

Origin, Settlement, and Beliefs of the *Bisukha* and *Bidakho* of the Luhya Community-Kenya

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This study interrogated the origin, settlement and the beliefs of the Bisukha and Bidakho sub-ethnic groups in the larger Luhya ethnic group. The paper has unravelled the etymologies of the Luhya, Isukha and Idakho terms. Furthermore, it has established the origins, migrations and settlements of the Bisukha and Bidakho, the differences and similarities that exist between them. The paper has also delved into the social-cultural economic and political institutions with their related beliefs, taboos and practices. The reviewed literature established a number of lacunae which this study has endeavoured to fill. The historical and ethnographic research designs were employed by the study. Oral interviews were used to collect the data, which was analysed within the environmental deterministic theoretical approach. The major finding is that; the various social, economic, cultural and political practices were done with the wisdom of maintaining the ecological set up for sustainability. That is, the pre-colonial Bisukha and Bidakho kept their ecological balance of give and take strategies that did not constrain the ecosystem.

Acronyms: AMAA - African Mutual Assistance Association, FGDs - Focused Group Discussions, NKCA - North Kavirondo Central Association, UNEP- United Nations Environmental Programme

Introduction

Since the beginning of the human species, historians have continued to be interested in the origins, migrations, settlements, and evolution of community beliefs. For many reasons, including famines, civil wars, ethnic rivalries, political repression, and conflicts across societies, humans have always departed their native habitats. As these communities move from place to place, they have ended up separating, uniting, and re-joining again, resulting in the formation of cultural groups in the form of ethnics, sub-ethnics, or clans. It becomes impossible to obtain "a pure ethnic group" as a result of these dynamic processes.

Among the Kenyans communities, the *Baluhya* (Luhya) community appears to be the most mixed, with influences and influxes from their neighbouring Nilotic groups. Research on the etymologies of Luhya, Isukha, and Idakho terminology, as well as sociocultural and political practices and their effects on ecology, is necessary, according to the literature on the Luhya in general and

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Isukha and Idakho in particular. This literature included; M.S Mwayuli, and J. Kavulavu, P.R. Bennett, C.J Indongole, just to mention a few. Additionally, this research examined the origin, migration, colonization, and development of beliefs among the Bisukha and Bidakho sub-ethnic groupings of the Luhya ethnic community in western Kenya. The study looked into the origins of the words Luhya, Isukha, and Idakho to better understand the subject. The investigation also identified the origins, migrations, and settlements of these individuals and evaluated their sociocultural, economic, and political activities as well as the ecological effects of those actions.

According to the research, there have been several hypotheses put up concerning the origins of the names Luhya, Isukha, and Idakho. Additionally, the study discovered that the place and environment in which they settled had an impact on their sociocultural, economic, and political behaviours. The study also emphasizes how the pre-colonial actions of the Bisukha and Bidakho were environmentally friendly since they were in line with the notion of give and take for sustainability.

Literature Review

Available literature reveals that the socio-political and cultural histories of the *Isukha* and *Idakho* have been examined by M.S Mwayuli, and J. Kavulavu.¹ However, in their works the issue of socio-cultural activities and their implications on the ecological set-up was not dealt with. The current research has endeavoured to fill this gap. Moreover, there are a number of works on the Luhya, for example, G. Wagner on the Bantu people of Kavirondo, G. S Were on the Western Bantu peoples from A. D 1300-1800 as well as a history of the Abaluhya of western Kenya c. 1500-1930, J. Osogo on the history of the Baluhya and E. M. Aseka on the Political economy of Buluhya. However, their works concentrated more the Wanga, the Bukusu and the colonial penetration in the general Buluhya. Thus, it calls for research to interrogate further other sub-ethnic groups in Buluhya, in this case, Isukha and Idakho.

There is need to elaborate and expand on the historical formations of these groups. C.J Indongole gives an outline history of the origin, migration and settlement of the Abaluhya sub-groups and the clan system. His work is too general about the Luhya and hence the need to single out some of these sub-ethnic groups for study. The Luhya eponym has remained a mirage. M.S Mwayuli mentions Muluhya eponym but research has demonstrated that the Luhya groups have different origins therefore the need to investigate the Luhya progeny.

1. M. S. Mwayuuli, (1989). *The History of the Isukha and Idakho Clans among the Abaluyia of Western Kenya*. Kanazawa University, Japan, p. 6.

Lastly, P.R. Bannet, L.J. Lubanga, D.W. Lwangale, B. Mudogo and M.S. Shidiavai have done a lot on Luhya dialects, phonological analysis of Luhya loan words, patterns in linguistic geography, the Bantu origins controversy and lexical semantic assessment of the Luhya dialects.² However, there are Lacunae in explaining the etymologies of ethnic or sub-ethnic names like Luhya, Isukha, Idakho, Wanga, Bukusu to name a few. This article has attempted to fill this gap by etymologizing the Luhya, Isukha and Idakho.

Methodology

Both historical and anthropological research designs were used in the study. To ascertain the causes, trends and impacts, data was collected, gathered and reviewed through dialectic and problematization. To gather information for analysis, different written works and informants (respondents) were surveyed. D. M. Feterman claims that ethnographic research is carried out through the lens of the cultural environment in order to comprehend the lives of the people in a community. Being an Isukha, one of the authors had inside knowledge. Being in that position allowed for a deeper grasp of the subjects being studied along with the rigor and objectivity that any scholarship requires. Positionality requires the researcher to be aware of their identity so that they can educate people outside their social, cultural, and political circles. In the researcher's positionality, subjectivism and objectivism collide in a dialectical realm. Insider research presents opportunities and challenges. For instance, it can speed up participant recruitment, trust building, and a better understanding of the opportunistic factor.³

Primary sources included the respondents for oral interviews. Using convenience and systematic sampling these respondents were identified. Furthermore, the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) of elders were formed to provide group interactions between respondents with diverse views that enriched

2. P. R. Bennett, (1983). Patterns in linguistic geography and the Bantu origins controversy. *History in Africa*, 10, 35-51; L. J. Lubangah, (2018). Linguistic Versus Geographical Boundaries: A Lexical Semantic Assessment of Luhya Dialects (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi); D. W. Lwangale, (2012). A genealogical linguistic implication of the Abaluhya Naming System; M. S. Shidiavai, (2015). A phonological analysis of Iwidakho loanwords from Kiswahili and English (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi) and B. Mudogo, (2018). Baker's strategies in translation: a lexico-semantic analysis of four luhya dialects; Lukabras, Lwisukha, Luwanga and Lukhayo in informative text. *Baker's Strategies in Translation: A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Four Luhya Dialects*, pp. 71-84.

3. P. Rooney, *Researches from the inside-does it compromise validity? A discussion Level 3*(3), pp. 1-19. (2003); P. Freire (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th Anniversary Ed.) New York, NY: Continuum, p. 65.

the study. Consequently, the study findings were further arranged thematically based on the main objectives of the study.

Discussion of Findings

This section has delved in etymologies of the terms: Luhya, Isukha and Idakho, origin of the Abaluhya, Isukha and Bidakho, cultural practices and the associated beliefs of the Isukha and the Idakho, c.1850 to 1894. Also, it has unraveled the pre-colonial socio-political institutions of Bisukha and Bidakho communities. Furthermore, the section has underscored the social-cultural practices and beliefs of Bisukha and Bidakho and their ecological implication. Finally, the conclusion has been provided.

Etymologies of the Terms: Luhya, Isukha and Idakho

The term “Luhya” is apparently recent and its genesis is not very clear.⁴ One suggestion holds that the Luhya emanated from the word ‘Haluyia’ - which means an open place (field) where the old men of the society used to meet to discuss clan matters.⁵ In this space (field), men could share a variety of views affecting their community; ranging from customs, marriage, war, rain, famine, cattle raids among others. Societal arrangements and plans were also made in such sittings.⁶ Therefore, since they were fond of engaging in this activity, the people were referred to as ‘Abahaluhya’ to mean the people of the *Haluyia*, (field) which culminated into the ‘Abaluyia’ ethnic group.⁷

The Luhya ethnic group entails other communities that speak different dialects but have a significant affinity for each other.⁸ According to S. A. Bulimo, the geographical spread of the Luhya-Speaking people extends beyond the Kenyan frontier into Uganda, Rwanda, Congo, Zambia, and Cameroon.⁹ The

4. P. R. Bennett, (1983). Patterns in Linguistic Geography and the Bantu origins controversy. *History in Africa*, 10, pp. 35-51 and Lubangah, L. J. (2018). Linguistic Versus Geographical Boundaries: A Lexical Semantic Assessment of Luhya Dialects (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi), p. 75.

5. Peter Ahindikha (67 Years, Retired Education officer), Oral Interview at his home in Khayega- Machilifu, 10th June, 1995.

6. Joseph M. Mabilia (98 Years, A peasant farmer and Herbalist), Oral Interview at his home in Shirumba in Idakho, 15th June, 1995.

7. D. W. Lwangale, (2012). A genealogical linguistic implication of the Abaluhya Naming System.

8. C. M. Scotton, (1983). Language and Dialect Atlas of Kenya, I: Geographical and Historical Introduction, Language and Society, Selected Bibliography. 665-667.

9. S. A. Bulimo, (2013a). *Luyia Nation: Origins, Clans, and Taboo*, Trafford Publishing and Bulimo, S. A. (2013). *Luyia of Kenya: A Cultural Profile*. Trafford Publishing.

second explanation is of J. Osogo, who opines that the locals themselves coined the term 'Abaluyia' in the 1940s as the outcome of forming a common political group known as 'Abaluyia Welfare Association'.¹⁰ According to him, the term means 'fellow brothers',¹¹ this comes from the word 'oluya,' meaning to burn, or warmth.¹² The term is associated with the Luhya people's campfires to establish their presence.¹³ According to Bulimo, Luhya is derived from *Oluyia (Oluhya)*, which in its generic sense means the fireplace or hearth.¹⁴ *Okhuyia* is a word that means to burn or cook.¹⁵

In general, because families gathered around a hearth or bonfire in the evening to discuss the events of the day or to pass down cultural beliefs from generation to generation, the word Oluhya translates readily into a family/village/community that shared a fireplace.¹⁶ These assertions notwithstanding, the archival records demonstrate that the term Abaluyia was already in use by 1935. Bulimo writes: "The word Luhya was first suggested by the local African Mutual Assistance Association (AMAA) around 1930 and adopted by the North Kavirondo Central Association (NKCA) in 1935.¹⁷ Generally, the name was used to describe the communities that lived in what was then known as North Kavirondo, later Bantu Kavirondo".¹⁸ Bulimo further posits that "in 1940, Abaluyia Welfare Association was formed which popularized the name and later the Luhya language committee was established to formulate an orthography".¹⁹ This is supported by the memorandum entitled Abaluyia ba 'North Kavirondo Central Association'. Even so, by the time Gunter Wagner researched the Abaluyia in the 1920s and 1930s, the term Abaluyia was already in use.²⁰

One of the respondents, Petro Liyayi, informed this study that the Kavirondo people met around a campfire in the field (Haluyia/Luyia) to debate and deliberate on issues impacting their society. The confluence of the two ideas for the origins of the term Luhya is made evident in his submission. Regardless of the various interpretations, it is clear that the term Luyia is rather new. These

10. J. Osogo, (1966). *A History of the Baluyia*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

11. Z. A. Ogutu, & M. Khayesi, (1995). "Culture as the Basis for Bio-diversity Conservation in Kakamega Forest." *Trans African Journal of History*, pp.195-204

12. Ibid, p. 199.

13. J. Osogo, (1966). *A History of the Baluyia*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, p. 17, Aseka, E. M. (1989). *Political Economy of Buluyia: 1900-1964*" (Unpublished Ph. D Thesis). Kenyatta University.

