

Original Paper

Nso, Mbum and Iyamho Creative Imagination and Social Concerns: The Study of Proverbs

Ngeh Ernestilia Dzekem^{1*}

¹ Higher Teacher Training College, Department of English Modern Letters, University of Bamenda, Bamenda, Cameroon

* Ngeh Ernestilia Dzekem, Higher Teacher Training College, Department of English Modern Letters, University of Bamenda, Bamenda, Cameroon

Received: April 30, 2022

Accepted: May 14, 2022

Online Published: July 28, 2022

doi:10.22158/wjssr.v9n3p25

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjssr.v9n3p25>

Abstract

This study investigates the relevance of oral performance in addressing social concerns within the context of the three oral communities under study. It contends that the oral literature of the Nso and Mbum people of the North West region of Cameroon and Iyamho people of Edo state, Nigeria lodge cherished African values that are still significant to the people's conception of development in this evolving society. Every community strives to reinforce positive values in order to enhance development. The paper considers the collection and documentation of proverbs that are on the lips of Nso, Mbum and Iyamho people relevant because this cultural heritage that harbours their valuable mores, lores and customs are threatened by globalization. Many have thought that oral literature is outdated and that given its mode of transmission which is by word of mouth, it cannot address serious contemporary social issues. Through the participant observation method and interviews with members of the communities under study, the findings tentatively reveal that orature which generally consists of material that is several generations old and is transmitted orally contains local knowledge systems that can be useful in the discussion in addressing social concerns to enhance sustainable development within the various communities under reference. Considering the crucial position of context in oral literature, new historicism, interpretative cultural translation and pragmatic functionalism theories guided the analysis, and revealed, that since all successful development efforts begin with the right decision which is anchored on good human qualities and resources, the indigenous knowledge system expressed in Nso, Mbum and Iyamho proverbs can be exploited and applied alongside some innovative methods to foster development. The study therefore assumes that since sustainable development anchors on the quality of the mind, we need to conceive our projects locally and think globally.

Keywords

creative, imagination, oral literature, development, proverb

1. Introduction

This paper sets out to demonstrate that oral literature of the Nso, Mbum and Iyamho people emanates from their natural and cultural environments and relates to issues of development from their perspectives. According to Andrew T. Ngeh and Nformi Dominic Ngayu, “The people of Africa, like other peoples of the world are inseparable from their history and culture, for their history is the record of what they did, thought and said; and their culture is the totality of the ideas, concepts and values that characterized their societies. These cultural elements are manifested in their literatures (oral as well as written)” (Note 1). The contention here is that literature whether written or spoken responds to the needs of its immediate socio-cultural environment. Nso, Mbum and Iyamho creative artists coin proverbs which are useful tools in development from their view point. So, meaning in these proverbs is meaning in context though the values they transmit are both specific and universal.

Nso is found in the North West region of Cameroon. Its division is Bui which constitutes one of the largest and densely populated ethnic groups in Cameroon. More than four fifth of the Nso people are farmers. They cultivate crops such as, beans, yams, maize and potatoes both for subsistence and commercial purposes.

The Nso people cherish their culture and traditions and these institutions are headed by a traditional administrator known as “Fon\ He is assisted by sub-chiefs known in the Nso oral culture as Shufaay or Fai”. These are quarter heads that assist the Fon in the day to day running of the administration. In addition to these are the regulatory authorities called the *Nwerong* and *Ngiri* that discipline deviants in the society and check the excesses of the Fon. The Fon coordinates all development projects.

The Mbum are located in Nkambe plateau of Donga and Mantung Division in the North West region of Cameroon. Their food crops include maize, groundnuts, beans, plantains, yams and sweet potatoes. Their main cash crops are Arabica coffee and Kola nuts. Tea production is the consequence of their encounter with the colonial administration. It is considered foreign. It constitutes a major economic activity in this area of the nation. The natives of this part of the nation engage themselves in other minor activities such as tapping and hunting. They also weave raffia bags, baskets, mats and make bamboo beds, chairs and benches. Their main commercial centre is Ndu, which is one of the major food producing areas in Cameroon.

Iyamho is a small town in Etsako local government area of Edo state, Nigeria. It is one of the villages/towns that constitute Azairue clan in Etsako West, Edo State. The major religion includes traditional, Christianity and Islam.

