senewa Nkuito in Grade 5 at Building Hope Academy, Narok County, Kenya

13. Mato Oput (a ritual to resolve conflicts)



"The *mato oput* is a traditional ritual common in the Acholi sub-region (northern Uganda). It is performed when there is a dispute either between families, clans or villages. During this ritual, the person, community, village or clan that has committed the offence is required to bring a goat or sheep which is slaughtered and boiled. A plant called *oput* is chopped into small pieces, mixed with water and dropped into the boiled meat. The two warring parties are then united by an elder, clan head or a local chief as their heads are brought in contact indicating unity and brotherhood. The meat is then eaten by the two parties.

"The *mato oput* is important among the Acholi because it helps in uniting people; it helps to fight against mob justice since after the ritual no one will again take the law in their hands. After a *mato oput*, any matter concerning the dispute is settled peacefully by holding talks without any weapon, which further promotes peace, justice and reconciliation in the community."

By Ronald Acoka, in Senior 6, Kitgum Comprehensive College, Uganda

3. Youth's commitment to peace and unity

In 2011, the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) initiated a Heritage Education Programme, reflecting a growing disconnect between young people, their cultural roots and their potential contribution towards promoting cultural heritage. This initiative recognises that one important way to promote cultural heritage, and its essential role in relation to Uganda's contemporary development challenges and agenda, is to engage the young generation. CCFU

therefore engages young people in a number of creative ways including Cultural Heritage Clubs which are currently in existence in 150 secondary schools across the country. Young people also participate in annual cultural heritage competitions, based on different themes. In 2019, the competition was extended to the school peace clubs in Kenya through peace museums coordinated by the Community Peace Museums Heritage Foundation.



Young people sharing experiences in Kampala in December 2019 (left) and a youth from Kenya explaining the use of Olkila beaded skirt in peace making (right)



On the left, young people from Uganda during a panel discussion on culture and peace and on the right, Ronald Acoka (in a black jacket), the overall winner of the 2019 Cross-Border competition receiving a certificate from Ms Beatrice Campodonico from the European Delegation to Uganda, flanked by Ms Emily, the Executive Director of CCFU, Okot Alfred from Kitgum Comprehensive College and Acoka's mother.

During the awarding ceremony held on 4th December 2019 in Kampala, 8 young people led a panel discussion during which they pledged to:

1. Use their cultural heritage clubs and peace clubs as platforms for promoting cultural diversity and peaceful co-existence among young people

2. Mobilise their fellow young people both in school and out of school to promote unity using their traditional values such as respect for elders and being honest with one another

3. Promote their languages to convey cultural messages of peace and unity

4. Continue learning about their cultures and sharing what we have learned with their siblings and other disadvantaged children

Young people further recognised the important role of elders and leaders and requested them to:

1. Create opportunities and spaces for them to participate in the promotion of peace, unity and peaceful co-existence beyond cultural heritage clubs and peace clubs.

2. Create spaces for transmitting to them important cultural aspects that promote peace and unity in communities.

3. Promote culture and traditional languages as key resources in contributing to development and nurturing a responsible young generation.

4. Implementing organisations

The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda

CCFU is a national NGO established in 2005 to promote the positive aspects of Culture in Uganda. Our mission is to promote the recognition of culture as vital for human development that responds to our national identity and diversity. At CCFU, we define culture as a constantly changing set of values, identities, traditions and aspirations that govern the way we relate as individuals, communities and nations. Culture is therefore central to our well-being and to defining the ideal society we seek. We believe that the positive aspects of culture can be harnessed to bring about social and economic transformation. The Foundation thus acts as a catalyst to promote an understanding of development, as seen through "cultural lenses".

In addition to supporting heritage clubs in 150 secondary schools, the Foundation has worked with the National Curriculum Development Centre to ensure that important cultural aspects become examinable under the new curriculum for lower secondary schools. Currently, CCFU is working with selected tertiary institutions - Kabale University, Kyambogo University, Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi and the Islamic University in Uganda - to pilot an undergraduate course for cultural studies. For further details, visit: www.crossculturalfoundation.or.ug.

The Community Peace Museums Heritage Foundation

CPMHF was started by a Kenyan ethnographer, Dr. Sultan Somjee, in 1994. He was searching for grassroots solutions to minimize conflicts during the time of intense ethnic fighting, looting, rape and displacements of families. He realised that the Western models of conflict resolution did not work. Today, after 26 years, there are 16 peace museums in various ethnic regions of Kenya working as grassroots civil societies raising awareness across the cultural and political landscapes. CPMHF has also expanded to Uganda and South Sudan largely through people to people and village to village movement.

CPMHF aims at engaging young people in creative activities to promote indigenous African languages and cultures of *utu* or community coexistence that respects diversity and enhances artistic and creative expressions towards democracy. The Foundation also aims at strengthening the network of peace museums and peace clubs in Kenya. For further details, visit: www.cpmhf.com

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