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## LOCATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: DISCOURSES ON EKEGUSII AND LUBUKUSU *PROVERBS* IN KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the pertinence of cultural knowledge as an indispensable tool for sustainable development and the attainment of the millennium goals. The formally schooled populace is seen to lay a lot of emphasis on information technology and globalization as they ignore and neglect culture and informal education; this has resulted to a total mismatch in the cultural and socio-economic orientation of the citizenry consequently leading to loss of identification of self and the inability to effectively focus on the attainment of sustainable development and the millennium goals. The study analysed the EkeGusii and LuBukusu teaching on self-reliance and development; investigated the extent to which cultural knowledge is a useful tool in presenting the development agenda and pursuance of the sustainable development goals, and discussed the success of integration of cultural knowledge and modern information technology and innovation in attaining the millennium development goals. Ethnography was used to sample and analyse from EkeGusii and LuBukusu a total of thirty proverbs that emphasise on the value of hard work and sustainability. The data was analysed basing on the tenets of the Cultural Literacy theory and Critical Discourse Analysis. Emphasis of cultural knowledge among Africans was realised to be a vital component in propelling self-reliance, realisation of sustainable development and achievement of the millennium goals. It concluded that there is need to integrate indigenous knowledge with information technology and modern knowledge to enable faster realisation of self-reliance, sustainable development and the achievement of the millennium goals.

**Keywords:** *Culture, Cultural Knowledge, Socio-economic*

### INTRODUCTION

As the world is works towards sustainable development, it has persistently advocated for modern education which is largely formal. Such persistence has however overlooked and ignored the role of informal education and the value of culture in pushing the development agenda. The problem with such advocacies is that most people especially in Africa have been left in a balance and are not able to actively participate in developmental activities. Hirsch (1987:12) presents a rationale that "The civic importance of cultural literacy lies in the fact that true enfranchisement depends upon knowledge, knowledge upon literacy, and literacy upon cultural literacy". This paper argues that it is this cultural literacy that will enhance development. This again is in line with Hirsch (1987) who postulates that cultural homogeneity is absolutely necessary for the development and expansion of the economy. Culture is a fundamental component of our wellbeing and is the paramount factor in providing the sense of who we are.

Culture is an indispensable element in every society. Although it occurs that in our modern society culture occupies a disregarded index in human development, the truth is that cultural factors have a great impact in a peoples' behaviour, their values, lifestyles and their orientation towards sustainable development. Ademowo and Balogun, (2014) posit that if culture is unquestionably very instrumental in development. They further argue that language carries culture and that the two are inseparable. According to Sapir (1963) language does not exist independent of culture; it is part of culture as well as a vehicle for the expression of culture. Sapir (1963); Ayer (1969); Wallnock, (1969); Engholm (1994); and Ogunsiji (2001) concur language is utilitarian in the achievement of development. Proverbs being a metaphorical use of language and in essence language cannot in any way be overlooked in discourses of development.

Wallnork (1969:12) enumerates the uses of language as being used for phatic communion i.e as a social regulator, an instrument of action, convey order and information, to influence people, to enable self-expression, and embody and enable thought. This being the case, it is evident that development can never be experienced in any human society if such a society lacks effective, explorative use of and development of its language. Although language is an important tool in fostering development, we agree with Ogunsiji (2001:165-189) that no other language can effectively displace one's mother tongue. One's mother tongue is their signature and a means of defining themselves. As much as lingua franca is important it cannot fully replace one's mother tongue in their defining of self. This study argues that one's mother tongue and especially the proverbs in such mother tongues can and will play an undisputable function in crusading for the sustainable development agenda. In any case it is an all true fact that countries like China have had her development culture driven through their language-Chinese, and have been able to attain development feat with the deliberate and concerted help of developing her indigenous culture, tradition and language.

Wilhelm, (1963) asserts that, culture function as a catalyst for development in these distinct ways: first, as a means of creating order, second, as an instrument of the achievement of social integration, third, to make events in human experience intelligible and significant and as a regulator of change. This assertion is also held by Ademowo and Balogun (2014) who postulate that culture and language are so intertwined in such a way that the death of language automatically marks the death of a culture that such language carried. Culture is a prismatic paradigm for development, with the exclusive manner in which the indigenous language are being played down for the exclusivist employment of foreign languages, culture and value system, it is appropriate to conclude that there is a need for a radical revival of the indigenous language and its strong metaphorical uses which include proverbs, which are supposedly endowed with the survival instinct and value of the people.

