

African Philosophy and the Roots of Leadership And Ethics in Swahili Proverbs

Gerephace Mwangosi¹, Mohamed Omary Maguo²

¹Catholic University of Mbeya

²Open University of Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This article explores African philosophy and the foundations of leadership and ethics, drawing on Swahili proverbs. Primary data were collected from library sources. Library-based reading methods were employed to collect primary data. Reviews of documents used to validate the primary data were obtained from electronic and library sources. Sociological Theory was utilized in analyzing the data. The main premise of this theory is that literary and artistic works cannot be understood without considering the historical, political and social contexts in which they were produced. The data analyses were consistent with the principles of the selected theory. A descriptive approach was used to present the data. The findings indicate that reflecting African philosophy in Swahili literature emphasizes solidarity, human dignity, accountability, justice and integrity as essential foundations of good leadership and ethics. Furthermore, literature, through examples of leaders and society, underscores the importance of unity, justice and accountability. Consequently, literature is a vital tool for promoting ethical leadership and effective leadership while also supporting social welfare, peace and sustainable development. This confirms that Swahili literature reflects African values that foster social well-being. This article recommends that, to strengthen leadership and ethics, schools and communities should promote education emphasizing African philosophy, including concepts such as *Ubuntu* [I am because we are], solidarity, accountability, justice and respect for every human being.

Keywords: African Philosophy, Swahili Proverbs, Roots of Leadership, Ethics and Realism Theory.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores African philosophy and the fundamentals of leadership and ethics through Swahili proverbs. African literature is a storehouse of knowledge that has long played a vital role in understanding social life, values and governance. It illuminates how leaders should govern with wisdom, prudence and accountability while prioritizing the broader public interest. In governance, literature thoroughly examines the relationship between power, morality and social justice (Wainaina, 2021). It depicts authority as a duty that must be exercised with regard for the interests of the entire community. Consistently, literature teaches that power lacking ethics can lead to violence, loss of a leader's legitimacy and the disintegration of unity and social cohesion. It advocates for leaders to serve as moral exemplars and remain accountable to society. It also issues warnings against selfishness, deception, corruption, economic sabotage and a lack of wisdom that could undermine social harmony (Chabal, 2017). Therefore, leaders are required to act justly and to foster and strengthen social cohesion to promote the development of citizens.

One of the most significant aspects of African philosophy is the idea that ethics form the foundation of good governance. Literature functions as an educational tool that illustrates the consequences of ethical behaviors in society. Leaders are encouraged to demonstrate integrity, wisdom, prudence and compassion. Swahili literature promotes integrity and condemns oppression, sabotage, corruption, misappropriation of public resources and the undermining of principles of good governance as outlined in national constitutions (Nyamnjoh, 2017). It also

highlights how selfishness, deceit, violence and arrogance of power hinder just governance. Literature acts as a guide reflecting the ethical expectations of leadership within a democratic system. Through various literary genres, people learn about justice, integrity, love and accountability. Characters exemplify the repercussions of their actions, serving as lessons for others (Okuyade, 2018). Moreover, literature encourages and guides society to uphold accepted moral values, while also aiming to preserve culture, customs, traditions and the foundations of social, spiritual and moral life.

Literature is one of the indigenous and social tools that reflect issues of governance ethics. Narratives about kings and community leaders show how authority should be exercised wisely and responsibly towards citizens. They also teach that when power lacks ethical values supporting social cohesion, it becomes a source of violence and instability. Consequently, literature acts as a mirror that reveals how governance can be strengthened, maintained, or collapses depending on leaders' moral values. On the other hand, African philosophy views governance as a collective social responsibility. Literature highlights the importance of the relationship between leaders and citizens, based on attentiveness, compassion and accountability. A good leader listens to citizens, understands their needs and resolves conflicts wisely (Garuba, 2020). Literature offers powerful informal education, emphasizing that power without accountability is dangerous to social cohesion. It functions as a moral classroom that educates new leaders and enhances governance systems that uphold justice and equality.

