

INVENTORY FORM

NAME OF COMMUNITY: Bagisu and Babukusu collectively known as Bamasaaba

Date: 17th January, 2023

Background Information

Name of respondent: Hon Wilson Watira

Status of respondent: Chairman, Imbalu Board

Age: 61 **Gender:** Male

Location: Maluku Cultural Headquarters, Mbale City, Uganda

Date & Time: 17th January 2023 **Time start:** 10:00am **Time end:** 2:00pm

Facilitator(s):

1. Daniel Kaweesi
 2. Isabirye James
 3. Nalubega Hajara
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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 consent. (Refer to consent form No. ____).

SECTION 1: IDENTIFICATION OF THE ELEMENT

1. What is the name of the element, as used by this community?

Isonja, Sinyimba, Kadodi, and Inemba

2. For someone from outside this community, how would you briefly explain this title?

These are initiation dances performed by the Bagisu and Babukusu communities. They represent structured cultural stages in the journey of youth toward adulthood, transmitting moral, social, and communal values through performance, music, and collective participation. Each dance—

Isonja, Sinyimba, Kadodi, and Inemba—is associated with a specific phase of the initiation process, fostering discipline, courage, endurance, and solidarity.

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

The Babukusu of western Kenya also practice these dances.

4. Where is this element practiced/performed?

These dances are performed across the Bugisu region in Eastern Uganda, including districts such as Mbale, Bududa, Sironko, Manafwa, Bulambuli, and Namisindwa.

Important performance spaces include:

- Clan cultural grounds
- Family homesteads
- Community gathering spaces
- Mutoto Cultural Grounds in Mbale City, where official ceremonies are conducted

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

- **Preparatory Stage – Isonja and Sinyimba:** Youth undergo rhythmic and physical training under elders (Basakhulu) and trainers (Bakubilisi), learning coordinated movements, call-and-response songs, and gestures that develop strength, agility, and communal awareness. Sinyimba includes chest beads (Matongo) whose movements imitate the colobus monkey, symbolising alertness and cooperation.
- **Transformative Stage – Kadodi:** Youth participate in three-day processions, singing personal songs, performing energetic dances, and moving through the community to celebrate determination and vitality. Kadodi rhythms have also become popular in cultural festivals beyond the initiation context.
- **Reintegration Stage – Inemba:** Youth are reintegrated into society with circular dances, green leaves as honour tokens, communal songs, and feasting, marking social acceptance and recognition.

These dances form a cohesive performative and pedagogical system that transmits Bamasaba values, identity, and intergenerational solidarity.

SECTION 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ELEMENT

1a. Materials/implements/tools/props used while performing/practicing this element:

- Drums (Kadodi, Inemba)
- Beads (Matongo)
- Cowbells (Bisenze)
- Wooden arm bars (Tsimboko)
- Headgear (Lirubisi, Ikwani)
- Traditional attire (Isumbati, Kamakayi)

- Cowrie shell belts (Likhalala)
- Decorative skins and furs

1b. Are the materials easily available in the community?

Most items are locally available; however, some materials such as Lirubisi headgear and Matongo beads are scarce due to wildlife protection and environmental changes, prompting the use of substitutes in some areas.

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

- Chest beads (Matongo)
- Cowbells and wooden bars (Tsimboko)
- Cowrie shell belts (Likhalala)
- Headgear (Lirubisi, Ikweni)
- Animal skins and furs around ankles
- Traditional wraps (Isumbati)

2b. Are the costumes/clothing easily available in the community?

Some costumes remain locally made; scarcity of specific materials (beads, Lirubisi, furs) has necessitated the use of alternative or synthetic materials.

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

- Traditional music and drumming
- Oral traditions and initiation songs
- Indigenous craftsmanship (drums, beads, attire)
- Social rituals and communal celebrations

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?

- Khuwenza Busani – “Finding the man within”
- Likobi Lye Bamasaaba – “Cultural responsibility of the Bamasaaba”
- Musambwa Gwe Ipalu – “Ancestral Spirit of Imbalu initiation”

6. How did this element originate?

Oral traditions attribute these dances to Masaba, an ancestral figure of the Bamasaaba, who instituted structured stages for youth to acquire social, moral, and communal virtues. Over centuries, songs, dances, and rituals evolved to reinforce community identity and intergenerational transmission.

SECTION 3: PERSONS AND INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED

Who performs/practices this element?

- Basinde (initiates) – youth participants
- Elders and trainers (Bakubilisi, Umwimbi) – teach dances and songs
- Clan leaders (Bakuuka) – oversee traditions
- Cultural leader (Umukuuka) – official ceremonies
- Women – support communal feasts and songs
- Drummers and musicians – Kadodi and Inemba

Other concerned people/groups:

- Government ministries (Tourism, Gender, Labour & Social Development)
- NGOs (Cross-Cultural Foundation)
- Diaspora organisations (NAMCA, IMUKA)
- Environmental conservationists (Uganda Wildlife Authority)

Customary values and practices:

- Courage, endurance, discipline
- Communal solidarity and moral education
- Voluntary participation and mentorship
- Respect for elders and intergenerational transmission

Transmission to younger generation:

- Apprenticeship with elders
- Participation in dance rehearsals and ceremonies
- Oral storytelling and song
- Community festivals and mentoring programmes

Organisations participating/promoting element:

- Institution of Umukuuka (main governing body)
- NGOs and local businesses
- Government ministries
- Diaspora and cross-border communities

SECTION 4: STATE OF THE ELEMENT: VIABILITY

Challenges/constraints in performance/practice:

- Declining knowledge and transmission due to hospital-based practices
- Influence of Western religions reducing youth participation; disappearance of some dances in northern Bugisu

- Loss of practitioners and skills among drummers, singers, and artisans
- Environmental degradation and scarcity of ritual materials (matongo, Lirubisi)
- Economic pressures and migration reducing participation
- Commercial exploitation and inadequate documentation threatening authenticity

Challenges in transmission:

- Reduced youth interest
- Migration and urbanisation
- Scarcity of traditional materials

Safeguarding measures taken:

- Government and NGO support
- Diaspora involvement
- Mentorship and apprenticeship programmes
- Promotion through cultural festivals

Additional safeguarding measures needed:

- Integration in school curricula
- Digital documentation and archives
- Training new performers and drummers
- Cultural exchange programmes

SECTION 5: DATA GATHERING AND INVENTORYING

Use of information:

- Cultural preservation
- Education and transmission to youth
- Cultural tourism promotion
- Research and creative inspiration

Sharing with other communities: Yes, to promote cultural exchange and awareness of Bamasaaba heritage

Materials submitted (U.2 materials): Written, audio-visual, and performance documentation of initiation dances.

SECTION 6: REFERENCES

Books/documents:

- Wotsuna Khamalwa, John Placid. *Identity, Power, and Culture: Imbalu Initiation Dances among the Bamasaaba of Uganda*. Bayreuth African Studies Series.
- Updated editions on Bamasaaba cultural practices and dances.

Audio/Visual materials:

- Videos of Isonja, Sinyimba, Kadodi, and Inemba dances available online (YouTube).
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Date Reviewed: 14 March 2023
Date Approved: 30 May 2023
Signature by Focal person: 