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Nzema Proverbs and Sayings About Hard-Work, Perseverance and Self-Reliance

Mohammed Yakub^{[a],*}; William Appiagyei Osei^[b]

^[a]Department of Akan-Nzema Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.

^[b]Department of Ghanaian Languages, Enchi College of Education, Enchi, Ghana.

* Corresponding author.

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Abstract

In many African socio-cultural setting, people cherish the incorporation of proverbs in discourse; partly because speakers use proverbs as a ‘vehicle’ to conveniently convey their messages to targeted audience. Since proverbs are concealed with a lot of didactics and wisdom, speakers often depend on them to advise people against vices, while most acceptable behaviours are encouraged through proverbs. Among the Nzema¹, proverbs permeate almost every communicative interaction. This paper presents a qualitative descriptive analysis of Nzema proverbial expressions that advocate the virtue and essence of hard work and perseverance. It aims at examining the role of the Nzema proverb in ‘empowering’ people to work hard and to highlight the implications for ensuring a peaceful society. The paper fetches data from both oral and documented sources, as well as the researchers’ intuitive knowledge as indigenous speakers of Nzema. It found that the Nzema detest people who entertain the spirit of laziness/idleness, since this could result in indigence and could sometimes compel people to indulge in several immoral acts. The Nzema rather believe that hard work and mobility could place people at the pinnacle of the pedestal with regard to achievements in life. The implication, as the discussions showcased, is that industriousness is a necessary tool for ensuring self-sufficiency; thereby promoting a peaceful, cohesive and

harmonious traditional society among the Nzema. The paper, thus, calls on all categories of people to be hard-working, so as to live independently to avoid undesirable attitudes like robbery, envy, jealousy, and hatred etc. to ensure the prevalence of peace and societal co-existence at all times.

Key words: Nzema proverbs; Hard-work; Self-reliance; Peaceful society

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INTRODUCTION

Every human society cherishes inhabitants who strive to contribute in diverse ways to ensure the growth of the individuals and the society at large. Indolence, immobility and absolute dependence on other people for life sustenance are disdained per many African cultural traditions, which the Nzema of course, are no exception. P’Bitek (1986) has advised that if all members of African societies play their numerous roles fully, there is no danger of societal or individual disintegration (cited in Ndlovu, 2018, p.128). This implies that certain positive roles and behaviours are cherished; and are expected to be exhibited by members of societies for unity, fairness and peace to prevail. These roles, which are expected to be performed adequately to maintain societal cohesion, in my view do not exclude behavioural principles and virtues such as hard work and perseverance, dedication and commitment to work, obedience and respect for authority, faithfulness, and honesty among other attitudes that societies appreciate.

Ndlovu (2018, p.28) has stated that “African values of fairness and hard work do not encourage uncouth

¹ Nzema is a Niger-Congo (Kwa) language of Ghana. The people and the language are both referred to as Nzema. The Nzema occupy the South-West part of the Western Region of Ghana, West Africa.

ways of acquiring materials”. He posits further that people are expected to do their part for the development and sustenance of humanity, not to take advantage of other people and situations. Ndlovu’s assertion suggests that societies can develop if inhabitants work hard to contribute their quota in diverse ways, but if the contrary takes place, the effects of corruption, assault and other social vices can overwhelm the people. It is prudent to mention that Nzema traditional values do not portray and/or advocate human deeds that deviate from the above postulations; rather, the Nzema also take cognisance of the fact that ‘hard work and perseverance’ ensures self-sufficiency and self-reliance, which in turn promotes peaceful traditional society. This is evidenced largely in the imports of some proverbial expressions among the Nzema; which are intended to be critically examined later in section 4 of this paper.

The paper attempts to investigate and to provide an expository account of the role of Nzema proverbs and proverbial expressions in encouraging people to be hard-working. It also assesses how hard work and perseverance (as depicted in Nzema proverbs) could contribute to building a ‘violence free’ society for peace to be enjoyed by its inhabitants. The study, thus, seeks to answer these questions:

- a. What specific themes do hard work-related proverbs in Nzema seek to highlight?
- b. What are the social-cultural implications of Nzema proverbs that encourage the virtue of industriousness?

