In times of rain shortage and droughts, the communities around the rain forest in Kiang West National Park resort to jiidaano, the process of invoking in mother nature to bring down rain through community prayers and sacrifices at shrines. The practices are led by women accompanied by children and by a community servant known as Falfa Keebaa (in mandinka). In some instances, they take along kola nuts and salt that they share among themselves as charity. At times, they mound sand or powdered ash which they place at the intersection of roads.

On the contrary, if there is heavy downpour leading to flash floods, they resort to their traditional practice to beseech God to stop the rain: korondo, often practiced by an individual born in the dry season. There are several kinds of korondo: molding of soil into balls and placing then at the intersection of roads; using kurulungo (battle brush), a type of plant whose branch is split symmetrically without separating it from the parent plant; or piercing a live scorpion with a stick and drying it upside facing the sun. In some communities, the drying of a pair of bellows locally called kura jaa is done by blacksmiths whose parents are both blacksmith kinfolks. As a form of continuity, children accompany the elderly to the sacred sites where the practice is performed so they can emulate them, learn and pass on the practice unto their descendant generation.

**Location**

Dumbuto, Batelling, Jali, Kuli Kunda and Bajana villages, Kiang West National Park (KWNP), Kiang West District, Lower River Region.
Contribution to DRR & sustainable management of natural resources

Rain rituals represent indigenous knowledge to mitigate the potential extremes of flooding or drought. Their practice reinforces social cohesion and community traditional values in relation with the environment, which foster notions of respect, custodianship and connectivity. By passing this knowledge and values on to new generations, a symbiotic and respectful relationship is maintained, contributing to environmental protection.

Threats and safeguarding

The practice of *jiidaano* and *korondo* is rare today due to various reasons. Religious taboos lead the population to perceive it as an animist, and thus *haram* (*un-Islamic*). Another threat that affects it is deforestation, which diminishes the vegetation cover needed for the practice to be take place. The decline of farming in rural areas and the adoption of drip irrigation and other mechanical farming techniques has removed the urgency of the need for rainwater. Finally, there is the lack of transmission of this knowledge from elder to youth due to rural-urban migration.

There is a need to conduct training sessions with young participants from across communities within the region to educate them on rain rituals and the fact that this knowledge stems from a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding environment that is to be maintained.

This element was inventoried in October 2021 by the NCAC in agreement with village chiefs. Bearers and communities agreed to participate in focus group meetings and discussions and signed a consent form. Research findings were validated by stakeholders and representatives of participant communities.

Woman from Kiang Kuli Kunda practising korondoo by placing a soil ball at roads' intersection. © NCAC
Description

Communities around Kiang West National Park rely heavily on medicinal plants to curb the spread of outbreaks of communicable diseases. Traditional healing with medicinal plants used to be the only means of treatment in the area for many ailments. The practice, known as mooing jaaraloo or moriyaa, is considered central for their health and wellbeing. Herbs such as kuntangJaawo, sinjango and sangfito (faara) are used for the treatment of fusibaa (measles) and other diseases. Herbalists visit the forest in search of a particular medicinal plant and recite incantations before the recollection. They avoid the shade or shadow of the plant from covering or touching them, which can affect its effectiveness, and remove the tree root, bark or leaves facing the east. Herbs are usually boiled or steamed, soaked or pounded and put into water for drinking or for bodily application.

Location

Dumbuto, Batelling, Jali, Kuli Kunda and Bajana villages, Kiang West National Park (KWNP), Kiang West District, Lower River Region.
- **Contribution to DRR & sustainable management of natural resources**

  Traditional ways to mitigate the transmission of communicable diseases, such as measles, promote the wanton depletion of the forest cover. Thanks to their use of medicinal plants, communities ensure that they engage in reforestations to protect and enable valuable trees and plants to thrive. The use of local medicinal herbs favors the creation of a zero-waste local economy which does not contaminate the environment, becoming thus and a perfect complement to manufactured medicine.

  In addition, traditional healing reinforces social cohesion and community values of respect and protection of nature. By passing them on to new generations, a symbiotic and respectful relationship is maintained, contributing to environmental protection.

- **Threats and safeguarding**

  Unlike in the past, when herbalists practiced it primarily to help members of their communities recover from illness, herbal medicine is now more economically viable. It is usually transmitted from practitioners to their children, and the lack of a younger generation of traditional herbalists due to migration from rural areas and the preference for white collar jobs represents a threat to its continuity. A belief that spiritual herbalists who treat certain sicknesses will end up transmitting the disease to their family members once the herbalist dies also deter prospective individuals from venturing into the practice.

  Nevertheless, continuous apprenticeship by herbalists to their children and prospect practitioners goes on within communities. The protection of the Kiang West National Park by authorities has helped save trees and plants which are used for medicinal purposes. Herbalists are willing to conduct training sessions with participants from across communities within the region to educate them on traditional herbal treatment.

