*Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.7 No.3 September, 2024; p.g. 319 – 328; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)*

# DEFICIENCY IN PROVERB (IGBO EXAMPLES): A BARRIER TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines the slow development in Nigeria and identifies deficiency in proverb as one of the causes. Proverb is grossly underrated and its great potentials largely untapped and unrecognized. Even people who should know; the government, educationist and Universities that should lead the way for our people, are guilty to this regard. Nigerians have not learnt and apply proverb in their daily lives. The importance of proverb, among others, is that it lightens burden of daily life, entertains and teaches by leaving legacy of knowledge. This is a survey research. The theory adopted was Migration Theory. The study revealed that some proverbsare associated with national development such as "Oburu na ala juo oyi; nduru e bee na ya (sustainable development is never made where there is no peace). "Aku karia na aku ruo ulo abughi otu (Good management of resources is as important as making wealth) "O bu ihe oba na-emereubi; ka ubi na-emere oba (it is mutual understanding and co-operation that sustains good development). It was recommended that every tribe in Nigeria should study proverbs. Through the lessons from proverbs, tribes in Nigeria can come together as one for the development of our great nation Nigeria.*

**Keywords: Deficiency, Proverb, Igbo Examples, Barrier, National Development.**

## Introduction

A proverb is part of the folklore elements peculiar to any given homogenous society. By folklore it means the traditional art, literature, knowledge and practice that are transmitted orally. Every group of people who shares a common culture has something that is unique to them and this includes their folklore. These groups of individuals share as central part of that identity, folk traditions-the things that the people traditionally believe, do, know and say. Folklore according to Asika&Akabuike (2014:34) "is embodies the totality of the people's existence, worldview and outlook to life. It comprises all the lore, cultural heritage and the traditions of the people, handed over to them from generation to generation orally". This lore makes a given set of people or community unique and distinguishable from other people and other communities. Proverbs, like other elements of folklore, are as old as man and many of them have existed, thrived and survived in the remote past.

Of the varied folklore elements, proverb is the form which has proved itself to be of great relevance to modern man. lt has been and remains a most powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another. The reason behind the efficacy of the proverb is that it is an aphorism, a wise saying, based upon people's experience and is a reflection of the social values and sensibility of the people. A collection of the proverbs of a community or nation is, in a real sense, an ethnography of the people which if systematized can give a penetrating picture of the people's way of life, their philosophy, their criticism of life, moral truths and social values. Proverbs are found in many languages and cultures. Nwoga (1975:186) describes proverbs as ''the wisdom of many and the wit of one, the experiences and wisdom of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression''. Proverbs deal with issues that border on the values, norms, institutions and artifacts of a society across the whole gamut of a people's experiences. They are tools used to describe and express social, cultural, natural and other practices in the society. Proverbs are both a functional means of communication and also a very elegant and artistic performance. lt is used in oratory, counseling, judging and embellishing speeches and in enriching conversation. Proverbsare highly valued by the lgbo people and proficiency in the language means knowing how to intersperse speech with a good dose of proverbs. lgbo proverbs are not only central to the propagation of lgbo culture in all its ramifications, they are the foremost factor in formal and familiar speeches and in other forms of popular communication. Okoli (2012:18) noted that Proverbs "are so ingrained in the Igbo language that there is no way to avoid them except one does not want to speak the language elegantly". Some Igbo proverbs are used in national development. They warn another about the consequences that may fellow if we get our priorities wrong by not doing things at the appointed time. Proverbs are didactic in nature. They are tools for education and acculturation especially to the benefit of the young in the society who may be culturally uniformed. The elders use proverbs to teach the youth wisdom about the world and how to behave. A good speaker who uses proverbs effectively can always say about trampling on people's human rights, lack of consideration for others, greedy, lying, stealing, impatience and seeking maximum reward for minimum effort that is rampant in Nigeria. These negative tendencies are threating the growth, stability, development and existence of Nigeria and can be addressed using proverbs.

**Concept of Proverbs**

Several scholars have attempted to define the proverb, each from the dimension or viewpoint that is more appealing and enduring to them. This has given rise to various definitions of proverbs found in many scholarly publications. Okezie (2007:42) says proverb "is a saying in which words of wisdom are perpetually enshrined. It is most poetic, most powerful and efficient form of oral literature." Proverb is stable and does not suffer from variation brought about by the genius of individuals. Thus, the proverb is unlike the folktale which an individual can bend at will to suit his artistic purposes. Proverbs originated in the distant past and their forms are maintained. They lend color and beauty to African speech unlike other prose forms or narratives. Proverbs help to emphasize and deepen the force of what is said. Moreover, the philosophy of the people is preserved in proverbs. Onuekwusi (2003:17) in Asika&Akabuike (2014:37) noted that a proverb is a philosophical, allusive and metaphorical citation that gives credence to traditional truth and wisdom. lt is allusive and metaphorical because it refers to some truth outside itself. lt is philosophy because it is a product of a long period of reasoning and observation which expresses some timeless truth.