1. DEFINITION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PROVERBS

Many conflicting opinions exist with regard to proverbs definition (Mieder, 2004; Fasiku, 2006; Villers, 2016) perhaps, because the subject is at the crossroads of various disciplines including folklore and anthropology, semantics and pragmatics, syntax and stylistics, as well as sociolinguistics. Fasiku (2006: 50) opines that, in talking about proverbs, the puzzlement one often finds oneself in is that it is easy to detect a flaw in the definitions others have proffered, but it is difficult to propose one’s own definition which is infallible. This underscores that proverbs lack a universally accepted definition. Nonetheless, several scholars have presented their opinions on the concept of proverbs.

For example, Finnegan (1970) and Yankah (1989) agree that a major feature of the proverb among others is its symbolic, allusive and figurative nature; which accounts for the multiplicity of its contextual interpretations. This can suggest that when a particular proverb is quoted, it could be possible for targeted audience to draw several explanations and interpretations out of it (see also Yakub, 2019, p.176). One of the renowned ‘paremiologists’, Mieder, defines proverb as

“a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphoric, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation” (Mieder, 2004, p.24). As Akporobora (2008) argues somewhat in consonance with Mieder’s assertion, a proverb is a short popular expressing which often provides a moral advice expressed in a concise form. This shows that proverbs are usually shrunk into few words, which capture and portray the beliefs, values and etiquettes of a particular cultural setting.

Hussein (2009) reports that proverbs serve as linguistics maxims of Africa; and that their incorporation in any speech ensures interest and excitement. In the words of Nyame and Tomekyin (2018a, p.96), “a proverb is crafted based on real life situations and or experiences and it is an embodiment of some universal truth about life and as a source of wisdom”. They aver further that proverbs can be ‘constructed’ from careful observation of the lives of humans, animals and plants, including socio-cultural practices and activities such as farming, fishing, weaving and hunting among others. Generally, from the above postulations on the concept of proverbs, the following could be learnt: (1) proverbs are profound pithy expressions which portray human experiences and realistic situations in various traditional societies, (2) proverbs are considered as a folk assert which convey many didactics and experiences drawn from past events, (3) as an oral genre, the proverb is characteristically memorable and passed on from one generation to another. In our opinion, all the foregoing thoughts about proverbs largely hold true. In essence, from our perspective, proverbs can be described as ‘abridged’ figurative sayings which constitute the wisdom of our elders and the general worldview of a people, used to make critical comments on important issues, and to enforce societal norms. It must also be mentioned that, due to its conciseness, a proverb has the communicative power to summarise a speaker’s intended meaning.

It has been ascertained that proverbs perform crucial rhetoric and moral functions; as many people employ proverbs in both oral and written communications in varied contexts. They (proverbs) embellish the speech and reveal a speaker’s communicative competence (Okpewho, 1992; Agyekum, 2012, p.2017). Fasiku (2006, p.51) contends that proverbs serve as a means of achieving ‘clarity and conciseness’ in discourse. Besides these roles, proverbs contain a lot of moral issues which are used to provide guidance and to straighten human attitudes. What people consider as either virtues or uncouth practices are enshrined in proverbs (Olatungi, 1984). Affirming this observation, Dzobo (1997) tells us that the overall principles used to direct personal and societal deeds are embedded in proverbs belonging to any given traditional society.

Among the Nzema, there is usually a profuse use of

proverbs during socio-cultural functions and activities like funeral and burial ceremonies, marriage and naming ceremonies, chieftaincy installations and in arbitration among others. It is therefore worth emphasising that, proverbs, especially in Nzema cultural context, abound in moral values which are employed in communication to encourage positive behaviours such as tolerance, forgiveness, patience, cooperation, obedience, kindness, faithfulness and the essence of 'industriousness'; which is our focus and major concern of this paper.