This is in line with the assertion held by Olubunmi (2010:16) that, proverbs essentially emphasized the values of good conduct, respect for elders, warning and advice, cordiality and cooperation for peaceful co-existence which are hallmark of ingredient for development. It is the background that forms the basis of this paper's argument that we can never succeed in ardently pushing for sustainable development without fully engaging language and using it, especially its metaphorical form, as an instrument in the advocacy for development.

### **The Nature and Value of Proverbs**

Proverbs are the simple truths of life that contain the ethical, moral values of a society (Taylor, 2003). Aside the aesthetic and figurative value in proverbs, it presents a graphic statement that expresses a truth of experience. Yusuf (1997:120) asserts that, the truth presented in the proverbs is not logical, a priori or intuitive truth but it is often an empirical fact based upon and derived from the people's experience of life, human relationship and interaction with the world of nature. Some scholars define traditional proverbs the prismatic verbal expression of the essence of folk culture'' (Nicolaisen, 1994; Shimkin and Sanjuan, 1953; Taylor, 1981; Oladeji, 1988 and Yusuf, 1996). Proverbs have also been defined as pithy, traditional statements used to further some social end (Seitel, 1981; Egbemogbe, 1980; Meider, 1989).

According to (Adeyemi, 2005), proverbs are a very powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, philosophy, social morality and values and the sensibility of the people. Proverbs are also seen as models of compressed or forceful language that make people behave according to norms and morals of the land (Ademowo and Balogun, 2014). As is held by Fasiku, (2006:25), it is true that proverbs evolved with the growth and development of the society. Proverbs reflect diverse aspects of a people's culture encapsulate the worldview of a people they serve as a means of arousing, defining, manifesting and establishing the expectations, aspirations and consciousness of a people. Proverbs serve as a linguistic confirmation of the totality of a people's worldview and the epistemic cognition of this worldview.

### **Theoretical Framework**

One of the theories that this study was based on is the Cultural Literacy Theory (CLT) which was propagated by E.D. Hirsch. Hirsch roots his claims on the schema theory which lays a picture of how people organize the amount of background knowledge which they accumulate about the world. CLT postulates that for one to be regarded as culturally literate they have to possess the ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture. They have to know a given culture's signs and symbols, including its language, particular dialectic, stories, entertainment, idioms, idiosyncrasies, and so on. CLT holds that children of a given culture typically become culturally literate there via the process of enculturation which seems to occur naturally, being intertwined with education, play, family relationships, etc. According to CLT, Literacy of a given culture seems to arise over time with consistent exposure to and participation in that culture, especially certain key cultural strongholds like business, story, arts, education, history, religion, and family (Hiebert, 1991)

According to this theory people are able to understand development and fully participate in development activities depending on the background knowledge they are oriented in and profess. Further, CLT holds that we can only crusade for development efficiently when we understand the cultures people live in. We can understand their culture by understanding their language and especially their proverbs. CLT posits that modern industrial nations depend upon the development of homogeneous national cultures. This being the case therefore this paper argues that developing nations also need to hold firm to their cultures as a means of fostering development. As is held by the proponents of CLT, education has fallen victim to romantic formalism and misguided pluralism, which has led to a diluted school curriculum and consequent cultural fragmentation. This has incapacitated the achievement of desired development.

Cultural literacy, as advanced by its major proponents, is a particular view of the construction and generation of knowledge, the role of culture in that process, and the role of education in modern industrial society. In spite of references to research on reading, cultural literacy is not an intellectual ability akin to reading literacy. Cultural Awareness is the foundation of communication and it involves the ability of standing back from ourselves and becoming aware of our cultural values, beliefs and perceptions. Why do we do things in that way? How do we see the world? Why do we react in that particular way? Only when this is done can sustainable development be fully realised. The study also uses tenets of the Critical Discourse Analysis Theory (CDA) to critically examine the proverbs as a semiotic system of signification grounded within an African social cultural milieu

### **METHODOLOGY**

To collect the relevant data for the study interviews were used. A total of thirty four (34) proverbs EkeGusii and LuBukusu proverbs were collected and analysed. Particularly, the proverbs whose subject matter is centred on development-related themes such as hard work, the importance of acquiring skills, etc were collected and analysed. Interview was carried out with selected community elders who were recommended by the local community on the bases of their deep knowledge of the socio-cultural context and oral tradition of the society. Furthermore, most of the interviews held with the key informants were recorded using tape-recorder. Likewise, proverbs were also collected via document analysis.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study found out that proverbs in EkeGusii and LuBukusu languages are essential as a means for enhancing sustainable development. They accomplished important roles that are development geared.