Noah (1996:92)" says that the word proverb comes from "proverbum'' which is a combination of two Latin words "pro" meaning "for" and "verbum" meaning "word" .A proverb is, therefore ,a substitute for what is normally expressed in plain words. Achebe (1958) defines proverb as the oil with which words are eaten. Some authors describe proverb as the soup with which words are eaten. According to Carnochan and lwuchukwu (1963:28) in Okoye (2009:106-107) says proverb "is salt that enhances the flavor of food,so the proverb gives point to the bare statement of fact". Whether proverbs are seen as the oil or the soup with which words are eaten or are as the salt in a food, it is clear that they play an over-riding role to the folks. Oil, as we know, brightens whatever food it is used in cooking and makes it look appetizing. Proverbs as oil, therefore, brightens Igbo language, be it oral or written .The Igbo words (languages) will be useless without the soup (proverb) because the words would not be 'eaten' in the absence of the soup. A man without a great knowledge of Igbo is given less attention in his community because he cannot make any wise speech.

Proverbs in principle required age, reason, reflection and experience to understand. Children and the inexperienced and shallow-minded are baffled by proverbs. People unfamiliar with proverbs are easily lost in the conversation and discussions of elders which are replete with proverbs. Below are the examples of proverbs in Igbo society as given by Onwudufor (2008:2);

(a) Ogologo okpu na-aka mma n'isi onye nwe ya
**Translation:** A long cap fits the head of the owner best
**Meaning:** No one condemns whatever belongs to him even when he has no basis to defend it
(b) Anyikena-aka mmana be onyenweya
**Translation:** It is better for an axe to be found in the house of the owner
**Meaning:** It is better for property to get damaged when it is still in the custody of the owner.
(c) Okokporo kwanyere onwe ya ugwu, a juo ya kedu maka umuaka ya
**Translation:** When a bachelor carries himself with honor, people may begin to ask him about the welfare of his children
**Meaning:** A person through goodwill may change his misfortune into a blessing

(d) A hu dike e bie abia
**Translation:** When a hero appears, the funeral drum (abia) is normally halted in his honor
**Meaning**: Honor is only given to the person who deserves it
(e) A dighi eri ogaranya n'aha
**Translation:** One does not answer a rich man merely as a nickname
Meaning: Nobody achieves greatness by mere wish
(f) A dighi ahu chaa onu nnunu na-ajukedu ebe o si eri nri
**Translation:** No one should be asking how a bird eats after looking at its beak
**Meaning:** A self-evident case does not call for any elucidations
(g) Onyena-ekwuna anu enyi ekweghi obubo ga-abu eziokwu ma na o kweghi agwucha agwucha bu okwu asi
**Translation:** That the carcass of an elephant is difficult to disemember is believeable but that it cannot be finished can never be true
**Meaning:** Certain claims are difficult to be defended
(h) Dike matakata usu o dighi mma ka a sina o matakwaghi

**Transllation:** After declaring that a hero has trapped a bat, it is not good to announce that he actually did not catch anything

**Meaning:** One who is highly esteemed is supposed to be a man of his word

(i) Agbara m enyi egbe bu eziokwu ma enwudere m enyi n'ukwu bu okwuasi

**Translation:** That one shot an elephant could be true but that he held it by the leg is a lie

**Meaning:** Certain claims are too bogus to be true

(j) O buru na oji aghaghi ugha, ose agaghi agha ugha

**Translation:** Provided the kola nut does not prove deceptive then the pepper will also be dependable

Meaning: Good co-operation and friendship often thrives on the principle of mutual honesty and trust

**Types of proverb**

According to Okoye (1996:237) there are three types of proverbs. They include: (i) epigrammatic proverb (ii) wellerisms and ( iii) Poetic proverb

**Epigrammatic proverbs**: These are mere statements of fact which are deep and thought provoking.

Examples are:

(a) Nwata gbakaa ute ya o hie n'ala

(b) Aturu muru ebule gba aka nwa

(c) lsi kote ebu o gbaa ya etc

Translation

(a) If a child tiers his mat he sleeps on the floor

(b) A sheep that gives birth to a ram is childless.

(c) Any head that attracts a wasp must be stung.

**Wellerism:** This type of proverb is attributed to have been said by a fictional character which could be animal, god, object, man etc. Asika and Akabuike (2014:51) say wellerism "is a very powerful instrument for indirect satire in a public forum. It is also a witty statement for teaching morals and other good behaviors and attitudes to life. Wellerisms also suggest realities of experience". Here are some examples:

(a) Udara si na o bughi so ya mutara nwa a na-apiwaonu.

