# Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Development

## The Case of Abanyala Proverbs

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**Résumé :** Les proverbes sont utilisés dans la communauté Abanyala pour transmettre les connaissances ancestrales d'une génération à l'autre. Selon Finnegan (1970), les proverbes transmettent des messages par le biais de mots soigneusement sélectionnés qui ont des significations cachées. Les proverbes représentent la sagesse des Abanyala et leur connaissance du monde qui les entoure. La connaissance de ces proverbes permet de contrôler le comportement des gens et de faire d'eux des citoyens responsables, améliorant ainsi leur qualité de vie. Cet article soutient que la recherche et la documentation des proverbes Abanyala est un moyen de promouvoir les langues locales et de permettre aux populations d'accéder aux connaissances locales qui peuvent améliorer leurs conditions de vie et contribuer au développement durable. L'article est basé sur une étude des proverbes Abanyala qui sont analysés dans leur contexte culturel afin d'expliquer leurs significations sous-jacentes. Il examine le rôle de ces proverbes dans la réalisation d'un développement socioculturel et économique durable, non seulement au niveau communautaire, mais aussi au niveau national.

**Mots-clés :** proverbes, culture, connaissances autochtones, recherche, documentation, développement durable.

**Abstract :** Proverbs are used in the Abanyala community to transmit indigenous knowledge from one generation to another. According to Finnegan (1970), proverbs convey messages through carefully selected words that have hidden meanings. Proverbs represent the wisdom of the Abanyala and their knowledge of the world around them. Knowledge of these proverbs helps to control peoples' behavior and make them responsible citizens hence improving their quality of life. This paper argues that research and documentation of Abanyala proverbs is one way of promoting local languages and enabling people to access indigenous knowledge which can improve their living conditions and contribute to sustainable development. The paper is based on a survey of Abanyala proverbs which are analysed in their cultural context in order to explain their underlying meanings. The paper discusses the role of these proverbs in the achievement of sociocultural and economic sustainable development not only at the community level but also at the national level.

**Key words :** proverbs, culture, indigenous knowledge, research, documentation, sustainable development.

# 1 Introduction

Abanyala is a sub-group of Abaluyia. Abaluyia is a Bantu group of people who live in the Western part of Kenya. The Abanyala, who speak the Olunyala dialect, mainly occupy Busia county but some of them also occupy Kakamega and Bungoma counties, and others are scattered in different parts of the country. Olunyala is one of the 17 dialects of the Oluluyia language spoken by the Abaluyia. The Abanyala of Busia practice farming, fishing and livestock keeping as their main traditional occupations. Since they practice fishing, most of them occupy the lowland areas bordering Lake Victoria and River Nzoia, which are prone to perennial flooding. Their neighbors are the Saamia, the Marachi and the Bakhayo, which are sub-groups of the Abaluyia people in Busia County, and the Luos, a Nilotic group of people who occupy Siaya County and parts of Busia County. The Abanyala have a vibrant culture characterized by various forms of indigenous knowledge that is transmitted from one generation to another. Notable forms of Abanyala indigenous knowledge include rain-making, foretelling or prediction, cooking traditional foods, food preservation techniques, fishing techniques, traditional family planning techniques, art and craft techniques e.g. weaving fish traps. Genres of oral literature which include proverbs, riddles and narratives are another form of Abanyala indigenous knowledge. This background information will help in the interpretation of the meanings of Abanyala proverbs in their cultural context. This paper focuses on proverbs as a cultural aspect of Abanyala indigenous knowledge. It investigates the role of these proverbs in the achievement of socio-cultural and economic sustainable development not only at the community level but also at the national level. The aims of the paper are : first, to analyse Abanyala proverbs in their cultural context in order to explain their underlying meanings ; secondly, to discuss the role of these proverbs in the achievement of socio-cultural and economic sustainable development. This paper argues that research and documentation of Abanyala proverbs is one way of promoting local languages and enabling people to access indigenous knowledge which can improve their living conditions and contribute to sustainable development. The paper begins by defining the key concepts used in the study, expounds the theory that guides the analysis, describes the research methodology, highlights the characteristic features of Abanyala proverbs and context of use, presents and analyses data, discusses the major findings and challenges and lastly, concludes by highlighting recommendations for policy making and further research.

## 1.1 Key Concepts

This study used the following six key concepts whose meanings are explained below :

(a) Culture : The customs, beliefs, art, music and all other products of human creative activity of a particular group of people at a particular time. Art includes genres of oral literature like proverbs and others. The culture of a group of people changes with time and may be influenced by other cultures.

(b) Documentation : A collection of written, printed or electronic material that provides information or evidence or that serves as a record. Language documentation (also known by the term 'documentary linguistics') is defined by Nikolaus Himmelmann as the subfield of linguistics that is 'concerned with the methods,

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tools, and theoretical underpinnings for compiling a representative and lasting multipurpose record of a natural language or one of its varieties' (Himmelmann 2006 : v). In the context of this study, it is the collection of Abanyala proverbs that have been researched and published in print or electronic media for public use.

