

INVENTORY FORM

NAME OF COMMUNITY: **Bagisu and Babukusu collectively known as Bamasaaba**

Date: **January 17th, 2023**

Background Information

1. Name of respondent: **Hon Wilson Watira**
2. Status of respondent as far as the element is concerned (e.g. Practitioner, Custodian, elder etc): **Chairman Imbalu Board**
3. Age: **61** Gender: **Male**
4. Location: **Maluku Cultural Headquarters Mbale City Uganda**
5. Date: **17th January 2023** Time start: **10.00am** Time end: **2.00pm**
6. Facilitator(s):

1. **Daniel Kaweesi**
2. **Isabirye James**
3. **Nalubega Hajara**

PROOF OF FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT OF RESPONDENTS

We have thoroughly informed the respondent(s) about this ICH inventorying exercise and its importance and (s) he has freely given us consent. (*Refer to consent form No. 03*).

SECTION 1: IDENTIFICATION OF THE ELEMENT

1. What is the name of the element, as used by this community?
Imbalu
2. For someone from outside this community, how would you briefly explain this title?
(Probe for the domain under which the element falls.)

"Imbalu" refers to a **circumcision ceremonies** practiced by the Bamasaaba people of Eastern Uganda. It falls under the domain of **cultural rites of passage**, as it symbolizes the transition of boys into adulthood. Imbalu is a deeply meaningful ritual enriched by ten unique processes, such as public circumcision, communal songs, dances, and blessings, which highlight the community's values and heritage.

3. Apart from this community, which other community (ies) practice this element?

The Babukusu of western Kenya also practice this element.

4. Where is this element practiced/performed? (Probe for special venues).

The Imbalu circumcision ceremony is primarily practiced in the **Bugisu region of eastern Uganda**, among the Bamasaaba people. Each **clan within the Bamasaaba community** has specific public spaces where different processes of the ritual are performed. The **Mutoto Cultural Grounds**, in Mbale City, plays a significant role as it hosts the official launch of the circumcision season, presided over by the cultural leader. This event marks the beginning of the initiates third process of the circumcision ceremony and brings together the entire community to celebrate their heritage.

Following the launch, individual families typically conduct the circumcision rituals at their homesteads or common clan cultural ground, ensuring the intimate involvement of relatives and neighbors. These homestead ceremonies maintain a personal and communal connection while preserving the traditions tied to each clan.

5. Briefly tell me how this element is performed /practiced.

Among the Bamasaaba people of eastern Uganda, Imbalu is more than just a tradition; it is a sacred journey that marks the time when boys become men. This deeply rooted practice, done every even year, involves boys aged 16 to 20 and follows a detailed process full of cultural, spiritual, and communal importance.

The journey begins with **Khushebusa**, where boys voluntarily declare that they are ready to become adults. This first step shows their willingness to go through the transformation process. Over the next six months, they take part in **Isonja**, which involves communal dances and **Sinyimba** music. These activities help to build their strength and mental readiness while bringing the community together in excitement and preparation.

As the circumcision season approaches, horns or drums are sounded by the **Babashebusa** (reminders), to call people's attention. The cultural leader then officially launches the circumcision period. This is followed by **Khuwenza Busani**, a spiritual phase where the initiates, along with their sisters, circumcised men, and other community members, go on a journey to "find the man within." This is filled with singing and **Kadodi** drumming, which deepen the boys' connection to their culture.

Next, the elders lead the stage of **Khukoya Busera**, where a ceremonial brew is prepared. As the brew is made, the elders teach the boys important lessons about leadership and the responsibilities of being an adult. During **Khuakha Kamamela**, the initiates fetch water to add to the brew, showing their dedication and readiness. The boys are then marked with flour mixed with the brew, a symbol of their identity and commitment.

The journey continues with **Ibukhootsa**, a moment for family bonding. Here, the initiates receive blessings and gifts from their maternal uncles, showing the unity of both their father's and mother's families. After this comes **Mwitosi**, a symbolic act of rebirth. The boys are immersed in mud, connecting them to the earth and their ancestors, before going through a cleansing ritual of their private parts to prepare for the final stage.

