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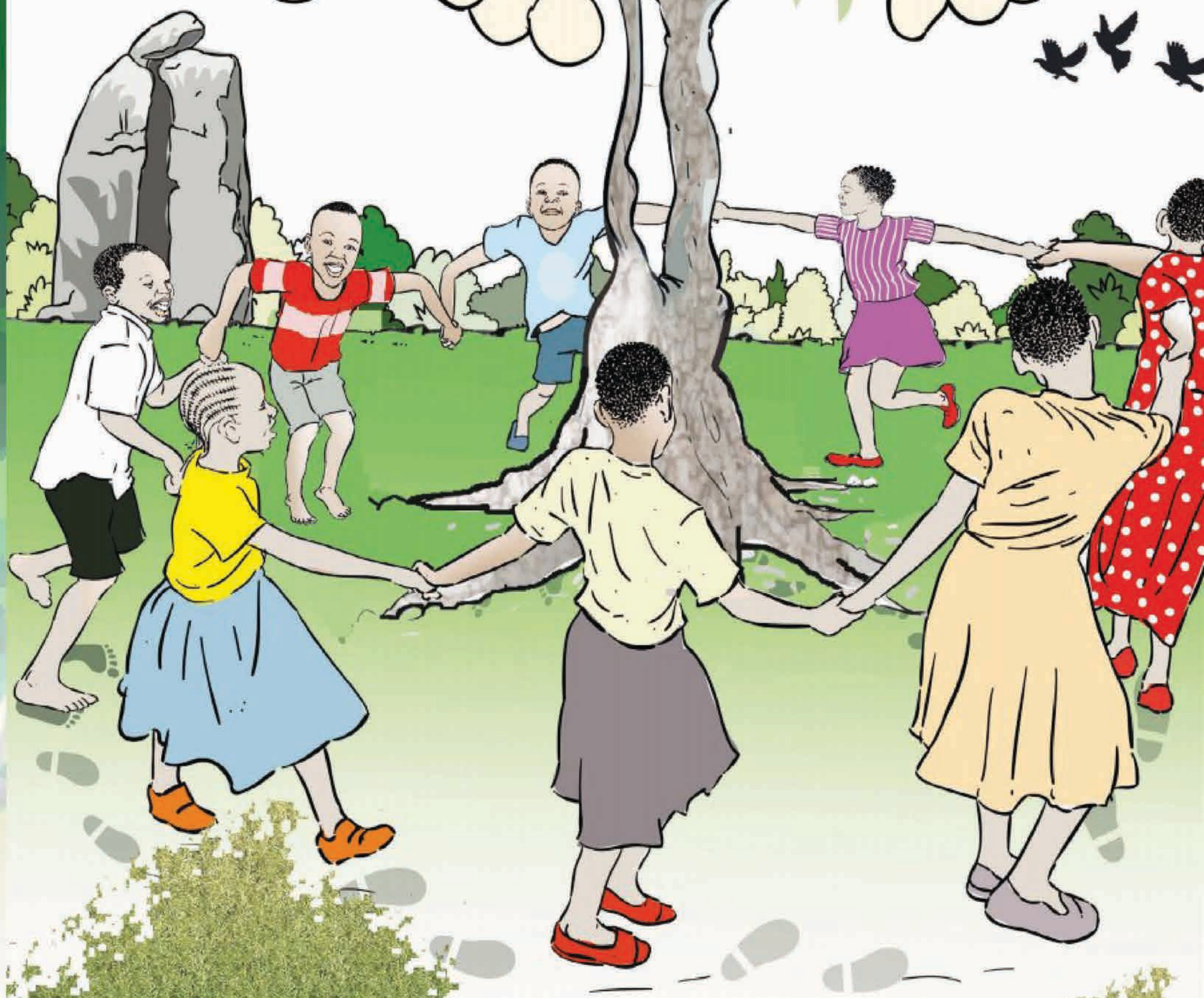
MUSALA & THE FOREST

(Living Together as Friends)



By Ruth Orlale & Dorcas Mutsotso

MUSALA AND THE FOREST (LIVING TOGETHER AS FRIENDS)

By
Ruth Orlale & Dorcas Mutsotso

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Dorcas Mutsotso,
the original teller of Musala's story,
who taught with a big heart and a deep wisdom.
She is missed but her influence lives on.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Prof. Marijoan Bull, you have indeed been a blessing to this project. You believe that the young people in Kenya could contribute to the restoration of the environmental health for peaceful co-existence. May your desire for quality life around the globe come forth through the reading of this book.