(c) Indigenous knowledge : A body of knowledge created by a group of people who have lived together and interacted with their local environment for many generations. That knowledge is specifically adapted to the requirements of the local community. Proverbs are part of Abanyala indigenous knowledge that is transmitted from one generation to another.

(d) Proverbs : Short sayings that convey messages using carefully selected words that have hidden meanings. The wisdom in proverbs can be utilized to promote sustainable development at the community and national level in general.

(e) Research : A systematic investigation of a phenomenon or problem which involves collecting, analyzing and presenting data in order to generate new knowledge or solve a particular problem. The current study aims at generating new knowledge concerning the role of Abanyala proverbs in the achievement of socio-cultural and economic sustainable development.

(f) Sustainable development : A multidimensional transformation process which brings about change to an individual or a people's welfare without compromising the welfare of future generations. Indicators of sustainable socio-cultural and economic development may include improved living standards, better income, reduced crime rates, alleviation of poverty, illiteracy and diseases, growth of socio-political freedom and decline in impunity and injustices, among others. While knowledge of Abanyala proverbs may not directly result in such development, it somehow contributes indirectly to the achievement of the same given the fact that proverbs are mainly used to educate people. This is because educated people are more likely to make informed decisions that may bring about such changes in society.

### 1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a functional framework to guide the analysis of Abanyala proverbs. Functionalism, which is associated with the sociologist Emile Durkheim, addresses the society as a whole in terms of function of its constituent elements such as norms, customs, traditions, oral literature, institutions and so on. The analysis puts emphasis on social structures and social functions that are deduced from these structures (Amoah and Ayim, 2018). Muleka (2014) argues that it is not easy to choose a theory to facilitate the analysis of oral literature. He contends that the oral type of African literature is unpredictable and ephemeral since it is the performer who mostly decides what to perform and how to perform it ; hence the literary analyst is left in a dilemma over what theory to apply. Although this argument is valid, the choice of a functional theory is appropriate for the analysis of proverbs because these proverbs are well-known by the Abanyala native speakers in terms of structure, function and context of use.

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Whichever proverbs the oral artist decides to perform depends on the context of use and this has no effect on a functional analysis. The point is that all proverbs have functions that can be analysed. The claim of a functional approach is that oral literature is not there for its own sake but for sociological purposes, principally that of educating people through informing, advising, warning, encouraging and criticizing them. Other functions that oral literature fulfills in the society include entertainment, promoting unity and solidarity, improvement of language proficiency, commentary on the pattern of life and preservation of cultural heritage, among others (Afolabi, 2004, p. 24). Mlacha (1985, p. 176 – 180) emphasizes the importance of proverbs in child upbringing by classifying them in terms of those whose function is to educate, slander, ridicule, accuse, warn, console, encourage and those that are used for corrective purposes. By using this functional approach, the survey reveals that Abanyala proverbs are used to perform some of these functions, hence enabling the Abanyala to participate fully in development activities. In the words of Mlacha (p. 179), "…This potential of proverbs is more beneficial especially in terms of activities concerning national development, professional and economic development, and even in dealing with political obstacles" [our translation]. This is particularly true with reference to the Swahili proverb *Mtaka cha mvunguni sharti ainame* (Whoever requires what is under the bed must bend for it) ; in other words, one who wants to survive must work hard. It encourages people to work hard in order to fulfill their needs.

### 1.3 Research Methodology

The paper is based on a survey of Abanyala proverbs which were collected from a sample of 20 respondents aged between 60 and 80 years old. The respondents consisted of 10 male and 10 female native speakers of Olunyala from Busia County. (We acknowledge and appreciate the contribution of the Late Mama Cloyi Bwonya Akumba, one of the informants who passed away while this paper was being prepared). A questionnaire was used to elicit background information from possible respondents to ensure that they fulfilled eligibility criteria in order to participate in the survey. Eligible respondents are those who were above 60 years old, born to native Olunyala-speaking parents ; they were born, brought up, married and lived in Bunyala Subcounty of Busia county ; they were fluent speakers of Olunyala dialect ; and they were conversant with aspects of Olunyala culture and oral literature. This was to ensure that they had native speaker competence of Olunyala and they understood fully Olunyala proverbs. Structured personal interviews accompanied with an interview guide were used to elicit 100 proverbs and relevant explanations from eligible respondents and their responses were tape-recorded. The recorded proverbs were transcribed, then translated into English before explaining their underlying meanings in their cultural context. They were analysed in terms of their functions, followed by an explanation of their role in the achievement of socio-cultural and economic sustainable development. Out of the 100 proverbs collected and analysed, a representative sample of 20 proverbs was selected and used for purposes of presentation and discussion in this paper. The sampled data were presented alphabetically and descriptively using a qualitative research design.