14. S. A. Bulimo, (2013a), *Op. Cit.*

15. E. S. Kabaji, (2005). *The construction of gender through the narrative process of the African folktale: A case study of the Maragoli folktale* (Doctoral dissertation), p. 30.

16. Ibid, p. 30.

17. Ibid, p. 30.

18. Ibid, p. 31.

19. Ibid, p. 31.

20. G. Wagner, (1949). *The Bantu of North Kavirondo*. London: Oxford University Press, p. 45.

individuals were not known as Luhya by 1850, or even earlier. Instead, they were essentially a collection of people who spoke distinct but closely related dialects. The term Luhya was elevated for political purposes during the mid-colonial period, particularly as a means of generating unity in the liberation process in Kenya.

The Bisukha and Bidakho are part of the eighteen Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups that are found in the southern part of Buluhya.²¹ Their neighbours are Abatirichi to the south-east, Abalogoli to the South, Abashisa to the south-west, Abatsotso to the North, Abakabras, and Abanandi (Nandi) to the East.²² It is recorded that, the Bisukha and Bidakho had, by 1850, emerged as distinct sub-ethnic groups having closely related dialects.²³ Linguistically, it is not easy to distinguish between Lwisukha and Lwidakho dialects unless one has good knowledge of the two.²⁴ The suggestion for this similarity is the proximity the two have enjoyed and the unity they always forged to repulse their enemies.²⁵ However, recent findings indicate that apart from proximity, the two communities have a similarity based on their origins that make them have similar dialects.²⁶

The two terms could have been coined by the people themselves. On the one hand, the phrase "Bisukha" has two meanings. It is derived from the mother term *khubisushila*, *khubisukhila*, or *khwisubulukha*, which meaning to arise or miraculously or mysteriously appear (*khubonekha*) (*mundu uboneshebutswa*).²⁷ The name Bisukha, on the other hand, is derived from the river 'Isiukhu.' People who lived near the Isiukhu River were known as Bandu Bisiukhu (people of the Isiukhu River). With the passage of time, the title Isukha became synonymous with all clans in the present-day Bisukha (Shinyalu sub-county) in Kakamega County.

According to other disclosures, the term 'Itakho' arose as a result of reconciliation (*khulia muyayano*) between the Isukha and the Idakho over boundary disagreements. One of the important respondents, P. Sulumeti, the

21. F. C. Bode, (1978). Leadership and Politics among the Abaluyia of Kenya 1894-1963. PhD. Dissertation, Yale University, p. 24.

22. The 18 Luhya sub-ethnic groups include: Abashisa, Abamarama, Abatsotso, Abalogoli, Abidakho, Ababukusu, Abawanga, Abakabaras, Abanyore, Abakhayo, Abanyala Ba Ndombi, Abanyamala Ba Busia, Abasamia, Abamarachi, Abatirichi, Abisukha, Abatachioni and Abatura.

23. Z. A. Samita. "The African Church of the Holy Spirit: Origins and Advent in Kabras Division, Kakamega District." *TransAfrican Journal of History* 25 (1996): 123.

24. B. Mudogo, (2018). Baker's strategies in translation: a lexico-semantic analysis of four luhya dialects; Lukabras, Lwisukha, Luwanga and Lukhayo in informative text. *Baker's Strategies in Translation: A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Four Luhya Dialects*, pp. 71-84.

25. Joseph M. Malusu (49 Years), Oral Interview, 6th August, 1995.

26. M. S. Shidiavai. (2015). A phonological analysis of lwidakho loanwords from Kiswahili and English (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi), p. 32.

27. Petro Liyayi (83 Years, a peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home Ivakale-Elianda, 19th July, 1995 and Peter Mwayuuli (81 Years), Oral interview at his home in Mukumu, on 3rd September, 1995.

retired Catholic Bishop of Kakamega, stated that during a reconciliation ritual, the term 'Itakho' arose. The battle between the two communities over the boundaries created a great deal of confusion and terror. Thus, the elders called for reconciliation, and a bull was slain as a sacrifice to please the ancestors. Furthermore, he provided this data indicating that once the bull was slaughtered, the two groups split it evenly. The people from the south took the bull's hind limbs (*shitakho*), while the people from the north got the forelimbs. Because of the hind limbs, individuals in the south were referred to as *bandu bishitakho*, who later became Bitakho. Following that, a famous woman ululated to demonstrate that reconciliation had occurred. Because of the ululation (*shikalakala*), this location was renamed *haShikalakala*, which is now known as Sigalagala.²⁸

It is unknown when these community came to be referred to as Bidakho, as it is with the Bisukha. The Bisukha were the first to coin the term Bidakho. 'Bitakho'-behind (*inyuma*, *imugongo*, or *itakho*) or Binyuma alluded to a later arrival of the people who were closely following them and settling to the west.²⁹

As a result, most clans in modern Idakho arrived later, earning them the moniker "people of the back" (Bandu Bitakho). Although responses may agree on this, it does not authenticate or reveal the facts regarding when the term Bidakho was used. Earlier, it was mentioned that distinct clans arrived at different times. The Abashimuli, Abamilonje, and Abashirotsa, for example, appear to have emerged at the same time. As a result, the issue of Bidakho clans arriving late may not constitute compelling proof. The phrase 'Itakho' or 'Imbo,' which means 'behind or west,' refers to the direction of the Bidakho in reference to the Bisukha.³⁰ Thus, the Bidakho referred to all people living in the eastern half as Bisukha, and the Bisukha referred to all individuals speaking a language close to theirs as Bidakho.³¹

28. Philip Sulumeti (83 Years, Bishop Emeritus- Catholic Diocese of Kakamega), Oral Interview at his residence in Kakamega, on 11th January, 2020.

29. FGD of Council of Elders (at Shinyalu Chief Centre), 10th September, 1995. Abang'onye.

30. K. L. Muchanga (1998), Impact of Economic Activities on the Ecology of the Isukha and Idakho Areas of Western Kenya, c.1850 to 1945, (A Master's Thesis), Kenyatta University, p. 58.

31. Joseph Musindayi Manyonyi (88 Years, a peasant farmer and founder of Shimuli Sect), Oral Interview at his home Savane- Idakho, 5th August, 1995.

Origin of the Abaluhya, Isukha and Bidakho

Oral traditions and records are replete with developments that explain the Abaluyia's genesis, including a highly intricate migratory pattern within their current abode.³² Luhyas migrated to their present-day location from Egypt in North Africa.³³ However, according to their oral history, some historians think that Luhyas arrived from Central and West Africa with other Bantus during the Great Bantu Migration.³⁴ As a result, it is claimed that "the major difficulty in studying the Abaluyia is defining exactly who they are."³⁵ Some of the questions raised include: Where did the Abaluhya originate? Who was their forefather? Did they arrive as a group or did each group arrive separately? These questions aided in the in-depth examination of the study.

The research has shown that most present-day Abaluyia sub-ethnic groups migrated to their present abode from the west in the direction of Uganda.³⁶ This idea is also held by Kakai. Linguistically, the Luhya dialect is very much related to the people of central and eastern Uganda, especially the Basoga, Baganda, and the Bagisu; a similarity that points to the close interaction that the Luhya had with them.³⁷ However, the African linguists argue that there is a likelihood that the similarity could be because they are within the same family as well as the same interlucustrine region, not necessarily due to their interaction.³⁸ Population increase has been considered the major factor for migration.³⁹ In their view, population increase in a locality triggers off demographic responses, for example, diseases, famines, conflicts, ethnic rivalry and pressures on land; hence a society

32. P., Kakai (2000). History of Inter-Ethnic Relations in Bungorna, Mt. Elgon and Trans Nzoia Districts, 1875-1997 (Doctoral dissertation, Kenyatta University), p. 76.

33. C., M. Wechuli, Jairus Omuteche, and Chrispinus Wasike. "Images of Women in Selected Luhya Popular Music." *African Journal of Education, Science and Technology* 7, no. 2 (2022): 366-389.

34. D. Seidensticker, Hubau, W., Verschuren, D., Fortes-Lima, C., de Maret, P., Schlebusch, C. M., & Bostoen, K. (2021). Population collapse in the Congo rainforest from 400 CE urges reassessment of the Bantu Expansion. *Science Advances*, 7(7), eabd8352, p. 7.

35. E. M. Aseka. (1989). Political Economy of Buluyia: 1900-1964" (Unpublished Ph. D Thesis). Kenyatta University, p. 76.

36. G. Wagner. (1949), *Op. Cit.*, p. 18, Osogo, J. (1966), *Op. Cit.*, p. 56 and Were, GS (1967). A History of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya C1500-1930. Nairobi, East Africa Publishing House. p. 78.

37. *Ibid*, p. 79.

38. David Barasa (35 Years, Lecturer in Linguistics), Oral Interview at the Department of Languages - MMMUST, 6th August, 2020.

39. E. Boserup. (1981). Population and Technological Change: A Study of long-term Trends. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 10 and Rudengren, J. (1981). Peasants by Preference? Socio-Economic and Environmental Aspects of Rural Development in Tanzania (PhD Dissertation). Stockholm School of Economics, Stockholm, p. 17.

under stress can respond by migrating or intensifying their agricultural production, which in essence changes the mode of production.



Figure 1. Migration Route of the Abaluhya People
 Source: Adopted from G. S. Were (1967).