The big moment, known as **Khukhu'Injila Imbalu**, is the public circumcision, held with much celebration. This is more **than** just a physical act; it is symbolic of their bravery and resilience, as the community cheers them on. After the circumcision, salt and pepper are applied to the wound for disinfection, serving as the final test of their endurance. Later that night into the morning, during **Khusabisa** or **Khubita**, the **Bashebi** (surgeons) give the boys symbolic guidance and tools to prepare them for adulthood.

Finally, the journey ends with the **Inemba** dance, a grand celebration held at the start of the following year. By this time, the boys have healed and are welcomed back into society as men. The event includes feasting, dancing, and spiritual reflection. The initiates are placed into age-sets, which create lifelong brotherhoods, known as **Makoji**, that tie them to their peers and community.

This sacred journey of Imbalu continues to hold deep meaning for the Bamasaaba people, bringing together their culture, spirituality, and unity in a unique and powerful way.

SECTION 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ELEMENT

1. a) What are the materials/implements/tools/props used while performing/practicing this element?

The Imbalu ritual uses different materials, tools, and items that carry deep cultural and symbolic meaning throughout the journey of transformation. Here are the key items:

Kadodi Drums: Played during communal dances and spiritual journeys, these drums set the rhythm and bring energy to participants, especially during **Khuwenza Busani**.

Flour and Brew: Sorghum and millet are mixed during **Khuakha Kamamela** to mark the initiates and show their identity and readiness.

Mud (Mwitosi): Represents re-birth and the connection to ancestors during the mud immersion ritual.

Ceremonial Drinks: Brewed by elders during **Khukoya Busera**, these drinks symbolize unity and shared responsibility in the community.

Salt and Pepper: Applied after circumcision for cleaning and disinfection, these materials also symbolize resilience and bravery.

Cultural Markers: Horns and drums are used by the **Babashebusa** to announce the start of the circumcision season.

Traditional Attire: Clothes worn by initiates and community members during ceremonies and dances, which include **Lirubisi headgear**, cowbells, and cultural beads, enhance the ritual's identity.

Circumcision Tools: Special knives used by skilled surgeons during the public circumcision.

Symbolic Gifts: Cows given by maternal uncles during **Ibukhootsa** to bless the initiates and strengthen family ties.

Props for Inemba Dance: The **Inemba drum**, used for the joyful celebration of reintegration into the community.

Special Plant (Lubwombabwombe): A congratulatory plant placed around the neck of the initiates by friends and relatives during **Inemba**, along with a gift to show love and pride.

These items are carefully used in different stages of the Imbalu ritual, showcasing the Bamasaaba people's deep cultural values and ensuring their rich heritage is passed on to future generations.

b) Are the materials/implements/tools/props easily available in the community? (Probe to establish whether these materials are freely available in the community or are bought from far and whether they are in abundance or scarce.)

The materials and tools used in the Imbalu ritual reflect the rich cultural traditions of the Bamasaaba people, although some items have become scarce or changed over time. Locally available materials like **Kadodi drums**, **Inemba drums**, and **mud (Mwitosi)** are still plentiful and remain central to the rituals. Ceremonial drinks and traditional attire also rely on resources easily found within the community.

However, there has been a change in how flour for ceremonial drinks is sourced. In the past, sorghum and millet were grown locally in abundance, but as **matooke (bananas)** became the main staple food, the cultivation of these grains reduced. Now, many families buy flour from neighboring areas to meet the needs of the ritual.

Circumcision tools require special skills to craft and are made by talented artisans within the community. These tools are often passed down through generations, helping to keep their cultural significance intact. The use and preparation of all these materials require the effort and teamwork of the entire community, which reflects the values of unity and shared responsibility.

Even with these changes, the Bamasaaba people have shown strength and creativity in preserving the Imbalu tradition. It continues to carry their cultural identity, values, and pride from generation to generation.

2. a) Are there any special costumes/clothing used while performing/practicing this element?

The costumes and accessories used in the Imbalu ritual are deeply connected to Bamasaaba culture, with each piece carrying a special meaning. Here's a simple breakdown:

Cultural Beads (Matongo): These are black and white beads that look like pearls. They were traditionally grown along riverbanks and represent cultural identity. Since they are now scarce, synthetic beads from China and other places are used instead.