The reflection of governance and ethical principles in African philosophy affirms that authority is a social responsibility. Through proverbs, stories and poetry, African philosophy offers lasting guidance on leaders' accountability and their relationship with society. It also acts as a tool for exploring morality, equality and wisdom, while maintaining social cohesion and a culture of respect. In African philosophy, issues related to governance and ethics arise through concepts like *utu* ["human dignity"], solidarity and leaders' accountability to the community. Governance is shaped by wisdom, collective consultation and communal decision-making rather than selfishness (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). Values such as justice, integrity, respect and equality are highlighted to protect peace and unity. A leader is seen as a servant of the people, expected to lead by example, uphold traditions, safeguard resources and promote the well-being of the entire community. Consequently, this article explores African philosophy and the foundations of leadership and ethics, with particular reference to Swahili proverbs.

Research Methodology

This article explores African philosophy and the foundations of leadership and ethics through Swahili proverbs. Primary data were collected from library sources using library reading methods. In library research, primary data consist of original written materials produced by first authors. These data offer authentic information without second-party interpretation and have not been published elsewhere before (Kothari, 2004; Kumar, 2019). Reviews of documents used to verify the primary data were gathered through electronic and library methods. Sociological Theory was employed in discussing the data. The core idea of this theory is that literary and artistic works cannot be fully understood without considering the historical, political and social contexts in which they were created. Findings are presented using a descriptive approach which involves explaining trends, relationships and patterns in the data. This approach also aids in simplifying understanding, comparing values and making informed decisions based on the collected information.

Research Theory

Historically, Sociological theory arose in Europe during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. It started as a cultural science that regarded literary works as representations of behaviors and as genuine reflections of specific societies (Sayer, 2020). One of its fundamental principles is that a society's natural environment shapes the nature of its literary output. Sociological theory was utilized in literature to examine its relationship with social environments (Zafirovski, 2020). Scholars contend that art is not created in isolation but is produced by an artist within a particular time and environment, with accountability to the society concerned. Alexander (2019) clarifies that an artist cannot escape the influence of the community because literature is a specific product of its society. Literature is a reflection of society that cannot separate truth from lived reality.

Literature uniquely reflects both science and culture within society. It is part of real social life and concerns people directly. Literature offers a holistic representation that portrays life broadly and critically (Collins, 2020). From this perspective, Swahili proverbs are viewed as specific products of the studied community, considering their history, philosophy, customs, economy and politics. Selected proverbs are also examined as special connectors of social relationships. Based on this theory, the researcher examined the relationship between social forces and artistic expression. The analysis considers that literary works are usually shaped by existing social structures and daily social interactions (Turner, 2021). Artistic forces relate to the messages embedded in the selected proverbs while social forces relate to the themes emerging from them.

This theory emphasizes the importance of social context in interpreting proverbs by examining representations of real-life situations. Accordingly, proverbs were analyzed within the framework of the artist's society and history. The researcher investigated the relationship between society and daily activities, philosophies, perspectives, history and social development. This facilitated an in-depth analysis of proverbs to identify themes rooted in culture, history, customs and traditions. Proverbs were interpreted as portrayals of settings, characters and social issues relevant to their time. In this article, Sociological theory was employed to analyse Swahili proverbs by exploring how they reflect leadership and ethical principles within African philosophy. The researcher examined how selected proverbs embody philosophical themes related to leadership and ethics in Swahili literature. Using Sociological theory, the proverbs were analyzed objectively and directly to offer a comprehensive critique. Consequently, the discussion presents leadership and ethical principles as fundamental aspects of African philosophy through Swahili proverbs.

African Philosophy and the Roots of Leadership and Ethics in Swahili Proverbs

In African philosophy, leadership, governance and ethics are rooted in the principles of human dignity, justice and social accountability. Leadership is regarded as a responsibility to serve society, whilst governance highlights collaboration and consultation. Ethics direct the behaviors of both leaders and citizens. These principles aim to uphold peace, unity and social well-being in accordance with African customs and traditions, as discussed in the following sections.

