

INDIGENOUS CRAFTS OF GUYANA



A Directory

INDIGENOUS CRAFTS OF GUYANA

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional crafts of Indigenous peoples hold cultural meaning and represent centuries-old traditions, passed down through the generations. These crafts are not merely objects; they are repositories of cultural heritage, storytelling, and spiritual connection to the land.

Craft plays an important role in the everyday life of Indigenous communities in Guyana, serving both practical and cultural purposes. Baskets, mats, and hammocks woven from local fibres serve as essential items for storage, seating, and sleeping. Pottery vessels are used for storing water, cooking traditional dishes, and ceremonial purposes. Traps, arrows and bows help in securing needed protein staples.

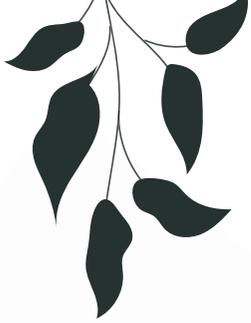
In the face of advancing technologies, Indigenous communities are experiencing significant changes in their lifestyles, livelihoods and ways of living. These changes present both challenges and opportunities for the preservation of traditional crafts. As younger generations move for school and jobs, there is an increased loss or dilution of traditional knowledge. Nevertheless, Indigenous communities are working on ways to safeguard craft knowledge through formal and informal training programmes, peer exchanges and mentoring of young crafters.

This directory presents craft items that have significant livelihood importance and are currently being made and used in Indigenous communities in Guyana. They were documented through craftswomen and craftsmen from villages of Regions 1, 3 and 9 who were engaged in the project Conserving Nature through Traditional Craft and Culture in Guyana funded by the National Geographic Society. We hope you enjoy learning about the rich diversity of crafts and Indigenous knowledge still present today.

GLOSSARY

L - Lokono (Arawak)
M - Makushi
W - Wapishana
Wu - Warrau





FANS



Common name: Cassava Bread Fan
Indigenous names: Wariwari (L), Ari wo' (M), Awaribai Badi Tannaa (W), Zami (Wu)
Materials made from: Awara, Kuriyu, Arowa
Patterns: Horse hoof
Uses: Fan fires, bake cassava bread, cool a person down
Length of time to make: One to two days
Expected lifespan: One year



Common name: Farine Fan
Indigenous names: Wiriwo' (M), Awaribai O'i Tannaa (W)
Materials made from: Awara, Kuriyu, Arowa
Patterns: Marudi chest
Uses: Fan fires, remove farine from pan
Length of time to make: Two days
Expected lifespan: One year



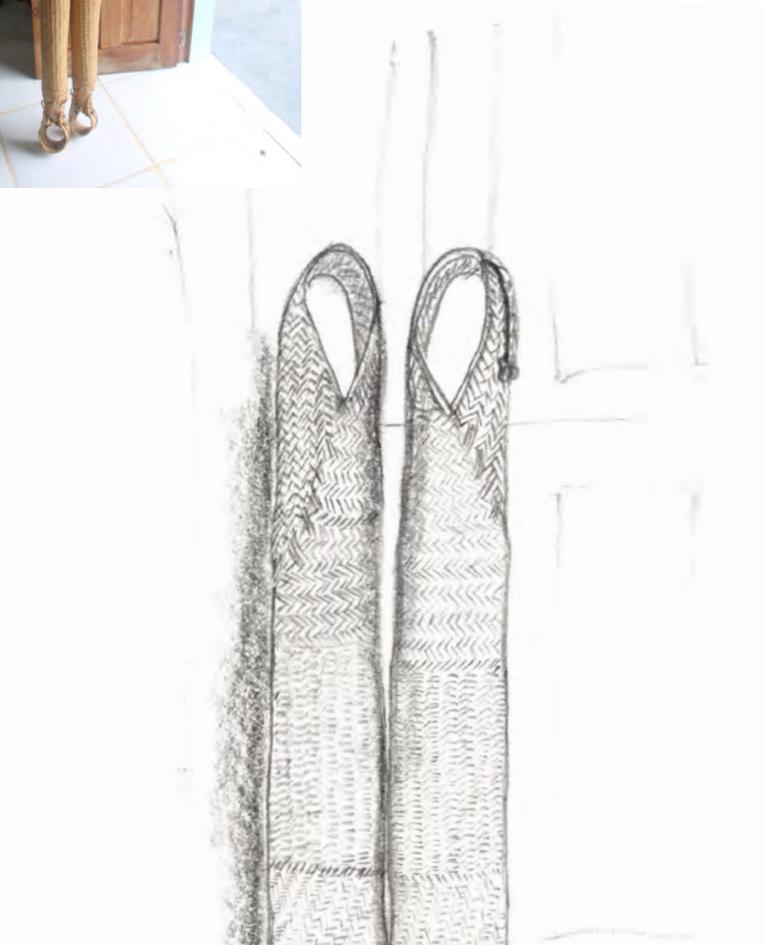
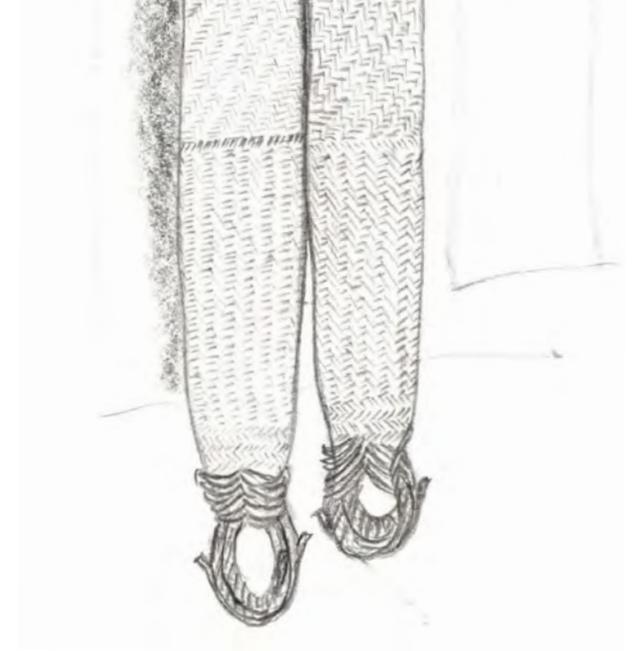
Common name: Round Fan
Indigenous names: Mara yare (M), Kadazdau'o Awaribai (W), Kobera Yami (Wu)
Materials made from: Awara spire
Patterns: Horse hoof
Uses: Fan fires, flip cassava bread
Length of time to make: One day
Expected lifespan: One year