FOREWORD

I am delighted to write this foreword, as a person born and bred in Kakamega. I know that nature is sacred and refreshing and thus it has to be preserved.

Dorcas, my biological mother is a core-author together with her friend Ruth who were so passionate about re-dressing the bare man made forests with trees. They both worked for KARI and KALRO, Research Institutions, through world bank re- afforest projects namely WKIEMP and SLM/FP, they developed the passion to actively engage communities in understanding the science about elements that constitute the environment and the ecosystem. The theory was put into practise by establishing tree/ fruit nurseries, raising seedlings, transplanting, caring to ensure there was high survival rates to increase the vegetation cover. Ruth and Dorcas have played a pivotal role in educating smallholder farmers about the importance of environmental conservation in the Western regions of Kenya.

Beyond the institutions' support, their friend Professor Marijoan Bull formerly of West- field University - USA has contributed in several ways helped them realise their dream of working on sustainable environmental conservation. Their mantra was ***'Let us pass our knowledge on environmental conservation to the younger generation since they are the future of our nation***- they will need a healthy environment for posterity. The vehicle to do so was Musala and the Forest book which was published in 2021 for the younger generation to participate in healing of the land. For this to happen it was their earnest prayer that all citizens parents and children included begin to plant at least 10 assorted fruit and forest trees for their birthdays, an event that is celebrated annually by all people.

As an educator, I am very excited about this book because environmental conservation is one of the highlights of the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC). Therefore, Musala's story is an inspirational story.

Winrose Nafula Barasa
Teacher of French and Kiswahili/Professional Translator
Alliance High School

