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# A study of the medicinal plants used by the Marakwet Community in Kenya

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## Abstract

**Background:** The medicinal plants used by herbalists in Kenya have not been well documented, despite their widespread use. The threat of complete disappearance of the knowledge on herbal medicine from factors such as deforestation, lack of proper regulation, overexploitation and sociocultural issues warrants an urgent need to document the information. The purpose of the study was to document information on medicinal plants used by herbalists in Marakwet District towards the utilization of indigenous ethnobotanical knowledge for the advancement of biomedical research and development.

**Methods:** Semi-structured oral interviews were conducted with 112 practicing herbalists. The types of plants used were identified and the conditions treated recorded.

**Results:** Herbal practice is still common in the district, and 111 plants were identified to have medicinal or related uses. Different herbal preparations including fruits and healing vegetables are employed in the treatment of various medical conditions. Veterinary uses and pesticides were also recorded.

**Conclusion:** The study provides comprehensive ethnobotanical information about herbal medicine and healing methods among the Marakwet community. The identification of the active ingredients of the plants used by the herbalists may provide some useful leads for the development of new drugs.

**Keywords:** Marakwet, Herbal medicine, Ethnobotanical, Plants, Documentation, Research

## Background

Medicinal plants have been used by humans from time immemorial. Many drugs have plant origin, and several plants are currently undergoing investigation to ascertain their therapeutic efficacies [1-3]. Traditional herbal medicine is still an important component of healthcare in sub-Saharan Africa. This is largely due to poverty, inadequacy of health services and shortage of health workers. Even when the facilities exist, there is rampant shortage of drugs and equipment. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that up to 80% of the population in some developing countries use traditional medicine [4,5].

Like many other developing countries, the use of traditional herbal medicine is still widespread in Kenya, especially in the rural areas [4]. In some instances, herbal remedies are combined with conventional medicine especially when the subjects feel that the prescription drugs

are not effective [6]. Despite this, most of the ethnobotanical information on herbal medicine and healing methods largely remain undocumented. This is compounded by the fact that in most Kenyan communities, the information is passed on orally, and only to very close relatives who might not necessarily be interested in practicing the art [7]. Lack of proper regulation has also led to the emergence of quack herbalists. The wanton destruction of forests and use of modern medicine have also contributed to the risk of the information disappearing completely over time [8]. There is therefore urgent need to document the knowledge on herbal information used by different communities in Kenya [7].

The Marakwet are a sub-tribe of the larger Kalenjin community residing in Rift Valley region. The other members of the Kalenjin ethnic group include Kipsigis, Nandi, Keiyo, Tugen, Pokot, Terik and Sabaot. They are Highland Nilotes, and are culturally related to the Maasai and Samburu. Apart from the Sabaot, all Kalejins live in the Great Rift Valley. The Sabaot live around Mt Elgon

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and are therefore citizens of both Kenya and Uganda. They are excellent athletes, and provide the vast majority of the Kenyan and of late Ugandan athletes with international honours in long distance races [9-11]. The Marakwet are mainly semi-pastoral just like the other Kalenjins [12]; Among the Kalenjin community, Marakwet District is one of the regions with a considerable number of authentic practicing herbalists. This is unlike many other regions of Kenya where there has been rapid decline in the use of herbal medicine. The local herbalists complement conventional local doctors in the treatment of common diseases within the district.

The perception of disease among the Marakwet like many other African Communities, is a complex matter. Disease or illness is thought to be associated with pollutants, misfortune, curse, "*Bon*" (witchcraft or sorcerers), or people with "bad eyes"; "*bich cho tinye konyen*". In most cases, these people (both men and women) are not even aware that they have "bad eyes". Usually they discover with horror that they can cause harm without their intention by merely looking at an object or person [13]. Each disease is therefore categorized according to the source, and the treatment differs. The practice of sorcery is not very common among the Marakwet. Treatment is by witchdoctors who use several methods including sacrificial animals. Preventive charms are used to protect against witches and people with "bad eyes". Disease causing pollutants are treated by herbalists [13]. Pollutants, which are thought to emanate from such conditions as changes in weather; poisoning, insect bites, food and sex are treated by use of herbs. Currently, traditional herbal medicine is still viewed as complimentary to modern medicine. Amongst the Marakwet and their Keiyo counterparts, mental illness, infertility in women, chronic diseases such as diabetes and fractured skulls are reserved for traditional healers, whereas diseases such respiratory diseases including, pneumonia, fever and accidents are treated by modern medicine [13,14].

The use of Ethnobotanical medicines has been part and parcel of the health system of the Marakwet community from time immemorial. It has had profound socio-economic, cultural and educational values, which in turn has provided opportunities for enhancing their livelihoods within the Greater Rift Valley [13]. Historically, the Marakwet had an integrated health system that comprised of both herbal medicine and surgery. The herbalists treated common ailments, whereas the surgeons performed simple, and sometimes complicated surgical procedures such as craniotomy and tonsillectomy. The only other Kenyan communities on record to have practiced this form of specialized surgery are the Kisii, Meru and Kuria [14,15].

However most of the herbal preparations have not been recorded. Dr Lindsay, a missionary who worked at

Kapsowar Mission Hospital for over 20 years published a book on Medicinal plants used by the Marakwet people which was however not exhaustive [16]. This is largely due to the fact that the practice is in most cases a closely guarded family secret. For instance, herbalists from the same locality may use similar plants to treat different conditions. Also, being a foreigner and missionary, Dr Lindsay faced several challenges in convincing the herbalists to reveal the herbs despite his long stay in the region. This was in part attributed to the negative approach by colonialists to traditional medicine who associated traditional healers with witchcraft or "black magic" and superstition [17]. Most of the herbalists with whom he interacted with are those who had converted to Christianity, mainly residing in the highlands around Kapsowar. Some few Marakwet herbal medicinal plants have also been reported by Kokwaro [18]. There are also published reports about traditional herbal medicine which have been carried out among the other Kalenjin tribes, notably the Nandi and Sabaot [19-21].

## Materials and methods

### Study area

The study was conducted within Marakwet district, which is located in the North rift Valley region of Kenya (Figures 1, 2). The district, together with Keiyo, form Elgeyo Marakwet County [22]. The district is situated between 0° 51' to 1° 19' N and 35° 29' to 35° 43' E, and covers a total area of 1588 Km<sup>2</sup> (Statoids). It has two regions; the highland also referred to by the residents as "*Mosop*"; and lowland located on the floor of Kerio Valley also known as "*Kew*" or "*Endo*". In between the two regions is the escarpment, a long line of steep slopes consisting of cliffs separating the lowland and highland areas; with distinct vegetation type (Figure 2).

The highland region rises up to 3300 m above sea level at the highest point (Cheran'gany hills), and is mainly forested with low temperatures of about 13°C. The district is one of the most forested in the country, with natural forests covering 43% of the land, a total of 65, 000 hectares [24]. In addition, unlike other regions of Kenya such as the Mau forest, it has relatively not suffered heavy deforestation, and is a source of many streams which feed Lake Victoria in the Western part, and Lake Turkana in the East [23-25]. Cherangani Hills is part of the five main closed forests areas in Kenya that are protected by the government. The others are the Aberdares, Mount Kenya, Mount Elgon and South West Mau [26,27]. Although still heavily forested, Cherangani now faces risk of serious degradation due to illegal forest clearing [23,24,28]. The escarpment region is about 1000 m, and is part of the Great Rift Valley. It is mainly semi arid with temperatures rising up to 35°C.

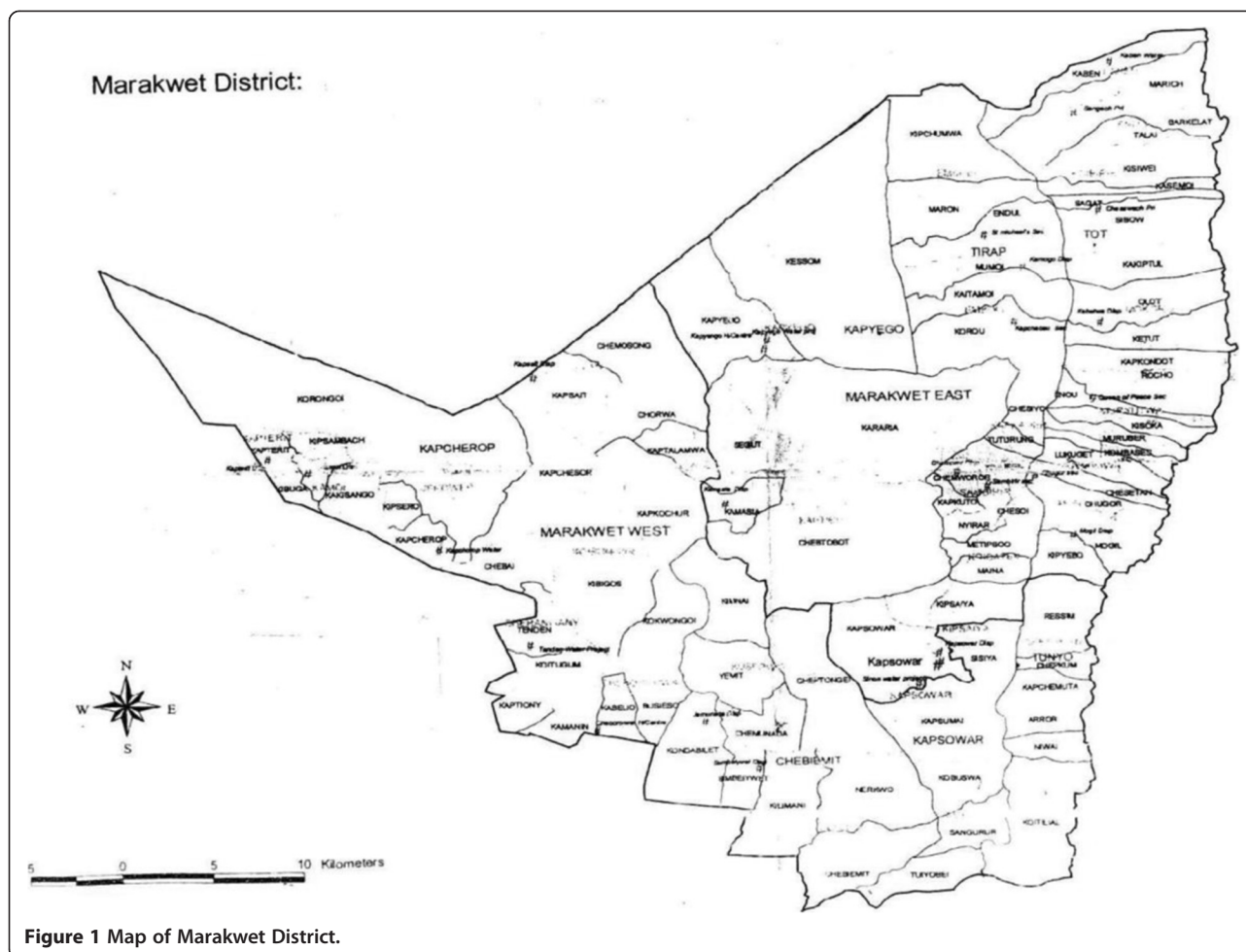


Figure 1 Map of Marakwet District.