Etsako West is made up of six clans Uzairue, Auchi, South Ibie, Anwain, Jagbe and Aviele. The most common language spoken here is Edo which is also called Bini, which was also the Primary language of the Benin Empire and its predecessor, Igodomigodo. They are Africa's most popular and artistic people that built the pre-colonial ancient and powerful Benin kingdom. The generic term "Edo" refers to these peoples who have shared historical origin as well as political and cultural similarities. They are called Edoid.

Henry Kah Jick posits that, "culture is the basis of development" and goes further to propose a reading of development as "The systematic realization of the full potentialities of individual members within a given geo-political entity" (Note 2) In his foreword to the above-mentioned text, George D. Nyamndi remarks: "In his scheme of developmental priorities, Jick places the mind on the first rung. And his reasons are not only cogent, they are arresting in their rationality. He has argued that if the human resources are not first developed, the natural resources will not also be developed" (Note 3). Although the concept of culture is obviated, development as a dialectic is addressed and confronted literally as he clarifies that "when reason is clouded, man degenerates almost to the level of a beast (Note 4).

Jick establishes the link between oral literature (proverbs) and development when he maintains that proverbs express the philosophy of the people and points out that "when man's reasoning faculty is sharpened and developed, his hard work baffles him; he explores and improves his environment"(Note 5). Jick defines development from the perspective of culture and this study finds it appealing to the discussion on Nso, Mbum and Iyamho proverbs because knowledge that can enhance sustainable development is that which emanates from the people's cultural and philosophical backgrounds.

In *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, Emmanuel Obiechina writes: "proverbs are the Kernels which contain the wisdom of the traditional people. They are philosophical and moral expositions shrunk to a few words" (Note 6). On his part Nol Alembong sees that, "a proverb is a gnomic or metaphorical statement accepted and used by a people as an expression of truth or wisdom" (Note 7). Obiechina's and Alembong's perspectives underline a key character of the proverb which is, its ability to transport wisdom and this is relevant to this paper which investigates the relevance of this oral art form in reinforcing collective social values within the Nso, Mbum and Iyahmo oral communities.

In the contemporary era where enormous scientific and technological innovations have visibly assaulted our indigenous ways of life, our cultures have not been given sufficient attention when looking at the moral, cultural, economic and social problems that retard the development process in our different African societies. Many have erroneously believed that modernity and development refer to the same thing and that is why many African youths pursue wealth instead of relevant knowledge. The argument in this paper is that proverbs contain indigenous knowledge systems that can be exploited to address contemporary social concerns using the three social units under study as examples.

Consequently, the paper investigates the role proverbs can play to sustain development in African cultures. This exercise is based on the fact, that culture is the basis of development and since literature reflects culture and its content, the cultural products of each society are both specific and universal. Literature enlightens and entertains but this study is concerned with the former function. The paper hopes to highlight the fact that the idea of education in relation to the character of proverbs has a great impact on any society and its development.

2. Method of Data Collection and Theoretical Framework

The nature of this study requires intense field work in order to collect the selected proverbs in the original forms as said by performers who also acted as consultants. The researcher adopted the participant observation method alongside conducting interviews with some members of the communities who are knowledgeable in their oral traditions irrespective of their age, sex, and social statuses. More than 50 proverbs were collected in their original languages of Lamnso, Limbum and Iyamho and carefully examined to select those that reinforce cherished African values that promote sustainable development in the contexts of Nso, Mbum and Iyamho oral cultures. The researcher's interaction with members of the Iyamho community during the fourth WACLAALS conference held in the University of Iyahmo, Edo state, Nigeria from the 23rd to the 27th of March 2021 gave her the opportunity to collect some of their proverbs that can address social concerns thereby contributing in the development process.

Writing about interpretative cultural translation, Sarah Maitland in *What is Cultural Translation?* points out that, "it is through language that the imagination reaches expression and that words are only one particular brand of human language" (Note 8). In translation, a lot is left out because the researcher who collects orally transmitted material focuses on words while the extra linguistic gestures like facial expression, sighing, nodding and body movements and what they communicate are not easy to be taken along into the target language. These non-verbal expressions need to be interpreted within the language of performance before the translation of the oral text into the target language. This makes interviews a crucial method in collecting oral texts. Maitland further writes: "Translations also does something else, for its objective is more to understand the production of meaning in another text (Note 9). Maitland points out that, "cultural translation is a gesture of interpretation-of contested understandings of human expression" (Note 10). This is why we attempted to translate the proverbs into English; though no translation no matter how perfect can carry the weight of the message from an oral text into English fully.