  This element was inventoried in October 2021 by the NCAC in agreement with village chiefs. Bearers and communities agreed to participate in focus group meetings and discussions and signed a consent form. Research findings were validated by stakeholders and representatives of participant communities.
TIBADAA AND TIBANG SINGO
THATCHING

Description

Thatching or tibadaa is the craft of building a roof with dry vegetation to shed water away from the inner roof. Increasingly uncommon, it is still an important source of shelter for rural communities. It is largely appreciated during the humid season, when the air temperature in the hinterland is usually exceedingly high, since thatched houses are often cool. Thatched homes are also protected from the rain and can withstand rainstorms and windstorms. There are two forms of thatching – tibadaa and tibang singo. The latter is used to revamp a house already thatched.

The communities around the Bao Bolong Wetland Reserve Area use thatching technology for their roofs, fencing and housing through the use of njamaloo, a type of locally available grass. Njamaloo is harvested and plaited into braids to cover a roof or make a fence around the compound. In the process, two sticks are used as pegs on opposite ends measuring twenty steps apart. Njamaloo is sandwiched in between the pegs and plaited into usually 31 bundles using fibred ropes obtained from the bush. At the apex of the roof, kukuwo sticks are covered by kumbirinyasso grass to shape the structure like a hat.

Location

Illiassa, Katchang, Minteh Kunda, Salikene and Baddibu Dia villages surrounding the Baobolong Wetland Reserve Area, Upper Baddibou District, North Bank Region.
**Contribution to DRR & sustainable management of natural resources**

Traditional thatched homes are protected from elements of weather such as rain or sun and can withstand violent weather conditions. In case of natural disasters such as windstorms, the flying grass cannot injure, unlike iron sheets used for roofing or brick falls.

*Tibadaa* increases communities’ self-sufficiency – the materials used are local, and thus have a zero-carbon footprint. Besides, *tibadaa* requires a specific craftsmanship that is passed on from one generation to the next, reinforcing social cohesion and values of respect and interdependence in relation to the environment that surrounds communities.

**Threats and safeguarding**

Nowadays, *tibadaa* is less and less practised because modern building materials such as brick walls and corrugated iron sheets are highly valued and sought after by villagers. The transmission chain is weak due to the rural-urban drift, especially of young potential apprentices. Community cooperative work and communal labour required to do the cutting, plaiting and erection of roofs are less and less common.

Other threats to *tibadaa* are the scarcity of *njaamaloo* grass in the Baobolong wetland because of salt intrusion and the increase in fire outbreaks. Communities ventured in the construction of barriers to prevent the intrusion of salt water into the swamps where the *njamalo* grass grows, as well as the planting of eucalyptus trees by the streams to minimize the presence of salt. There is a need to upskill youth with the technique of thatching, which could be done through the help of experienced thatch masters within communities.

This element was inventoried in September 2021 by the NCAC in agreement with village chiefs. Bearers and communities agreed to participate in focus group meetings and discussions and signed a consent form. Research findings were validated by stakeholders and representatives of participant communities.
KAYAA, KOJEWO, DOLINGO, BAMOO
TRADITIONAL FISHING TECHNIQUES

Description

Kayaa or sora (using a reed basket for fishing), dolingo (using hooks to catch fish in shallow waters), kojewo (using a gourd and then removing the water) and bamoo (creating a blockage so that fish are stranded when the tide ebbs) are traditional fishing methods practiced by communities of the area in various creeks of the Baobolong, such as Simbolongo, Ley ringoto, Nyapangdoto, Ngongeto and Jalikiya.

These fishing techniques used to be practiced within every family in the community, and in the days when the Bao Bolong tributary was in full swing and fishesin abundance, fisherfolks used to exchange their catch with other commodities (njoloo) through barter. Both women and men within communities contribute to the practice of these techniques, which are sourced locally: a weaver will fabricate the net used for the kayaa from river reed, and a carver will make the hooks from bone or scrap metal.

Location

Illiassa, Katchang, Minteh Kunda, Salikene and Baddibu Dia villages surrounding the Baobolong Wetland Reserve Area, Upper Baddibou District, North Bank Region.
Contribution to DRR & sustainable management of natural resources

These traditional fishing techniques use only biodegradable and locally sourced or recycled materials such as reed basket, bone hooks, sticks and gourds. They do not contaminate the water, as do other forms of commercial fishing though the use of use explosives or the disposal of toxic waste. The practice of these techniques contributes to a small, circular economy which feeds into other traditional trades that are passed on from one generation to the next, such as weaving or carving. Traditional fishing puts an emphasis on the importance of sustainably managing natural resources: since these techniques do not allow for fish-catching in industrial scales, the renewal of fish is ensured.

Threats and safeguarding

These fishing techniques have traditionally been performed to feed families especially during the lean season (June to October), when farmers are yet to harvest their farm produce. Nowadays they are being lost for different reasons. Young people from these villages have or are migrating to urban areas, families buy processed fish from shops, usually coming from industrial fishing vessels and many fisherfolks use new fishing methods like wire nettings, electronic fishing lines and outboard engine boats. Salinity is another threat to the safeguarding of these practices. It causes the death of vegetation, including the njaamalo and saingo grasses, which serve as breeding places for fishes along the Baobolong tributary, thus diminishing the quantity of fish available to catch.