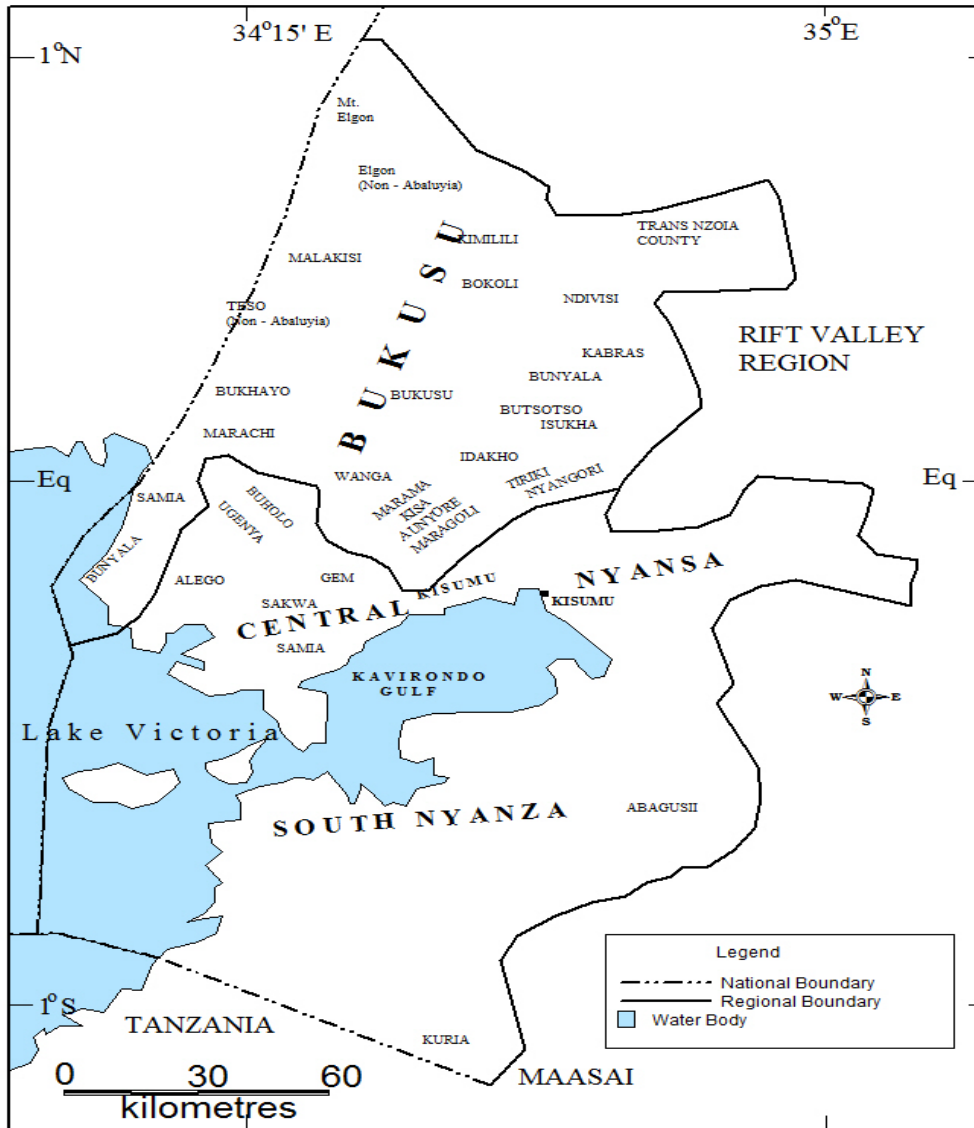


Figure 2. Abaluhya Locations with Adjacent Luo Locations
 Source: Were (1967).

According to Were (1967), the Abaluhya people (including the *Bisukha* and *Bidakho*) migrated from the west because of both ecological and human factors (see Figure 1).⁴⁰ Resources had been depleted, necessitating the search for fresh resources in the east, which led them to Kenya. Other reasons for the Luhya movement were internal warfare, droughts, and a desire for better living conditions, antagonism against new immigrants, domestic problems, and a sense of adventure.⁴¹ Their migration was sensible, with demographics playing an

40. G. S. Were. (1967), *Op. Cit*, p. 191.

41. C. J. Indongole. (2014). *Abaluhya: An Outline History of the Origin, Migration, and Settlement of the Abaluhya Sub-Tribes and their Current Clans in Western Kenya*. Kakamega: Brainwave Talents Centre, p. 87.

important part. However, because of the plentiful resources and low population, pre-colonial cultures were strongly dependent on the bio-physical environment, which determined cultural conceptions.⁴² To this end, this study established that societies migrated because areas they initially inhabited had deteriorated in particular essential resources, so migrations were bound to happen given resource availability elsewhere.⁴³

Whereas the Agikuyu have 'Adam and Eve' in Gikuyu and Mumbi, and the Gusii have 'Omugusii' as their creator, Abaluyia appears to have no singular ancestor.⁴⁴ The fabled 'Muluyia' or 'Mumwamu' as the founders of the Abaluyia people appear to be made up figures by oral traditionalists to form unity in the heterogeneous society and excuse the likeness in their language and cultural activities.⁴⁵ What appears to be clear is the existence of clan-level sub-progenitors such as Omulogoli, Akhwitsende, Anazio, Arimbuli, and others who are not related in any manner. The proximity, relationships, and assimilation of the many sub-ethnic groups and clans are likely candidates for the closest likeness. It so advances the commonly held concept that the Bidakho and Bisukha are descended from progenitors whose true identities are unknown.

Bode (1978) documents that Abisukha and Abidakho had always been in their present settlement since the 16th century.⁴⁶ Bode, in this context, might have viewed the Bisukha and Bidakho as people who came about in the 16th century. However, his view is not born out of the oral accounts of the various clans, which point to Mount Elgon (Masaaba) as their origin. According to Mwayuli (1989), the Bashimutu, Basilitsa, Bakisila, and Bakukhumi are believed to be the "indigenous" *Bisukha* and *Bidakho*.⁴⁷ However, this is still debatable because written accounts of Were (1967) and Osogo (1966) indicate that the area referred to as Buluhya was occupied by the Proto-Kalenjin groups who the in-coming Bantu groups displaced.⁴⁸

Furthermore, Osogo (1966) does not provide sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that Bisukha and Bidakho evolved. These indigenous communities appear to have arrived in the area before other Isukha and Idakho groups. Other clans trace their ancestry beyond Mount Masaaba, claiming 'Misiri' (modern-day

42. F. C. Bode. (1978). *Leadership and Politics among the Abaluyia of Kenya 1894-1963*, (PhD. Dissertation) Yale University, p. 87.

43. Andrew S. Liseche (60 Years, Retired Agricultural Extension Officer), Oral interview at Khayega Market, on 16th June, 1995.

44. E. M. Aseka, (1989), *Op. Cit.*, p. 76.

45. G. S. Were. (1967), *Op. Cit.*, p. 191, F. C. Bode. (1978), *Op. Cit.*, p. 89 and M. S. Mwayuuli, (1989). *The History of the Isukha and Idakho Clans among the Abaluyia of Western Kenya*. Kanazawa University, Japan, p.6 and Joseph M. Malusu (49 Years, Lecture in KU), Oral Interview at his residence at Kenyatta University, 6th August, 1995.

46. F. C. Bode. (1978), *Op. Cit.*, p. 89.

47. M. S. Mwayuuli. (1989). *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

48. G. S. Were (1967), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 62-63 and J. Osogo. (1966), *Op. Cit.*, p. 73.

Egypt) as their ancestral home. The Abalira, Abamakhaya, Abasakala, and Abashikulu are among them. The notion of 'Misiri origin' appears to have permeated most East African groups. According to Were (1967), 'Misiri' refers to an undiscovered country or nations from where many Abaluhya clans descended.⁴⁹ Misiri was a place to the North of Mt. Elgon. It has nothing to do with present-day Egypt. Egypt gets mentioned in some Africa Oral Traditions explaining their origins as part of the Hamitic hypothesis.⁵⁰ For Bisukha and Bidakho clans, see Table 1.

Table 1. Clans Making up Bisukha and Bidakho

	Bisukha Clans	Bidakho Clans	
1.	Abasakala	Abashimuli	Abatura
2.	Abakhaywa	Abashikunga	Abamasitsi
3.	Abarimbuli	Abamasaaba	Abambale
4.	Abichina	Abamusaali	Abanzali
5.	Abamironje	Abakobero	Abandabu
6.	Abatsunga	Abamanyisi	Abashitanyi
7.	Abitsende	Abakondi	Abamachina
8.	Abakhulunya	Abashikulu	Abamalava
9.	Abakuusi	Abasikhobu	Abasalwa
10.	Abamahalia	Abashitsiula	Abamakambe
11.	Abalira	Abamuhali	Abashiasuli
12.	Abashitaho	Ababuka	Abahuuli
13.	Abakhombwa	Abashisiila	Ababwanishili
14.	Abayokha	Abashiangala	Abanyikha
15.	Abasuulwa	Abamalaba	Abangoloni
16.	Abashirukha	Abasilwa	Abakaase
17.	Abateheli	Abamahaani	Abashilakaya
18.	Abasaalwa	Abaterema	Abasikhobu
19.	Abatuura	Abanyikhu	
20.	Abakukhumi	Abakhwanga	
21.	Abasilitsa	Abayemi	
22.	Abamakhaya	Abakhulunya	
23.	Abashibembe	Abarendwa	
24.	Abashimutu	Abamagambe	
25.	Abakhwanga	Abakhubi	
26.	Abasheleli	Abashisalachi	
27.	Abashilili	Abashiikali	

Source: Author 1995/1996.

49. Ibid.

50. R. Law. (2009). The "Hamitic hypothesis" in indigenous West African historical thought. *History in Africa*, 36, pp. 293-314.

Many societies regard the tale of 'Misiri' or 'Egypt' as the beginning of time and the center of creation.⁵¹ Although traditions may not explain this issue vividly, the study of pottery in East Africa corroborates the view that the Bantu groups might have migrated from the same place.⁵² When studying ironworking technology, archaeologists point to Meroe as a likely core from whence it moved through West Africa, then to East and Central Africa on the outskirts of the tropical forest.⁵³

This, too, correlates with the Bantu migration patterns and the linguistic evidence of Guthrie and Greenberg (1981).⁵⁴ Although the pottery has been altered, the Meroe hypothesis appears to be the most logical, as evidenced by its proximity to what the Luhya call 'Misiri.' The origin of the 'Misiri' is consistent with the Hamitic myth, which attempted to explain everything in Africa as having exterior influence. According to the Hamitic idea, everything of value ever discovered in Africa was carried there by the Hamites, an offshoot of the Caucasian race. According to this belief, the Hamites are blacks (Negroes). That the Hamites are descendants of Ham who were cursed by being black and having an unsavoury personality.⁵⁵ According to Hamitic myth, all people living in East Africa and other regions south of the Sahara migrated from somewhere else, presumably Egypt, via the Nile Valley.⁵⁶ These prejudiced European scholarships, as well as horrible attitudes regarding Africa and African people. The era of the Hamitic school was defined by its assumptions and fascination with people's origins, migration patterns, pottery, iron working, technology, and other notions.⁵⁷ The Hamitic theories were enthusiastically adopted by writers who naively accepted and, in some cases, grossly overstated the alleged source evidence. It seems that Hamitic beliefs were used to legitimize European objectives in

51. Peter Mwayuuli (81 Years, Retired Civil Servant), Oral Interview at his home in Mukumu on 3rd September, 1995 and Petro Liyayi (83 Years, A Peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home in Ivakale - Elianda, 19th July, 1995.

52. T. N. Huffman. (1989). Ceramics, settlements and late Iron Age migrations. *African archaeological review*, 7(1), pp. 155-182.

53. D. W. Phillipson (1981). J. D. Fage (ed.): *The Cambridge history of Africa. Volume II, from c. 500 BC to AD 1080*. xvii, 840 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. 38 plates. £ 30. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 44(2), pp. 418-419.

54. J. H. Greenberg, (1972). "Linguistic Evidence Regarding Bantu Origins" *In Journal of African History* 3(2), pp.189-216.

55. E. S. Karani, (2017). Continuity and Change in The Funeral Rites of Abatirichi of Western Kenya c. 1850-1960 (A Master's thesis) Kenyatta University, p. 74.

56. C. A. Diop & M. Cook, (2012). *The African origin of civilization: Myth or reality*. Chicago Review Press, p. 8.

57. J. E. G. Sutton, (1981). East Africa Before the Seventh century. *General History of Africa II, Ancient Civilizations of Africa*, pp. 568-92.