Isumbati Wrapping: Made from goat or cow skin, initiates wear this after healing during the **Inemba** celebration to show they have become adults.

Lirubisi Headgear: This headpiece is made from colobus monkey skin and has a

sacred meaning. However, its use is now limited because of wildlife protection laws.

Ikweni: A wooden headgear decorated with a bull symbol.

Kamakayi: A long back covering made from colobus monkey skin mixed with strips of goat or cow skin. It is decorated with cowrie shells.

Cowbells (Bisenze) and Wooden Bars (Tsimboko): Cowbells are tied to the thighs and wooden bars are worn on the upper arms during **Isonja** dances. They add rhythm and excitement to the performances.

Cowrie Shell Belt (Likhalala): This belt, covered with cowrie shells, is worn around the waist and highlights the Bamasaaba's heritage.

Decorative Animal Fur: Fur is tied around the ankles for decoration, making the attire look more beautiful.

These items are not just for looks—they hold cultural and symbolic value. They show the Bamasaaba people's commitment to preserving their traditions, even as times change

b) Are the costumes/clothing easily available in the community? (Probe to establish whether these costumes are freely available in the community or are bought from far and whether they are in abundance or scarce).

The availability of costumes and clothing for the Imbalu ritual in the Bamasaaba community varies. Some traditional items, like cultural beads (Matongo), are becoming scarce due to environmental changes, leading to the use of synthetic alternatives sourced from other regions. Similarly, the Lirubisi headgear and Kamakayi, made from colobus monkey skin, is now limited due to wildlife conservation laws, making it inaccessible.

Other items, such as the Isumbati wrapping and decorative animal fur, are locally sourced but could depend on the availability and cost of materials like goat or cow skin. The cowbells and wooden bars used in dances are crafted within the community, but their abundance varies based on demand and craftsmanship.

3. Which are the other ICH elements associated with this element?

The Imbalu ritual is deeply intertwined with various Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements that enrich its significance. These include:

Music and Dance: Traditional dances like *Isonja*, *Mwaga/Kadodi*, and *Inemba* are integral to the ritual, symbolizing different stages of the initiation process. These performances are accompanied by rhythmic drumming and singing, creating a vibrant cultural expression.

Oral Traditions: Storytelling and songs passed down through generations play a crucial role in conveying the values, history, and significance of the Imbalu ritual.

Traditional Knowledge and Practices: The preparation of costumes, use of medicinal herbs for healing, and the ceremonial procedures reflect the community's indigenous knowledge systems.

Social Practices and Rituals: The communal aspect of the Imbalu ritual fosters unity and reinforces social bonds within the Bamasaaba community.

Craftsmanship: The creation of ceremonial items like cowbells, wooden bars, and cultural beads showcases the community's artisanal skills

4. Which languages are used while performing/practicing this element
Lumasaaba

5. Is there any special language and phrases used in performing/practicing this element?
The Imbalu ritual uses lumasaaba language and special phrases that carry deep cultural meaning. For example:

Khuwenza Busani is a phrase means "finding the man within" and a spiritual internal transformation from boy to man.

Likobi Lye Bamasaba: This means "the cultural debt of the Bamasaba," symbolizing the responsibility of undergoing the ritual to honor the community.

Musambwa Gwe Ipalu: This refers to the "spirit of Imbalu," which the initiates metaphorically search for during the preparation phase.

These phrases are often accompanied by traditional songs, dances like *Isonja* and *Kadodi*, and symbolic acts that enrich the ritual's meaning.

6. How did this element originate? (Probe for the individual who is perceived to have started the element, where and when the element is perceived to have started.)

The origin of the Imbalu ritual is tied to a fascinating tale involving Masaba, an ancestral figure of the Bamasaba people. According to oral traditions, Masaba sought to marry Nabarwa, a woman from the neighboring Elgon Maasai (Kalenjin) community. However, Nabarwa set a condition for marriage: Masaba had to undergo circumcision. Masaba agreed and underwent the procedure, paving the way for their union.

This act became a transformative event, symbolizing not only bravery and commitment but also maturity and readiness for responsibility. Over time, this personal story evolved into a communal rite of passage, becoming a central pillar of Bamasaba culture. The tradition is from Mount Elgon and has been practiced for centuries, passed down through generations as a mark of cultural identity and social cohesion

SECTION 3: PERSONS AND INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED WITH THE ELEMENT

1. Who in this community performs/practices this element? (Probe for name(s), age, gender, location social status, and/or professional category).

