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AFRICAN

JEWISH VOICES

BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES



**Scaling Success, Creating
Opportunity, and Strengthening
Jewish Life Across Africa.**



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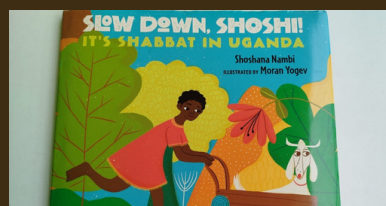
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Israel Abraham



AFRICAN JEWISH VOICES

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

AVRAHAM AVRAHAM

MANAGING EDITOR

NONSO EKWUNIFE

CONTENT DIRECTOR

ORA YOKHANAN

PROOFREADER

ISRAEL AVRAHAM

NETZACH EKWUNIFE

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

ROSCABELMEDIA

PHOTO(S) CREDITS

**KALANIOT BOOKS,
NATHANIEL,
NESHAMA, NJYM,
TIKKUN HAYAM.**

SENIOR CORRESPONDENCE

RISHON ABRAHAM

ISRAEL BEN AVRAHAM

REBECCA TENDO

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

JORAM OBAK

HAIM ISRAEL MPODOL

Message From The Editor.

Shalom, and welcome to another edition of African Jewish Voices. Earlier this year, we celebrated a milestone that fills me with both gratitude and humility—our third anniversary. Three years ago, this publication began with a simple conviction: that the stories of Jewish communities across Africa deserved to be documented, preserved, and shared with the world. Since then, we have published more than one hundred articles on our website, each contributing to a growing record of African Jewish life. None of this would have been possible without our dedicated writers, photographers, volunteers, and readers. To every contributor who has given their time, knowledge, and passion to this mission, thank you.

Much has happened since our last printed edition. The world has watched wars and regional conflicts unfold, antisemitism continues to cast its shadow across many societies, and inflation has placed enormous pressure on families and communities everywhere. We have also witnessed moments that brought people together, from the FIFA World Cup to the Maccabiah Games, reminding us that even in difficult times, hope and unity still have a place. Against this global backdrop, I found myself asking a different question: What does survival look like for rural Jewish communities in Africa? That question became the inspiration for this edition.

As we travelled to visit Jewish communities in different parts of Africa, we discovered people who are not waiting for change—they are creating it. We met farmers, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and families who are working with the little they have to build sustainable futures. We also saw the obstacles they continue to face: limited investment, inadequate infrastructure, food insecurity, and the challenge of creating lasting economic opportunities. Yet everywhere we went, we encountered determination, dignity, and an unwavering belief that a better future is possible. This edition therefore focuses on growing Jewish enterprises, agriculture, and community-based economic development. These are not simply business stories; they are stories about preserving Jewish life and ensuring that communities can flourish with dignity.

Our journey has also led us to think deeply about the future of Jewish philanthropy in Africa. Increasingly, we see the value of a decentralized approach—one in which donors and supporters are connected directly with the communities they wish to help, building relationships based on trust, openness, and mutual understanding rather than unnecessary layers of administration. Such a model should never compromise accountability. On the contrary, it should strengthen it through clear reporting, regular communication, measurable outcomes, and complete transparency at every stage of every project.

While we continue exploring how such a framework can be developed responsibly, AJV hopes to contribute to the conversation by encouraging professional standards of reporting, documentation, visibility, and direct communication between funded communities and those who support them. If this vision proves practical, it could become a sustainable model that benefits both today's communities and future generations.

The Jewish communities of Africa have remarkable stories to tell. They possess resilience, creativity, and an enduring faith that deserves not only recognition but meaningful partnership. My hope is that this edition will inspire readers to see these communities not simply as recipients of assistance, but as partners capable of building lasting solutions when given the opportunity. Thank you for continuing this journey with us. Thank you for reading, for sharing our stories, and for believing that every community, no matter how small or remote, deserves to have its voice heard.





Opening Shot



Welcome to the
Adamah Farm

Sarah Nakintu, Vice President of the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance (SAJA), at Adamah Farm, where she is gaining practical experience in sustainable agriculture through a Jewish environmental programme.

CONNECTING AFRICAN JEWISH CREATIVITY TO THE GLOBAL MARKET.



As African Jewish Voices marks its third anniversary, we are proud to announce an exciting new chapter in our journey—the launch of the African Judaica Marketplace, a dedicated section of our expanding website where authentic Judaica crafted by African Jewish communities will find its place on the global stage.

Our vision is simple but powerful: to create a platform where made-in-Nigeria tallit, beautifully woven Uganda kippot, Ghanaian challah covers, handcrafted mezuzah, ritual items, and artwork—products that carry the creativity, faith, and heritage of Jewish artisans across the continent—can reach Jewish homes and communities around the world.

Too often, these remarkable products remain known only within their local communities, their stories untold beyond their own neighbourhoods. The African Judaica Marketplace changes that. By connecting African Jewish producers directly with buyers across the globe, we aim to increase visibility for African Jewish brands, open new markets for local artisans, and help families earn a sustainable parnassah through their craft and creativity.

This is more than a marketplace. It is a bridge—connecting African Jewish communities with the wider Jewish world through partnership, commerce, and mutual appreciation.

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From Feathers to Fruit: How Shehechayanu Oil Mills Turned a Setback into Beth Ha'arachman's Path to Self- Sufficiency



BY
AVRAHAM BEN AVRAHAM



Fresh oil palm fruit bunches await processing at the Shehechayanu Palm Oil Mill, a key community initiative advancing food security and economic self-sufficiency.

In life, work is the engine of survival. It provides for needs, ignites ambition, and can sustain a community—but the very setup built to sustain that work is often fragile. Business statistics bear these facts out starkly: on average, only about 5% of startups survive past the first five years, and of those survivors, only a similar fraction, or percentage, make it to the next five. Beth Ha'arachman, a Jewish community in Nigeria, knows this fragility firsthand from experience. Its story, though, is not one of collapse—it is one of pivot, determination, and a bet on palm oil that is now paying off.

Beth Ha'arachman, like many communities seeking food security, has long turned to agriculture for survival. Through the Shehechayanu Foundation, the agricultural arm of the community, members have built real farming experience over the years. Cassava, yam, cucumber, greens, and maize grow on community land, alongside a modest stand of palm trees, and the harvests help feed communal gatherings such as festivals and Shabbat meals.

So, when the community launched a 2,000-bird poultry operation in 2023, the challenge wasn't a lack of chicken rearing know-how. It was something else entirely.

The poultry facility sat in a rural area, in the village of Ekpene Ukim, in Uruan, at the outskirts of Uyo, the state capital. This location, with a dispersed settlement pattern, is, unfortunately, within reach of opportunistic thieves who struck under cover of night. The site lacked secure perimeter fencing and night lighting, and the planned two-room farm shelter near the poultry building remained unfinished. The facility was exposed because it was positioned at one end of the extended compound, out of view from the synagogue guesthouse.



Workers feed hundreds of young chickens inside the community poultry house.

The first year went well. The second did not. Nighttime break-ins became frequent, compounding losses from disease and suffocation during feeding. At the same time, feed prices more than doubled, going from 9,500 to 24,000 naira—an increase of over 150%, squeezing the operation's finances just as lack of security costs were mounting. The situation reached a critical point when armed thieves nearly lynched workers during a raid at night. With the facility vandalized and the threat of violence now real, the community faced a decision that would determine whether the project survived at all.

Reinforcing the poultry operation was one option on the table: metal gauze netting, additional blockwork, solar lighting for night surveillance, and finally completing the farm shelter, all paired with a smaller flock of birds to start again. That plan was presented to the original donor. But a second idea was also on the table: converting the space into a small factory for processing palm fruit into red oil. The donor chose neither, declining further support and leaving the project's fate uncertain.

Revenue from the last poultry sales was redirected to lease 18 plots of land near the synagogue for yam, maize, and cassava—a separate food-crop operation that kept the food security drive alive. But the community had learnt something important from the poultry collapse: whatever came next needed to be something thieves couldn't simply carry away. Chickens can be stolen. Machinery, bolted to the ground, cannot.



Damage to the poultry facility's entrance following a nighttime break-in by thieves.

The Mill That Changed Everything

A year into operation, the results speak for themselves. After a 10% down payment secured a mini oil mill facility, the Shehechayanu Palm Oil Mills was born, and it has reshaped the community's economic prospects. An experienced team, built for resilience from the ground up, led this new phase of operation.

Red palm oil is a staple ingredient in roughly 75% of Nigeria's daily local dishes, used across cooking and a range of industries. Despite the ubiquity of the oil, it isn't cheap: a liter sells for around 2,500 naira (roughly \$1.80), which is more than double the price of a litre of fuel, which currently runs more than 1,000 naira at Nigerian pumps. Traditionally, the oil is taken from the soft part around palm kernel seeds, and it can be extracted at home by boiling and crushing, using small machines for moderate amounts, like at Shehechayanu, or in a factory for large-scale production.

The community's own stand of roughly 18 palm trees isn't nearly enough to meet the mill's needs. Most palm trees take about three years to mature and begin bearing fruit, although some hybrid varieties reach productivity faster. As a result, the mill primarily sources its fresh fruit from larger plantations located in and around Akwa Ibom State in southern Nigeria.

In the production line, the process begins with sorting: fresh palm fruits are pulled from the bunch, sticky residue is removed, and then they are prepared to be fed to the boiler. From there, a sequence of machines takes over. The boiler softens the fruit; the digester, which is powered by a small motor, mashes it further; the presser, run by human labor, extracts the oil; and the separator divides the resulting chaff from the kernel seeds, while the oil itself is separated from the watery mix and collected into jerrycans.



Palm fruits being boiled during a nighttime processing operation.



Inside the Shehechayanu Palm Oil Mill

Despite the mechanization, human hands remain essential at every stage—moving material from one machine to the next, monitoring quality, and keeping the line coordinated. Four workers, men and women alike, run a typical day at the mill, and almost nothing produced goes to waste. The leftover chaff and kernel shells serve as heating fuel for boilers and fireplaces, the chaff doubles as livestock feed for piggery operations, and the kernel itself encases an edible nut. A small engine-powered cracking machine separates that nut from its shell; once cleaned of sand and residue, it can be eaten raw or sold to a biscuit manufacturer that grinds it into the granular base for biscuits and cookies.

The mill's output has already grown into something more than a kitchen staple. Bleaching the red oil produces a neutral cooking oil prized for frying fish, yam, or chicken thanks to its mild taste and lower smoke point. The same bleached oil, combined with caustic soda, becomes the base ingredient for making soap. At a recent community exhibition, Shehechayanu management demonstrated its soap-making process; today, that soap is distributed to community members at a steep discount, with free samples given out at the product's launch.

Converting the old poultry facility into a fortified oil mill solved the community's original problem directly: every machine is firmly mounted to the ground, making theft or disassembly nearly impossible. In its first year, even working with a palm tree supply far too small to meet demand, the mill produced 2,000 litres of red oil—a record for the community and a clear signal that the model works.