Pragmatic functionalism is employed as an analytical tool to highlight the fact that oral literature is always performed for a purpose. In this case it is to present the way man utilizes knowledge in his culture to make his life better. Put differently, this paper does not only look at how the selected

proverbs can be exploited to enhance sustainable development but is also involves the dialectics of how the oral texts can be used to address social concerns.

3. Discussion: Proverbs and Social Concerns

Nso, Mbum and Iyamho proverbs emanate from the background of their various communities and incorporate all the ways of life of the people including their natural environments, socio-cultural, political, moral backgrounds and their ideological perspectives. Nso, Mbum and Iyamho people see unity as an essential element in development. Some of the proverbs they coin bring out messages on the significance of communal life. An evaluation of their proverbs presents several instances in which the idea communalism is clearly illustrated. For example:

Nso: Wirdza wir bi' wir.

Translation: A person is a person because of a person.

The above Nso proverb that is adorned with repetition puts emphasis on the inability of man to function in isolation. The proverb acquires significance in this multicultural context because it emanates from the Nso philosophy and ideology that see the other person as the centre of all development efforts made by any given community. The principal message that this proverb communicates is that members of the Nso contemporary society should consider others first for individualism and egocentric attitudes retard development.

The socio-cultural value that the proverb carves on the human psyche is quite enriching. It reminds Nso people to stay away from activities that impede a communal spirit among people without whom one's endeavours would be worthless and unprofitable. The poetic vibration in the performance is rendered by the lyric derived from the performer's repetition of the word *wir* "person". This repetition used to dress the above proverb renders the verbal expression a complete short long text which is dense and charged with a force that echoes the theme of communality and cooperation in a distinct manner. It is through this use of lyrism that the memory sustains the message that contributes to the reinforcements of communality as a rich socio-cultural value on which the Nso oral community is anchored.

This Nso proverb arises out of the comprehensive and historical African world view based on the values of intense humanness, which embody respect, love, sharing and caring, courtesy, compassion and concern for others. This implies that among the Nso people one affirms his/her humanity through his/her affirmation of others. Through its emphasis on humanness the proverb brings out the pedagogic innovations of the Nso oral culture thus, highlighting cooperative learning and interdependence as important ingredients in any conception of development. This sense of communion as emphasized by the repetition of the word *wir* "person" presents each element of the Nso community as a member of a whole. The proverb illustrates a deep sense of Kinship, which stands as a strong force in Nso cultural life.

Consequently, belonging to a community constitutes the very fabric and core of Nso culture. The implication is that among the Nso people no successful development can be carried out without the efforts of others. Closely linked to the above proverb that centres on the importance of communality among contemporary Nso are the following:

Nso: Wir e tan Nkarsi e wovrijiwuyo' kerashisho

Translation: A person lacked friends and pretended that he did not need any.

Nso: A dzewiryika la wir?

Translation: What can a person do without a person?

Like the Nso people, the Mbum believe that:

Rdipli ke jerminggiku goote.

Translation: A river that travels alone meanders.

The performer of the above proverb text uses the image of the "river" that "meanders" because it "travels alone" to discourage those that are passive to team spirit. The images that are used during performance define a communicative situation which acquires significance beyond what the object literally means. In the personification of the "river that meanders" because it "travels alone" the image is meaningless without its social and natural context because their transition from nature to social context involves a transportation of meaning. Mbum people use this performance to reinforce team spirit, unity and collective efforts.

Also, among the Iyamho people proverbs are used as a crucial element in the development endeavour as illustrated in the following performance:

Ogeno nini opke keroale ti Auchu ti akware aki opkareki Jetu.

Translation: Let the market hold despite the absence of the neighbouring village.

This proverb illustrates that the right decision in difficult circumstances can avoid crisis. The performer echoes the views of a tactful leader who sees no reason why his| her people should fail to sell or buy in the market because of the absence of the neighbouring village. According to our consultants: Madam Habib Aisha Ibinose and Madam Christiana Godwin Ogbemienoh, this proverb that is on the lips of the Iyahmo people arises from their historical background and oral culture where a neighbouring village was absent from a market and the chief of the village present urge his people to go on with their business activities "despite the absence of the other village". The leadership quality of the authority in this proverb has contemporary relevance. Buying and selling are aspects of development and the voice in the proverb takes a decision that fosters development as he sees that people who are already in the market should move on. This implies that for a people to develop there must be good decision making by the authorities in place.

