

Community Dialogues

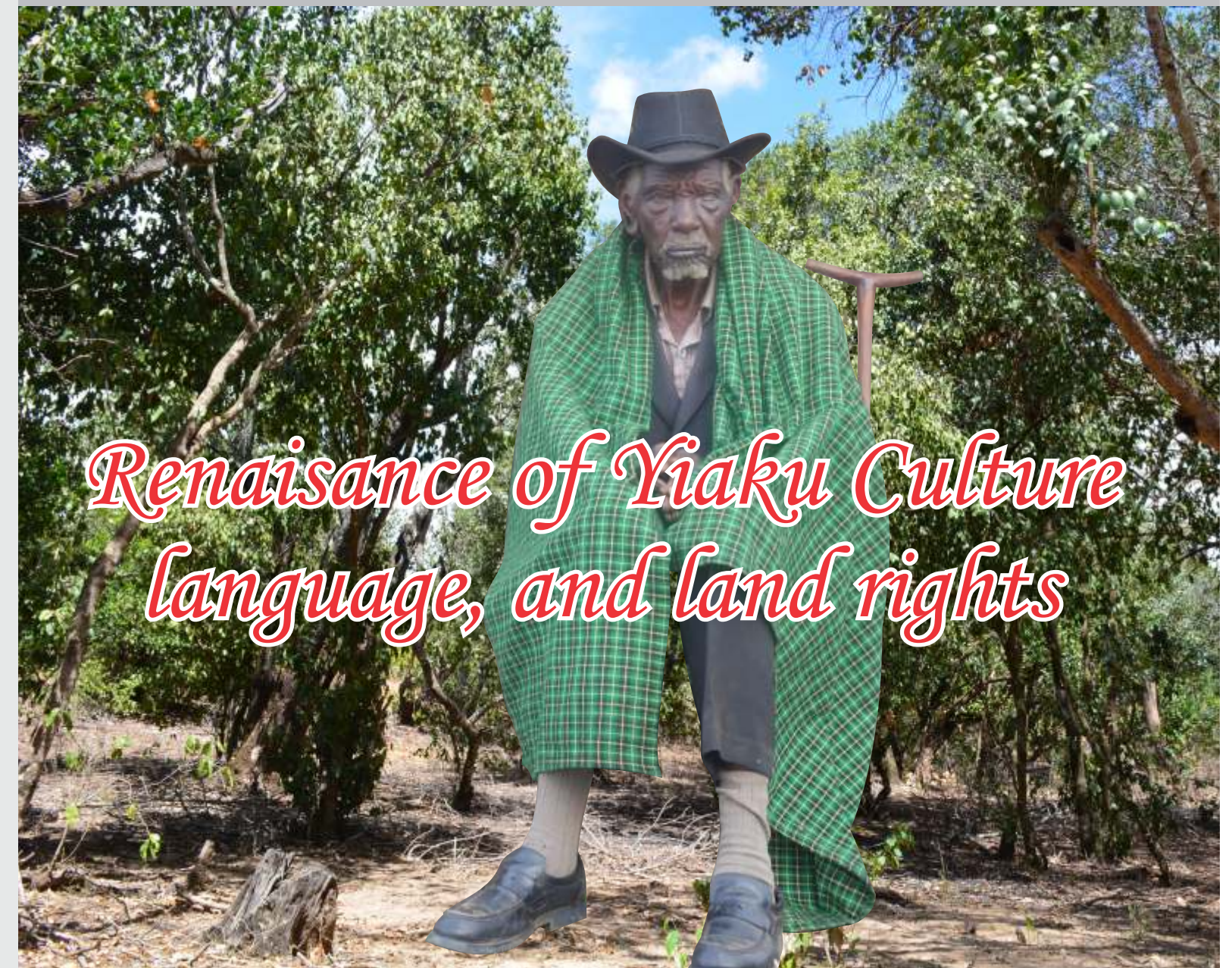
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Forum for Constructive interchange



Yiaku Laikipia Trust
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Visual Statement



Photo credit: Murimi Njahira



Photo credit: Murimi Njahira



women: Keeping culture alive

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HUMAN WILDLIFE CONFLICT



Photo credit: Murimi Njahira

Pesky Jumbo's or simply demanding space?
a simmering conflict over land. signalling a need for careful
spatial planning in this fragile eco-system.



Photo credit: Bernard Peren



Photo credit: Bernard Peren

Elephant menace; counting losses
after a raid.

English for documentation. Steps taken towards speaking that language is that so far the speakers greet each other in Yaakunte and know about each other well-bouts in Yaakunte before shifting to Maasai as the basic language of exchanging knowledge. Recording of the language also takes place in the learning sessions with Teacher Rashid and Mzee Leriman Leitiko. This recording helps get the correct pronunciation of the language. Another important tool that is used by the teachers and learners is practical interaction lessons for instance while walking together to the field the teacher and the learners see and talk about various tree species pronouncing the same Yaakunte.

The major challenge however that is faced is that there is still a shortage of willing Yaakunte language learners. However there is a plan to map out a campaign that will bring people on board to learn their native language. The Campaign seeks to recruit youth aged 16-30 years



Vandalized Yiaku cultural museum

who firstly have the will to learn the language. This group of learners will then be rolled out as trainers of trainers (TOT) who will disseminate the language to the family level especially among the people of Yaaku origin.