2. STUDIES ON NZEMA PROVERBS

It is to be noted that Nzema has received quite appreciable scholarly attention in the area of oral literature in general and on proverbs in specific. In an earlier publication, Quarm and Kwesi (1998) made a compilation of about One Thousand Two-hundred and Thirty-nine (1,239) proverbs in Nzema. This secondary material crucially serves as corpus from which many researchers obtain data for various academic purposes. In addendum to the work of Quarm and Kwesi (1998) are other scholarly journal articles which make contributions to the existing literature on 'paremiology' in general and to add to studies on Nzema proverbs in particular.

One of such studies was done by Nyame & Tomekyin (2018a) which provided a descriptive qualitative analysis of 'neological' developments in Nzema Proverbs. The research specifically aimed to examine recent Nzema proverbs; why they are described as recent, the central messages they seek to communicate and the similarities and differences between the recent and traditional Nzema proverbs. The authors obtained primary data based on their native speakers' intuitions and discussed the data in the light of 'neological' issues in proverbs, variations on existing proverbs, reasons for considering some Nzema proverbs as recent and the differences and similarities between the recent and traditionally established proverbs. The study found that the Nzema possibly 'coin' new proverbs from the traditionally existing ones. Nzema proverbs, as the study showcased are based on real life situations and observations, and that many people use their artistic skills, wisdom, linguistic knowledge and observations from current situations in the society to create proverbs. The study further noted that such recent Nzema proverbs as well as the old proverbs have the same structure and provide connote similar meaning and interpretation.

Another study by Nyame & Tomekyin (2018b) sought to uncover the gender situations in Nzema society and to show how men and women are stratified from Nzema socio-cultural perspective. The data used for the study comprised some Nzema proverbs related to men and women, which were purposively tapped from both primary and secondary sources. Situating the analysis within the lens of the social construction

of gender framework, the study showed that traditional proverbs among the people of Nzema are considered as a validation of their culture which provide are rich source for creating and perpetuating gendered culture. It revealed that Nzema society has values and traditions that influence the attitudes and behaviours of its people, which are communicated through proverbial sayings in different dimensions. Contrary to previous postulations in scholarship that African oral literature portrays women as oppressed and men as oppressors, the authors demonstrated that the societal construction of masculinity and femininity in Nzema proverbs rather shows society's aspiration and desire to social order by presenting patriarchy as an immutable part of that social order in the nuclear family.

Yakub (2018a) also assembled data (some Nzema proverbs) through interviews with elderly native speakers and discussed some 'wellerisms' in Nzema proverbs; in which certain entities like animals, birds and plants among others are personified as if they are humans and are able to quote certain proverbial statements. The author tried to highlight how these nonhuman entities are made to depict the wisdom, values, beliefs, traditions and experiences of the people. The study demonstrated that some Nzema proverbs are 'woven' around animals and insects such as ants, flies, dogs, antelopes, monkeys, doves, ducks, vultures and others; which central messages usually transcend metaphorically to teach good morals and entreat all people to also desist from practices which societies do not embrace.

An equally significant study is "Unity and Cooperation as Portrayed in Nzema proverbs" by Yakub (2018b). The study focused on proverbs that tend to propagate the virtue of collectiveness, solidarity and social cohesion among the Nzema. Data were sourced by interviewing four (4) indigenous speakers of Nzema. Some additional data were fetched in the course of reading other literary texts in Nzema. The study revealed that unity and cooperation is 'key' in achieving success in all human endeavours, and so the people of Nzema through their proverbs largely encourage the positive attitude of being united. It proved that the Nzema as a way of revealing their communicative competence, and to spice their discourse interactions, generally resort to proverbs. Situating the analysis within the basic assumptions of the 'Theory of Proverbs Praxis' by Yankah 1989); which relates to the contextual functionality of proverbs, the study confirmed that Nzema proverbs about unity and cooperation are not cited randomly and haphazardly; rather, they are 'injected' into any discourse based on appropriate context situations.