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### 1.4 Characteristic Features of Abanyala Proverbs and Context of Use

Abanyala proverbs have common features and their meanings may be analysed, interpreted and understood by considering the socio-cultural context in which they are used. The main distinctive features of Abanyala proverbs include : firstly, they are short sentences which are expressed metaphorically ; secondly, they have a fixed structure which is memorizable ; thirdly, they contain wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views ; fourthly, they are handed down from generation to generation ; and lastly, they use selected words and are generally known among Abanyala community. According to Vansina (1992, p. 27), proverbs "…could be old or they could be freshly coined. There is nothing in a proverb that makes it old by definition, only wise… such sayings are shorter and more allusive." Mulokozi (1989, p. 14) notes that the wisdom in proverbs is mostly expressed using figurative language, especially metaphors and parables or puzzles. Sometimes the interpretation of the meaning of a proverb may depend on one's understanding of the metaphor that is used in the proverb, hence the need to highlight those characteristic features. However, some of these features may also be found in other sub-genres of oral literature. The contexts in which these proverbs are used include : during work related activities e.g. cultivation, harvesting and fishing ; during social functions e.g. political and religious meetings ; during cultural festivals e.g wrestling and boat-riding competitions ; and during everyday conversations among Abanyala speakers. According to Mulokozi (1989, p. 14), the manifestation of proverbs depends on other genres like conversation and serious discussions in specific social contexts. This is echoed by Saidi (2006, p. 67) who observes that among the Digo, proverbs are mostly used during serious discussions in order to warn, educate people and also during funerals. Similarly, Ligami and Barasa (2006, p. 117) have noted that Swahili proverbs can be used to spice up speech during everyday conversations and to resolve political, religious and legal conflicts. Speaking in an exciting or interesting manner and resolving conflicts involves persuasion of listeners by using words of wisdom, which are proverbs. It is in this context that Kandagor, Wendo and Sawe (2017, p. 67) have observed that, indigenous languages are used by politicians such as Governors and Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) as tools of persuasion in their pre and post-parliamentary discussions. They use these languages "…to persuade and convince each other concerning issues which include development agenda…[and]…to persuade the populace to embrace and participate in the development plans of the county governments" (p. 67). An interesting aspect of this paper is how it illustrates the ambiguity of indigenous knowledge and its use both for promotion of added values and for protecting their perversion. This is evident in the use of proverbs among politicians as it will be illustrated in proverbs Number 2, 7 and 20. In the context of the Igbo culture in Nigeria, the importance of proverbs in the conversations of everyday life is aptly captured in Chinua Achebe's quote : "Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (Chintya, Jumino, & Purwarno, 2019, p. 166). The choice of any particular proverb will depend on various contextual features like the relationship between the speaker and the listener (e.g. parent and his/her child) ; the topic of conversation ; the time of conversation ; the place of conversation ; the intention or attitude of the speaker towards the listener or the message being communicated ; and other social variables like gender, age, experience,

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socio-economic status and education. This means that Abanyala proverbs are not used in a vacuum but they are context-specific.

### 1.5 Presentation and Analysis of Abanyala Proverbs

Based on their functions (or what proverbs are meant to do), we can categorize the 100 Abanyala proverbs that were analysed in this study into the following five major educational functions : encouraging, warning, advising, caution and criticizing people. Some proverbs may also be used for purposes of discouraging or consoling people. However, a single proverb may sometimes be used in different senses depending on the context of use, which means that they have more than one function ; hence it is possible for the functions to overlap. A similar case has been observed among the Boran people where a proverb can have up to four different interpretations arising from metaphorical use of words (Shongolo and Schlee, 2007, p. 52). Mtesigwa (1989, p. 6) argues that a good proverb usually has multiple meanings because the wisdom in it is supposed to fit different contexts and situations according to the needs of its user. While it is acceptable for scholars to pass judgments on various aspects of oral literature, we concur with Okombo's (1992, p. 23) argument that the criteria for evaluating a community's creative verbal art cannot be determined by the researcher but by the community itself. In other words, it is the Abanyala community that can reliably determine the principles that govern their literary appreciation of a "good" proverb, its characteristic features, its meaning, its appropriate context of use and its function. According to Okombo, "…the formal properties of an oral text, its method of production, its moral content, the success of its performance and, above all, its status as art or non-art are all judged with reference to the artistic norms of the community that produced the text." (p. 30). Apart from the sociological functions of proverbs, which this study is concerned with, proverbs may also be looked at stylistically as markers of discourse structure, for example, they are used when introducing, elaborating, emphasizing or summarizing a conversation. In Kiswahili poetry, Maitaria (2018) notes that proverbs are used stylistically as titles of poems or as refrain of poems. Mulokozi (1989, p. 14) adds that some proverbs are shortened forms of a famous folktale in a community. The analysis of Abanyala proverbs in the following section is guided by a functional theoretical approach as expounded in section 1.2 of this paper, and also by the three steps of analyzing the meaning of a proverb that are identified by Mtesigwa (1989, p. 7) : firstly, to translate the Abanyala proverb into English ; secondly, to interpret the underlying or hidden meaning of the proverb in terms of the context of its use ; and lastly, to state the function and contribution of the proverb. In the following section, the following abbreviations are used to refer to the following words : Trans : (Translation of the proverb into English ; Mean : (Underlying meaning of the proverb) ; Func & Contr : (The function of the proverb in terms of its use and its contribution to socio-cultural and economic sustainable development). It is important to mention two important aspects of this article : first, frequent reference to proverbs from related and unrelated languages of the wider area is part of the design of the article. Comparing the Abanyala proverbs with similar proverbs from other languages and sometimes quotations from the Holy scriptures helps the reader and the Abanyala community to understand the proverbs better. Secondly, Olunyala is a tone language that has a complex tone system (Onyango, 2006). Therefore, the