Another major setback is the difference between the verbatve and written language. The learners encountered this difficult as there are some transcripts to the verbatve that are not applicable to the written

language. The learners as well do not have a clear cut framework on the tools to use while recording the language though they would appreciate any training that will equip them on a proper guideline that will come up with a concrete syllabus that will learn with and also translate the same when teaching learners of the language.

Unity is strength, the common adage so goes. We hereby call for a collective effort even by the government of Kenya for recognition of the community and allocation of resources towards development of its culture and heritage. Enshrined clearly right from the preamble of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, the nurturing and protecting the well being of the individuals, families, communities and the nation is well stipulated in Article 56 of constitution of Kenya 2010 that the state shall put affirmative action programs that ensure that minorities and marginalized group develop their

cultural values languages and practices.

Until next time Ikaapatin!(Goodye!).

Editorial

There comes a time when a community attains political maturity. It is a time when it ceases to beg for its rights but rather demands for them. The time has come for the Yiaku community. Like other ethnic groups in Kenya, the Yiaku made an entry into their current territory through migration from Ethiopia like other communities like the Nilotes, Bantus and -- over 4 centuries ago. While the more numerous groups ventured further into new found lands, this pacifist group settled in Mukogondo forest which suited their hunter gatherer lives; a forest they have called home to date. The Yiaku suffered a first historic injustice from Government with the onset for scramble for Africa when the British colonized Kenya and through forceful relocations, pushed the Laikipia Masai on to their territory. This heralded the beginning of their woes as a minority. The more numerous Masai community imposed upon the Yiaku their culture an act that has led to a demise of the Yiaku language. Today, only three aged persons can fluently speak Yiakunte. It is now be classified as a proto-type but there is hope for revival.

The Yiaku has woken up to the glaring inequalities between them and other minority groups in Kenya. Kenya has 43 registered tribes so far with the most recent being a forest dwelling community similar to the Yiaku; the **Ogiek** of the Mau forest Complex and the Asian community. These latter group migrated to Kenya about a 100 years ago to provide labor for railway construction by the colonialist. Despite the community's long existence in Kenya, this fundamental human right has eluded it all this time. Is has now downed upon them that they have to fight for this right as it is enshrined in Kenyan constitution.

In **CHAPTER FOUR—THE BILL OF RIGHTS**
Part 2 – RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS ; Article 27. (2) states; Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and fundamental freedoms
Sub-article (6) states; **To give full effect to the realization of rights guaranteed under this article, the state shall take legislative and other measures including affirmative action programmes and policies designed to redress any disadvantage suffered by individuals or groups because of past discrimination.**

The YIAKU have been discriminated against and have not been treated as equal to other communities in Kenya. Despite living in the Mukogondo eco-system and being its custodian for decades they still are not recognized as owning it like other communities own their territories. Upon promulgation of the 2010 constitution of Kenya, they banked on the implementation of Article 56 of the BILL OF RIGHTS which states; The state shall put in place affirmative action programmes designed to ensure that minorities and marginarized groups-

(a) Participate and are represented in governance and other spheres of life;
And **CHAPTER ELEVEN—DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT- membership of county assembly- ARTICLE 177. (1) A county assembly consists of;**
(C) the number of members of marginalized group, including persons with disabilities and the youth, prescribed by an act of Parliament.

It has dawned on the community that for this article to apply to them, they have to be recognized as a **TRIBE** of Kenya. YIAKU LAIKIPIA TRUST, embarked on a campaign to sensitize the Yiaku community on the need to clearly state their tribe and to write the same during the just concluded census of 2019. It is good to note that the campaign was successful and that the community in its entirety showed a desire to be accorded recognition as YIAKU.

The Yiaku community faces many challenges including a near demise of their language and effects of climate change. During interviews conducted with members of the community for purposes of writing articles for this publication, it was evident was community resilience and a yearning for recognition as a tribe. It is our hope that the struggle for recognition for this marginalized community will bear fruit. It is our hope that the attempt of reviving the Yiakunte language will be successful and that the community will embrace it as the language of choice.