### **Proverbs as Social Regulators and an Instrument for Achievement Social Integration**

This study found out that proverbs if used properly can regulate members of the society and can enhance social integration. This is evident in the following examples:

1. *Eeri tiyana kwana marara* → EkeGusii. (A bull does not bellow while lying down)

2. *Eyisakulila ebocha* –Bukusu (The hen that scratches the ground finds something to eat)

The discursive import of proverbs 1 and 2 is that everyone who wants to succeed in something must stand and take up the task. Development can never be attained until members of the society rise to the occasion of working for it.

3. *Genda ase getinge omere otari kenyambi* → EkeGusii proverb (Go to your marriage home, grow well, don't be a weed)

4. *Omukhasi omukara embako yewefwe*. →Bukusu. (A lazy woman says: "If only I had a hoe from my home").

This proverb discursively implies that the AbaGusii and Bukusu value industry and harmony. Young ladies are advised that as they get to their marriage homes they should be industrious in order to sustainably develop themselves.

5. *Baba tarera mogondo na nguru ngesera ibu* → EkeGusii proverb. (Let mother not dig alone when her strength (children) are warming themselves at the fireplace).

6. *Umusoleli omulayi ekofia ya rarawe*. → LuBukusu (A good boy is the honour of the father).

The proverbs caution young people against laziness. The proverbs aim at building their social responsibility and to enable them live well in their societies. Young people are encouraged to help their parents in carrying out different chores and works. It is therefore clear that the AbaGusii encourage each member of the society regardless of their age to work hence building in them development consciousness.

7. *Entakana ebe nguru tenakwerera, ebe nguru buna nyeke* → EkeGusii proverb (An orphan should have strength like a seedling he should not sit there sympathizing with himself or herself).

8. *Endubi eyo muleme ekhila owafwa*. Bukusu Proverb. (The basket of a lame person is better than a dead person).

9. *Etari na kemincha etirerie keene* → EkeGusii proverb. (Let the tailless cow play with its stump /disability is not inability)

10. *Mogani kia omwabo okwa motaka* → EkeGusii proverb. (One who depends on his kinsman dies poor).

11. *Getiro nke mogondo, ko moserengeti ore eero* → EkeGusii proverb (He that encounters a hill at the farm, leads a conversation in the living room)

12. *Nisio omukhasi afuna sosislia mumulembe tawe*. → Bukusu proverb (What a woman has earned, you will not eat it in peace.).

13. *Mogisangi Siberia ong'e toa monto okobayabaya* → EkeGusii proverb (Sip and pass it to, me my age mate. Don't give the lazy one who wanders aimlessly)

Proverb 7, 8 and 9 emphasise on the importance of each member of the society participating in development activities. The orphans and those enabled differently should work hard in order to develop the society. It was believed that disability was not inability. They were encouraged to have constructive thinking on how they would positively contribute to the development of their societies.

In proverb 9, lazy people in the society are mocked. The AbaGusii and Bukusu are seen as people who value hard work and as depicted in this proverb the lazy people are disregarded and never allowed to participate in enjoying what other members of the society have worked for. This is also evident as evinced in proverb 10, 11 and 12. More so, dependency and laziness are highly discouraged among the AbaGusii and Bukusu societies. The discursive implication of proverbs 7-13 is that laziness is a vice and therefore, it should be discouraged. Each member of the society is encouraged to participate fully in the development of the society.

### **Proverbs as Instruments for Spurring Action**

14. *Bosaga mborura, enchara mbobe ekorura genda mogondo* → EkeGusii proverb

(The morning cold bites, but hunger bites harder so go to work)

15. *Kiage kiaora, moremi ogokonga mogondo* → EkeGusii proverb. (A yawning (empty) granary is a farmer doing nothing but just starving at the farm.)

16. *Enjofu yabwayiaya sekhusia musanga.* → Bukusu Proverb (A woman who prostitutes around never brings up a family).

17. *Siomutakha sibola bamwata.* → Bukusu proverb. (That which belongs to a mean person gets spoilt and is thrown away).

These proverbs are intended at spurring members of the society to action. The proverbs caution people against laziness and selfishness. Instead, hard work and sharing is encouraged.

### **Proverbs as Creators of Order and Conveyers of Information**

17. *Mosomba n'onguru* → EkeGusii proverb. (A servant is one that has strength)

18. *Omusani wa lebe khulia-* Bukusu proverb. (A strong young man is one who feeds well).

19. *Omwana wesecha kamani mukhumbo.* Bukusu Proverb. (A man is recognized by the strength in his hands).

20. *Enula yama bwana.* Bukusu proverb. (A good end starts from a good beginning).

The discursive implication of proverbs is that strength and good health are a precursor to sustainable development.