The geographical landscape provides a uniquely wide topography, with a rich biodiversity comprising of different plant species, and in some instances largely undisturbed indigenous forests. The plant biodiversity in the Valley is particularly luxuriant and varied especially on the escarpment. Stunted trees, shrubs, succulents (*Sansevieria spp.*), and myriad of plants grow here in profusion. The herbalists use the numerous plants found throughout the diverse ecosystems from the Kerio Valley to the highlands [23,24]. Information on the most prevalent diseases within the district was obtained from the Medical officer of Health office. The population per doctor ratio in Elgeyo Marakwet County is 62,000: 1 [22,29].

#### Data collection

The research team comprised of a group of professionals from both the medical field and plant specialists led by four scientists; a plant specialist (Kipkore), taxonomist (Wanjohi), a pharmacologist (Kigen) and an ophthalmologist (Rono). Apart from their respective professions, Kipkore and Kigen are residents of Elgeyo Marakwet County, and could therefore easily communicate in the

local dialect. Rono has been involved in Trachoma control programs within the county, and is well known in the District. Ethnobotanical survey was conducted in different parts of Marakwet district over a 12-month period between February 2011 and January 2012.

Reconnaissance visits were initially conducted in order to identify the known/authentic herbalists in the district. The initial selection was based on the willingness of herbalists to voluntarily give information and interaction with the researchers during consultative meetings. These meetings were participatory in nature, with acquaintances from the local communities as facilitators. Local opinion leaders including Church and village elders, Chiefs and Councilors were enlisted to assist in the identification, and to convince the herbalists to volunteer the information. Formal interviews were avoided. This was crucial as the herbalists had to clearly understand our motives before providing information, since most of the practicing herbalists were old and uneducated.

Ethnobotanical data was collected from the herbalists, both men and women practicing across the district. Their age ranged from 35 to 76 years, with the number





**Table 1 List of the various Herbal plants used by herbalists and corresponding uses**

<i>Botanical name</i>	<i>Voucher no.</i>	<i>Local name</i>	<i>Common name</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Habit</i>	<i>Habitat</i>	<i>Parts used</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>General plant uses</i>
<i>Acacia brevispica</i> Harms	WBHG/13/081	Korniswo	Prickly Thorn Bonsai	Mimosaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Crushed and rubbed on skin	Itchy skin rashes
<i>Acacia brevispica</i> Harms	WBHG/13/081	Korniswo	Prickly Thorn Bonsai	Mimosaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Crused and applied	Removal of ganglion
<i>Acacia hockii</i> De. Willd.	WBHG/13/026	Churur	Whistling thorn/ shittim wood	Mimosaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Bark	Boiled and administered	Abdominal (colic) pains
<i>Acacia hockii</i> De. Willd.	WBHG/13/026	Churur	Whistling thorn/ shittim wood	Mimosaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Bark	Boiled with water	Herbal "tea"
<i>Acacia lahai</i> [Steud. & Hochst. ex] Benth	WBHG/13/038	Seretetwo	Red thorn	Mimosaceae	Tree	Highland	Leaves	Pounded and mixed with other herbs	Synergistic herb
<i>Acacia mellifera</i> (Vahl) Benth	WBHG/13/043	Ngowo	Black thorn/ wait-a-bit thorn	Mimosaceae	Shrub	Lowland	Roots	Boiled and administered	Sexually transmitted diseases
<i>Acacia mellifera</i> (Vahl) Benth	WBHG/13/043	Ngowo	Black thorn/ wait-a-bit thorn	Mimosaceae	Shrub	Lowland	Higher parasites	Burnt and ashes licked	Rheumatism
<i>Acacia nilotica</i> (L.) Delile	WBHG/13/068	Ngopkwo	Thorn tree/whistling thorn	Mimosaceae	Tree	Lowland/ escarpment	Bark	Bark chewed when raw or boiled	Abdominal (colic) pains
<i>Acacia tortilis</i> Hayne	WBHG/13/039	Sesia	Shittim wood	Mimosaceae	Tree	Lowland/ escarpment	Fruit bodies	Burnt and ash licked	Cancer
<i>Acalypha fruticosa</i> Forsk.	WBHG/13/101	Sawiyon	Birch-leaved <i>Acalypha</i>	Euphorbiaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Crushed and applied on the site	Scorpion/bee stings
<i>Acokanthera</i> <i>schimperi</i> (A. DC.) Benth. & Hook.	WBHG/13/110	Kelyo	Arrow-poison plant	Apocynaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Roots	Boiled and applied	Arrow poison
<i>Albizia spp.</i>	WBHG/13/063	Seet	Flea tree /frywood	Mimosaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Fruit bodies	Burnt and ash licked	Cancer
<i>Albizia spp.</i>	WBHG/13/063	Seet	Flea tree /frywood	Mimosaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Bark	Boiled and administered	Abortifacient, Contraceptive
<i>Albuca bracteata</i> (Thunb.) J.C. Manning & Goldblatt	WBHG/13/049	K'dow	Pregnant onion plant	Asparagaceae	Herb	Lowland	Bulbs	Boiled and administered	Cancer
<i>Aloe spp.</i>	WBHG/13/095	Chepkenderetwo	Burn plant	Aloaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Crushed and sap applied	Wounds
<i>Aloe spp.</i>	WBHG/13/095	Chepkenderetwo	Burn Plant	Aloaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Sap applied on the operated area	Craniotomy (surgery)
<i>Balanites</i> <i>aegyptiaca</i> (L.) Del.	WBHG/13/011	Tuyunwo	Desert date	Balanitaceae	Tree	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves, fruits	Cooked as vegetable	Healing vegetable
<i>Balanites rotundifolia</i> (Tiegh.) Blatt	WBHG/13/118	Lomion	Not found	Balanitaceae	Tree	Lowland/ escarpment	Fruits	Crush the fruits, soak in water and apply	Pesticide
<i>Berchemia discolor</i> (Klotzsch) Hemsl	WBHG/13/076	Muchukwo	Bird plum	Rhamnaceae	Tree	Lowland/ escarpment	Roots	Boiled and administered	Erectile dysfunction

**Table 1 List of the various Herbal plants used by herbalists and corresponding uses (Continued)**

<i>Boscia coriacea</i> Pax.	WBHG/13/062	Sorukwo	Not found	Capparidaceae	Tree	Lowland/ escarpment	Seeds	Boiled and administered	Obesity
<i>Bryophyta</i> spp.	WBHG/13/096	Chebumbu	Green Moss	Oxallidaceae	Herb	Highland/ escarpment	Whole plant	Burnt and ash licked	Heartburn/Teething in children
<i>Bryophyta</i> spp.	WBHG/13/096	Chebumbu	Green Moss	Oxallidaceae	Herb	Highland/ escarpment	Whole plant	Burnt and ashes rubbed on the gums	To relieve pain associated with teething in children
<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Aiton) W.T. Aiton	WBHG/13/079	Kibou	Giant milkweed/ calotropis	Asclepiadaceae	Shrub	Lowland	Leaves	Burnt and ash administered	Emetic
<i>Capparis cartilaginea</i> Decne.	WBHG/13/091	Chepteretwo	Caper shrub	Capparidaceae	Shrub	Lowland	Leaves	Chewed/ burnt and ash licked	Heartburn/peptic ulcers
<i>Capparis cartilaginea</i> Decne.	WBHG/13/091	Chepteretwo	Caper shrub	Capparidaceae	Shrub	Lowland	Flowers	Dried, crushed and added to meat	Food flavour
<i>Caralluma acutangula</i>	WBHG/13/031	Mochontopokot	Caralluma	Asclepiadaceae	Herb	Lowland	Whole plant	Whole plant chewed	Chest congestion (wheezing)
<i>Carissa edulis</i> (Forssk.) Vahl	WBHG/13/091	Legetetwet	Egyptian carissa	Apocynaceae	Shrub	Highland/ escarpment/ lowland	Roots	Boiled and added to other herbs or used alone	General malaise
<i>Carissa edulis</i> (Forssk.) Vahl	WBHG/13/091	Legetetwet	Egyptian carissa	Apocynaceae	Shrub	Highland/ escarpment/ lowland	Fruits	Consumed in whole	Appetizer
<i>Cassia didymobotrya</i> Fres.	WBHG/13/094	Senetwo	Peanut- butter cassia	Caesalpinaceae	Shrub	Highland/ escarpment	Dried bark	Pound and applied on bleeding area	Antihemorrhagic (stops bleeding)
<i>Cassia didymobotrya</i> Fres.	WBHG/13/094	Senetwo	Peanut- butter cassia	Caesalpinaceae	Shrub	Highland/ escarpment	Leaves/bark	Boiled and administered	Hypertension
<i>Cassia obtusifolia</i> Linn or <i>Cassia occidentalis</i> L.	WBHG/13/070 or 070a	Kipkurkuris	Senna	Caesalpinaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves and seeds	Boiled and administered	Abortifacient
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i> (Savi.) Ten	WBHG/13/013	Tokoukowo	Spear thistle	Asteraceae	Herb	Highland/ escarpment	Leaves/twigs	Burnt and ash licked	Heartburn
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i> (Savi.) Ten	WBHG/13/013	Tokoukowo	Spear Thistle	Asteraceae	Herb	Highland/ escarpment	Leaves/Twigs	Burnt ash applied on incisions made on the skin	Talisman
<i>Clerodendrum myricoides</i> (Hochst.) Vatke	WBHG/13/005	Chebobot	Blue glory bower	Lamiaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Leaves	Burnt and ash licked	"Kipei" condition
<i>Clusia abyssinica</i> Jaub & Spach	WBHG/13/089	Kapkurelwo	Smooth-fruited lightning-bush	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ riverine	Roots	Boiled and mixed with other herbs	Synergistic herb
<i>Clusia abyssinica</i> Jaub & Spach	WBHG/13/089	Kapkurelwo	Smooth-fruited lightning-bush	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ riverine	Roots	Boiled and administered	Erectile dysfunction
<i>Coccinia grandis</i> (L.) Voigt	WBHG/13/019	Minjilwo	Ivy ground	Cucurbitaceae	Herb	Lowland	Leaves	Boiled and used as vegetable	Treatment of heavy snoring