Nso: Wirjevriusu' ηv̄ənwu fəə fəɣv̄əɳ.

Translation: If one resents giving the land owner's share of what has been harvested, he/she should quit

the farmland.

This performance enhances an aspect of Nso cultural practice whereby there is land owner identified as tarijvən who gives out land for people to cultivate. Those to whom land has been given are expected to give a small quantity of what they harvest yearly to the tarijvən. What is given out to the landowner is known in Nso oral culture as *nsu' ηgvən*. This expression as used in the performance is largely an exploration of the Nso socio-cultural and spiritual universe in an endeavour by the performer to bring to light the fundamental world view that underlies the collective consciousness of the Nso person's life. The expression *nsu' ηgvən* defines the proverb as distinctively Nso as it celebrates this unique social practice that gives the performance a purely Nso flavour.

The researcher watched this performance live in Banten village during a meeting convened by the lineage head to caution some members who do not participated in the cleanup sessions organized every month to keep the road clean as part of the village development projects. When she stood up to speak, she danced a few steps while singing and said the above proverb, thanked the village head for giving her the opportunity to speak and sat down. In this case, we observe that the verbal context represents only one element in a complete opera-like performance, which combines words, music and dance. Though the verbal element seems to predominate, the actual delivery and movement of the element of dancing to both performer and audience enhances the aesthetic effectiveness of the occasion.

From the above proverb we see that despite the oral nature of its culture, the Nso community is keen to issues development. The performer's authoritative voice in rebuking those who are passive to the contribution of food crops illustrate the Nso person's willingness to live in conformity to the social normative charter to sustain development. The performance in this context fosters team spirit and communality in order to enhance development.

Nso, Mbum and Iyamho societies are closely knit communities and, to maintain an orderly system of moral relations, they fit into John Beattie's opinion when he writes in *Other Cultures* that, "people have to be subjected to some degree of compulsion. They cannot all the time do exactly as they like for often self-interest may incite behaviour incompatible for the common good, and so it is, that in every society some kind of restraints of people's behaviour are acknowledged and on the whole adhered to".

Consequently, in the Nso, Mbum and Iyahmo oral communities, performance functions as the means to safeguard the dignity of the individual and the morality of the community as a whole. The moral values of Nso and Mbum oral literature are immense. Proverbs emanating from their societies reinforce moral values such as patience, honesty, humility and self-control. Among the Mbum people patience is encouraged through performance thus:

Mbtt ce eka' yemjSScSrcSr e kuuye ne btetir^we.

Translation: A goat that chews in haste chews caterpillars.

This performance is used in the Mbum oral community to encourage people to be patient. The proverb

is relevant to the lives and moral wellbeing of the people from the background and understanding that impatience has negative effects on the individual and the community as a whole. Patience is an important tool in social cohesion. The primary factor in any development effort is the morality of the actors. Man is a moral agent through the effective and appropriate use of his primary tools which are his reason and free will. The performer's intent in this proverb is to expose the negative effects of impatience, so as to instill patience in the audience. This proverb is said among the Mbum people to advise people especially the youth to journey through life at their pace. It is also used to caution those children or students who envy things their parents or care takers cannot afford. The image of the "caterpillar" is used to illustrate the undesirable consequences of indulging in a race of life which one's natural strength cannot withstand. The performance further discourages unnecessary comparison and competition which are breeding grounds for envy, impatience and jealousy.

The performer uses the images of the "goat" and the "caterpillar" to enhance the effectiveness of the message. The idea in this proverb is that patience is an important ingredient in advancement of moral values. Oral tradition in oral communities thus becomes an effective communicative medium since it employs images that are understood within contexts of the Mbum cultural and environmental surroundings.

In the same vein the Iyamho performance cautions on the negative consequences of stubbornness and impatience with proverbs such as:

Okpeshia oyio kum ayukia ki emonono enogiaki emoria kia.

Translation: A child who insists on going to the market when an elder says no reasons in regret.

The voice in this proverb carries the tone of an elder who is concerned with the morality of the youth. Among the Iyahmo people, this performance is used to educate youths on the consequences of disobedience. The performer demonstrates qualities of an instructor in his choice of words to enhance moral values such as respect and obedience among members of his community. The expression "reasons in regrets" as used in the proverb illustrates the undesirable results of stubbornness. The performer's intention is to achieve a morally stable society for there is hardly any sustainable development in a social unit whose youths do not abide to moral norms.