Scaling the Vision

The next phase moves beyond simply purchasing palm fruit. The community is considering exploring the option of leasing agreements with large plantations, under which each leased tree's full annual harvest would go to Shehechayanu. That arrangement would stabilize supply and boost capacity. Undoubtedly, such an arrangement is a crucial step towards a larger goal: acquiring entirely new land elsewhere in the state for the community's own large-scale palm plantation. The search is for flat, rural ground near a stream—territory suited to both the demands of palm cultivation and the irrigation it requires.

The numbers illustrate the scale of that ambition. The pilot mill did cost roughly \$7,500 to set up and run for its first year—a small, largely man-run operation dependent on sourced palm bunches trucked in from outside plantations. Scaling to 10,000–20,000 palm trees, by contrast, would require an investment of \$350,000 to \$500,000. A single mature palm tree can produce around 20 bunches of fruit a year, yielding roughly 100 litres of oil—a per-tree benchmark that hints at the scale of production a full plantation could eventually support. The plan unfolds in phases: land is acquired and levelled first, followed by staggered planting (10,000 trees in the first year, then 5,000 in each of the second and third years) while leasing fruit from established plantations bridges the supply gap in the meantime. Once the earliest trees mature and begin yielding fruit, roughly three years in, a far larger mechanized mill will be installed directly within the new plantation: a 5-ton-per-hour palm fruit processing line requiring 148.5 kW of power. Built for the plantation's full eventual capacity of 20,000 trees, the new mill will continue drawing on outside plantations to fill the gap until all of its trees reach full production.

This is, by design, a community-driven enterprise. The labor that would sustain a plantation of this size is meant to come directly from the Jewish community, turning the farm into something more than an economic asset. It becomes a shared project that strengthens the community itself.

The vision for the plantation, which will have 10,000 to 20,000 trees spread across 200 to 225 hectares, extends well past the community's own needs. It could meaningfully shift the country's domestic oil market to some extent, displacing some of the millions of litres of palm oil currently imported from Asia. For Beth Ha'arachman, the ambitions run deeper still: dignified wages, the birth of a new community with hundreds of folks living side by side, a health centre, and ultimately a foundation for self-sufficiency that could lift roughly a thousand Nigerian Jews out of poverty.



The 18 palm trees at the Beth Ha'arachman community provide fresh fruit bunches for the community's palm oil mill.



The community aims to expand its palm oil initiative by growing the plantation from 18 trees to between 10,000 and 20,000 palm trees.

This project is also a replicable model. The Shehechayanu approach—starting small, proving the concept, then scaling deliberately—can be applied in other parts of Nigeria, where Jewish communities face similar economic hardship. A second plantation, modelled on everything learned at Beth Ha'arachman, could extend the same opportunity to another population entirely, giving more Nigerian Jews job security, stable incomes, and a stake in something built to last.

An Invitation to Investors and Donors

The Shehechayanu Oil Mills project is now actively seeking investors and donors who share this vision. A comprehensive 60-page investment document is available upon request, detailing the full financial breakdown: land acquisition and leveling costs; staggered planting budgets across the three-year timeline; the operating expenses of running the 5-ton-per-hour processing line; and the logistics of farm operations using mechanical farm equipment.

For investors looking to deploy capital with a tangible social return, this project offers a structured opportunity. The plantation is projected to break even within seven years of full operation, after which returns become increasingly predictable and profitable as the trees reach peak productivity. This is patient capital with purpose, the kind of investment that builds infrastructure, sustains a workforce, and generates income for a community over decades, not just quarters.



Proposed 5-ton-per-hour palm oil processing facility that the community hopes to acquire to expand production, create jobs, and transform its growing palm plantation into a sustainable, community-driven enterprise

Those who wish to support the mission without a financial return are equally welcome. Donations of any size help close the gap between what the pilot mill has achieved and what the plantation can fully become—whether it's for buying land, getting seedlings, growing trees from the nursery to maturity, or building facilities for the Jewish community that is part of the larger vision.

It is worth stating plainly what this project represents: a deliberate shift from food security to job security, where families and individuals working the plantation earn a reliable monthly income and where investors not only recover their capital but also receive returns that exceed what was put in, especially from investment in the 148.5 Kw-powered palm fruit processing plant itself. Beyond the financial case, success here means the birth of a practical Hebrew community: one where kosher living shapes the surrounding living environment. This initiative is not merely a profit-making venture; it is an answer to one of the most overlooked crises facing African Jews today, offering job security, dignity, and the foundation of a community that can endure for generations.

In conclusion, none of all this would have been possible without the original donor who funded the poultry venture at Beth Ha'arachman. Though the chicken operation ultimately could not be sustained, the physical infrastructure it left behind (the facility built to house 2,000 birds) became the very space that gave Shehechayanu Oil Mills its start. That structure, repurposed and fortified, became the pilot mill's home, and it was within those walls that the community first proved it could extract, refine, and sell red oil at scale.

That early grant donation, made in good faith, did not go to waste. It ignited something. The confidence gained from producing 2,000 litres of red oil in a single year, in a space originally built for chickens, is what gave the community the courage to dream of 20,000 palm trees and a workforce drawn entirely from Nigeria's Jewish population. The original donor planted a seed: not in the ground, but in the community's belief in itself. For that, Beth Ha'arachman is profoundly grateful.



Rice Farming, Tourism and, Economic Tree Planting in Uganda



By Tendo Rebecca

Uganda is also known as the Pearl of Africa, and no doubt the name is for a good reason. Its rich soil, abundant rainfall, and equatorial climate, all of which conspire to produce agricultural abundance that few countries on the continent can match. Vast stretches of arable land, much of which is still untouched and unharnessed, hold enormous potential for farming communities that are willing to invest their labour, knowledge, and hopes in the earth. Moving around the country's rural heartlands, it's clearly evident that agriculture is not merely a livelihood for the majority; it is a way of life, a cultural identity, and the primary engine of household survival.

However, potential and prosperity are not the same thing. This is the simple reality. Because across Uganda's countryside, significant portions of fertile land go unfarmed. Economic trees that could generate income for generations remain unplanted. And in tourism, opportunities for organised tourism services remain largely untapped. This article examines how the Abayudaya, the indigenous Jewish community of Uganda, are turning the land into a source of food security and communal strength and how, with vision and resources, these efforts can be exponentially scaled to turn things around for good

Like most Ugandans, the Abayudaya are primarily agricultural people. Their connection to the land is an important part of their daily lives and their sense of community. Across their scattered locations in villages within the Mbale District of eastern Uganda, families tilled their plots individually, growing food for home consumption and modest sales. Yet beyond the household, the Abayudaya also engage in collective farming—members of different Jewish communities working side by side, pooling effort and sharing both the burden and the reward of cultivation.

This spirit of cooperative agriculture reflects something deeper: a community that has survived and thrived not through individual ambition alone, but through collective effort and resilience. It is this same spirit that has carried the Abayudaya through more than a century of hardship, faith, and renewal.

At this point, let's briefly look at the history. The Abayudaya, which literally means 'People of Judah' in the Luganda language, trace their origins to the early twentieth century, when Semei Kakungulu, a Ugandan military leader and political figure, embraced the teachings in the Hebrew Bible as it appealed to him heartily. Around 1919, Kakungulu and his followers began observing Jewish law: keeping the Sabbath, practicing circumcision, and following the dietary laws of kashrut. Over subsequent decades, after the death of Semie in 1927, the community deepened its Jewish practice, eventually meeting several global Jewish organizations that contributed to shaping their future.

Under the regime of Idi Amin in the 1970s, the community endured severe persecution when Jewish practice was outlawed by the dictatorial regime. The regime's crackdown on worshipers forced many to flee, forsaking their faith, and nearly obliterated the community. A cave synagogue in Nangolo provided a hideout for religious gatherings and prayers in the thick of the forest, where the brave ones continued to hold the torch of Judaism against all odds.

Yet the Abayudaya survived, regrouped, rebuilt, and flourished. Today, they number several thousand people, spread across multiple congregations in the Mbale region and beyond, with synagogues, schools, and a growing connection to the worldwide Jewish family. They can be found in central and western as well as in northern Uganda. Their story is one of extraordinary faith, resilience, and the quiet power of a people rooted in both their African heritage and their Jewish identity.



This 6-hectare farmland belonging to Kahal Kadosh She'erit Yisrael (KKSJ) Synagogue in Nasenyi, Western Uganda, is helping the community strengthen food security, promote sustainable agriculture, and work toward long-term self-sufficiency.



Wagagai Peak, the highest point on Mount Elgon and the second in Uganda, is a renowned destination that attracts hikers, mountain climbers, and adventure tourists from around the world.



The breathtaking view of one of the three waterfalls at Sipi Falls, nestled at the foot of Mount Elgon, is a popular tourist attraction located just a couple of minutes' drive from the Jewish community in Mbale, Eastern Uganda.

Eastern Uganda's Tourism Treasure: Mbale and Beyond

The Mbale region, which is the cradle of Judaism, is home to the majority of the Abayudaya and a couple of minutes' drive from the foot of Mount Elgon, the second-largest mountain in Uganda. Mount Elgon National Park offers trekkers, bird-watchers, and nature lovers a pristine highland environment rich in biodiversity. Its caves, hot springs, and unique flora make it an unforgettable destination for adventure travellers. The peak of the mountain, known as the Wagagai peak, stands at a height of 4,321 metres and is a destination for lovers of mountain climbing.

Nearby, the Sipi Falls cascade down the slopes of Mount Elgon in a series of three dramatic waterfalls, offering breathtaking scenery, hiking trails, and cool highland air. Guides familiar with the terrain can access and view all three of these falls from three different locations. The area has quietly become one of Uganda's most beloved natural retreats, drawing visitors who linger for days to take in the views and the serenity.

Ascending the mountain from the Ugandan side and descending on the other side into Kenya is a fascinating experience. The Malaba-Busia border crossing, connecting Uganda to Kenya, adds another dimension to the region's appeal—offering double opportunities: for cross-border cultural tourism and trade. Eastern Uganda, in short, is a region of genuine touristic richness, waiting to be more fully discovered and its potentials harnessed.

Rice Cultivation in the Swamps of Nalubembe.

Another aspect of the region is its rich and fertile soil for agricultural purposes. Among the most compelling stories in eastern Uganda's Jewish landscape is the rice farming project of Nalubembe, a small village where a group of Abayudaya are demonstrating what communal agriculture can look like when faith and hard work combine. Located at the outskirts of Mbale town, this isolated rural area currently has no public electricity, but most of the people farm the land for survival.

In the wetlands and swampy lowlands of Nalubembe, a modest but determined Jewish congregation has taken root. These are not wealthy farmers. They have received no external grants, no international development funding, and no NGO support. With their hands and their own limited resources, the community has cultivated two hectares of rice paddies in the swamps, turning marginal land into productive fields.

