

**Indigenous Gendered Practices and Beliefs for Climate Mitigation in
Bududa and Bulambuli Districts, Eastern Uganda**

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Abstract

This paper examines how indigenous knowledge systems and proverbs, which promote peace and social harmony, can serve as pathways to contemporary peacebuilding. Participants were selected from two case studies: Bulambuli and Bududa in the Bugisu region of eastern Uganda, severely affected by mudslides and volcanic eruptions. An ethnographic study, through in-depth interviews, reveals tensions that spread from the family to the wider community. Importantly, the Gishu strongly uphold traditional knowledge and heritage for revitalizing social harmony. This includes recognizing women in the traditional extended family institutions as key in nurturing character through conflict prevention. The article supports this position by arguing against any stereotypes that reinforce marginalization of women as passive victims of conflict situations. It recommends creating a forum for strengthening family solidarity by invoking the positive aspects of traditional Gishu knowledge that facilitates meaningful participation of both men and women in reforming peace in landslide-affected communities.

Keywords: Indigenous, Ubuntu, Proverbs, Gishu, Landslides, Conflict, Climate change

Introduction

Adaptation to gender-inclusive indigenous knowledge systems (IKs) and practices in peace-building processes and sometimes preventive diplomacy across African societies is not a new phenomenon (ISIKE & UZODIKE 2010; MURITHI 2008; OLAITAN 2020). The contribution of women in the cultural socio-political and wellbeing of their societies is recognized, although sometimes marginalized and depicted as passive in conflict situations due to patriarchy stereotypes (TADESSE n.d.n 2010; ERZURUM & EREN 2014). The paper argues against stereotypes that could otherwise hinder women's meaningful participation in contemporary peace-building forums (ERZURUM & EREN 2014). Gishu proverbs are used by both Gishu men and women. In this article, they facilitate a deeper understanding of Gishu cultural heritage for maintaining social harmony in contemporary peace-building dialogues. Traditionally, proverbs call for precaution on rational choice making, as well as perseverance and prudence that educate individuals, guide behaviour and strengthen bonds (AKINJIDE 2014).

I use two case studies: Bulambuli and Bududa in eastern Uganda, to discuss the relevance of indigenous gendered practices to modern peace-building. These sites are severely affected by climate-induced conflicts resulting from mudslides and volcanic eruptions. The paper adopts a more recent definition of climate-induced conflicts by Burke Sharon (2023, 4), as the “disputes arising from adverse impacts of climate change on human stability, such as drought, floods, sea-level rise”, etc. Central to the article is gendered practices, and the mechanisms for preventing a relapse into chaos through healing processes that minimize social divisions, and redress the exclusion and inequality that exist in the communities (TARUSARIRA 2017).

The aim is to borrow the positive virtues of IKs as a basis for restoring broken relationships through the involvement and participation of all community members, including both women and men (MURITHI 2008; NKABAHONA 2007). These useful African IKs and proverbs, as cultural resource knowledge systems for climate mitigation are rarely documented (NYONG n.d.n, 2007). Firstly, the paper provides an overview of the landslide-affected sites in Gishu where this study was conducted. Secondly, it analyzes the theoretical concepts; indigenous and endogenous knowledge systems, and Ubuntu in the context of peace-building. Thirdly, it provides the methodology for conducting this study. Finally, it explores Gishu proverbs, beliefs and practices as resourceful knowledge bases for conflict prevention, mediation and resolution.

Contextualizing Climate-induced conflicts in Budunda and Bulambuli

Bududa and Bulambuli are among the mountainous districts in Uganda facing high impacts of climate change. The natives who are referred to as Bagisu (or Gishu) occupy the ranges of the towering Mount Elgon, a volcano in which they trace their ancestry (KHANAKWA 2018; KHANAKWA 2023). These districts are known for their extreme steepness, with the highest reaching up to 8,000 ft and the lowest at 4,000 ft above sea level (KHANAKWA 2018; MAKWA 2021). The area is naturally well-irrigated and contains some of the most fertile soils in the country, which easily explains why the Bagisu people thrive in agriculture. Frequent loss of land to mudslides implies that their source of survival and livelihood is impacted. As a result, tussle for this valuable resource becomes a major source of conflict in the affected communities. The population pressure of about 952 people per square kilometre (UBOS 2024), further intensifies vulnerability to environmental disasters and conflicts (MAKWA 2023).