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Visual Statement

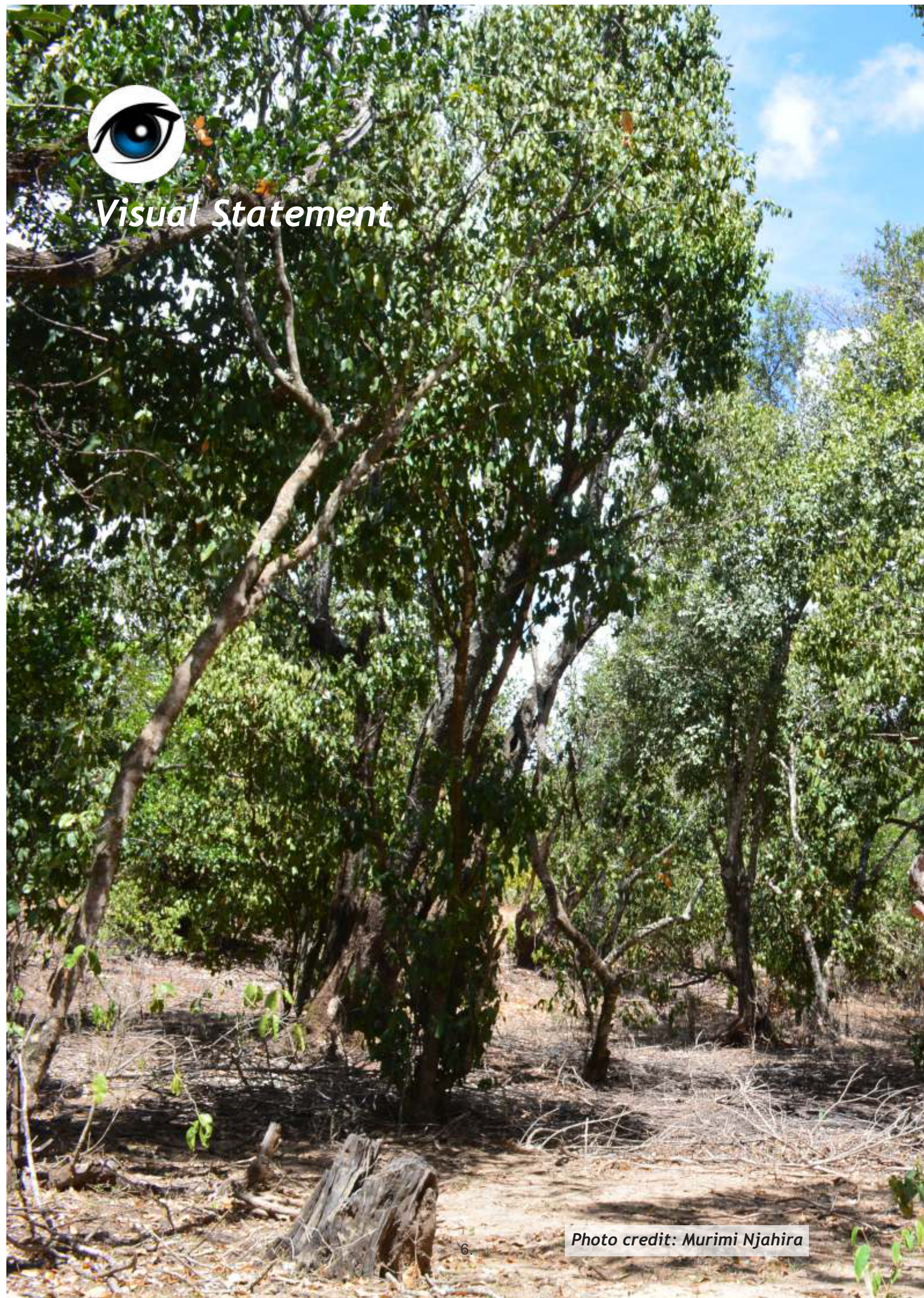


Photo credit: Murimi Njahiria

men are advanced in age. The oldest is in his late 90,s while the youngest is in his 70,s. Indeed the existence of the language faces a risk of extinction which will be a big blow to the global heritage and that of the nation of Kenya.

Prompted by this ardent need, a group of locals embarked on a unique journey of going against odds by daring to reinvigorate their language that is at the brink of extinction. At the onset the group has 3 teachers and 6 students. Recruitment of the learners of the

reside in Dol-dol Centre are Mr. Bernard Loolasho, Noah Matunge ,George Kilepu, Josiah Pokisa and Daniel Kilepu who are members of the Yaaku Community themselves.

With the support of Yiaku Laikipiak Trust, the group meets from Monday to Friday with 2 hours of active learning and takes away assignments over the weekend. The communication mode between students & teacher is mainly Maasai & Yaaku. The students then translate the script from



Photo credit: Erina Naishorua

Yiakunte student Bernard Peren with his teacher Mzee Leriman

language is still ongoing. The teachers of the language are Mr. Rashid Lolkinyanyi aged roughly 70 and Mzee Leriman Stephen aged 95 and Mzee Leitiko aged 89 years. These men have a rich experience in the Yaaku language

speech, having grown all their lives speaking the Yaakunte Language. On this journey of faith, the group albeit small is making strides revitalizing their language. The 5 students of language who Maasai to

YIAKU LANGUAGE REVIVAL:

A last shot attempt

“It is sad 3,000 of the world's 6,000 languages are doomed because no children can speak them. In Africa alone there are 1,800 such languages, in Indonesia 672 and in New Guinea 800. If a language disappears, traditional knowledge tends to vanish with it since individual language groups have specialized vocabularies reflecting native peoples unique solutions to challenges of food gathering, healing and dealing with the elements in their particular niche”