Integrity and Justice

In African philosophy, integrity and justice are central to the foundations of leadership and ethics, as society holds that a legitimate leader upholds truth and equality. Leadership is seen as a trust to protect the rights of everyone without favoritism based on lineage, wealth or power. The literature reflects this idea by portraying upright leaders as wise and blessed while oppressive leaders face societal curses. The proverb which states that '*Haki haizai hasara*' [Justice does not bring loss] shows that acting justly yields long-lasting benefits, even if they are not instantly visible. Integrity and justice serve as pillars of social well-being. The roots of ujamaa, solidarity and collective responsibility (Akaka & Wandewa-Simwa, 2024). Integrity fosters trust and peace, while justice ensures equality and respect for all. Integrity supports peace by enhancing trust, justice and accountability, helping prevent corruption and conflict, fostering mutual respect and ensuring truthful decisions are made for society's greater good. Through fair decisions and good conduct, society maintains harmony, safeguards the vulnerable and promotes sustainable development that nurtures ethics, transparency, good leadership, reconciliation and social, economic and cultural balance for future generations.

Integrity and justice in African philosophy also manifest in how leaders exercise authority. A leader is expected to be a fair arbiter, attentive and compassionate while avoiding oppression and selfishness. Literature heavily criticizes the misuse of power by illustrating its consequences such as conflict, hatred and moral decay. The proverb '*Mfalme ni haki*' [The king is justice] underscores that the legitimacy of leadership comes from integrity. Legitimate leadership stems from the integrity of the leader. Society appreciates leaders who live by ethics, truth and justice. Through the foundations of a leader governs by serving others rather than seeking personal gain or self-interest. Integrity fosters public trust and without that trust, leadership loses its legitimacy (Resane, 2025). Therefore, good leadership results from good conduct and accountability to society. Integrity is a vital pillar of

leadership and daily life; it fosters trust, justice and responsibility, reduces corruption and conflict, strengthens peace and encourages sustainable social, economic and political development within society.

Within the foundations of African leadership and ethics, integrity and justice concern not only the leader but the entire community. Every member of society has a duty to uphold justice and condemn oppression wherever it occurs. The proverb '*Asiyependa haki, hapendi watu*' [One who does not love justice does not love people] reflects the belief that justice is the foundation of *utu* [human dignity] and solidarity. Upholding justice and condemning oppression are a responsibility shared by all members of society. The principles of *Ubuntu* [I am because we are] highlight that a person exists through others; therefore, the violation of justice impacts the whole community. Elders, leaders and citizens are responsible for protecting equality, truth and human dignity. Condemning oppression sustains harmony, peace and social cohesion, ensuring that justice prevails for the benefit of current and future generations. It is vital to condemn oppression to protect human rights, reinforce equality and justice, prevent acts of abuse, foster social courage, maintain peace and promote accountability and good governance (Metz, 2023). Consequently, African philosophy advocates for leadership founded on integrity as a means of safeguarding human dignity and social well-being.

Caring for Human Dignity

In African philosophy, caring for human dignity is a fundamental foundation of leadership and ethics because every person deserves respect and fair treatment. When a leader values the dignity of citizens, social cohesion, peace and communal well-being are strengthened. Literature reflects this idea by portraying leaders who value life, rights and the feelings of others as embodiments of integrity, while those who oppress others are shown as losing respect and legitimacy. The proverb '*Mtu ni watu*' [A person is people] clearly shows that human dignity cannot be separated from the dignity of the community. Human dignity is the core foundation of public leadership. Through the concept of *Ubuntu*, a leader is recognized by how they respect, serve and protect their people. Human dignity guides leaders to be humble, just and compassionate, prioritizing communal interests over personal gain (Kazinja & Joseph, 2022). Human dignity forms the basis of respect, love and social cohesion within society. It strengthens positive relationships, promotes compassion and equality, reduces conflict, protects human rights and encourages peace, moral conduct and sustainable social development. A leader guided by *utu* builds trust, unity and peace and promotes just decisions that advance social, economic and cultural well-being for all.

