



Uganda's Bark Cloth

The history of barkcloth in Uganda, goes back over 700 years, used initially as clothing, even pre-dating weaving in Europe. For many tribes in Uganda, barkcloth is historically significant. The Kings of Uganda ruled with absolute power in the civilisation, which was steeped in unchanging culture and tradition. Barkcloth was and to this day remains an essential part of this history with vital cultural and ritual significance. The cloth adorns cultural sites and shrines, is worn at important ceremonial occasions and is used in burying the dead. In 2005, Ugandan barkcloth manufacturing was inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage of Humanity List. Elegyo Marakwet Farm's role is to revive and preserve this dying part of our culture and its significance by bringing it to the forefront.

It gets its name from its source – the soft bark of the Omutoma trees – and the process of making it is steeped in ancient culture and tradition. For many tribes in Uganda, Barkcloth is a sacred fabric with strong cultural and ritual significance. Barkcloth is repeatedly harvested from the same Omutoma tree, and after each harvest, the tree is protectively wrapped to allow the bark to regrow.

There is renewed interest in barkcloth in contemporary Ugandan and global culture because the industry nurtures the environment, and some local programs that are working towards revitalising the ancient art of making barkcloth have been beneficiaries of funding. Today many decorative uses for bark cloth have emerged, and items such as; bags, purses, furniture, placemats, coasters, cushion covers can be bought in any of the craft markets all over the country. In rural Uganda, barkcloth is commonly used as curtains, mosquito screens and bedding.