The climate-induced conflicts witnessed in Bugisu region, like elsewhere (TARUSARIRA 2017; TOULMIN 2010), undermine internal peaceful co-existence, erodes social trust and destroys avenues for collective action for the wellbeing of the affected communities KHANAKWA (2023). Moreover, under these climates, induced conflicts, women suffer more because they are required to fulfil social responsibilities of building family cohesion during and after conflicts (ERZURUM & EREN 2014). It becomes paramount, therefore, to understand how the conflicts could be reduced by applying certain elements of indigenous cultural resources as taboos, riddles, proverbs, myths and folktales as alternative strategies for rebuilding solidarity.

Theoretical Conceptualization

Both concepts of indigenous knowledge (IK) and endogenous knowledge (EK) are useful for this study on peace-building because they have long provided reliable knowledge bases for rural communities (NKABAHONA 2007; HLALELE 2019). While defined in different ways, I will adapt Hlalele's (2019, 90) definitions, where indigenous knowledge is understood as tacit know-how, and community based knowledge which is unique, multiplex, constantly evolving, eclectic, non-formal and transferred from one generation to another in various contexts to aid indigenous communities in solving problems and making fundamental decisions. It is stored in the collective memory and communicated orally among members of the community through songs, stories, myths and proverbs.

Endogenous knowledge (EK) will be taken to mean knowledge which is acquired within a culture, grown as a culture, and developed together with other cultures (VELTHUIZEN 2019; GATHOGO 2022; KANYANDAGO 2010). This suggests the integration of local knowledge with modern methods for mitigating climate conflicts as recommended by this article. Crosscutting in these indigenous knowledge systems (IKs) refers to the diversity within the local contents and forms of knowing. Wadada Nabudere (2012) considers these as critical knowledge resources for the new academic global market. What Walter Mignolo (2012, 6) terms "ecology of knowledges". IKs serve to demonstrate the African view of the world as consisting of both visible and invisible spheres (TARUSARIRA 2017; HLALELE 2019), which can generate diverse knowledge and discourses for policymakers and other stakeholders involved in post-climate-disaster conflict mitigation (HINKEL & BISARO 2015). Their uniqueness lies in their ability to utilise local strategies, values, institutions, resources, and wisdom that have been developed by people to solve problems within the community (NKABAHONA 2007; HLALELE 2019). The paper does not intend to elevate indigenous approaches as a pure mechanism for eradicating conflict, mostly due to the limited scholarly consensus on what counts as an African knowledge system and the existence of varied beliefs and traditions (MURITHI 2008). However, it permits the possibility of combining traditional knowledge systems with contemporary initiatives to create diversified alternative knowledge bases for peace-building that have potential for sustainability.

The centrality of African traditional mechanisms to conflict resolution and peace-building has been emphasized, as they deal with ways of life and relationships, both human and non-human, including animals, the earth, the spiritual and the cosmos from which knowledge emanates and manifests (NKABAHONA 2007; MAPARA 2009). To Jackie Smith (2021), indigenous knowledge has the potential for shaping and influencing peace solutions, as it illustrates the ways in which the past, present and future are connected. By placing emphasis on knowing, being and doing together, Mapara (2009) argues that IKs weave pathways for deep connection between knowledge, identity and practice, which are useful tools for interconnectedness and cohesion. The deep connectedness within African life leads to the crucial concept of Ubuntu whose metaphysical underpinings influence the value judgements of several African societies.

