

Oware is a member of the mancala family of games. While its exact origin is debated, one popular belief is that it emerged from the Ashanti people of Ghana.

A legend tells of a couple so passionate about Oware that they married to continue playing without interruption. The game's name, "Oware," reflects this union. The word is derived from the Akan word "ware" meaning "he/she marries."

As we play the game, we imagine two cunning farmers competing to harvest the most cocoa beans.

During our research, we learned that competitions favored the "Abapa" variant in both historical and modern settings. "Abapa" translates to "good version." In the LUDOS Africa collection, we introduce you to this variant, and two others: Nam-Nam, which we love to play with children, and a more complex but less known variant, called Omweso.

Krisztina & Tamas, Lemery Games

On a sun-drenched hillside, two rival farmers tend their precious cacao groves. Each carefully selected pod holds the promise of rich, velvety chocolate. However, these farmers aren't merely focused on their own trees. With cunning eyes, they strategize to plant new cocoa seeds and reap rewards from their opponent's land.

Which clever farmer will claim the sweetest harvest?

- Narrative based on the imagination of Lemery Games -

Oware is a 2-player mancala-type board game from Ghana.

Each player owns one half of the land—one row of 6 "plots."

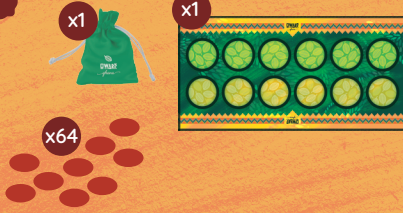
Players will take turns sowing seeds from their own plots to other plots, and harvesting from their opponent's side.

OBJECT OF THE GAME

To win, sow seeds to harvest 25 or more from your opponent's land.

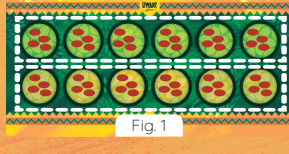
GAME CONTENTS

- 1 travel bag
- 1 game mat
- 64 cocoa seed pieces
- 1 rulebook



SETUP

1. Lay out the game mat with the correct side up (Fig. 1). Note that each player owns the 6 plots closest to them. These 6 plots make up their "land."



2. Distribute 4 seeds to each of the twelve plots (Fig. 1). Return all the remaining seeds to the bag.

HOW TO PLAY

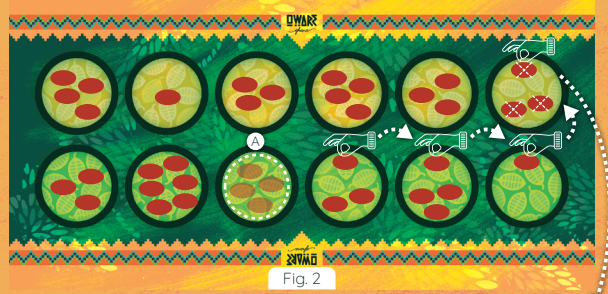
Choose the starting player: one player hides a seed in one hand (and nothing in the other hand), then holds up both closed hands. The other player chooses one hand. If they find the seed, they go first. If not, they will go second.

Sowing Seeds

On your turn, pick up all the seeds from one of your 6 plots (Fig. 2A). Moving counter-clockwise, sow (place) 1 seed onto each subsequent plot.

Harvesting Seeds

If the last seed you sow is in one of your opponent's plots, and that plot then has exactly 2 or 3 seeds in it, harvest all the seeds in that plot. Place your harvested seeds in front of you. This is your "store" (Fig. 2B).



Harvesting from multiple plots

If your last sown seed allows a harvest, and the previous plot on your opponent's land ALSO contains 2 or 3 seeds, you may harvest those seeds too. You may continue harvesting seeds this way, from each of your opponent's contiguous plots with 2-3 seeds. However, you may only harvest a maximum of 5 of your opponent's plots this way—you must leave at least 1 of their plots unharvested, so your opponent can sow on their next turn.