MATAPEES



Common name: Matapee
Indigenous names: Yoro (L), Tinki' (M), Niizo (W), Aruhuba (Wu)
Materials made from: Mukuru, Nibbi, Ascitar
Patterns: Labba teeth, Ité plaiting, Camudi plaiting, Wapishana plaiting, Yarrow ribs, Hassar scale
Uses: Squeeze cassava meal, decoration
Length of time to make: Two to three days, longer if the pattern is complicated
Expected lifespan: Approximately six months



WAPISHANA PATTERNS



MAKUSHI PATTERNS



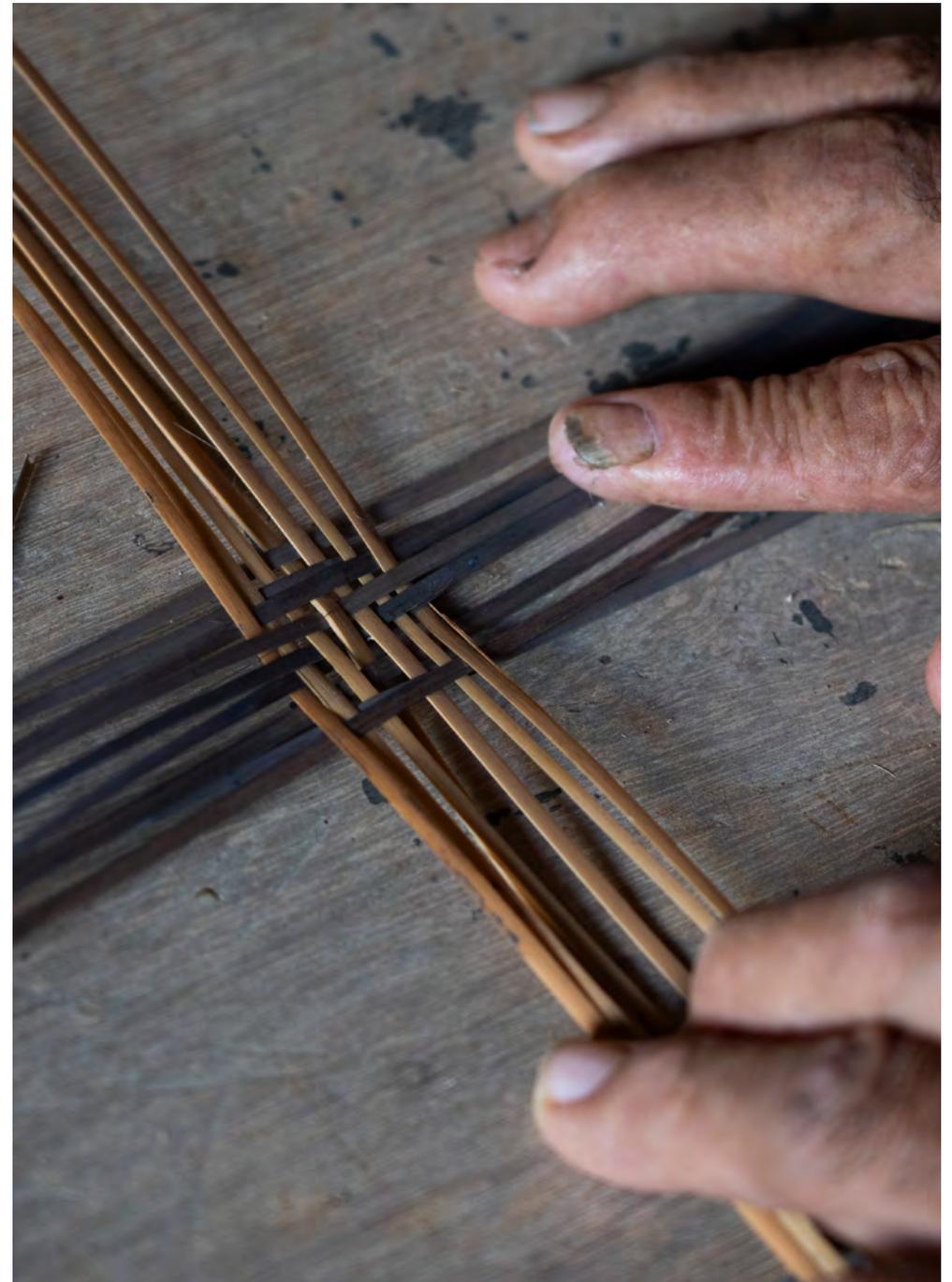
LOOKING AFTER YOUR MATAPEE

Before using your matapee, it should be soaked, especially the head and tail, or if preferred, the whole body. Since cassava water degrades the Ascitar and Mukuru fibres used to make matapees, care should be taken when using these items. For example, when making paiwari (drink made of burnt cassava bread by Lokono peoples), a mould should be made to hold the weight or the matapee could break or be damaged. When loading the matapee with cassava meal, do not use your foot, instead rest the matapee in a bucket or basin so it does not get away from you.

Matapees made from Ascitar last longer than those made from Mukuru. The average lifespan of a matapee is approximately six months. So, take time to inspect your matapee before use and repair any sections that are damaged. Importantly, ensure you clean it thoroughly before storing.

SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

If you look inside a matapee, a camudi (anaconda) will swallow you. Squeeze the matapee over the belly of a pregnant woman if she is having a hard labour to help ease the birth.