Africa under the guise of their civilizing mission.⁵⁸ According to the belief, everything in Africa has a foreign origin that is not from Africa.

Many African societies still believe that they migrated from Egypt. Such reminiscences, however, have frequently been regarded as a corruptible adaptation of the legendary biblical account of Moses. Were (1967), for example, views the Misiri origin as a myth based on biblical influence.⁵⁹ Instead of Egypt, he offers the current districts of Karamoja and Turkana. This may not be the case. Historical documents and oral traditions show that the Bisukha and Bidakho share a nearly identical ethnic identity. The two come from the same set of exchanges and assimilations that occurred in Buluhya. Even the most casual observer cannot not but notice the unusual forms of so many place names in this region. Ichirovani, Ingolomosio, Ileho, Lubaho, Shisaina, Ilucheho, Kakamega, and Handidi, for example, have Maasai and Kalenjin origins and meanings. The Isukha and Idakho localities saw an independent influx of people from all directions and at various times. Acculturation occurred between these populations and the Kalenjin, Luo, and Maasai resulting to various clans forming Bisukha and Bidakho.

According to the foregoing, it appears that the argument that Bisukha and Bidakho are brothers and sisters, as often supposed, is not persuasive.⁶⁰ Whereas the Maragoli have Mulogoli as a legendary ancestor, the traditions of clan ancestors in our area of study are different in that there has not been any common ancestor of the whole of Bisukha or Bidakho.⁶¹ According to Osogo (1966), progenitors such as Mwisukha and Mwidakho as sons of Muluhyia or Omumwamu do not exist. As a result, this research reveals that the legendary Mwisukha and Mwidakho are contemporary inventions and mythological individuals meant to demonstrate unity among the Abaluyia in general, Bisukha and Bidakho in particular.⁶² Bisukha and Bidakho did not move *en masse*. However, each group moved and settled independently in their present habitat.

If we take the view of C. J. Indongole that the ancestor of Abisukha and Abidakho was Omumwamu, translated as black or dark, it may elicit many questions with no answers.⁶³ For example, how did Omumwamu originate? Is there any mythology explaining his origin? Where did he live, in Isukha or Idakho? Who was the wife? Did they have children? What were the children's names? The answers to these questions will help in authenticating the

58. Adjei Adjepong, "The Image of Pre-Colonial Africa in European Circles." In *Distance Forum*, vol. 1, pp. 15-37. 2011.

59. G. S. Were. (1967), *Op. Cit.*, p. 86.

60. Ibid, p. 82, and Osogo, J. (1966), *Op. Cit.*, p. 43.

61. G. Wagner. (1949), *Op. Cit.*, p. 67 and Ibid, p. 45.

62. Peter Mwayuuli (81 Years, Retired Civil Servant), Oral Interview at his home in Mukumu, 3rd September, 1985 and Joseph M. Malusu (49 Years, Lecturer at KU), Oral Interview at his residence at Kenyatta University, 6th August, 1995.

63. C. J. Indongole. (2014). *Op. Cit.*, p. 34.

Omumwamu progenation. Otherwise, the Omumwamu ancestry does not explain why the various clans have different origins and directions of arrival. In addition, the Abisukha and Abidakho do not regularly use 'O'. Instead of Omundu, they say Mundu; instead of Omumwamu, they say Mumwamu; thus, the Omumwamu progeny still stands questionable.⁶⁴ The assertion that there is a tradition explains that some people of Bukusuland migrated to the area and became the ancestors of the Abisukha clans of Abamilonje, Abakuusi. Abamuhali and Abamahalia do not correlate with the widely held theory that Abamilonje migrated from Soy, a Kalenjin origin. That is why they are called Abasooyi, hence, possessing 'ubusooyi,' a kind of spell that when they visit a home, the foods on the fire will not cook until they touch the firewood and utter a few words to revitalize the cooking process. This belief is held to date.⁶⁵

The Abashimuli and Abamilonje are believed to have emerged as a result of some Bidakho groups intermarrying with the Maasai.⁶⁶ The presence of the Maasai in this location is debatable. However, it is thought that the Maasai were on their way from the Turkana region in pursuit of the Nandi in order to recover what they perceived to be their cattle and pastures. As a result, the Maasai spread to various sections of Buluhya. In Isukha, for example, they lived at *Ikhongamurwi* (The Crying Stone). This massive granite rock became the genesis of the Abamilonje clan of Bisukha and the Abashirotsa of Kisa.⁶⁷ Another group of the Maasai reached Idakho under a man called Kassim (kasamu), who married a woman called *Shimuli* (flower).⁶⁸ Due to his golden bangle, Kassim was easily accepted as a respected person in the community, equivalent to a leader.⁶⁹ Therefore, the descendants of Kassim and Shimuli came to be called Bashimuli Bamulongo, who are, indeed, Maasai by descent.⁷⁰

Bidakho, also known as Abetakho or Bitakho, has a migration history that is essentially connected with the rest of the Luhya sub-nations, who claim 'Misri'

64. K. L. Muchanga. (2023). The Ecology and Economic Practices of the Isukha and Idakho Communities in Colonial Period 1895-1963. *Journal of African History*, 7(2), pp. 279-293.

65. Jotham M. Asenahabi (40 Years, Secondary Teacher at Mukumu Girls High School), Oral interview at his residence at Milonje - Mukumu, 4th May, 1995.

66. G. S. Were. (1974). "The Western Bantu People's from AD 1300 to 1800" in *Zamani*: pp. 150-169.

67. Peter Itebete (65 Years, Retired Civil Servant), Oral interview at his residence at Muraka- Kakamega, 29th April, 1995.

68. Joseph M. Manyonyi (88 Years, A peasant Farmer and founder of Shimuli Sect), Oral interview at his home in Savane- Idakho, 5th August, 1995.

69. G. S. Were. (1974), *Op. Cit.*, p. 56.

70. M. S. Mwayuuli (1989), *Op. Cit.*, p. 6 and Were, G. S. (1972). The Maasai and Kalenjin factor in settlement of Western Kenya: a study in ethnic interaction and evolution. *Journal of Eastern African Research & Development*, 2(1), pp. 1-11 and Were, G. S. (1972), *Op. Cit.*, p. 23.

(Egypt) as their ancestral homeland.⁷¹ An interesting aspect of the genealogy of Bidakho is the link with Maasai and Nandi. Were (1967), the acclaimed historian on Baluhya, says that the founder of the dominant Abashimuli clan was Kasamu Naluse, a Maasai immigrant.⁷² Kasamu (Kassim/Chasamu) first lived at Sang'alo in Bungoma before moving to Butso, where he married a local girl Ashimuli who bore him many sons. When Kasamu moved to Idakho, one of his sons remained behind and is believed to be the founder of the Abashimuli clan in Butso.⁷³ He was welcomed to Idakho territory with his family (Abashimuli) by then *Omwami* (leader) called Ashisira, founder of Abashisiravai, the aboriginal clandom. Kasamu integrated with Bidakho and gained such popularity with local people that he became ruler of the combined Abashisira and his Abashimuli clan. His clan members abandoned Maasai culture and language and adopted Lwidakho.⁷⁴

According to Lihraw (2010), Kasamu led his Chepruko (Abachimuku) clan members from Soy following a family conflict and settled in Kakamega at the Crying Stone (Ikongamurwi) near Muraka. They intermarried with Abashisira, resulting in the Abashimuli people. Bidakho and Bisukha are thought to have been founded by brothers.⁷⁵ Some oral traditions, however, disagree with the assumption that Mwitakho and Mwisukha were brothers. According to certain scholars, such as Osogo (1966), Bisukha means upper and Bidakho means lower in the settlement of these sub-nations south and north of the River Yala (Lukose).⁷⁶

Similarly, the people currently called Abidakho did not migrate *en masse* to settle in their present habitat. Each clan emerged on its own. For instance, *Abamusaali* and *Abashimuli* had no blood relations, nor were they brothers, as documented by Bode (1978). Whereas *Abamusaali* have a close relationship with the *Abatsotso*⁷⁷, the *Abashimuli* are closely related to the Maasai. *Abamusaali* and *Abang'onye* of Butso originated from one person.⁷⁸ That is why the two do not intermarry to avoid congenital malformations.

Based on the preceding arguments, it is possible to conclude that these two communities do not have a common ancestor. As a result, experts wonder why they share a nearly identical dialect and cultural activities and why it is difficult to

71. K. L. Muchanga. (2023). *Op. Cit.*, p. 280.

72. Were, G. S (1967), *Op. Cit.*, p. 70.

73. Joseph Lumati (65 Years, Retired Teacher), Oral Interview at MMUST-Kakamega, on 15th August, 2020.

74. FGD of Council of Elders (at Ikolomani Chief Centre), on 12th September, 1996.

75. Joseph Lumati (65 Years, Retired Teacher), Oral Interview at MMUST - Kakamega, on 15th August, 2020.

76. Abeingo Community Network, 2014.

77. Joseph M. Mabilia (98 Years, a peasant farmer), Oral Interview at his home Shirumba- Idakho, on 15th June, 1995.

78. M. S. Mwayuuli (1989), *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

distinguish between them. This could be a language tracking issue for which no adequate research has been conducted. Because of these factors, some responders believe Bisukha and Bidakho are linked. Lwisukha and Lwitakho are dialects with essentially identical pronunciations. For example, while the dialects are practically identical, the Bisukha speak slightly faster than the Abidakho.⁷⁹ Pronunciations of 'kha' and 'kho' suffixes are very common among the Bisukha and Bidakho respectively. Furthermore, the Abidakho slightly pull the words, although some words though with the same meaning have different pronunciations among the two sub-ethnic groups. For instance, the verb "to talk" among the Bisukha is *khulakaya*, while the Bidakho says *khulomaloma*. The meaning of the verb remains the same.

Cultural Practices and the Associated Beliefs of the Isukha and the Idakho, c.1850 to 1894

These Isukha and Idakho cultural practices differ slightly. For example, their initiation of boys occurs at the same time or season. Perhaps the distinction is that Abisukha use a single-edged knife, whereas Abidakho employs a double-edged knife. This was explained as the Abidakho's cultural supremacy.⁸⁰ Candidates among the Abisukha are initiated near a house where they are authorized to stay after circumcision. According to the research, such a dwelling becomes the Irumbi. Irumbi is the initiation residence. While Bidakho begins in specific trees, he eventually becomes murumbi. For example, "boys were circumcised while standing under musembe or musutsu trees."⁸¹ These two words, *irumbi* and *murumbi*, have different nuances but a similar etymology.

Irumbi house belonged to an elder of the village or clan entrusted to teach the initiates about the socio-economic and political aspects of their society. However, N.S. Yakhama differs from this account. According to him, the *irumbi* was the house of a widower.⁸² A man believed to have dedicated his time to the initiates. Focus Group Discussions of the Ikolomani council of elders reported that:

The owner of Irumbi house was a respected clan elder who was versed in the knowledge and wisdom of the Bisukha and Bidakho. Knowledge of the origins, migrations, and genealogies of the Isukha and Idakho as well as the specific individual clans. He was a man also versed in the knowledge of plants, animals, and their related taboos, totems, and curses.... Some of the topics taught in *Irumbi* included marriage, family, war, socialization, morals, respect for the elders,

79. Osogo, J. (1966), *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.

80. Joseph Musindayi Manyonyi (88 Years, a peasant farmer and founder of Shimuli Sect), Oral Interview at his home Savane- Idakho, 5th August, 1995.

