

#### **TOPIC 04: CULTURE AND KEY ETHNIC GROUPS IN EAST AFRICA.**

Culture refers to the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively.

**OR**

The ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society. UNESCO defines culture as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art literature, but life styles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs<sup>1</sup>.

Cultural heritage refers to monuments, buildings and sites which are of outstanding value for history, art or science<sup>2</sup>:

#### **EXAMPLES OF HERITAGE SITES IN EAST AFRICA.**

<b>Uganda</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>Tanzania</b>
Bwindi impenetrable National park Rwenzori mountains National park Kasubi tombs		

#### **CULTURAL VALUES THAT EXIST IN OUR FAMILIES.**

Family refers to the basic unit of society. For a very long period of time, there has been cultural values that are much cherished in our society<sup>3</sup>.

The cultural values vary from community to community for example kneeling is very important among the Baganda.

#### **Culture and Ethnic Groups in East Africa**

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<sup>1</sup> The 2009 UNESCO framework for cultural sites.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Politics of putting Asunder by Dr.Maria Nassali.



Traditionally, families have been a source of moral being and discipline among the children<sup>4</sup>.

It was a duty of a man to create sanity and protect family as our mothers concentrate on feeding children, building values and character.

However, due to changing global trends, women and children are now taking lead in some families.

A new generation of families with children has now come up.

In the face of scarcity of resources, a number of young men and young women world over have chosen to stay single.

It is important, however to stay cultured and to respect our traditions<sup>5</sup>.

Some of the cultural values in our families include:

Kneeling- this is vary common among the Baganda of Central Uganda.

Peeling – Children were trained by their mothers to know how to peel.

Greeting - This is a value cherished by many families in different communities.

Respecting elders- Young ones are taught to respect those who are older than them.

Sitting habits -people have to sit properly while eating food.

#### **Activity 4.1: What is family?**

1. What is a family?
2. Which members of the family do you think are vital in the progression of values?
3. Which type of family do you think brings up better and cultured children?

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<sup>4</sup> NCDC, Histpry and political education textbook for lower secondary curriculum,p.35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

4. List and provide examples of bad cultures in Uganda. How can you control your Children from getting bad cultural values from the community?

5. Indicate whether the statements below are true or false:

- i) Taking part in family decisions is my right.
- ii) Members of a family deserve equal treatment.
- iii) Children should not be involved in decision-making.
- iv) Decisions made about children should aim at making their lives better.
- v) Children should obey all decisions made in a family.
- vi) All members of a family should be allowed to say anything they like anytime.

### **ROLES OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN A FAMILY**

In East Africa we share beliefs and cultures. Those beliefs and cultures have gone further to determine family values and cultures that we believe in.

Below are some of the roles or cultural roles of people in a family.

- ✓ Building a new house, previously this has always been the responsibility of men, but the trend is changing because many women actively participate in building houses.
- ✓ Clearing land for anew garden.
- ✓ Planting and looking after crops
- ✓ Buying food from the market.
- ✓ Preparing meals
- ✓ Collecting firewood
- ✓ Fetching water
- ✓ Taking animals out of graze
- ✓ Fishing
- ✓ Carrying heavy loads
- ✓ Working to earn money for the family
- ✓ Looking after children at home
- ✓ Caring for sick and elderly people
- ✓ Paying electricity and water bills.
- ✓ Paying school fees.
- ✓ Helping children to do homework.

Activity:

- (1) In groups, discuss how the roles of men, women and children are changing in families. Do you think these changes are good? Give reasons.
- (2) Copy table 4.1 and show which group of people normally play each of the roles listed above in your family.

Role	Men	Women	Children	All
Build a new house				

### **CHANGES IN THE ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN.**

The part played by someone in decision- making is also called a role.

Change of roles according to gender has resulted in change of values in East Africa.

Traditionally, one of the main roles of men in a family or community was to ensure security and provide leadership.

Men had to look after the family or community and make sure they were not attacked by enemies.

This explains why men made up the armies of different societies or communities. Because men were considered stronger than women, men used to take up this role and so they became leaders.

In the past, it was mainly the boys who went to school and this enabled them to gain positions of leadership in their communities.

Today both girls and boys go to school to gain modern education.

Article 30 of the 1995 constitution, all persons have a right to education<sup>6</sup>, this explains why there has been increase in the number of girls enrolled in schools and institutions of higher learning<sup>7</sup>.

Also, Article 21 of the constitutions has led to increase in the number of girls joining schools and universities<sup>8</sup> - The 1995 constitution. The Article provides for equal treatment of all people

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<sup>6</sup> The 1995 constitution of the Republic of Uganda.

<sup>7</sup> See Education, A means for population transformation (2017) chapter two.

<sup>8</sup> Art 21 of the 1995 constitution.

irrespective of their race, sex, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, social or economic standing, political opinion or disability.

Girls are also in gainful employment and earn money. This means that many women have equal opportunities to compete for jobs and to attain leadership.

Below is an example of changing roles in East African states.