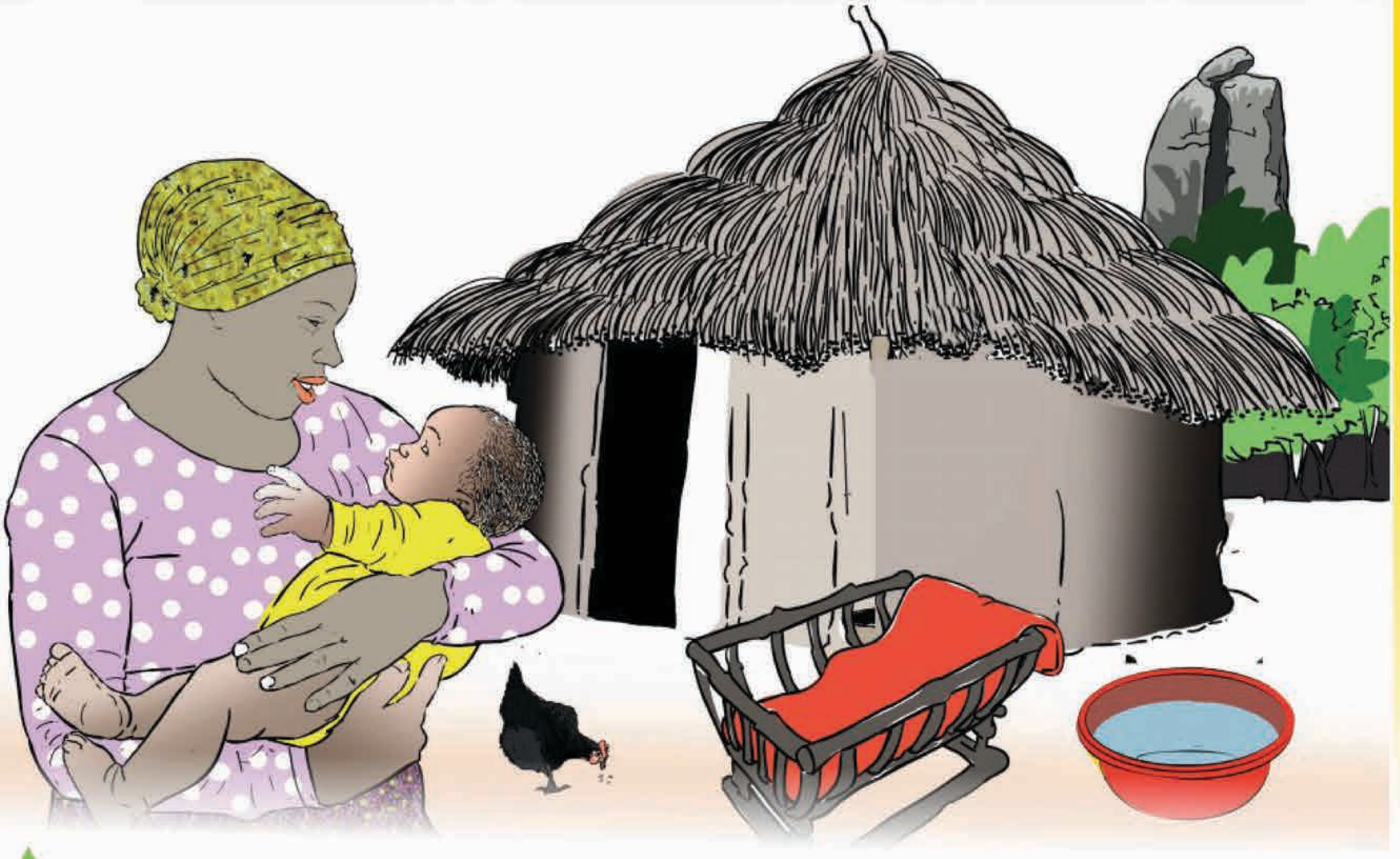
PART ONE

MUSALA IS BORN

Long time ago, but not too long, at the edge of the Kakamega Forest, in the village of Muliru, a newborn baby named Musala slept quietly in a sturdy wooden cradle. Since there were no doctors, nurses or hospitals nearby, Musala was born at home with the help of his grandmother who was a traditional midwife.