Distributing 12 or more seeds

When distributing 12 or more seeds—which would complete a full lap around the board—skip the empty plot from where you picked up the seeds. (Note: this is the only case when a plot is skipped while distributing seeds).

Compulsory distribution

If a player runs out of seeds on their turn (i.e., all 6 of their plots are empty by the end of their turn), the other player must distribute at least 1 seed to their opponent's side during their next turn (if possible).

Automatic harvest

If your opponent doesn't have any seeds in any of their plots, and on your turn you are unable to distribute any seeds to your opponent's side, immediately harvest ALL remaining seeds on the board. This ends the game.

GAME END

There are 2 ways for the game to end:

1. When a player has harvested 25 or more seeds, they immediately win.
2. If one player gets an automatic harvest, the game ends. The player with the most seeds in their store wins. If both players have harvested exactly 24 seeds, the game is a draw.

TIPS AND TRICKS

- 💡 Try to minimize the number of plots on your side that have fewer than 3 seeds.
- 💡 Try to hoard seeds on your side while sowing them on the opponent's side in small quantities.
- 💡 Sometimes it can be advantageous to give up a few seeds to set up a bigger harvest on later turns. Consider sowing seeds to your opponent's lands to control the flow of seeds on the board.

GAME VARIANTS

NAM-NAM: a traditional variant played by the children of Ghana.

OBJECT OF THE GAME

Harvest all 48 seeds from the plots. (This can take multiple rounds to accomplish.)

SETUP

Same as base rules.

HOW TO PLAY

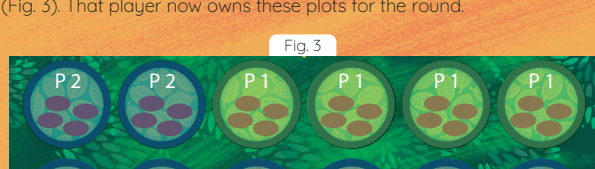
Pick up all the seeds from 1 of your plots and distribute them the same way as in the base game. However your round doesn't end here. Pick up all the seeds from the plot where you finished, and keep on distributing until you sow your last seed on an empty plot. Then players alternate turns.

During the Sowing Phase, whenever the sum of seeds in any plot on the board equals exactly 4, the active player pauses sowing and the player who owns that plot immediately harvests those 4 seeds. Then the active player continues sowing (if they had more seeds left to sow). However, if the active player's LAST distributed seed makes the number of seeds sum up to 4, then the active player harvests those 4 seeds—even if those were on the other player's plot.

Once there are only 8 seeds left on the board, the next player who harvests 4 seeds gets to harvest the remaining 4 seeds as well. Then a new round begins with the following setup:

Using their previously harvested seeds, each player distributes 4 seeds onto each of their plots, starting with the leftmost plot and moving to the right. If one player has more seeds than the other, they will use them to fill any plots left empty by their opponent, again placing 4 seeds per plot (Fig. 3). That player now owns these plots for the round.

Fig. 3



GAME END

In Nam-Nam the game only ends if one player acquires all 48 seeds.

OMWESO

Oware is played in West Africa. There are two variants played in East Africa: Bao and Omweso. Bao is played mainly in Tanzania, Zanzibar and Kenya. For this collection, we chose the Omweso variant (played mainly in Uganda) as we found it less known, but more enjoyable over the complex rules of Bao. However, you can still learn the rules of Bao (Bao la Kiswahili being the official tournament version) online, and play that variant on the Omweso side of the game mat.

OBJECT OF THE GAME

Sow your seeds strategically on your own land, in ways that allow you to harvest seeds from your opponent's land.

SETUP

1. Lay out the game mat with the correct side up (Fig. 4).
2. Each player owns the 2 rows of 8 plots closest to them.
3. Distribute 4 seeds on each of the 8 plots in each player's top row (Fig. 4).
4. Determine the starting player (in a similar way to Oware).
5. The first player may rearrange all 32 of their seeds on their side of the board, without restriction. Then player 2 may rearrange all 32 of their seeds.