A member of the Nalubembe Jewish community overlooking the rice fields that are helping strengthen food security and build a more self-sufficient future.

The results are tangible, providing a means of livelihood and survival to an extent. The rice harvest provides food security for the families involved—reducing hunger and dependence on purchased food. The surplus is sold in local markets, generating cash income that goes toward paying school fees for children's education, meeting household bills, and covering other essential costs. In a community where poverty is the daily reality, this rice harvest represents something of extraordinary importance: self-sufficiency, dignity, and hope.

The Nalubembe congregation is small, and the challenges it faces are real and daring. But its achievement of farming two hectares of rice without any external support is proof of the spirit and capability of the Abayudaya people. With years of experience, this achievement also serves as proof of concept for what could be accomplished on a much larger scale.

The question facing the Nalubembe Jewish community—and those who care about their future—is not whether rice farming works. It clearly does. The question is: how can it be expanded?



At present, the congregation farms about two hectares. But the swamplands of Nalubembe, like many areas in eastern Uganda, contain far more cultivable land than is currently in use. If rice farming were scaled to between ten and fifty hectares, the economic transformation would be massive. At ten hectares, the community could generate enough income to fund the running of the synagogue, invest in farm equipment, and create steady employment for members of the congregation. At fifty hectares, the Nalubembe Jewish community could become a meaningful agricultural enterprise—producing rice for regional markets, funding communal infrastructure, and lifting families out of subsistence living into sustainable prosperity.



Rice fields in the swamps of Nalubembe, where the Jewish community has several plots of farmland dedicated to improving food security, generating income, and building long-term self-sufficiency.

Access to clean drinking water is another challenge in the village, and the absence of electricity is another setback. However, the Jewish community is prepared to take the lead; if their expanded agricultural enterprise succeeds, they can immensely contribute back to the surroundings that have sustained them. While the neglect from the government has continued over the years, efforts from the Jewish community can offer some basic and cooperative social responsibility to their immediate neighbourhood, harnessing the abundant sunshine to power a borehole and solar electricity to light up the village at night.

More revenue from rice sales is one of the most practical, grounded, and immediately actionable solutions available to the Nalubembe congregation. It does not require waiting for perfect conditions. It builds on skills the community already possesses. And it uses land that is already there, waiting.

Tourism as a Community Engine

Apart from agriculture, tourism offers the broader Abayudaya community a powerful second engine of economic development. This isn't rocket science because the lights are already green. Without doubt, the Jewish community of Uganda is already a destination in itself. Each year, Jewish visitors from Israel, North America, Europe, and beyond make the journey to Mbale to experience life in the Abayudaya, who celebrated 100 years of existence back in 2019. Many visit to pray with them, celebrate Shabbat and Jewish holidays, learn from them, and be inspired by their extraordinary story of going from extinction to being the fastest-growing Jewish community in East Africa. This religious and cultural tourism is a genuine and growing phenomenon.

However, the community has not fully harnessed this visitor traffic as an economic opportunity. Organized tourism—with members of the community serving as guides, hosts, and cultural ambassadors—could transform these visits into a reliable and growing income stream. When visitors have unforgettable experiences, they become evangelists: they tell their friends, post on social media, write in community newsletters, and return themselves. Word-of-mouth promotion, rooted in authentic and memorable encounters, builds a growing network of potential visitors. The Abayudaya's unique story of Jewish survival and resilience is precisely the kind that resonates powerfully with global Jewish audiences and beyond.

Fortunately, members of the Abayudaya community have already served as tour guides, welcoming visitors and sharing their world. The human infrastructure for community tourism is already present. What is needed is organisation, investment in welcoming facilities, and a deliberate strategy to develop tourism as a sustained economic pillar.

The tourism potential of eastern Uganda and of Uganda as a whole extends far beyond religious visits. The country offers an extraordinary range of experiences for the curious traveller: wildlife safaris in national parks, boat trips on the great lakes, hiking to spectacular waterfalls, mountain treks, cultural exchanges with diverse ethnic communities, visits to remote islands, border crossing adventures, and immersion in the rhythms of rural Ugandan life.

Each of these experiences represents a potential revenue stream for communities that are positioned and prepared to serve visitors well. For the Abayudaya and other Ugandan Jewish communities, integrating these broader tourism offerings into a community-led programme would allow them to serve visitors not just as a spiritual destination, but as a gateway to the full richness of Uganda's landscape and culture.

Island Opportunities: Lake Victoria and Economic Trees

Lake Victoria, Africa's largest lake and the world's second-largest freshwater lake, is home to dozens of inhabited islands, some with populations numbering in the thousands. Because of the geographic location, these islands enjoy fertile soils and a particularly favourable microclimate, making them ideal for large-scale agriculture.

Buvuma Island, a collection of more than 52 islands inside Lake Victoria, offers a striking example of what large-scale economic planting can achieve. A government-owned mega palm tree plantation currently growing on the island produces cooking oil used in millions of Ugandan homes. The plantation has created significant employment for islanders, offering a reliable means of livelihood to hundreds of households that might otherwise depend on subsistence fishing and micro farming alone.



The Source of the Nile, where the River Nile begins its remarkable northward journey from Lake Victoria through Uganda, South Sudan, Sudan, and Egypt before emptying into the Mediterranean Sea, is one of Uganda's most iconic and popular tourist destinations, attracting visitors from around the world.



A team from the Save the Nile Foundation makes landfall on Samuka Island, a scenic tourist destination on Lake Victoria located just a few kilometers from the Source of the Nile, during a community environmental conservation mission.

Many portions of Uganda's fertile islands remain uninhabited and uncultivated. This represents a remarkable opportunity: land for large-scale economic tree planting that could generate sustainable income for generations. For the Jewish farming communities in Uganda, engagement with such opportunities—whether planting timber trees or commercial crops—could provide long-term financial sustainability that complements the shorter-term returns of rice and other crop farming.

In conclusion, I must state the fact that mega revenues only come as a result of mega projects. This is not merely a slogan. It is an economic truth. The Nalubembe congregation has demonstrated, without external support, that Jewish farmers in Uganda can work together to grow rice, feed their families, and generate some income. Across other Abayudaya communities, small-scale tree planting is already underway. And on the other hand, a couple of community members have served as tour guides. The knowledge, dedication, and skills exist. No doubt.

What is needed now is scale. If rice farming in Nalubembe grows from two hectares to fifty, the community will be sporadically transformed. If tourism is developed as a deliberate economic strategy with trained guides and organised itineraries that draw on the region's natural and cultural wealth, then Abayudaya could become a hub for international visitors and a model for community-led development. If economic tree planting is embraced on Uganda's fertile islands and open lands, the Jewish farming communities of Uganda can invest in a future that will sustain their grandchildren

The experience is already on the ground. The land is already fertile. The story is already compelling. All that remains is the commitment to scale these small successes into a large-scale, commercially viable enterprise—one that can lift the entire Jewish population of Uganda out of extreme poverty and into a future of dignity, prosperity, and pride, just like their counterparts in other parts of the globe.



Several Lake Victoria islands have vast tracts of land and small populations, making them ideal for large-scale economic tree plantations.



Buvuma Island in Lake Victoria is home to thousands of oil palm trees, providing the raw fruit used to produce cooking oil consumed by millions of people across Uganda.



Members of the Nalubembe Jewish Community in Eastern Uganda.

From Nigeria to the World: The Rise of Igbo-Made Tallitot



BY RISHON ABRAHAM.

Jewish consciousness is awakening throughout Africa, particularly in Nigeria, and this has resulted in an increase in demand for Judaica materials. One of these is the tallit, the traditional Jewish prayer shawl, which holds special place in Jewish worship and identity. To meet this increasing demand, the Nigerian Jewish community has started to embrace locally made tallitot that reflect the creativity and identity of the Nigerian people while still being faithful to Jewish halakha. This unfolding story brings together spirituality, cultural expression, textile art and economic opportunity.

Ideally, a tallit, also pronounced talis, is a rectangular prayer shawl traditionally made of wool, with stripes running down the two sides of the garment and fringes attached to each of its four corners. The tallit is worn during prayer and spiritual devotion over the shoulders like a cape. In many Jewish communities throughout the world, the tallit is viewed as something more than an article of clothing. It is viewed as a holy object that symbolizes Jewish identity, submission and awe before Hashem.

The Talmud does not specifically describe the tallit as a prayer shawl but does mention the usual rectangular cloak or mantle which was commonly worn as everyday clothing in ancient times. But through the generations the garment became a symbol of prayer and spiritual reflection. The garment, tzitzit, with fringes attached, became central to its religious significance.



Yehudah Aniegboka wears a Nigerian-made tallit of his own design inside a sukkah in Lagos, reflecting the growing tradition of locally produced Judaica in Nigeria.

The Torah commands the children of Israel twice regarding tzitzit. The first commandment appears in Bamidbar (Numbers 15:38–41), while the second appears in Deuteronomy 22:12. In Bamidbar, God instructs Moshe to command Bnei Yisrael to place fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations. The Torah explains that the tzitzit are meant to remind the Jewish people of all the commandments of Hashem, so that they may observe them faithfully and not follow the desires of the heart and eyes.

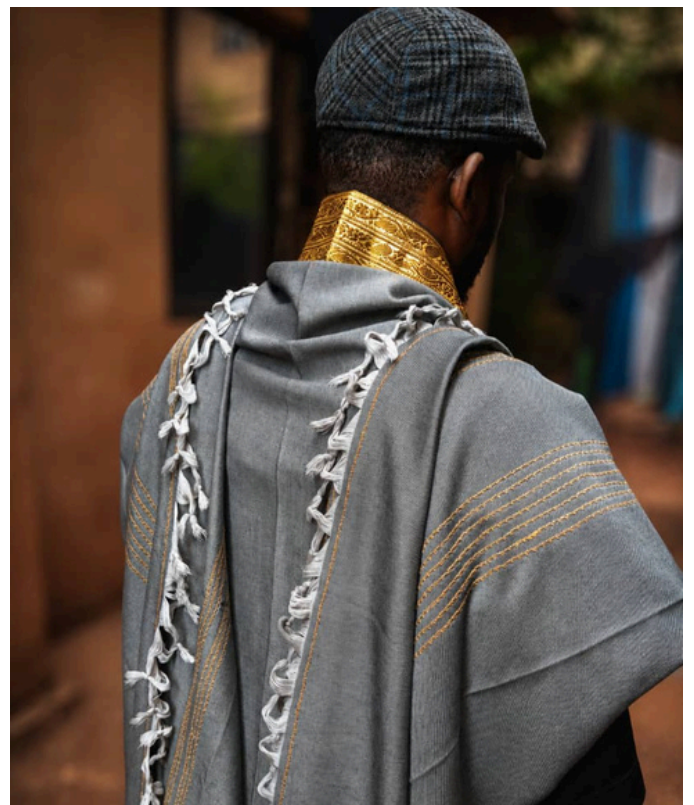
The Nigerian Jewish community has evolved into one of the most vibrant and committed Jewish communities in Africa. They have become more cohesive, organized and committed to Rabbinical Judaism based on the observance of Torah, regardless of ethnic distinctions. Communities are slowly spending more money on Jewish education, synagogue worship, Hebrew learning and observance of mitzvot. As expected, this heightened consciousness has generated an increasing demand for Judaica materials, such as siddurim and mezuzot, kippot and tefillin and above all, tallitot.