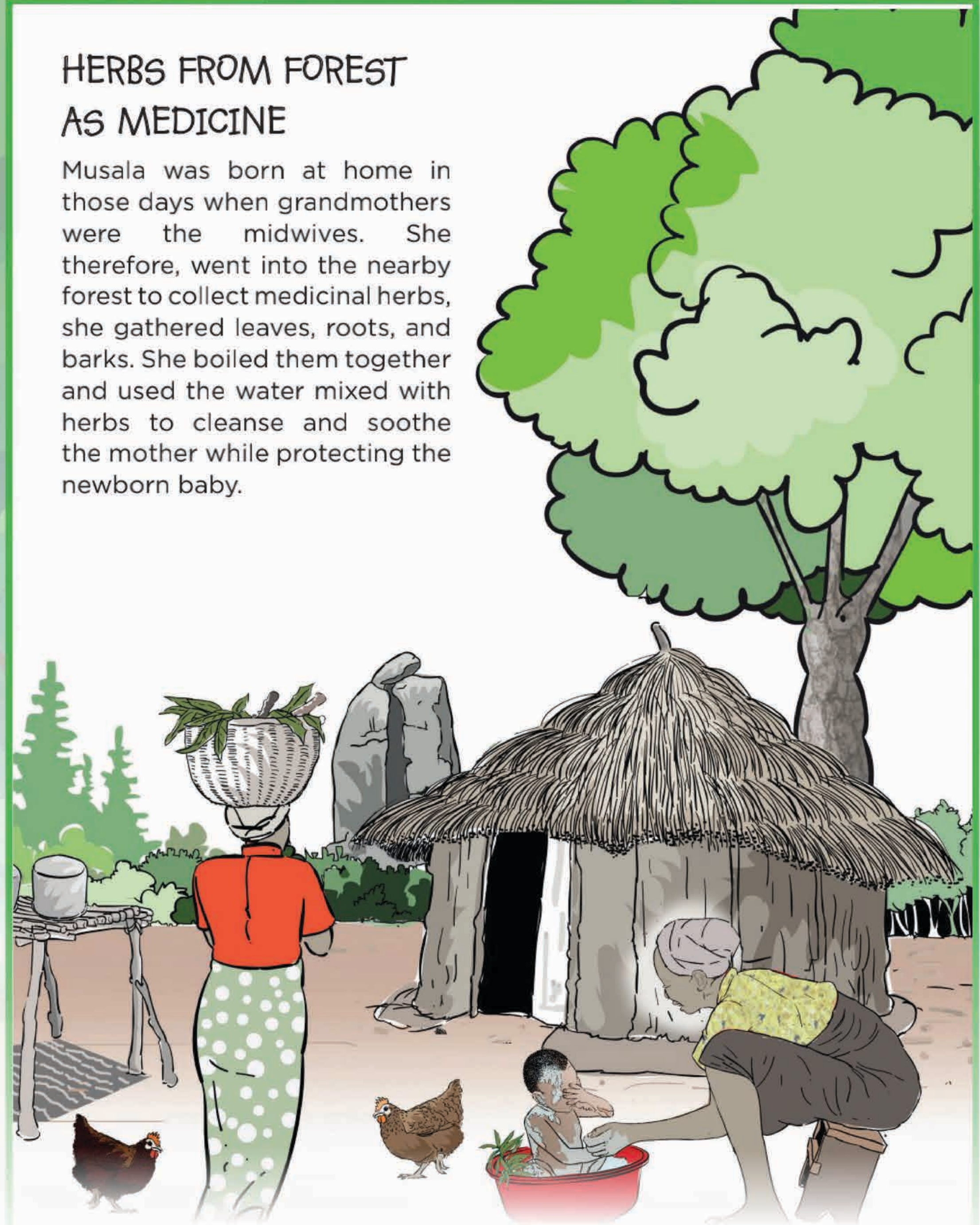
The day he was born, while Musala and his mother slept, his grandmother went into the nearby forest to collect Shikangania wood for cooking, and fruits for eating. She gathered medicinal leaves, roots, and barks to cleanse and soothe the mother while protecting the newborn baby.

For many days, mother and child rested in their simple home, made from wooden posts, with mud walls and a grass-thatched roof. They were snug, sheltered in their home, while boiled water from the wood-fed fire kept baby Musala and his family warm.



HERBS FROM FOREST AS MEDICINE

Musala was born at home in those days when grandmothers were the midwives. She therefore, went into the nearby forest to collect medicinal herbs, she gathered leaves, roots, and barks. She boiled them together and used the water mixed with herbs to cleanse and soothe the mother while protecting the newborn baby.



PART TWO

MUSALA'S MOTHER PREPARES A MEAL

Musala loved ugali and his mother used a long wooden stick to stir it, while it was cooked over a fuel wood open fire. The source of their fire was from the trees, he often went into the forest to gather dead wood, but also harvested berries, and nuts. He loved the juice from the fruits he picked from the trees and the sweet honey the bees made in their hives. He came to see the trees as friends who generously shared their produce with the villagers. He noticed that their house and furniture were partly made from wood.

MUSALA LOVES THE FOREST

Musala grew into a young boy, finding delight in the nearby forest. The forest was home to many wild animals and Musala came to know all these creatures - the squirrels and snakes, the butterflies and beetles, the monkeys and mongoose. Yet it was the many birds that enchanted Musala the most - some of which were not found anywhere else in the world. He loved the early morning walks as he listened to the sounds of the Mutsuni, Likholove and Lisoko birds. As he grew, Musala spent more time in the forest.