Adopting the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Yakub (2019) picked eighteen (18) proverbs related to animals and explored 'animal metaphors and imagery in Nzema proverbs'. The study aimed at investigating the kinds of animals deployed in Nzema proverbs to portray human activities and attributions; shedding light on

some relevant themes that are portrayed in the selected proverbs. The paper demonstrated that both domestic and nondomestic animals including birds, flies, insects and reptiles are incorporated in Nzema proverbs; which symbolic and figurative functions are dwelled upon to advise people against undesirable attitudes like recalcitrance, procrastination, greed, selfishness and all sort of social vices. It showed that the Nzema learn many lessons from the behaviours and natural features of animals which serve as a rich 'source domain' (a more physical/concrete reality) through which the Nzema are able to conceptualise certain positive human behavioural principles and activities (as target domain). In this regard, the study revealed some crucial themes that are commonly conveyed in animal-related proverbs among the Nzema, such as good kinship, justice, tolerance, forgiveness, unity and togetherness, patience, generosity, faithfulness, respect for authority, controlling one's temper and hard work among others.

From a purely descriptive perspective, Yakub (2020) discussed the Nzema socio-cultural perception of *abotane* 'patience'; using sampled proverbs in the language. The data, (which comprised 17 proverbs about the virtue of patience) were taken from documented sources; and through focused discussions with two (2) indigenous respondents who were purposively chosen. Discussing the data under salient thematic sub-headings, the study revealed that the Nzema perceive patience (the ability to avoid rush and endure hardships) as a 'crucial virtue', and that, it is a potential behavioural trait required in achieving success in all human endeavours. It showed that the Nzema trust the efficacy of patience in ensuring a rightful decision making. The data and discussions also underpinned the fact that people who have the spirit of waiting sometimes stand the chance to be joyful in the long run. Interestingly, the study further found a couple of 'counter-proverbs' used by the Nzema to caution people against procrastination. The so called 'counter-proverbs' rather undermined the necessities of being patient, which explicated that, though patience is indispensable in any good work done, certain critical situations rather demand reactions in haste. These patience-related proverbs, as the discussions showcased, are largely deployed in Nzema communication based on appropriate contexts.

From the above empirical review, it could be seen that some attempts have been made to unearth part of the Nzema socio-cultural worldview through proverbs. In spite of these previous works, further contributions seem to be relevant, since the proverb genre appears to remain an inexhaustible field of research. The current paper, thus, seeks to build on and to broaden the scope of the existing ones, highlighting the essence of another important virtue, which has to do with 'hard work and perseverance' as enshrined in Nzema proverbs.

3. SOURCE OF DATA AND METHODS

Data for analysis/discussions in this paper comprised Nzema proverbs related to hard work, perseverance and self-reliance, which were purposively sampled from a secondary source (a collection of Nzema proverbs) titled *Nzema mrele nee be ngilenu* by Quarm and Kwesi (1998). In doing this, we spent ample time to do thorough scrutiny particularly in search of proverbs concerning industriousness and its related issues. Introspections based on our intuitions and experiences in the socio-cultural aspects of Nzema also helped in the selection and appropriate interpretation of the proverbs. We also interacted with two (2) elderly people who are noted for their rich knowledge in the linguistic and cultural concepts of Nzema to illicit some information and useful clarifications in order to 'purify' our conceptions. We relied on these grownups because the aged in any community, especially in the African contexts (Rababa'h & Malkawi, 2012; Thompson & Agyekum, 2015) are seen as the custodians of culture with a lot of wisdom.

Overall, fourteen (14) proverbs were purposively considered for the analysis, out of the total of twenty-five (25) proverbs that were collected. As part of the data analysis procedure, each proverb was presented in the local language and the literal translation (glossing) was given in single quotation marks. The pragma-semantic interpretations of the proverbs were further provided and enclosed in parenthesis alongside the literal meanings. The data were categorised based on 'relevant themes' under various sub-headings for discussions.

4. DATA ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the data obtained for the study. Our first taste of the proverbial expressions that propagate the essence of hard work and perseverance comes below in sub-section 4.1:

4.1 A Proverb About Retirement Preparation and Planning

Wɔanza enrinli bile zo a esoa egypte zo 'If you do not carry your load on black hair, you would carry it on grey hair' (Whoever fails to work hard at a youthful age would struggle at old age).