**Table 1 List of the various Herbal plants used by herbalists and corresponding uses (Continued)**

<i>Combretum apiculatum</i> Sond.	WBHG/13/111	<i>Leleiya</i>	Red bushwillow	Combretaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Fruit bodies	Burnt and ash licked	Cancer
<i>Commicarpus africanus</i> (Lour.) Dandy	WBHG/13/065	<i>Tanagit</i>	Comicarp (Catalan)	Nyctaginaceae	Herb	Escarpment	Leaves	Crushed leaves rubbed on the ganglion	Removal of ganglion
<i>Cordia sinensis</i> Lam.	WBHG/13/007	<i>Adomeyon</i>	Grey-leaved saucer berry	Boraginaceae	Tree	Lowland	Twigs	Break tender twigs for use	Toothbrush
<i>Crassocephalum mannii</i>	WBHG/13/042	<i>Terkekwo</i>	Thickhead	Asteraceae	Shrub	Highland/escarpment	Roots	Boiled and administered	Arthritis
<i>Crotalaria incana</i> L.	WBHG/13/060	<i>Kimira</i>	Woolly Rattlepod	Fabaceae	Herb	Lowland/escarpment	Leaves	Boiled and used as vegetable	Anaemia
<i>Crotalaria incana</i> L.	WBHG/13/060	<i>Kimira</i>	Woolly Rattlepod	Fabaceae	Herb	Lowland/escarpment	Leaves	Cooked as vegetable	Healing vegetable
<i>Croton ciliatoglandulifer</i> Ortega	WBHG/13/077	<i>Kibichan</i>	Mexican croton	Euphorbiaceae	Liana/climber	Lowland/escarpment	Roots	Boiled and mixed with other herbs	Synergistic herb
<i>Croton ciliatoglandulifer</i> Ortega	WBHG/13/077	<i>Kibichan</i>	Mexican croton	Euphorbiaceae	Liana/climber	Lowland/escarpment	Roots	Chewed raw/ boiled with other herbs	Heartburn
<i>Croton dichogamus</i> Pax	WBHG/13/064	<i>Kerelwo</i>	Orange leaved croton	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Escarpment	Higher parasites on this plant	Burnt and ash licked	"Kipei" condition (abdominal pain and oral thrush)
<i>Croton dichogamus</i> Pax	WBHG/13/064	<i>Kerelwo</i>	Orange leaved croton	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Escarpment	Bark, roots and flowers	Boiled and administered	Chest congestion (wheezing)
<i>Croton megalocarpus</i> Hutch.	WBHG/13/045	<i>Otonwet</i>	Broadleaved croton	Euphorbiaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Roots	Boiled and administered	Purgative
<i>Cucumis dipsaceus</i> C. G. Ehrenb. ex Spac	WBHG/13/055	<i>Kisangwa</i>	Bitter gourd	Cucurbitaceae	Herb	Lowland/escarpment	Fruits	Crushed and mixed with little water and administered to patient	Emetic
<i>Cyperus esculentus</i> L.	WBHG/13/103	<i>Morgut</i>	Yellow nutsedge	Cyperaceae	Herb	Lowland/swampy areas	Tubers	Chewed	Stomachache
<i>Cyperus esculentus</i> L.	WBHG/13/103	<i>Morgut</i>	Yellow nutsedge	Cyperaceae	Herb	Lowland/swampy areas	Tubers	Chewed	Abdominal (colic) pains/Talisman
<i>Cyperus esculentus</i> L.	WBHG/13/103	<i>Morgut</i>	Yellow nutsedge	Cyperaceae	Herb	Lowland/swampy areas	Tubers	Chewed or boiled	Colic pain in children
<i>Cyperus esculentus</i> L.	WBHG/13/103	<i>Morgut</i>	Yellow nutsedge	Cyperaceae	Herb	Lowland/swampy areas	Tubers	Chewed and applied	Talisman
<i>Cyphostemma serpens</i> (Hochst. ex A. Rich.) Desc	WBHG/13/021	<i>Kirorot</i>	Not found	Vitaceae	Herb	Lowland/escarpment	Dried stem	Boiled and administered	Abortifacient



**Table 1 List of the various Herbal plants used by herbalists and corresponding uses (Continued)**

<i>Cyphostemma cyphopetalum</i> (Fresen.) Descouings	WBHG/13/075	Kibungwach	Not found	Vitaceae	Herb	Escarpment	Tubers	Crush and apply on the pests	Pesticide
<i>Dactyloctenium aegyptium</i> L.	WBHG/13/073	Anyinya	Egyptian crowfoot grass	Poaceae	Herb	Lowland/escarpment	Leaves	Crushed and chewed raw	Heartburn
<i>Dactyloctenium aegyptium</i> L.	WBHG/23/073	Anyinya	Egyptian crowfoot grass	Poaceae	Herb	Lowland/escarpment	Whole plant	Cooked as vegetable	Healing vegetable
<i>Digeramuricata</i> L.	WBHG/13/099	Chesugut	False Amaranth	Amaranthaceae	Herb	Lowland	Leaves	Cooked as vegetable	Healing vegetable
<i>Diospyros scabra</i> (Chiov.) Cufod	WBHG/13/016	Turetuo	Ebony tree	Ebenaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Bark	Boil and patient bathed in concoction and covered	Fever in children
<i>Diospyros scabra</i> (Chiov.) Cufod	WBHG/13/016	Turetuo	Ebony tree	Ebenaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Twigs	Break tender twigs for use	Toothbrush
<i>Dodonaea viscosa</i> (L.) Jacq.	WBHG/13/098	Tebelekwo	Hopbush	Sapindaceae	Shrub	Escarpment	Twigs	Break tender twigs and use	Toothbrush
<i>Dolichos</i> spp.	WBHG/13/104	Kipchoror	Hyacinth bean	Fabaceae	Herb	Lowland	Dry leaves	Pound, mixed with water and administered	Enhance lactation in breastfeeding mothers
<i>Drimia indica</i> (Roxb.) Jessop	WBHG/13/046	Barangoya	Indian-squill	Asparagaceae	Herb	Lowland/escarpment	Bulbs	Bulb applied on the ulcers	Cancer
<i>Ehretia cymosa</i> var. <i>silvatica</i> Guerke	WBHG/13/066	Kabonbonet or Mororion	Stamperwood	Boraginaceae	Shrub	Highland	Bark	Boiled and administered	Stomachache
<i>Ekebergia rueppelliana</i> Fres	WBHG/13/045	Kerbu	Ekebergia	Meliaceae	Tree	Lowland	Bark	Boiled and administered	Purgative
<i>Ensete ventricosum</i> (Welw.) E.E. Cheesman	WBHG/13/002	Sosurwo	False banana	Musaceae	Shrub	Highland/escarpment	Tip end (flower)	Crushed, dried and burnt. Ash licked	Heartburn
<i>Erythrina abyssinica</i> DC.	WBHG/13/029	Korkorwo	Corpse flower	Fabaceae	Tree	Highland	Bark	Boiled and administered	Mumps
<i>Euclea divinorum</i> Hiern.	WBHG/13/052	Uswo	Magic Guarri	Ebenaceae	Shrub	Escarpment	Twigs	Break tender twigs for use	Toothbrush
<i>Euclea divinorum</i> Hiern.	WBHG/13/052	Uswo	Magic Guarri	Ebenaceae	Shrub	Escarpment	Bark	Pound and applied on the incision made on the bitten site	Antivenom
<i>Faidherbia albida</i> (Delile) A.Chev.	WBHG/13/027	Kokocha	Apple ring acacia	Mimosaceae	Tree	Lowland/riverine/swampy areas	Fruit bodies	Burnt and ash licked	Cancer
<i>Faurea saligna</i> Harvey	WBHG/13/018	Sirirte	Beechwood	Proteaceae	Tree	Highland	Bark	Boiled and administered	Period pains
<i>Flacourtia indica</i> (Burm.f.) Merr.	WBHG/13/072	Tingoswo	Governor's plum	Flacourtiaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Fruits	Dry the fruit and use	Fermentation
<i>Fuerstia africana</i> T.C.E. Fries	WBHG/13/004	Kipirirwo	Not found	Lamiaceae	Herb	Escarpment	Leaves	Crushed and sap instilled	Eye ailments