Linguist Ken Hale, 1991



Photo credit: Erina Naishorua

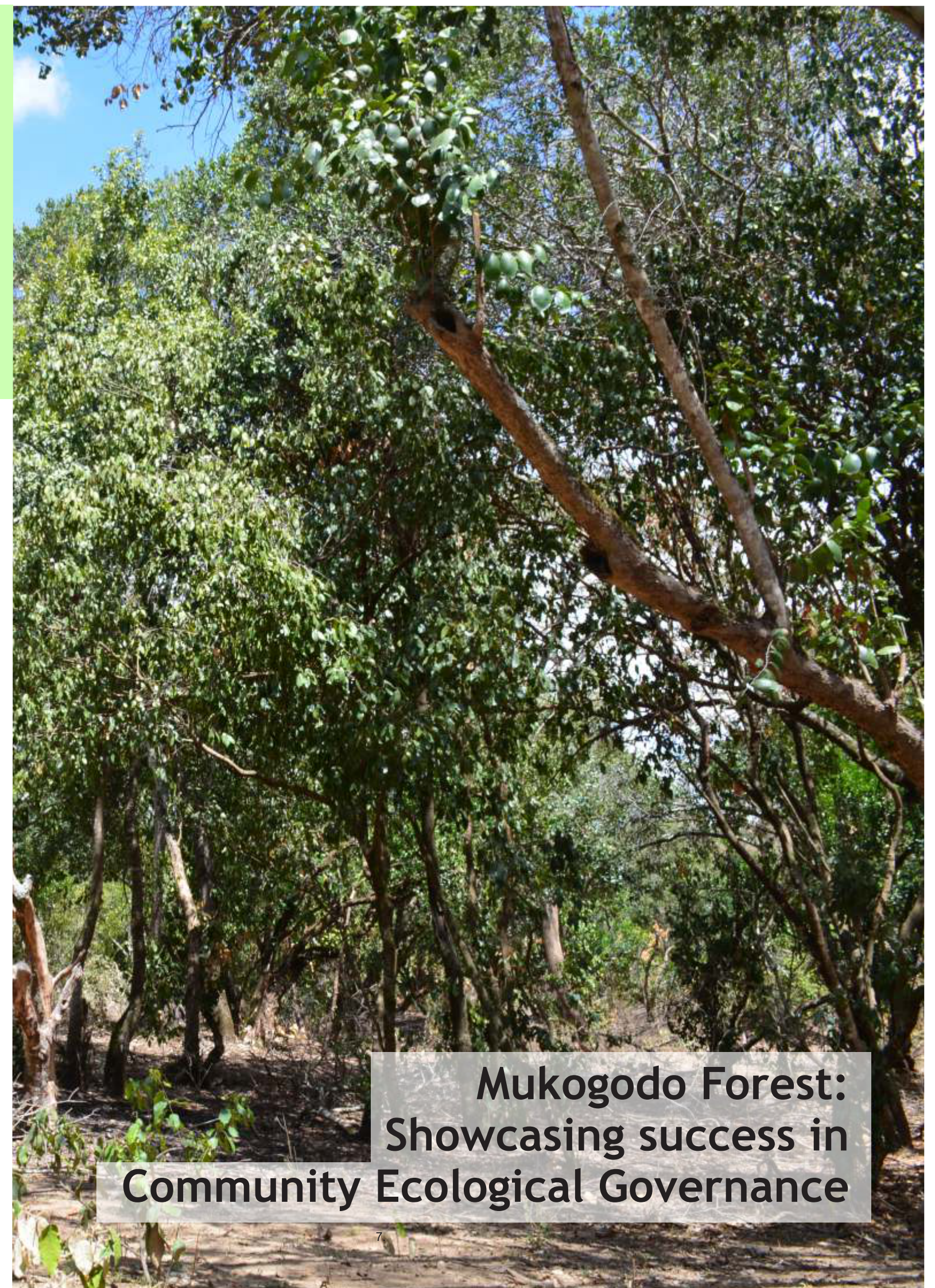
Yiakunte student Bernard Peren with his teacher Mzee Rashid

In an article on the Standard Newspaper dated September 11 2013, the title by Beatrice Wamuyu, the author of the same goes, “Dying languages that take culture, history to the grave! From her write up Beatrice connotes that the Yaaku Language was being absorbed by the Samburu Language. Something worth noting at the tail end of her article is that she ends with a rather somber mode while she comments, “Unless something is done to preserve these Kenyan Languages (Yaaku being among them) the

unique culture and rich history that they hold will forever be lost.

Six years down the line, the same sad commentary on the Wednesday September 11th 2013 Standard newspaper still obtains.

As at November 2019, there were 3 fluent speakers of the Yaakunte Language. The most alarming reality is how all the three



**Mukogodo Forest:
Showcasing success in
Community Ecological Governance**

Reminiscences of a bygone era; a journey back in time in the history of the YIAKU people.

By Murimi Njahira



“Mukogodo forest is our home. Mukogodo is our life not simply a source Of livelihood”

Mzee Stephen leriman, Mukogodo

Mzee Leriman stares at a crackling fire from wild olive wood (olea Africana) lost in thought and in a trance like posture. The dark manyatta is redolent with scent from the wild olive flames which together with its warmth created a homely ambience in this humble setting. I sit on a an empty water jelly can and I too stare at the fire trying to conjure up what could be going on in the old man’s mind. How far back could his aged memory manage to take him? I had been warned that he might not be as coherent due to advancing years and this worried me since my mission was to have a firsthand encounter with this Beacon of hope for the YIAKU community; the last from his generation and to be able to share the experience with a larger audience.

A glimpse into pre-colonial history of Yiaku

The Yiaku are an Eastern Cushitic tribe that migrated into the Rift Valley area of East Africa during the second wave of migration. During the period that spanned over a period of 20 centuries, other ethnic groups also migrated into the East African territory. These included the Highland Nilotes, the River Nilotes, Plains Nirotos, and the Early and later Bantus.