This demand has also presented an economic opportunity where Nigerian Jewry can learn the halakha of tallit-making while incorporating their rich cultural heritage into the production of locally crafted tallitot. These locally made tallitot would be more affordable for Nigerian Jews living in a developing country where imported Judaica materials are often expensive and difficult to obtain. As a result, more people would have the opportunity to daven with a tallit and participate more fully in the observance of the mitzvah

It is taught in Judaism that fulfilling a mitzvah in the service of Hashem should be done in the most beautiful way possible. This principle is called Hiddur Mitzvah, meaning “beautifying the mitzvah.” The concept is derived from Shemot (Exodus) 15:2, which says: “This is my G-D and I will glorify Him.” The Talmud further explains this principle by teaching: “Beautify yourself before Him in mitzvot; make before Him a beautiful sukkah, a beautiful lulav, beautiful tzitzit, and beautiful tefillin” (Shabbat 133b).



A full-length view of an Igbo-made tallit showcases its elegant drape, locally woven fabric, and handcrafted tzitzit, reflecting the growing revival of Jewish textile craftsmanship among the country's Jewish community



The rear design of an Igbo-made tallit highlights intricate weaving and carefully hand-tied tzitzit, blending centuries-old Jewish tradition with the rich textile heritage of the Igbo people.

This teaching reveals something deep in Judaism. Hashem commanded the Jewish people to do mitzvot not mechanically, but He wants them to be done with dignity, with care, with devotion and with beauty. When a Jew takes the time to make a mitzvah beautiful, through fine craftsmanship, elegant design or careful preparation, the result is a sign of love and honour to the mitzvah itself.

The Rambam codifies this principle in Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shabbat 30:1, where he explains that beautifying mitzvot is a mitzvah. Hence, we must realise that beauty can lift the heart and bring the soul closer to spiritual awareness. A beautiful tallit can inspire awesome prayer and can build emotional connections to the mitzvah of tzitzit.

Yehuda Aniegboka, a Lagos-based tailor and furniture designer, inspired by Rabbi Ari Greenspan, was introduced to other styles of tallitot other than the traditional conventional designs. From that moment, he realized that Nigerians could also produce tallitot that reflected their identity and cultural heritage while remaining halakhically acceptable.



Nathaniel Shimayah, one of Nigeria's youngest tallit makers, proudly displays an Igbo-made tallit handcrafted by him using locally sourced materials.

In practice, Hiddur Mitzvah concerning the mitzvah of tzitzit would mean choosing a beautifully designed rectangular garment upon which tzitzit are attached properly according to halakha. By doing so, one acknowledges that holiness and beauty are not enemies but companions. Many sages have taught that the Shechinah rests where there is beauty, joy, honor and sincerity in the service of Hashem.

This vision is therefore not only about financial and economic empowerment; it is also about expressing the Nigerian—and, in a broader sense, African—identity within the global Jewish community. Jewish communities throughout the world have traditionally incorporated aspects of their religious expression while observing halakhic standards. Now the Nigerian Jews want to do the same through textile craftsmanship and Judaica production.

Nigeria is internationally known for its rich textile heritage, including aso-oke, Ankara, adire, buba, akwete and other hand-woven cotton textiles. These fabrics are appreciated for their bright colours, durability, patterns and cultural symbolism. These designs already contain many stories of identity and heritage in the Nigerian society.

The incorporation of this textile tradition into the making of tallitot introduces an added element of adornment to the mitzvah. A Nigerian-made tallit can meet all halakhic requirements and yet bear the artistic identity of African craftsmanship. Between this Jewish symbolism and Nigerian ingenuity, a tallit like no other in the world of Judaica could be made. Nigerian designers have been acknowledged within Africa and beyond for producing garments of exceptional quality and creativity. With the right training in Jewish laws—especially about the size of the garments, suitable materials, and how to tie tzitzit—these craftsmen can make tallitot that can compete on a global level. In an interview, Baruch Uziah Nwamini, a Judaica brand owner with the name Neshama, a producer of tallitot, kippot, and several other prayer materials in Nigeria, stated the following:

“If you have seen my tallitot, you can barely differentiate between the Israeli tallit and brands by Neshama. From the onset, I decided that I would make a tallit that would be internationally accepted.”

Sustainability and Opportunity

It is one thing to start producing tallitot locally in Nigeria, and it is quite another thing to keep the industry going over time. Sustainability depends on three major factors: cost efficiency, export potential, and job creation. These areas must be carefully developed in order to keep both the business and the mitzvah alive.

Locally produced tallitot would make ownership more affordable for Nigerian Jews while also increasing access to the mitzvah itself. At the same time, the industry can market handmade and culturally designed tallitot to the global Jewish community, leveraging both Nigeria's textile reputation and the uniqueness of African Jewish identity

The result would be a model in which religious observance, cultural expression, and economic empowerment reinforce one another. In this way, the industry becomes sustainable rather than donor-dependent. Young people can find employment within textile production, embroidery, weaving, packaging, marketing, and exportation.

For the worldwide recognition and acceptance of Nigerian-made tallitot, strict adherence to Jewish law (halakha) is an absolute necessity. There can be no compromise on core halakhic requirements if these products are to be embraced by observant Jewish communities worldwide.

Neshama™ White & Blue Stripes Collection – A classic prayer shawl featuring traditional blue stripes, handcrafted to preserve timeless Jewish elegance and halachic tradition.



A kosher tallit is a four-cornered garment, properly made and of sufficient size, with tzitzit attached at the proper places and tied according to accepted halakhic traditions. The materials of the garment and of the fringes must also comply with accepted halakhic standards, so that the end result fulfills its religious function. Getting certification and endorsement from respected rabbinic authorities and Jewish organizations would go a long way toward giving Nigerian-made tallitot credibility and international acceptance.

Yehuda Aniegboka, in one of his interviews, said: “I was trained on the knotting of the tzitzit by Gadi Bentley during a seminar held in Nigeria on the two major knotting traditions of Rashi and Rambam. I assure you that most Nigerian youths, including myself, possess a deep understanding of tzitzit-knotting halakha.”

One of the most fascinating aspects of Nigerian tallitot is the fusion of Nigerian and African aesthetics with Jewish symbolism. This can be seen in the incorporation of traditional Nigerian patterns into the body of the tallit, the use of African-designed fabrics as base materials, and the inclusion of indigenous colours and designs.

This approach does not interfere with the religious function of the tallit; rather, it enriches it. If globally accepted, Nigerian-made tallitot can reflect a distinctly African Jewish identity within world Jewry and contribute to the diversity that already exists within the Jewish world.



Neshama™ Magen David Rear Mosaic Collection – A contemporary tallit featuring a striking rear Magen David mosaic design, blending Jewish symbolism with refined craftsmanship.

Branding will also play a crucial role in the success of Nigerian-made tallitot. More than mere advertising, branding is the process of communicating identity, value, trust, and story. For these products to gain global acceptance, their presentation must clearly demonstrate adherence to halakha and authenticity while highlighting the handmade craftsmanship that goes into their production.

Effective branding should also celebrate the rich Nigerian and African heritage reflected in the designs, maintain consistency in materials and quality, and tell a compelling Nigerian Jewish story that resonates with buyers on an emotional level. When combined with halakhic integrity, a strong and authentic brand can create a lasting connection with consumers and establish Nigerian-made tallitot as a respected presence in the global Judaica market.

Opportunities or no opportunities, there are still many challenges to face. It might be hard for products that are not rabbinically endorsed and certified to be accepted in Nigeria and international Jewish communities. Some Nigerian Jews are reluctant to buy locally made tallitot, believing they're not made under proper rabbinic supervision, Baruch said. This brings us back to the need for trust, education and certification when it comes to the production of Judaica.

However, encouraging signs are beginning to emerge. Nathaniel Shimayah, Baruch's brother, has taken important steps to address these concerns by securing certification from Rabbi Urzan of Chabad House Abuja for his tallit production. This endorsement has enhanced the credibility of his work and has become a major part of his professional profile. Before he obtained this certification, Nathaniel had already distinguished himself as one of the first Nigerian youths to begin exporting locally manufactured tallitot to customers abroad, proving that Nigerian-made Judaica can be embraced outside the borders of Nigeria if it is quality and authentic.

But to break into the established global market for Judaica, you need strong distribution, international partnerships and consistent quality. Nigerian producers will need patience, networking, strategic marketing and ongoing rabbinic support to compete effectively and establish a sustainable presence in the global Judaica industry.



Rudy Rochman wears an Igbo-made tallit handcrafted in Nigeria, demonstrating how indigenous African Judaica is finding recognition and appreciation on the global Jewish stage.

Nigerian Tallitot Beyond Africa

The growing appeal of Nigerian-made tallitot is not merely theoretical; examples of their use can already be found beyond Africa's shores. Among the early pioneers of tallit production in Nigeria was Ephraim Abraham, whose handcrafted prayer shawls found their way into the hands of Jewish users abroad.

One of the recipients was Professor William F. S. Miles of Northeastern University in Boston, who received a Nigerian-made tallit from Ephraim Abraham in about 2017. To Professor Miles, the tallit was more than a garment of prayer. It was a sign of the cross-continental ties between Jewish communities and the rise of African Jewish creativity within the broader Jewish world. He treasures the tallit to this day and wears what is probably the only Nigerian-made tallit in his Rhode Island congregation.



David wears a handcrafted Ugandan kippah together with an Igbo-made tallit, symbolizing the growing collaboration between Jewish communities across Sub-Saharan Africa through locally crafted Judaica.



Professor William F. S. Miles reverently kisses the Torah scroll in Eastern Nigeria using the tzitzit of a tallit handcrafted by Ephraim, an Igbo Jewish artisan.

Another example is Shmuel Miles, who received one of Ephraim Abraham's tallitot from Avraham Ben Avraham when he came to Nigeria from Senegal in 2019. He reflected on the experience and said he was delighted to think that he would be wearing a Nigerian-made tallit in California and how a prayer shawl made in West Africa could become a meaningful expression of Jewish identity thousands of miles away.