The Imbalu ritual is a deeply communal event, practiced and performed by various members of the Bamasaba community. Here's an overview of the key participants:

The Imbalu ritual brings together diverse members of the Bamasaaba community, each playing distinct and vital roles in the practice. Here's an enriched account combining the initial details with the new extract:

Basinde (Initiates): Boys, usually aged between 16 and 20, voluntarily step forward to be circumcised, marking their transition to adulthood.

Elders and Apprentices: Elders, supported by apprentices, lead the initiates in the *Isonja* ritual to prepare them physically and mentally for the ceremony.

Balebe (Relatives): Maternal uncles play a crucial role in providing blessings and moral support to the initiates, symbolizing familial and communal solidarity.

Babashebusa: These individuals announce the commencement of the circumcision season by sounding the drum or horn, creating an atmosphere of anticipation and unity.

Umukuuka (Cultural Leader): The cultural leader officially launches the Imbalu season, highlighting its significance to the Bamasaaba identity.

Bakuuka (Clan Leaders): Clan leaders oversee rituals to ensure they align with cultural and spiritual traditions, maintaining their sanctity.

Women and Girls: They transmit cultural knowledge, provide moral support, and prepare meals for participants, underscoring their essential contribution to the ceremony.

Kadodi Drummers: These drummers amplify the festive spirit of the ritual with their energetic rhythms, adding a celebratory dimension.

Uwekumwendo/Umibiti: Mentors who guide and support the initiates during the symbolic mud cleansing, which is a purification process.

Umurara (First Initiate): The first initiate to be circumcised leads his peers, exemplifying bravery and inspiring confidence.

Uwemwitosi (Leader of Mud Bath): This leader offers guidance to initiates during the mud bath, a ritual of cleansing and preparation.

Bashebi (Traditional Surgeons): Skilled and respected surgeons who perform the circumcisions, carrying out their role with precision and cultural reverence.

Inemba Drummers: These drummers perform during the *Inemba* stage, aiding in the spiritual reintegration of initiates into the community.

Communities: Beyond individual roles, the entire community participates by providing moral and spiritual support, celebrating, and ensuring the continuity of this inclusive tradition.

This rich diverse group of participants reflects the communal and inclusive nature of the Imbalu ritual. Every role, from the initiates to the leaders, women, and drummers, contributes to preserving and celebrating this cultural heritage

2. Are there any other people who are concerned with this element? If so, who are they and what is their role in the performance/practice of the element? (Probe for name(s), age, gender, location social status, and/or professional category)

Beyond the key participants already mentioned, several other groups and individuals also play roles in keeping the Imbalu ritual alive and practiced:

Government and Cultural Institutions: Groups like the **Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development** and other cultural heritage organizations help to promote the importance of Imbalu and ensure it continues. The **Ministry of Tourism** works alongside the Bamasaaba Cultural Institution to support and promote the Imbalu Festival. They also make sure that the practices follow modern values and conservation laws.

Medical Professionals: Health workers sometimes work with traditional surgeons to make sure the circumcision is done safely and in a clean environment. This helps to bring together cultural practices and modern medical standards.

Environmental Conservationists: Organizations like the **Uganda Wildlife Authority** focus on protecting wildlife used in the ritual, such as for the *Lirubisi* headgear made from animal skins. They also promote sustainable alternatives for these ceremonial items to balance culture with conservation.

Educators and Scholars: Teachers, researchers, and cultural experts study, document, and spread knowledge about the Imbalu ritual to preserve its history and importance for future generations.

Artists and Performers: Besides the *Kadodi* drummers, other creatives such as visual artists, designers, and choreographers highlight the Imbalu tradition through performances, artwork, and media, adding more richness to the culture.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): NGOs like the **Cross-Cultural Foundation** work to preserve cultural heritage. They support the Bamasaaba community in protecting and promoting the Imbalu ritual.

