



NATURE TALK AFRICA

HEALING UNDER THE TREES: REVIVING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, COLLECTIVE CARE AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AMONG UGANDA'S OIL-HOST COMMUNITIES.

ACTIVITY REPORT AUGUST 1, 2026



Email: info@naturetalkafrika.org
Website: www.naturetalkafrika.org
X: https://x.com/NatureTalk_A

INTRODUCTION

On August 1, 2026, Nature Talk Africa (NaTA) convened a communal event at Kyakaboga Resettlement Camp, Buseruka Sub-county, Hoima District, as part of its **Joy and Well-being Initiative**, which seeks to strengthen the emotional well-being, solidarity and resilience of environmental and human rights defenders (EHRDs), project-affected persons (PAPs) and grassroots community organizers in Uganda's Albertine Graben.

The event was organized within a context where many communities in the oil-host region continue to experience profound social, economic and environmental changes, including displacement, loss of traditional livelihoods, environmental pollution, increasing climate change impacts, food insecurity and growing pressure on community voices advocating for environmental and social justice. For many grassroots organizers and community defenders, these challenges are accompanied by stress, uncertainty, fear and isolation resulting from intimidation, threats, surveillance and shrinking civic space. NaTA recognizes that sustaining community action requires not only advocacy skills and resources but also **spaces where people can reconnect, heal, restore relationships and strengthen collective support systems**.

The Communal Food Event was therefore designed as more than a cultural gathering or food-sharing activity. It was a deliberate community healing and learning space that brought together **over 200 participants, including elders, mothers, youth, PAPs, community organizers and defenders**, to reflect on the traditional values and practices that enabled communities to survive difficult times. Inspired by indigenous systems of collective care, participants gathered under the trees to share stories, prepare and eat food together, learn from elders and reflect on how ancestral practices of solidarity, mutual support, respect for nature and shared responsibility can provide lessons for today's challenges. The gathering created an opportunity to revisit practices such as communal food sharing, traditional healing, collective labour, indigenous food systems and sustainable relationships with nature and community responsibility for vulnerable members. Participants reflected on how these values can contribute to strengthening present-day responses to climate change, environmental degradation, poverty and social fragmentation.

By creating a space where knowledge flowed between generations, the event recognized elders as custodians of lived experience, mothers and elders as carriers of cultural practices and young people as important actors in adapting and carrying forward community solutions. Ultimately, the gathering reaffirmed NaTA's belief that community resilience is built not only through external interventions but also through restoring relationships, dignity, cultural identity, collective care and the shared responsibility of communities to protect one another and their environment.



About NaTA

[Nature Talk Africa \(NaTA\)](#) is a youth-led, community-based organization founded in 2023 and formally registered in 2024 in Hoima District, Uganda. We were established by young people, community organizers, environmental defenders and individuals directly affected by large-scale oil and gas developments in Uganda's Albertine Graben.

Unlike many organizations that work from a distance, our leadership and membership come directly from the communities experiencing the realities of displacement, land acquisition, environmental degradation, livelihood loss and social disruption associated with oil and gas extractive industries.

We believe that communities closest to environmental and climate injustices should be at the center of designing solutions, shaping policies and determining their own future. Our work is rooted in solidarity, nonviolence, human dignity, environmental stewardship, social justice and community empowerment.



Purpose of the gathering.

The Communal Food Event was organized as a community-led reflection and healing space bringing together elders, mothers, youth, project-affected persons (PAPs), environmental and human rights defenders and grassroots community organizers to reconnect, learn from one another and strengthen collective resilience. The gathering was not intended to replace modern knowledge or systems of support, but rather to recognize that indigenous wisdom, community solidarity and contemporary approaches can complement each other in building healthier, safer and more resilient communities.

The gathering aimed to:

- **Create a safe and welcoming space for community healing and connection** by bringing people together through shared food, storytelling, cultural practices and honest conversations at a time when many community members and defenders experience stress, uncertainty, displacement-related challenges and pressure linked to defending their rights and environment.
- **Revive conversations around indigenous knowledge and community survival practices** by creating space for elders to share lived experiences on traditional healing, food systems, communal work, environmental stewardship and social support systems that helped communities withstand difficult periods.
- **Strengthen intergenerational learning and relationships** by connecting elders who carry community memories with young people who are seeking knowledge, identity and practical lessons that can guide present-day responses to social and environmental challenges.
- **Reflect on traditional systems of collective care and solidarity** that ensured vulnerable people were supported, food was shared, children were cared for collectively and community members responded together during times of illness, hardship or crisis.
- **Provide a moment of wellness and restoration** for grassroots organizers, environmental and human rights defenders and affected communities by reducing isolation, creating opportunities for emotional expression, rebuilding trust and reminding participants that resilience is strengthened through relationships and collective support.
- **Explore lessons from indigenous practices** that can inform today's community responses to climate change impacts, environmental pollution, food insecurity, poverty, displacement and the increasing challenges faced by grassroots movements operating within shrinking civic spaces.