Dispersal patterns were advice by numbers and livelihoods of the various ethnic groups. This saw the minority Hunter Gatherer groups like the Ogieks, Sengwer and the Yiaku concentrate around forests. The Ogieks settled in the Mau and Mt Elgon, the Sengwer community chose Cherangani while the Yiaku made Mukogodo forest their home.

Bracing for disappointment, I shift my stare into his expressionless eyes and waited. And then the Man spoke. “Mwacha mila ni mtumwa”(culture abandonment is akin to slavery). I almost jump from my sit. Not only is the old man alert and coherent, he could communicate in Swahili. What a relief. He went on in the Maa language, “we integrated with the Laikipia Masai to our demise”. I asked him why they integrated and he sayed it was simply to survive as a community. He explained that the intruding Laikipia Masai were more numerous and they were also very fierce fighters. But with a chuckle, he added, “we cheated a physical annihilation but we are staring at a cultural death”.

The good, the bad, and the ugly

Each traditional community had its down side. Some used to sleep with the deceased as a cleansing ritual; others used to killed twins since they were thought to bring bad omen while most used to mutilate girls’ genitals.

And many such vices. The Yiaku had many good practices and a few not too palatable practices which we can now reveal.

The good; domestic violence against women was unheard of amongst the Yiaku.

The bad; female genital mutilation was practiced as rite of passage.

The ugly; infanticide was practiced on babies who cried incessantly and also out of belief that the cry would cause the death of the kids father.

Our land is dying

I recall a conversation I had with two gentlemen in Doldol one evening four years ago. I had raised my concern on widespread degradation on the community land side of Laikipia North pointing at the stark difference on the divide from Illpolei. Being the passionate environmentalist that I am and not knowing all the facts, I made the common mistake of offering a solution instead of seeking for the same from the locals. What was my suggestion? Perhaps the community should consider ceding more land to the Wazungu ranchers who appears to be better conservationists than the locals. I benefited from the Maa culture of patience and hearing the other person out. So after I made my case, it was their turn to respond and respond they did.

What I gathered first was about historical land injustice metted on the local community by the colonial government and not addressed by the post–colonial governments that have been in power. I steered clear from that quagmire and stuck to the environmental challenge threatening

the community. The fact of the matter is the rangelands are severely degraded and if nothing is done the general area will soon turn into a desert.

One of the hosts pointed out one contributing factor to the degradation. He asked whether I had noticed how securely the ranches are fenced to which I concurred. “The thousands of cedar poles used to fence those ranches were all harvested from Mukogodo forest”, he volunteered. “The “conservationist” who owns the ranches seems to be only interested in their lands”, he continues and asked me if that is true conservation. I said it is not. This fact calls for restitution in lieu of destroyed forest by the logging. The ranching community should also consider engaging in reforestation and rangeland management in the community land as a CSR gesture.

Pastoralism is the single most environmentally destructive practice that is slowly rendering Laikipia north into desert. The Samburu community has historically been guilty of forceful intrusion into the Yiaku territory. Armed with guns, this pastolist community has been known to invade the Yiaku grazing grounds during droughts. With the increasing evidence of changing climate, droughts are becoming severe and more prolonged leading to the invaders lingering in the Yiaku community. This coupled with resident livestock population has led to massive erosion and vegetation depletion.



Mukogodo a bird watchers paradise



*Yellow billed hornbill
(Yiakunte - Ilkotikote)*



*Nubian woodpecker
(Yiakunte - Ltillo)*



*Red and yellow barbet
(Yiakunte - Lodidio)*



*Verreaux's eagle
(Yiakunte - Lugut)*



*Superb sterling
(Yiakunte - Surpalen)*

The Yaku thus became cave dwellers inside the Mukogodo forest and its environs the name 'Mukogodo' means people who live in rocks. This is the Yaku identity and proves their claim as the rightful owners of the Mukogodo territory.

The Yaku community is composed of four distinct clans. These include the **ORONDI**, **LOSSOS**, **LUNO** and **SIALO** clans. Out of these 4 clans, an offshoot of 13 sub-clans emerged. The ORONDI clan is split into 4 family lineages namely; (1) Padero, (2) losupuko, (3) Matunge, and (4) Leitiko. SIALO clan is composed of (1) Parmashu, (2) Sakui, (3) Miole and (4) Nantiri. LUNO clan has 2 families namely (1) Liba and (2) Len-Nkilelenyi while LOSOS family lineage is (1) Lentura, (2) Napei, and (3) Lol Kinyanyi

Although according to oral history the different family lineages moved into Mukogodo independently and from two directions ie, North and Southern directions, they later fused to form what become the YIAKU having settled in an orderly manner in the MUKOGODO region.

The River Nilotes, the Plains Nilotes, the Highlands Nilotes and the Bantus all have regions within the map of Kenya that they call home. As Mzee Leitiko posed is too much to demand recognition as rightful owners of where we have resided for hundreds of years?

“Who would challenge the Yaku people that they are not the owners of the hills and valleys appearing in this 3-Dimensional model? Every feature in this map has a name and an owner. Sadly Our Government has no respect for names and history.

Indigenous peoples cannot save their remaining territories

once their stories, names and customary laws are extinguished.