"Yes, Musala," she smiled. "They are our home."

MUSALA IN THE FOREST

TREES PROVIDE SHADE

MUSALA PLANTS TREES

Musala decided to plant trees. He worked hard to make a small tree nursery where he cared for seedlings until they were mature enough to be transplanted.

One day, Wekesa their neighbor teased him. "What do you think you're doing out here in the hot sun? All these little seedlings! – they won't grow. Go play with the other boys." Musala smiled but kept working. In time he planted over fifty trees on his father's farm, thus establishing a forest. This will be my own forest he exclaimed!

MASSIVE DE- FOREST AND LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

As human population grew in villages, they cleared forest areas for economic activities and burnt trees to create space for agriculture such as growing crops and rearing cattle. The once large forest was broken into smaller pieces of logs and the forest became bare. Illegal logging and poaching increased.

soil washed away by heavy rains, and wild animals getting fewer and fewer as we lost a wide range of species of animals, birds and plants in the forest.

PART THREE

THE FOREST NEEDS PROTECTION

Kakamega forest is the Eastern part of the once vast Guinea-Congolian equatorial rain forest found in Kenya and provide several ecosystem services is in need reforestation and conservation as our inheritage.

Musala, however, had come to appreciate how if he tended the forest, it in return provided a livelihood for him, his family and the whole village. "The forest is our home," Musala thought to himself, "It needs care and protection to boost tourism industry and biodiversity.

MUSALA AND FOREST STUDENTS GRADUATE

What could Musala to create awareness on the importance of trees to our ecosystem? He needed to know more. He wanted to learn about the life in forest and how human activities affected it.

Musala made the decision to study forestry at the university. He would study hard and use this knowledge to defend the forest.

"I would like to be one of those who guard the forest and help it to flourish," he declared.

Musala did study hard, adding the knowledge of science to what he had learned from the forest and the farm and he eventually graduated.

After his graduation, he became a Forest Conservator.

He still had a wooden desk for working but now the forest was also his office. He recorded forest conditions, patrolled the forests, and taught about the dangers of deforestation. He passed on his knowledge of how trees keep soil in place and contribute to rainfall in the places where they grow.

PART FOUR

A GOOD INVESTMENT

In village meetings, Musala would explain, "All the forest asks in return for its gifts is respect and regeneration of the things we use."

People listened to Musala. They could see his love for the forest, and his knowledge and commitment to the forest influenced farmers to change their ways of managing land, while the young people were inspired to follow his footsteps.

"Here he is," they would say when he arrived in their villages. "The man who protects the trees."

When speaking with villagers Musala would say, "Don't forget you have an important role to play in keeping the cycle of life going. Live in harmony with the forest and many good things will continue to flow such as good crop harvest and clean water and air."