SIFTERS



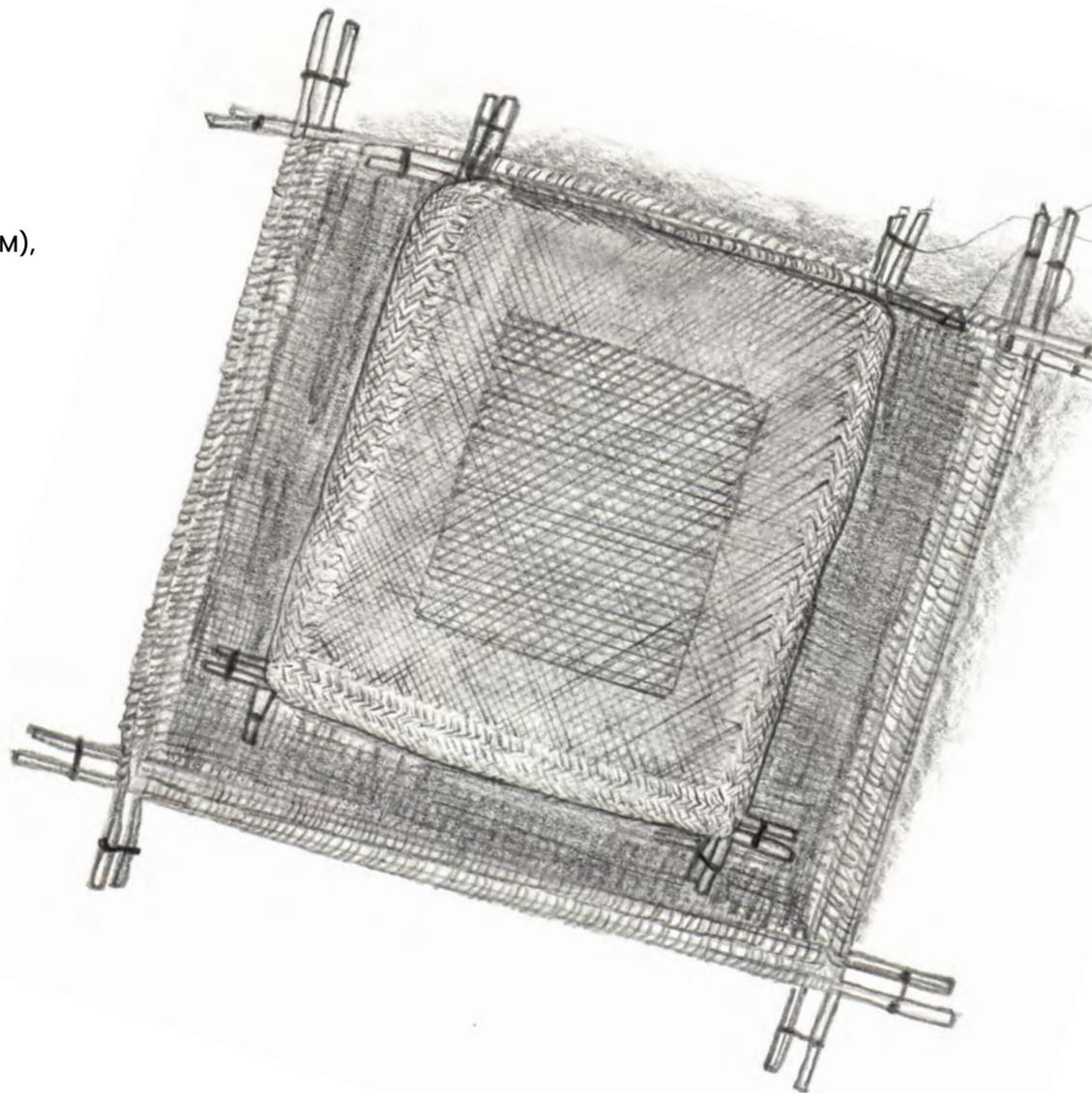
Common name: Cassava Bread Sifter
Indigenous names: Manari (L) Ikai yainonkato' (M), Manaru Badi Tannaa (W), Manari (Wu)
Materials made from: Muku
Patterns: Armadillo shell, Button/Diamond fish
Uses: Sift cassava meal for cassava bread
Length of time to make: Two days
Expected lifespan: Six month to two years



Common name: Farine Sifter
Indigenous names: U'wiyainonkato' (M), Manaru O'i Tannaa (W)
Materials made from: Muku
Patterns: Kiwo (kokrite worm hole), Iwo worm hole (40 strips), Kisiri
Uses: Sift cassava meal for farine making
Length of time to make: Seven days
Expected lifespan: Three years



Common name: Kari Sifter
Indigenous names: Parakri Koromoto' (M), Manaru Parakari Tannaa (Manaru Parakari Zorookinao) (W)
Materials made from: Muku (strips are thinner)
Uses: Strain kari (cassava drink), sift cassava bread but takes longer
Length of time to make: Two days
Expected lifespan: Two to three years

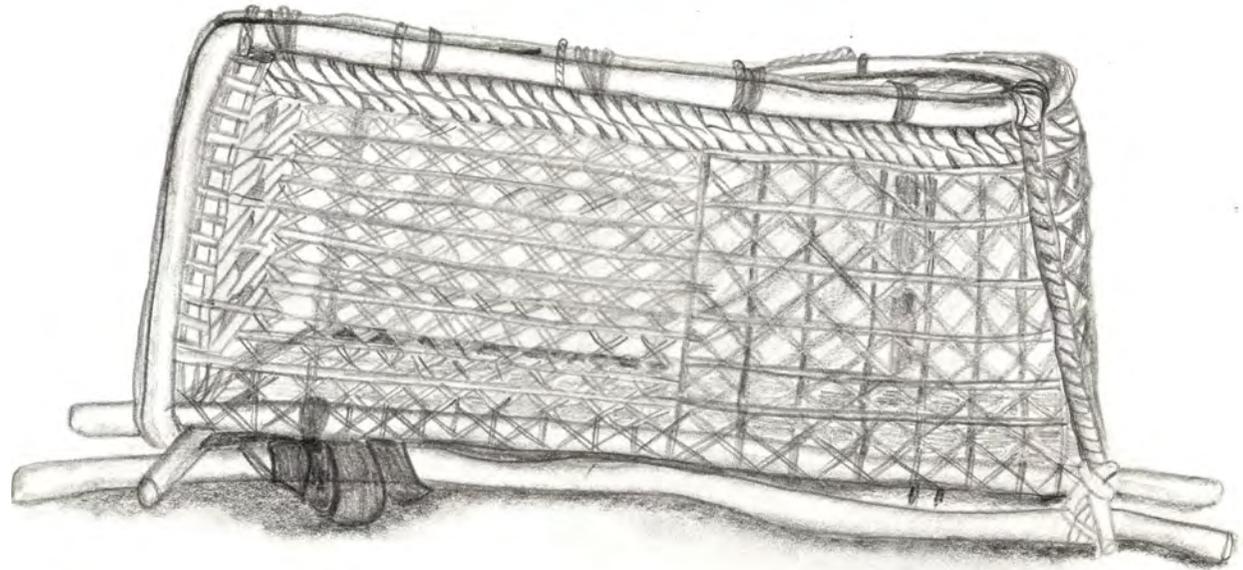


SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS



If you bathe under a sifter, it will remove a bad eye (curse).
If you pour water through a new sifter to bathe, your enemies can't see you or are oblivious of you.