This proverb could be best deployed in the context of advising young men and women who do not strive to work when they have the strength. In this proverb, *enrinli bile* 'black hair' symbolises youthful age when one has enough physical strength, whereas *egyene* 'grey hair' represents old age. According to Nzema traditional worldview, someone at a youthful age is expected to have black hairs on the head, and that is the convenient time the person is expected to utilise his/her strength profitably by working hard. Subsequently, grey hairs emerge while the person grows older and weaker, and that is the time the person is expected to retire from any hard work, relax

comfortably and reap the benefits of his/her toil. This proverb, therefore, reminds us that people who would fail to do hard work at the time that they are capable, would be rather compelled to struggle for survival when they had grown older. In Nzema society, people who waste their time and energy at their youthful ages, moving from one city to another without returning with any profitable asserts are not much appreciated. Such people eventually put their burdens on their family members because they failed to insure their old ages. When this happens, those family members who are to cater for such 'worthless' grownups are not pleased; and so peace does not often prevail within the family. In essence, proverb (1) advocates the need to work hard to prevent economic frustrations; especially when one grows old. It actually informs people on the significance of proper retirement preparation and planning.

4.2 Proverb That Entreats Men (in particular) to be More Industrious

Nrenyia a kposa maa raale di a 'It is a man who chews for a woman to swallow' (Men need to work hard to be able to feed their wives and children (family)).

The import of proverb (2) seems to shed more light on gender construction and stratification. In the process of human consumption (eating), chewing any food substance may be seen to be more difficult, which requires much energy than merely swallowing the chewed substance. Thus, for a man to chew for a woman to swallow as expressed in (2) suggests that men need to work hard to be able to feed their wives and children. This is, however, not to claim that women in their matrimonial homes, according to Nzema tradition, must not also work to support their husbands; rather, the proverb tries to emphasise the Nzema cultural conception that a man must perform the most herculean task to take care of his family. In Nzema socio-cultural context, lazy men are disdained, whereas hardworking and responsible men are cherished. A real and responsible man is the one who strives to place food on the table, provides shelter, educates his children and cares about their health matters. Any woman who would be fortunate to have such a man as a husband, together with her children accords the man maximum respect; which in turn ensures peaceful family cohesion and societal co-existence at large.

4.3 Proverbs That Entreat All People to Be Mobile and Hard Working

Ede eleka ko a ede wo debie zo 'If you sit at one place, you sit on something precious' (Whoever remains idle without working, stifles his/her progress and success).

In a communicative encounter where a person is being advised against laziness, this pithy maxim could be conveniently quoted. Obviously, if a person sits at one place (without working hard), hardly would that person make progress in life. This proverb, thus, reminds us to refrain from idleness. It teaches us that mobility with focus on

achieving better standard of living is a good practice. The Akan of Ghana, for instance, also have a similar adage in this regard; which says: "anoma enntu a, obua da" 'if a bird does not fly, it goes hungry' (see Owu-Ewie, 2019: 35). In this didactic maxim, we are told to learn from the behaviour of the bird which flies and goes round in such of food. The people of Nzema trust that when everybody works hard to be self-reliant, stealing, cheating and other social vices would be mitigated and/or ceased for peace to always prevail in human societies. So, proverb (3) entreats all people to work hard in order to provide basic needs for themselves since staying at one point without any effort hinders one's progress. It is also worth mentioning that people who may not be physically challenged (handicapped), but would deliberately live in societies without working could be easily compelled to indulge in stealing and other undesirable practices, which the people of Nzema always strive to eradicate from their socio-cultural setting. Strengthening the need to be hard working, another proverbial expression among the Nzema goes like this:

Gyima esesebe eyele engu be 'Difficult task does not kill people' (Hard work does not kill human being).