Ubuntu in African society is often expressed by Mbiti's phrase "I am because we are" (MBITI 1969, 108). Its key pillars are survival, solidarity, compassion, respect, dignity and the acknowledgement of interconnectedness of humanity at all times (MURITHI 2008). Gathogo (2022) embodies Ubuntu with inclusiveness, humanism, and community, which challenges patriarchal norms and gendered stereotypes (LETSEKE 2021, qtd in DANKE 2023). Further, Ubuntu as a normative concept encapsulates a range of values such as right actions, group solidarity and human dignity, which is important for shaping relationships in conditions of climate-induced conflicts, arising out of social disorder, resource scarcity and grief that necessitates cooperation to resolve (LETSEKE 2021, qtd in DANKE 2023).

In any case, the Gishu continue to judge human conduct based on the virtues of humility, and how individuals carry themselves both as individuals and as groups. Underscoring the positive human hallmarks of Ubuntu, peace-building for the landslide victims, implies restructuring relationships by entrenching a politics of non-violence, gender justice, mutual respect, tolerance and inclusivity (SHULIKA 2016). For the ethnic group of the Gishu, the practice of Ubuntu, as connoted by the words *ubuundu* for humility or *Butweela* for unity (MAKWA 2023), would literally mean reflecting on the essence of the collective in human relationships— male and female as a whole. Furthermore, Ubuntu reaffirms a common understanding of being open, available to others and belonging to a greater whole (ISIKE & UZODIKE 2010). This has a connection to the gendered aspect of this paper, which emphasizes collaboration, negotiation, and compromise in response to climate conflicts (RWABYOMA 2014). Cheikh Anta Diop (1989) uses the concept 'harmonious dualism' to describe the co-existence of male and female in Africa. While Ifi Amadiume (1997), writes about the complementary role of men and women in pre-colonial African matriarchy and patriarchy, which allowed them to function cohesively rather than as a threat to each other. Understanding peace building from traditional perspectives heightens hybrid, gender sensitive and inclusive environments for the Gishu mudslide affected victims.

Women in Peace-building: Indigenous Practices from Precolonial African Societies

The traditional responsibility of women in averting conflict is embedded in the perception that women possess an inherent ability to influence peace (SHULIKA 2016). Passed on by their grandmothers and mothers through proverbs, totems, riddles, stories, song lines (SMITH 2021), their socialized roles relate to the present, past generations and to the ancestors. While it is true that women as agents of social capital is often limited and ineffective in relation to some types of conflict resolution (PRETTY & WARD 2001 qtd in TADASEE n.d.n 2010; MAKWA 2023), sustaining the power relations that often excludes them from caring for humanity and all existence would mean destroying the social values on which the future generation would live. Shulika (2016) asserts that, women are endowed with the moral capacity to care and embrace curiosity in complex situations. Moreover, the four pillars on which peace-building revolves— security,

justice, reconciliation, social wellbeing, governance and participation, necessitate women's meaningful participation.

Additionally, African women are perceived as more relational, with the ability to imagine themselves in a web of relationships, including those with enemies (TADASSE n.d.n 2010; LEDERACH 2005). Whether practised consciously or subconsciously, their participation in social matters enables interaction, networking, building trust and observing certain common norms that enhance the Ubuntu values of collectiveness and mutual benefit (SHULIKA 2016). The socialization and upbringing of African women also imbue them with virtues, such as patience, discretion, compassion, gentleness, modesty and self-control, which makes them more effective arbiters of conflict and promoters of peace in the family and community (UNESCO 2003; OLAITAN 2020). Without applying these statements to stereotype women as naturally pacific, they serve to explain why women in different African societies are recognized for making a positive contribution as mediators and conflict preventers to date (TADASEE n.d.n. 2010).

Traditionally, folk tales, songs, proverbs, poetry, and dance— were common methods used by women for inculcating a culture of tolerance, peace and anti-war. In the Burundian community, women were seen as a symbol of peace and cooperation (NTAHOBARI & NDAYIZIGA 2003). Through the exchange of gifts and bride wealth during marriage, unity is symbolized between families, clans, communities and ethnic groups. Of course, men are also looked upon to provide protection and leadership through good character, ensuring the prosperity of the household and communal living, which cement bonds and minimize the eruption of hostilities (MURITHI 2008). Among the Mungo of Cameroon, married women (*Kalbia*) mediated conflicts between humans and the spiritual world in times of misfortune or calamity (Ngongo-Mbede 2003). It is the role of elderly women (*Mbabi*) to perform rituals and consult oracles for reconciling human beings with themselves, with relatives and with nature.