Mzee Tongoyian Supuko, Mukogodi

The sentiments echoed by this man brought to mind an incident that happened in another territory during a similar campaign by the Karima community in Nyeri region of Kenya as they fought to regain ownership of Karima forest. A conversation which I now borrow and quote:

Nelius -First is the Town Clerk a Christian? Wanjiku -Yes

Nelius -So he knows about the story of Jesus Christ?

Wanjiku -Yes

Nelius -How old is the story of Christ?

Wanjiku -About 2,007 years old

Nelius -Is is not a very old story such that the educated refer to BC or AD?

Wanjiku -Yes, it is a very old story indeed

Nelius -Then, if the Town Clerk can believe in a story which is 2,007 years old, why does he doubt our story which is only 200 to 300 years old? Is he not a fool?

Wanjiku -It seems

Consistence and logic draws a parallel to Nelius line of argument in the case of Yaku territorial ancestry. Asked to name the various ethnic groups of Kenya, their migratory routes and settlement, could a history student who gives Mukogodo region as the home of the Yaku be marked wrong or would they be marked right only in theory? Teaching truth means practicing truth. Yaku children demands to be truthfully represented in the Kenyan history of migration and territorial ancestry.

The Government should disembark from the tight-rope walk of historical injustices it was bequeathed by the British colonial masters and recognize the indigenous Yaku community and their god given territory; the MUKOGODO. Lest it falls off

Story of vanquished vanquisher

89 year old Mzee Leteyion Tuta Leitiko narrated an interesting occurrence that heralded the infiltration of the Laikipia Masai into the Yaku territory.

The Laikipia Masai were a fierce and war loving community who proved to a thorn in the flesh to their Narok and Kajiado brothers. They used to conduct numerous raids into these territories plundering their livestock and stealing their women and girls. A time came when the masai from Narok could take no more and so they held a war council to strategize on how to overcome this numerous community. After consultation they engaged the services of a witch doctor (loibon).

“The witchdoctor prepared a charm for them to rub onto a buffalo. One moran undertook the task and rubbed the charm on a buffalo after which the beast went and entered into a Laikipia community Boma. It was promptly killed. The report was taken back to the witchdoctor who now changed tact and requested to be brought a skin of a dikdik (small antelope). He again rubbed some charm on the skin and gave instruction for it to be taken to the same Boma. When the bearers of skin arrived at the said Boma, they found morans outside singing traditional songs and as they contemplated how to deposit the skin, it started raining forcing the morans to take shelter inside a manyatta. The skin bearers took advantage of the situation and quickly sneaked inside the Boma and spread the skin in the compound and left. When the rain stopped, the morans emerged only to find the strange item in their compound. A forboding groom engulfed them and they surrendered to fate. In the meantime the Masai from Narok and Kisonko merged and attacked the Laikipia foes pursuing them with great slaughter from Naivasha all the way North to near the Borana border”.

The result of that war saw a remnant of the Laikipia masai take refuge in the Yiaku territory where they were welcomed perhaps as a mercy gesture. The Yiaku referred to these newcomers as Ilmomonyot meaning a people who move from place to place. What the Yiaku did not know then was that these Ilmomonyot would irreversibly change their culture and way of life.

It started with the benevolent Yiaku giving their beautiful girls to the Laikipia masai for marriage. The Laikipia Masai in turn returned the gesture by giving the Yiaku livestock and a precedent was thus set. As the new-comers continued their stay, more trade and inter-marriage took root within the two communities.

According to Mzee Leriman, the Yiaku community slowly fell for a simingly easy lifestyle of the Masai. He alluded to a Yiaku or

Masai saying; “a bird is trapped with food on the ground”. “The Yiaku were trapped by the lure of an easy life of livestock keeping by the Masai” he observed. “For meat we would go out to the bush to hunt. It was a rigorous and sometimes dangerous venture. But with livestock, the meat was at your doorstep. And so we took the bait and started to keep livestock” he continued. “Admiration of the Masai way of life was the start of the demise of Yiaku culture. It became fashionable to speak like the Masai, dress like the Masai and herd like the Masai” Mzee Leriman lamented. “Today, we are Masai housed in Yiaku bodies”. He sums up by repeating his earlier observation, “mwacha mila ni mtumwa”.

And so the vanquished Laikipia masai made their revenge by vanquishing the culture of their host the Yiaku. But the Yiaku never say die. A cultural renaissance is on the re-bound.

Yiaku traditional food

The Yiaku diet was healthy to say the least. On their menu were 4 dishes all organic. These included 1. Game meat 2. Honey 3. Fruits 4. Roots and Tubers

Milk and fried foods were not known to the Yiaku. Young children used to be fed bee larvae mixed with sika. The mixture was called **Rhiimo**. It should be noted that roots and tubers were mostly consumed during famine and were not liked mostly by the young ones.

Except for meat, the rest of Yiaku food was ready to eat items making them quite a healthy choice. Honey required no cooking and the same goes for fruits and tubers. They could actually be eaten as they were harvested.