Community Members Outside the Region: The Bamasaaba diaspora, such as members of the **North America Masaba Association (NAMCA)** and **Inzu Ya Masaaba United Kingdom (IMUKA)**, contribute to supporting the ritual. Additionally, neighboring communities like the Bukusu in western Kenya, represented by the **Bukusu Council of Elders**, participate or support Imbalu indirectly, showing how the tradition has a wider cultural reach.

These groups ensure that Imbalu remains vibrant and continues to be celebrated as an important tradition for the Bamasaaba people.

3. What are the customary values and practices governing the element?

The Imbalu ritual is at the heart of Bamasaaba culture, built on strong values and vibrant practices. It starts with the courage and resilience of the boys, called *Basinde*, who willingly go through circumcision to mark their journey into adulthood. This act shows bravery and strength, which are key qualities of a mumasaaba man. The ritual also protects the

community's cultural heritage, passing down traditions from their ancestors to the next generation.

Imbalu is not only about the individual; it is a ceremony that brings the whole community together. It creates unity and a sense of shared responsibility, encouraging everyone to participate. Elders, cultural leaders, and traditional surgeons play important roles in guiding and leading the rituals to keep them true to tradition. Spiritual renewal and cleansing are also central to the ritual, with acts like the mud bath symbolizing a fresh start. The ritual includes everyone—men, women, and children—each having special roles that keep the community balanced and united.

These values are brought to life through practices that hold deep meaning. Participation in Imbalu is voluntary, with the boys and their families giving consent to take part. The ten traditional steps of Imbalu must be followed carefully to keep the ceremony authentic. Specific clans and skilled individuals take on the important roles. For example, the *Bashebi*, the trained surgeons, perform the circumcision, while the *Umukuuka*, the cultural leader, guides the whole process.

Men carry out key duties like mentorship, circumcision, and leading ceremonies. Women provide moral support, prepare meals, and pass on cultural knowledge to the younger generation. Children also play their part by joining the celebrations and learning the traditions that they will carry forward in the future.

The public circumcision is a moment of dignity and respect. Only adult men surround the boy during circumcision to follow cultural norms. The preparation starts with *Isonja*, where elders guide the boys both physically and mentally to get them ready. After this, the *Uwemwitosi* leads the boys through the mud bath, which is a symbol of cleansing and purification.

The community comes alive during the Imbalu season. *Babashebusa* sound the drums and horns to announce the start of the circumcision season, which is officially launched by the *Umukuuka*. The celebrations are full of joy and unity, with *Kadodi* drummers and dancers creating a lively and festive mood. After the circumcision, the *Inemba* drummers help reintegrate the boys into the community as fully grown men.

One special part of the *Inemba* celebrations is the use of the *Lubwombabwombe*, a congratulatory plant that is placed around the boys' necks by friends and relatives. This act comes with a gift and shows love, respect, and pride in the boys' achievement.

These values and practices together form the foundation of the Imbalu ritual, connecting the Bamasaba people's culture, spirit, and social life. Through the bravery of the boys, the wisdom of the elders, and the support of the community, this important tradition remains alive and strong for generations to come.

4. In which ways is the element passed on to the young generation? (Probe for who transmits the element).

The Imbalu ritual is a much-loved tradition among the Bamasaba people, passed down from generation to generation through storytelling, hands-on learning, and even modern methods. In families, elders and clan leaders are the main keepers of this heritage. Around traditional fireplaces or during shared meals, matriarchs and patriarchs tell stories about the history, values, and practices of Imbalu. These moments are not just about words but about teaching the next generation the courage, unity, and pride that the ritual represents.

In the wider community, the learning happens in practical ways. Boys are guided by elders and apprentices from specific clans who are skilled in circumcision, *Kadodi* drumming, and *Inemba* practices. These apprenticeships are important training grounds where skills like herbal care before and after circumcision, spiritual guidance, and ceremonial leadership are

passed on within specific clans. Children also get involved by watching the events, joining in celebrations, and learning through songs, music, and dance.

Women and girls play a key role in this cultural education too. They not only give moral support and prepare food for the ceremonies, but they also share cultural stories and practices with the younger generation. Their contribution shows how inclusive Imbalu is, ensuring that every member of the community has a part to play in keeping the tradition alive.