In Somalia, married women (*godob-reeb*), translated as wound-healer, were responsible for ensuring harmony whenever conflict erupted (TADASEE n.d.n 2010). Moreover, women were sent as peace envoys to enemy communities, either by arranging marriages or exchanging information, as clan ambassadors to strengthen societal stability (TADASEE n.d.n 2010; ISIKE & UZODIKE 2011).

Despite their vulnerability, elderly women in most African societies are respected for their qualities of good humor, responsibility, patience, personality, oratory abilities and decency (DANKE 2023). For instance, the grandmother (*gogo*) of Swaziland use folktales (*tinsimi*) with moral values to pass on important family and community norms. She also deliberates and makes decisions that resolve family disputes and unify family members (DANKE 2023). The Zulu women in South Africa were traditionally able to stop fights by falling over the person being beaten (OLOWU 2017; ISIKE & UZODIKE 2010). Their instinct as mothers meant that they cared for every person as their own child, and connected with all human beings in the community. The continued use of IKs by women in waging peace in recent times (BUKARI 2013; SHULIKA 2016) underscores African motherhood and women's sacredness, as relevant in maintaining societal harmony in the Gishu community.

Methods of Data Collection

Data for this paper were gathered from the residents of the Masugu landslide site in Buluganya sub-county, Bulambuli district, and the Nabushi site in Bududa district, both of which were affected by severe mudslides in May and July 2023, respectively. As a native of Mugisu, I employed an ethnographic approach to investigate how indigenous beliefs and practices can be leveraged by authorities in addressing climate-induced conflicts. Data collection for this study was done in three phases. The first phase involved familiarity visits, negotiating protocols and securing the collaboration of different stakeholders before gaining access to the study participants (MacDONALD 2012). The second phase involved actual data collection, during which in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 purposively selected men and women, who were victims of landslides (CRESWELL & CRESWELL 2023). Another 30 participants were involved through six focus group discussions (FDGs). All these were considered to be information-rich and were sampled to the point of information saturation (HENNINK n.d.n 2020).

Individual interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, provided opportunities for deeper conversations and in-depth probing (CRESWELL & CRESWELL 2023), while focus group discussions facilitated the collection of wide-ranging data from a cross-section of people within a short time (MORGAN 2002). Further corroboration was obtained through four phone interviews with people from Inzu ya Masaba for validating findings. The third phase (intervention) is outside the scope of the present article.

The interview guides designed in English were translated into the local language, Lugisu, in order to tap into the nuances and metaphors of Lugisu vocabulary and to make the interactions more naturalistic (HENNINK n.d.n 2020). Informed consent and assurance of confidentiality, especially with the use of audio and video recordings, were emphasized. Grounding the research process in the interpretive paradigm (FLICK 2019), the data were translated, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically in line with the objectives of the study (FLICK 2019).

As established by other studies (MAKWA 2023; KHANAKWA 2018), the anguish of the people at the study sites meant that anyone who visited them including myself, was perceived as one who would possibly solve some of their problems. Others thought I was seeking ‘popularity’ in preparation for a political position. And, being a Mugisu woman myself, a desire for women to focus on personal family issues was common. It became clear that both men and women harbored emotional anger and needed someone to listen to their marital grievances. Although careful not to indulge in such conversations, sidelining their information would be tantamount to a lack of concern. Listening to them before diverting the discussion meant that the interviews usually lasted for longer periods than scheduled. Nonetheless, participants perceived it as a ‘learning’ opportunity and were eager to both receive and give, a significant gesture of beneficence in participatory research (HENNINK n.d.n 2020).