These stories may seem small, but they gesture toward a bigger possibility. Every Nigerian-made tallit worn abroad is not just a religious garment but also an ambassador of Nigerian Jewish life, craftsmanship, and resilience. As more people become familiar with these products, the reputation of Nigerian-made Judaica can grow further in the global Jewish community

The reach of Nigerian-made tallitot continues to expand. More recently, tallitot produced by Yehuda Aniegboka and Chimaobi, a tallit maker based in Aba, were shipped to California through Hanna Lancer, president of the Jewish Multiracial Network, for marketing and distribution within Jewish communities abroad. Together with the earlier work of Ephraim Abraham of Anambra State, these developments demonstrate that Nigerian-made tallitot are gradually finding a place in the international Judaica market.

In conclusion, the tallit, which has been part of Jewish tradition for thousands of years, and as long as it follows the biblical commandment of the four corners and tzitzit and all halakhic requirements will continue to evolve as Jewish communities around the world express their identity with this traditional garment.

Likewise, Nigerian-made tallitot represent a vision that has already begun its march into the global Jewish community. From local congregations in Nigeria to Jewish communities abroad, these prayer shawls are increasingly carrying with them a story of faith, craftsmanship, and cultural identity. Through perseverance, appropriate training, rabbinic guidance, and unwavering commitment to halakha, Nigerian Jewry can carve out a respected place for itself in the international Judaica industry while sharing its unique heritage with the world.

Spotlight: Cameroon Bantu Israelites of Beth Goshen



By Rabbi Haïm Israël Mpodol



Leaders and members of the Beth Goshen Bantu Israelite community in Cameroon, where Jewish life continues to flourish through faith, family, and community.

Cameroon is a true patchwork of cultures, a country which has, despite all odds, maintained peace and security inside its borders. In this mix is our community, a Jewish community with roots in Bantu identity, practising a faith that we understand not as something we adopted from outside but as an expression

We call ourselves the Bantu Israelites, and our community is called Beth Goshen. The name comes from the Torah: Goshen was the fertile region in Egypt where Yacov settled when he came to be reunited with his son Yosef, who was then governor of Egypt. In Hebrew, it evokes a house of the sun, a green and grassy place, a home of abundance and renewal. It is the name we chose because it speaks both of memory and of what we are building

About Us: Who We Are.

The word “Bantu” describes one of the largest ethnolinguistic groupings in the world, encompassing hundreds of peoples across Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa. We Bantu Israelites did not begin our identity with a foreign mission or a sudden conversion. It has its origin in the 19th century, when African groups, brought into contact with the Bible (often under the influence of Protestantism), found in its writings a description of themselves, and came to see their ancestry as the Lost Tribes of Israel. Later generations reaffirmed this identification through the narratives of travellers, the testimony of some missionaries, and the wider currents of Pan-African ideology.

Our community was born with a specific realisation. After visiting a number of communities across Cameroon and other parts of Africa that claimed a connection to Judaism, we saw a recurring problem: the transmission and practice of Jewish tradition in these groups rested on fragile foundations due to a lack of deep knowledge. We set out to build something different—a community anchored in serious study, faithful to the *Derekh Haïm*, the Jewish path of life, and committed to connecting our ancestral Bantu traditions to the teachings of the Torah and the Mekoubalim, the Kabbalists.

Our community came to life with the guidance and support of our teacher, Rabbi Pin’has Eliyahou Shaday. From the beginning, our goal has been to foster a communal life grounded in *Ahavat Yisrael* – love of one’s fellow Jews – and in *Shalom*, peace with all the cultural and religious communities around us in Cameroon and beyond.



Some of the members of the Bantu Israelites gather for a group photograph in Cameroon as they prepare to observe the solemn fast of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, marked by prayer, repentance, and spiritual reflection.

Our Community Life.

We are based in Yaoundé, and our membership reflects the diversity of our city and country. More than fifty active members are fully engaged in community life, coming from a range of backgrounds, both national and international. A further eighty-five people are currently in the process of formal conversion, awaiting the ceremony that will mark their official entry into our community. Around thirty supporting members regularly join us for worship.

Prayer is the beating heart of Beth Goshen. Everything begins and ends with it. Every Friday evening through to Saturday night, we observe Shabbat. We celebrate all the major festivals of the Jewish calendar: Passover, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and others. We hold daily services, and Torah study is woven into the rhythm of our communal life.

“Israelite Bantu Judaism is one of the lesser-known but authentic faces of Cameroonian diversity. Since 1995, it has been represented by our association, Beth Goshen, committed to dialogue and civic engagement.”

How We Sustain Ourselves

We are a young organization, and sustaining community life is ongoing. We support ourselves through a range of economic activities that reflect both the realities of daily life in Yaoundé and the values of self-reliance and mutual care that define us.

We farm, cultivating cassava, sweet potatoes, maize, peanuts, and vegetables. We raise fish, including kanga and carp. The women of our community have built small enterprises producing and selling household goods: liquid soap, fabric dyes, natural juices, smoked fish, and poultry. We also trade in Jewish religious items—kippot, menorahs, and the Chumash—and distribute kosher products across Africa, including wine, books, and prayer shawls. We offer online training in soap-making and dyeing, extending our skills and economic reach beyond our membership.

Since 2019, we have also been connected to the Kibboutz Haolam project, a French association whose vision of international Jewish community networking aligns closely with our own. What draws us to this partnership is the conviction that modern technology and ease of travel make it possible to build strong bonds between communities that are geographically distant but spiritually close. Together, we pursue mutual enrichment through collective study, the sharing of experience and best practices, and the patient weaving of what we call a living and effective haverut—fellowship.

Our Place in Cameroonian Society

We understand our Jewishness not as a private matter but as a civic one. Our community participates actively in the interfaith life of Cameroon, and we show up at moments when the country needs voices of peace. In February 2025, with presidential elections on the horizon, we were invited to stand alongside the main religious denominations of Cameroon, including Christian and Muslim, in a solemn and unified appeal for national peace. We affirmed our community's commitment to stability, dialogue, and the well-being of our nation—first and foremost, Cameroon.



From left: Rebbetzin Haya, Sarah, and Mazal of the Bantu Israelites community in Yaoundé.

We have also cultivated a relationship with the Embassy of Israel in Cameroon. In February 2024, we made a formal presentation of our community to Ambassador Raphael Morav. Most recently, we were glad to announce a significant partnership: the Israeli anthropologist Dr. Malka Shabtay has formalized a collaboration to produce an academic and cinematic documentary dedicated to the Israelite Bantus. For us, this project carries deep meaning. It is a record of who we are—of a community that has existed largely beyond the awareness of the wider Jewish world, now to be brought into view. We work on it with pride to honor our ancestors.

Where We Are Going

Our ambitions are concrete. We are working toward the construction of a synagogue, a school, and a training centre. We wish to build a mikveh, a community health facility, and a cemetery. We are also awaiting formal legal recognition as a religious and cultural association, as all administrative steps have been completed, and a presidential approval decree is pending.

We seek to formalize our practice through a halakhic conversion, so our members are fully recognized in the Orthodox community and connected with the State of Israel.

Our vision, as Bantu Israelites—descendants of Jacob, also called Israel—is to transmit the light of the Torah and share its wisdom with all who seek it, while remaining rooted in who we are: Bantu people, citizens of Cameroon, and members of Am Yisrael.

We are not a community on the margins of Jewish life. We are part of its story, which has a chapter written in Cameroon, in the Bantu tongue, under the African sun. Beth Goshen is our house. We are building it, one Shabbat at a time.

Scaling Dairy Dreams: How Cattle Rearing Can Lift Remote Kenyan Jewish Communities Out of Poverty



By Avraham Ben Avraham

Kenya has one of East Africa's fastest-growing Jewish communities, ranking behind Ethiopia and Uganda in size. In Nairobi, the capital city, stands a synagogue established over a century, although its congregation has historically consisted primarily of expatriate and non-indigenous Jews. Beyond the capital, indigenous Kenyan Jewish communities are found mainly in the Rift Valley region, particularly around Nakuru, the 4th-largest town in the country, which has some fascinating rich Jewish history.



A memorial at the historic Jewish cemetery in Nakuru, Kenya, where a generation of European Jewish settlers and refugees who made the Rift Valley their home were laid to rest.

Traveling from the Indian Ocean coast at Mombasa through Nairobi and westward into the Rift Valley, one can find fascinating European Jewish history on different fronts. In Nakuru stands a former synagogue whose construction began in 1955 and was completed in 1956; today, the building serves as an orphanage. Nearby lies a Jewish cemetery, near the Kenya Medical College campus in Nakuru. Not far from Nakuru, the town of Elburgon became home to several European Jewish settlers who established agricultural enterprises in the fertile highlands. Further northwest, Eldoret also attracted Jewish immigrants and refugees seeking new opportunities and safety far from the growing turmoil in Europe.

While Nakuru remains the most prominent center of Jewish history in Kenya, the legacy of Jewish agriculture in the Rift Valley extends far beyond the town itself. Gustav Kramer, a German Jewish refugee who arrived in Kenya in 1938, rose to become Nakuru's first mayor in 1955 and played a key role in facilitating the construction of the Nakuru Synagogue, completed in 1956. In nearby Elburgon and across the fertile Rift Valley, early Jewish settlers established successful agricultural enterprises that sustained their communities and contributed to the region's development.



We can only look at some historical facts through the lens of history to understand this story. At one time, European settlers lived and farmed in the Nakuru region. Even Rothschild's family was involved in large-scale farming in the Rift Valley. But over time, the Jews left the area. Their departures have led many local people to ask what happened to that early Jewish presence, as the baton wasn't handed to any local people when they all left, selling the Nakuru Synagogue to the government, which eventually converted it into an orphanage.

The fertile soils of Kenya's Rift Valley have sustained generations of farmers. Long before today, European Jewish settlers cultivated this rich land, helping to establish agriculture in the region. Decades after their departure, the same fertile fields continue to nourish local communities, where indigenous Kenyan Jews are once again building livelihoods through farming.

However, today, many decades after the complete exodus, an indigenous Kenyan Jewish congregation and community have risen in the Rift Valley area, most especially in Elburgon and Molo in Nakuru County, and Kasuku in Ol Kalou in neighbouring Nyandarua County. Many of them once came from Messianic backgrounds before returning to Torah-based Judaism. The community in Kasuku has a shul, while communities in Molo and Elburgon continue to gather in homes and other informal settings. Some of the members say they received formal conversion through a Beit Din in Uganda about a decade ago.

He also says he serves as a local chief over more than 20 villages, and he sees a connection between his role and the earlier history of Jewish leadership in Nakuru.

The question posed earlier has now been answered. When the European Jews left Nakuru and the Rift Valley area, they left a religious and spiritual vacuum in the entire environment. According to Moshe Abraham, a Jewish leader in Elburgon,

“The land has been calling for the return of Jewish people and Judaism. Today, we have filled that gap, both spiritually and in leadership.”