The Nso community encourages humility and self-control with proverbs such as:

Viku vi yur a dza e wirve a ker ggwasang e tavsi shu.

Translation: cocoyams only itch in the mouths of those who have maize in their bans.

This performance reveals two elements of the Nso culinary tradition, which are: cocoyam and maize. Among the Nso people, these crops do not have the same values. The performer uses the technique of contrast to educate members on the significance of humility and self-control which help people to avoid the temptation of envying what they do not have.

The idea in this proverb is that those who do not have “maize” in their bans; seen from the perspective of the Nso oral culture are deprived of life. Maize in this context stands for those things that are crucial to us but are not always affordable due to financial constraints. The Nso people eat maize in different forms. They use it to make corn flour which is used in preparing corn fufu; their staple food, they fry it and eat, boil, make pap and corn chaff.

The performer here seeks to sustain a morally stable Nso community. Through the parallel he draws between “maize” and “cocoyam”, he encourages patience. His opinion here is that people should learn to accept what they have and make use of it. In this way envy and jealousy will reduce from our society since these ill results from our constant desire to own what we cannot afford. The contrast between “maize” and “cocoyam” brings out the Nso environment. Its climate favours the cultivation of the above-mentioned crops. These crops enrich the language of performance while providing the performer with efficient pedagogic tools.

Similarities in terms of Values and Usage of proverbs in the three communities.

Proverbs from the three communities under study display striking similarities in terms of value and use. These proverbs emanate from strict agricultural backgrounds and this is seen in the similar images and symbols employed by the users. Farming forms an intrinsic part of the economic activities of the Nso, Mbum and Iyahmo people. Both proverbs derive their communicative strengths from the images drawn from their specific natural environments. For example, the proverb uses the image of the yam tendril to educate parents on issues of parenting. While the Nso proverb uses the image of the “Sheep”, the “Goat” and the “Cocoyam” to warn the youth against the oddities of the present context, where young people copy from others without bothering about the consequences. The images employed by the performers reveal their main economic activities which become a source of inspiration when it comes to communicating cherished social, moral and cultural values.

Our translation focused on the meaning of words in context as used in the various oral communities. Among the Nso, the use of the sheep, the goat, and the cocoyam go beyond what can generally be said about these images. They are not only communicative tools but pedagogic items used for ethical instructions among the Nso people.

Also, among the Iyahmo people, the use of the anthill and the bird translate a different meaning within their economic and social circles. They use the image of the bird and the anthill to spur their youths and members of the community to work harder. “Anthill” stands for laziness, obstacle and the inability of some members to work hard to achieve their goals. It is used to mock those who do very little to overcome poverty and spend time complaining and giving irrelevant excuses.

Through the proverbs discussed above, one sees that these communities share similar social, economic and moral concerns. They both use their oral forms to reinforce similar moral values. For example, both the Mbum and Iyahmo cherish patience. The Mbum use the image of the “goat” and “caterpillars”

to encourage people to be patient while the Iyahmo use “string”. The difference here lies in the tones. The Mbum use a stronger tone than the Iyahmo to inculcate patience as a significant moral value. Proverbs make them more sensitive to their world. They use them to instruct their youths, providing them with knowledge regarding the, physical, psychological and cultural canvas. Like in any other community in Africa, proverbs occupy a commanding position in the rhetorical arsenal of the Nso, Mbum and Iyahmo local communities.

These communities are both rural and they earn a living through farming, tapping, weaving and cattle rearing. Majority is poor and hardly has enough for both their immediate families and extended ones. The aesthetic force of the proverbs from these communities derives from the underlying imagery drawn directly from their natural, cultural and social environments. That is why they serve them in their social contexts in very significant ways Ruth Finnegan has rightly pointed out that, “their literary significance emerges not only in the beauty of words and form, their sense of detachment and generalization, and their connections with other genres of artistic expression but also the aptness and perspectives with which they are used in an actual context” (Note 11).

One shares Finnegan’s position here to say that the proverbs among the Nso, Mbum and Iyahmo people are not different from those of the other African communities. What makes them similar as chosen for this study is that they are apt in discussing moral, economic and cultural values from the perspective of their specific local communities. Their similarities are defined by their similar economic activities and the perception of moral and social values.