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orthographic presentation of the proverbs in this paper uses diacritic marks to mark tones. Syllables which have high tones are marked by ( ‘ ) whereas those which have low tones are unmarked. Although this is not a phonological study, it is necessary to use the tones in order to make the pronunciation of words easier for readers who are not conversant with the Olunyala dialect. The following are the 20 sampled Abanyala proverbs that educate people in various ways that may contribute to their welfare.

*1) Áchiayíra akháo khakhoyá khábákhomo.*

*Trans :* Where they graze (cattle) yours (diminutive adjective) should be among them.

*Mean :* It is important to get involved in something that other people are doing which will benefit you. Proverbs with similar meanings among the Swahili are : *Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa* (One finger cannot kill a louse) ; *Umoja ni nguvu na utengano ni udhaifu* (Unity is strength and disunity is weakness) ; and *Kichango kuchangizana* (Contribution is a collective responsibility) (Ndalu & King’ei, 1992, p. 62). All these proverbs emphasize the importance of teamwork.

*Func & Contr :* It encourages people to cooperate and invest in economic activities that will benefit them later rather than shying away, therefore contributing to sustainable development.

*2) Amáani kómwéyá mwanáng’íná.*

*Trans :* The strength of a newly-married girl is her sibling.

*Mean :* A person who comes to help you when you are in need is your closest relative. As the English saying goes, *blood is thicker than water.* It is similar to the Boran proverb that says *Dansa orma hama ufiit irra jira* (A bad one of one’s own is better than a good stranger). It means that no matter how strained, kin relationships are more reliable than non-kin relationships in times of peril or distress (Shongolo and Schlee, 2007, p. 32). The Swahili equivalent *Damu ni nzito kuliko maji* (blood is thicker than water) is also intended to encourage kinsmen to be ready to assist each other but as Mwangi and Maitaria (2019, p. 55) have observed, Kenyan politicians nowadays use it to encourage nepotism especially in the public sector.

*Func & Contr :* This Abanyala proverb is used as an appeal to kin solidarity. It advises people to value their kinsmen, relatives or people who are closer to them because they will be ready to help you when you are in trouble as compared to strangers ; this may contribute to sustainable development.

*3) Eríkheré sirikaíra íng’ómbé óng’wa amáchí.*

*Trans :* A frog does not stop a cow from drinking water.

*Mean :* Whatever your enemies or distracters say about you, cannot stop you from doing what you want to do. It is similar to the Boran proverb that says *Jibbi waraabessa aláalle woma hin tólcin* (Hatred has not even affected the hyena of the wilderness). It means that hatred alone without adverse action being taken does not do harm to anybody (Shongolo and Schlee, 2007, p. 71). A similar message is found in the English proverb *No man is without* enemies (Best, 2000, p. 72) and in Kiwahili *Kelele za chura*

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*hazimkatazi ng'ombe kunywa maji* (The frogs noise cannot stop cows from drinking water) ; *Kelele za mwenye nyumba hazimkatazi mgeni kulala* (The noise of the house owner cannot stop the visitor from sleeping) (Ndalu & King'ei, 1992, p. 61 – 62). In the context of Abanyala culture, cows go to drink water in ponds, rivers and lake where frogs live and make a lot of snoring noise that can scare animals.

*Func & Contr :* It is used as a response to abuse by encouraging people to continue pursuing what they want in spite of various challenges they are facing. It implies that your business competitors cannot stop you from doing business. If you ignore them and remain focused, you will succeed, hence contributing to sustainable economic development.

*4) Ésiesúbirúa síákonía ménó ínjálá.*

*Trans :* Hoping for something made the teeth sleep hungry.

*Mean :* When you wait for something that you don't see, you may end up not getting it, so you need to have another plan if you don't want to regret later. It also implies that if something that is supposed to be done immediately is not done at the right time, it may lead to suffering later.

*Func & Contr :* It encourages or advises people to act at the right time or have alternative plans of achieving their goals rather than waiting patiently hoping to get what they want, hence contributing to sustainable development.

*5) Ífúlú yákerera íngeke.*

*Trans : Ífúlú* (a species of a small fish that resembles a tilapia) advised a tilapia (a species of a big fish commonly found in Lake Victoria).

*Mean :* A younger person may advise or may say something that is worth listening to by an older person.

*Func & Contr :* It encourages elderly people to heed the advice of younger people sometimes instead of ignoring them because it may benefit them (older people). It implies that each person has his/her potential that may be exploited for the benefit of other people. In many cultures across the continent, age is credited with wisdom, and dominant practice is to value the elder's advice. To restore the balance, a genre of literature known as proverbs goes against the grain of this dominant view. This proverb, therefore, is important given its potential as a game-changer in matters relevant to development.