**Table 1 List of the various Herbal plants used by herbalists and corresponding uses (Continued)**

<i>Fuerstia africana</i> T.C.E. Fries	WBHG/13/004	Kipirwo	Not found	Lamiaceae	Herb	Escarpment	Leaves	Crushed and sap applied	Toothache
<i>Gardenia sp</i>	WBHG/13/044	Mogilion/ Kobilwo	Forest gardenia	Rubiaceae	Tree	Lowland	Fruits	Crushed and administered to patient	Emetic/purgative
<i>Grewia villosa</i> Willd	WBHG/13/020	Mokurwo	Mallow raisin	Tiliaceae	Shrub	Lowland	Leaves	Cover milk gourd with it	Fermentation
<i>Gynandropsis gynandra</i> (L.) Briq.	WBHG/13/025	Sachan	African spider flower	Capparidaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Cooked and used as vegetable	Healing vegetable
<i>Heeria reticulata</i> (Baker f.) Engl	WBHG/13/008	Mutung'wo	Raisin bush	Anacardiaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Bark	Burnt and ash licked	Removal of retained placenta in both human and animals
<i>Heeria reticulata</i> (Baker f.) Engl	WBHG/13/008	Mutung'wo	Raisin bush	Anacardiaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Leaves	Crush, soak in water and apply	Constipation in animals
<i>Hoslundia opposita</i> Valh.	WBHG/13/083	Sumeyon	Orange bird berry	Lamiaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves, roots	Boiled and administered	Colic pain in children
<i>Hoslundia opposita</i> Valh.	WBHG/13/083	Sumeyon	Orange bird berry	Lamiaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ escarpment	Roots, leaves	Boiled and administered	Amoebiasis
<i>Hoslundia opposita</i> Valh.	WBHG/13/083	Sumeyon	Orange bird berry	Lamiaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Crushed, soaked in water and gargled	Oral thrush
<i>Hypoestes forskalii</i> (Vahl) Roem. & Schult.	WBHG/13/059	Sirkonwo/ Kaberkewo	White ribbon bush	Acanthaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves , twigs	Crush, soak in water and apply	Pesticide
<i>Iboza spp.</i>	WBHG/13/012	Lonwo	Nutmeg bush	Lamiaceae	Shrub	Escarpment	leaves	Crushed and pound	Perfume
<i>Indigofera arrecta</i> L.	WBHG/13/034	Sargellat	African indigo	Fabaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Roots	Boiled and mixed with other herbs	Synergistic herb
<i>Indigofera arrecta</i> L.	WBHG/13/034	Sargellat	African indigo	Fabaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Roots	Boiled and administered	Stomachache
<i>Indigofera arrecta</i> L.	WBHG/13/034	Sargellat	African indigo	Fabaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Roots	Boiled & mixed with other herbs	Cancer
<i>Indigofera arrecta</i> L.	WBHG/13/034	Sargellat	African indigo	Fabaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Roots	Chewed	Toothache
<i>Ipomoea lapidosa</i> Vatke	WBHG/13/078	Kimugugu	Common morning glory	Convolvulaceae	Liana/ climber	Lowland/ escarpment	Stem	Boiled and administered	Sexually transmitted diseases
<i>Justica spp.</i>	WBHG/13/024	Kepkalomion	Jacobinia	Acanthaceae	Herb	Escarpment	Leaves	Boiled and administered	Abdominal (colic) pains
<i>Kalanchoe germanae</i> Raym.-Hamet ex Raadts	WBHG/13/030	Kibarbany	Air plant	Crassulaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Pound and rubbed on ganglion area	Removal of ganglion
<i>Kalanchoe germanae</i> Raym.- Hamet ex Raadts	WBHG/13/030	Kibarbany	Air plant	Crassulaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Pound and rubbed on painful area	Poultice

**Table 1 List of the various Herbal plants used by herbalists and corresponding uses (Continued)**

<i>Kigelia Africana</i> (Lam.) Beneth	WBHG/13/048	Rotion	African sausage	Bignoniaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Fruits	Split and dry	For fermentation during the brewing of traditional beer
<i>Lannea fulva</i> (Engl.) Engl.	WBHG/13/056	Lolotwo	Not found	Anacardiaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Bark	Pound and mixed with other herbs	Antivenom
<i>Lantana trifolia</i> L.	WBHG/13/046	Bekaptarit	Three-leafshrubverbena	Verbenaceae	Shrub	Lowland/escarpment	Leaves/twigs	Boiled and administered	Abdominal (colic) pains
<i>Lantana trifolia</i> L.	WBHG/13/046	Bekaptarit	Three-leafshrubverbena	Verbenaceae	Shrub	Lowland/escarpment	Leaves, twigs & fruits	Boiled and administered	Enhance lactation in breastfeeding mothers
<i>Leptadenia hastate</i> (Pers.) Decne.	WBHG/13/058	Kipchegin	Not found	Apocynaceae	Liana/climber	Lowland/escarpment	Tender leaves	Cooked as vegetable	Healing vegetable
<i>Lippia javanica</i> (Burm. f.) Spreng	WBHG/13/053	Chebokobil	Zinziba plant	Verbenaceae	Shrub	Highland	Leaves and twigs	Boiled and administered	Amoebiasis
<i>Lippia javanica</i> (Burm. f.) Spreng	WBHG/13/053	Chebokobil	Zinziba plant	Verbenaceae	Shrub	Highland	Leaves and twigs	Boiled together with maize, cassava, groundnuts and even tea	Food flavour
<i>Maesa lanceolata</i> Forsk.	WBHG/13/087	Mborion	False assegai	Myrsinaceae	Liana/climber	Lowland	Whole plant	Crush, soak in water and apply	Veterinary use as antipoison
<i>Nuxia congesta</i> Fres	WBHG/13/082	Chorwa	Brittle wood	Loganiaceae	Tree	Highland	Roots	Boiled and administered	Abdominal (colic) pains /Flu
<i>Nuxia congesta</i> Fres	WBHG/13/082	Chorwa	Brittle wood	Loganiaceae	Tree	Highland	Roots	Boiled and administered	Flu
<i>Ocimum basilicum</i> L.	WBHG/13/028	Klachir	Basil	Lamiaceae	Herb	Lowland	Leaves	Crushed and sap instilled on the affected eye	Eye ailments
<i>Olea Africana</i> Mill.	WBHG/13/032	Remit	Wild olive	Oleaceae	Tree	Highland/escarpment	Dried bark	Pound and powder applied	Eye ailments
<i>Olea Africana</i> Mill.	WBHG/13/032	Remit	Wild olive	Oleaceae	Tree	Highland/escarpment	Bark	Boiled and administered	Itchy rashes
<i>Ornithogalum tenuifolium</i> Delaroché	WBHG/13/050	Katagwa	Sea-onion	Hyacinthaceae	Herb	Lowland/escarpment	Tubers	Crushed and applied on joints	Arthritis
<i>Pappea capensis</i> Eckyl & Zeyh	WBHG/13/023	Kibiryokwo	Jacket plum	Sapindaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Fruit bodies	Burnt and ash licked	Cancer
<i>Pappea capensis</i> Eckyl & Zeyh	WBHG/13/023	Kibiryokwo	Jacket plum	Sapindaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Higher parasites	Burnt and ashes licked	Rheumatism
<i>Pavetta abyssinica</i> Fresen	WBHG/13/107	Cheptabirbirwo	Not found	Rubiaceae	Shrub	Lowland/escarpment	Bark	Crushed and administered	Purgative
<i>Pentas longiflora</i> W.R.B. Oliv.	WBHG/13/093	Chebirbirgorok	Not found	Rubiaceae	Shrub	Escarpment	Fruits/bark	Boiled and administered	Malaria like symptoms
<i>Periploca linearifolia</i> Dill. & Rich.	WBHG/13/073	Sinende	Not found	Apocynaceae	Liana/climber	Highland	Fruits/Leaves		Ceremonial plant

**Table 1 List of the various Herbal plants used by herbalists and corresponding uses (Continued)**

<i>Periploca linearifolia</i> Dill. & Rich.	WBHG/13/073	Sinende	Not found	Apocynaceae	Liana/ climber	Highland	Fruits/Leaves	Crush the fruits, soak in water and apply	Pesticide
<i>Podocarpus graciliari</i> Pilger	WBHG/13/067	Bennet	African fern tree/ bastard yellow wood	Podocarpaceae	Tree	Highland	Bark	Boiled and administered	Hypertension
<i>Portulaca</i> <i>quadrifida</i> L.	WBHG/13/037	Kitumerio	Small-leaved purslane	Portulacaceae	Herb	Lowland	Whole plant	Cooked as vegetable	Healing vegetable
<i>Portulaca oleracea</i> L.	WBHG/13/092	Chemorin	Asthma weed	Portulacaceae	Herb	Lowland	Whole crushed plant	Boiled with other herbs	Cancer
<i>Prunus africana</i> (Hook f.) Kalkm.	WBHG/13/014	Tendwo	African plum tree	Rosaceae	Tree	Highland	Bark	Boiled and administered	Hypertension
<i>Prunus Africana</i> (Hook f.) Kalkm.	WBHG/13/014	Tendwo	African plum tree	Rosaceae	Tree	Highland	Bark/roots	Boiled and administered	Enlarged prostate
<i>Psiadia arabica</i> Jaub.et Spach	WBHG/13/047	Konocho	Not found	Asteraceae	Shrub	Escarpment	Bark	Boiled with water	Herbal "tea"
<i>Ricinus communis</i> L.	WBHG/13/017	Menwa	Castor bean	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ escarpment	Seeds	Crushed and oil applied	Treatment of hides and skins
<i>Rumex acetosella</i> L.	WBHG/13/080	Kibongbong	Sheep sorrel	Polygonaceae	Shrub	Highland/ escarpment	Tubers	Chewed or boiled and administered	Hypertension
<i>Rumex acetosella</i> L.	WBHG/13/080	Kibongbong	Sheep sorrel	Polygonaceae	Shrub	Highland/ escarpment	Tubers	Chewed or boiled and administered	Diabetes
<i>Saba comorensis</i> (Bojer ex A.DC.) Pichon	WBHG/13/112	Ochon	Rubber vine	Apocynaceae	Liana/ climber	Lowland/ escarpment (riverine)	Fruits	Fruit consumed	Diagnosis of enlarged prostate
<i>Salvadora</i> <i>persica</i> Wall.	WBHG/13/033	Chekowo	Toothbrush tree	Salvadoraceae	Tree	Lowland/ escarpment	Twigs	Break tender twigs and use	Toothbrush
<i>Sansevieria</i> <i>intermedia</i>	WBHG/13/009	Sorogat	Mother-in-law tongue	Agavaceae	Herb	Lowland/ escarpment	Leaves	Sap used as bait	Used to kill snakes
<i>Schefflera</i> <i>volkensii</i> (Engl.) Harms	WBHG/13/088	Tingwon	Schefflera	Araliaceae	Tree	Highland	Dried resin	Resin sniffed	Inhaled to clear blocked nose
<i>Schefflera volkensii</i> (Engl.) Harms	WBHG/13/088	Tingwon	Schefflera	Araliaceae	Tree	Highland	Dried resin	Smear on body	Perfume
<i>Sclerocarya birrea</i> (A. Rich.) Hochst	WBHG/13/106	Orolwo	Amarula tree	Anacardiaceae	Tree	Lowland/ escarpment	Bark	Chewed or boiled and administered	Diabetes
<i>Solanum incanum</i> L.	WBHG/13/035	Kalobotwo	Thorn Apple	Solanaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ escarpment	Roots	Boiled or chewed raw	Abdominal (colic) pains
<i>Solanum incanum</i> L.	WBHG/13/035	Kalobotwo	Thorn Apple	Solanaceae	Shrub	Lowland/ escarpment	Roots	Boiled or chewed	Colic pain in children
<i>Sphaeranthus</i> <i>ukambensis</i> Vatke & O.Hoffm	WBHG/13/085	Moyon	Not found	Asteraceae	Shrub	Lowland	Roots	Chewed or boiled and administered	Stomachache resulting food poisoning