Ahianmwengue oto lu eghian; ona ya tin yaen ulelefe.

Translation: A bird that flew from the ground only to perch on an anthill is still very much on the ground.

In the Iyahmo oral culture, this performance is used to discourage laziness. The tone of the proverb suggests the views of a leader who wishes to see his community members working hard to contribute to development. The proverb makes use of the metaphor of a bird that “flew from the ground to perch on an ant hill” to encourage hard work which is seen in this context as a significant contributor to development. This proverb suggests a value-based leadership among the Iyahmo where a leader encourages his/her subjects and collaborators to work hard in order to ensure progress.

The Nso people highlight the importance of hard work and commitment with these proverbs: Nsayyd’ yiika’ la yii.

Translation: The soil does not make empty promises.

A wanle nsumkerlavwun a sume, bosi lumen.

Translation: It is by owning a house and a farm a boy becomes a man.

Jigyd’ dza wa’ wir.

Translation: Hunger is no one’s age mate.

Oral performance cannot be analyzed in isolation since context is what provides a grammar of values by which the ideas expressed by the performer can be measured and evaluated. The audience observes how the images in these proverbs operate within the larger lexicon of rhetoric built into the Nso specific context of performance before attaching economic meaning to them. The above Nso proverbs, like that of the Mbum, emphasize hard work and commitment as economic norms essential in the advancement of the contemporary Nso oral community.

In the first Nso proverb, the performer makes use of personification. The “soil” is seen in this performance as a living being that can be trusted. This performance encourages members of the Nso community especially the youths to believe in the “soil”. The image of the “soil” and the expression “does not make empty promises” communicate the fact that those who work hard by tilling the “soil” always succeed.

In the second Nso proverb above, the performer employs the images of a “house” and a “farm” to encourage hard work and responsible socio-economic actions. In the third proverb, the performer sees hunger as a threat to peace.

Context plays a significant role in performance for it triggers semantic elasticity

In the performance of the last Nso proverb cited earlier, the performer sees hunger as “no one’s age mate”. Both the Nso and Mbum oral traditions perceive “hunger” as a disturbing factor that brings discomfort. They are engaged in a variety of economic activities such as farming, tapping, weaving and cattle rearing which we deduced from performance like the following:

Nso: Bvaynjii-ii shemgoo wun a ye log, e kfarkiku’.

Translation: A sheep that moves with goats eats raw cocoyam.

The social ills that exist come under the sharp eye of talented observers of nature who engage their minds cognitively in order to give moral instructions to their youths and warn them against actions that lead to unacceptable conduct. The “sheep”, the “goat” and “cocoyam” are metaphorically employed to vividly point out the outcome of bad company. The Nso oral mind sees nature as a rich source from which didactic materials are tapped to facilitate moral instruction. These three images are realistic depictions of the Nso specific natural environment. The images demonstrate that nature persistently and profoundly structures the way talented oral minds in the Nso society perceive and conceive what they feel about the world. Nature helps to sustain the socio-ethical philosophy of the Nso people.

This proverb is said to advise someone who keeps company with those who care very little about their cherished positive characteristics and moral values. It can also be performed to warn and caution those who admire and keep company with those who are richer than they are and own things their limited financial resources can neither afford nor provide. From the perspective of the Nso observer, sheep do not eat raw cocoyam, whereas goats do. But when a sheep frequently associates with goats, it learns to eat what they eat. The metaphors of the “goat”, the “sheep” and “raw cocoyam” reveal that nature

provides a short and accessible text to the cognitive mind of the oral artist whose principal concern is the moral product, which the community depends on for its continuity and development. The Nso people practise farming and cultivate cocoyam, which they use to feed their households and sell some to raise money. They also rear animals like goats and sheep. The images in the above proverb are therefore communicative signs that convey meaning from the live performer to the live audience in a live performance within the context of Nso community. It further instructs youths and whoever the proverb is spoken to, to avoid copying negative attitudes that impede development in their community. The performer's language presents a difficulty, which Nso people who cultivate "cocoyam" may encounter. The performance reveals that goats and sheep may eat "raw cocoyam" thereby leading to poor yield and a decrease in the farmer's income. This expression takes the audience to other issues that are common in the Nso community and most areas in the Bamenda grass field such as the farmer-grazer conflict. It is a common phenomenon in Nso to find farmers complaining of cattle that have eaten their farm produce.