The Mountain Jews of Kenya

On a trip to Kenya, starting from Nairobi, the capital, one should not expect to find any indigenous Jewish congregation in this city of more than five million people. It takes over four hours to reach the Rift Valley region, known for its vast lakes, forested mountaintops, and rocky hills. Whether in Ol Kalou, Molo, or Elburgon, one thing becomes clear: these communities are rural and isolated. While all three locations can be accessed through Nakuru, Ol Kalou is the farthest. The community sits on a mountaintop overlooking the long waters of Lake Olbolosat, home to hippos, fish, and crocodiles.

Hiking through the fertile mountain trails near the Elburgon Jewish Community in Kenya's Rift Valley.



The Molo Jewish community, on the other hand, is accessible through a rugged, sloping, and meandering mountain track that leads to the highland plateau. The weather there is chilly and windy, offering endless views of grassy landscapes stretching into the distance. Yet the lack of sufficient basic amenities and the rugged terrain often make life challenging, with many interior villages depending on the small Molo town centre for most of their supplies.

The model of the Molo Jewish community is a particularly interesting one. Because of their small population and the fact that families live in scattered settlement across the mountain, they have adopted a rotational Shabbat system. Without a centrally built synagogue, each household takes turns hosting Shabbat in their home. Without a rabbi and without the luxury of trained and structured leadership, this weekly gathering from house to house has helped keep the community united as they share in the harsh realities of the terrain, the tough weather, and the poverty that affects the area.

What makes this detail even more striking is that the European Jewish settlers in the same Rift Valley region once did exactly the same thing. Before Gustav Kramer became mayor and before the Nakuru Synagogue was built, those early settlers gathered in one another's homes to observe Shabbat, rotating from household to household as they worked to establish themselves in a new land. The Molo community is not behind; rather, it stands at a similar starting point to where its predecessors once stood, walking a path that eventually led to a synagogue, community institutions, and a lasting Jewish presence in the region

This raises an important question: why do most Kenyan Jews live in rural areas, where life is often difficult? Survival requires hard work, and many families depend on cultivating their land to provide food for their households rather than relying on the market. Given these challenges, one might ask, if opportunities are greater in the towns and cities, why have so many remained in these remote highland communities?"

This region is where some of us came from. We are called the Mountain Jews of Kenya for a reason. We started out as Messianics, but today, as rabbinical Jews, we still find ourselves living on these highlands. — **Elder Sam Ben Abraham**



Sam, an elder of the Molo Jewish Community, keeps dairy cows in his homestead—a common practice among many Jewish families in Kenya's Rift Valley.

The gathering was filled with excitement and, as they told me, it was the first time they had ever received a visitor from Nigeria. As part of my speaking tour with Olam Network and its Olam in Motion program, I travelled into the Rift Valley and up the mountains to the Molo Jewish community, where I met about 20 of its members.

Poverty in the highlands does not only mean an empty pocket. It also affects the spiritual and communal life of the Molo Jewish community. The absence of a dedicated synagogue building means the community has no permanent place to gather. The community lacks Torah scrolls, has very few siddurim for prayers, and many cannot afford items such as tallitot and tefillin. There is no Jewish library with books on Torah, Talmud, halacha, and Jewish history to support learning and leadership development.

The children attend government schools with no Jewish education program, growing up without formal instruction in Hebrew, Jewish history, or Torah study. Without a rabbi of their own, the community hopes that one day it will be able to send one of its young men to a yeshiva so that he can return as an ordained rabbi and serve future generations.

These are not small challenges. For a community that embraced rabbinical Judaism with such commitment, the lack of resources makes it difficult to fully practice and develop Jewish life. Week after week, Shabbat services are held in different homes, often with limited prayer books and no central communal building. Yet despite these difficulties, the community continues to preserve its Jewish identity and look toward the future with hope.

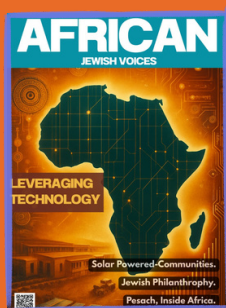
Kenya's Dairy Sector: A Proven Opportunity

The discussion was highly spirited as we sat with members of the community—men, women, and youth—reflecting on practical ways to support development and improve their future. Before anything can be achieved, there must be something already on the ground that can be used as a foundation. In their case, that foundation is experience—practical knowledge of cattle rearing and dairy farming. Almost every household keeps at least two cows in their compound, used for milk and basic economic support.

In their case, the answer lies in looking inward—asking what their environment can provide. The Rift Valley is rich in natural resources—fertile soil, a favorable climate, and green hills that support livestock farming. For generations, the people of Molo have kept cattle, and their experience with dairy farming is well developed. The cows thrive in this cool, lush environment, where grass is abundant. With enough land, farmers can both sustain their herds and grow improved fodder crops to increase milk production.

Moreover, the market for milk is vast. The Molo centre itself is a busy town hub with surrounding mountain settlements, each with populations of more than 2000 people, all dependent on milk for daily nutrition. Beyond Molo, the nearby town of Elburgon and the larger population of Nakuru City together create an even larger market for dairy products from these highland farms. Thus, what begins in the heights of Molo can become a lifeline, sustaining families as far as Nakuru, which is a testament to how looking inward can set them on a path to prosperity.

The broader context makes the dairy potential of the Molo community even more compelling. Kenya has the largest dairy industry in sub-Saharan Africa, producing billions of litres of milk every year. The sector supports well over one million smallholder farmers, while demand for milk and dairy products continues to grow across the country. The Rift Valley, where Molo is located, is already one of Kenya's leading dairy-producing regions, benefiting from the same cool climate and fertile grazing lands that the community has long relied upon.



Members of the Molo Jewish Community rely on cattle rearing as an important part of daily life. The cool climate, abundant grasslands, and fertile highlands of Kenya's Rift Valley provide ideal conditions for ranching, allowing families to produce fresh milk while sustaining a long-standing agricultural tradition.



Across Kenya, smallholder dairy cooperatives have proven to be one of the most effective tools for rural economic development. When farmers pool their resources, share veterinary services, and work together to secure better prices for their products, household incomes can increase significantly. The Molo Jewish community already possesses many of the qualities that make such initiatives successful. Through their rotational Shabbat system and other communal activities, they have developed a culture of cooperation, shared responsibility, and mutual support. In many ways, the social foundation needed for a successful dairy cooperative is already in place.

The human capital needed for this dairy project is already in place. During our discussions, members of the Molo Jewish community expressed a strong willingness to contribute their time and skills. Men, women, and even younger family members are ready to play their part, helping to care for the cows, milk them, and manage the day-to-day operations of the farm. This spirit of volunteerism provides a strong foundation, allowing the project to grow from within the community.

To move the project forward, land will first be leased, providing a cost-effective way to begin operations immediately. A fertile and relatively flat piece of land near the foot of the mountain, with access to natural water sources, has been identified as a suitable location. By leasing the land for an initial period of five years, the community can reduce upfront costs while retaining the option to purchase it in the future.

The next step will be the construction of a secure cattle shelter using locally available materials. Designed to protect the cows from cold nights and harsh weather, the structure will provide a safe and comfortable environment for the herd. With proper security, lighting, and access to water, the farm will create the conditions needed for healthy cattle and steady milk production.

What Investment Would Unlock

With strategic investment, the Molo Jewish Community could one day manage herds of tens of cattle, turning the Rift Valley's rich pastures into a foundation for sustainable dairy farming and economic growth.



The Molo dairy initiative does not require enormous capital to get off the ground. Its greatest assets are already present within the community. What outside investment and partnership would unlock is the ability to move from subsistence to scale. Additional funding would allow the community to expand beyond the two or three cows that most households currently keep and build a coordinated communal herd capable of producing enough milk to serve larger markets, including Nakuru. It would also make it possible to acquire basic milk cooling and processing equipment, helping to reduce spoilage, improve quality, and secure better prices.

Beyond the farm itself, improved earnings would provide something equally important: opportunity and choice. Today, poverty keeps many members of the Molo Jewish community tied to the mountain interior. With a sustainable source of income, families could establish small businesses, participate more fully in the wider Kenyan economy, and create new opportunities for the next generation. For young people especially, such a change means access to education, employment, and a reason to invest in the future of their community.

And it would mean something more. It would mean the ability to build a synagogue, acquire siddurim and other religious materials, establish a Jewish library, and provide children with a stronger Jewish education alongside their secular studies. Investment in the Molo dairy initiative is therefore more than an investment in agriculture. It is an investment in the future of Jewish life on a Kenyan mountaintop.

In conclusion, the story of the Jewish people throughout history has often been a tale of endurance and of starting from scratch. Whether in Europe, North America, the Middle East, or Africa, they share a similar pattern. They rose from poverty, displacement, and hardship to build prosperous lives and strong institutions. They never waited for an opportunity to arrive but did so by identifying the resources around them and working together to create a better future.

Today, the Molo Jewish community stands at the beginning of a similar journey. Rooted in the highlands of Kenya, they are looking inward at what they already have: land, knowledge, faith, and a spirit of working together to create a better future for the next generation.

A NEW SYNAGOGUE RISES IN KWANIA



By Joram Obak

Thirty years in a grass-thatched house. One roof away from a home that will stand for a hundred years.

The Shehecheyanu blessing rose above the red soil of Kwania on a hot morning as Muzee Ocare Abraham, 55, pressed a fired clay brick into wet mortar. Around him, children from the community recited the Alef-Bet under a tarpaulin. Builders in dusty overalls paused with trowels in hand. Farmers, mothers, and visitors from Mbale whispered “Amen.”



Members of the Kwania Jewish Community gather for a group photograph in front of their grass-thatched synagogue, which faithfully served the community for more than three decades.

For more than thirty years, the Jewish community of Kwania has prayed inside a small grass-thatched house, built by hand and held together through weddings, rainy seasons, and drought. Now, for the first time, that is about to change. According to an elder, Muzee Nakson Otim, who has been there since the beginning, he had a powerful expression.

That house has witnessed every prayer, every cry, and every song we have shared. The grass roof leaked, the walls leaned, but it kept our faith alive. Now we are ready for the house that will stand for our grandchildren.

The Kwania Jewish community has spent the past year building a permanent synagogue with their own hands and local materials. The walls are up, fired brick by fired brick. What remains is the part no community can finish alone: a roof, doors, windows, and the plaster and paint that will make the building whole.

Who Are the Jews of Kwania?

The community is part of Uganda's broader Abayudaya and Israelite movement, with roots stretching back to the early 1990s. While the largest Ugandan Jewish communities are centered in Mbale and Budaka districts, smaller clusters have grown steadily in the north over the past twenty years. Kwania's congregation began in 2006 with seven families, roughly thirty people, meeting in homes. Today it counts forty households and about two hundred congregants, most of them subsistence farmers growing cassava, maize, millet, sorghum, beans, and sunflowers.



For more than 30 years, this humble grass-thatched synagogue has been the spiritual home of the Kwania Jewish community—hosting Shabbat, festivals, weddings, life-cycle events, and countless prayers.