Proverb (4) is a common expression used by the Nzema to motivate people to be hard working. This proverb largely indicates the Nzema perception that hard work has no control over a person who undertakes any exercise; it does not 'kill', but ensures the progress of an individual, a family, a society and a nation. Among the Nzema, a person who entertains the spirit of laziness, not wanting to experience any tiredness is not cherished so much. Such a person is often described as *mgbovonle* 'one who feels reluctant at doing any hard work'. Such a person, if a man, may find it difficult to get any helpful woman to marry and the vice-versa, since the Nzema believe in mutual efforts to arrive at the peak of the ladder of life.

4.4 Proverbs That Discourage the Attitude of Absolute Dependency

Asele ngyenle ende alee 'If you beg for salt, it would not be enough for you to prepare a delicious meal' (Whoever depends greatly on external support does not enjoy life sufficiently).

The people of Nzema encourage the habit of independence and self-reliance through hard-work and perseverance; hence, the 'coinage' of proverb (5) above. Salt is one of the most essential ingredients required to prepare a very palatable meal. Besides a variety of fish/meat, onion, tomato, pepper, ginger and the like, the salt is paramount in ensuring the maximum taste of every soup. In case a cook (a woman in the kitchen) goes to her next door neighbour to beg for salt, the neighbour may not offer her (the cook) enough salt to ensure the deliciousness of the meal. However, if the cook owns salt at her disposal, she would have the opportunity to put as much as may be needed into the soup; making the soup as palatable as possible. Here, proverb (5) carries a

message that informs us to work hard to possess our own properties, so that we could make use of any quantity that we may wish. This would in turn, ensure independence and self-reliance. Although mankind may not be able to acquire all his needs and wants, this witty proverb, nonetheless, entreats people to strive to gain their own asserts and to desist from relying on external support; since donors may not always be able to provide up to one's expectations and satisfactions. More significantly, whenever there is hard work and self-reliance among inhabitants of a given society, peace would obviously prevail since people would not disturb, envy and jealous other people unnecessarily. Stressing the need to be self-dependent, another Nzema proverb says:

Ɛ *sa anzi keye wo fe a* ɔnreye *ke e sa akunlu*. 'Behind your palm cannot be as sweet as inside your palm' (Depending on one's own effort is better than always seeking external support).

The advisory content of proverb (5) addressed above is aptly analogous to (6). In (6) also, one is urged to work hard, so as to be independent and reliant on his/her personal efforts. From the literal meaning of this proverb, *ε sa anzi* 'behind one's palm' metaphorically represents external support, whereas *ε sa akunlu* 'inside one's palm' represents a person's own efforts. The proverb thus sends the message that any help from other people would not be able to solve one's problems adequately; rather, the little that one would possess through his/her own hard work and perseverance could better sustain him/her. Hence, proverb (6) tells us to try to be reliant on our own abilities.

4.5 Proverbs That Encourage People to Make Advance Efforts

Nyamenle boa mɔɔ boa ɔ nwo la 'God helps whoever helps him/herself in advance' (Make advance preparation before others could come to assist you).

In this proverb, we are informed to do our best in the first place so that benevolent donors and generous people could easily support us. In other words, one should work hard to make advance preparation before others could come to assist him/her. The people of Nzema believe in caring about one another and being each other's keeper. However, assistance is largely offered to people who are found to be determined and preoccupied, and are seen to be seriously doing their best to prepare in advance. In such circumstance, other people (the able ones) often spend their time, their energy and money to assist the less privileged person who may be struggling in his/her own capacity to achieve success. If the less privileged remains idle with 'folded arms', however, hardly would people sympathise with him/her². It is worth also noting

² This is not to claim that the people of Nzema are not passionate, and do not support the indigent or vulnerable in the society; rather, the concern of this proverb is to embolden people to 'get started' in any work before seeking help elsewhere; especially people who may not be physically challenged.

that the Nzema somewhat portray their religious beliefs and values through this maxim; hence the incorporation of *Nyamenle* (God) as helping those who try to help themselves. The need for people to make initiations (begin to work) in order to attract others to come to their aid is also concealed in proverb (8), as it states:

Ɛkyekye *a yee besoa wo a* 'If you tie your load adequately, you easily get people to help you carry it' (You must strive in your own capacity before others could help you to excel).