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED

1. Opening session.

The gathering officially commenced at 10:00 AM (EAT) with an opening prayer led by Ms. Furaswazi Ongiera. In her prayer, she thanked God for bringing together elders, mothers and young people and asked for wisdom to learn from one another, heal as a community and strengthen unity in the face of today's social and environmental challenges.



Following the prayer, **Emmanuel Ongyeer**, Co-founder and Programs Director of Nature Talk Africa (NaTA), welcomed the more than 200 participants and expressed appreciation for their willingness to spend a day learning together. He explained that the gathering was intentionally designed as a community dialogue rather than a workshop, where everyone; especially elders would be recognized as custodians of knowledge and lived experience.

Emmanuel reminded participants that many communities in Uganda's oil-hosting areas are navigating multiple, interconnected challenges, including climate change, environmental pollution, loss of land and livelihoods, poverty, food insecurity, forced displacement and increasing pressure on grassroots civic action.

He noted that many environmental and human rights defenders, project-affected persons (PAPs) and community organizers continue to experience intimidation, threats, surveillance and blackmail while working to defend their communities and the environment. These realities, he said, affect not only people's livelihoods but also their mental well-being, relationships and sense of belonging. He invited participants to reflect on an important question: ***"When our ancestors faced hunger, disease, conflict, or hardship, what enabled them to survive together? And what lessons from those traditions can help us build resilient, caring and safe communities today?"***



Emmanuel encouraged participants not to romanticize the past, but to identify values and practices that remain relevant today. He emphasized that the gathering was about learning from indigenous knowledge to strengthen collective well-being, community resilience and climate action alongside modern approaches.

"Today is not about listening to one speaker. It is about listening to one another. Our elders carry memories that books do not contain, our mothers carry practices that have sustained families for generations and our young people carry the energy and innovation to adapt these traditions to today's realities. If we combine these strengths, we can build communities that are healthier, more resilient and better prepared to face climate change, social injustice and shrinking civic space together." Emmanuel concluded.

a. Elders' storytelling on traditional healing, communal hunting, food gathering and resilience

The elders' storytelling session was one of the most powerful moments of the gathering. Sitting together under the shade of trees, elders shared lived experiences of how communities cared for one another long before formal institutions and external aid became common. The session became a living archive of indigenous knowledge, with many young participants hearing these stories for the first time.



One elder, **Midar Ukuna** recalled that during outbreaks of illness, families did not isolate themselves or struggle alone. Community members would gather at a designated place where respected elders prepared medicinal herbs collected from nearby forests. Before approaching the herbs, people removed their shoes as a sign of respect for nature and life, walked barefoot, knelt together and drank the herbal medicine from a communal point. The elder explained that healing was understood as both a physical and social process; people recovered because they were surrounded by care, encouragement and collective responsibility.

Elders also described seasonal wild fruit gathering as a collective activity rather than an individual pursuit. Children, women, and men entered the forests together to collect indigenous fruits, mushrooms, vegetables, and medicinal plants. They explained that harvesting was guided by customary rules that prohibited destroying trees or taking more than was needed, ensuring that future generations would also benefit. Participants reflected that these practices embodied principles of environmental stewardship and sustainable resource use that remain highly relevant in addressing today's climate and biodiversity crises.

Another elder, **Yakabo** narrated the communal hunting traditions among the Alur people. Before setting out, hunters constructed a simple three-stone fireplace in the bush near their homes. They carried dried meat, prepared it using natural leaves instead of cooking oil, and shared every successful hunt with widows, older persons, and families that could not hunt. "A good hunter was not measured by how much meat he kept for his family," one elder explained, "but by how many households returned home smiling because of his generosity." This story sparked discussion about how today's community organizers and defenders can strengthen solidarity by ensuring that no colleague facing threats, displacement, or hardship is left to struggle alone.



Food preservation methods were another important topic. Elders demonstrated how crops and meat were dried, smoked, or stored using locally available materials to ensure food remained available during droughts, floods, or poor harvest seasons. They emphasized that preserving food was not only about survival but also about preparing the community to withstand future shocks together.



The discussion on collective labour reminded participants of a time when neighbours voluntarily came together to cultivate gardens, build homes, repair roofs, or harvest crops for families facing illness, widowhood, or other hardships. No payment was expected because supporting one another was considered a shared community obligation rather than charity.

Elders also reflected on strategic marriages and collective child upbringing. They explained that marriage strengthened relationships between families and clans, creating wider networks of mutual support during crises. Likewise, every child was regarded as belonging to the community. If a young person made a mistake or needed guidance, any responsible adult could provide counsel, protection, and care. Participants observed that rebuilding such trusted support networks could significantly improve the well-being, safety, and resilience of young grassroots defenders, activists, and community organizers who often face intimidation, isolation, and burnout.

The storytelling session reminded participants that indigenous knowledge is not merely history—it offers practical lessons for strengthening collective care, psychosocial well-being, food security, environmental stewardship, and community resilience in the face of today's interconnected social, environmental, and climate challenges.



b. Group discussions: What traditional practices should we revive and why?

Participants formed mixed discussion groups of elders, women and young people to reflect on the question: **"What traditional practices should we revive and why?"** The discussions became one of the most engaging sessions of the day, creating meaningful dialogue between generations. Young participants expressed surprise at learning how communities once relied on collective systems of care rather than individual survival. Elders reflected on how many of these practices have faded due to displacement, changing lifestyles, urbanization and the erosion of cultural knowledge. Several practical examples emerged that participants believed could strengthen the well-being, safety and resilience of today's grassroots environmental and human rights defenders, community organizers and project-affected communities.



1. **Communal food sharing ("No one sleeps hungry").** Elders explained that when one family lacked food, neighbors willingly shared what they had without expecting payment. Participants reflected that this spirit could be revived today by organizing community food-sharing days, emergency food baskets or solidarity kitchens for activists, defenders and vulnerable households experiencing financial hardship or security-related disruptions. **Communal preparation and sharing of traditional food** during this event by our community members (Women and youth) who served everyone food symbolized: unity; equality; mutual care, hospitality; collective responsibility and traditional "**Kwete**" was also served, prompting conversations about indigenous foods, nutrition, identity and cultural heritage.
2. **Collective labour and mutual support.** Participants discussed traditional communal work systems where families came together to cultivate gardens, build homes, harvest crops, or support households facing challenges. They suggested adapting this practice into volunteer solidarity days where community members help defenders recovering from threats, displacement, illness, or burnout by assisting with farming, home repairs or other livelihood activities.
3. **Elders as community mentors.** Young people appreciated the opportunity to listen directly to elders and proposed establishing regular intergenerational dialogue circles where elders mentor young organizers on conflict resolution, ethical leadership, cultural values and peaceful community organizing. Participants noted that such spaces could reduce stress, strengthen identity and build confidence among young activists.
4. **Community healing circles.** Participants recalled that, traditionally, communities gathered after difficult events such as conflict, illness, or loss to comfort one another through storytelling, songs, shared meals and collective reflection. They recommended reviving community healing circles where environmental defenders and organizers can safely share experiences of intimidation, threats, grief or exhaustion while receiving emotional support from trusted community members.
5. **Indigenous food and nutrition.** Elders encouraged greater use of traditional foods, local vegetables, wild fruits, millet, cassava, sweet potatoes and herbal drinks such as Kwete, explaining that these foods promoted health before processed foods became widespread. Participants agreed that promoting indigenous foods can improve nutrition, reduce household food costs, strengthen climate resilience and support the physical well-being of activists and their families.
6. **Collective childcare and family support.** Participants reflected on how children were traditionally raised as a community responsibility, with neighbours and relatives helping parents during times of work, illness, or travel. They suggested creating community support networks where trusted volunteers assist defenders with childcare during trainings, community meetings, emergency responses or periods of heightened security risk.
7. **Indigenous medicinal knowledge.** Elders emphasized the importance of preserving knowledge about safe traditional medicinal plants while recognizing the value of modern healthcare. Participants agreed that documenting indigenous medicinal knowledge, alongside scientific guidance, could contribute to environmental protection, nature conservation, preventive health, cultural preservation and community well-being without discouraging access to formal medical services.

Throughout the discussions, participants emphasized that reviving these practices does not mean rejecting modern knowledge or technology. Rather, indigenous knowledge and contemporary approaches should complement one another to build healthier, safer and more resilient communities. The session concluded with a shared reflection that wellness is a collective responsibility. Participants agreed that young grassroots defenders, activists and community organizers are more likely to remain resilient when they are supported by strong relationships, trusted community networks, shared resources, intergenerational learning and a culture of mutual care rather than facing challenges in isolation.

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS.



"What values and practices from our ancestors can help us care for one another, protect our communities and remain resilient in the face of today's challenges?"

Elders reminded participants that survival was never based on individual efforts alone. Communities depended on relationships, shared responsibilities, and collective action. One elder shared that in the past, when a family experienced hunger, illness, or loss, neighbours did not wait to be asked for help. Food was shared, gardens were cultivated together, and community members stood with affected families until they recovered.

A mother participant reflected that in earlier times, food security was a community responsibility. Families exchanged seeds, shared planting knowledge, and worked together during cultivation and harvesting seasons. She explained that "a person's harvest was not only for their own home; it was part of the community's survival." Participants connected this practice to today's challenges where many households, including defenders and community organizers, experience economic pressure while working for the protection of their communities.

Young participants reflected on the stories shared by elders and acknowledged that many valuable practices are disappearing because younger generations have limited opportunities to learn directly from older community members. Several young people expressed interest in documenting indigenous knowledge before it is lost.

The reflection circles generated several commitments:

- Reviving communal farming and food-sharing initiatives to strengthen local food security and provide support to vulnerable households.
- Preserving indigenous seeds and local food varieties that are adapted to local environments and contribute to climate resilience.
- Creating more spaces for elders and young people to learn together and transfer knowledge across generations.
- Protecting indigenous knowledge and documenting community histories before they disappear.
- Strengthening solidarity networks for environmental and human rights defenders, PAPs, and grassroots organizers who often face challenges alone.
- Creating more community healing spaces where people can share experiences, rebuild trust, and restore emotional strength.
- Promoting collective climate action based on both indigenous wisdom and modern knowledge.
- Participants emphasized that these practices should not simply be copied from the past but adapted to present realities, including the pressures faced by communities living in areas affected by extractive activities, climate change, and shrinking civic space.

Outstanding moments.

Several moments stood out throughout the day.

- One particularly memorable experience occurred when many young participants encountered a traditional **food grinding stone** for the first time. For many, it became both a learning opportunity and a reminder of how rapidly indigenous technologies and cultural knowledge are disappearing.
- Another highlight was elders demonstrating **traditional food preservation and preparation methods** while explaining the cultural meanings attached to different foods and practices.
- Sharing "**Kwete**", a traditional beverage, also sparked rich conversations about cultural identity, nutrition and community celebration.

Immediate results and outcomes.

The event achieved several important immediate outcomes:

- **Intergenerational and traditional classroom for learning:** More than 200 participants attended and a strong representation of elders, women, youth, PAPs, community organizers and environmental defenders who learned from lived experiences of our elders in food preservation and other traditional solidarity actions for collective safety and wellbeing.
- **Documentation of indigenous knowledge;** through storytelling and intergenerational learning, collective care through the communal food sharing was strengthened and documented in this activity report.
- **Safe spaces created for experience sharing and solidarity building;** participants described the gathering as a healing, peaceful and emotionally uplifting and the communal meal strengthened relationships and trust.

Next steps: Nature Talk Africa will build on this gathering by:

- Documenting additional indigenous stories and practices.
- Organizing similar communal learning events across oil-host communities.
- Supporting youth to document elders' knowledge.
- Promoting indigenous food systems as part of climate adaptation.
- Creating additional safe spaces for healing, reflection and collective organizing.
- Producing multimedia stories that amplify community voices and preserve indigenous knowledge.

Appreciation

Nature Talk Africa sincerely thanks all community members, elders, women, youth, community organizers, environmental and human rights defenders and project-affected persons who participated and generously shared their knowledge, stories and experiences. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to our donors and partners including **UMI Fund** supporting the **Joy and Well-being Initiative for community organizers, EHRDs and PAPs**. Your solidarity makes it possible to create safe, community-led spaces where people can heal, learn from one another, preserve indigenous knowledge and strengthen collective resilience in the face of climate change, environmental injustice, displacement and shrinking civic space.

CONTACT AND FOLLOW US ON:

Email: info@naturetalkafrica.org

Website: [Nature Talk Africa -NaTA](https://www.naturetalkafrica.org)

X: [Nature Talk Africa \(NaTA\)](https://twitter.com/NatureTalkAfrica)

LinkedIn: [Nature Talk Africa \(NaTA\)](https://www.linkedin.com/company/nature-talk-africa)

Instagram: [naturetalk.africa](https://www.instagram.com/naturetalk.africa)