WARISHIS



Common name: Warishi

Indigenous names: Warishi (L), Ruttī Kararinpī (M), Kawarada Dopaawai (W), Ahutu (Wu)

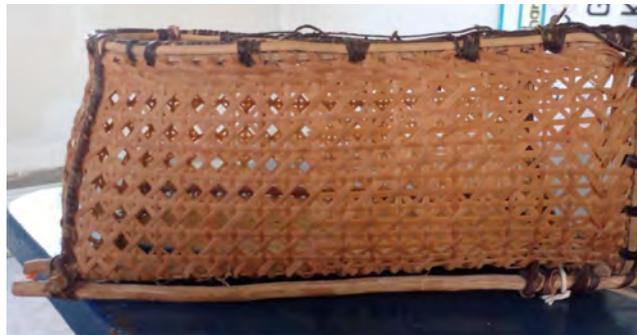
Materials made from: Mukuru, Nibbi

Pattern: Big eye, Iwo worm hole, Diamond, Round eye

Uses: Carry items including farm produce

Length of time to make: Two to four days

Expected lifespan: One year



Common name: Child's Warishi

Indigenous names: Kiwo'pipī (M), Koraidaonaa Dopaawa (W), Noboto Ahutu (Wu)

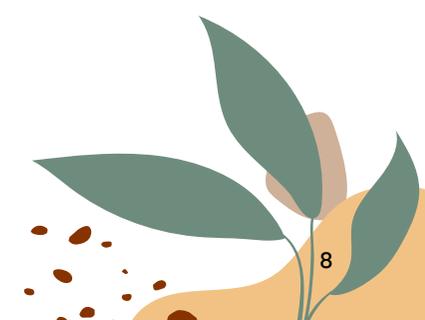
Materials made from: Mukuru, Nibbi, Loo, Manicole

Pattern: Deer eye, Tikasan, Moru nakata pipī, Kara sai pipī, Sika pakapī

Uses: Carry items such as farm produce and firewood

Length of time to make: Four days

Expected lifespan: One year



SHUMBAS



Common name: Farine Shumba

Indigenous names: Sunpa (M),
Sombaara (W)

Materials made from: Mukuru

Uses: Storage of cassava bread and farine,
kari dust, pepper

Length of time to make: One day

Expected lifespan: Three years



Common name: Round Shumba

Indigenous names: Oopa (M), Kadazdau'o Sombaara
(Awaubaara) (W)

Materials made from: Mukuru (bottom uses 100 strips)

Uses: Carry items and food storage

Length of time to make: Seven days

Expected lifespan: Five years

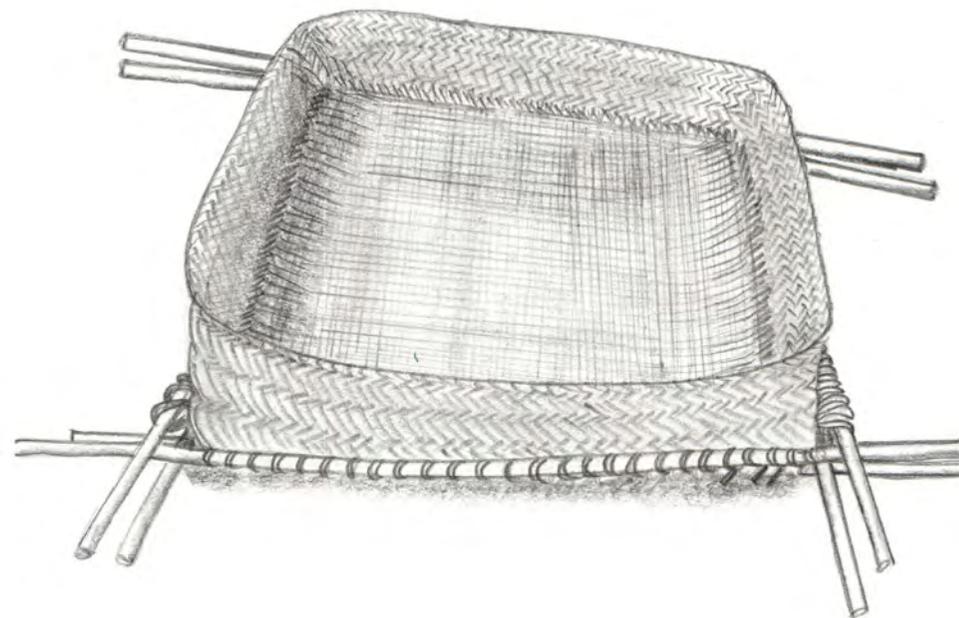




Common name: Square Shumba
Indigenous names: Pi'mupa (M), Kadanoma'ó Sombaara (W)
Materials made from: Mukuru
Uses: Carry items and storage of farine
Length of time to make: Seven days for the large version
Expected lifespan: Five years



Common name: Flat Shumba
Indigenous names: Shumba (M), Sombaaran (W)
Materials made from: Mukuru
Pattern: Maikan yei ma'pî (fox tracks), Spider monkey
Uses: Carry items and storage of cassava, kambu (roasted/smoked meat or fish), beat cotton
Length of time to make: Seven days
Expected lifespan: Five years



Common name: Square Shumba with legs
Indigenous names: Haba (L), Kataba'u'ó Sombaara (W), Bihi (Wu)
Materials made from: Mukuru
Uses: Lokono and Warrau use to collect sifted cassava meal
Length of time to make: Two days
Expected lifespan: Two to three years



CASSAVA MAMA (TRADITIONAL FOLK SONG)

(Chorus)

Cassava Mama, in the fields she sway,
Underneath the sun's warm ray.
Cassava Mama, her roots run deep,
In our hearts, her secrets we keep.

(Verse 1)

In the morning light, she starts to rise,
In the earth, her spirit lies.
With hands that toil, and hearts that sing,
We harvest her bounty, the joy it brings.

(Chorus)

Cassava Mama, in the fields she sway,
Underneath the sun's warm ray.
Cassava Mama, her roots run deep,
In our hearts, her secrets we keep.

(Verse 2)

From dawn 'til dusk, we work the land,
With love and care, we lend a hand.
Her leaves, they whisper tales untold,
Of generations past, brave and bold.

(Chorus)

Cassava Mama, in the fields she sway,
Underneath the sun's warm ray.
Cassava Mama, her roots run deep,
In our hearts, her secrets we keep.

(Bridge)

With mortar and pestle, we grind her down,
Into flour, golden and brown.
In pots and pans, her magic we weave,
Nourishing bodies, in her we believe.

(Chorus)

Cassava Mama, in the fields she sway,
Underneath the sun's warm ray.
Cassava Mama, her roots run deep,
In our hearts, her secrets we keep.

(Outro)

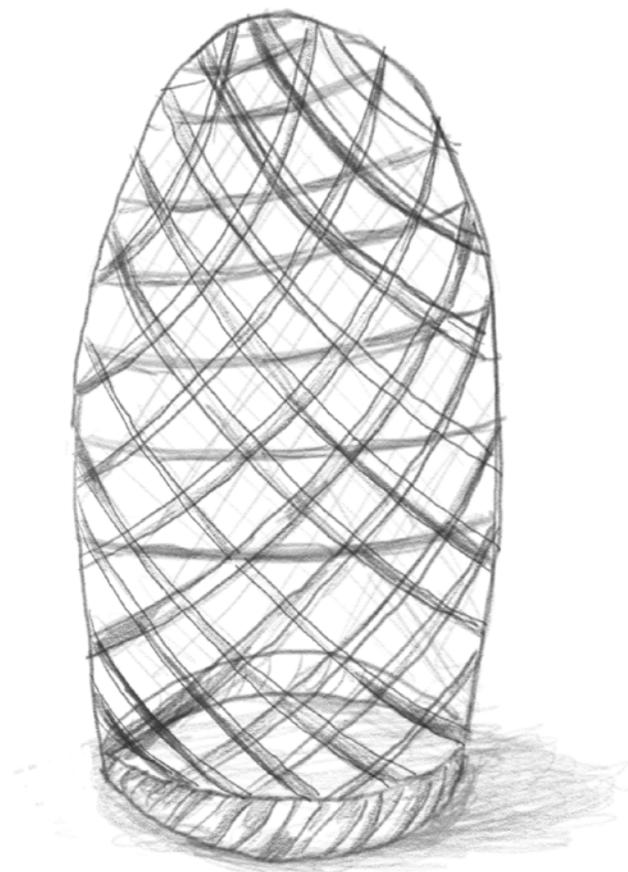
So here's to Cassava Mama, forever true,
In our songs, our dances, in all we do.
For she's the heart of our land, our pride and joy,
Cassava Mama, our roots deploy.