We have been keeping Shabbat, burying our dead, and teaching our children with no proper roof of our own. Every rainy season, our Torah scroll went into a plastic drum. Every drought, our children learned under the sun. Moving into this new synagogue means our Judaism is no longer hiding from the weather.

That was Ziporah Acayo, 60, treasurer of the Kwania Jewish community. The nearest established synagogue is over 280 kilometers away in Mbale, roughly a six-hour drive by taxi. For life-cycle events, holy days, and weekly study, this distance has been a barrier to growth. The distance has long hindered growth, but this new building will finally eliminate that barrier.

The synagogue under construction sits on 1.5 acres of land donated by Muzee Samson Gunna from his family's holdings. The design is simple and rooted in local building tradition but meant to last: fired clay bricks made on-site, which provided wages to twelve local youth over three months, now stand as complete walls. Gutters will one day feed a rainwater harvest tank to support a future mikveh and garden—once the roof is on.

Every wall standing today began as red mud from the ground the synagogue sits on. Youth from the community mix the mud with water and pack it into molds by hand, shaping each brick before it is stacked into a high-rising local kiln—a fireplace built up from the bricks themselves. It is fired for several days until the heat hardens the bricks enough to bear the weight of a permanent building. It is slow, physical work, done almost entirely by the community's own young people, and it is the reason the walls of Kwania's synagogue are already standing. This method, common across rural Uganda, turns local soil into building material without needing anything brought in from outside



Interior at night: Revered by a congregation of more than 200 members, this sacred sanctuary now stands ready to pass its legacy to a new synagogue that will serve future generations.

“This is not a foreign building dropped into Kwania. My team of carpenters, masons, and helpers is all from here. We have finished the walls. Now we wait for the roof. Once it's on, we can finish in one month. My children benefit from this synagogue. This is a blessing for everyone.” —Isaac Ojok, lead builder

The Roof Is All That Stands Between Kwania and a Finished Synagogue

The walls are complete. What the community cannot do without outside support is close the building against the rains: iron sheets for the roof, doors, windows, plaster, and paint. Everything else—the labour, the land, and the bricks—has come from Kwania itself. The community has already contributed all of its available resources. What remains is the part that requires partners beyond the district.

Land security is also underway: the synagogue committee is processing a certificate of customary ownership with the Kwania District Land Board to turn donated land into a formally recognised community asset. And because the community has no shochet, mohel, or sofer of its own, it continues to rely on the Mbale community for these needs. This is a reminder of how much a permanent, central home in Kwania will mean for the community's long-term independence.



Children play a dreidel game inside the new synagogue under construction during Hanukkah 2025, while the community's 30-year-old grass-thatched synagogue stands in the background.

While a permanent building is only part of what Kwania is working toward, the community does not yet own a Sefer Torah, and for years its Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrants have had to travel roughly 300 kilometers, which is about five hours each way, to Stern Synagogue in Nabugoye, Mbale, to read from the Torah in front of a congregation. As recently as this past January, five young people from Kwania made that journey to come of age under Jewish law, alongside their families.

The full story of that trip, and what it means for a community still waiting on a Torah scroll of its own, is available here: [Kwania Jewish Community Takes Bar and Bat Mitzvah Celebration to Mbale](#). A Sefer Torah for Kwania and the ark to house it remain one of the community's standing needs, alongside the synagogue's roof.

The round, grass-thatched hut is the traditional home of the Lango people, arranged in circular family compounds and known locally as 'ot lobo.' It is the architecture of daily life across rural Kwania. That is also why, for more than thirty years, the community's synagogue took the same form as the homes around it.

The new brick synagogue marks a departure from that pattern and is certainly not a rejection of it but a first step. It is the first permanent, rectangular structure the community has built for itself, and it is introducing a new generation to a different idea of what a Kwania building can be, even as the homes around it remain rooted in tradition.

From Grass Roof to Brick Walls: The Building's Progress

The image below shows the work-in-progress and the community's journey—from the grass-thatched house that has served as their synagogue for more than thirty years to the brick walls rising in its place.



Work in progress: After moulding thousands of bricks by hand and raising the walls themselves, the remaining challenge is securing financial support to complete the roof and finish the building.

Future of the Community

Not everything Kwania has tried has worked. A goat husbandry project, launched to give the community an income stream alongside its farming, did not survive: the goats are gone, and the shelter built for them now sits empty. But the community carries something forward from it: a clearer sense of the value of staying closely engaged with donors and projects funded from outside, rather than at a distance. The facility is still standing, ready to be put back to use, and the community says it is ready to try again, and this time with what it has learned.

Last year, during Hanukkah, Avraham Ben Avraham, general secretary of the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance (SAJA), travelled to Kwania and formally welcomed the community into the SAJA network. During the 3 days visit, he formally welcomed the community into the SAJA network in the same visit that brought the Nalubembe community in East Uganda into the alliance. Much of the conversation focused on practical steps: how Kwania might strengthen its economic footing over time, alongside the work of finishing the synagogue. It is a connection the community hopes to build on as it looks toward projects like the goat facility again

The Kwania synagogue's dedication, once hoped for this October 2026, has been delayed as the community waits for the funds to complete the roof and finishing work. When that day comes, the ark will face Jerusalem. The ner tamid, the eternal light, will be a solar-powered bulb, drawing its light from the very roof the community is still waiting to build.

In Lango tradition, fire is kept burning for visitors. In Jewish tradition, light means presence. In Kwania, both are true.

This is a community that has already given everything it has: its labor, its land, its faith, sustained for thirty years inside a house of grass. What stands between them and a synagogue built to last a century is a roof, doors, and windows.

We have been kept alive. We have been sustained, and we have reached this season. We are only lacking iron sheets, roofing materials, and paint. When those come, the season will be complete.



21 December 2025: Members of the Kwania Jewish Community gather at the entrance of their synagogue under construction—a moment of gratitude and hope as decades of prayer move closer to a permanent home.

Book Review

Slow Down, Shoshi!

Discovering Shabbat Through the Eyes of a Ugandan Jewish Child.



I'll admit, I read *Slow Down, Shoshi!* It's Shabbat in Uganda, slower than I usually read children's books because Shoshana Nambi's gentle picture book isn't in a rush to tell a big story. Instead, it invites you to pause, to breathe, and to notice the quiet beauty of Shabbat as it unfolds in an Abayudaya Jewish village in Uganda.

Through the eyes of little Shoshi, a curious and energetic girl, we see what happens when the workweek gives way to Shabbat. Shoshi doesn't want to slow down at first. What is on her mind is to run and play. But however, her grandmother and the rhythm of her community have simply shown her one thing, which is the reality that Shabbat isn't about stopping life. Rather, it's about shifting its tempo

The part that touched me most deeply was Shoshi racing against the setting sun as Shabbat approached. I could feel her excitement as she hurried to arrive in time for the candle lighting blessings, only to realise that she had forgotten to buy the Shabbat candles from the market. Here, we are able to see just how deeply rooted Jewish practice is within the Abayudaya community of Uganda. Her Jjajja (which means grandparent in the local language) teaches her that Shabbat candle lighting is not merely about the candles themselves:

"The light of Shabbat shows us that there is a light present in all of us. We bring this light into the world and share it with each other."

Her Jjajja also explains that, in ancient times, Jews used oil lamps rather than candles, and she went ahead to use two special oil lamps in their home in place of candles for the Shabbat lighting. There are no frills here, no dramatic plot twists, but just warmth, togetherness, and the gift of stillness.

But the greatness of the book isn't just in its message of mindfulness. It's also about who gets to tell this story and where it takes place.



The Abayudaya Jews have been living and practicing Judaism in eastern Uganda for over a hundred years, blending their faith with the Luganda language and Ugandan culture. Yet their story rarely appears in children's literature. Shoshana Nambi doesn't treat their experience as exotic or exceptional. Instead, she shows that Shabbat in Mbale feels both ordinary and sacred.

I saw Jewishness side by side with Ugandan culture: challah beside matooke, prayers sung with African cadence, and children in kippot chasing one another across the red earth. For Jewish children of color, for African children, or for any child who has wondered whether their culture "fits" the image they see in books, Shoshi quietly says: You belong here too.

I must say that Moran Yogev did a great job; the illustrations deserve just as much attention as the words. Rich greens and warm terracotta tones capture the landscape without turning it into a postcard. I could almost feel the texture of wooden carts, the roughness of the clay earth, and the soft glow of Shabbat candles at dusk

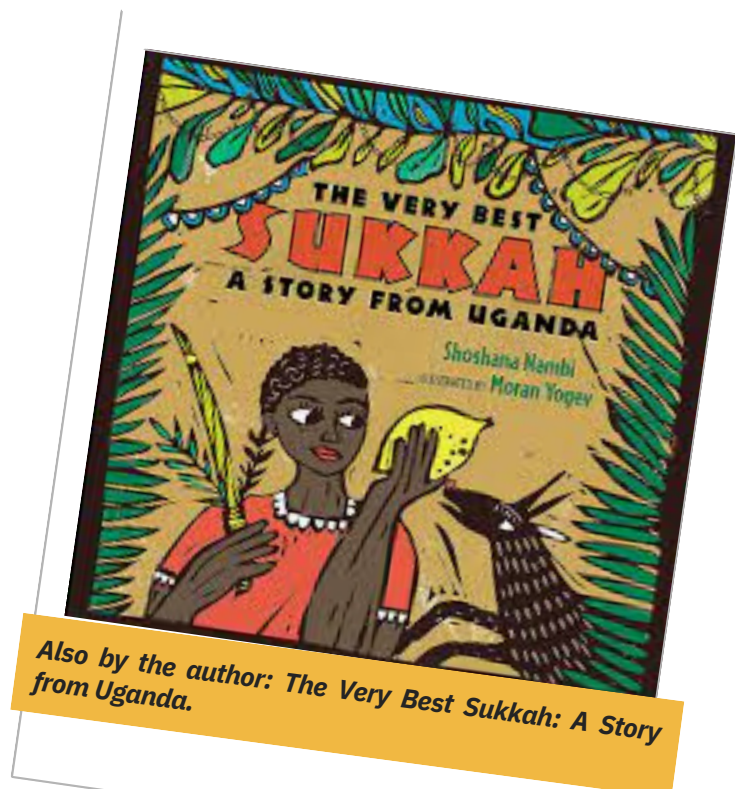
A child can see the contrast, without even reading the text—from the bright, busy energy of the week day, to the softer, golden calm of Shabbat. The art doesn't just decorate the story. It carries it.

The tone is nurturing rather than didactic. Nambi doesn't lecture children about rest or mindfulness. She lets the scenes do the teaching. The language is simple and lyrical, making it a lovely read-aloud for ages 4 to 8, and it works beautifully for both Jewish and interfaith families.

That said, the book doesn't pause to explain every Jewish custom. Terms like "mitzvot" or "kiddush" appear without definition, which assumes some prior familiarity. For some readers, that might mean an adult steps in to fill in the gaps. But that's also where the conversation begins.