*6) Ínyángá siikonánga khuíndi.*

*Trans :* A day does not sleep on another day.

*Mean :* If you did not get whatever you wanted today, you may get it another day. It is similar to the English proverb that says *Every dog has his day* (Best, 2000, p. 68), which means that every person has a successful moment in life.

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*Func & Contr :* It encourages people to continue pursuing what they need or to continue looking for opportunities where they can invest ; such determination will enable them to succeed soon or later and have a chance to improve their welfare.

*7) Nende riakhanúle oreemánga omúsámbí.*

*Trans :* Even when it gets sweeter (a roasted potato), do not fail to share it with the roaster.

*Mean :* If you get something good, do not forget to thank the person who enabled you to get it. It is similar to the Boran proverb that says *Galati bade halo, haalon badde yareena* (Forgotten gratefulness will be avenged, forgotten revenge is a shame). It means that somebody who accepts favours or help without returning gifts or favours will not be helped on later occasions (Shongolo and Schlee, 2007, p. 42). There is also a Swahili proverb with a similar meaning which says *Mkono mtupu haulambwi* (An empty hand is not licked) (Robert, 2007, p. 42). This means that you don't get help without providing something in return. It is interesting to note that sometimes politicians intentionally disregard the intended meanings of proverbs and instead use them negatively to justify their corrupt activities and to promote ethnicity and nepotism in the public sector (Mwangi and Maitaria, 2019, p. 55 – 56). For example, *Mkono mtupu haulambwi* is no longer used to discourage selfishness as intended but it is used to solicit bribes thus encouraging corruption.

*Func & Contr :* This proverb emphasizes the basic principle of reciprocity among the Abanyala by cautioning people that they should not be selfish with their possessions but they should know that their success resulted from the contribution of other people ; therefore, it is reasonable to appreciate those contributors, and this is expected to contribute to social harmony.

*8) Njuukhania yáayia ménó.*

*Trans :* An impatient person burned his/her teeth.

*Mean :* A person who does not heed advice suffers or perishes.

*Func & Contr :* It advises and encourages people to be patient and listen to what they are told to do in order to avoid suffering later, and this is expected to contribute to their welfare in terms of sustainable socio-cultural and economic development.

*9) Obwâró bwechukhángá mákóbá.*

*Trans :* A boat capsizes when it is about to reach the shore.

*Mean :* A person fails to achieve what they were looking for when they are about to get it.

*Func & Contr :* It encourages and also warns people not to give up when they are pursuing something. They tend to get tired and discouraged when they are about to succeed. When used in the business context, this proverb implies that a new business may not perform well in the beginning but it will be profitable later only when you persevere, hence contributing to a person's economic welfare. Similarly, when it is used in the marriage context, a man who has been looking for a suitable girl to marry

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for a long time without success may want to give up the search when he is about to get one. The proverb encourages him to continue searching, because he will get one to marry soon, hence improving his social welfare.

*10) Ogóngo omwíbó oba orí nômwâríkhisía.*

*Trans :* A crowned hornbill bird species (*ogóngo*) that has given birth (*omwíbó*) does not need a co-wife (mwarikhwa) to help with domestic chores.

*Mean :* A newly delivered mother does not need a helper to be able to do her domestic chores. In other words, every person is able to deal with their challenges, problems or situations. According to Barasa (2014, p. 195), *ogongo* is "a crowned hornbill bird species." If this word is used metaphorically in this proverb, it could symbolize a newly delivered mother or a person who is faced with a certain challenge.

*Func & Contr :* It encourages people to come up with home-grown solutions to their problems rather than expecting external solutions, and this is expected to improve their welfare. Such problems that face the Abanyala community include perennial floods, youth unemployment, drunkenness, child marriages, wife inheritance, etc.

*11) Okenda kaalá yóola Ebúnyóló.*

*Trans :* A person who walked slowly eventually reached Luoland.

*Mean :* If you do something hurriedly, you may not accomplish it successfully. As the English saying goes, *hurry hurry has no blessing*. The Swahili equivalents of this proverb with a similar message are : *Kawia ufike* (It is better to be late but reach your destination) ; *Haraka haraka haina baraka* (hurry hurry has no blessing) ; *Kutangulia si kufika* (being ahead doesn't mean that you have arrived) ; *Mwenda pole hajikwai* (the slow walker does not stumble) ; and *Polepole ndio mwendo* (slowly is the way) (Musau & Ngugi, 1999, p. 95).

*Func & Contr :* It cautions people not to hurry when trying to accomplish difficult tasks ; it is better to take their time and proceed carefully if they want to succeed, and this may contribute to sustainable development.

*12) Ô khúsakândía akhúra álaí.*

*Trans :* A person who persecutes you puts you in a good place.

*Mean :* A person who persecutes, ill-treats or mishandles you yet you are meant to be under his/her care or control, is helping you. It means that your apparent enemies may sometimes be doing you good or wishing you well. In other words, your afflictions could be blessings in disguise.