Caring for human dignity in African philosophy is also reflected in images of just and accountable leadership. Leaders are expected to protect the dignity and lives of all community members and avoid oppression, selfishness and discrimination based on race, ethnicity or economic status. Literature uses stories of leaders who oppress or ignore citizens to illustrate the consequences of disregarding dignity (Mazigo, Mwaijande, Nguliki & Mkombozi, 2024). The proverb '*Heshima si utumwa*' [Respect is not slavery] emphasizes that every human being deserves respectful treatment without discrimination. Traditionally, African philosophy stresses that every person deserves respect because dignity is rooted in social relationships. The concept of *utu* demonstrates that a person exists through others, meaning everyone must be valued, honored and protected from oppression. Wisdom is essential in life because it enables sound decisions, prudent leadership, avoidance of mistakes, peaceful conflict resolution, social understanding, moral reinforcement and sustainable development for individuals and communities. Respect ensures social cohesion, peace and equality while encouraging collective accountability and sustainable development for all members of society.

African philosophy asserts that respecting human dignity is the basis of good ethics and leadership, a belief strongly echoed in Swahili literature. Human dignity promotes unity through respect, solidarity and compassion, eradicating discrimination and hatred, strengthening social bonds, maintaining peace, fostering communal cohesion and supporting collective development (Mlelwa, 2024). Oppressed characters embody suffering that urges society to uphold justice and human dignity. Literature shows that neglecting human dignity results in conflict, poverty and social disintegration. The proverb '*Kidole kimoja kikiuma, vyote huuma*' [When one finger hurts, all feel pain] highlights that one person's suffering impacts the entire community. According to African philosophy, since a person is part of the community, injustice or pain inflicted on one individual causes sorrow,

tension and weakens social cohesion. Hence, society is encouraged to protect each member, cooperate and address injustices to sustain peace, equality and collective well-being for both current and future generations.

Seeking Peaceful Conflict Resolution

In African philosophy, seeking solutions based on peace is a fundamental aspect of leadership and ethics, as society believes conflicts should be resolved with wisdom and respect. A leader who upholds African values takes responsibility for pursuing nonviolent solutions and promoting dialogue and social cohesion. The proverb *'Usichome nyavu zako ukiwa na samaki wengine'* [Do not burn your nets while there are still fish] illustrates that careful decision-making fosters cooperation and peace. Prudent decision-making is essential for social harmony and stability. These choices help avoid errors, address challenges wisely, strengthen personal and community growth, increase accountability and ensure positive outcomes that safeguard rights and collective well-being (Yoon, 1992). The concept of African unity highlights that every action should consider the welfare of others. A leader or community member who makes careful decisions demonstrates justice, accountability and balance thereby encouraging cooperation. Such choices prevent conflict, reinforce peace and promote sustainable development and social cohesion for all generations.

Seeking peaceful solutions in African philosophy is also reflected in leadership that promotes unity and justice. When leaders involve citizens in conflict resolution, they encourage accountability, integrity and social cohesion. Cooperation between leaders and citizens fosters peace and collaboration, builds trust, improves governance, supports collective development and ensures citizens' needs are met fairly and responsibly (Duwe, 2021). Literature highlights examples of leaders who endorse violence to show the results of division, hatred and social instability. The proverb *'Penye paa pa maana, migongano hushughulikiwa kwa busara'* [Where there is meaningful leadership, conflicts are handled wisely] underscores that peaceful solutions start with wisdom and dialogue. Peaceful resolution is advanced through unity and shared responsibility. In African philosophy, everyone is part of the community; therefore, conflicts should be settled through dialogue, reconciliation and justice. The importance of peaceful solutions lies in maintaining unity, respect and individual well-being while preventing oppression and reinforcing social, economic and cultural bonds for current and future generations.

African philosophy holds that good leadership and ethical behaviors are rooted in the pursuit of peaceful solutions; a principle seen in Swahili literature. Characters who resolve conflicts through respect and dialogue are portrayed as wise, while those who disturb peace cause harm to society. The proverb *'Amani ni mali, vita ni hasara'* [Peace is wealth, war is loss] clearly demonstrates that peace is the foundation of social well-being. According to African philosophy, society cannot prosper without unity and cooperation. Peace fosters cohesion, reduces conflict, promotes inclusion and respect for all and supports collective prosperity for both present and future generations (Odera, 1990). Therefore, peace and stability are essential for sustainable development, encouraging cooperation, preventing violence, boosting economic productivity, safeguarding human rights and ensuring a dignified life for every community member.