Of course, the slow, meditative pacing won't suit every child. If you're expecting action or a fast-moving plot, this isn't it. But that's intentional. *Slow Down, Shoshi!* is less an adventure and more a grounding experience. It lingers instead of rushing. It reminds you that identity can be layered. One can be Ugandan and Jewish, local and global, modern and traditional without contradiction.

This book left me with a sense of calm I didn't expect. In a world that rarely stops moving, there's something radical about a story that asks us to do just that. For families wanting to broaden their children's understanding of what Jewish life looks like around the world, *Slow Down, Shoshi!* is a beautiful place to start. It's a visual hug, and occasionally, that's precisely what we need.





A football match between players from the host Akwa Ibom Jewish Community and visiting players from Jewish communities across Nigeria during the 2025 National Jewish Youth Seminar in Southern Nigeria, featuring 100% Jewish footballers.

Nigeria Leads a Growing Jewish Sporting Movement in West Africa



By Israel Abraham

A Jewish sporting movement is emerging across West Africa, with Nigeria leading the way. While neighboring countries are only beginning to build the frameworks for organized Jewish athletics, Nigeria already fields active football clubs and two youth teams, alongside a small but growing number of individual athletes making their mark in kickboxing, swimming, tennis, and soon, perhaps, volleyball. Behind the games and the training sessions, a quieter process is also underway: the country's bid to formally join the structures of world Jewish sport.



For decades, the South African Maccabi Union has stood alone as Sub-Saharan Africa's only recognized voice within the Maccabi World Union, the body that governs the Maccabiah Games. What is happening in Nigeria now, both on the pitch and in a widening field of individual sport is best understood as the first serious attempt to build a second one

Now, Nigeria's Jewish football scene rests on four teams: Maccabi FCN and Harachman FC at the club level, and Mehamizrach FC and a National Youth Team developing the next generation of players. Together they form the most organized Jewish sporting structure anywhere in West Africa: regularly training, playing friendlies against professional and community clubs alike, and using the pitch as a gathering point for community life rather than a separate, purely competitive pursuit.

Some players of Maccabi FC Nigeria join the global Bedikat HaMayim pre-Pesach cleanup at Jabi Lake, collecting plastic waste to promote marine conservation through the Tikkun HaYam ("Repair the Sea") initiative.



That community dimension has always run alongside the competitive one. Players from Maccabi FC Nigeria have taken part in Repair the Sea's cleanup of Jabi Lake, and the club has played exhibition matches at gatherings like Camp Sarah and Simchat Torah football activities, turning sport into a shared celebration rather than a separate activity. That pattern continued Sunday, July 5, when Maccabi FC Nigeria faced Runners FC in an Abuja Youth Shabbat friendly at Kubwa. In August, the club is looking to return to the field for possibly two matches during Camp Sarah.



Female footballers representing Jewish communities from across Nigeria prepare to face their opponents during the 2025 National Jewish Youth Seminar in Akwa Ibom State, showcasing the growing role of women in Jewish sports.

Mehamizrach FC and the National Youth Team have their rhythm built directly around religious life: the two sides play each other at the close of the National Youth Shabbat, an event that draws Jewish youth from across Nigeria to keep Shabbat together before turning, on Sunday, to football. Every player on both sides is Jewish—the match is less a standalone fixture than the athletic close to a weekend built around communal prayer and observance, which is as much the point as the result on the scoreboard

Shlomo Yaakov, the head coach of Maccabi FC Nigeria, has been deepening his credentials alongside the team, enrolling in an AMAC coaching course even as he continues to lead the club and teach at Gihon Eden Academy. It is a dual role—coach and educator—that mirrors the broader pattern in Nigeria's Jewish sporting life, where the same small group of committed individuals often carries responsibility across both the pitch and the classroom, a story explored in From the Bimah to the Football Pitch, which follows Shlomo's work at Gihon Hebrew Synagogue and his commitment to nurturing both faith and football.

Maccabi FC Nigeria players gather before their friendly match against Runners FC following the Abuja Youth Shabbat, hosted by Tikavat Yisrael Synagogue in Abuja. The match ended in a 1–1 draw.



A Cycle Missed, A Longer Goal in View

Maccabiah 2026, the quadrennial gathering known as the “Jewish Olympics,” opened in Jerusalem on July 1 after its postponement in 2025, drawing thousands of athletes from dozens of countries. Nigeria's clubs did not make the trip this cycle. But that absence has only sharpened focus on a longer-term goal shared across the region: a future in which Sub-Saharan African Jewish athletes have a structured pathway toward the Maccabiah Games, rather than relying on informal relationships and one-off invitations.

That vision builds on the groundwork explored in *Africa's Jewish Sporting Revolution*: Inside the Formation of MAC, which examines the emergence of the Maccabi African Confederation and the growing network of Jewish sporting activity across the continent. Within that broader movement, Nigeria's football clubs remain central—not as a finished product but as the most developed base from which organizers hope to build a lasting pathway to future Maccabiah participation.

Football remains the most visible face of Nigeria's Jewish sporting life, but it is no longer the only one. A Nigerian Jewish athlete is currently building a career in kickboxing. In Lagos, a Jewish swimmer trains competitively in the water. A young Nigerian Jewish girl, under fourteen, has taken up table tennis, suggesting the next generation of talent may not come through football at all. And team sport may be next to grow: a woman has reached out about the possibility of organizing Nigeria's first Jewish women's volleyball team—an early, exploratory conversation, but one organizer is taking it seriously as a sign of where interest is heading.

Most of these individual pursuits yet don't have the structure that football does: no club, no league, no fixed training ground. But that is roughly where Nigeria's football clubs started too, as informal gatherings before they became organized teams with coaches and fixtures. If the pattern holds, today's lone athletes may be the seeds of tomorrow's second and third organized sports. And the volleyball inquiry may be the first sign of Nigeria's next team sport taking shape.



Ha'arachman FC players pose before their Sukkot friendly match against Uruan Feeders. Ha'arachman FC secured a convincing 4–0 victory.



A Jewish teenager continues to train diligently to become a skilled table tennis player, pursuing the dream of representing Nigeria at the 2030 Maccabiah Games in Israel.

What sets Nigeria apart is not any single team or athlete, but the combination: an organized league structure at home and a widening base of individual sport growing alongside it. Other communities have athletes. Nigeria has athletes, teams, and coaches. It is a distinction worth naming plainly, because it is easy, from outside Africa, to assume Jewish sporting life on the continent is a single, uniform story. It is not. It is a patchwork of communities at very different stages, and Nigeria's stage happens to be the most advanced.

The comparison across the region is stark. In Ghana and Zimbabwe, Jewish sporting activity is still at the stage of building basic frameworks—early conversations and organizing, not yet active teams. In Cameroon, community leaders have expressed readiness to contribute to recruitment and development, but no active teams have yet formed there either.

In other countries across the continent, there are various pockets of sporting activity, although football is not one of them. Uganda's Jewish community has moved toward basketball and netball, with an emerging female netball team and interest building around basketball, alongside individual athletes such as competitive track and field athletes and a chess player. Kenya has a promising table tennis player and a marathon runner, alongside its established lawn tennis and long-distance running talent. Ethiopia has its own long-distance running culture, and swimming activity has been seen on the island of Madagascar off the East African coast. Morocco's Jewish sporting scene is formidable, with a long-established football culture. But nowhere else in West Africa has organized team sport reached the scale Nigeria has built, characterized by professional football clubs and youth teams, all playing regular fixtures.

Nigeria's rise doesn't happen in isolation. Across the continent, Jewish sporting life is taking shape unevenly and sometimes in unexpected places. In Uganda, beyond the emerging female netball team, organizers are exploring the idea of a men's basketball team—an early conversation, much like Nigeria's own volleyball inquiry, but one more sign that team sports for young athletes is a growing interest across the region rather than a one-off idea.

Morocco, home to one of Africa's oldest and largest Jewish communities, has a sporting culture that is formidable by any regional comparison and built on decades of established communal infrastructure rather than a recent revival. And in a different but related story, Cape Verde's extraordinary run at the 2026 World Cup, becoming the smallest nation ever to reach the tournament's knockout stage after historic draws against Spain and Uruguay, has drawn fresh attention to the island's Sephardic Jewish history. Forward Gilson Benchimol, who wears the No. 9 shirt for Cape Verde, carries a surname that traces directly to that history: Hillel Benchimol, a Tetouani Jewish merchant who settled on the island of Santiago in the 19th century and whose grave remains a recognized heritage site in Cape Verde today. According to Carol Castiel, president of the Cape Verde Jewish Heritage Project, every Benchimol in Cape Verde descends from that Jewish lineage, even though the community assimilated fully generations ago and no longer practices Judaism. Fittingly, Cape Verde's World Cup squad also includes Portugal-based defender Hélio Varela, whose club side is Maccabi Tel Aviv, which is another small thread tying this West African World Cup story back to Jewish life. Jewish sports stories here span multiple countries and continents.

Building for Continuity

None of these matters if it lasts only one generation. Continuity—not any single match, tournament, or headline—is what will determine whether Nigeria's Jewish sporting life becomes a lasting institution or a moment that fades once its current athletes retire and move on. It is not enough to say Nigeria has Jewish athletes today if there is no clear path to having them tomorrow.

That is where the schools come in. Institutions like Brachot Yeshiva and Bal Shem Tov and growing academies like Ardent Hebrew Academy and Gihon Eden Academy build the land of Israel directly

Israel directly into their curriculum—not as distant history but as living context, covering the Maccabiah Games alongside Israel's geography and tourist sites. A child who grows up learning about Maccabiah in the classroom is a child who grows up expecting, one day, to take part in it, whether through a future MAC tournament or the Maccabi Games itself.

That is what sustains a movement long after any single event or headline has faded: a generation of Jewish children in Nigeria who see themselves, from an early age, as part of the story rather than spectators to it. Football clubs and individual athletes give the country's Jewish sporting life its present. The classrooms are what will give it a future.

None of this activity happens on a fast or predictable timeline. Building organized sport from informal beginnings takes years, as Nigeria's own football clubs demonstrate—friendlies that grew into a four-team structure only after sustained community investment and media coverage. The same will likely be true for Uganda's basketball idea, Kenya's emerging individual talent, and Nigeria's own kickboxer, swimmer, and tennis player.

But the direction of travel is clear enough: a football program that has grown from friendlies into a four-team structure, a widening field of individual athletes in sports the community had no presence in a few years ago, and similar early signs of growth echoing across Uganda, Kenya, and beyond. Few Sub-Saharan Jewish communities outside South Africa can say as much.

That is precisely what MAC organizers are watching. If a continental Jewish sporting body takes shape in the coming years, Nigeria's clubs, coaches, and now its individual athletes give it one of the clearest starting points on the continent. This development is proof that, even without a single launch event to mark the moment, the movement is already underway, community by community, across West and East Africa alike.



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