81. N. S. Yakhama (2018). *Heritage: Foundation of Noah Yakhama's Generation*. Eldoret: Utafiti Foundation., p. 55.

82. Ibid.

discipline, and responsibility.... The owner of *Irumbi* was assisted by a selected person who was to clean and perfect the initiates (*Mutili/ Batili*), who also was selected carefully following the set descriptions and norms. He was to avoid his wife for the period he served in *Irumbi* until the graduation of the initiates (*Shisabitsu*). At the graduation ceremony, the two men were given honoraria ranging from goats, sheep, bulls, alcohol, and traditional regalia...then the initiates formed an age group named after the owner of *Irumbi*. Women were barred/ excluded from entering or walking about the *Irumbi*.⁸³

The *Irumbi* curriculum addressed marriage and masculine concerns. In this way, the *Irumbi* was analogous to current formal education in that initiates were taught about society values, needs, norms, medicine, hunting, economic views, and so on. For those who were to be initiated, the *Irumbi* possessed the most appropriate curriculum.⁸⁴ Also, while in *Irumbi*, a lot of knowledge was imparted to them that were geared towards ecological conservation.⁸⁵ The research unravelled that, among the Bisukha, the initiates danced to initiation songs using poles (*mitobolo*), while among Bidakho, they danced using poles with jingles tied to them (*mitobolo* and *masili*). All these practices during circumcision were adopted from the Maasai and the Kalenjin people who roamed in this area in search of grass and water for their animals.⁸⁶ Usually, the art of circumcision was dominated by Abasilitsa and Abichina clans among Bisukha. Until the 1960s, Isukha relied on circumcisers from Idakho,⁸⁷ an art that was inherent among the Idakho clans such as the Bamasaba, Bamanyisi, and Bashianga. Although there is a belief that the Isukha people received the ritual of circumcision from the Idakho, there is no evidence of this belief from the respondents. Thus, it appears that circumcision may have evolved independently among some clans that honeycombed this area. The elders posited that:

The pre-colonial Isukha and Idakho circumcised their boys aged 14 to 18 years. After circumcision, the initiates were assembled and put in groups where specifically selected elders of advanced age and wisdom were in charge of advising and teaching the initiates on ideals, virtues, and norms of the society.... Before the D-day of circumcision, the initiates were subjected to a lot of walking, dancing, and singing to inspire them to face the knife or the initiator (*Mushebi*). The songs encouraged them, and they fearlessly hurried to meet the knife. It was forbidden for the candidates to cry during circumcision as it was a sign of cowardice and showing that they were not

83. FGD of Council of Elders (at Ikolomani Chief Centre), on 12TH September, 1996.

84. K. L. Muchanga, (1998), *Op. Cit*, p. 59.

85. Andrew S. Liseche (60 Years, Retired Agricultural Extension Officer), Oral interview at Khayega Market, on 16th June, 1995.

86. Itebete Kaburu (63 Years, a peasant farmer), Oral Interview at his home in Lusiola- Shinyalu, on 20th July, 1996.

87. Mwisaiyi S. Malenya (70 Years, Retired Sub Chief, Shinyalu Sublocation), Oral Interview at his home at Likhovero - Ibwitsende, on 7th July, 1995.

men enough. Sometimes *Isambakhalu* (*Boehmeria marc*) was smeared on those who attempted to cry. This is because *Isambakhalu* intensified the pain to make the initiates 'more of men'⁸⁸ that is solid and hardened, ready to take over the challenges and responsibilities of men.

It appears that Bantu and Kalenjin enculturation resulted in a lot of borrowing in terms of initiation behavior. Proto-Abisukha may have learned this technique from the Kalenjin who once lived in the area.⁸⁹ For instance, the groups that came in later, like Abitsende, were not circumcised. It was the Abasilitsa clan who circumcised them.⁹⁰ This demonstrates that circumcision was used to incorporate or initiate 'strangers' into the Bisukha society.⁹¹ Furthermore, the account of Akhitsende and his sons not being circumcised shows that not all Bantu communities that settled in this area practiced the procedure of circumcision. The age-set system after circumcision is thought to have been borrowed from either the Maasai or the Nandi, who had evolved this process over a lengthy period of time.

Despite borrowing from the Kalenjin or Maasai, the Bisukha and Bidakho age groupings served little purpose. Oral histories do not indicate a situation in which one age group was given a name like the Nandi. Instead, the age groups were determined by the season in which the individual generation was circumcised.⁹² While healing in the special initiates' house (Irumbi), the Bisukha and Bidakho could not share the caretaker (typically an elderly male in the clan). This was due to the fact that the same house may be utilised in another season. That is why the circumcision season, which was used to define the age set (Likhula), became significant. The study discovered that the Abisukha and Abidakho circumcised each other.

Pre-colonial Socio-Political Institutions of Bisukha and Bidakho Communities

A brief understanding of the Bisukha and Bidakho's socio-political set-up directs focus to the pre-colonial economic practices believed to have taken place in the socio-political *milieu*. It is, therefore, premised that the political, social, and economic systems of the Bisukha and Bidakho were completely inextricable.⁹³

88. FGD of Council of Elders (at Ikolomani Chief Centre), 12TH September, 1996.

89. A. J. Njoh. (2006). *Tradition, culture and development in Africa: Historical lessons for modern development planning*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, p. 131.

90. Itebete Kaburu (63 Years, a peasant farmer), Oral Interview at his home in Lusiola- Shinyalu, on 20th July, 1996.

91. M.S. Mwayuuli (1989), *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

92. Joseph Lumati (65 Years, Retired teacher), Oral Interview at MMUST- Kakamega, on 15th August, 2020

93. Bode F.C. (1978). *Op. Cit.*, p. 24.

Socio-political authority usually began at the family level, either extended (*Litaala*) or nuclear (*Hango*). The lines of authority were drawn with the father or grandfather as the head (*Muhindila wa Hango*).⁹⁴ The family, as the primary social group, collaborated extensively and intensely in daily operations. Every member of the household had a certain function to fulfil. Men cleared virgin land and assisted women in planting crops, while women weeded.⁹⁵ This line of power extended upwards to larger units in the socio-political systems, such as village or clan systems. The clan was the political structure of a group of families from the same village and ancestry. In this context, a homestead was defined as a self-governing unit in and of itself, and as such, breaches and conflicts within it were handled by the homestead's head.⁹⁶ His authority included his wives, sons, and unmarried daughters. If a family member performed an abhorrent act, the head had the authority to curse, basing his curse on a specific taboo(s) in society.⁹⁷ Other difficult problems in the household, on the other hand, were brought before the community or clan council of elders. As a result, the gendered division of labor indicated above was reinforced by a system of taboos that ruled the family unit.⁹⁸

The institution of the council of elders might have emerged from the homestead council where a grandfather could call for a *baraza* of the elder sons to discuss matters of the family. The Bisukha and Bidakho heavily relied on taboos and beliefs as their set of rules. The council of elders (Miliango), selected based on age and wisdom, formed the highest court of appeal.⁹⁹ The head of the council was called *Mwami* (an equivalent of the chief). Through the council, the relationship between the traditional authority of natural resources management and the political organization of communities was maintained.¹⁰⁰

The Omwami (leader) institution was based on the individual who possessed wisdom and was socially esteemed by the clan. Omwami, like the Oloibons and Orkoiyots, was required to have a notion of the leading clan in officiating and offering sacrifices to placate the clan's ancestral spirits--what J.S Mbiti refers to as

94. FGD of Council of Elders (at Shinyalu Chief Centre), 10TH September, 1995.

95. Andrew S. Liseche (60 Years, Retired Agricultural Extension Officer), Oral interview at Khayega Market, on 16th June, 1995.

96. L. Kavulavu (2017). The History and Culture of Idakho People of Western Kenya during the Pre-colonial period. *Sociology and Anthropology* 5(8): pp. 655-663.

97. E. H. Embeywa, (1991). *The Place of Kenya Culture and Values in Environmental Education*. ASESP. Kenyatta University, Nairobi, p. 63.

98. L. Kavulavu (2017), *Op. Cit.*, p. 657.

99. Mwisiayi S. Malenya (70 Years, retired Sub Chief – Shinyalu Sub Location), Oral Interview at his home in Likhovero - Ibwitsende, on 7th July, 1995.

100. Mwisiayi S. Malenya (70 Years, Retired Sub Chief – Shinyalu Sub location), Oral Interview at his home Likhovero- Ibwitsende, 7th July, 1995.

the living dead.¹⁰¹ Omwami served as the council of elders' unifying influence. He either authorized war with his neighbors or intervened for peace. Omwami had a group of people around him who formed his army for protection and war, among them respected warriors who achieved fame by their conflicts, fights, and wrestling talents.¹⁰² Their respective successors were measured in terms of the number of enemies killed and the big number of animals they raided. According to N.S. Yakhama, during *Shilembe* celebrations, such decorated soldiers could carry as many spears as possible regarding the people they killed. A higher premium was given to those who killed a Masaai or a Nandi.¹⁰³ To the Isukha and the Idakho, killing a Masaai, a Nandi, or a Turkana during the war gave the killer a lot of honour and respect because the latter were regarded as fearless, and any person who dismantled and humiliated them to death was highly regarded. Such warriors were accorded with *Shilembe* at their burial ceremony.¹⁰⁴

Omwami, notwithstanding his age and wisdom, was to have a lot of wealth which in pre-colonized Isukha-Idakho, was measured in terms of huge granaries full of grains and cereals.¹⁰⁵ Their wealth could also be defined by one being a polygamous man with many children, a lot of animals and birds, able to host and entertain many visitors regularly with beer (*Busaa*) and food, besides supporting the clansmen during famines with food and sacrificial animals. In addition, Mwami had to have knowledge of herbalism or engage a strong herbalist, a rainmaker, and iron smelters on his council of leadership.¹⁰⁶

The Omwami was the head of the Bisukha-Bidakho council of elders, which included the decorated soldiers, the head medicine men, the head iron smelters (Mwirianyi), the rainmaker, a few men of high economic status, and other people appointed by the Mwami for his reasons for clan administration.¹⁰⁷

Women were occasionally appointed to the council of elders. It was the domain of the elderly men. According to Kavulavu, the women were sometimes just invited to witness.¹⁰⁸ This explains the gender prejudices against women that

101. Mbiti, J. (1991). *Introduction of African Religions* (second edition) Portsmouth, NH and London: Heinemann Educational Books, p. 56.

102. Hudson Shitambasi (68 Years, Retired Sub Chief Shidodo Sub Location), Oral Interview at Khayega Market, on 7th July, 1996.

103. Petro Liyayi (83 Years, a peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home Ivakale - Elianda, on 19th July, 1995.

104. Muhika P. Amukayia (87 Years, A peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home at Ilusiola Ibwitse, on 4th May, 1995.