In the olden days, and possibly now, most people of Nzema are peasant subsistent farmers who often tie bundles of firewood and carry them home after completing the day's work on the farm. Thus, the etymology of proverb (8) seems to emanate from this practice of tying the load (fire wood). The communicative and advisory content of (8) is somewhat parallel to that of (7) discussed above. The Nzema dwell on this proverb also to propagate the essence and the need for one to strive in his/her own capacity before others could help him/her to succeed eventually. These proverbs, (7 and 8), simply seek to discourage absolute dependence.

4.6 Proverbs That Highlight the Adverse Consequence of Indolence

Ɛsale *mɔɔ enye gyima la enli aleε* 'The hand that does not work does not eat also' (A lazy person goes hungry).

Example (9) is another proverbial expression that is often 'injected' into conversations to advise people who entertain the spirit of laziness and idleness; not making any attempt to work to be able to feed themselves. This proverb underscores the fact that a lazy person obviously goes hungry. The Igbo of Nigeria, for instance, also have a proverb concealed with an equivalent wisdom, which states: *ngana kpuchié ákwa, ágúú ékpughé ya*, literally meaning that, 'when a lazy man covers himself with cloth, hunger uncovers him' (see Nwankwo, 2015, p.58). This affirms that laziness could result in hunger, displeasure, miserableness and wretchedness in one's life. As has been hinted earlier, the Nzema frown at lazy people in the society because whoever refuses to work hard would be likely to find dubious means such as theft and robbery to make earnings meet. Such indolent persons may even murder innocent people for 'rituals' with the intent to becoming rich overnight. Therefore, in entreating people to always get occupied (work hard) to earn some income for survival in order to prevent certain uncouth practices in the society, proverb (9) would become very useful to be employed. The Nzema proverb in (10) below also emphasises that a lazy person goes hungry and lives miserably. The proverb reads as follows:

Saa wɔanve a enli 'If you do not strive hard, you do not eat also' (If you are lazy, you do not live any joyful life).

This proverbial expression appears to be short, but it is actually a complex construction denoting conditionality; which seems to have significant influence on its pragmatic

interpretation. Crucially, the conditional marker *saa* ‘if’, informs us that one should eat (or enjoy) only if the person works accordingly. The proverb tries to say that a lazy person hardly lives a happy life. Thus, we are taught here to work hard (effectively) so that we would be rewarded with the appropriate earns. The Nzema, besides other suitable contexts of communication, largely resort to this proverb to admonish people who would wish to gain wealth without engaging in any hard work. Buttressing the disadvantages of laziness, another proverb says:

Mgbovonle εdanle *ku a* ɔnnwu *ye* ‘A lazy person refuses to recognise that his/her clothes are dirty’ (People who do not want to work hard pretend as if they have no work to do).

People who are indolent often pretend even when there are obvious responsibilities for them to perform. Such people in societies deliberately refuse to embark on activities they may be entitled to do. Proverb (11) provides the message that people who do not want to work hard run away from basic duties such as washing their own clothing among others. The proverb aptly indicates that lazy people live in filthy surroundings; since they refuse to recognise and wash their own dirty garments. If a person feels reluctant to keep his/her clothes and environment tidy, to what extent would he/she do any Herculean task? This suggests that the spirit of laziness paralyses one’s attempt to be hard-working. This proverb could be appropriately cited to motivate people to cultivate the habit of hard work and discard the attitude of indolence.

4.7 Proverb That Encourages Hard Work With Collective Hands on Board

Alee mɔɔ εkɛli *bie la* εwude-wuda ɔ *bo* ‘You must rekindle the fire if you intend to join hands in eating the food’ (One needs to work to help others achieve something for mutual benefit).