BASKETS



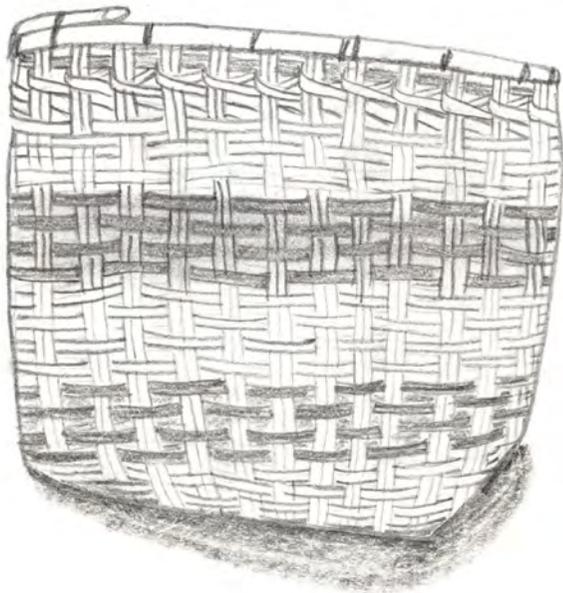
Common name: Crab Quake
Indigenous names: Kwake (L), Kwarada (W), He U (Wu)
Materials made from: Mukuru
Uses: Carry crabs, transport cassava
Length of time to make: Half a day
Expected lifespan: Three months



Common name: Back Quake
Indigenous names: Kwarada (W), Miyo (Wu)
Materials made from: Mukuru, Nibbi, bark of the Maho, Baramali and Yari Yari can be stripped to make straps
Uses: Carry cassava, firewood, baby over long distances, and storage (mainly an Arawak item). The quake is set high on a tree and then the person sets themselves to rest the quake on their back. There is a head strap to help ease pressure on the back.
Length of time to make: Two days
Expected lifespan: Two years



Common name: Square Basket
Indigenous names: Mu'ru Pi'pi (M), Dazoan (W)
Materials made from: Mukuru
Pattern: Cobweb bottom
Uses: Storage of farine
Length of time to make: One to two days
Expected lifespan: Two to three years



Common name: Square Basket
Indigenous names: Wayanmuri waikara'pi (m), Dazoan (W)
Materials made from: Mukuru, Nibbi
Pattern: Spider web bottom
Uses: Storage
Length of time to make: Three days
Expected lifespan: Two years



Common name: Cotton Basket (M/W)/Egg Basket (L)

Indigenous names: Me'ro Wenmuku (M),
Kinaridi Dziidiribanaa (W), Ukobo U (Wu)

Materials made from: Mukuru

Uses: Cotton storage

Length of time to make: One day

Expected lifespan: Two years



Common name: Fish Basket

Indigenous names: Me'ro Wenmuku (M),
Kopau Dazoinizinaa (W), Homakaba U (Wu)

Materials made from: Mukuru

Uses: Carry fine fish

Length of time to make: One day

Expected lifespan: Two years



Common name: Big-eye Basket

Indigenous names: Krafibe (M), Aradu'o Dazoan (W)

Materials made from: Mukuru, Nibbi

Uses: Carry items and storage of kambu
(roasted/smoked meat or fish) and cotton balls

Length of time to make: One day

Expected lifespan: Two years





AN ARAWAK STORY

In ancient times, in order to marry, Arawak men had to prove their hunting and plaiting skills. A young man, confident he only needed to catch crabs and clear a field, married without mastering basket plaiting skills. On a crab-catching trip, he pretended to weave a quake but unable to do so, had to put the crabs in his hammock. Realising his lack of knowledge, his wife left him for her old lover. Ashamed, the man sought his mother's help to learn plaiting, and she put him in touch with an elder in another village. After a year, the young man returned, and showing off his new skills, impressed both the community and his wife. Realising her lover's laziness, the wife returned to her husband, but he rejected her, content to remain alone in his hammock and was glad to hear her go.



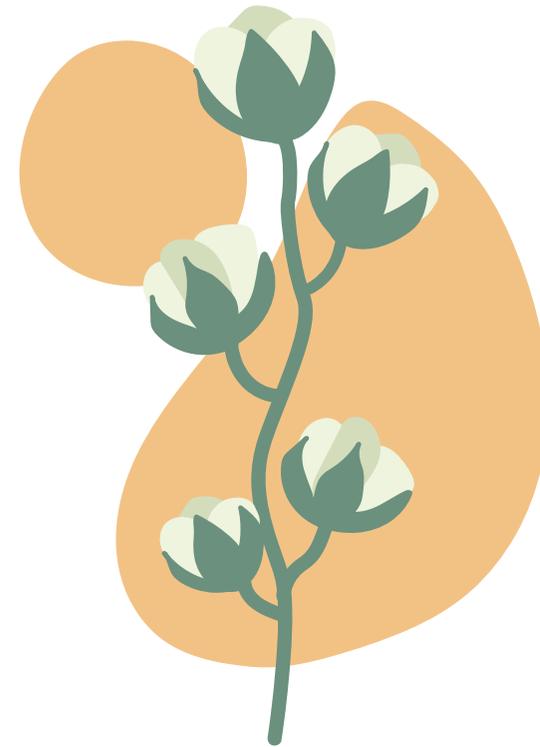
COTTON WEAVING



Common name: Baby Sling
Indigenous names: Temî (L) Wenne' (M), Koraidaonaa didimanaa (Didimai) (W), Doanakaha (Wu)
Materials made from: White and brown cotton
Uses: To carry babies
Length of time to make: Two days
Expected lifespan: Five years



Common name: Toddler Sling
Indigenous names: Wêna (L), Wenne' (M), Didimai (W)
Materials made from: White and brown cotton
Patterns: Armadillo chest
Uses: To carry babies
Length of time to make: Three days
Expected lifespan: Five years



Common name: Hammock
Indigenous names: Sensóro (L), Atta' (M), Karaishai aradu'u, dado (W), Ukobotoha (Wu)
Materials made from: White and brown cotton, Tibisiri straw
Pattern: Armadillo shell, Makushi fast weave
Uses: For sleeping and relaxing
Length of time to make: One to two weeks
Expected lifespan: One year (Makushi fast weave), three years (Armadillo shell)



A MAKUSHI TRADITION

In the olden days when Indigenous girls entered puberty, they were separated from the family and given a basket (me'ro wenmuku) which the girl kept near her hammock. Inside the basket she would have had cotton, a spindle, annatto powder lipstick, a little stick to scratch skin from kokorite bark, a comb, head tie, spoon, and arrow-guide when going out marked with annatto and blessed to point the girl away from spirits. From this age, she was expected to spin the cotton into a ball and have enough cotton thread to make a hammock. She would also be given a calabash bowl and a small pot for cooking and eating (for her use only). These utensils were broken and buried after her period of isolation.