105. Joseph M. Mabilia (98 Years, A peasant farmer), Oral Interview at his home Shirumba- Muasali, on 15th June, 1995.

106. Sunguti P. Amukoye (87 Years, A peasant Farmer), Oral interview at his home Ishikunga- Imusoli, 4th August, 1995.

107. Mwisaiyi S. Malenya (70 Years, Retired Sub Chief – Shinyalu Sublocation), Oral Interview at his home Likhovero- Ibwitse, on 7th July, 1995.

108. L. Kavulavu (2017). *Op. Cit.*, 657.

proliferated the pre-colonial Africa. The elders were in charge of hearing cases and rendering decisions. Elders were regarded as divinely endowed with the authority to lead clans in communal sacrifices and social activities.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, they were regarded with high esteem. For example, they were given priority during cultivation, sowing, planting, and harvesting. "In times of famine or war, they asked people to pool manpower and resources; they managed military affairs".¹¹⁰

Towards the 1880s, the Bisukha and Bidakho, like many other Luhya ethnic groups, began acknowledging the nominal suzerainty of the Wanga chiefdom under Nabongo Mumia. This acknowledgement was intensified with the advent of the Swahili and Arab traders who armed Nabongo with guns from the Coast. Apart from the Maasai, Nabongo Mumia used these traders as mercenaries to extend Wanga imperialism on the Abisukha, Abidakho and other Luyhia communities.¹¹¹

Social-cultural Practices and Beliefs of Bisukha and Bidakho and their Ecological Implications

Folk knowledge can be defined as that which has been acquired through hard work and is usually guardedly stored in order to ease current and future human issues and food security.

Wisdom is related to experience, skill, self-control, and understanding of the community's goods, depending on age. That is why the custodians of this wisdom were old people from whom it was disseminated to the new generations during the normal socialization processes and apprenticeship.¹¹²

The research established that ecological knowledge existed among the Bisukha and the Bidakho but under various descriptions. They referred to it as "Knowledge of the world" *Bucheli bwi shibala* or man's knowledge that was not common. According to them, their knowledge comprised witchcraft, healing, rainmaking, hailstone dipping, and identification of good soils, animals to be hunted, the best grass, identification of totem animals, and the like.¹¹³ It was vested in the traditional leaders-cum-elders, who guarded and transmitted the

109. Clement Akhura (74 Years, Village Elder (Liguru) in Lugose Sub Location), Oral Interview Ibusakala- Lugose sub location, 12th May, 1995.

110. Ibid.

111. Joseph Shiakamiri (90 Years, Second World War Veteran and a Peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home Iburimbuli -Shinakotsi, on 10th August, 1995.

112. Joseph Shiakamiri (90 Years, Second World War Veteran and a peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home Iburimbuli - Shiakotsi, on 10th August, 1995.

113. Aliavikali A. Dongolo (102 Years, A renowned Herbalist among Bisukha community), Oral Interview at his home in Ilala- Mukumu, 16th May, 1995.

socio-economic and political 'values' system. It was also vested in the old people because they had interacted with the environment longer, hence had accumulated experience.¹¹⁴ Some of this knowledge was believed to be inspired by the ancestral spirits *Misambwa*, making some people talented in mysteries of the environment. Others simply inherited it from their grandparents.¹¹⁵

Through apprenticeship, the young were taught various skills in healing diseases and performing various functions.¹¹⁶ The practice of herbal treatment was 'sacred.' It was an art for specific family groups, and a terrible disaster to attempt such art without the prerequisite training and coronation rituals. This was to prevent the misuse of such skills in society.¹¹⁷ For this reason, the plants identified as medicinal were preserved through an appropriate taboo system, as explained above. In the apprenticeship process, the candidates were thoroughly trained through testing, obedience, endurance, and willingness to work hard. Liyayi, in an interview, said, "Norms related to each knowledge was taught, and a token of appreciation like a hen, goat, or sheep could be given in return".¹¹⁸

The elders were in charge of enforcing traditional ecological regulations. In the event that this knowledge is misused, the elders may curse or force one to drink a toxic potion derived from *Datura stramonium*, locally known as *Shilulu*.¹¹⁹ This would be given to deviants in society, particularly those who had caused significant harm. In the absence of rain, traditional leaders would organize meetings to figure out what was going on in order to safeguard the continuity of this knowledge.¹²⁰ If it was found out that rains had disappeared due to abuse or somebody owing a debt to a rainmaker, it was resolved.¹²¹ Rainmakers had their methods or art of attracting the rain. They would sacrifice goats to the ancestral

114. Andrew S. Liseche (60 Years, a retire Agricultural Extension Officer), Oral interview at Khayega Market, on 16th June, 1995.

115. M. Opole (1992). A Report on Local Traditional Institutional Forms among Selected Tiriki Communities in Kakamega District. The Kenya Indigenous Forest Conservation Project.

116. B. Crossan, J. Field, J. Gallacher, & B. Merrill (2003). Understanding participation in learning for non-traditional adult learners: Learning careers and the construction of learning identities. In *British journal of sociology of education*, 24(1), pp. 55-67.

117. Aliavikali A. Dongolo (102 Years, A renowned Herbalist among Bisukha community), Oral Interview at his home Ilala- Mukumu, on 16th May, 1995. and Petro Liyayi (83 Years), Oral Interview at his home Ivakale Elianda, on 19th July, 1995.

118. Petro Liyayi (83 Years, a Peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home Ivakale - Elianda, on 19th July, 1995.

119. Aliavikali A. Dongolo (102 Years, a renowned Herbalist), Oral Interview at his home Ilala- Mukumu, on 16th May, 1995.

120. Ibid.

121. KNA: DC/KMG/2/2/30.

spirits and stay without bathing for a long time as a sign of beckoning for the rains.¹²²

Therefore, traditional ecological knowledge among the Bisukha and the Bidakho was holistic.¹²³ It encompassed all elements of matter which were viewed as interconnected and could not be understood in isolation.¹²⁴ Some traditional administration methods are said to have worked successfully because of low population densities. As a result, they cannot be expected to tackle colonial and post-colonial resource management challenges whose demands on resources surpassed their productive limits as the population doubled or even tripled. R.B Johannes and J. Wes contend that pre-colonial communities were not as sensitive to nature as has been asserted.¹²⁵ The only distinction is in population numbers and technical sophistication. Thus, in the pre-colonial era, the population and technology of Abisukha and Abidakho controlled how they managed their resources, and some techniques were worth replicating.

Indigenous ecological knowledge and the belief systems of the Abisukha and Abidakho were closely linked. Their beliefs consisted of the good/moral and immoral, interwoven into the societal practices.¹²⁶ The study established those societal beliefs were a function of the interplay of environmental and social relationships marked by the historical process of migrations, settlements, absorption, and physical phenomenon. As Abisukha and Abidakho emerged as a distinct ethnic group in about 1850 AD, their belief systems became elaborate. Consequently, as these people interacted with the environment and the neighbouring migrant groups of the Nilotic stalk, they developed some ecological perceptions worth studying.¹²⁷ Outstanding among these are social processes such as taboos, worship, sacrifices, witchcraft, the art of rainmaking, and other magico-religious practices.¹²⁸

122. Petro Liyayi (83 Years, a peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home in Ivakale-Elianda, on 19th July, 1995 and Joseph M. Mabilia (98 Years, a peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his at Shirumba -Musali, on 15th June, 1995.

123. K. L. Muchanga. (2023), *Op. Cit.*, p. 283.

124. Jotham M. Asenahabi (40 Years, teacher at Mukumu Girls High school), Oral interview at his home at Mukumu. On 4th May, 1995.

125. R. B. Johannes (eds.), (1989). *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: A Collection of Essays*. IUCN, *The World Conservation Union*, p. 18 and J. Wes (1971). *Man and the Environment*, Dubungue, Iowa WMC: Brown Company Publishers, p. 26.

126. Andrew S. Liseche (60 Years, Retired Agricultural Extension Officer), Oral interview at Khayega Market, on 16th June, 1995.

127. Lawi, Yusuf Q. (1999). Where Physical and Ideological Landscapes Meet: Landscape Use and Ecological Knowledge in Iraqw, Northern Tanzania, 1920s-1950s, *Iraqw Environment, History and Exploration Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment Development and Technology Peoples of Africa (Ethnic Groups)*, In *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 32(2-3), 281-310.

128. G. S. Were (1974). "The Western Bantu People's from AD 1300 to 1800" in *Zamani*: pp. 150-169.

Western scholars have downplayed or neglected the importance of African ideas in environmental conservation. Karp emphasizes this when he says, "African beliefs tend to show concern for the control of people rather than the environment."...."¹²⁹ Such scholars fail to comprehend the importance of controlling people first, then the environment. Studies conducted by African scholars and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have, on the other hand, highlighted the idea that some African beliefs strengthened and preserved the worth of life-sustaining resources, hence assuring long-term visibility.¹³⁰

Various taboos governed socioeconomic and political behavior in pre-colonial Bisukha and Bidakho belief systems. The taboos associated with socioeconomic practices were enshrined in the societal way of thought, which also helped to the conservation of the ecosystem.¹³¹ This was due to the fact that breaking a taboo was considered an abomination in society and was punished with poor luck, rejection, or death. Taboos among the Bisukha and Bidakho instilled terror in this regard. They avoided or reduced the committing of sin by individuals, plants, animals, rivers, woods, and all other creatures in the ecosystem.¹³² For example, cutting *Figus Thoningii* (Mukumu) was taboo because it would cause hailstones to fall or lightning to strike. Cutting of *Markhamia Lutea* (*Lusiola*) would make ancestors annoyed and cause death to the family or the clan.¹³³ Use of *Crotons Megalacapus* (*Musine*) for firewood was prohibited because it was believed that the smoke would lead to blindness. Women were not allowed to cut *Boehmeria marc* (*Isambakhalu*) as it would lead to miscarriage during pregnancy.¹³⁴

129. W. R. Hull (1972). *Munwakare: African Civilization before the Batuuere*, London: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

130. G. L. Chavunduka (1979). Polygyny among urban Shona and Ndebele Christians: a case study. *Nada: The Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual*, 12(1), pp. 10-20, Z.A. Ogutu & M. Khayesi. (1995). Culture as the Basis for Biodiversity Conservation in Kakamega Forest, Kenya. In *Transafrican Journal of History*, pp.195-204. and Otiende, J.E. (1991). Education since the Early Times. In WR, Ochieng', (ed.), *Themes in Kenyan History*, (pp. 145-155). Nairobi: EAPH.

131. E. H. Embeywa (1991). *The Place of Kenya Culture and Values in Environmental Education*. ASESP. Kenyatta University, Nairobi.

132. Gabriel Masinza (50 Years, Primary School Headmaster), Oral Interview at his home Wanzalala- Ibulila, 15th May, 1995.

133. Gabriel Masinza (50 Years, Primary School Headmaster), Oral Interview at his home Wanalala- Ibulila, on 15th May, 1995.

134. S. G. Omare (2011). The Role of Isukha Religious Beliefs and Practices in Mitigating Deforestation Deforestation in Kakamega Forest. *International Journal of Current Research*, 3(6), pp. 308-315.