Unity and Cooperation

In African philosophy, fostering cooperation is a core principle of leadership and ethics, as society builds cohesion through collaboration. A leader who values cooperation recognizes the contributions of every community member and encourages collective solidarity rather than selfishness (Eze, 1998). Literature reflects this principle by depicting characters who work together to achieve shared goals, while those acting alone face negative outcomes. The proverb *'Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa'* [One finger cannot crush a louse] clearly demonstrates that collective strength surpasses individual effort. Collective strength forms the basis of social well-being in African philosophy. Since a person exists through others, unity and cooperation contribute to both individual and community success. Collective work, social support and collaboration enhance cohesion, reduce conflict and promote social, economic and cultural development. Through collective effort, societies can effectively address challenges, maintain peace and ensure the welfare of current and future generations.

Cooperation in African philosophy is closely tied to ethical leadership, as leaders are expected to involve citizens in decision-making and implementation. Leaders who exclude citizens cause conflict, dissatisfaction and declining morale. The proverb *'Umoja ni nguvu, utengano ni udhaifu* [Unity is strength, division is weakness] highlights that societal success depends on collective solidarity. Lack of unity leads to conflict, hatred, discrimination, hindered development, loss of peace, damaged relationships, fear and irresponsibility (Mbua, 2009). African philosophy emphasizes that breaking unity results in mistrust, diminished social support, injustice and the absence of peace, equality and sustainable development. Divided societies face increased oppression and suffering which deprive individuals of the security and respect necessary for collective well-being.

Building cooperation is a key aspect of African philosophy's promotion of unity, justice and peace. Justice, unity and peace form the basis of stable societies, strengthening cohesion, preventing conflict, safeguarding life and property, promoting equality and supporting sustainable development (Hountondji, 1996). Literature depicts cooperative characters positively and shows those who isolate others as facing loss or conflict. The proverb *'Wengi wape* [Many minds give] highlights that collective wisdom surpasses individual insight. African philosophy teaches that cooperation is vital for well-being, development and ethical leadership that values every community member.

Safeguarding Social Well-being

In African philosophy, safeguarding the well-being of society is a fundamental aspect of leadership and ethics as society must be maintained through wisdom, justice and solidarity. A leader who protects social well-being ensures that resources, property and social relationships are developed for the benefit of all. Social well-being is essential because it enhances citizens' quality of life, reduces poverty, promotes education and health, fosters unity and peace, guarantees social equality and contributes to sustainable development for individuals and society as a whole (Gyekye, 1995). Literature reflects this principle by depicting leaders who nurture society and encourage citizens to cooperate and respect one another while those who exploit resources and violate others' rights are shown to cause harm. The proverb *'Nyumba ya pamoja haiwezi kuharibika kwa mtu mmoja* [A communal house cannot be destroyed by one person] clearly illustrates that social well-being depends on collective responsibility and solidarity. Solidarity and accountability form the foundation of social well-being. This proverb also reinforces the belief that a person is defined through others, meaning that solidarity strengthens cooperation and peace, while accountability ensures everyone fulfils their obligations to others. Together, these values diminish conflict, promote respect and support social, economic and cultural development for present and future generations.

Safeguarding social well-being in African philosophy is directly linked to ethical leadership. When leaders involve citizens in decision-making and resource management, unity and peace are strengthened. Literature uses examples of leaders who neglect this responsibility to demonstrate the consequences of selfishness, discrimination and weakened cohesion (Mburu, 2018). The proverb *'Mchawi hawezi kuharibu shamba lote* [A sorcerer cannot destroy the entire field] shows that fair governance and proper resource management contribute to the well-being of every community member. Fair resource management is essential for social welfare. African philosophy holds that everyone is part of the community; therefore, equitable distribution of resources ensures justice for all. Good governance prevents oppression, conflict and social fragmentation while promoting sustainable social, economic and cultural development and maintaining peace and cohesion for present and future generations. Effective social management ensures optimal use of resources, promotes accountability and transparency, strengthens peace and unity, resolves conflicts wisely and guarantees sustainable development and collective welfare.