Also, the Iyamho elders use similar proverbs to advise their youths thus:

Nekpen nekpen era si irhi uwa.

Translation: Draw the string of wealth gently.

The tone in this proverb echoes the views of a leader who cautions the youth about danger of speed in acquiring wealth. The adverb "gently" as used by the performer suggests that it is dangerous to be in a hurry to become rich. This proverb is relevant to our contemporary society where we have witnessed a lot of youths of unfortunate situations such as untimely deaths among the younger generation as result of questionable sources of money. Such negative occurrences retard development.

Within the context of the Iyamho oral community, oral performance communicates the people's economic activities as deduced from proverbs such as:

Like the Nso and Mbum people, farming is one of most important economic activities of the Iyahmo people and one of their main cash crops is yam. In oral performance, the performer plays the role of a leader for through the images employed in the oral text; he/she demonstrates a high mastery of life in his/her social context. The Iyahmo people also contribute to sustainable development through the cultivation of yam.

Also, the Mbum believe that:

Weka raasimre, mikuko' abta'.

Translation: If you direct a yam tendril it will climb on the stake.

This proverb which is performed using the image of the "yam tendril" is metaphorically directed to parents. The image of the "yam tendril" and the expression "will climb on the stake" are metaphors, which highlight the indispensable role of the parent in child upbringing. Like a yam tendril that can only climb on the stake if directed, children and youths in general can only become useful elements of

their community if they acquire the right instruction. Farming and the observation of the characteristics of crops can provide the performer with the right language. This implies that in oral cultures like those of Nso and Mbum people, the performer's language is shaped by the natural environment and its economic activities, thus making oral performance more relevant to the lives of the local people than other development ideologies.

The use of the conditional "if" in the Mbum proverb above is a warning against unfriendly activities to the natural environment and the neglect of activities that enhance productivity. Within the framework of the Mbum proverb discourse, the images that the performers create become strong educative tools for youths who are by these advised to concentrate and work hard in order to enhance development. The proverb texts and the economic practice become constituent units in the Mbum signifying system. The images act as anchors linking members to the dominant ways of thinking within society. They further draw their attention to appropriate cultural patterns in the practice of agriculture and what it takes to realize good yield. Thus, if they concentrate on activities such as directing "yam tendrils", their economy will emerge. It is from this perspective that Mbum oral tradition become relevant to development in a contemporary context.

4. Results

The analysis reveals that though oral literature comes from a distant past and only comes to live in a living community where it is only realized through performance, it is relevant to the contemporary in addressing social concerns in order to sustain development in oral local communities. The proverbs enhance sustainable development from the perspectives of the communities from which they emanate. The proverbs selected for this study are relevant to development in that they transport indigenous knowledge systems which contain their moral, economic and socio-cultural values that can advance humanity.

This paper has examined the proverbs collected from Nso, Mbum and Iyahmo people and illustrated how they effectively transmit diverse socio-cultural, economic and moral values of the people under reference thus providing them with a vision for the future. Proverbs as conceptualized by Jick in relation to development is still significant in the lives of their producers in this modern era for he maintains that: "culture is the basis for development and that science and technology are only its products that education stabilizes, develops and transmits (Note 12).

Proverbs constitute a very important instrument for living and continued mutual and harmonious existence of the oral communities under study. The paper set out to demonstrate that oral literature houses indigenous knowledge systems that can be applied alongside modern methods to address social concerns within the context of the three local communities under reference. The study assumes that proverbs address social concerns by reinforcing socio-cultural values such as communalism, peace,

unity and cooperation which are essential ingredients in sustainable development. They further sustain moral qualities such as humility, honesty, respect, self-control, love, self-esteem, patience and selflessness. Without these human qualities among a people, their society will crumble and remain underdeveloped since any form meaningful development depends on the quality of the mind.

The study has further illustrated that the proverbs collected for this study transmit and sustain economic values and one of the main economic activities of the Nso, Mbum and Iyamho people is farming. Their proverbs emphasize hard work, diligence and commitment as important ingredients in sustainable development. Ibrahim Kashim Tala in *Orature in Africa* writes: “Oral literature in African languages is naturally, the oldest and most predominant kind of literature in Africa. This is so because its creators and users are, generally speaking, non-literate, rural and agricultural” (Note 13). Ruth Finnegan in *Oral Literature in Africa* has stated that, “oral literature arises from society” (Note 14). This implies that the indigenous knowledge systems that oral performance transmits from one generation to the other are transcendental in nature. The performers employ images from their cultural and natural environments to reinforce these values which contribute to sustainable development.