Modern times have added new ways of teaching. Radio talk shows and multimedia platforms now work alongside traditional methods, reaching more people and inspiring young generations in creative ways. Circumcised men often return to share their experiences with the new initiates, encouraging them and boosting their confidence. Even medical workers are involved, helping to ensure the ritual meets modern safety standards while still keeping its cultural meaning.

Through these deep-rooted traditions and new ways of learning, the Bamasaaba people are connecting their past with the present. This careful blend of storytelling, mentorship, and community involvement makes sure that Imbalu remains a living tradition, strong and vibrant for the generations to come.

5. Which organizations participate in performing/practicing and/or promoting the element and how?

The Imbalu ritual involves many organizations and institutions, each playing a part in its performance, promotion, and preservation. At the center of this is the **Institution of the Umukuuka**, which serves as the main governing body. This institution is managed by a 19-member board, where I am the chairperson, and it oversees the smooth running of the ritual. The board organizes circumcision schedules for all clans, under the leadership of the **Umukuuka**, the cultural leader of the Bamasaaba people. Their work is key in protecting the ritual's values and ensuring all rules are followed.

Support for the Imbalu festival also comes from outside cultural institutions. **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)** and **local businesses** provide financial and logistical help, especially for the launch of the circumcision season at the **Mutoto cultural site**. Kenyan counterparts also participate and support the launch, showing the shared cultural ties between the two regions. Organizations like **Namca** and **Imuka** give important financial contributions to make the event successful.

Central government also plays an important role by providing a lump sum of money to support the launch. This shows the government's appreciation of the ritual's cultural importance. To add to its significance, the **President of Uganda or their representative** always attends the launch as the guest of honor, giving the event national recognition and respect.

To promote Imbalu further, the **Ministry of Tourism** has partnered with the Institution of Umukuuka to advertise the launch at Mutoto. This partnership shines a spotlight on the ritual's cultural value and helps to make it part of Uganda's tourism attractions, drawing visitors and increasing cultural pride.

With all these efforts, involving traditional leaders, government support, cross-border partnerships, and modern strategies, the Imbalu ritual remains a proud and respected part of Bamasaaba culture and heritage.

SECTION 4: STATE OF THE ELEMENT: VIABILITY

1. What challenges and constraints have the community experienced in performing/practicing the element?

The Imbalu ritual, which is very important to the Bamasaaba heritage, is facing many problems that are putting it at risk. These problems are social, economic, environmental, and cultural, and they are weakening this sacred tradition.

In the past, Imbalu was highly respected, but Western religions and foreign cultures have made things difficult. These outsiders have called Imbalu "backward" or even "satanic," which has discouraged people from participating. Younger generations, influenced by modern ideas, are starting to question whether this tradition is still important or not.

The focus on the circumcision surgery itself has also taken away the deeper meaning of Imbalu. Hospital circumcisions are cheaper and faster, but they leave out the mentorship, rituals, and community involvement that make Imbalu special. Without these parts, the roles of elders, drummers, and traditional surgeons are disappearing, and the tradition is losing its guardians.

Economic struggles have made things even harder. Organizing Imbalu celebrations, which used to happen every year, is now too expensive for many families. Things like Kadodi drums, costumes, beads, and food are costly, so families often choose hospital circumcisions to save money. The big, colorful ceremonies are being replaced with simpler and less meaningful events.

Environmental problems are also causing trouble. Climate change and mudslides have destroyed important cultural sites called *mishengero*, where rituals used to take place. These disasters have also killed elders who were key in teaching the younger generation about Imbalu. Wildlife protection laws have made it hard to get materials like colobus monkey skins for making *Lirubisi* headgear, and special beads (*Matongo*) are becoming rare. This affects how traditional and authentic the rituals feel.

The problems don't stop there. Many traditional practitioners, like elders and surgeons, are aging, and younger people are not learning these skills. This has led to a shortage of qualified drummers and surgeons. Kadodi performances, once full of energy and meaning, now suffer because of untrained performers and non-traditional instruments.

Health and safety issues have also created challenges. Traditional circumcisions, which are done without anesthesia, can be risky. Modern medical procedures are safer, but they don't include the spiritual and cultural parts of the ritual. This has caused disagreements about how to balance safety with keeping the tradition.