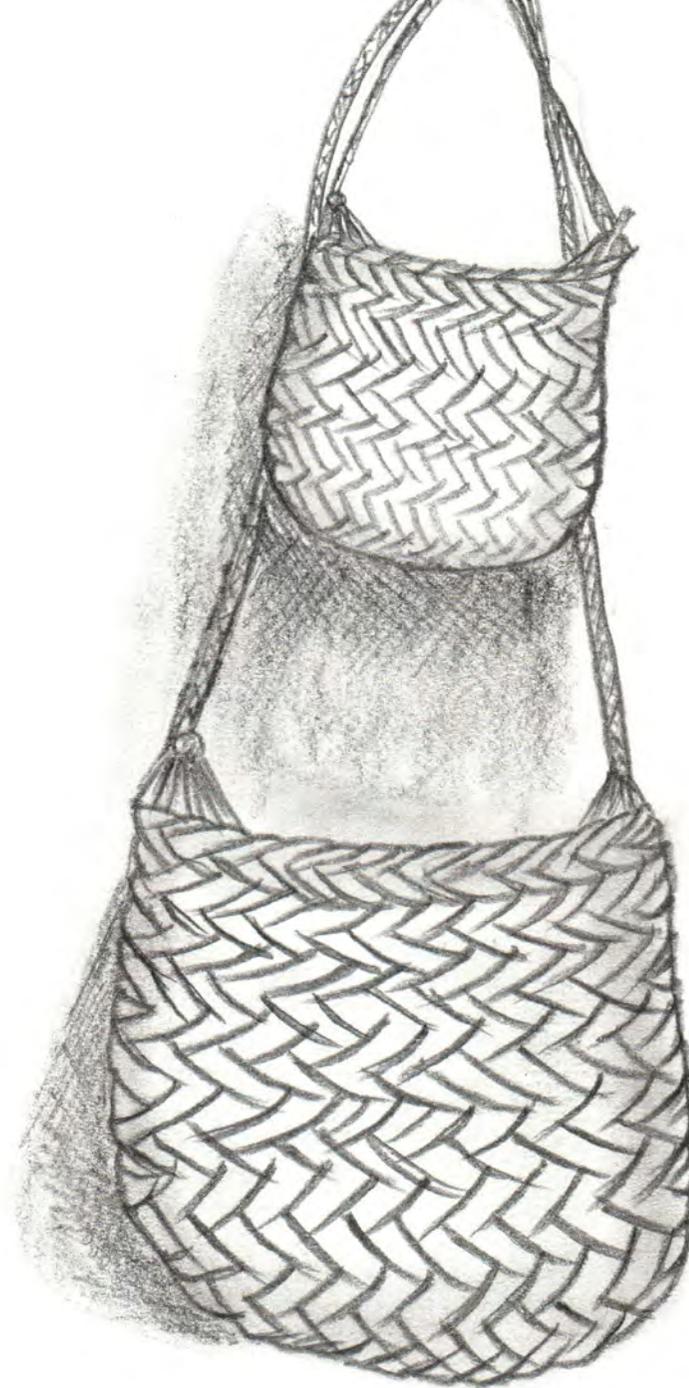
ITÉ BASKETS

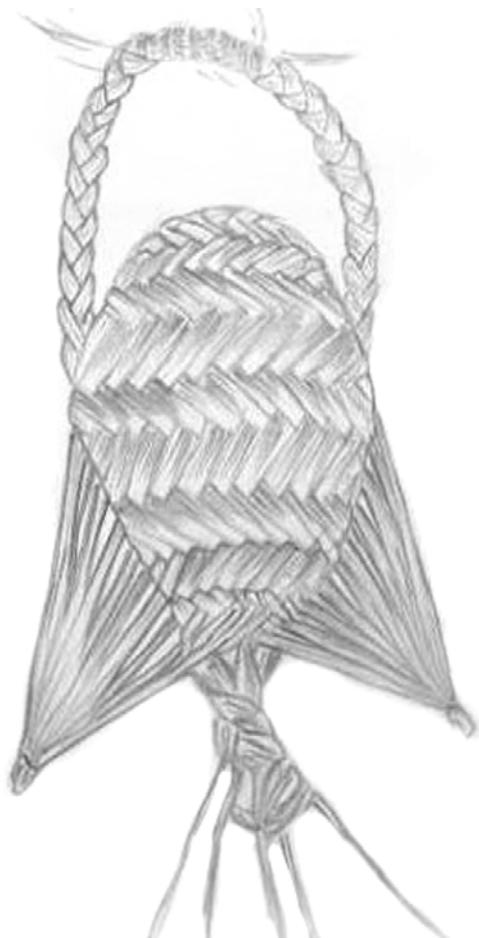


Common name: Baboon Jaw
Indigenous names: Arauta mata (M),
Soburu korokoron (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Fish basket for storing fishing gear
Length of time to make: One hour
Expected lifespan: One to two years



Common name: Baboon Ears
Indigenous names: Arauta pana (M),
Soburu tain (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Fish basket for storage
Length of time to make: One hour
Expected lifespan: One to two years





Common name: Duck Tail
Indigenous names: Mai'wa Yauki (M), Bai dyuo (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Fish basket for carrying pots
Length of time to make: One hour
Expected lifespan: One to two years



Common name: Hog Head
Indigenous names: Karuma (M), Bakuru zowau (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Purse, fish basket, storing items
Length of time to make: One hour
Expected lifespan: One to two years



Common name: Chicken Nest
Indigenous names: Kariwana pon (M), Kuruku shimaka (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Chicken nest and storing food items
Length of time to make: One hour
Expected lifespan: Nine to ten months