Findings

Nature of Climate-induced Conflicts

Like most climate-affected societies (TOULMIN 2010), the landslide victims shared experiences of fragility and existential anxiety due to the social, economic and emotional damage. Economically, displaced boundaries for farmland, which was their major source of livelihood had become a source of disputes. Poverty due to the loss of family wealth triggered family tensions between husbands, wives and the children. Additionally, those relocated faced heightened pressure from sharing shrunken communal resources with the natives in the new settlements, but were also perturbed by different manifestations of corruption involving favoritism and nepotism during government compensation to the families. Emotionally, the victims reported stigmatization, marginalization, exclusion and displeasure over mockery as *bemungururwe*, meaning, ‘those of mudslides’. Such factors, compounded by inadequate government plan for intervention on basics like housing and medication provide fertile ground for high crime rates and social disorder (KHANAKWA 2023). Apparently, the social divides created by patriarchal cultures cause more disproportionate impact of disasters for women than men. For instance, the tradition that bestows resource ownership on men favored them as beneficiaries for government emergency support.

Foundations of Social Stability

Social stability among the Gishu people revolve around conflict prevention, mediation and resolution. Without limiting their submissions to the climate-induced conflicts, the interviewees reaffirmed the Gishu philosophy of humanity as rooted in the philosophy of Ubuntu, which is emphasized through oneness—*butweela* and goodness—*bulaayi*. Despite persistent, systemic and patriarchal obstacles that enhance male dominance (KHANAKWA 2023), the women’s space and role in conflict prevention were acknowledged. For instance, in Bugisu, one’s neighbor is perceived as one’s brother or sister (*yaaya*), which strengthens bonds. A strong emphasis on Gishu oneness was placed on the value of greeting, which to the participants is a kinship gesture of care, taught from early childhood.

A strong handshake and hug, accompanied by the words, *woose, woose*, interpreted as ‘you are mine... you are mine’, reaffirm identity and belonging. Such greetings are usually followed by inquiry words, *wenaayo* (Singular) and *mweenayo* (Plural), meaning ‘how are you’, ‘how are they’, imply the Gishu, not only care about the immediate person, but also wish to know about those left behind. A response, such as *ndibuulayi* ‘I am well’ or *khuuli buulayi* ‘we are well’ trigger positive communication and demonstrate a sense of collective responsibility to all humanity. A shortened Gishu greeting, *kamakhuuwa*, meaning ‘news?’, is a form of interrogation that prompts the parties to reveal personal and community predicaments. Although the Bagisu value keeping communal secrets, they encouraged honest and transparent sharing of information to entrench oneness. Hence, the proverb *utimiila lumaako Lukoore*, meaning ‘responsibility to expose wrongdoing openly’. These descriptions confirm the practice of greeting as strengthening social ties, harnessing peace, and paving the way for negotiating social order.

Interviewees believed that relationships were cemented through feasting, as expressed in a proverb: *Buleebe iindaa*, or *Buleebe indekheelo*. Thus, free rotational parties and communal feasts were forums for men to resolve important community matters. It is no wonder that any conflict resolution forum was supplemented with celebrations commonly known as '*Kamayiiya*'. The practice was to prepare, feast and exchange gifts, which they interpreted as '*lugoosi*', often used interchangeably to mean either peace or respect. The proverb, *Umuruumaandu aboasa biibye*, meaning, 'stinginess strains personal relationships', was used to denounce selfishness, envy and jealousy.

Hence, the Bagisu continue to organize cultural activities according to a schedule and chain of command. For instance, the *imbalu* ceremony (circumcision), a Bugisu-wide event for cultural advocacy and ethnic coherence (KHANAKWA 2019), is centrally coordinated, following a consensus by a council of elders. Walimbwa, an elder in Inzu Ya Masaba, a cultural institution that unites all the Bagisu, stressed that converging at the sites of communally owned resources, such as sacred swamps '*litoosi*'— mud used for ceremonial circumcision rituals, continues to be a Gishu uniting factor beyond the clan or lineage level. Another elder Wanzusi, revealed that individuals are cautioned against causing damage, engaging in fights or killing creatures at sacred sites, which would disrupt harmony with the spiritual world.