The communal part of Imbalu has also been affected by diseases like HIV/AIDS and COVID-19, which stopped gatherings and forced people to make changes to stay safe. On top of this, it is hard to plan circumcision schedules for clans, and there are no proper records to document the traditions. When elderly custodians pass away, important knowledge is often lost forever.

Even with all these challenges, Imbalu is still very important to the Bamasaaba people. However, to save this tradition, the community needs to teach the younger generation, document the practices, provide financial support, and keep promoting the rituals. This will help keep Imbalu alive and meaningful for future generations.

2. What challenges and constraints have the community experienced in passing on the element from one generation to another?

The Bamasaaba community faces many problems in passing down the Imbalu ritual to the next generation. These problems make it hard to keep the tradition alive and strong.

First, some young people are losing interest in the ritual. Many focus only on the circumcision part and forget the mentorship, songs, dances, and ceremonies that make Imbalu special. Hospital circumcisions skip the traditional way, so elders, drummers, and traditional surgeons are not involved anymore. This makes it hard to pass on the full process of Imbalu.

Second, foreign religions and cultures call Imbalu "backward" or "satanic," making some people shy away from the tradition. As modern ideas grow, many youths feel that Imbalu is not important anymore. The elders who know the traditions are aging, and younger people are not learning these skills, like Kadodi drumming or performing ceremonies.

Third, money problems make it hard for families to participate. The drums, costumes, beads, and celebrations cost a lot, so some families choose cheaper hospital circumcisions. This removes the cultural part of Imbalu. Also, environmental problems like mudslides have destroyed cultural sites and killed elders who pass down traditions. Laws protecting wildlife mean things like colobus monkey skins cannot be used for *Lirubisi* headgear, and some special beads are now hard to find.

The health side also brings challenges. Traditional circumcision without medicine can be risky, and while hospitals make it safer, they leave out the rituals. Pandemics like HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 stop people from gathering, and social pressure stresses young boys who must take part, or they face stigma.

Even with all these issues, people are still working hard to save Imbalu. Mentorship programs, teaching traditions to the youth, and documenting cultural practices are helping keep it alive. Financial support and training are also needed to make sure the ritual continues for the next generation. This way, Imbalu will remain a proud heritage for the Bamasaaba people

3. Which measures have been taken in safeguarding the element?

The Bamasaaba community and other organizations have taken steps to protect the Imbalu ritual and make sure it continues for future generations. These efforts include:

Government Support: Ministries like **Gender, Labour, and Social Development** and **Tourism** work with the Bamasaaba Cultural Institution to support and promote the ritual. They ensure that it meets modern safety and conservation standards while keeping it true to the culture.

Health Support: Health workers partner with traditional surgeons to ensure circumcision is done safely and cleanly, addressing any health concerns while respecting cultural practices.

Community Involvement: Everyone in the community is encouraged to take part in the ritual. Men, women, and children all play different roles, ensuring that the tradition is inclusive and brings people together.

Support from Diaspora: Bamasaaba people living abroad, through groups like the **North America Masaba Association (NAMCA)**, **Bukusu Council of Elders**, and **Inzu Ya**

Masaaba United Kingdom (IMUKA), help support Imbalu with funding and cultural awareness campaigns.

NGO Support: Organizations such as the **Cross-Cultural Foundation** help protect Imbalu as part of Uganda's intangible cultural heritage. They provide resources to ensure the ritual survives.

Cultural Tourism: The **Ministry of Tourism**, together with the Bamasaaba Cultural Institution, promotes the Imbalu Festival as a tourist attraction. This helps raise awareness and appreciation for the ritual while bringing in extra support.

Through these efforts, the Bamasaaba people are keeping Imbalu alive, ensuring it remains an important part of their culture and identity for years to come.

4. Which other measures should be taken to safeguard the element in future?

In addition to the existing measures, several other steps can be taken to further preserve the Imbalu ritual:

Cultural Curriculum Development: Schools and universities can include Imbalu in their curricula as part of cultural studies, teaching its history, values, and significance to young learners. This will help raise awareness and pride among the youth.

Digital Documentation: Creating a digital archive of Imbalu practices, stories, songs, and dances would safeguard its knowledge against loss and make it accessible to future generations.

Training Programs for Practitioners: Establish programs to train the next generation of traditional surgeons, drummers, and dancers. These initiatives will address the declining number of skilled practitioners.