**Table 1 List of the various Herbal plants used by herbalists and corresponding uses (Continued)**

<i>Spilanthes mauritiana</i> (Pers.) D.C	WBHG/13/090	Kibutkut	Not found	Asteraceae	Herb	Highland/escarpment/lowland	Whole plant	Crushed and applied on the affected tooth	Toothache
<i>Spilanthes mauritiana</i> (Pers.) D.C	WBHG/13/090	Kibutkut	Not found	Asteraceae	Herb	Highland/escarpment/lowland	Whole crushed plant	Crushed and used as mouthwash	Oral thrush
<i>Spilanthes mauritiana</i> (Pers.) D.C	WBHG/13/090	Kibutkut	Not found	Asteraceae	Herb	Highland/escarpment/lowland	Whole plant	Crushed and applied on the area to be operated before surgery	Craniotomy (surgery)
<i>Sterculia Africana</i> (Lou.) Fiori	WBHG/13/086	Ililwo	African star chestnut tree	Sterculiaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Seeds	Chewed	Erectile dysfunction
<i>Terminalia brownie</i> Fresen	WBHG/13/069	Koloswo	Mbarao (in Swahili)	Combretaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Bark	Boiled or chewed raw	Abdominal (colic) pains
<i>Terminalia brownie</i> Fresen	WBHG/13/069	Koloswo	Mbarao (in Swahili)	Combretaceae	Tree	Escarpment	Bark	Chewed or boiled and administered	Jaundice
<i>Terminalia spinosa</i> Engl.	WBHG/13/092	Kitong'wo	Spiny cluster-leaf	Combretaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Bark	Boiled and administered	Malaria like symptoms
<i>Tragiabrevipes</i> Pax.	WBHG/13/069	Kimelei	Shortspikenoseburn	Euphorbiaceae	Liana/ climber	Lowland/escarpment	Roots	Pound and mixed with other herbs	Antivenom
<i>Tribulusterrestris</i> L.	WBHG/13/001	Kilesan	Bullhead	Zygophyllaceae	Herb	Lowland	Whole crushed plant	Chewed or boiled and administered	Erectile dysfunction
<i>Tribulusterrestris</i> L.	WBHG/13/001	Kilesan	Bullhead	Zygophyllaceae	Herb	Lowland	Whole plant	Cooked as vegetable	Healing vegetable
<i>Uvariasp var. scheffleri</i>	WBHG/13/010	Murkuiyo	Not found	Annonaceae	Shrub/ climber	Lowland/escarpment	Roots	Boiled and administered	Common colds/cough
<i>Vangueria apiculata</i> K. Schum.	WBHG/13/003	Tabirirwo (Komolwo ne mining)	Triangle-flowered Wild-medlar	Rubiaceae	Shrub	Highland/escarpment	Fruits	Cooked as porridge and consumed	Food supplement
<i>Vangueria madagascariensis</i> Gmel.	WBHG/13/041	Komolwo neo	Common wild medlar	Rubiaceae	Shrub	Highland/escarpment/lowland	Fruits	Cooked as porridge and consumed	Food supplement
<i>Vernoniabrachycalyx</i> O. Hoffm.	WBHG/13/074	Kimagoi or Chebongony	Ironweed	Asteraceae	Herb	Lowland	Roots	Boiled and decoction administered	Emetic
<i>Warburgia ugandensis</i> Sprague	WBHG/13/109	Sokwon	East African green wood	Canellaceae	Tree	Highland/escarpment	Leaves	Chewed or soaked in hot water and administered	Stomachache
<i>Warburgia ugandensis</i> Sprague	WBHG/13/109	Sokwon	East African green wood	Canellaceae	Tree	Highland/escarpment	Bark	Burnt and smoked sniffed	Headache
<i>Warburgia ugandensis</i> Sprague	WBHG/13/109	Sokwon	East African green wood	Canellaceae	Tree	Highland/escarpment	Leaves	Crush and applied	Toothache
<i>Warburgia ugandensis</i> Sprague	WBHG/13/109	Sokwon	East African green wood	Canellaceae	Tree	Highland/escarpment	Leaves	Chewed or soaked in water and gargled	Common colds/cough/ sore throat



**Table 1 List of the various Herbal plants used by herbalists and corresponding uses (Continued)**

<i>Warburgia ugandensis</i> Sprague	WBHG/13/109	Sokwon	East African green wood	Canellaceae	Tree	Highland/escarpment	Leaves	Soaked in water and gargled	Oral thrush
<i>Withaniasomnifera</i> (L.) Dunal	WBHG/13/054	Tarkukai	Red Cherry	Solanaceae	Shrub	Lowland/escarpment	Roots/leaves	Boiled and administered	Amoebiasis
<i>Withania somnifera</i> (L.) Dunal	WBHG/13/054	Tarkukai	Red Cherry	Solanaceae	Shrub	Lowland/escarpment	Leaves	Crushed and applied	Chronic skin ulcers
<i>Ximenia Americana</i> L.	WBHG/13/105	Kunyotwo	Yellow plum	Olacaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Seeds	Crushed and oil applied	Wounds
<i>Ximenia Americana</i> L.	WBHG/13/105	Kunyotwo	Yellow Plum	Olacaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Seeds	Crushed and oil applied	Treatment of hides and skins
<i>Zanthoxylum chalybeum</i> Engl	WBHG/13/061	Kochon	Knob wood	Rutaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Bark/seeds	Pounded together and mixed with other herbs	Synergistic herb
<i>Zanthoxylum chalybeum</i> Engl	WBHG/13/061	Kochon	Knob wood	Rutaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Bark/seeds	Boiled or chewed	Amoebiasis
<i>Zanthoxylum chalybeum</i> Engl	WBHG/13/061	Kochon	Knob wood	Rutaceae		Lowland/escarpment	Bark	Boiled and administered	Malaria like symptoms
<i>Zanthoxylum chalybeum</i> Engl	WBHG/13/061	Kochon	Knob wood	Rutaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Bark	Boiled and administered	Administered to recuperating patients (after surgery)
<i>Zanthoxylum chalybeum</i> Engl	WBHG/13/061	Kochon	Knob wood	Rutaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Higher parasites	Burnt and ashes licked	Rheumatism
<i>Zehneria scabra</i> (Linn f.) Sond	WBHG/13/097	Cheserya	Not found	Cucurbitaceae	Shrub/climber	Highland	Leaves	Crushed and administered	Common colds/cough
<i>Zehneria scabra</i> (Linn f.) Sond	WBHG/13/097	Cheserya	Not found	Cucurbitaceae	Shrub/climber	Highland	Whole plant	Boiled with other herbs	Cancer
<i>Zehneria scabra</i> (Linn f.) Sond	WBHG/13/097	Cheserya	Not found	Cucurbitaceae	Shrub/climber	Highland	Whole plant	Boiled and administered	Administered to recuperating patients
<i>Ziziphus mauritania</i> var. <i>spinachristi</i> (L.) Wild.	WBHG/13/100	Tilomwo	Christ thorn/ujube	Rhamnaceae	Tree	Lowland	Bark	Boiled with water	Herbal "tea"
<i>Ziziphus mauritiana</i> var. <i>spina Christi</i> (L.) Willd	WBHG/13/100	Tilomwo	Christ thorn/ujube	Rhamnaceae	Tree	Lowland/escarpment	Bark	Chewed raw	Abdominal (colic) pains
Unidentified	WBHG/13/015	Mindililwo ne mining			Herb	Escarpment	Leaves	Smoked	Drug of abuse
Unidentified	WBHG/13/048	Seremwo			Tree	Escarpment	Bark	Boiled and administered	Appetizer
Unidentified	WBHG/13/057	Turesio			Tree	Highland	Bark/roots	Burnt and with other herbs	Cancer
Unidentified	WBHG/13/057	Turesio			Tree	Highland	Leaves	Burnt and ashes licked	"Kipei" condition

**Table 2 Diversity of medicinal plant use**

	Family	No. of medicinal plant species	%
1.	Mimosaceae	8	7.4
2.	Euphorbiaceae	7	6.5
3.	Asteraceae	6	5.6
4.	Lamiaceae	5	4.6
5.	Apocynaceae	5	4.6
6.	Rubiaceae	5	4.6
7.	Fabaceae	4	3.7
8.	Cucurbitaceae	3	2.8
9.	Capparidaceae	3	2.8
10.	Combretaceae	3	2.8
11.	Anacardiaceae	3	2.8
12.	Ebenaceae	2	1.9
13.	Olacaceae	2	1.9
14.	Solanaceae	2	1.9
15.	Verbenaceae	2	1.9
16.	Caesalpiniaceae	2	1.9
17.	Rhamnaceae	2	1.9
18.	Sapindaceae	2	1.9
19.	Acanthaceae	2	1.9
20.	Asclepiadaceae	2	1.9
21.	Asparagaceae	2	1.9
22.	Balanitaceae	2	1.9
23.	Boraginaceae	2	1.9
24.	Vitaceae	2	1.9
25.	Portulacaceae	2	1.9
26.	Canellaceae	1	0.9
27.	Rutaceae	1	0.9
28.	Cyperaceae	1	0.9
29.	Aloaceae	1	0.9
30.	Araliaceae	1	0.9
31.	Crassulaceae	1	0.9
32.	Loganiaceae	1	0.9
33.	Oxallidaceae	1	0.9
34.	Polygonaceae	1	0.9
35.	Rosaceae	1	0.9
36.	Zygophyllaceae	1	0.9
37.	Agavaceae	1	0.9
38.	Annonaceae	1	0.9
39.	Bignoniaceae	1	0.9
40.	Convolvulaceae	1	0.9
41.	Flacourtiaceae	1	0.9
42.	Hyacinthaceae	1	0.9
43.	Meliaceae	1	0.9
44.	Musaceae	1	0.9