(b) Mbe si na ndi umunna ya huru ya n'anya wee kwaara ya kootu igwe.

(C) Nweke sina o ruo n'omume, onye agbala oso

**Translation**

(a) Apple says that it is not only her that begets a child whose mouth is opened by force.

(b) Tortoise says that his kinsmen so loved him that they made him an iron coat

(c) Nweke says in time of action let no one run away.

**Poetic proverb**: This is a genre of proverb which perfectly falls within the context of oral poetry. ln the course of performance it contains rhythmic elements, and is in form of miniature poems. Here are some examples

Nwata bulie nna ya elu ogodo ayochie ya anya

Maobu

Nkilinkili ka a na-ekiti ododo.

E jighi ododo eli ozu
Maobu
Okiliki ka a na-agba ukwu ose.
A naghi ari ukwu ose elu.

**Translation**
If a child lifts his father up his wrapper covers his eyes
or
The clothes where one lies in state are for decoration.
None of it is used for burial
or
Pepper plant can only be running around
As no one can climb it.

**Figures of Speech in Proverbs**
Figures of Speech constitute another instance of linguistic deviation in literary language. Figures of speech or semantic violations are deviant because meaning is not conveyed through literal meaningfulness; that is, meaning is not found at the surface structure but at the deep structure. The reader must look for meaning beyond the denotative meaning. Abrams (1981) in Onwukwe (2009) defines figures of speech" as a deviation from what speakers of a language apprehend as the ordinary, or standard, significance or sequence of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect, literary language abounds in figures of speech because of the aesthetic intentions of the writers. Figures of speech are ornamental because of its picturesqueness.

The following are figures of speech; simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche personification, hyperbole, euphemism, litotes, apostrophe, antithesis, oxymoron, paradox, and irony will be discussed in the section, we will now look at these one after another.

1. **Proverbs as Similes**

Abrams (1981) defines simile as a comparison between two distinctly different things' in which the words ''like ''or' 'are used.

Some proverbs employ similes as central figure rhetoric. Here are the examples:

i. Onye kariri madu dika chi ya:
One's superior is like one's God.
ii. Onye tara ahu nodu n'uzooba, o dika o na-ario ji
If a slim person is on the path to the barn, it looks as if he is begging for yams
iii. Eburu ozu onye ozo gawa, o dika ebu ukwu nku
When the corps of another is being carried it seem as if it is a bundle of fire-wood
iv. Out esi ama aka nkwa ka esi agba ya.
As the drum beats so it danced

2. **Proverbs as Metaphor**. Every proverb is Metaphorical or figurative statement, which relies on a variety of features to create its central image or symbol. Emenanjo (2008:23) says "metaphor used in Igbo proverbs may be simple or complex, negative or affirmative, declarative or interrogative, opaque or transparent". Here are the examples:

i. Ewu nwa mgbei / ogbenye bu ehi ya
The poor man's goat is his cow
ii. Eluwa bu ahia, onye zu juo a bo ya, ya eburu la
The world is a market when one fills one's basket with wares, on carries it and goes
iii. Ugwo bu etuto / onwo, a pia, ya, ya efe
Debt is a boil, when the pus is expressed, it subsides.

**3. Proverbs as Paradox:** A paradox is a statement or proposition that is self-contradictory. Some proverbs draw their pithiness and picturesqueness from harboring self-contradicting images in their internal structure. Examples are

i. Mmanya ngwo, ogbum, agum
Palm wine, kills me (intoxicates me) I thirst after it.
ii. Akwa okuko tipiara aku
The egg has cracked the kernel.
iii. Nta-ntamiri ghoro osimiri
Little drops of rain / drizzle that becomes an ocean

**4. Proverbs as Hyperbole**

i. Ngwere si na out akwa ya ha ka onwa;
The lizard says that its egg is as big as the moon
ii. Ogwumagala si na ya were otu ya ha zo n'ala, ya azopuo ya.
The chameleon says that if it should use all its weight to walk on the ground, it will give away.
iii. Ihe ehi huru gbaoso, okuko agaghi anwa itu ya onu
What the cow sees and runs away, the fowl will not dare to peck at it.

**5. Proverbs as Euphemism:**

In the ethnography of Igbo speech, when elders talk with fellow elders, they can use euphemism; for the forbidden areas of speech referring to sex, excretion, death, pregnancy, etc. They could, however, when they want to be 'polite' especially when speaking to those who are not their peers, use euphemisms or proverbs which are inherently euphemistic. Here are a few examples.