Gishu music, dance and songs, linked to ancestral veneration and blessings are invoked on special occasions like circumcision, marriage and death. Further reflections by Walimbwa show how the Gishu meaning of unity and interconnectedness extend to the spirit world:

...the songs we sang during circumcision ceremonies conveyed very important messages of counsel and guidance... to grow in the right path... the children went to the graves of their ancestors... they slaughtered a cow or goat, sprinkled blood and dung... and those things (*rituals*)... if you did not do them, the child would get spoilt... curses do not leave homes...(WALIMBWA 2023, oral Interview)

Ceremonial activities transform ritual spaces into communal classrooms for conveying cultural values and tutoring participants about ideology and history (MAKWA 2015; KHANAKWA 2023). Indubitably, the continuity of ancestral reverence has been challenged in the wake of rapid social-ecological changes, thus a belief that most social problems are due to a failure to observe indigenous norms.

Proverbs: Indigenous Gishu Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention and Resolution

Despite the ever-shifting culture, as gleaned from the interviews and focus group discussions, indigenous proverbs were perceived as valued tools for communicating messages of unity. Of course, the use of such proverbs is more generic and is not limited to climate-induced conflicts. Socially, care and hospitality are usually extended to all humanity, including strangers as a mechanism for enhancing oneness. Although to ensure safety and trust, strangers are often challenged to explain their origins, and connotations, such as *basamba*

metshi (plural) or *umusaamba metsi* (singular) or *babetswa*, which denotes aliens, are indirectly used in their reference. Wewuula, an interviewee explained that the proverb, “*never kick a frog that hops towards one’s door*” is used to mean, ‘never turn away a stranger because they may carry a lifesaving message’. Meanwhile, Penina, a female participant, intimated that a proverb, such as *miimbe mulyaaka naase ikhuubimbe mwíikeesa* was used to enhance charity, goodwill and interdependence. Muyama, a female participant, explained that songs like *kumulyaango kumwíkule kukwoowo*, *kumwíikaale kwaabene* means ‘only go where you are welcomed and do not force one’s way into closed doors’, which teaches people to avoid transgression and trespass.

Conflict Prevention

Despite the Bagisu having a reputation for violence, a tendency associated with male circumcision (KHANAKWA 2018), they uphold the value of peace and unity (*bubuundu*), meaning humility. This philosophy promotes good human relations and inculcates values of trust and respect that are important for restoring sanity in landslide-affected communities. The elders’ council is a respected forum for dialoging. Emphasis is put on respect for each other as elders, but also respect for elders by the young. Walimbwa, recounted:

Bagisu people have clans, clan structures and leadership. These sit down people [sic] who have disagreed and question, guide, counsel and teach them how to forgive each other. Punishments can be administered but what is important is teaching them how to forgive...even when courts are there, the clan remains very strong... cultural courts are respected for order and discipline...(WALIMBWA 2023, oral Interview)

The saying that charity begins at home was mentioned several times, and responsibility was placed on the parents, especially the mothers, for ensuring child discipline. A proverb, *nakhakambilila akwa khuu mwanda kwenzofu* was a warning that those who disregard the elders’ counsel get into the trap of the elephant. They believed that acting contrary to parental orders attracted a curse (*sikholimo/siwuumo*).

The elders were concerned about the declining social order and growing indiscipline among contemporary youths. Acts of sexual promiscuity, alcoholism and drug abuse were blamed on social anomie and tension between modernity and tradition. Wamayi feared that the increasing youth delinquency could be due to neglected long-term cross-generational curses (*Imbikho*) and disregard for cleansing rituals (*Khukhwiwoosa*) as stated:

Most parents today have neglected our traditions... we need to revive and teach not only the children but also the parents need to know... they should not be in shock why our children are no longer well behaved... it is because we followed what our parents told us... parents fighting and uttering vulgarness in front of children and there is no cleansing... now those are curses transferred...(WAMAYI 2023, oral Interview)

Similar views are shared through literature studies about Gishu perceptions on the causes of natural calamities and social disorder. Khanakwa's 2023 study indicates that the major causes of chaos in Gishu society areas are attributed to the participation in Christianity and the abandonment of indigenous rituals.