**Table 2 Diversity of medicinal plant use (Continued)**

45.	Myrsinaceae	1	0.9
46.	Nyctaginaceae	1	0.9
47.	Podocarpaceae	1	0.9
48.	Proteaceae	1	0.9
49.	Salvadoraceae	1	0.9
50.	Amaranthaceae	1	0.9
51.	Poaceae	1	0.9
52.	Sterculiaceae	1	0.9
53.	Tiliaceae	1	0.9
		108	

Most treatment regimen included a combination of several herbal preparations from different plants. Emetics and purgatives were widely used as part of the treatment for several ailments. The leaves of *Acacia lahai*, barks and seeds of *Zanthoxylum chalybeum* and roots of *Indigofera arrecta*, *Croton ciliatoglandulifer*, *Clutia abyssinica* are combined with most of the preparations in order to improve the efficacy. The most commonly used medicinal plants were *Warburgia ugandensis* and *Zanthoxylum chalybeum* which were both used in the treatment of five different conditions. *Indigofera arrecta* was used in the treatment of four conditions. Among the species, Acacia was the most widely used with a total of six species employed in the treatment of various disorders. These include: *A. lahai*, *A. brevispica*, *A. hockii*, *A. mellifera* and *A. nilotica*. Among the diseases, cancer had the largest number of species used (10) followed by abdominal pains (9). Several plant species were also used as food supplements or to assist in recovery (Table 5).

Women herbalists mainly treated malaria, diarrhoeal diseases, children's diseases and fertility, including erectile dysfunction and abortion. Men tended to specialize in hypertension, skin diseases, rheumatism/arthritis, and

**Table 3 Plant habitat**

	No of species	%
Lowland/escarpment	42	38
Escarpment	21	19
Lowland	20	18
Highland	12	11
Highland/escarpment	9	8
Highland/escarpment/lowland	3	3
Lowland/escarpment (riverine)	1	1
Lowland/riverine	1	1
Lowland/riverine/swampy areas	1	1
Lowland/swampy areas	1	1
	111	

**Table 4 Plant habit**

Type	No of species	%
Tree	41	37
Herb	32	29
Shrub	29	26
Liana/climber	7	6
Shrub/climber	2	2
	111	

surgical procedures including craniotomy, removal of ganglions and setting fractures. The most prevalent infections on the highland areas were respiratory diseases mainly; common colds, flu, pneumonia, upper respiratory tract infections and allergies due to cold weather. Malaria and animal diseases are more prevalent in the lowlands areas. Other common diseases in the district include diarrhoeal diseases, skin diseases, eye diseases and urinary tract infections. The plants used by the herbalists in the two regions correlated to the prevalent diseases. For instance, common colds and flu were treated by highland plants such as *Schefflera volkensii*, *Zehneria scabra* and *Nuxia congesta*; whereas malaria was treated by either lowland or escarpment plants such as *Terminalia spinosa*, *Zanthoxylum chalybeum*, *Pentas longiflora* and *Diospyros scabra* (Table 1).

#### Herbal preparations

The preparations consisted of roots, barks, leaves, twigs, sap and fruits and were prepared in different forms depending on the intended medicinal use. The proportions of the parts used are as illustrated in Table 6. Leaves were the most widely used (30%), followed by bark (21%) roots (16%), fruits (8%), whole plant (7%), seeds (5%), tubers (5%), fruit bodies (3%), higher parasites (2%) and flowers (2%).

#### Decoctions

The plant parts are boiled or simply soaked in water and the decoction taken alone, or in some instances combined with honey, soup, or milk if the decoction is from a bitter plant. The soup is made from the head, intestines and hooves of an animal, preferably a goat or cow. A mixture of barks, leaves and fruits from several herbs may also be used depending on the condition being treated and the concoction administered to the patient.

#### Ashes

Leaves are dried and burnt to form powder ash locally referred to as “*Tusan*” in Marakwet. The ashes may then be licked, or in some instances applied on incisions that are made on the skin to treat particular ailments.

#### Green leaves

The leaves are crushed, and sometimes soaked in water and the resultant concoction may be drunk, or applied directly on the affected area such as in the treatment of toothache. The latex may also be applied on the affected area of the skin, an example being in the treatment of allergy.

#### Others

Higher parasites [32], “*Sagorket*” and fruit bodies of fungi “*Lobchon*” that grow on trees (Sporocarps) are also used.

#### Plant use

##### Emetics

There are several plants that are used as emetics. The fruits of the bitter gourd, *Cucumis dipsaceus* are crushed and administered to the patient to induce vomiting. The fruits of *Gardenia spp.* are also crushed and given to the patient to induce both vomiting and diarrhea. The concoction is considered to be dangerous on overdose, and is therefore only administered by an experienced herbalist. Others used include the leaves of *Calotropis procera* and roots of *Vernonia brachycalyx* which are boiled and the decoctions administered.

##### Purgatives

The roots of *Croton megalocarpus* are boiled and the decoction used as a purgative. Others include the barks from *Pavetta abyssinica* and *Ekebergia rueppelliana*.

##### Heart burn

The treatment involves licking of the ashes prepared from the leaves and twigs of *Cirsium vulgare*. An alternative treatment involves the administration of decoction from the boiled roots of *Croton ciliatoglandulifer*. The leaves of *Dactyloctenium aegyptium* are also crushed and administered to patient. Similarly, the leaves of *Capparis cartilaginea* are chewed for the relief of both heartburn and treatment of peptic ulcers. We interviewed two patients who informed us that upon chewing the leaves, they felt as though “smoke came out of their nose”, before getting some relief. The ash of *Bryophyta spp.* and that obtained from burning the tip end of the fruit of *Ensete ventricosum* are also licked.

##### Stomachache

The tuber of *Cyperus esculentus* is chewed and swallowed. The roots of *Indigofera arrecta* and bark of *Ehretia cymose var. silvatica* are boiled and decoction taken to relieve stomachache. Alternative cure involves chewing of the leaves of *Warburgia ugandensis*. The roots of *Saba comorensis* and the bark of *Sclerocarya birrea* are boiled and administered to the patient. In the treatment of the

**Table 5 Medicinal plant uses**

	No of species used	Percentage
Cancer	10	7.1
Abdominal (colic pains)	9	6.4
Food supplements	5	3.6
Heartburns	5	3.6
Herbs used by convalescing patients	5	3.6
Synergistic herbs	5	3.6
Amoebiasis	4	2.9
Emetics	4	2.9
Hypertension	4	2.9
Malaria like symptoms	4	2.9
Purgatives	4	2.9
Stomachache	4	2.9
Toothache	4	2.9
Abortifacients	3	2.1
Antivenom	3	2.1
Colic pain in children	3	2.1
Erectile dysfunction	3	2.1
Eye ailments	3	2.1
Food flavours	3	2.1
Herbal tea	3	2.1
Oral thrush	3	2.1
Removal of ganglions	3	2.1
"Kipei" condition	2	1.4
Administered after surgery	2	1.4
Arthritis	2	1.4
Chest congestion (wheezing)	2	1.4
Common colds/cough	2	1.4
Craniotomy (surgery)	2	1.4
Diabetes	2	1.4
Enhance lactation in breastfeeding mothers	2	1.4
Itchy skin rashes	2	1.4
Rheumatism	2	1.4
Sexually transmitted diseases	2	1.4
Wounds	2	1.4
Anaemia	1	0.7
Antihaemorrhagic (arrests bleeding)	1	0.7
Appetizers	1	0.7
Blocked nose	1	0.7
Chronic skin ulcers	1	0.7
Common colds/cough/sore throat	1	0.7
Diagnosis of an enlarged prostate	1	0.7
Enlarged prostate	1	0.7
Fever in children	1	0.7

**Table 5 Medicinal plant uses (Continued)**

Flu	1	0.7
General Malaise	1	0.7
Headache	1	0.7
Jaundice	1	0.7
Mumps	1	0.7
Obesity	1	0.7
Peptic ulcers	1	0.7
Period pains	1	0.7
Poultice	1	0.7
Removal of retained placenta	1	0.7
Stomachache resulting from food poisoning	1	0.7
Teething in children	1	0.7
Treatment of heavy snoring	1	0.7

stomachache resulting food poisoning, the roots of *Sphaeranthus ukambensis* are chewed or boiled.

**Abdominal pains (colic pains)**

Treatment involves the boiling of the bark of *Acacia hockii* and the roots of *Nuxia congesta*. The tuber of *Cyperus esculentus* and bark of *Acacia nilotica* are also chewed to relieve the colic pain. Alternative treatment involves the chewing of the roots of *Solanum incanum* and *Croton ciliatoglandulifer*. The barks of *Ziziphus mauritiana var spina Christi* and *Terminalia brownie* may either be chewed or boiled to treat the condition. The leaves of *Justica spp.* may also be used.

**Colic pain in children**

The roots and leaves of *Hoslundia opposita* or tuber of *Cyperus esculentus* are crushed or chewed and administered to the children. An alternative treatment involves the administration of chewed leaves or decoction from boiled roots of *Solanum incanum*.

**Table 6 Proportions of plant parts used**

Part	%
Leaves	30
Bark	21
Roots	16
Fruits	8
Whole plant	7
Seeds	5
Tubers	5
Fruit bodies	3
Higher parasites	2
Flowers	2

#### **Amoebiasis**

A concoction made from the boiled roots and leaves of both *Hoslundia opposita* and *Withania somnifera* leaves of *Lippia javanica* and the bark and seeds of *Zanthoxylum chalybeum*.

#### **Kipei condition**

This condition manifests with oral thrush and severe abdominal pain. It is treated by using the ashes made from higher parasites [32], “*Sagorket*” that grow on *Croton dichogamus* which are licked. The leaves of *Clerodendrum myricoides* and “*Turesio*” are also burnt and ashes licked.

#### **Period pains**

The bark of *Faurea saligna* is boiled and concoction administered.