*Func & Contr :* It criticizes people who do not like to be corrected when they do wrong ; that when we learn from our mistakes, we can realize that our apparent enemies (persecutors) are indeed our friends, and this may contribute to our welfare in various ways. For example, a positive change in the behavior of a thief after being punished signifies social development at a personal and community level because the individual will be able to fit in the community and thus participate in their development activities.

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*13) Olúkhwi ólwa werényeere lukhúrusía amásiká.*

*Trans :* A piece of firewood that you collected for yourself can make you shed tears (due to the smoke that it emits when used for cooking).

*Mean :* Your own actions can harm you if you are not careful.

*Func & Contr :* It warns and advises people against acting blindly because they might suffer the consequences later. It is expected that when they heed the advice of this proverb, they are likely to avoid the suffering ; hence it may contribute to their welfare.

*14) Omúkará abeyérángá ímbákó.*

*Trans :* A lazy person always blames the hoe for his or her own laziness. Literally, *-ranga* signifies the habitual aspect of the applicative verb *beyera* (blame one thing for something else).

*Mean :* A person who does not have the energy or ability to do a task e.g digging, will always blame other people or other things and give excuses in order to stop doing the task. They will claim that the hoe is faulty so it should be changed.

*Func & Contr :* It encourages people to work hard and avoid blaming others and giving excuses and this is expected to contribute to social harmony.

*15) Mwana ogénda akhirá ng'íná amákesí.*

*Trans :* A walking child is cleverer than his/her mother.

*Mean :* A person who travels widely is more knowledgeable than one who does not. This Abanyala proverb seems to depict women negatively as potentially ignorant people in a manner that is consistent with Swahili and Arabic proverbs. Karakacha, *et.al* (2021) have observed that Swahili and Arabic proverbs are used to silence women's voices by portraying them as objects of pleasure, passive objects and ignorant people in need of guidance. This is echoed in the Swahili proverb *Kuku hawekwi shahidi wala hajui sheria* (The hen is not taken as a witness because it does not know the law). It subtly suggests that women's ignorance especially with matters of law is responsible for them being denied public participation like standing as witnesses (Karakacha, et.al 2021, p. 102). These Abanyala and Swahili proverbs are similar to the Boran proverb that says *Miili deemu raada, ka tau jibic* (The foot which walks is a female calf, the one which stays a male calf). It means that by staying at home one cannot acquire anything. Moving about and looking for different opportunities are more productive : It is like a female animal which can bear offspring but a male animal cannot (Shongolo and Schlee, 2007, p. 81).

*Func & Contr :* This Abanyala proverb encourages people to travel widely and get exposure. This will help them interact with more people, learn from them and hence avoid ignorance that is associated with women. Consequently, this is expected to improve people's welfare. This proverb, which emphasizes gender divergence in the Abanyala community, may not be used in the context of a society that has embraced the ideals of gender equality where men and women are expected to enjoy the same opportunities and have the same potential.

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*16) Omwîní kufunúkhe ímbákó ibêeo.*

*Trans :* The handle of a hoe should break but the hoe should be there.

*Mean :* It is better for the handle of a hoe to break than the hoe itself. For example, if your child dies **(God forbid)**, you don't have to kill yourself, because it is believed that you will give birth to another one.

*Func & Contr :* It encourages people not to be discouraged when their property or sources of livelihood are damaged e.g perennial floods that destroy their houses and food in the shambas (farms) ; this is because they still have the land to cultivate and build more houses later, and this is expected to contribute to their socio-economic development.

*17) Oonîa owérikónjíó oraonísîe owéinjálá.*

*Trans :* You heal a person who suffers from a wound rather than saving a hungry person.

*Mean :* It is better to help someone who has experienced unforgettable problems than helping one who has not undergone any trouble. In the context of this proverb, the wound sufferer has a bigger problem than the hungry person and so s/he will heal and remain with a scar to remember but the hungry one will not remember after being fed and getting satisfied.

*Func & Contr :* It advises people to help those who have bigger problems instead of helping those with smaller problems because the former are more likely to remember and appreciate the support they were given as compared to the latter. This message is similar to the one communicated in *The Holy Bible* about the parable of the two debtors, whereby the woman with greater sins was forgiven by Jesus Christ because she reciprocated by washing His feet. The people with lesser sins did not see the need to reciprocate (Luke 7 : 36 – 50, The New King James Version). The proverb implies that one who appreciates the support they are given is likely to attract more support and (in the minds of people) this may contribute to their welfare.

*18) Ôoraíkuríre nîoíkháácha (ímónyé).*

*Trans :* A person who has not bought it (lung fish) is the one who consumes it extravagantly or greedily.

*Mean :* People who do not take the trouble to do or acquire anything are the ones who benefit later from whatever was done or acquired. In the context of Abanyala culture, *imonye* (lung fish) is a fish species that is supposed to be eaten by men only and is believed to be very delicious, especially the tail part of it. *Ókhaachá* is usually used in reference to eating a big chunk of fish in a wasteful and greedy manner. Interestingly, this proverb appears to contradict the Boran proverb that says *Okkote nam it aanut d'eefe qab* (The cooking pot benefits the one next to it). It means that the benefits of any activity are most likely to accrue to the actors. For example, the labourer is the first to lay hands on his wage before he has to share it with others and meet his obligations. Similarly, successful raiders get a larger share of the booty than those left behind in the homestead (Shongolo and Schlee, 2007, p. 107). This contradiction does

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not imply that either of the two proverbs is not saying the truth ; it simply shows that they are used in different cultural contexts to mean different things to different communities.