Honey was stored in large wooden containers called **Itaam** in Yiakunte. One Itaam could hold 70kg of honey. A family that was well stocked on this commodity was regarded as food secure while a family head who failed to provide this vital food risked divorce from his wife. Honey harvesting was an important

He cannot believe his fortune as he returns the call and starts to follow the bird. A few minutes later the bird goes silent. The hunter now applies his hunting instinct and gives the surrounding area a scrutiny. Lying to his left and covered with moss in perfect camouflage is a gigantic shomoongo (albizia gumifera) log. A close examination reveals a hollow filled to the brim with honey. He stares at the Ino bird perched just across on a dried up tree trunk and thanks it from his heart. He knows what he must do. He scoops the golden honey with his sword and hungrily starts chewing but even before he extracts all the juice from the honeycomb he throws it towards the bird which now joins in the feasting. This is the way of the forest. After a while both the hunter and the bird have had their fill. It is now time to park the honey and take it home. At last his family will have a meal and more to spare thanks to the indicator indicator bird.

Kirrianga (pied crow) leads hunters to dead prey by perching on nearby tree and making a particular sound. It also leads by flying towards the prey's direction till it lands to where the dead animal is to be found.

Hunters are also alerted to a dead animal's position by **Tilatu** (eagles) when they continuously circle an area.

The Yiaku never hunted birds. They also would never kill mating animals or delivering animals. They had deep respect for life. Destruction of flowering plants was highly prohibited. This is the reason the community took seriously breach on trespass regulations to protect vegetation.

Mukogodo a bird watchers paradise



Secretary Bird
(Yiakunte - Lembae nabo)



White bellied go-away bird
(Yiakunte - Ilkwaak)



Crested francolin
(Yiakunte - Nkurrlen)

ailment required an astute observation and mental documentation of processes to advise similar management in the future. Without papers, pens, or even computers, the Yiaku medicine fraternity was quite adept in mental record keeping that contributed to an establishment of a standardized management of diseases.

A branch that required lots of precision and bravery was surgery. Unlike today though, there were no specialists for different cases requiring the surgeon's knife. A bush doctor would important to note here that no form of intrusive surgery was performed in the early days in the traditional set-up. Only minor surgeries like circumcision were performed.

Welcome to traditional Yiaku pharmacy.

Dressing of wounds

Sunguroi (Aloe secundiflra), Ipara (Kibwezensis), Ngamei and Lesayiet (Withonia sommifera).

Treatment of STDs

Ilmakutikuti (Clerodendron myricoides), Laibaiy, Kealko (Senseviera sp)

Treatment of malaria

Senetoi (Senna didymobotrya), Ilchibilikwa, Nkitaru, Ingogola and Ilmengi for cerebral malaria

Treatment for rheumatic fever

Segetet, Sogono, Ilmaniman

Constipation management

Silalei (Commiphera Africana)

Management of diarrhea

Ingirgir, Seketet (Mysine Africana)

Treatment of pneumonia

Lamaloki, Segetet, Olngilai

Treatment of chesty and dry coughs

Lolmurtana (Warbugia ugadensis), Sukurtuti (Cissu quadrangularis)

Treatment of sore gums

Iltononik, Lamai (Ximenia americana)

Treatment of TB

Seketet (Myrsine Africana)

Treatment of scabies

Suguroi (Aloe secundiflora)

Treatment of ashma

Lowuai Banites aegyptiaca)

The Yiaku culture; a lesson in symbiosis

Successful day to day living of the Yiaku depended on close symbiotic relationship with nature. Being a forest dwelling community, the Yiaku had a deep respect for all other life forms within the forest ecosystem. This in turn bred a reciprocal bonding between the Yiaku and nature resulting in mutual benefit for all. The following few examples illustrate how it worked.

A hunter has been looking for prey all morning without success. It is now noon and the hot sun has started taking a toll on the man. With his stomach grumbling due to hunger, he takes a rest under a tree as he contemplates his next course of action. Going back home is simply out of question. He conjures up his kids running to meet him as he gets into the compound with eyes wide in expectation and the mere thought adds to his distress. And then he is jolted by a familiar sound! A call from Ino (indicator indicator) bird.



Greater
Honey
Guide

(Yiakunte - Ino)



Lchangorrs - Used for honey storage



Lchangorrs - Used for honey storage

calendar event and was determined by the flowering season of various tree species. This occurred three times in a year during the months of March, August and October. Maximum blooming of the tree species in all the three cycles ensured food security for the community. The cycle followed the following order. In March the dominant tree species in bloom is Croton megalocarpus (Lmergweit), August saw Acokanthera schimperi (Lmoriyo) in bloom and in October it was the turn for Techlea simplicifolia (Lgilei) to bloom.

Honey was also used to make honey wine which was the pride of a Yiaku home to be enjoyed by men. During major occasions

where celebration is called for, large amounts of honey wine was brewed and consumed. Today the making of this traditional brew is still practiced.

The Yiaku were quite adept at game hunting but not indiscriminate. They had preference especially during good seasons. They for example mostly consumed the rock

hyrax readily found in the many nooks and crannies of rocks found in the territory. Second choice to this included the antelopes with occasional large game like the buffalo also consumed.

Amongst the Yiaku and with exception of the SIALO CLAN, it was taboo to consume elephant.