Fisherfolks have and keep investing in efforts to prevent the intrusion of salt water into the Baobolong and safeguard breeding places of fish from extinction. Knowledge transfer of traditional fishing techniques from them to the youths through mentorship sessions and reviving local markets of fresh fish are some ideas to safeguard this practice.
Koo bondoo consists of digging pits which are filled with salty water, letting the radiation of the sun evaporate all the liquid, leaving behind only the solid salt. The salt is then removed and washed with salty water to eliminate any dirt on it. Koo bondoo is commonly practiced by women in the communities, and the resulting salt is used to preserve food, to add it to their diets and for trading.

Koo bondoo is now a major revenue earner for women and youths in these communities: they form cooperative groups to process the salt and sell it in the urban or weekly markets (lumoolu). In the process, participants learn the technique from one another. Salt mining serves as avenue for income generation within the communities.

Location
Illiassa, Katchang, Minteh Kunda, Salikene and Baddibu Dia villages surrounding the Baobolong Wetland Reserve Area, Upper Baddibou District, North Bank Region.
**Contribution to DRR & sustainable management of natural resources**

*Koo bondoo* is possible due to the tangible consequences of climate change in The Gambia: the sea level rise and the increase of floods result in an increased upstream migration of saltwater and increased salinization of coastal ecosystems. This practice is considered as a substitute to the lost glory of fishing, which has been declining since the intrusion of salt water, which caused the death of breading places for fish.

It has turned into a new economic engine of the area, providing work to locals, and thus countering the rural-urban pattern of migration. The sustainable extraction and transformation of a raw material such as salt allows for the creation of a small local economy led by women where communities depend on the use and selling of natural resources that surround them instead of importing them, which would entail the production of more waste and contamination derived from transporting manufactured salt from urban centres.

**Threats and safeguarding**

Local communities in the area have limited capacity to iodize the salt they process, which makes it less marketable. If no support is engaged, local salt cannot compete with imported salt.

To continue with the new established tradition of *koo bondoo*, these techniques could be taught to the youths in vocational and mixed farming centres around the Baobolong through initiatives like the Chamen Songhai project, part of the Gambia Songhai Initiative (GSI) programme to tackle the multiple challenges of food insecurity, environmental degradation and youth unemployment (started in 2014).

This element was inventoried in September 2021 by the NCAC in agreement with village chiefs. Bearers and communities agreed to participate in focus group meetings and discussions and signed a consent form. Research findings were validated by stakeholders and representatives of participant communities.
Traditional hunting or fayrlaa is practised by a certain clan or family called danoo. The community depends on this family for wild meat nutrition. The practise begins at home, through danayaa, a series of incantations or spiritual soothsaying performed by the hunter to establish the kind of wild animal he wants to capture. An offering is then made. Hunting is practised by men in small groups or individually, in the bush and during the night. Hunters usually return home at dawn. They use guns, knives, cutlasses and sometimes bows and arrows as weapons, and they take dogs with them to chase the preys.

In the past, hunting used to be practise by danoos primarily for home consumption or show of valour, and it was transmitted through inheritance.

**Location**

Dumbuto, Batelling, Jali, Kuli Kunda and Bajana villages, Kiang West National Park (KWNP), Kiang West District, Lower River Region.
Contribution to DRR & sustainable management of natural resources

Hunters can directly support the conservation of their habitat and the sustainable living of their communities: they are activists for forest protection because they know that when the forest is gone, their livelihood will be gone too. Hunter families are custodians of sacred groves, which they are very knowledgeable about, and that knowledge is sought after to address situations such as attacks by wild animals to farms or gardens or to collaborate with traditional healers to locate and inventory medicinal plants in the Kiang West Park. Their knowledge can also help predict weather patterns and the movement of the stars: just like fisherfolks and sea storms, the hunters around Kiang West avoid embarking in hunting trips when bad weather is about to break in, and they warn their communities of impending windstorms, for example.

Traditional hunters in the Kiang West and Baobolong hunt for food, only the amount of game that is needed and edible. They are choosy of the size and status of the animals they select. They believe that just as certain fruits cannot be eaten before they ripen, certain animals cannot be captured until they mature, otherwise, when eaten, the family will develop stomach upset. The same applies to pregnant deer or other prey: if they harm or kill an animal that is suckling, they will be banished by the hunting community. Traditional hunters respect conservation red lines which allow them to contribute to the sustainable renewal of their environment.

Threats and safeguarding

In the past, elders used to encourage children to develop hunting skills by attributing show of heroism to it. At that time, the forest was luxuriant and interspersed with considerable wildlife. Nowadays, most traditional hunters do not encourage their offspring to continue the practice, since it is dangerous, and they posit that the future of hunting is bleak. Today, the practice of hunting has become more of a sporting activity.

There is need for advocacy in collaboration with the Department of Parks and Wildlife with Community Development for communities to appreciate hunting as a cultural heritage, and, at the same time, distinguish the fauna that they are allowed to hunt. This could be done in the form of sensitisation workshops held in KWNP. Additionally, allowing villages to issue permits to hunters and pouring the resources earned into wildlife conservation and community development programmes can be a way of redirecting revenues toward nature conservation while giving villagers the possibility and agency to engage in nature safeguarding activities.