*Func & Contr :* It encourages people to take an active role in creating wealth because they will ultimately be the beneficiaries. This is expected to improve their socio-economic welfare.

*19) Orachekhéra ákhari ebúsíbá, owáo anyalá óbámo.*

*Trans :* Never laugh at a small fishing vessel (a boat) that is in deep waters because yours (relative) could also be on board.

*Mean :* Never celebrate other people's misfortunes because you could also be a victim. It is similar to the English proverb *Forewarned is forearmed* (Best, 2000, p. 69) and the Swahili equivalent *Mwenzio akinyolewa chako kitie maji* (when your companion is being shaved, wash your head – make ready to be shaved too) (Ndalu & King'ei, 1992, p. 140). It means that one person's fate is another person's lesson.

*Func & Contr :* It warns people against the habit of feeling happy or taking advantage of other people's misfortunes but instead be compassionate and find ways of safeguarding themselves ; hence it is expected that they will improve their welfare.

*20) Silabá éng'u sirafwíre éng'u.*

*Trans :* Let the crops be ready for harvesting (*Silabá*) where you come from (*éng'u*) rather than the crops to die (*sirafwíre*) where you come from (*éng'u*).

*Mean :* Let there be bumper harvest where you come from than failing to harvest. It is better to help your people solve problems than leaving them to suffer, ignoring or abandoning them. However, sometimes politicians tend to use this proverb to perpetuate tribalism and nepotism when they misuse it to suggest that it is better to vote for somebody because he/she is from your clan or your tribe. This confirms the observation made by Mwangi & Maitaria (2019, p. 55) as explained in proverb number 2 and 7.

*Func & Contr :* It encourages people to invest and create wealth in the rural areas where they come from, instead of ignoring those areas and developing other places where they have migrated to in search of better opportunities like employment in town. When *charity begins at home,* as the English saying goes, it is expected that this is likely to contribute to sustainable socio-economic development in the rural areas.

### 1.6 Discussion of Major Findings and Challenges of the Study

The data presented in the above section show that Abanyala proverbs perform an important educational function of imparting knowledge to the people. Some of the knowledge is presented in form of encouragement, advice, caution, warning and criticism. The analysis shows that about 6o % of the selected proverbs are used to encourage (Number 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 18 and 20), 20 % are used to warn and caution (Number 7, 11, 13 and 19), 15 % are used to advise (Number 2, 8 and 17)

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whereas 5 % are used to criticize people (Number 12). It is also evident that a good understanding of the Abanyala proverbs requires one to have an idea of the physical, socio-cultural and economic environment in which they are used as highlighted in the Introduction section. This is because almost 50 % of the selected proverbs make reference to issues related to economic activities like farming, fishing and livestock keeping. This is evident in proverbs number 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 14, 15, 16, 18 and 20. This major finding implies that the sub-genre of proverbs is mostly used among the Abanyala to educate people by encouraging them to participate actively in economic activities in order to promote sustainable development. Other proverbs also play an important role in warning and cautioning people against unbecoming behaviors like selfishness and haste while justifying carefulness and compassion and this is evident in proverbs number 7, 11, 13 and 19. It should, however, be noted that the functions of proverbs may overlap since a single proverb may be counted in two or more categories depending on its context of use. For example, proverb Number 9 may be used to encourage as well as to warn and caution people. One interesting observation that was illustrated in proverbs Number 2, 7 and 20 is the ambiguity of some Abanyala proverbs which may be used both for promotion of added values and for protecting their perversion. From a traditional perspective, people who are educated in terms of knowledge of proverbs are more likely to contribute to development than those who are uneducated. Indeed, before the advent of formal education, African communities relied mainly on oral literature as a way of imparting knowledge to people in informal settings like evening story-telling sessions around the fire-place, communal activities like cultivation and harvesting in farms, meetings convened by village elders, cultural festivals or during everyday interactions of community members. This is confirmed by Wanyenya (2020) who observed that sayings are used for children upbringing among the Wamasaaba of Uganda. This is unlike formal education which takes the form of systematic instruction especially at a school or university. While the benefits of formal education cannot be underestimated in this era of globalization, the discussion in this paper has shown that indigenous knowledge in form of proverbs also plays a key role in educating people and this may contribute to the improvement of their socio-economic welfare. Unfortunately, the teaching of proverbs and oral literature in general is currently not very much emphasized in the school and university curriculum in Kenya, and this poses a serious threat to the survival of proverbs. The following are some of the challenges that hinder the use of Abanyala proverbs and their transmission to future generations for sustainable development : The first challenge is the tendency of scholars to avoid conducting research on Abanyala proverbs probably because they do not consider it as an important research area. As a result, many young and middle-aged people do not know their proverbs. This implies that when the custodians of these proverbs (mostly the old people) die, they die with many proverbs that have not been documented for transmission to future generations. This is emphasized by an African proverb that says "*When an old man dies a library burns to the ground*."