On the gendered aspect, women were recognized for caring for children and preserving family unity despite continued marginalization. Women in a FGD revealed that elderly women in traditional Bugisu are accorded respect as either grandmother- *kuukhu*, auntie- *seenge* or mother- *mayi*. They constructively instill fear for wrongdoing in children by, for instance, explaining the dos and don'ts of society, and reinforcing character through rewards. When sending children on an urgent errand, saliva is spat on the floor, warning that it would lead to stunted growth should it dry before one returned, narrated Nadunga. Through stories- *tsingano*, proverbs- *tsisiúmo*, riddles- *kiminayi* and counselling- *khukambila*, they skillfully groom and nurture character.

Parental responsibility of character building is also emphasized, using proverbs like '*lusoola ukoolola nga lusíli lwaana*', meaning a curved tree trunk is straightened when young or '*inuula yaama inyaana*', meaning, charisma builds from childhood. These are intended to impart values of patience, endurance, tolerance, respect, humility, care and love. Nambozo, another female participant, narrated that the *seenge*'s counsel, who was symbolic of fatherhood (*Abaaba*), was specifically respected because the Bagisu believed that by word of mouth, she could either bless or inflict devastating curses (*shitsuubo*).

Elders lamented the phasing out of community bonds due to migration, family disintegration, and several other impacts, including those caused by climate change. The practice of introducing children to their extended family folks, which, according to Nambozo, are significant for kinship stability:

Those days, children were sent to stay with their aunts, uncles and grandparents... they were introduced to relatives... they learned the values of their clans and they took clan orders seriously...but now these children grow up without knowing about their clan totems...(NAMBOZO 2023, oral Interview)

The participants believed that strengthening family bonds was effective for conflict prevention and expressed immediate need for cultural revival, explained Walimbwa:

We need to strengthen clan structure and also teach the young children to learn those norms and totems (*kyimusiilo*) that bring them together... that help them respect the decisions of the clan...teach them those clan values, discipline, respect and take elders counsel as something important...as a rule... so we think that if we revive these traditions, we shall also follow them and see that we also reconcile our people. Like the clans affected by the mudslides, the clan can sit and see how to help this person so that they do not go astray...(WALIMBWA 2023, oral Interview)

These threads of evidence show the values Gishu people place on family as the first unit of society (OLAITAN 2020), from which values flow to the wider society through interactions.

Women were also recognized for extending kinship and friendship bonds through intermarriage with different clans. This study established that marriage exchanges positioned Gishu women as primary agents in building allies and social ties, linking it to the *exchange* of gifts and bride price (*búúkhwe*). Subsequently, the Bagisu accorded extraordinary respect to the in-laws, denoted as *báákhwe* or *bamasakwa*, with whom friction was restricted. Brothers for the bride '*bamukhwaasi*' (plural) or *mukhwaasi* (singular) were respected for giving their sister (s) who would be resourceful through procreation and expansion of the marriage clan. The brides acquired the title of '*mulamu*', meaning 'alive', who, as in Somalia (TADESSE n.d.n 2010), restored family stability through procreation. The landslide victims revealed getting shelter and other basic needs (*khusaakha*) for resuscitating means of livelihood through marital bonds, thus enhancing psycho-social empowerment that lessened stigma and stress.

Gishu Practices for Conflict Mediation and Reconciliation

The women's role in conflict mediation was mainly limited to input on general family and community issues. Important decisions and secrets, such as the distribution of family resources, including government financial assistance for rebuilding livelihoods were a preserve for men. This patriarchal practice was largely perceived by women as breaching trust and honesty, leading to family wrangles. However, to minimize the destructive effects of disasters and to reduce the tensions, clan meetings locally referred to as *Lukhoobo/Lubuusano* or *Luwaalo*, presided over by clan leaders, are convened for aggrieved parties to seek forgiveness (*Sisonyíwo*) as stated earlier. The Gishu preferred that decisions be made openly to avoid mistrust and accusations of conspiracy and betrayal in the reconciliation processes. Thus, the saying, '*bataaru bateesa bibyaabwe...babiili bateesa lilooko*', meaning 'a plan by three is less likely to be evil, unlike two who may keep a vicious secret'.