#### **Headache**

The bark of *Warburgia ugandensis* is burnt and smoke sniffed.

#### **Toothache**

The leaves of *Fuerstia africana* and/or roots of *Indigofera arrecta* are crushed and applied on the affected tooth. The leaves of *Warburgia ugandensis* may also be used. An alternative treatment involves the application of the whole the crushed *Spilanthes mauritiana* plant on the site.

#### **Teething in children**

The ashes of the *Bryophyta* spp. are rubbed on the gums to relieve the pain and soreness associated with teething.

#### **Malaria and fever**

The bark of *Terminalia spinosa* alone, or in combination with that of *Zanthoxylum chalybeum* are boiled and the concoction administered. The fruits and bark of *Pentas longiflora* may also be added. To reduce the fever associated with malaria especially in young children, the bark *Diospyros scabra* is boiled and the patient is bathed in the concoction.

#### **Jaundice**

Treatment involves the chewing of the bark of *Terminalia brownii* or administration of the decoction obtained by the boiling of the bark of the same plant.

#### **Common colds and cough**

The decoction from boiled roots of *Uvaria sp. var. schefleri* plant is combined with leaves of either *Zehneria scabra* or *Warburgia ugandensis* which are chewed for treatment of colds including sore throats. The boiled roots of *Nuxia congesta* are used in the treatment of flu. The dried resin (“*Manga*”) of *Schefflera volkensii* is inhaled to clear blocked nose.

#### **Chest congestion (wheezing)**

The whole of *Caralluma acutangula* is crushed and administered, especially children. An alternative treatment involves use of a concoction from the roots, bark and flowers of *Croton dichogamus* are boiled and administered.

#### **Oral thrush**

The Whole of crushed *Spilanthes mauritiana* is chewed. For oral thrush in children, they are crushed and mixed with water or milk and administered. Alternative treatment involves gargling of the crushed leaves of *Warburgia ugandensis* or *Hoslundia opposita*.

#### **Eye ailments**

The leaves of *Ocimum basilicum* are crushed and concoction applied to the eye. The leaves *Fuerstia Africana* of are also crushed and instilled on the affected eye. An alternative treatment involves the grinding the dried barks of either *Olea Africana* and applying the powder into the affected eye. The powder from *Podocarpus gracilior* may also be used.

#### **Wounds**

The seeds of *Ximenia Americana* are crushed and the oil extracted applied on the wounds. Alternatively, the leaves of *Aloe spp.* are broken and the sap squeezed on to the exposed wounds. The leaves of either *Capparis cartilaginea* or *Indigofera arrecta* are used in the treatment of skin sores and ulcers; whereas those of *Withania somnifera* are used in treatment of chronic skin ulcers. *Aloe spp.* was reportedly used for the treatment of wounds in Nandi and ulcers in Sabaot [20,21].

#### **Cancer**

Ashes from burnt fruit bodies of fungi “*Lobchon*” that grow on trees (Sporocarps) such as *Acacia spp.*, *Faidherbia albida*, *Combretum apiculatum*, *Albizia species* and *Pappea capensis* are mixed with milk and administered to the patient. The roots of *Indigofera arrecta* may also be boiled or chewed and combined with the herbal concoction. *Drimia indica* and *Albuca bracteata* are also used in the treatment of cancer and may be combined with the other herbs. An alternative treatment involves the use of *Zehneria scabra*. A mixture of the whole plant, together with the bark and roots of “*Turesio*”, one maize cob and bean husks are burnt. The resultant ashes are then mixed with ground finger millet and administered. The whole crushed plant of *Portulaca oleracea* may also be used. Researchers from previous studies have reported cytotoxic effects from the isolates of *Acacia spp.* [33], *Albizia species* [34] and *Zehneria scabra* [35].



### **Skin rashes**

The crushed leaves of *Commicarpus africanus* are combined with those of *Acacia brevispica* and rubbed on affected area. The bark of *Olea Africana* may also be boiled and the decoction taken to treat the itchy rashes.

### **Removal of ganglions**

The leaves of *Acacia brevispica* are crushed and mixed with those of *Commicarpus africanus* and rubbed on the area of the body with a ganglion cyst. It is repeated until the ganglion disappears. We interviewed one patient who informed us that the ganglion disappeared completely after applying the preparation for three days.

### **Herbs used during craniotomy**

The whole of *Spilanthes mauritiana* is crushed and soaked in water. It is then administered to patient on the eve of surgery, and for the next two days after surgery. The sap of *Aloe sp.* is then applied on the wound to reduce infection. In order to enhance recovery, the bark of *Zanthoxylum chalybeum* and the whole of *Zehneria scabra* plant are crushed and the resultant concoction administered to the patient.

### **Sexually transmitted diseases**

*Acacia melifera* is used as an antibiotic for the treatment of venereal diseases. The roots are boiled and the decoction administered to the patient. It is combined with the whole of *Ipomoea lapidosa* plant and roots of *Berchemia discolor*.

### **Hypertension**

The bark of *Prunus Africana* mixed with that of *Podocarpus graciliar* are boiled and administered to the patient in the treatment of hypertension. The concoction made from the tuber of *Rumex acetosella* may also be used.

### **Diabetes**

The tubers of *Rumex acetosella* are boiled alone, or in combination with the bark of *Sclerocarya birrea* and the decoction administered.

### **Obesity**

The seeds of *Boscia coriacea* are boiled and administered to the patient.

### **Arthritis**

The tubers of *Ornithogalum tenuifolium* are crushed and applied on the affected knees or joints. The roots of *Crassocephalum mannii* are boiled and administered.

### **Rheumatism**

Higher plant parasites that grow on the following trees; *Acacia mellifera*, *Zanthoxylum chalybeum* and *Pappea capensis* are burnt and the ashes licked.

### **Poultice**

The leaves of *Kalanchoe germanae* are pound and rubbed on the painful areas of the body. In the Sabao study, *Kalanchoe mitejea* is used [21].

### **Erectile dysfunction**

The roots of *Berchemia discolor* mixed with those of *Clusia abyssinica* are boiled and the concoction drunk to improve virility. An alternative treatment involves boiling the concoction from the bark and chewing the roasted seeds of *Sterculia africana*. Young shoots of the whole plant of *Tribulus terrestris* may also be chewed.

### **Renal disorders/enlarged prostate**

The fruits of *Saba comorensis* are used in the diagnosis of renal disorders including an enlarged prostate. It is also used in the diagnosis of sexual function, to ascertain whether the man is responsible in families who cannot bear children. The herbalists informed us that it was difficult to obtain the fruits as the plant has yellow sweet fruits which are a delicacy for baboons. The plant is used only in men, and appears to have some diuretic activity. In order to make a diagnosis of a renal disorder, the patient is given the fruits, and if the patient does not pass yellow urine after about one hour, then it is assumed that he has a renal disorder especially an enlarged prostate, or a venereal disease. It is also interpreted to mean that he has erectile dysfunction and therefore sterile, if they have been in a marriage and have not been able to get children. A concoction made from the bark of *Prunus africana* is also used on the treatment of an enlarged prostate.

### **Mumps**

The barks of *Erythrina abyssinica* are used in the treatment of mumps. They are boiled and concoction administered.

### **Lactation**

In order to enhance lactation in breastfeeding mothers, the leaves of *Dolichos spp* are used. They are dried, crushed and dissolved in water before administering to the mother. An alternative preparation consists of the use of crushed leaves and twigs of *Lantana trifolia*.

### **Abortifacients**

The bark of *Albizia spp* is boiled and administered to induce abortion. It is also used as a contraceptive. The leaves and seeds of *Cassia occidentalis/obtusifolia* and

stem of *Cyphostemma serpens* are also used as abortifacients. They are crushed and soaked in water before administration.

#### **Removal of placenta**

In case of a retained placenta in both humans and animals, the bark of *Heeria reticulata* is crushed, dissolved in water and administered.

#### **Antihæmorrhagic**

The bark of *Cassia didymobotrya* is used to stop bleeding. The dried bark is ground and powder applied on the bleeding area.

#### **Anaemia**

Iron deficiency anaemia is treated by supplementing food with *Crotalaria brevidens*.

#### **Heavy snoring**

The leaves of *Coccinia grandis* are used as a remedy to treat people who snore heavily. Patients are advised to use the leaves as vegetables.

#### **Astringent**

The leaves and twigs of *Lantana trifolia* are used as astringents.

#### **General malaise/appetizers**

The roots of *Carissa edulis* are boiled and decoction administered to the patient with general malaise symptoms. Ripe fruits of the same plant are used as appetizers. The bark of “*Seremwo*” is also boiled and administered to patient for the same purpose.

#### **Natural healing vegetables and fruits**

There are some specific vegetables that are recommended for use by convalescing patients or those in frail health. After a course of treatment, the spider plant *Gynandropsis gynandra* is cooked and milk added. It is then administered to the patients in order to speed up the recovery. Other healing vegetables include the leaves of *Digera muricata*, *Crotalaria incana* and *Leptadenia hastata*. It also includes the tender young plant of *Tribulus terrestris*, the whole of *Dactyloctenium aegyptium* and *Portulaca quadrifida* plants, as well as the leaves and oil from the seeds of *Balanites aegyptiaca*. The fruits of *Vangueria madagascariensis* and *Vangueria apiculata* are used by recuperating patients.

#### **Food flavours**

The leaves of *Lippia javanica* are used. There are three species of this plant used, but only one is used for this purpose and is identifiable by experienced herbalists. The plant is a potent sweetener and is boiled with food,

especially maize in order to improve the taste. The flowers of *Capparis cartilaginea* are also used, especially in the preparation of fish stew to reduce the smell as fish is not generally popular among the Kalenjin community.

#### **Herbal “tea”**

The barks of *Ziziphus Mauritania* var. *spina Christi* and *Acacia hockii* are boiled in water used as herbal beverages in a similar way as tea leaves. The bark of *Psiadia Arabica* may also be used.

#### **Scorpion, bee, and wasp stings**

The leaves of *Acalypha fruticosa* are applied directly on the stung area of the body.