For preservation, meat was cooked until it became crunchy and the mixed with fat. This mixer was called Iporrda in maa and was stashed in a wooden container and stored in a cave. This delicacy together with crystallized honey saw a many Yiaku family avoid starvation during famine.(Beehives were considered as social status symbols. A person who owned less than 10 hives was

considered poor while person with up to 30 hives was considered moderately rich. Owners of over 300 hives was a very rich person)

Spirituality

Like all cultures, the Yiaku believed in a deity who they referred to god (yecheri). There is a shared belief among the Bantu from Central Kenya and the Yiaku on the dwelling place of god. Both believed he resided on top of Mt Kenya. The Yiaku on their part believed that if one dared to climb to the peak of the mountain they would essentially have desecrated the sacred place and would be



(Photo of African beehive)

punished by being blown down to their death by strong winds.

Nearer home the top of ol donyo lossos hill in Mukogodo served as the holiest sacred site and this is where offerings of honey, blood and fat were made. These offerings were made to plead for rain, peace, honey and other foods. Various other sacred site were found inside Mukogodo. These included a particular water

Marriage

There was strict prohibition on intra-family marriages within the Yiaku community. Marriage was only allowed outside the family lineage.

Traditionally, the Yiaku practiced monogamy. When a man attained a marriageable age of about 25yrs and got interested in a particular girl, he would go to the father and inform him of his intention. The father would then arrange on dowry negotiations. According to Yiaku elder Mzee Leriman, the bride price was traditionally 4 hives with bees. The girls' father would be given two hives. This solemnized the union and the son in law now was allowed to call his father in law by name but would henceforth refer to him as **pameren** which was a respectful name.

The girls' mother would also be give one bee hive which was called **sakama**. The other hive was given to the girls' brothers.

During the wedding ceremony, honey wine was served to elders while women, youth and children enjoyed honey to celebrate. The couple would then leave to start their marital life. Domestic violence was unheard off in the Yiaku culture. It only reared its head when they started borrowing from the Maa culture which allowed the vice.

Divorce would only occur when the man neglected his duty to provide for the family which was a rare thing. A curious observation though is that a good number of Yiaku men chose not to marry and this has contributed to the low numbers of this tribe.

Why a Pardero cannot marry a Losupuko

According to oral history the Pardero was the first family to settle in Mukogodo. All of Wandiki forest was within their territory. The Pardero great grandfather was called Makonori. His father was reportedly killed during a hunting expendation upon where his wife migrated to Narok with her son and lived among the Masai eventually getting married there. She bore two

sons in that marriage. When her first born son got of age, he refused to be circumcised among the Masai opting to return to his own father's ancestral land. the mother obliged and brought the boy back to their home around Wandiki in Mukogodo. it is reported that the boy got so excited he broke a tree called Lokirisiai thus earning the place the name Ndikiri Olokirisiai.

As he went about discovering his territory, he found two men harvesting honey from his fathers' beehive. Since he had been warned not ot kill anybody within that locality since they might actually be his brothers, he removed the poisoned arrowhead and shot at the men. Startled, the men exclaimed , “has hills resurrected, let us run away”, and they took off. Makonori in turn called after them and enquired where they were living to which they replied that they were living in a fig tree with a hallow space (shomogoo tiwaa). Makonori went for his mother where they were staying in a cave at a place called Toirai and they went to live in Shomogoo tiwa where they were welcomed by the Losupuko family. The father of that family played the role of father to Makonori and circumcised him. Makonori in turn gave Losupuko part of the territory which includes Punnj hills and the surrounding plain called Laloo lolopi.

This circumcision bondage in effect makes Losupuko a father to Makonori and hence the marriage restriction between the two families.

The traditional Yiaku herbal medicine practice

Before the advent of “civilization”, traditional African societies had elaborate societal structures that served the needs of the communities. Key among these was a well established medical system. The Yiaku community had a deep understanding of herbal medicine. For centuries, conventional system of medicine was unknown to the community and they still thrived on their rich knowledge and skill of natural medicines and herbs. Just like in modern medicine, traditional medicine was divided into different branches of speciality. Research on diseases and their cure required a deep knowledge in pharmacology. Successful management of an

source found in the forest, a small hill in the Sieku Valley and a particular tree known as Hindadai. At this particular tree, contents from a slaughtered animal stomach were rubbed round the tree as offering.

According to **Mzee Leriman** there was provision for prayers from a household level. “A family head would make a seasonal prayer for his household. During the flowering season, the man would go and collect flowers and tender branches from igilai, meguit and other trees and he would mix them with honey and water and leave them overnight. Early the following morning, he would wake up and go outside and sprinkle the mixture as he implored god for good fortunes”. This prayer was offered during the trees flowering period.

This is proof that the traditional way of life of the Yiaku was not inferior to the other cultures and that it served them as a people.

***Mukogodo Honey Trees and
Flowers in bloom***



Croton megalocarpus
(Yiakunte - Borko)



Euphorbia gossypina
(Yiakunte - Loilei)



Bidden pilosa
(Yiakunte - Siando)



Photo credit: Manaseh Luta

*Mzee Leteyion Tuta Leitiko 89 years
One of the last three fluent Yiakunte speakers*

Rangeland Degradation

Reaping Bitter fruits of an introduced culture

**“Our land is dying if we do not act now,
we are all doomed”**

Kiuri Kimeru, 85 years. Daily Nation, August 12, P4

Photo credit: Murimi Njahira