Lack of funds to be used for conducting research on Abanyala proverbs is the second challenge. A comprehensive survey of proverbs is an expensive undertaking which can only be accomplished when the researcher is well funded. Unfortunately, it is not easy to acquire such funds from academic institutions, state departments of culture and

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organizations. Consequently, most available proverbs remain undocumented. Thirdly, reliable oral artists who are experts in the field are scarce. Some oral artists do not have a good memory of the proverbs hence they may not give the researcher a complete picture of their reminiscence. Scarcity of well-trained people who can conduct research on proverbs and other aspects of oral literature is yet another challenge. Such research requires to be carried out by people who are well-trained and experienced in data collection and analysis procedures and also theoretical approaches that guide oral literature research. This is because the research findings tend to be influenced by the methodology and theoretical framework adopted. The fifth challenge is the negative attitude of most youth towards the teaching of proverbs and oral literature in general. Most of them have the notion that any knowledge that is associated with oral literature is old-fashioned and inferior to knowledge accessed through modern technology like the Internet, social media, etc. Most of them, therefore, use tools of modern technology (smart phones, computers, Internet and social media platforms) as agents of socialization and as a convenient and major source of their knowledge rather than sitting with family members and village oral artists. Sixthly, commercial book publishers prefer publishing school course books which have a ready market rather than publishing works of oral literature like proverbs and other genres whose target readers are unknown. This kills the morale of prospective researchers and scholars who would have wanted to document such works. In Kiswahili, Kobia (2006, p. 151) notes that scholars only started writing oral literature manuscripts for publishing after the new syllabus of 2002 recommended the teaching of aspects of oral literature in schools. Lastly, when tools of modern technology (computer, mobile phones, flash disks, Compact Disks, radio, television and books) are used to preserve and disseminate works of oral literature, they kill the liveliness and creativity that is associated with narrators during the live performance. The result is that people end up consuming proverbs and other works of oral literature that are artificial rather than natural and those works are presented out of context, contrary to the nature of oral literature. Oral literature requires proverbs to be used during real situations, real events and by real people during communication. Indeed, scholars have questioned whether recorded literature in print or electronic media should be considered to be oral literature or written literature (Muleka, 2014, p. 86).

### 1.7 Recommendations for Policy Making and Further Research

The foregoing challenges, if not urgently addressed, may put the survival and subsequent transmission of proverbs to future generations in jeopardy. It is, therefore, necessary to make the following recommendations as possible interventions that may help reinvigorate and perpetuate the use of proverbs and other genres of oral literature for the sake of promoting sustainable socio-cultural and economic development.

1) Conducting Research and Publishing Findings : Scholars should conduct research on proverbs and other genres of oral literature in order to generate new knowledge to be published in theses, monographs, newspapers, journals, books and Internet.

2) Preparing Compact Discs (CD) : Information concerning oral literature should be collected and recorded on compact discs that are used on computers, video

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and radio cassettes. This will enable a lot of information to be preserved using very little space and also to reach wider audience.

3) Teaching : The information collected on oral literature should be incorporated in the school and university curricula for the purpose of teaching and examining students.

4) Radio and Television Programs : Radio and television stations that broadcast especially in the rural areas, should prepare programs that will help in disseminating information concerning oral literature.

5) Music and Drama Festivals : These festivals should be organized annually in form of competitions that bring together various institutions in order to help promote and disseminate information on oral literature.

6) Groups of Performing Arts : Groups of performing arts like music bands and theatre groups should be encouraged and supported by the government in their endeavour to promote and disseminate genres of oral literature.

7) Clothing : Clothing like T-shirts, lesos, head scarfs and caps should be used to preserve and disseminate messages concerning aspects of oral literature, for example, proverbs and riddles.

8) Stickers and Posters : Stickers and posters bearing writings concerning aspects of oral literature should be pinned on various means of transport (for example vehicles, ferries, ships, aeroplanes and boats), public places, businesses and products. This will enable many people who use those means of transport or who frequent those public places to learn more concerning oral literature.

9) Websites on the Internet : Individuals, organizations and various institutions may start Websites so as to promote and disseminate information on oral literature. This will enable many people to discuss issues concerning proverbs and oral literature in general.

10) Establishing a Research Fund : Universities and the State Department of Culture should establish a special fund aimed at promoting research activities on oral literature in general.

## Conclusion

This paper has discussed the role of Abanyala proverbs in the transmission of indigenous knowledge that may improve people's living conditions and contribute to sustainable socio-cultural and economic development. The analysis has revealed that Abanyala oral literature is rich in proverbs that educate people through encouraging, advising, warning, cautioning, and criticizing. It is evident that the survival and use of proverbs is threatened by various challenges which can only be overcome through various interventions. It is worth emphasizing the fact that research and documentation of Abanyala proverbs is a key intervention in the promotion of local languages and enabling people to access indigenous knowledge which can improve their living conditions and contribute to sustainable development.

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