African philosophy holds that safeguarding social well-being is the responsibility of every leader and community member, as protecting resources, justice and solidarity fosters a dignified life for both current and future generations. Literature depicts characters who protect social well-being as wise, ethical and honorable while those who undermine it face loss and conflict. The proverb *'Aliyekula peke yake hakosi kunenepa* [One who eats alone never fails to grow fat] illustrates that selfishness destroys collective welfare. In African philosophy, selfishness weakens communal well-being because it contradicts the solidarity emphasized by *Ubuntu* [I am

because we are]. A self-centered individual diminishes unity, leads to conflict, oppression and inequality. Selfish leadership causes social division, loss of peace and cohesion, increased corruption, hindered development, decreased public trust and overall social decline (Bediako, 2000). Therefore, social well-being depends on rejecting selfishness and promoting cooperation based on respect and accountability.

Leading with Respect and Wisdom

In African philosophy, leading with wisdom and respect forms the foundation of ethical leadership, as leaders are expected to govern prudently, avoid selfishness and maintain social cohesion. Literature reflects this by depicting leaders who use wisdom in decision-making and promote equality, justice and unity while selfish leaders face conflict. The proverb *Busara haina umri* [Wisdom has no age] demonstrates that wisdom is not measured by age but by the ability to make sound decisions. In African philosophy, wisdom is a vital pillar of leadership. A wise leader applies knowledge, caution and moral guidance to make decisions that benefit society (Gustafson, 2017). Leaders who lack wisdom tend to make poor decisions, trigger conflict, weaken social cohesion, lose public trust, promote corruption and hinder development and social well-being. The concept of *Ubuntu* emphasizes that decisions must protect unity, justice and human dignity. Wisdom helps reduce conflict, strengthen peace and promote sustainable development and social balance for both present and future generations.

Leading with wisdom and respect also reflects a measure of ethical leadership in African philosophy. Leaders who respect their citizens inspire trust, accountability and unity while avoiding violence and selfishness. The proverb *Aliyeshauri huishi* [One who listens to advice survives] demonstrates that listening and inclusive leadership strengthen governance. Listening to and involving others is a key aspect of good leadership in African philosophy (Serequeberhan, 1994). Since a person exists through others, leaders who engage citizens value diverse perspectives and reinforce unity. This cooperation reduces conflict, promotes justice and peace and ensures social, economic and cultural development for communal well-being. Ignoring citizens, leaders and stakeholders leads to misunderstanding, unnecessary conflict, diminished trust, weakened cooperation, low motivation and poor policy implementation. Societal division ultimately undermines peace and development.

Stakeholder and Citizen Participation in Nation Building

In African philosophy, citizen participation is a fundamental aspect of leadership and ethics, as society is seen as a partner in development. When leaders exercise authority by involving citizens in decision-making, they foster unity, transparency and accountability. Literature reflects this by depicting inclusive leaders as true guardians, while selfish leaders instigate division and conflict (Ogunnaike, 2002). The proverb *Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa* [One finger cannot crush a louse] underscores the importance of collective effort and shared responsibility for societal success. Unity and cohesion are vital for peace, security and development. United communities work together to solve problems, support each other, defend shared interests, reduce conflicts, promote harmony and uphold moral values. A united society fosters economic and social progress and constructs a resilient nation rooted in enduring solidarity. Unity enhances peace, security and mutual respect, ensuring everyone feels valued and supported.