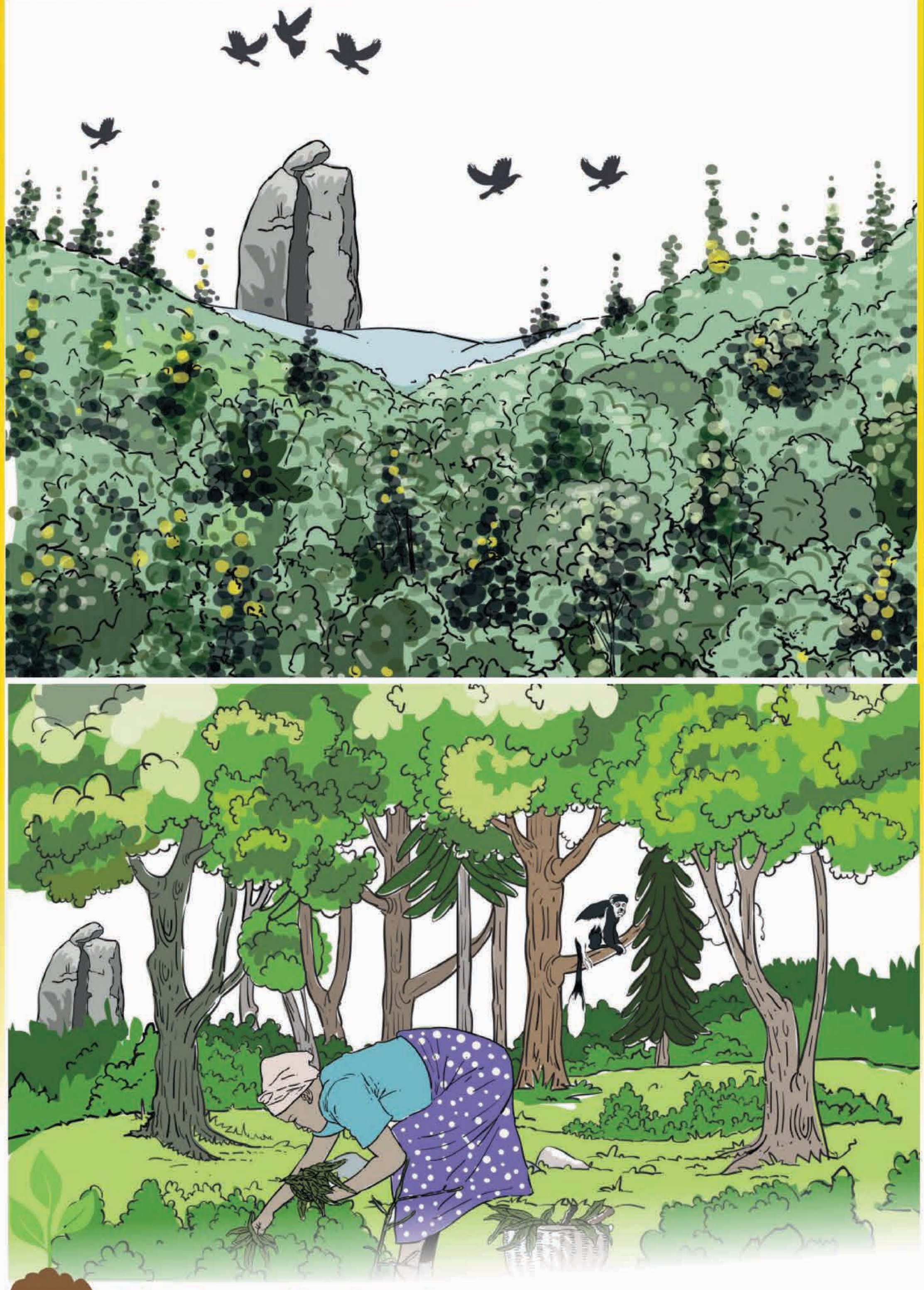
MUSALA WEDS

When Musala was ready to get married, he travelled to his home in Muliru to speak to his family.

"Before you marry," his father said, "you must build your own house for your family, on the farm. You may live near the city but you need a home here. Musala smiled, he had his own forest. But wondered what would happen to those whose homes were bare?

Musala walked around the land and looked at the trees he had planted as a child. Some were ready for harvest. Choosing carefully, he used the trees to build a small beautiful house. He used the wood to make furniture.

MUSALA GROWS A FOREST



Musala became known throughout western Kenya as an expert on forest management. He exclaimed, "The relationship between trees and people is the basis for a prosperous future for all." He travelled widely and over his lifetime planted thousands of trees. He believed in the trees. He planted them for his children and grandchildren, and for future generations. He received many honors and certificates for his work on conserving the environment.

After many years, Musala retired from his work. He travelled back to his village in Muliru, to live in the house he had built. When he arrived, he stood on the hill, leading down to his home. He looked out on to the forest and saw that his work had been good. The forest that had always been his heart was still alive, filled with the trees that Musala had planted and cared for.

When Musala died, friends, family and all those he had touched, grieved. People came from far and wide to honor him and to see the difference he had made in environmental conservation.