The Nzema usually try to rebuke a person who intentionally looks on and allows one person to shoulder the burdens in performing a difficult task. Thus, they depend on this proverb to unveil the importance of uniting and working harder with supporting hands. Rekindling the fire that is used for cooking, as captured in the proverb is likened to someone making **continuous** efforts (working hard) together with other people in order to reach a common goal. It could be generally observed that in any human settlement, conflicts and misunderstanding may not be completely eradicated, but efforts could always be made for such unpleasant circumstances to be mitigated. A part of these attempts to reduce commotion in the society as proverb (12) tries to depict is by engaging in mutual assignments and working hand-in-hand. Once everybody works hard for any job to be done collectively, all participants would be pleased and satisfied for peace to be enjoyed. Hence, this proverb cautions that when a particular task is meant to be performed by many, all

must endeavour to contribute their maximum; either by physical strength or in cash for success to rain for mutual enjoyment. However, if one person is made to exhaust his/her energy to do any work, while others come to enjoy the positive outcomes later, confusion would be likely to ‘explode’.

4.8 Proverb That Teaches the Merits of Independent Work Done

Menli dɔnwo debie εnle *sonla ko de* ‘Whatever belongs to many people is not an individual’s asset’ (One person cannot claim ownership of what belongs to a multitude of people).

This proverbial expression reminds us not to put our trusts so much in family assets and properties that may be accessible to numerous people. It teaches people to do independent work so as to have absolute control over their own achievements and be able to manage their own affairs; thereby being self-sufficient and self-reliant. Obviously, when two or more people own a property, one person may not legally and conveniently have access to the property without the consent of the others. In fact, any attempt by an individual to make sole benefit of the item(s) could result in chaos, a situation which the Nzema try to discard through this proverb. However, it is important to mention here that proverb (13) does not necessarily seek to ‘counter’ the essence of working in collaboration; rather, it tries to emphasise the merits of working hard independently to be able to make maximum utilisation of one’s gains without any interference.

4.9 Proverb That Underscores the Significance of Hard Work

Mɔɔ kɔ azule la anwo εmbɔ ‘One who goes to fetch water does not experience body odour’ (Whoever works hard, lives to benefit out of it).

In the olden days, the Nzema mostly fetched water from rivers and streams for cooking, washing and other domestic purposes. Sometimes, some distance needed to be covered before these sources of water could be reached. Any child, (or whosoever) may go to fetch water from such distance was somewhat considered hard working. We may then conceptualise that anyone who was dedicated and committed to fetching water for the house chores would not lack water for bathing (washing his/her body); whereas other people who might feel reluctant to perform the duty (fetching of water) may be struggling to get water to wash their bodies. This could rightly account for the glossing of the proverb as “one who goes to fetch water does not experience body odour”. Proverb (14) tries to say that whoever works hard lives to benefit better than a person who may remain idle and unconcern. It actually informs us that, with all things being equal, a lazy person would lack some basic things in life and also lose certain opportunities; while a hard working person would benefit out of his/her toil.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined Nzema proverbial expressions about the essence of hard-work, perseverance and self-reliance. The discussions have shown the efficacy of mobility and industriousness, not only in ensuring financial growth and development, but also in promoting peace and social cohesion as evidenced in the selected proverbs. The paper further uncovered the adverse consequences and the devastating powers of idleness and indolence. It confirmed that lazy people hardly become self-reliant, thereby trying to find dubious means such as murdering innocent people (for money rituals), robbing, defrauding, cheating and bullying other people to make earnings meet. Crucially, the paper highlighted certain essential themes as per the Nzema cultural beliefs, values and worldview. Some of these themes as concealed in the proverbs are: the need to make proper retirement preparation and planning, the need to make advance efforts before seeking external support, the need for one to make persistent contribution when a duty is being performed collectively, the need to avoid absolute dependency and the need for men to be more hard-working among others. The overall implicature is a reflection of the Nzema belief that industriousness is a vital 'mechanism' to ensuring self-sufficiency; thereby promoting a peaceful, cohesive and harmonious traditional society among the Nzema. The paper, thus, calls on all categories of persons to 'bury' the spirit of laziness, but must be hard-working, so as to live independently to avoid undesirable attitudes like robbery, envy, jealousy, and hatred among other uncouth practices to ensure the prevalence of peace and societal co-existence at all times.

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