**Figure 4.3: A woman repairing a vehicle**  
*baking*



**Figure 4.4: A man**

### **CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN EAST AFRICA:**

In East Africa, cultural institutions have been in existence since the pre-colonial period, a case in point, Buganda kingdom was founded in the late 14<sup>th</sup> C<sup>9</sup>, when the Kabaka or ruler of the Ganda people came to exercise strong centralized control over his domains called Buganda, Bunyoro has also been in existence since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Kenya Wanga also known as Abawanga had been in existence since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The influence of cultural institutions has been changing over time.

At the advent of colonialism, some cultural institutions signed treaties with the colonialists for example in 1894 Buganda signed a treaty with the British (protection treaty) and later the 1900 Buganda agreement<sup>10</sup>. These agreements shaped the roles of the cultural institutions.

During the colonial period, many cultural institutions were subdued by the colonialists.

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<sup>9</sup> Phares Mutiibwa, The Buganda factor in Uganda politics.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p.5

In 1899 Kabaka Mwanga of Buganda and Kabalega of Bunyoro were exiled to Seychelles Island by the British.

In 1953 Andrew Cohen exiled Sir Edward Mutesa II to England (Britain), the Kabaka only came back after concessions made in the 1955 Namirembe Agreement.

#### CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD.

It is important to note that Tanganyika attained her independence in 1961, Uganda 1962 and Kenya in 1963.

The role of cultural institutions in the post- independence era continued to diminish.

In 1966 Obote attacked the Kabaka of Buganda in what is famously known as the 1966 Kabaka crisis<sup>11</sup>.

In 1967 Obote established the republican constitution which abolished cultural institutions<sup>12</sup>.

In 1995 constitution, the constituent assembly recognized the restoration of cultural institutions under Article 246<sup>13</sup>.

In 2011 parliament passed an Act of parliament<sup>14</sup> which operationalized Article 246 of the constitution.

The Act also provided for the existence of traditional or cultural leaders in any area of Uganda in accordance with the constitution.

The Article further provided for the privileges and benefits of the traditional or cultural leaders<sup>15</sup>.

The Act in addition provided for the resolution of issues relating to traditional or cultural leaders and related matters.

In Kenya and Tanzania equally relative rules and regulations governing the traditional institutions that strongly support Cultural Institutions.

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<sup>11</sup> Phares Mutiibwa, The Buganda factor in Uganda politics, p.85

<sup>12</sup> Article 118 of the 1967 constitution.

<sup>13</sup> The 1995 constitution of the republic of Uganda.

<sup>14</sup> The institution of traditional or cultural leaders Act, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> S.10 of the institution of traditional or cultural leaders Act, 2011.

In Uganda, we have a number of traditional monarchial kingdoms supported by the state and the people who belong to the kingdoms as approved by an Act of parliament in 2011.

### TRADITIONAL LEADERS IN EAST AFRICA.

S/N	MONARCHY	LEADER	DATE OF RESTORATION/ ENTHRONMENT
1	Acholi	Rwot Acana I	15 <sup>th</sup> jan 2005
2	Alur	Rwot Ubim Olarker Rauni III	1 <sup>st</sup> Aug 2000
3	Buganda	Kabaka Muwenda Mutebi II	24 <sup>th</sup> july 1993
4	Bunyoro	Omukama Solomon I Guru	24 <sup>th</sup> july 1993
5	Iteso	Emorior Augustine Osuban	4h may 2004
6	Rwenzoruru	Charles Wesley Mumbere	
7	Toro	Oyo Nyimba Kabamba Iguru	





## **Kenya.**

Unlike Uganda, Kenya does not recognize cultural leaders much.

The most prominent cultural leader in Kenya heads Wanga Kingdom of Mumia in Kakamega county.

When the British arrived in Kenya in 1883, they found the Wanga Kingdom, the only organized state with a centralized hereditary monarchy in Kenya.

In fact, the British used much of the Nabongo administrative system, that was the most organized by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as a stepping stone to territorial and political expansion.

The Wanga, who mainly inhabit Mumias in Kakamega county, have partly stuck to their culture.

Some still build their houses and granaries using the architecture of their forefathers, use traditional herbs and medians to treat the sick.

They cook using traditional pots, cultivate their lands using ox ploughs and hoes and store their water in large pots as their ancestors did.



But like many other Kenyan communities, Western Culture, rural-urban migration and opening up to the outside world have affected this kingdom that was once Africans most organized traditional ruling body.

The Kingdom now concentrates on conducting cultural festivals to enable its people to know who they are and what is expected of them.

To keep very close to one another and maintain their culture the Wanga came together to perform common ceremonies like blessing the harvest, circumcision, child naming, marriages and appointment of the next of King.

### ***The Kingdom of Wanga Council meeting.***

The Kingdom of Wanga council consists of low elders drawn from different clans and meets on different occasions.

To keep their culture vibrant, the Wanga usually encourage communal activities like harvesting, wrestling, sports, singing and dancing.

Harvesting ceremonies where crops are blessed before consumption are held every year.

### **Tanzania**

Tanzania has 120 ethnic groups, making it one of the richest in cultural diversity in East Africa.

