

**Iron Smelting in The Abaheesi of Bukoora at the South Western  
End of Kabale Municipality, Kabale District  
in Kigezi Region**

**Introduction**

Iron Smelting is an important skill that has been practiced, in production of a large spectrum of implements used in homesteads, the world over since the Stone Age. However, on the sad note, its products have, overtime, been largely replaced by modern industrial and mechanization products .On a positive note, in some communities, this skill and practice have been kept alive by expert artisans. The good example is the Abaheesi of Bukoora village at the south western end of Kabale Municipality, Kabale District in Kigezi Region. Abaheesi is Rukiga dialect meaning blacksmiths. In this documentary, Kabale University Library together with the Multimedia officer from E-learning Unit visited the Abaheesi deep in the hills and talked to one of them at his workshop and the conversation and the video are presented in the repository.

**The Conversation**

**Qn. What is your name and what do you do?**

Ans. My name is Byamukama Richard, the Chair Person LC 1 of this village. The village is called Hamuganda

**Qn. How old are you and do you have a family?**

Ans. I am 48 years old and I have eight children; two have completed senior six, two are in secondary and the others are still in Primary.

**Qn. How long have you been in this business**

Ans. I have done this job for 33 years

**Qn. How did you learn this profession?**

Ans. I was taught by my father who also learnt it from his father.

**Qn. What do you use in this business?"**

Ans. Our fore fathers used to get the iron from iron ore (obtare) which they would smelt and extract the iron. Now days we get the raw materials from scrap or from the garage like vehicle springs thrown away after repairing vehicles. We buy them from the owners at the garage.

**Qn. What products do you make from these materials**

Ans. From these materials we can forge many products of our choice or according to orders from traders and members of the community who need to sales or use them in the work. We produce among others: axes, spears, sickles, knives, pangas, knitting needles, ornaments and many other things.

**Qn. What process do you go through in smelting?**

Ans. The process goes through heating the metals and shaping them using hammer until the intended tool is shaped. To head a metal you need a fire place, the bellows that are used to blow air to light up fire, the air is blew using ebicunga which is a port like tied on one with a skin or pience of cloth with a stick (omujuba) which a person uses to push the air, The air goes through a vent (enkyenku) to the fire palace where charcoal is prepared and causes burning. This process continues until the iron is red hot and ready for shaping.

**Qn. How do you handle the hot metal from the fire?**

Ans. To hold hot metals from the fire we use pincers/tongs (magaro) some of which are made by us here in our smith shade (ekirubi) and commonly these days we use the modern ones. With the pincers the hot metal is held in a position where is easy to shape with a hammer and it becomes easy to turn the metal in any angle you want. The metal is hit repeatedly until it is in the desired shape.

**Qn. What do you go through to make a hoe?**

Ans. If I want to make a hoe, because I have provided for a handle, I first fold one using a metal of size of hoe handle forge the for handle around the hoe like metal and continue to forge it the way I want it. I do this for any other implement depending on its shape. For example when I want to a knife, I get a metal, cut it into the wanted shape when it is still hot using chisel to get a required shape. After I place it in fire, get a tong that helps me to hold it in position and then forge it the way I want. I go through similar processes for spear, door hinges, knitting needle, ankle bell, a sickle, axe, ornaments and many other things.

**Qn. How do you choose these stones that stand the continuous hit for a long time?**

Ans. These are special stones (anvil) selected for their hardness and can be used over years. We have those that have flat surface and can help to shape a number of metal shapes.

**Qn. How many implements can you make in a day?**

Ans. This depends on the implement, because some of them are hard to make and other are easy. For example, for knives I can make up to thirty (30), ten (10) axes and twenty banana pruning sickles. This also depends on what quality of metal I have, because some disturb when trying to shape.

**Qn. Do you meet accidents in your work?**

Ans. There are many accidents involved. These include: Hitting oneself with or a break off metal from what you cutting hits for example on the leg, get burnt when the metal slips out of the tongs and falls on you, the sprinkles from the fire can burn you even the clothes. This can happen when you have purchased poor charcoal that burns while sending out sprinkles. This can be seen especially on my arms. You can see all these sports cause by burns from sprinkles from the fire. In some rare cases the clothes (trousers) catch fire.

**Qn. What other problems do you face in this job?**

Ans. The problems we meet in this job include: lack of raw materials; sometimes you need metal, but no money to buy them or charcoal which limits you from doing the work the way you want and when you want. There is also a problem of market; when you have finished making the implements you get no buyers for a long time. There is a problem of transport; when one get orders from far sometime one fails to transport product to where they are wanted.

**Qn. How do you go about the problem of market?**

Ans. Sometimes customers come and buy the products form here, but they can come when you don't have the types they want. In some case we get orders from different places as far as from Kampala and we produce according to the order. We can hock the products in the near markets in Kabale and the surrounding areas.

**Qn. Do you have standard prices for the products?**

Ans. You sale the products according to the market. Sometimes you get a good price and sometimes they can go for unsatisfying prices when fear to carry them back you give out any the price offered as longer you can get marginal profit.

The advantage I have found in this job is that, from the day I started smelting iron, I have never worked from anywhere else. It helps me to earn a living and fend for my family. I have managed to educate my children to where they have reached without resorting to loans whether from financial institutions.

**Qn. You learnt this art from father, are you doing the same for your sons?**

Ans. There is formal instructional means to train them, but if they are interested they can observe and pick the art.

**Qn. Now that the children are in schools and have time to sit here and by observation isn't the industry dying?**

Ans. That is the danger. After us there might be no general to take over and do this work.

**Qn. Have you considered making it deliberate to train some youth into the trade?**

Ans. We have considered making formal to train youth. They also seem not quite interested. However, we can think about it.

**Qn. Have you ever been helped by anybody (local or government leaders) to think of promoting your trade?**

Ans. There is nobody who has helped us. During campaigns they can here and promise us held, but after that we never see them again.

**Qn. If someone helped you to organize training would you come out to train some people?**

Ans. We would very much like to do so, but we have no means to organize it ourselves. We are also worried that this trade can end with us if we don't train other people to take over.