Notably, severe consequences of violating taboos depended on the nature of the prohibition.¹³⁵ It would be a disease, poverty, misfortune, misery, exposure to evil spirits and witchcraft, and eventual death. Such death, therefore, would make one enter the ancestral world, *Imakombe*, where further punishments would be given to the victim by the ancestors.¹³⁶

Thus, religious norms, punishments, and obligations pervaded the social, political, and economic domains. As a result, Bisukha and Bidhakho now have a balanced economic and ecological setup. These traditions served as the foundation for pre-colonial curriculum, which were passed down orally. Their schooling included a significant religious component; "it was from it that elders and the wider society sanctioned rules and beliefs were used."¹³⁷

There was a belief in a single God (Nyasaye), whose power of creation could be seen in the fauna and plants. Thus, any bountiful harvest, good cattle, rains, fertile soils, health, and fertility were all gifts from Him. It is possible that the pre-colonial Bisukha and Bidakho had a metaphysical understanding of reality. The spiritual world of reality was regarded in terms of cherished ancestral spirits. They were seen as powerful and authoritative. As the spirits influenced the physical reality of fauna and flora, this helped to a better link between humans and the environment.¹³⁸ The Bisukha and the Bidakho worshipped under the *Mukumu* tree, which symbolized health, endurance, and continuity. East African hardwood, *Lusiola*, was used as a point for cursing enemies and deviants.¹³⁹ People were terrified because they feared their ancestors' wrath. As a result, religion served as a coercive factor in the natural milieu, ensuring peace and the reproduction of the social order. Some food was left in the shrine (*Mwitookho*) for the ancestors during the sacrifices. Blood, meat samples, and bones were examples of such food. The appearance of insects, wild animals, and even humans revealed the presence of ancestors. This technique had significant environmental consequences. It was one method of feeding the ecosystem's numerous species.¹⁴⁰

Myths and taboos about forests, legends about people, and folk tales about wild animals were used as vehicles for passing on religious values.¹⁴¹ Apprenticeship was also used to teach the youth. This form of schooling was both practical and long-lasting. The people were subjected to the demands of the

135. J. Malusu (1978). *The Luyia way of death based on the Isukha people of Kakamega District*. Oxford Univ. Press. p. 16.

136. Ibid.

137. P. M. Shilaro (1991). *Kabras Culture Under Colonial Rule: A study of the Impact of Christianity and Western Education* (MA Thesis). Kenyatta University: Kenya, p. 78.

138. Joseph M. Malusu (49 Years, Lecture at KU), Oral Interview at his residence at Kenyatta University, on 6th August, 1995.

139. Ibid.

140. Joseph M. Malusu (49 Years Lecturer at KU), Oral Interview at his residence at Kenyatta University, on 6th August, 1995

141. K. L. Muchanga (2023). *Op. Cit.*, p. 283.

broader society through education and religion.¹⁴² Individuals were put under pressure to meet their social requirements and obligations through the two. This was encouraged by corporate responsibility. As a result, religious education was adaptable to both the human and ecological environments of the Abisukha and Abidakho.

All property in a household belonged to the head, who was the father, grandpa, or great grandfather in patriarchal civilizations.¹⁴³ The man had the authority to determine when the home supplies and granaries would be opened, as well as which hen, goat, or sheep would be slain for the occasion.¹⁴⁴ This points to a culture establishing a dominating ideology that gradually evolved and brought all riches under the central control of the family's leader. As time went, it became against traditional Bisukha and Bidakho norms for the wife or sons to act independently on such things.¹⁴⁵ That was interpreted as usurping the old man's power or a sign of wishing death upon the old man. The traditions explained that no wife had the power to take over the male responsibilities in society. On the other hand, the sons were defined as "*jural minors*" as long as the head of the household lived.¹⁴⁶ The purpose of this centralized management by family elders was to prevent food waste by several women and children in a household. A son who attempted to open a granary or store was labelled a thief and summoned to the village elders for admonition and, if feasible, punishment.¹⁴⁷

The research established that grandchildren and women were prohibited from cutting bananas or planting trees. The belief that their hands were not pleasing to the ancestors may not have been a strong case. Instead, society was afraid of misuse and subsequent decline in production. Grave desecration was prevented by adhering to religious systems and continuously avoiding exploitation of cultivated crops by relatives and youth in the home. Some taboos enhanced the economization of resources; for example, a taboo preventing women from eating chicken and eggs ensured a continuous supply of chicken. Embeywa argues that:

As men spent most of the time hunting or fighting, women remained mostly at home. If women were allowed to eat chicken, their men would return home and find a home with very little to offer for the entertainment of important relatives.¹⁴⁸

142. Ibid, p. 284.

143. F. T. M. van Driel (1994). *Poor and Powerful: Female-headed households and unmarried motherhood in Botswana*. Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Breitenbach, p. 127.

144. Ibid, p. 128.

145. Mwisaiyi S. Malenya (70 Years, Retired Sub Chief of Shinyalu sub location), Oral Interview at his home at Likhohero, on 7th July, 1995.

146. Joseph M. Malusu (49 Years, Lecture at KU), Oral Interview at his residence at Kenyatta University, on 6th August, 1995.

147. Ibid.

148. E. H. Embeywa (1991). *The Place of Kenya Culture and Values in Environmental Education*. ASESP. Kenyatta University, Nairobi, p. 51.

This was a way of ensuring perpetual control of the economy by the elders. By the 1870s, with the arrival of the Arabs and Swahilis, this belief began to die as chicken, and its eggs were commoditized.¹⁴⁹ A similar rule is applied when planting crops. A careful selection of seeds was made right from the farm in anticipation of a better harvest. The selection of seeds might have begun in the 1860s.¹⁵⁰ Otherwise, before this, the people may have relied on the superabundance of biodiversity. That is, there were sufficient terms of variability among living organisms from all sources in the ecosystem to produce the ecological complexities in the species diversity. As a result, there was enough food with a sustainable ecology. Thus, biodiversity serves as the foundation for the enormous array of ecosystem services that were vital to human well-being in pre-colonial Isukha-Idakho. Biodiversity is crucial in both human and natural ecosystem management.¹⁵¹ Decision humans make that influence biodiversity affected the well-being of themselves and others. The selected seeds were kept in their natural form, still covered with leaves, and then put on the household roof either at the doorway or on the roof near the fireplace.¹⁵² In anticipation of the household head, seeds in the doorway received good blessings from the visitors. The more the eyes looked at these seeds, the more they could multiply on the farm.¹⁵³ It would also appear that the doorway was secure as it would be easily noticed when the seeds were sown.

The seeds kept near the fireplace were always covered by soot (*Muyale*). Sooting was a form of preservation as it kept away destructive micro-organisms, especially weevils. Thus, soot was the possible pesticide of the time.¹⁵⁴ These preservation strategies might have developed as early as the 1860s because cereals were mixed with ash by the time the Arabs and Swahilis arrived in the area and its neighbourhoods. In general, ashes have been recorded to be used in Africa. Ashes (Likoshe) were important in the social-economic structure. Ashes had therapeutic properties and were sprinkled with seeds to preserve them before planting. Ashes were mixed with water in a special pot (Lushalekho), and

149. Ibid, p. 53.

150. Ibid, p. 54.

151. S. Chaudhary, A. McGregor, D. Houston, & N. Chettri (2015). The evolution of ecosystem services: A time series and discourse-centred analysis. In *Environmental Science & Policy*, 54, pp. 25-34, and B. J. Cardinale, J. E. Duffy, A. Gonzalez, D. U. Hooper, C. Perrings, P. Venail, & S. Naeem (2012). Biodiversity loss and its impact on humanity. *Nature*, 486(7401), pp. 59-67.

152. Joseph M. Mabilia (98 Years, a Peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home at Shirumba- Muasali, 15th June, 1995.

153. Petro Liyayi (83 Years, a peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home in Ivakale - Elianda, on 19th July 1995 and Joseph M. Malusu (49 Years, Lecture at KU), Oral Interview at his residence Kenyatta University, on 6th August, 1995.

154. Andrew S. Liseche (60 Years, Retired Agricultural Extension Officer), Oral interview at Khayega Market, on 16th June, 1995.

the resulting alkaline (Mushelekha) product was and still is used for cooking vegetables and softening dried meat (shihango). Ashes were also utilized as fertilizer on farms, particularly in "bush-burn." As a sort of treatment, ashes were smeared on the stomachs of constipated people. It is reported that smearing ashes on the stomach alleviated dyspepsia.¹⁵⁵ It was also believed that the person would have instant diarrhoea if the ashes were put on human faeces. Thus, it was a threatening measure to deter people from dropping faeces anyhow.¹⁵⁶ The people were threatened that in case the axe (*Ihaywa*) was cut or placed in the faeces; it would make the anus of the one who defecated to have severe wounds.

Those who handled the seeds before planting undertook special measures to keep purity. It was taboo or prohibited to have sexual relations when assigned duties of handling seeds or harvesting millet. According to traditions, sexual intercourse at such times meant impurity. Thus, the crops could not do well.¹⁵⁷ The traditions were strict about maintaining high yields.¹⁵⁸

Planting often started on the grandparents' farm, with communal or corporate labour from the household.¹⁵⁹ This was only applicable when the grandparents were still alive. In this case, it would be the grandfather or great-grandfather. The same applied to harvesting; it began on the grandparent's parcel or the first wife's farm, then to the other farms of the household.¹⁶⁰ It was respect accorded to the elders in the household from whom the actual successes and blessings from the living dead would reach the members. The above also happened among the Wanga where the Nabongo exercised authority on everything by virtue of his kingship, which had duties of the priesthood. According to Murunga (1996), Nabongo presided over numerous ritual ceremonies, including breaking the soil and sowing.¹⁶¹ This made him a custodian of crop fertility. Crops and animals could not prosper without the ritual blessings of their ancestors.¹⁶² For instance:

In the absence of such well-organized political institutions as the Nabongoship, the Bisukha and Bidakho relied on their clan leaders or the council of elders. The clan elders solved serious clan disputes through their authority as religious leaders. Instead of giving only to the clan elders, part of the harvest was given to the

155. Andrew S. Liseche (60 Years, Retired Agricultural Extension Officer), Oral interview at Khayega Market, on 16th June, 1995.

156. Ibid.

157. Petro Matasio (76 Years, a Peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at his home in Lirhanda, on 5th September, 1995.

158. Ibid.

159. K. L. Muchanga (2023), *Op. Cit.*, p. 283.

160. Ibid, p. 283.

161. G. R. Murunga. (1996). *Western Education among the Wanga of Mumias Division: A Case Study of the Roman Catholic Mission and the Mumias Boys' Schools, c. 1920 to c. 1960*" (BA Dissertation). Kenyatta University, Kenya, p. 85.