The interviewees believed in the value of community labor and work in uniting, bonding and rekindling communal spirit. Fights over land boundaries are settled by gathering at the gardens of the aggrieved parties, cultivating jointly and redemarcating boundaries. Particularly, women, as the regular tillers of the land, are instrumental in providing guidance on accurate demarcations. Special tree species locally known as *Tsísoola* and *Dracaena (Kamasínzi)* were respected landmarks. Natunga, a female victim at the landslide-affected community of Bududa revealed that she directly guided the men when re-establishing land boundaries:

My husband was not agreeing [sic] with his brother... so I came in and told him... our land has been passing here... And we had to settle the issues... he was supposed to tell those government people so that they compensate us...(NATUNGA 2023, oral Interview)

Traditionally, a pact (*shiwuumo* or *khukhwiilaama*) is made to end the misunderstandings, accompanied with ceremonial rituals, sacrifices and prayer, locally known as '*Khukwiisaaya*', related to warfare and reconciliation. Women contribute food, animals such as cows, goats, sheep, various types of fowl and ground millet for alcohol brewing for reconciliation festivities. Mainly performed for purposes of cleansing (*Khubiita*) and veneration of ancestors, a well-fed bull raised under a special shelter commonly referred to as '*likhongoolo*' is slaughtered, said 70-year-old Makai of Bumwalye village, in Bududa. A person found guilty of destroying social order is fined a cow, a goat, or a sheep, which would be slaughtered and eaten by all, as compensation for the breach. Ééfuumbo a Gishu ritual is a form of memorial service for appeasing the ancestors usually accompanied by clearing the graveyards (*khungoona tsingooba*). All festivities gathered relatives and friends, reaffirming their unity with the ancestral spirits (*Bisaambwa*). *Khubiita*, a libation of splashing local brew (*kámalwa*), is assumed to cleanse the people of their wrongs, appease spirits, reignite new relations with both the living and the living-dead, and avert trouble from mother nature. Therefore, it can be said that traditional knowledge systems in the Gishu people's cosmology continue to shape conflict resolution strategies.

Conclusion

This paper discussed how indigenous beliefs and practices, especially those embedded in the Gishu proverbs and cultural practices, provide insightful alternative mediation strategies in the aftermath of climate-induced conflicts. It demonstrated the significance of IKs to peace building by showing that the life of the Gishu continues to rotate on building unity through oneness '*butweela*'. Local knowledge and virtues of patience, perserverance, connectedness and rational choice making are perceived to be significant in resolving local conflicts and imparting social values, especially in remote areas like the mudslide-affected districts of Bududa and Bulambuli.

Furthermore, this study revealed a strong connection between family cohesion and peace-building, as well as the contribution of Gishu women to peace-building post mudslides by providing advice to brothers, husbands and fathers. The implication for the communities is the need to consolidate family ties, a sense of community belongingness that is a vital part of traditional African life. Another fundamental policy implication is to strengthen governance disaster response structures by meaningfully engaging in community-level conflict prevention, mediation and resolution fora. More focus should be on bottom-up approaches like strengthening family solidarity, re-inventing and reintegrating IKs in modern peace negotiations. Creating a forum for dialogue on community concerns in landslide affected districts is not only important for peacebuilding, but also for raising awareness about adapting indigenous lifestyles for climate mitigation. Finally, drafting joint action plans that enhance climate resilience is key to fostering social cohesion in response to climate disasters for land slide victims.

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Declaration

*The author declares no conflict of interest or ethical issues for this work.

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Excerpts based on interviews with the following:

1. (MUYAMA 2023, oral Interview).
2. (NADUNGA 2023, oral Interview).
3. (NAGUDI 2023, oral Interview).
4. (NAMBOZO 2023, oral Interview).
5. (NATUNGA 2023, oral Interview).
6. (PENINA 2023, oral Interview).
7. (WALIMBWA 2023, oral Interview).
8. (WAMAYI 2023, oral Interview).
9. (WANZUSI 2023, oral Interview).
10. (WEWULA 2023, oral Interview).