### **Proverbs as Instruments for Influencing People and as Regulators of Change**

21. *Chinguru n'amakonde akoria* → EkeGusii proverb. (Strength is eaten by worms)

22. *Nanda kambilwa akona khumwanda kwenjoli.* Bukusu proverb. (The one who did not listen regretted later).

These proverbs aim at influencing peoples' behaviour in a manner that would enhance development of a society. People with undesirable mannerisms are being influenced to have a paradigm shift in their behaviour in order to contribute positively to developmental activities in the society. People are also encouraged to seek for knowledge from other people.

### **Proverbs as Means of Embodying and Enabling Thought.**

23. *Otari kerenga chimbero nchiarare koora kiige kia mwana* → EkeGusii proverb. (He who has no goal is like a small child trying to do work only adults can do).

24. *Omwana wesecha sikoloncho silinda ekunda.* → Bukusu proverb (A man is the custodian of the land).

It was believed that setting of goals would enable people to work hard and hence be prosperous. Especially men were charged with the responsibility of planning for the future of the society. Those without goals were regarded as children and were therefore treated with disrespect.

### **Proverbs as Elements Enhancing Character Soundness/Uprightness to Personal and Social Development**

25. *Chiakumeire Moraa O'Kiage, akama ng'ombe akama na mbori* → EkeGusii proverb. (Fame has come to Moraa, daughter of Kiage, who milks both cows and goats).

26. *Namunyu kalia owamkisa* → Bukusu proverb. (The hyena ate the one who hid him)

Proverb 25 signals acquisition of status. People earn fame and social status through their hard work. Members of the society were therefore encouraged to work and avoid shortcuts to riches. The discursive import of proverb 26 is that people should refrain from behaviours that are undesirable such as greed and corruption. This is because such vices are retrogressive and drag development efforts.

27. *Ona gesire tana kaborwa nko* → EkeGusii proverb (One who has an axe never lacks firewood)

28. *Ore na gesero tana kaborwa boraro* → EkeGusii proverb (Whoever has a sleeping hide will never lack a place to sleep).

29. *Nare komenya ndore bigori chiyana (chinsingo) nchiborwa moenori otari mosunte* → EkeGusii proverb. (If I live longer I could be an advisor, so that people cannot lack enlightenment)

30. *Mukenda mbola kola ebunyolo.* → Bukusu proverb. (The one who walked slowly reached Luo land)

It was believed among the AbaGusii that Knowledge and skills were extremely vital in enhancing sustainable development. Knowledge and skills were seen as axes that would enable one get firewood

hence be able to cook their food. The importance of knowledge and skills are likened to sleeping hides in proverb 28. Sustainable development can only be achieved when people have the necessary skills. Further, the aged were supposed to educate the young on ways of developing themselves and their societies at large (see proverb 29). However, in order for the young to learn the necessary skills for development, patience is a requirement (Proverb 30). Note that Bukusu land and Luo land are worlds apart. Therefore patience is required for anyone to walk from either of the region to the other.

### **Proverbs as a Means for Advocating for Investment and Innovation**

31. *Ngende emo yaibora igana* → EkeGusii proverb. (One bean gives birth to a hundred beans)
32. *Nosia bonuke mboanda bogokuma* → EkeGusii proverb. (It is alright to grind refined flour, but what will matter is how full it will make our stomachs)
33. *Otamba tamba okhafwa*. → Bukusu proverb. (The poor do not die easily)
34. *Olia sikekhe okhasimbwa*. → Bukusu proverb. (Eat little so that you do not overfeed)

The importance of investing and being innovative is emphasised. Investment is the only guarantee for a better tomorrow. Based on this, people should not encourage poverty by thinking that they would die soon and thus there is no future for them (proverb 33). More so, people should avoid wastage of resources (proverb 34) for sustainable development.

### **CONCLUSION**

Africa's inability to wholesomely embrace western education and culture and the enforcement of western values on the African people has immensely contributed to rendering Africa's developmental quest a futile exercise. This is because there is no continent that can develop without its cultural values. Africa therefore urgently needs to rejuvenate its cultural elements that would enhance development, if it has desires for not being regarded as a dark continent. This study concludes that proverbs inculcate social values that are essential for people centred sustainable development and that enable and drive development. The study advocates that our culture should be taught to our people and that we should always strive to make culture work for the purpose of development. There is great need for us to invest in conserving our culture and especially our proverbs as they are effective factors that enhance sustainable development. Furthermore, this study concludes that we should endeavour to practically integrate culture into the international development policies if sustainable development has to be attained. It recommends that advocacies of sustainable development should entrench the pedagogical aspects of proverbs in the day-today activities of young and old Africans as a means to fostering self driven sustainable development in our societies.

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