162. Musindayi J. Manyonyi (88 Years, a peasant farmer and founder of Shimuli sect), Oral Interview at his home Isavane - Idakho, on 5th August, 1995.

rainmakers, hailstone stoppers, medicine men, and iron workers. It is believed that through such giving as rewards to these people. God would give them more powers to increase rain, stop hailstones and heal cattle and people simultaneously.¹⁶³

Once rewarded, these people offered sacrifices to the ancestors by burning some of the food and burying some in areas where dogs, insects, and other wild animals could graze. By doing so, they expressed gratitude to the all-powerful God who was their defender and source of power.¹⁶⁴

Having emerged as distinct ethnic groups by 1850, Bisukha and Bidakho developed, particularly living near the present-day Kakamega Forest, which they often referred to as their property. There was great awe towards the forest as it was associated with dangerous wild animals, ogres, and ancestral spirits.¹⁶⁵ Any phenomena considered abnormal, for example, identical twins were thrown into the forest. They believed that forests were reservoirs of diseases, and this explains why people feared gathering firewood in the forest or grazing their animals.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, protection of the forests and their resources were highly regarded, and the fear perceptions changed in the 1870s, especially with the arrival of the Swahili and Arab traders interested in wildlife for ivory and skins.¹⁶⁷

Initially, plants grew anywhere, but with time rare plants were planted at specific locations on the homestead. Such places were used as consensus locations of family graveyards or farm boundaries. These included *Bilokho*, *Tsikhubu* (*Dracaena Fragrance*), *Binakotsi* (*Euphobia Tiruccali*), *Mikummu* (*Ficus Thoningii*), *Tsisiola* (*Markhamia lutea*), etcetera.¹⁶⁸ As time progressed, taboos related with the obligation of planting them grew stronger. For example, the prohibition on women planting trees, bananas, and the like inevitably precluded them from making cutting decisions, which were solely the responsibility of men.¹⁶⁹ Women were prohibited from cutting down trees because that would have led to indiscriminate cutting, hence interference with the forest.¹⁷⁰ Other beliefs include becoming blind from the smoke of some trees, miscarriage for those who were pregnant, the body swelling, and cutting some trees as *Maytenashete* would lead to infertility.

163. Yakhama, N, S. (2018), *Op. Cit.*, p. 32.

164. Musindayi J. Manyoni (88 Years a peasant farmer and founder of Shimuli sect), Oral Interview, 5th August, 1995.

165. Isiongo Irma (63 Years, a Nun in the Sisters of Mary of Kakamega congregation), Oral Interview at the Sisters convent- Mukumu, on 2nd October, 1995.

166. Ibid

167. G. R. Murunga, (1996), *Op. Cit.*, p. 85.

168. Isiongo Irma (63 Years, a Nun in the Sisters of Mary congregation), Oral Interview at the Sisters Convent - Mukumu, on 2nd October, 1995.

169. Ibid.

170. Ibid.

Interference and cutting of *Mutere* (*Maesopsieminii*) could lead to the disappearance of other trees.¹⁷¹ A group of elders interviewed expressed that:

Women would face injunctions against felling trees probably because they were supposed to take care of the cooking. Thus, they would wantonly destroy the trees for fuel if they were in charge. Even when a tree had to be cut down for fuel, it was the household's head who gave the authority.¹⁷²

The collection of firewood was done with a sense of economization whereby women always collected those short-seasoned plants when in dry withered form. They were only able to remove the dry branches.¹⁷³ This may not have been determined by prohibition alone. The Bisukha and Bidakho could only remove the dried branches due to the nature of social technology. Again, as the population increased significantly during the 1880s, so did the approach to fuel gathering. The dried branches were scarce, and it became necessary to seek out large tree trunks.¹⁷⁴

Sacred trees were feared and not interfered with. For instance, *Erythrina Abyssinica* (*murembe*) tree was used for healing mumps (*tsindendeyi*), *Trichilia* (*Munyama*) healed stomachaches, and *Olea Welwichii* healed chest pains and backaches. Cutting down such trees signified that the person would be afflicted with all of the diseases that the tree had healed. The Musutsu (*croton macrostachyus*) tree was and still is used to make funeral bonfires. As a result, the negligent cutting of this tree was a summons for death to strike the victim's family.¹⁷⁵

The Siala (*markhamia lutea*) tree, on the other hand, represented protection from evil spirits. People rarely cut down such trees. Only pruning could take place, but only on rare occasions. This was, in fact, a component of the pre-colonial Isukha and Idakho environmental philosophy.¹⁷⁶

Animals, particularly wild animals, were conserved in the same way as plants. These creatures were thought to bring prosperity and protect people from harm, or they may be utilized to inflict havoc in the enemy's home.¹⁷⁷ For this reason, totemic animals were protected from molestation. The elders ensured and

171. Abulala M. Shikokoti (76 Years, a peasant farmer a veteran of Second world war), Oral interview at his home in Busakala- Lukose sub location, on 4th September, 1995 and Clement Akhura (74 Years, Village Elder (Liguru) I Lugose sub Location), Oral Interview at his home in Busakala- Lukose Sub Location, on 12th May, 1995.

172. FGD of Council of Elders (at Ikolomani Chief Centre), on 12th September, 1996.

173. Ibid.

174. Ibid.

175. Aliavikali A. Dongolo (102 Years, a renowned Herbalist among the Isukha), Oral Interview at his home Ilala- Mukumu, on 16th May, 1995.

176. Ibid.

177. Z. A. Ogutu & M. Khayesi (1995). Culture as the Basis for Biodiversity Conservation in Kakamega Forest, Kenya. *Transafrican Journal of History*, pp. 195-204.

cautioned against the indiscriminate killing of such animals.¹⁷⁸ The majority of these animals, including snakes, leopards, frogs, birds, and tortoises, were captured in the forests and passed down from generation to generation in a familial lineage. These creatures were retained as a form of identification and for magical purposes. People who maintained these animals were feared; some were considered to as magicians and were sought for during times of uncertainty, such as illness.

It is essential to echo some respondents' words that some totemic animals were not originally in the Bisukha and Bidakho catalogue of totem animals. Due to interactions through wars, intermarriages, trading activities, and cultural sports, totemic animals might have been acquired from outside. For instance, the keeping of reptiles, especially snakes, was not initially practised by the Abisukha and Abidakho. It is a practice that might have come with Luo, Maragoli, or Bunyore women who got married in the area.¹⁷⁹ With time, these totemized animals have equally evolved to become part of a few families among the Bisukha and Bidakho. They are used as remote controllers for either increasing harvests or causing harm.

Animals whose skins were used in traditional practices were hunted by specialized families with the governing norms or the procedures and regulations for obtaining such animals.¹⁸⁰ It was also not advisable to kill a pregnant animal, whether domesticated or wild. This was an obvious method of sustaining procreation in the ecology. Killing such animals would irritate the ancestors, resulting in terrible punishment for the sufferer. However, the arrival of merchants from the Coast looking for leopard skins, python skins, and ivory shifted this tradition and power away from the elders and toward those seeking to profit from the sale of such valuables to Arabs and Swahili traders.¹⁸¹

Burial rites had a significant economic impact. It was common practice to feed mourners before and after the burial of the dead. A tiny token (*mukulukha*) was presented to relatives among Bisukha and Bidakho.¹⁸² This signified the people's appreciation of the dead and that the society believed that giving *mukulukha* increased the harvest and general prosperity of the home.¹⁸³ Sometimes a rich man would be wrapped in a cow's skin during his burial as a sign of honour and respect for increasing the harvest and the health of the cattle. If the dead man had harvested a lot, then food was prepared for the mourners. If

178. Ibid, p. 196.

179. Margaret Mmbaka (90 Years, a peasant Farmer), Oral Interview at the home of Joseph Nyapala ILusiola – Ibwitsende, 6th May, 1995.

180. M. S. Mwayuuli (1989). *The History of the Isukha and Idakho Clans among the Abaluyia of Western Kenya*. Kanazawa University, Japan, p. 7.

181. Ibid.

182. K. L. Muchanga. (2023). *Op. Cit.*, p. 282.

183. Mwisaiyi S. Malenya (70 Years, Retired Sub chief Of Shinyalu Sub location), Oral Interview at his home in Likhovero -Ibwitsende, on 7th July, 1995.

this was not done, the yield could decline in the next season, or weevils would destroy the food in the stores and the offspring would not enjoy a pamper harvest.¹⁸⁴

Although the Bisukha and Bidakho believed in life after death, the idea of burying people in the house may not have been of Egyptian provenance.¹⁸⁵ The Hamitic myth appears to have affected some of the respondents, who strongly think that the majority of what they practice is originally Egyptian. This is consistent with what many responders said: they came from 'Misiri.' However, it seems possible that the Abitsende clan's habit of burying males in the house did not develop independently. This stems from the claim that while many Luhya sub-groups claim Misiri as their motherland, this clan, among others, practices this kind of burial. It could have been caused by the interactions and assimilations that occurred. It is difficult to identify the group that practiced this burial first in this environment. The Abakabras, Abatachioni, Babukusu, and Luo all did the same thing.¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

First, the etymologies of the terms: Luhya, Isukha, and Idakho were derived from their occupations and settlements. According to the research, the phrase Luhya derives from the words field (*luyia*) and fire (*luya*), which refers to the location where people used to gather and debate issues affecting their communities around bonfires. People at the bonfire in the field (*Haluyia*), as the name suggests. However, this is a relatively new word. Initially, they were not referred to as Luhya but Kavirondo people or simply referred to by their sub-ethnic names. The Isukha and Idakho, on the other hand, are etymologically related to either Masukhu or Shitakho. After sharing an animal, those who took the front limbs were known as Isukha (from Masukhu/Lungs), while those who took the back limbs (shitakho) were known as Idakho. Others referred to the people who lived around the Isiukhu River as Bisukha or the inhabitants of the Isiukhu River (a river that runs through the Isukha people). However, these assumptions continue to be debated.

Second, the investigation has revealed that Bisukha and Bidakho are not brothers, as S.M Mwayuli, J. Indongole, and G. Wagner claimed. According to the research, the Bisukha and Bidakho are a conglomeration of clans with disparate origins that are rarely related. The majority of these clans have origins in the north

184. Clement Akhura (74 Years), Oral Interview at his home Ibusakala – Lukose Location, on 12th May, 1995.

185. Ibid.

186. Joseph M. Malusu (49 Years), Oral Interview at his residence Kenyatta University, on 6th August, 1995.

(Imatioli), pointing towards Mount Masaaba (Elgon) or somewhere in eastern Uganda. If this is the case, the Bisukha and Bidakho can be placed within the larger context of Western Bantu migration into Kenya. Another finding in this study is that Bisukha, Bidakho, and the general Luhya people do not share a common ancestor. As a result, each sub-ethnic or clan claims distinct origins or a tenuous link with others based on interaction that ensued.

This paper also revealed that the Bisukha and Bidakho political institution beliefs, customs, and cultural practices were inextricably linked to the people's experiences and attempts to influence their destiny. Indeed, their beliefs are intricately linked to everyday life and point to life beyond death under the custodianship of the elders. The elders were both political and religious leaders in this society. Despite the lack of a centralized form of authority, the segregary unilineal-patrilineal principles had a significant impact on the Bisukha and Bidakho society systems. As a result, the entire society was continuously segmented based on genealogical lineage constituted of primary groups, often blood related. Rather than the larger group that comprised the 'Oluhya' society, the blood grouping was the driving force in societal life, with more outstanding commitments within itself. Every adult member of the 'Oluhya' shared responsibility in his 'Oluhya's' riches, thus centralizing individual identity in accordance with a communal or community identity.

Finally, the Bisukha and Bidakho's sociopolitical and economic activities were accompanied by a number of taboos, beliefs, rituals, and prohibitions that preserved a proper ecological balance for the sustainability of biodiversity. The study emphasized the interdependence of social, political, and economic institutions.

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