Table 1. Informants and Performers

No	NAME	SEX	AGE	OCCUPATION	ROLE PLAYED	RESIDENCE
1	Taata Spellian Shinyuy	M	52	Traditional Ruler	Informant/Performer	Vekovi-Jakiri
2	Lucy Suuyka	F	83	Farmer	Informant /Performer	Mbiame
3	Shey Godbless Laashejan	M	53	Farmer	Informant/Performer	Nse'-Nkum
4	Lukong Boniface	M	78	Lamnso Instructor	Informant /Performer	Sop-Jakiri
5	Ngoran Nelly Kumo	F	43	Teacher	Informant /Performer	Kimar-Jakiri
6	Erica Kinyuy	F	51	Lamnso Instructor	Informant/Performer	Jakiri Town
7	Njodzeka Emmanuel	M	55	Rev. Pastor	Informant	Vekovi-Jakiri
8	Mbilam Veronica Biimela	F	60	Trader	Informant	Kumbo
9	Habib	F	40	Business woman	Informant/Translator	Iyahmo
10	Christiana Obinonso	F	47	Farmer	Informant/Performer	Iyahmo

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to the Ministry of Higher Education in Cameroon for introducing in 2009 the Modernization Research Allowance in Cameroon State universities which has boosted and revamped research in Cameroon. I am indebted to the research allowance paid by the University of Bamenda for research related activities.

References

- Alembong, N. (2011). *Standpoints in African Orature*. Yaounde: Les Presses Universitaires.
- Fai, K. N. (2016). *Two Hundred and Fifty-Five (255) Original Nso Proverbs*. Bamenda: Among Lens Designers.
- Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hedinger et al. (Eds.). (2015). *Lamso-English Dictionary*. Yaounde: CABTAL Print & publishing Services.
- Jick, H., & Ngeh, A. (2009). Globalisation and Non-Verbal Communication Symbols in Mbum Land: Issues, Dilemmas and Challenges. In V. A. Tanda, H. K. Jick, & P. A. Tamahji (Eds), *Language, Literature and social Discourse in Africa: Essays in Honour of Emmanuel Nges Chia* (pp. 268-292). Bamenda: Agwecams Publishers.
- Jick, K. H. (2015). *Folklore and National Development: Kom and Bakweri Proverbs*. Bamenda: Scholars' Press.
- Maitland, S. (2017). *What is Cultural Translation*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Ngeh, T. A., & Nganyu, D. N. (2013). Folklore and Commitment in Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry: A Study of Bongasu Tanla Kishani and Nol Alembong. *African Journal of Social Sciences*. Bamenda: Shiloh Print.
- Obiechina, E. (1975). *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tala, I. K. (1999). *Orature in Africa*. Canada: Saskatchewan Press.

Notes

Note 1. Ngeh, T.A & Nganyu, D. N. "Folklore and Commitment in Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry: A Study of Bongasu Tanla Kishani and Nol Alembong" in *African Journal of Social Sciences*, Bamenda: Shiloh Print, 2013, p. 16.

Note 2. Jick, K. H. (2015). *Folklore and National Development: Kom and Bakweri Proverbs*. Bamenda: Scholars' Press. p.15.

Note 3. Ibid, p.15.

Note 4. Ibid, p.15.

Note 5. Ibid, p.15.

Note 6. Obiechina, E. (1975). *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.156.

Note 7. Alembong, N. (2011). *Standpoints in African Orature*. Yaounde: Les Presses Universitaires. p.131.

Note 8. Maitland, S. (2017). *What is Cultural Translation* London: Bloomsbury. p.51.

Note 9. Ibid, 52

Note 10. Ibid, 53

Note 11. Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p.425.

Note 12. Jick, K. H. p.45.

Note 13. Tala, I. K. (1999). *Orature in Africa*. Canada: Saskatchewan Press. p.5.

Note 14. Ibid, p.5.

About the author

Ngeh Emestilia Dzekem holds a BA in English and French, an MA in African Literature and a PhD in African Literatures and Cultures. She is a lecturer and teaches in the Higher Teacher Training College, The University of Bamenda, Cameroon. She has published in different journals and is interested in researching into the oral traditions of different African people and her hobbies are reading, farming and travelling.