But there was one loyal friend that embraced him - the tree. Musala was buried in a strong wooden coffin. Musala's sons planted a Mugumu tree by the grave, so that Musala would have a life-time companion.

MUSALA'S POEM

Throughout a lifetime,
A tree remains a true friend to all.
To have a good environment in the future,
We must grow many trees
Into a forest.

Then at the right time,
The clouds will gather,
Enough rainfall, we'll receive,
Trees will produce flowers
And bees will make honey.

Then the trees,
Will produce all kinds of fruits.
Vegetables and mushrooms will naturally grow.
Rivers will dance gently
With plenty of clean water;
Into lakes, seas and oceans;
And then, fish species will return in plenty and swim joyfully
Children will eat fish and grow healthy
The wind will blow clean air with whistling sounds
As people breath clean fresh air
Then beautiful birds will make nests on huge trees
Trunks, branches and canopies
As the beautiful birds sing,
They will sing a song saying.

"Forest trees nourish the soil, grow food, regenerate water springs, provide timber and shade. Grow a tree for a sustainable environment."

The lesson Musala taught us is this: Working with our hands, minds and hearts we can plant and care for trees and contribute to the cycle of life to ensure a bright future for all.

QUIZ

1. Why did Musala see trees as friends?
2. What did Musala do to show that he loved trees?
3. Wekesa discouraged Musala from planting and taking care of trees by saying...
4. How many trees in total did Musala plant?
5. What was caused by massive cutting down of trees?
6. Why did the villagers clear the forest?
7. Which course did Musala study at the university?
8. According to Musala, what does the forest need from us?
9. List the different uses of trees from Musala's story.
10. Name the different types of trees and birds that you know in both English and your native language.

VOCABULARY

Climate: Regular weather pattern of a particular place.

Deforestation: Act of burning or cutting down trees in a particular area

Precipitation: All the forms of water particles that fall from the atmosphere (rain or snow).

Environment: The surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates Forest: A large area covered chiefly with trees and undergrowth Forest

conservation: The retention of existing forest or the creation of new forest at the

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks to the many farmers of Western Kenya who have participated in workshops and responded to the story of trees as life-long friends. We also express gratitude for editorial assistance from American Storyteller Bill Harley, Bob Odhiambo (Illustrator/ Cartoonist) and support from many contributors to a Go-Fund-Me publishing campaign. Finally, thanks to Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research Organization, Kisumu Office.

Ruth Amara-Orlale is a seasoned Social Research Scientist working at KALRO-KIBOS as a community participation officer. She has been mobilizing and sensitizing local communities at the on set of Agriculture projects, mainly concerned with the involvement in their understanding of the project objectives, activities and expected outcomes, building the farmers capacity to understand how the ecosystem functions, translate science into local language while incorporating the indigenous knowledge and practices for sustainable development. The projects did not target the youth, so she shared the idea with Dorcas on finding a project that would transcend generation - they decided on a book.

The story highlights how conservation, preservation and healing of the land nurtures sustainable livelihoods. The book will evoke emotional responses in readers, and by the help of parents and teachers they will be inspired to embrace growing all types of trees in their life time, focusing on creation of a healthy environment where they will enjoy water in plenty, clean air and feed well.

Dorcas Isiaho Mutsotso was a Senior Technical Officer at KARLO- KIBOS before her retirement in 2019. She worked in various projects such as; Western Kenya Integrated Ecosystem Management Project, Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project 11, and Sustainable Land and Forest Management Project that addressed food insecurity which was exacerbated by environmental degradation and deforestation. The main objective was to increase agricultural productivity while rehabilitating and conserving the environment.

Dorcas was the originator of the story called ***"Musala and The Forest-The Friendship Between Man and Tree"*** whose theme was to promote sustainable co-existence between man and the environment. During the Training sessions she enhanced the story with a song and a dance whose title was "To whom does it belong to" that contributed massively to the project's great success in terms of technology adoption.

Illustrated by **Igah**, Designed by **Benjamin Situma**

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