#### **Antivenom**

The bark of *Euclea divinorum* and roots of *Tragia brevipes* are used as antivenom. They are crushed and the resultant preparation applied into an incision made on the area that has been bitten by the snake. The juice from the fruits of *Solanum incanum* combined with the crushed bark of *Lannea fulva* are then applied on the bitten area. The sap from the leaves of *Sansevieria intermedia* are used to kill snakes. The leaves are squeezed and juice applied on the opening of the hole where snakes reside. The authors in the Sabaot study also reported the use of *Euclea divinorum* for the treatment of snake bites [21].

#### **Talisman**

It is a common practice to make three incisions on the temples, nape and epigastric region among the Marakwet and Pokot tribes in children or a person who has been ill for a long time in order to protect them from witches or people with “bad eyes” (evil intentions) or evil influences [13]. The burnt ashes of *Cirsium vulgare* are used for this purpose. The tuber of *Cyperus esculentus* is also chewed directly and the saliva smeared on children where it acts as a talisman.

#### **Drug of abuse**

“*Mindililwo ne mining*”, is an ephemeral plant that is usually chewed to provide a sweet taste, but the elders informed us that they know it as a drug of abuse when the leaves are smoked. In order to discourage children from going near the plant; they are informed that the plant only grows near where “*Ilal*” lives; and that it is “*nguekab chesowiloy*” (a vegetable that belongs to the devil). “*Ilal*” is considered an agent of “*Asis*”, the Supreme Being, and omnipotent arbiter of all things and guarantor of right. “*Ilal*”, in mundane terms “thunder and lightning” is dreaded, for he can cause death. He is invincible, and is seen when lightning strikes something, such as a house or a tree. He acts in the interest of justice and may strike an offenders house or stock [13].

### **Ceremonial**

Among the Marakwet, and indeed all Kalenjin communities, *Periploca linearifolia* is considered a sacred plant. It is used in all celebration ceremonies including weddings and initiations [20,21,36].

### **Perfumes**

The leaves of *Iboza spp.* are crushed and applied to the body as perfume. The dried resin obtained from *Schefflera volkensii* is added to tobacco to improve the aroma and can also be applied on the body.

### **Fermentation**

The fruits of *Kigelia Africana* and *Flacourtia indica*, and the leaves of *Grewia villosa* and *Croton dichogamus* are used to provide fermentation during the brewing of traditional beer.

### **Hides and skins**

The seeds of *Ximenia americana* and *castor plant* are used for the treatment of hides and skins.

### **Toothbrush**

The twigs of the following tree species are used as toothbrushes: *Salvadora persica*, *Dodonaea viscosa*, *Diospyros spp.*, *Cordia sinensis*, *Euclea divinorum* and *Grewia bicolor*.

### **Arrow poison**

*Acokanthera schimperi* is used as an arrow poison. The roots are boiled and left to settle and after evaporation, the concentrate applied on the arrows. The efficacy of the poison is then tested in dogs. In order to enhance the potency, the poison is mixed with bile from either a crocodile or monitor lizard. The plant has been used as an arrow poison in many parts of Africa [37-39]. However, in the Nandi study *Acokanthera schimperi* was reportedly used as an antibiotic for the treatment of syphilis [20].

### **Pesticides**

The tuber of *Cyphostemma cyphopetalum* is used to eradicate all insects. It is crushed water added, and the resultant concoction is used against all insects. When used to kill household insects like mites, the concoction is left standing in the room for one day and after that left for at least two before occupation since the plant is very poisonous. It is also employed as a poison to kill unwanted animals. The leaves and fruits of *Periploca linearifolia* are used for the eradication of lice in goats and sheep. The whole plant is crushed and soaked in water and applied on the skin of the animals. It is also used as a poison. The fruits of *Balanites rotundifolia* are also employed as pesticides. They are crushed, soaked in

water and used against insect pests in both crops and animals. The leaves and twigs of *Hypoestes forskalii* are crushed and used to kill pests especially lice on domestic animals.

### **Veterinary uses**

#### **Poisoning/constipation**

The whole of *Maesa lanceolata* plant is crushed and after the addition of a little water administered to an animal which has eaten poison or constipated to induce diarrhoea. Alternatively, the leaves of *Heeria reticulata* are crushed and administered.

Our biggest challenge was to gain the trust from the herbalists. It took a lot of persuasion and involvement of opinion leaders to let them understand our intentions and volunteer the information. Some conditions described by the herbalists were not easily identifiable as we could not access the patients, or they were already healed by the time we met them. Herbalists from the same area tended to use the similar herbs for the same conditions. However, we found many incidences of herbalists from a similar location using the same plants for totally different conditions, especially those widely known to specialize in the treatment of a specific disorder such as infertility. This could be attributed to the fact that the traditional knowledge is by and large a closely guarded family secret [7].

Emetics and purgatives were widely used. Among the Kalenjin community, emesis “*Ketap*” and diarrhoea “*Kegoor*” constituted important forms of treatment as they were believed to decontaminate the body from pollutants, just like their Maasai counterparts [40,41]. It was therefore important for each person to use either purgatives, emetics or in most instances both at least once a year in order to cleanse the system so as to maintain good health; or to prevent a disease condition that they referred to as “*N'gwono*”. The term “*N'gwono*” is also separately a synonym for poison. “*N'gwono*” was a very prominent condition that was mentioned by the herbalists. They described the condition as presenting with malaria like symptoms including malaise, fatigue, lack of appetite, nausea and vomiting, including the vomiting of a yellow substance; presumably bile. The condition according to the herbalists could only be treated by inducing vomiting and diarrhoea by use of emetics and purgatives. Both classes of herbal drugs were also taken in preparation of major events such as festive seasons. In fact, emesis and diarrhoea were mandatory for boys or girls as part of the preparations, weeks before undergoing circumcision. However, the herbalists informed us that some of the emetics and purgatives such as *Gardenia Spp.* were quite toxic on overdose and could only be administered by experienced herbalists. *Calotropis procera* in large doses is known to be an emetic and a purgative [42,43]. *Croton megalocarpus*

has also been used as a purgative and *Pavetta abyssinica* for indigestion [18].

Our research team could not quite figure out the condition that most of the herbalists and patients we interviewed referred to as cancer, “Seryan”. The symptoms they described appeared to suggest myiasis, chronic tropical ulcer, or probably squamous cell carcinoma. They described cancer as a condition that manifests with a chronic wound on the skin. After treatment using the cancer specific herbs for some period of time, the area of the skin with the ulcer reduced, finally into a small size which they described as the mouth, “Kuti”. Upon pressing the areas around the “mouth”, a substance resembling a pupa emerging from a cocoon which they referred to as “Kutyen” appears, indicating that the patient was now healed. This could also suggest guinea worm infestation although unlikely as this is not a Guinea worm endemic area. We concluded that this was most likely thick solid pus from an abscess, suggesting involvement of some infection. Had we seen a patient with the condition before treatment, then perhaps we would have made a diagnosis. However, the fact that some of the plants used in the treatment of the condition such as *Acacia spp.*, *Albizia species* and *Zehneria scabra* have been shown to possess some cytotoxic activities may actually suggest that it is actually cancer [33-35]. Indeed cancer was the condition treated by the highest number of species, indicating the complexity of the condition (Table 5). “Kipei” was another condition that was not very clear. The herbalists described the condition as that presenting with severe abdominal pain and oral thrush, suggestive of some form of immunosuppression. Likewise, we were not able to see a patient with this condition. However, we managed to interview some other patients with other conditions, such as ulcers and ganglion growths.

Despite the long distance between Marakwet and Sabaot districts (about 200 kilometers away), there were 24 recorded plant species that were used in both communities, with 9 of them having similar uses. These include: *Acacia lahai*, *Albezia spp.*, *Aloe spp.*, *Carissa edulis*, *Clerodendrum myricoides*, *Diospyros spp.*, *Dolichos spp.*, *Ensete ventricosum*, *Erythrina abyssinica*, *Euclea divinorum*, *Flacourtia indica*, *Indigofera arrecta*, *Kalanchoe germanae*, *Lantana trifolia*, *Maesa lanceolata*, *Periploca linearifolia*, *Prunus Africana*, *Ricinus communis*, *Schefflera volkensii*, *Cassia (Senna) didymobotrya*, *Solanum incanum*, *Vangueria apiculata*, *Warburgia ugandensis*, *Withania somnifera* [21]. The nine plants used for similar indications were: *Aloe spp.* (wounds/ulcers), *Dolichos spp.* (enhance lactation/fertility), *Euclea divinorum* (antivenom), *Kalanchoe spp.* (poultice), *Periploca linearifolia* (ceremonial/initiation), *Prunus Africana* (UTIs), *Schefflera volkensii* (respiratory disorders), *Solanum incanum* (abdominal pains) and *Warburgia ugandensis* (headache).

The species that were common with Nandi were (eight) including: *Acokanthera schimperii*, *Aloe spp.*, *Carissa edulis*, *Justica spp.*, *Cassia (Senna) didymobotrya*, *Ehretia cymose*, *Justica spp.*, *Kigelia Africana*, *Periploca linearifolia*, with four having similar indications [20]. The 4 plants with similar indications were: *Aloe spp.* (wounds), *Ehretia cymose* (stomachache/typhoid), *Justica spp.* (abdominal pains/ulcers), *Periploca linearifolia* (ceremonial/rituals). Four plants; *Aloe spp.*, *Carissa edulis*, *Cassia (Senna) didymobotrya*, and *Periploca linearifolia* were commonly used in all the three districts; with *Aloe spp.* and *Periploca linearifolia* having similar uses in all the three districts.

## Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive report on the vast wealth of traditional medical knowledge, health practices and plant use among the Marakwet community. Scientific evaluation of the medicinal plants may lead to the development of new drugs. There are few records on traditional medicinal plant usage among the various communities in Kenya despite their widespread use. There is therefore urgent need to document this information, as it is rapidly disappearing due to influence of western medicine and other reasons including socio-cultural issues and overexploitation coupled with rapid deforestation. It is important to collect this information and develop a database of medicinal plants for future research and potential development of new drugs.

## Competing interests

The author's declare that they have no competing interests.

## Authors' contributions

All the authors shared the contributions to the work fieldwork of the manuscript. Kipkore and Wanjohi identified the plants. Kigen and Rono interviewed the herbalists and patients, in order to identify the illnesses. Kipkore and Kigen analyzed the data and prepared the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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