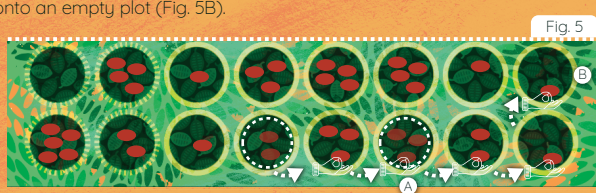


HOW TO PLAY

Sowing seeds

On your turn, pick up all the seeds from one of your 16 plots (that contains at least 2 seeds). In this variant, you will only ever sow seeds onto your own plots. Moving counter-clockwise, drop 1 seed onto each of your own subsequent plots, similarly to Oware.

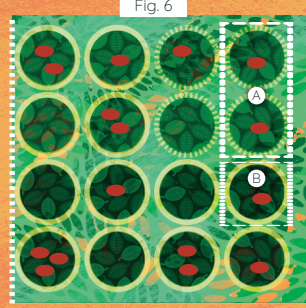
If the active player's last sown seed is dropped onto a plot that already contains seeds (Fig. 5A), the active player must pick up all seeds from that plot and sow again. This continues until their last sown seed is dropped onto an empty plot (Fig. 5B).



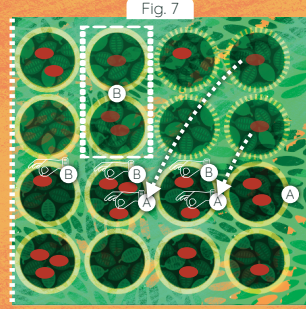
Harvesting seeds

You may harvest your opponent's seeds only if the following 3 requirements are met (Fig. 6):

1. Your opponent has at least 1 seed on both plots of a column (Fig. 6A).
2. You have at least 1 seed on your top plot in the same column (Fig. 6B).
3. The last seed you sow drops onto the plot described in point 2 (Fig. 6B).



If the above conditions are met, you harvest all seeds from both of those plots of your opponent's land (Fig. 6A), and start sowing them as if they were picked up from the same plot where you dropped your last seed (Fig. 7A). If this immediately results in another harvest, sow the newly harvested seeds from the same starting position as the previous harvest (Fig. 7B).

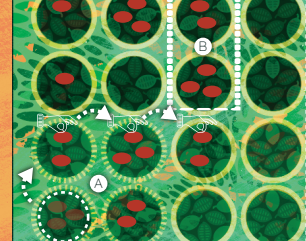


Reverse harvest

On your turn, you may choose to sow seeds **clockwise** from your 4 leftmost plots (Fig. 8A), but only if the distribution of those seeds will end in a harvest (Fig. 8B). Then, after capturing seeds, you may continue sowing:

If continuing to sow clockwise would allow you to harvest more seeds from your opponent, you may continue sowing clockwise.

Otherwise, you must return to sowing counter-clockwise, beginning from the plot where you started sowing this turn (Fig. 8A).



GAME END

There are 3 ways for Omweso to end:

- Normal victory: if a player is unable to make a legal move, the other player wins.
- If a player harvests seeds in 2 separate turns before the other player has harvested any seeds in the game, the player who collected seeds wins. (This victory is called Akakyala, which translates to "Visitor.")
- If a player harvests seeds from the 2 opposite ends of the board (the far left column and far right column) during the same turn, they automatically win. (This victory is called Emitwebiri, which translates to "Two Heads")

MINI EXPANSIONS

Heroes of Africa

Coming soon..

Challenges of Africa

Coming soon..

The rules of Oware described in the LUDOS collection were inspired by the book Religion and art in Ashanti by R. S. Rattray.

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To follow our journey and see all of our games, visit LemeryGames.com