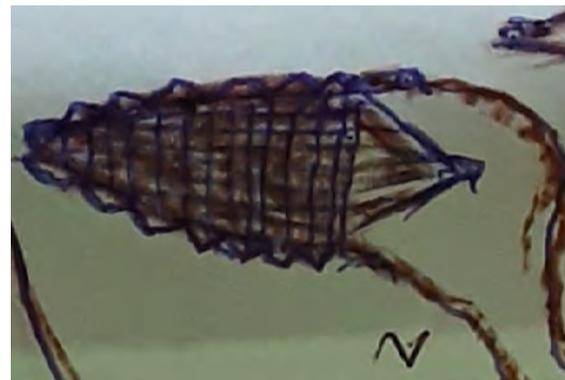




Common name: Cacique Nest
Indigenous names: Sorika (M),
Kabishako shimaka (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Carry water bottles, fish and other items
Length of time to make: One hour
Expected lifespan: One to two years



Common name: Ite Warishi
Indigenous names: Waiari (L), Kuwai yare ruttî (M)
Kishinawuda (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Carry smoked fish and meat
Length of time to make: 30 minutes to one hour
Expected lifespan: One off use



Common name: Caiman Chest
Indigenous names: Kuratu Roppo'ta (M), Atoru dokoridi (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Carry and store items
Length of time to make: One hour
Expected lifespan: One to two years



Common name: Flat Mat
Indigenous names: Ta'bra kuai shumba (M), Somabaara (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Rest food when cooking on camping trips or travelling
Length of time to make: 30 minutes to one hour
Expected lifespan: One off use



Common name: High-edge Basket
Indigenous names: Ku wanan tepi shumba (M), Awaubaara (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Storage or carrying items
Length of time to make: 30 minutes to one hour
Expected lifespan: 1 year



Common name: Eastern Meadowlark Nest
Indigenous names: Suru yette (M), Shizori shimaka (W)
Materials made from: Ité Palm leaves
Uses: Storage of items
Length of time to make: 30 minutes to one
Expected lifespan: One year





TRADING HISTORIES

In the olden days, people from the Indigenous communities would travel to a market at a European settlement to purchase items that would help to make life a little easier. As described by English missionary William Brett in 1861 "On the canoe arriving at the landing place, the bow and arrows, clay cooking-vessels, calabashes, hammocks, and crab-baskets were all brought into view, forming a very complete and striking specimen of original equipage and accommodation. The price of which will supply the family with axes, cutlasses, hoes, and other necessary implements with perhaps a gun, and a few other articles of European manufacture for the ensuing year".

Brett, W.H. (1861). *The Indian tribes of Guiana: their condition and habits, with researches into their past history, superstitions, legends, antiquities, languages &c.* London: Bell and Daldy, p343.

ARROWS



Common name: Metal or Wire Point

Indigenous names: Arami (M), Arami (W), Boza (Wu)

Materials made from: Thick gauge wire, single wire with barbs attached to shaft

Uses: Shooting small fish and small animals

Length of time to make: One hour

Expected lifespan: Depends on what is being shot



Common name: Spear with disk

Indigenous names: Shiparari (L) now known as Parari (L), Si'parare (M), Chipirari (W)

Materials made from: Flattened steel of various lengths with tapering point like a spear, Krawa. A coil mamuri is wrapped around the base of the spear forming a plate, diameter greater than the blade. Disk may not be employed by Makushi and Wapishana. Tibisiri used as string instead of krawa on coast and disk made of rubber or plaited nibbi

Uses: Shooting large animals like deer and jaguar

Length of time to make: Two hours

Expected lifespan: Depends on use and ability to recover



Common name: Spear

Indigenous names: Shiparari (L), Si'parare (M), Wada, Chipirari (W), Dabarabaka (Wu)

Materials made from: Bamboo or Kokorite but now also made with filed down cutlass

Uses: Big game hunting like bush hog, tapir and jaguar

Length of time to make: Two hours

Expected lifespan: Depend on if you are a marksman





Common name: Flat bow
Indigenous names: Warapa (M), Somara (W), Washiba (Wu)
Materials made from: Kabada wood
Uses: Hunting, fishing, teaching bow use
Length of time to make: One to two days
Expected lifespan: One to two years



Common name: Bird Arrow
Indigenous names: Taramai (M), Tapara (W)
Materials made from: Wooden point spread out at the end or with small wood pieces in cross attached to shaft of arrow
Uses: Used to shoot birds, especially pigeons (Maya)
Length of time to make: One to two hours
Expected lifespan: Depends on use and type of wood



Common name: Bird Arrow
Indigenous names: Marwa (L), Kami Samo, Toodau (W), Hikwamu (Wu)
Materials made from: Hardwood such as bullet wood
Uses: Hunt small birds
Length of time to make: 30 minutes
Expected lifespan: Depends on use and type of wood



Common name: Benab Point
Indigenous names: Tikusi (M), Tokochi (W)
Materials made from: Piece of wire embedded in wooden point of arrow
Uses: Shooting birds or fish feeding close to surface of water. Seldom used by people of North Rupununi but continues to be used by South people
Length of time to make: One day
Expected lifespan: Depends as arrows can break or get lost



Common name: Three-Pronged Arrow
Indigenous names: Sarapa (L), Sa'moro (M), Parata (W), Hisebe (Wu)
Materials made from: Metal, bicycle spoke, feather, wires with barbs affixed to a shaft of arrow
Uses: Shooting smaller fish such as yarrow
Length of time to make: Three hours
Expected lifespan: Depends on how you use it



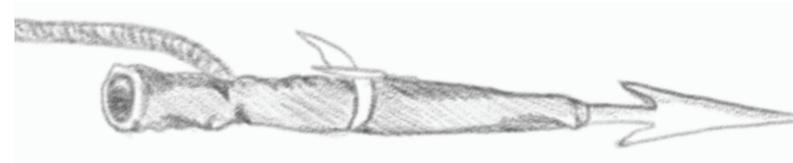
Common name: Drop point on a long line
Indigenous names: Sawo'to (M), Tawaoto (W)
Materials made from: Point with large barbs made from wire nails affixed to wood and embedded in shaft of the arrow with a line attached at the butt of the arrow shaft. Point comes off when fish is shot and immediately pulled in
Uses: Fishing in swift flowing waters e.g. rapids
Length of time to make: Two hours
Expected lifespan: Lasts long and point can be replaced



Common name: Type of drop point
Indigenous names: Aarapon pottí (M), Tawaoto (W)
Materials made from: Piece of wire with barb embedded in wood attached to a shaft of arrow (with line). When the fish is shot the point comes off leaving the arrow with line attached floating in the water, so direction of the fish shot can easily be traced
Uses: Hunt Arapaima and Paku
Length of time to make: Two to three hours
Expected lifespan: Lasts long and the point can be replaced