Citizen participation in African philosophy also appears in the context of just and ethical leadership. Leaders who consider public opinions and expectations foster accountability and respect, thereby reducing social conflict. Literature describes leaders who avoid participation as encouraging selfishness, corruption and poverty. The proverb *Umoja ni nguvu, utengano ni udhaifu* [Unity is strength, division is weakness] highlights that societal success depends on collective cohesion. According to African philosophies such as ujamaa [African communal socialism], selfishness and corruption weaken social unity. Leaders who pursue personal interests violate human dignity, equality and collective accountability, leading to resource depletion, increased poverty and diminished justice (Sesanti & Matebu, 2002). In African philosophy, leaders are viewed as servants rather than self-interested rulers. Their role is to govern transparently, listen actively and promote societal welfare for the benefit of all, not for personal gain.

African philosophy asserts that citizen participation promotes accountability, justice and unity. Inclusive figures are depicted as wise and honorable while exclusionary leaders encounter conflict and societal disintegration. The proverb '*Wengi wape*' [Many minds give] illustrates that collective wisdom exceeds individual judgment. In traditional African democracy, collective wisdom forms the foundation of sound decision-making. Since one mind alone is inadequate, communal deliberation yields fair and balanced solutions. Collective wisdom enhances unity, respect and accountability, increases participation of elders, youth and women and prevents selfishness (Nwauche, 2010). Knowledge is regarded as a communal heritage utilized to protect peace, well-being and sustainable development for current and future generations.

Accountability

In African philosophy, accountability is a core principle of leadership and ethics, requiring leaders to recognize authority as a trust given by society. Leaders are not rulers over people but servants accountable for their actions and decisions. Swahili literature reflects this by depicting leaders who prioritize the public interest as symbols of wisdom and integrity. The proverb '*Cheo ni dhamana*' [A position is a trust] clearly demonstrates that leadership exists to serve society, not for personal gain. Unaccountable leaders lose respect and legitimacy. Accountability fosters trust, enhances transparency, reduces corruption, encourages lawful compliance and strengthens institutional responsibility (Bosire, 2011). Accountable leaders admit mistakes, explain their decisions, respect laws, promote public participation and pursue sustainable development. They also set moral examples that inspire ethical leadership at all levels.

Accountability in African philosophy also governs the relationship between leaders and society. Leaders are expected to listen, consult and accept criticism to uphold transparency and justice. Swahili literature depicts leaders who evade accountability as causing selfishness, corruption and social fragmentation. The proverb '*Asiyesikia la mkuu huvunjika guu*' [One who ignores advice breaks a leg] warns that ignoring communal guidance leads to downfall. Leaders who disregard public accountability weaken trust, increase conflict, undermine the rule of law and fuel public frustration (Abu-Lughod, 1991). Such failures reduce public services, promote corruption, waste resources, delay development and threaten national stability. Long-term consequences affect youth, education, health and future generations. African philosophy emphasizes accountability as essential for self-correction and collective benefit.

In African leadership ethics, accountability begins at the individual level and extends to the entire society. Leaders are accountable to citizens and citizens are responsible for holding leaders to account. Literature shows that societies demanding accountability produce ethical and resilient leaders. The proverb '*Aliyekula peke yake hakosi kunenepa*' [One who eats alone never fails to grow fat] warns against selfish leadership. Leaders who uphold constitutional governance and the rule of law promote social and economic development by improving healthcare, education and infrastructure thereby enhancing citizens' lives (Bame, 2005). Good leadership builds trust, unity, participation, reduces poverty, creates employment, ensures equality and justice and fosters peace, stability and sustainable national development for present and future generations. Hence, literature advances African philosophy by affirming accountability as the foundation of ethics, good leadership and social well-being.

CONCLUSION

African philosophy highlights unity, *utu* ["human dignity"], accountability, justice and integrity as key

foundations for ethical and effective leadership. Swahili literature teaches and promotes these values by illustrating examples of leaders and communities that emphasize unity, justice and accountability. As a result, literature becomes an important tool for fostering ethics and good leadership, while also supporting social well-being, peace and sustainable development. This demonstrates that Swahili literature embodies African values that enhance societal welfare. To reinforce leadership and ethics, schools and communities should encourage education based on African philosophy, incorporating Ubuntu, solidarity, accountability, justice and respect for

all individuals. Swahili literature should be developed as a moral teaching tool to promote ethical behaviour among young people and society at large.

MAREJELEO

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