If you are interested in learning more about these tribes and cultures, it is possible to spend part of your Safari visiting, learning from and interacting with Tanzanians.

Some of the people to visit with established structures include the Maasai, **Datogu**, Hadzape, **Iraqw**, Chaga and Meru.

Each tribe has distinct rituals, belief customs and artistic traditions.

### **THE WANGA KINGDOM OF THE LUYIA:**

The Wanga kingdom was the only centralized monarchy in the area of modern Kenya.

The founders of the Wanga were a group of Bahima from the Chwezi Empire. They from Western Uganda Eastwards into Kenya and settled at Imanga Hill, by about 1500 AD.

The Chwezi however, were not the earliest or the only settlers in this territory.

The area was inhabited by different groups of people but the largest single group was the Luyia, who were of Bantu origin. Others included the Kalenjin and the Maasai.

By 1750, the Luo had also moved into the area. It was thus a melting point of different cultures, but the Bantu culture was dominant.

Between 1550 and 1650, new settlers arrived, led by Wanga. They settled in the territory peacefully. Wanga united the five clans: the Buka, Runga, Shikao, Kolwe and Shitsetse clans.

The latter became the traditional ruling clan. The Abashitsetse dynasty replaced the Hima dynasty in the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>16</sup>.

### **ORGANISATION OF THE WANGA:**

The Wanga organized politically, socially and economically.

#### **Political organisation;**

- The Wanga Kingdom was a centralized monarchy under a king, known as Nabongo.
- Nabongo had absolute powers: he could appoint officials and dismiss them at his own will.
- He also made military decisions and had power over life and death.
- The King's position was hereditary: upon the death of the King, he could be succeeded by his eldest son or close relative.
- Items of regalia like shields, spears and drums were used to symbolize the King's authority and to give him prestige.
- The King was helped by various officials in administration. These included: the Prime minister who was the head of the hierarchy of chiefs. He also advised the King and ensured that his policies were implemented by his officials.

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<sup>16</sup> George Ogaba, History of East Africa, p.103.

- There was a council of elders which advised the King on matters of administration, security and justice.
- The Kingdom was divided into five clans, which made administration easy.
- Each clan was headed by a member of the Hima clan.
- The clan leaders played an advisory role, collected taxes and maintained justice, law and order.
- In the judicial system, the King judged major offences, while minor crimes were dealt with by the chiefs.
- Their Kingdom had a strong standing army for the purpose of defending and expanding its territory.
- The chiefs had the role of mobilizing able-bodied men to serve in the army. The army commander was appointed by the King.
- The army used spears, bow, arrows for defense and later guns obtained from the Swahili and Arab traders.

**Social organization;**

- The Luyia lived in small villages grouped into administrative units.
- Each village consisted of about 500 members and was under a chief who had political and religious powers.
- Politically, he was an administrator and a judge.
- He also ensured that taxes were collected and law and order maintained.
- His religious role included presiding over cultural or religious ceremonies.
- Clans were an important part of the Luyia society.
- Clans were made up of age sets. Youths of the same age group were regarded as relatives.
- Marriage within the same clan was forbidden because clan members were regarded as relatives.
- The Luyia believed in the existence of a supreme being, whom they referred to as “Were”.
- They also had lesser gods and spirits that they worshiped.
- They communicated with “Were” through the spirits of their ancestors and with the help of diviners.
- Shrines were built for worship and for offering sacrifices to the gods.

- The King and his Chiefs presided over various religious and cultural rituals such as coronation, cleansing and harvest rituals.
- Communal work was encouraged among the Wanga. Activities like farming, building as well as ceremonies like initiation, marriage and funeral rites, involved the whole community.
- The villages and clans created a sense of unity among the people.
- The Wanga used to wear cow and goat skins.
- There was division of labour, with the men clearing land, building houses and granaries, hunting and fishing, while the women did the cultivation, made beer and took care of the homestead.

**Economic organization:**

- Cultivation was the main economic activity among the Wanga.
- Crops like cereals, potatoes, beans and other vegetables were grown.
- Cattle, sheep and goats were reared and poultry were kept.
- Fishing was also carried out to supplement on their diet.
- Other activities included hunting for meat and skins. Elephants were hunted for ivory at the coast. This became an important activity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the high demand for ivory at the coast.
- They carried out trade with their neighbouring societies such as the Maasai: exchanging foodstuffs and ivory for cattle and iron products.
- They also traded with the coastal Swahili and Arab traders bringing in guns, glassware and other manufactured goods.
- The Wanga on the other hand exported ivory and slaves.
- The Luyia homes were also rich in items like pots, mats, baskets, stools, grinding stones and calabashes which made them self- sufficient.

In conclusion, the Wanga Kingdom was therefore organized politically, socially, and economically as seen above.

***Qn. How was the Wanga Kingdom of the Luyia organized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?***

**Activity, traditional leaders.**

1. In your groups, carry out research on the social, political and economic organisation of the Wanga people in Kenya, present your findings to the class.
2. Using a table, research and match the monarchial leader with his respective Kingdom in Tanzania.
3. List and categorize the cultural institutions in Kenya.