Community-Based Conservation: Encourage community members to protect cultural sites and resources used in the ritual, like mishengero (ritual spaces). Local leadership can work with conservationists to preserve these areas.

Cultural Exchange Programs: Introduce programs that connect Bamasaaba youth with elders and practitioners from neighboring Bukusu communities in Kenya, fostering mutual learning and regional collaboration.

Resource Mobilization: Set up fundraising initiatives or partnerships to support families who struggle financially to participate in Imbalu. This will ensure inclusivity and protect the grandeur of the ritual.

Advocacy for Cultural Rights: Advocate for policies that respect and promote cultural traditions, ensuring that Imbalu is recognized and safeguarded under Uganda's laws.

Capacity Building for Cultural Leaders: Offer training to cultural leaders to enhance their leadership and organizational skills, helping them manage Imbalu-related activities effectively.

Youth Engagement Events: Organize cultural festivals, competitions, or mentorship programs aimed at youth participation to spark their interest in learning and preserving Imbalu.

Creative Preservation Through Arts: Promote artistic projects such as films, documentaries, songs, or books about Imbalu, showcasing its significance to broader audiences.

By implementing these additional measures, the Bamasaaba community can strengthen their efforts to safeguard Imbalu, ensuring that it continues to thrive as a vibrant and meaningful tradition.

SECTION 5: DATA GATHERING AND INVENTORYING

1. How would you want this information to be used?

The information gathered about the Imbalu ritual can be applied in several meaningful ways to preserve and celebrate this cherished tradition. Efforts to protect Bamasaaba culture begin with recording and safeguarding the Imbalu ritual, ensuring that future generations maintain a strong connection to their heritage. By documenting the practices and symbolism, the Bamasaaba people can keep their tradition alive despite changes in modern society.

Teaching about Imbalu in schools, universities, and communities can foster understanding and respect among the youth. Learning materials that explore the history and significance of the ritual can instill pride in the younger generation and encourage their participation in cultural preservation. Beyond education, Imbalu can also become a key feature of Uganda's cultural tourism. By promoting the Imbalu Festival as a unique attraction, the country can bring attention to this vibrant ritual while supporting the local economy.

Laws and policies are another area where Imbalu can be safeguarded. By influencing policies that recognize and protect cultural traditions, the ritual can be preserved at both national and regional levels. This ensures that its cultural value is formally acknowledged and respected.

The Imbalu ritual has the power to bring people together, not only within the Bamasaaba community but also among those in the diaspora. By encouraging participation and shared knowledge, Bamasaaba people abroad can remain connected to their identity and traditions, reinforcing their pride and unity.

Imbalu's rich cultural elements also have the potential to inspire creativity. Filmmakers, writers, and artists can draw from the ritual's deep meaning to create documentaries, books, or artworks that showcase the tradition.

2. Would you like this information to be shared with other communities?

Sure! Sharing this meaningful information about the Imbalu ritual with other communities can help more people appreciate and value it. Showing the Bamasaaba heritage to different audiences can bring chances for cultural exchange, working together, and even global recognition of this vibrant tradition.

It can also be an example for other cultures that want to keep their own unique traditions alive

SECTION 6: REFERENCES TO LITERATURE, DISCOGRAPHY, AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS, ARCHIVES

1. Are there books or any other documents written about the element? If so, where can I access them?

Yes, there are books and documents written about the Imbalu ritual! One notable work is *Identity, Power, and Culture: Imbalu: Initiation Ritual Among the Bamasaaba of Uganda* by John Placid Wotsuna Khamalwa. This book explores the cultural and symbolic aspects of the ritual and is part of the Bayreuth African Studies Series2.

Another edition, titled *The Power of Culture and Identity: Imbalu Initiation Ritual Among the Bamasaaba of Uganda*, provides updated insights and focuses on the role of women and the symbolism within the ritual.

You can access these works through platforms like Open Library or Google Books. Additionally, the revised edition is available on the Librairie Numérique Africaine.

2. Are there any audio or video recordings about the element? If so, where can I access them?

Yes there are several videos on YouTube. Although none with a comprehensive detail of all the rituals.

Date Reviewed:

14 March 2023

Date Approved:

30 May 2023

Signature by Focal person:

