

ISSUE No. 1

YABA DIYA

*The Foods of
Our Ancestors*



By:
Trax Ghana &
The Beela Project



About Us:

TRAX Ghana is an NGO working with rural communities in Northern Ghana to reduce poverty and increase food security through sustainable agricultural and livelihood interventions. We use the principles of agroecological production to support health and sustainable food systems in Northern Ghana, working through a philosophy of community participation.

The Beela Project uses a community participatory model to work with farmers to build, support, and strengthen their seed and food systems. We support farmers and their communities through seed fairs, seed exchanges, community seed banking, and organic seed production to advance and transform their food sovereignty and seed security.

Trax Ghana, in partnership with The Beela Project, is implementing a project dubbed "Strengthening Local and Indigenous Food Systems in the Upper East and North East Regions of Ghana" supported by SeedChange and The 11th Hour Project. The project is aimed at conserving biodiversity, preserving community seed systems and seed sovereignty, promoting knowledge sharing and traditions among farmers.

Trax Ghana and The Beela Project work in collaboration to preserve local and indigenous seeds grown in the Upper East and North East Regions of Ghana.

Introduction

Community Indigenous Cooking



Trax Ghana and The Beela Project supported project communities to facilitate indigenous cooking, engaging communities on the impact of the loss and decline of their local and indigenous seeds on their food sovereignty, indigenous knowledge, and cultural practices. The community's indigenous cooking activities to revive and reconnect with their indigenous foods came from a Seed Security Assessment and Action Plan (SSAAP), which Trax and Beela conducted in key communities with farmers to understand the seed security situation in their communities. The decline of seeds and their varieties impacts the kinds of foods households and communities decide to prepare. The gradual loss of local and indigenous seeds over time means a decline in indigenous food histories, stories, and practices.

The indigenous cooking took place in twenty communities across the Upper East and North East Regions of Ghana, supporting the communities to revive traditional cooking practices, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance food security through local and indigenous ingredients. The cooking gatherings created a space for intergenerational learning and a practical knowledge transfer through the sharing of the history of each recipe. **YABA DIYA** is a compilation of the stories told by the elderly men and women in each community, sharing the stories and histories behind each dish. This book is a way to capture the stories held by communities about their foods, and to also create another mechanism of passing on the stories, and histories to the future generations.

Key Ingredients



Baobab Seeds



Bambara Beans



Cowpea



Dawadawa (fermented seeds of African locust bean fruit)



Millet



Pepper



Roselle (Bito)



Shea Butter



Sorghum

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Gengilemah La Tuntui Zeero

Beo Tankoo Community

HISTORY

Gengilemah is a traditional dish usually prepared during the dry and farming seasons for people doing hard physical work, like farmers and masons. Gengilemah is made with bambara beans and the soup is made with roselle (bito) leaves flavored with Baobab fruit seeds (tuntui) instead of groundnuts. It is a hearty, filling meal that keeps you full all day. After eating Gengilemah, people often drink a lot of water to stay hydrated. The dish is a result of women's ingenuity due to food scarcity. In the past, in order to feed their households, women turned simple and accessible ingredients into a nutritious, energy-boosting meal for their families. This traditional dish is loved for how much it sustains you through a long, hard day.



INGREDIENTS

- Salt
- Dawadawa
- Shea butter
- Pepper
- Baobab Seeds
- Bambara Beans
- Roselle (Bito)
- Sorghum Flour



Gengilemah La Tuntui Zeero

Beo Tankoo Community



Mue Moliga Kunkore

Kambusigo Community

INGREDIENTS

- Salt
- Dried Herrings (Amani)
- Pepper
- Dawadawa
- Shea butter
- Groundnut
- Onions
- Guinea fowl
- Tomatoes
- Rice



HISTORY

Mue Moliga Kunkore is a dish prepared to honor visitors, reflecting the community's deep respect and hospitality for guests. In the past, households preserved dried guinea fowl meat and pre-ground rice in advance to ensure quick and seamless preparation of the dish. When a guest arrived, family members would engage them in conversation while someone in the household quietly prepares the meal, often without the visitor noticing. This practice symbolized the value placed on guests, making them feel genuinely welcomed and appreciated.



MUE MOLIGA KUNKORE

Kambusigo Community

Tuntui

Kansigo Community

HISTORY

Tuntui is a meal used to usher in the new season, the April to May period, during the beginning of farming activities. This ancestral dish is known to be so fulfilling that it can replace a three-square meal. Tuntui takes a long time to digest completely. You need to drink a lot of water or fluids throughout the day after eating it. Traditionally, the community will first have to feed the ancestors with this meal before they eat it. The first shea butter made in the season is used as a source to signify the renewal of life and anointing from the ancestors. These days, tuntui is prepared during the rites of passage (funeral rites) only but not as an ordinary meal for home consumption. It is known to give energy and the food is nutrient dense.

INGREDIENTS

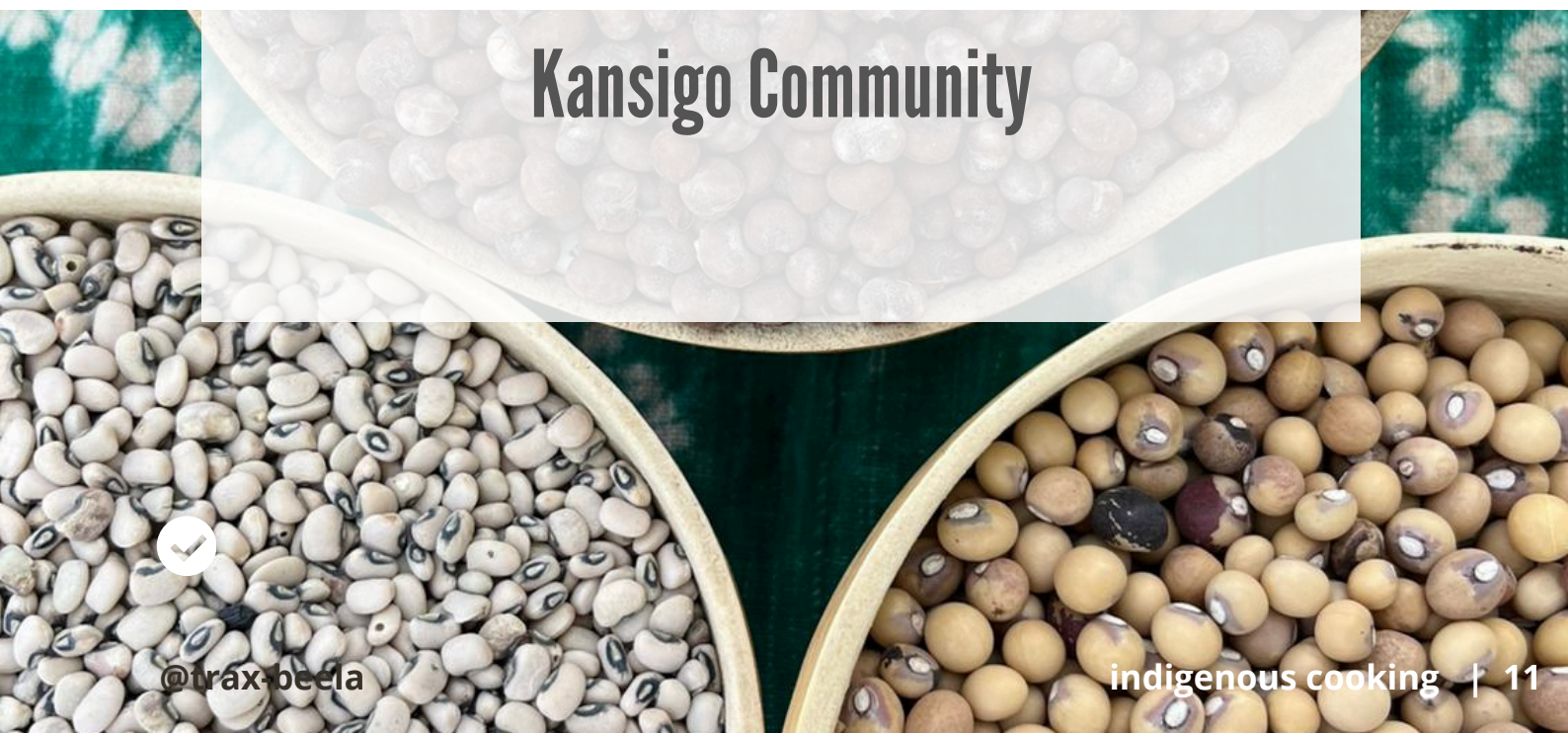
- Shea butter
- Pepper powder
- Crushed baobab seeds
- Bambara beans
- Beans
- Sorghum flour
- Salt
- Salt petre (potassium nitrate)





Tuntui

Kansigo Community





KILATEA

Sapooro Community

HISTORY

Ki La Tea was born out of innovation during a time of food scarcity. When resources were limited, the older women of the community combined sorghum seeds and baobab seeds to create a simple, nourishing meal. Later, they experimented by adding beans to the mix and discovered that the combination was not only filling but also packed with nutrition. This is how Ki La Tea came to be a practical yet nutritious food born from creativity during tough times.



INGREDIENTS

- Sorghum
- Beans
- Salt
- Pepper
- Shea butter
- Groundnut Paste
- Dawadawa



Zer-sagibo La Nankepulig

Logre-Yakin Community





INGREDIENTS

- Millet
- Dawadawa
- Sorghum Yeast
- Dried Herrings (Amani)
- Pepper
- Salt
- Baobab fruit extract
- Baobab leaves
- Salt petre (potassium nitrate)

HISTORY

Zer-sagibo La Nankepulg is a traditional dish prepared for women who have just given birth. It plays a crucial role in cleansing the womb and preparing the body for nourishment after childbirth. Among the Nabt people, this meal has been an essential part of postpartum care for generations.

Unfortunately, with time, Zea Sagibo is being gradually replaced by maize sagibo, which lacks the same cleansing properties. Unlike Zea Sagibo, maize sagibo does not provide the same level of preparation for a new mother's digestive system, making its decline a concern for those who value traditional healing practices.

An interesting aspect of this dish is the leftover sagibo that sticks to the pot. When soaked overnight in water and consumed first thing in the morning, it is believed to have medicinal benefits, including the ability to cure ulcers. This demonstrates the deep-rooted wisdom in traditional food practices, where nothing goes to waste, and every element serves a purpose.



Kazee-Gorya

Nkunzeisi Community

Kazee-Gorya

Nkunzeisi Community

HISTORY

Kazee-Gorya emerged from the creativity and adaptability of women during times of hunger. When food supplies ran low, and only sorghum remained, women in the Nabt traditional area struggled to prepare varied meals for their families. In their ingenuity, they discovered a way to use sorghum to make tubaani, a dish that has since become a cherished part of their culinary heritage. Today, Kazee-Gorya is not just a symbol of resilience but also an essential meal in the Nabt traditional area. It is both nutritious and filling, making it a reliable food source for many households.

INGREDIENTS

- Salt
- Pepper
- Shea butter
- Baana leaves
- Sorghum (soaked and grounded)
- Salt petre (potassium nitrate)



Kansagma

Nyoboko Community

HISTORY

Kansagma is a traditional dish known for its ability to combat hunger and malnutrition, especially in children. It is typically prepared right after the harvest of early millet when bean leaves are in abundance. Packed with essential nutrients, Kansagma provides a balanced meal, making it an effective remedy for malnutrition.

The name Kansagma comes from the unique preparation method, which involves shaking the mixture to form small balls. This traditional technique not only gives the dish its distinctive texture but also reflects the ingenuity of past generations in creating nutritious meals from seasonal ingredients.



INGREDIENTS

- Early millet
- Salt
- Shea butter
- Pepper
- Beans leaves
- Salt petre
(potassium nitrate)



Kansagma

Nyoboko Community



Kemoliga Sagibo La Bito Zeero

Potin Community

HISTORY

Kemoliga Sagibo La Bito Zeero is a traditional meal commonly prepared for farmers' cooperatives. This dish provides the necessary strength and nourishment needed for hard labor in the fields. The Kemoliga Sagibo is rich in carbohydrates, serving as a vital energy source, while also helping to boost blood levels. The accompanying Roselle Soup (Bito Zeero) is packed with essential minerals and vitamins, promoting healthy growth and overall well-being. Kemoliga, known as the "father of all crops" in the Nabt traditional area, is highly valued for its rich nutrient content and affordability. Despite its immense health benefits, it remains a simple and cost-effective dish, making it an essential part of the local diet.

INGREDIENTS

- Dawadawa
- Salt
- Shea butter
- Dried Herrings (Amani)
- Groundnut
- Amaranth leaves (Alefufu)
- Onions
- Sorghum flour





KEMOLIGA SAGIBO LA BITO ZEERO

Potin Community

Ben-Gwae

Gua Community

HISTORY

Ben-Gwae originated during times of hunger when early millet, the first crop to be harvested, became a vital food source for families. To make it more nourishing, the millet is grinded and mixed with the water from freshly pounded bean leaves, creating a filling and flavorful meal. This simple yet essential dish helped sustain families and became a cherished part of the Gua people.



INGREDIENTS

- Beans leaves (fresh)
- Early millet
- Salt
- Pepper
- Shea butter



Ben-Gwae

Gua Community





SAGEBO LA BITO ZEERO

Karamenga Community

INGREDIENTS

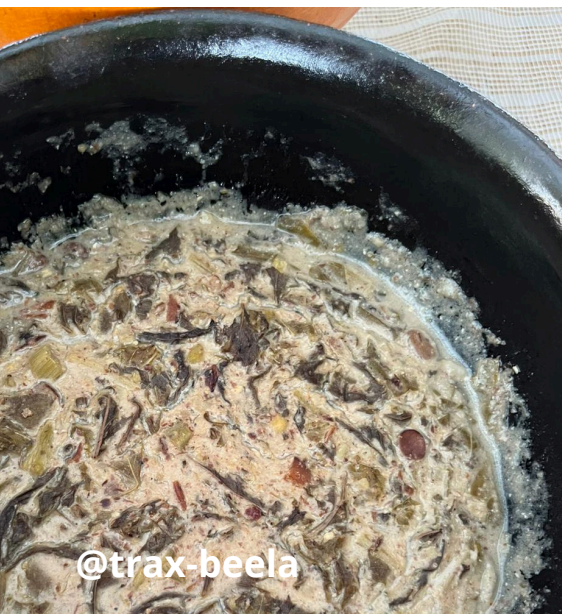
- Pepper
- Dried Herrings (Amani)
- Salt
- Late millet flour
- Roselle (Bito)
- Amaranth leaves (Alef)
- Rough groundnut paste
- Fermented millet water
- Shea butter

HISTORY

Sagebo is a dish deeply rooted in tradition, passed down from generation to generation. As young girls, we learned to prepare it by watching our mothers, who called us to their side whenever they made it. Sagebo represents the unity of a man and a woman, our grandparents who worked together to create something nourishing from what they had.

Long ago, when our great-grandparents harvested millet, they only ate the seeds. Over time, they grew tired of eating them in the same form. One day, a woman decided to grind the millet into fine flour using grinding stones. As she worked, she sang, kneeling beside the grinding stone. That night, she and her husband ate sagebo made from the finely ground flour. A guest visiting their home noticed they were eating something different and asked them to teach his wife, spreading the dish beyond their family.

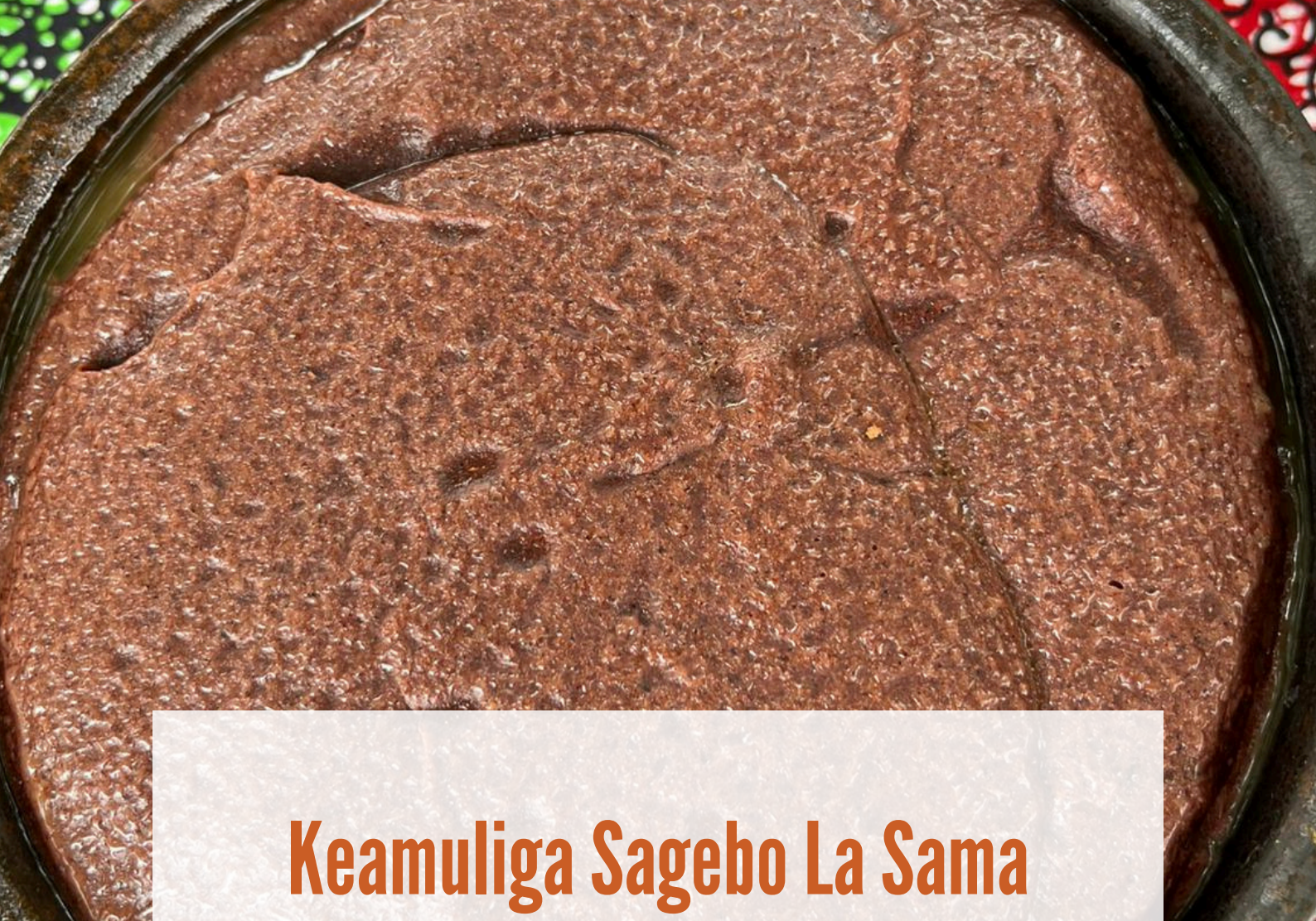
Bito (roselle) soup has its own rich history. Our forefathers were hunters and farmers, often spending days away from home. While in the wild, they discovered bito leaves and brought them back to cook. However, the leaves were itchy and rough, making them difficult to eat. Over time, they decided to cultivate bito, and through this process, the itchiness disappeared. This allowed them to prepare a soothing soup, which became a staple in our meals.



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Keamuliga Sagebo La Sama

Namiyela Community





INGREDIENTS

- Red Millet
- Dried Herrings (Amani)
- Pepper
- Dawadawa
- Shea Butter Oil
- Neri
- Salt

HISTORY

For generations, sorghum was the lifeblood of our community, a staple that sustained our forefathers and foremothers. It was more than just food; it was tradition, strength, and a symbol of unity. In the past, our fathers would return from the farm, bringing home bundles of sorghum. The grains were carefully stored in the traditional food storeroom. Only the head of the household had access to it. When it was time, he would call upon our mothers to collect the grains from the storeroom. Our traditional meal, sagebo is prepared from sorghum—an energy-giving porridge so rich that its strength could be felt even as it was made.

Alongside these meals, our people discovered Neri soup, a dish born from ancestral wisdom. The small, watermelon-like seeds of the Neri fruit were gathered, cracked open with stones, washed, and dried. Some were roasted and salted, enjoyed as a simple yet nutritious snack. These foods were not just meals; they were the essence of our heritage.

A top-down view of a round wooden bowl filled with several pieces of golden-brown, fried chicken. The chicken is resting on a bed of dark green, leafy vegetables. The bowl is placed on a white fabric with a subtle geometric pattern. A dark wooden handle is visible at the bottom left. A large, semi-transparent orange rectangle is overlaid on the center of the bowl, containing white text.

GORALA KOOSE

ZAATO-FUNGU COMMUNITY

Gora La Koose

ZAA TO - FUNGU COMMUNITY

INGREDIENTS

- Pepper
- Onions
- Shea butter
- Bean flour
- Monkey Orange leaves (Pompona)
- Salt

HISTORY

Long ago, our great-grandparents roamed the farms in search of food, guided by instinct and necessity. One day, they stumbled upon the monkey orange tree (pompona), its branches heavy with unfamiliar fruit. Curious, they plucked one, broke it open, and tasted the flesh inside. It was sweet. In those days, the elders bore the responsibility of testing unknown foods, risking their lives for the survival of the community. An old man took the first bite. The people watched, waiting anxiously. Hours passed, and he remained unharmed we knew the food was safe to eat. With this silent approval, the rest of the family joined in, savoring the fruit without fear. The logic followed: if the fruit was safe, perhaps the leaves were too. They gathered the leaves and brought them home, boiling them to test their flavor. At first, the bitterness was overwhelming, but they noticed the leaves became soft with cooking. Determined, they changed the water, added salt and pepper, and continued the process. Over time, they perfected the dish. Later, they found another pairing: koose, made from black-eyed pea flour, could be crumbled into the dish just as they once did with toubani.

Generations later, the tradition lives on. One of the narrators recalls her own experience of returning from the south to the north, hesitant at first to try the dish. Yet, with the first bite, she was struck by its rich, unexpected flavor. What was once a survival food had become a treasured delicacy, a testament to the resourcefulness and wisdom of our ancestors.

Waha

Damolgo-Tindongo Community

INGREDIENTS


- Millet
- Roselle (Bito)
- Shea butter
- Pepper
- Salt



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HISTORY

Waha originated as a practical solution to hunger, born from the resourcefulness of an elderly woman who transformed readily available millet into a sustaining meal. This simple dish, developed over generations, reflects the deep connection between agricultural practices and culinary traditions. It is a testament to the ability to adapt to the environment, utilizing local ingredients like millet and roselle (bito) to create a nourishing staple. The techniques and knowledge surrounding Waha's preparation were passed down through families and communities, ensuring its survival as a cultural marker and a vital part of daily life. Over time, while the core of the dish remained, regional and familial variations likely emerged, adding layers of complexity to its history. Thus, Waha stands as a symbol of resilience, cultural heritage, and the enduring power of simple, nourishing food.



WAHA

Damolgo-Tindongo Community

Keemoliga Sagibo La Bito Zeero

Gundoug Community



HISTORY

In the Nabt community, Sorghum sagibo is a staple dish, prepared almost daily in many households. Beyond its everyday use, it also holds cultural importance commonly served during funerals and special occasions as a mark of respect and tradition. This dish is deeply valued not just for its cultural role but also for its health benefits. It is believed to help boost blood levels, supporting the proper functioning of the body and promoting healthy living.

INGREDIENTS

- Salt
- Shea butter
- Dawadawa
- Dried Herrings (Amani)
- Onions
- Tomatoes
- Groundnut paste
- Sorghum flour
- Pepper
- Amaranth leaves (Alef)
- Roselle (Bito)



KEEMOLIGA SAGIBO LA BITO ZEERO

Gundoug Community

Tea Mpegira

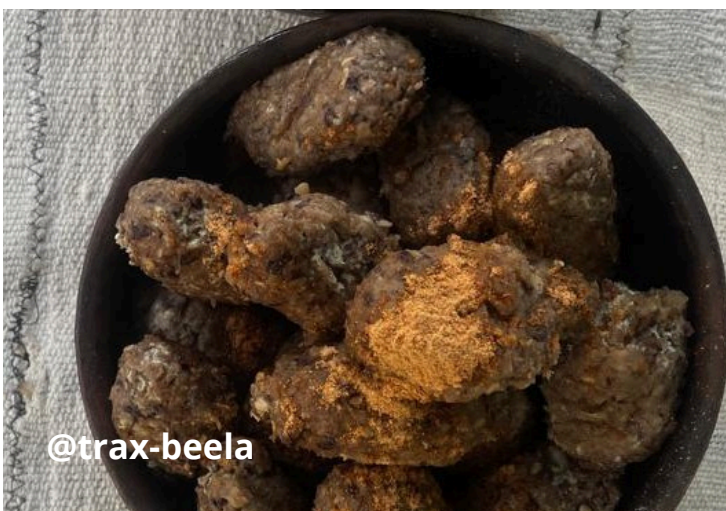
Pelungu Community

HISTORY

Tea Mpegira is more than just a meal, it's a story of resilience, creativity, and tradition. Our forefathers didn't have the luxury of endless ingredients like we do today. They had to make do with what was available, and out of that necessity, they created something both simple and nourishing.

Tea Mpegira became a staple in many homes, not just because it was easy to prepare, but because it was packed with protein and kept families strong and energized. It was the kind of meal that brought people together after a long day, shared around the fire with laughter and stories.

Even today, Tea Mpegira carries that history with it. It reminds us of the resourcefulness of those who came before us and the way food can connect generations. While we may now have more options, there's something special about keeping these traditions alive, about tasting a piece of history with every bite.



INGREDIENTS

- Beans
- Salt
- Pepper
- Onions
- Shea butter
- Salt petre
(potassium nitrate)



Tea Mpegira
Pelungu Community





Gingilimah

Yakoti Community



HISTORY

Gingilimah is a traditional dish that was commonly prepared in the olden days to help families endure periods of hunger. Made from bambara bean flour, this dish was highly valued because of its ability to expand during cooking, making a small quantity enough to feed an entire family.

During times of food scarcity, women would grind a small amount of bambara beans into powder and use it to prepare Gingilimah. Once eaten, the meal provided lasting sustenance, allowing people to go through the day with just water.

Over time, sorghum and other types of beans were also used as substitutes, but the essence of the dish remained the same: a simple yet powerful solution to keep hunger at bay.