Common name: Half Moon bow
Indigenous names: Shimarábo (L), Kobada (W)
Materials made from: Cowfoot Tree, Purpleheart, Leopard wood, Savanna Greenheart, Bow bar (Kobada)
Uses: Hunting and fishing
Length of time to make: One day
Expected lifespan: Three to five years



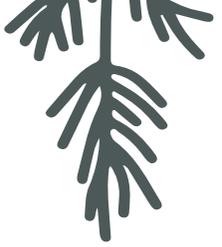
Common name: Turtle Arrow
Indigenous names: Tarau (M), Sazaka (W)
Materials made from: Similar to the Tawaoto but the point is short and has a single barb
Uses: Turtles (only in the Rupununi)
Length of time to make: Three hours
Expected lifespan: Lasts long



HUNTING STORY

Three brothers took their sister hunting, and while they searched for game, the sister remained alone in a benab. Each day they only brought back a powis. Annoyed, she asked for meat, and a nearby singing Adaba (frog) transformed itself into a man and brought her some. He laughed at the brothers poorly made arrows and showed them how to shoot accurately. Impressed, they made him their brother-in-law. But when the sister tried to bathe with him, he revealed his true form as a frog and escaped. Angered, the brothers beat their sister, and the Adaba never returned to bring them luck on hunts again.





POTTERY



Common name: Goblet
Indigenous names: Kubaiao (W)
Materials made fom: Clay
Uses: Storage of liquids such as water and local drinks
Length of time to make: One to three days
Expected lifespan: 10 years



Common name: Tuma pots
Indigenous names: îlinî (M), Kubaiao (W), Horu (Wu)
Materials made from: Clay
Uses: Cooking tuma, must boil cassava water, cassreep or oil in the pot before cooking
Length of time to make: One to three days
Expected lifespan: 5 years



BALATA CRAFT



Common name: Goobie
Indigenous names: Wai (M), Dowada (W)
Materials made from: Balata
Uses: Storage of liquids such as water and local drinks
Length of time to make: One to two hours
Expected lifespan: 15 to 20 years



GRATER



Common name: Cassava Grater
Indigenous names: Samari (L), Sumari (M), Chimari
Badi Tannaa (W) Hoyo (Wu)
Materials made from: Wood, Flint, Stone, Zinc
Uses: Grate cassava
Length of time to make: One week
Expected lifespan: 15 years



GOURDS



Common name: Water Gourd
Indigenous names: Poosi (M) poochi (W)
Ho Kana (Wu)
Materials made from: Squash
Uses: Storage, carrying water or utensils
like spoons



Common name: Big Round Gourd
Indigenous names: ma' (M), kadazadau'o
moto (W) Irija Kobera Kana (Wu)
Materials made from: Squash
Uses: Store Kasiri and Wo' (cassava drinks)



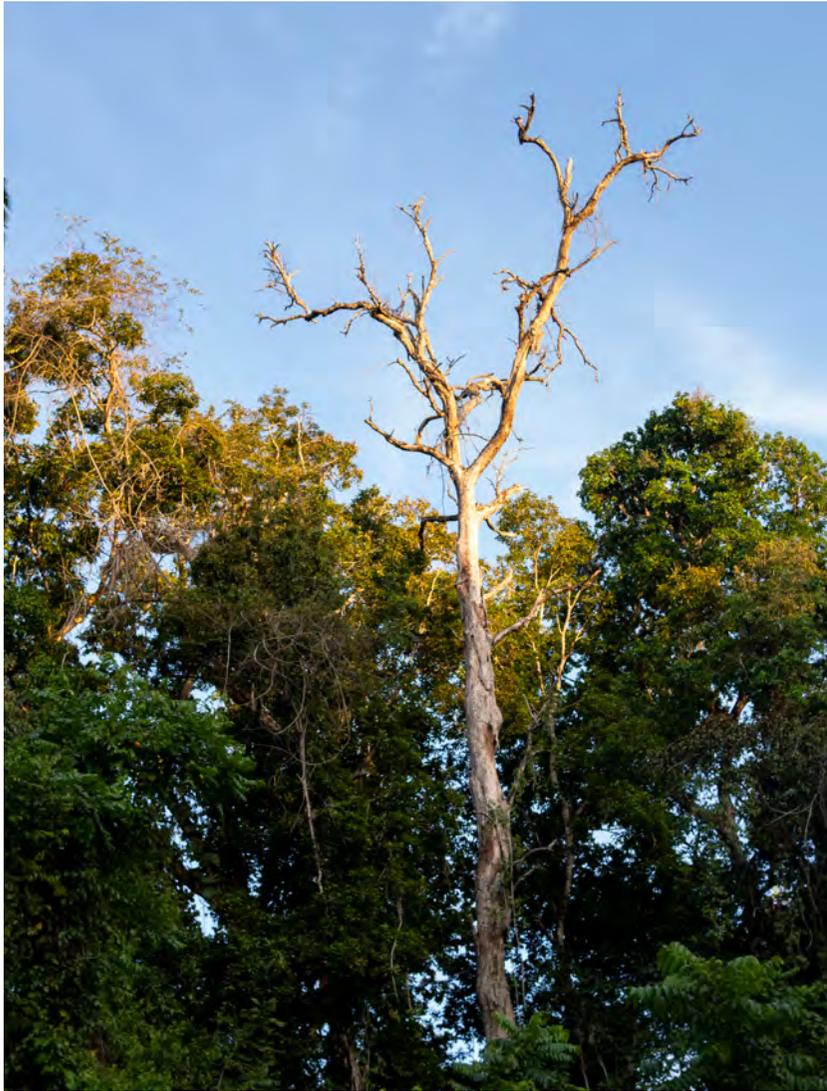
Common name: Calabash
Indigenous names: Rapî (M), Korowachi (W)
Mataro (Wu)
Materials made from: Calabash
Uses: Storage, utensil for drinking and eating
porridge and parakari, ornamental and musical
instrument (shack shack)



Common name: Small round Calabash
Indigenous names: Mare' (M), Korowachi (W)
Sanuka Kobera Mataro (Wu)
Materials made from: Calabash
Uses: Storage, utensil for drinking and eating,
ornamental and musical instrument (shack
shack)



Common name: Long Bottle Gourd
Indigenous names: Kusan Pottoro Wayi (M),
Dawua'o Moto (W) Bumija Anamu Kana (Wu)
Materials made from: Squash
Uses: Storage of seeds and other small items,
carrying water



THE ORIGIN OF THE CALABASH

During a period of great suffering caused by floods and famine, Arawanili, a piaman (shaman) among the Arawak people, encountered a water spirit named Orehu. She gave him a special branch to plant, which grew into a calabash tree. From its fruit, Orehu taught Arawanili to make useful items like bowls and maracas. With these tools, Arawanili drove away evil spirits, bringing prosperity back to his people. The calabash became cherished for its versatility, from practical use to musical instrument, symbolizing hope and renewal.