INGREDIENTS

- Shea butter
- Pepper
- Salt
- Dawadawa
- Groundnut paste
- Bambara beans flour
- Roselle (Bito)
- Early Millet



Samkunkola/Ke Moliga Sagebo

Gowrie/Kansigo Community





INGREDIENTS

- Neri
- Salt
- Pepper
- Smoked guinea fowl
- Dawadawa
- Dried Herrings (Amani)
- Sorghum
- Bean leaves
- Roselle (Bito)
- Early millet
- Raw groundnut

HISTORY

Samkunkola is a highly nutritious, protein-rich dish traditionally prepared to honor esteemed guests, especially in-laws. Serving this meal is a cultural gesture of respect and a way to show that the visitor holds a special place in the family.

Sorghum TZ is a traditional staple in the Gowrie community. It is not only filling and energy-rich making it ideal for farmers who work long hours but it is also believed to help boost blood levels, making it especially beneficial for individuals with anemia.

Roselle (bito) and bean leaves soup is packed with essential vitamins and minerals that support healthy growth and overall well-being. The combination of roselle and bean leaves creates a nutrient-dense soup that complements the sorghum sagebo both in taste and nutritional value.



Kanzagma

YIPAALA COMMUNITY



Kanzagma

YIPAALA COMMUNITY

HISTORY

Kanzagma gets its name from the method used in its preparation—shaking a mixture of millet flour and bean leaf extract in a calabash until it forms small, round balls. The dish is traditionally prepared right after the early millet harvest, when fresh bean leaves are also in season.

Women use this time to prepare Kanzagma as a special meal for their families, for farmers who assist during the second round of weeding, or for cherished visitors.

What makes Kanzagma unique is its simplicity: it requires no elaborate spices just salt, pepper, and oil yet it remains a highly nutritious and wholesome dish, rich in local flavor and tradition.

INGREDIENTS

- Early millet
- Shea butter
- Bean leaves
- Dry Pepper
- Salt
- Salt petre
(potassium nitrate)





Wasa



Yorogo Community



INGREDIENTS

- Salt
- Pepper
- Shea butter
- Roselle (Bito)
- Late millet flour

HISTORY

Wasa is a traditional dish that originated during a time of hunger and hardship. In the olden days, when resources were scarce, our foremothers used what little they had to experiment in the kitchen. By mixing roselle (locally known as bito) with flour and stirring it together, they created a simple, nourishing meal Wasa.

It remains a quick and easy dish to prepare, symbolizing the creativity and resilience of the community in times of need.



Kansagma

Zaare Community

INGREDIENTS

- Millet
- Bean leaves
- Pepper
- Salt
- Shea butter
- Salt petre
(potassium
nitrate)

HISTORY

Kansagma was introduced by our forefathers as a solution to malnutrition caused by imbalanced diets.

Recognizing the rich nutritional value of Bambara beans, bean leaves, early millet, and shea butter oil, our grandmothers combined these ingredients to create a wholesome and nourishing dish. They soon discovered that Kansagma provided all the essential nutrients needed for the body's growth and development.

Beyond its health benefits, Kansagma became a culturally significant meal. It is traditionally prepared to honor an in-law during their first visit to the bride's home, symbolizing respect and warmth. The dish is also known for its ability to sustain household members throughout the day, keeping them energetic and youthful. Additionally, kansagma is believed to enhance brain function, making it not just a meal, but a source of strength and vitality for the community.

Communities



Putting shea butter on the Gengilemah in Beo Tankoo



Women cracking baobab seeds at Beo Tankoo



Namiyela woman stirring Keamuliga Sagebo



Plucking alefu in Karamenga leaves to prepare soup for late millet sagebo



Trax-Beela staff enjoying Zaato-Fungu Gora La Koose



Gundoug woman stirring Keemoliga Sagibo



Women in Gowrie processing fresh bean leaves
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Woman using grinding stones to process millet



women at Kansigo holding legumes and cereals

Contact Us



The process of making Kansigma



Logre Yakin Zer-sagibo La Nankepilig

The Beela Project

beelacenter@gmail.com

+233(0)533 042 270

<https://beela.org>

Trax Ghana

info@traxghana.com

+233(0)245 982 702

<https://traxghana.wordpress.com>

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