I. Naani di na nwunye ma ihe obogwu yi ikili ukwu ya
Only husband or wife knows what duck wears on its heels

**Functions of proverbs in Igbo society**

Proverbs according to Okezie (2007:45) "are used in settling dispute, to give advice, to show wisdom and to beautify speech". It deals with certain serious issues about life, man, his relationships with his environment. Proverbs teach children and youths the expected cultural comportment. This include, for example, how to relate to elders, obey constituted authority, show deference and consideration for others. In modern Nigeria society, disrespect and lack of consideration for others, dishonesty, greed, as well as a variety of other destructive societal values have become the special trademark of the youths. Records in fact, show that most of the crime and violence in the society is perpetrated by the youths. An understanding of proverbs will doubtless equip such members of society better, for decent and responsible living. In Nigeria, hard work has been forced to take the back seat, and honesty relegated to where it ought not to be. A study of proverbs will reveal that these self-same qualities were

previously, highly priced. Okoh (2008:127) and Akporobaro (2012) noted that "apart from their role in enlivening conversation, proverbs display a literary capacity for accomplishing a range of other functions; to conceal meaning or veil references ,save offence, admonish persuade, even rebuke". Proverbs particularly display enormous potential for commenting on a situation, ridiculing a speaker, criticizing another's action or comportment but, more importantly, all this is oblique fashion. It is precisely this element of tact and obliqueness that makes the proverb a highly effective device in driving, home one's point, without necessarily giving offence in one's conversation, whether with a friend, acquaintance, equal, even a superior.

**The Concept of National Development**

The term national development is a very important phenomenon as regards the existence and well-being of the country. The condition description and status of any nation is dependent upon the nature of life of its citizen. If a country possesses the highest security missiles but is deficit in some basic amenities like water, electricity, good roads and a good communication networks, such a country cannot be said to be developed. More so, in a country where a limited number out of a whole majority is living in opulence while the rest are famished, living from hand to mouth in a squalid and hostile environment, development cannot be said to have taken place. National development, therefore, entails some positive, quantitative and qualitative change in a society. By this, it mean the process of improving human life. Todero (1977) in Eyisi and Akaegbuobi (2014:162-163) established three important aspects of development thus;

Raising people's living levels - their incomes and consumption levels of food, medical services, education, etc. through relevant economic growth.

Creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institution which promote human dignity and respect.

Increasing people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice-variables, for example, by increase of consumer goods and services.

National development means improving the living condition of the people by integrating social development, economic development and environmental conservation and protection. Essentially, it is about the welfare of all. National development according to Olayode (2006) "is also defined as a development that meets the need of the presents without compromising the ability of the future generation to meets their needs. lt also means capacity to continue into the future" .It is to be noted that, this concept applies not only to environmental issues, but also incorporated into economic and social issues. The concept entails developmental strategy that manage all assets, natural resources as well as finance and physical assets for increasing long-term wealth and well-being. National development could be seen to encompass all attempts to ensure meeting the needs of the existing inhabitant of a community without jeopardizing the ability of its future generation.

**Proverbs Associated With National Development**

Proverb should be regarded as a good work of art. Another important function of proverbs is the ushering of unity. There are some proverbs that can unite all tribes in Nigeria. Here are examples

1. Egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebela nku kwaa ya

The kite shall perch, the eagle shall perch, and any who says no as to the other shall have a broken wing.

2. I biri ka m biri

Live and let live

3. Anyukoo mma miri onu o gboo ufufu

Urine foams when many people urinate together

4. Gidigidi bu ugwueze

Coming out in mass is the pride of a king

5. Mba na-asun'olu mana a kwacha ukwara o buru otu

Languages may differ but we all cough alike

6. A naghi akoro onu na ya na imi bu nwanne

Needless telling the mouth that he is a brother to the nose

7. Uka a kparaakpa a na-eji isi ekwe ya

Mutual agreement is key to success.

8. AKa aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu

What you sow you will reap

9. E mee ngwa e megharaodachi

A stitch in time saves nine.

10. Onye ndidi na-eri azu ukpoo

A patience dog eats the fattest bone.

11. A tuara omara o mara ma a tuara ofeke, ofejilie onu.

A word is enough for the wise.

12. Aka weta, aka weta, ojuonu.Gidigidi bu ugwueze.

Unity is strength.

13. Oge adighi eche mmadu.

Time and tide wait for nobody.

14. Choo ewu ojii ka chi di.

Make hay while the sun shines.

15. A tuara omara omara, ma atuara ofeke ofejilie onu.

A word is enough for the wise.

16. Onye ndidi na-eri azu ukpo.

A patient dog eats the fattest bone.

17.Okuko si na ya agaghi echezo onye horo ya odudo n'udu mmiri.
A friend in need is a friend indeed.

Philosophically these proverbs are telling us to love and be our brother's keeper. Indeed, Nigeria cannot grow in development if it continues to live in division and distrust. From these proverbs, one has seen the important of unity. Any nation or even tribe that does not want to go extinct must learn to unite. Sticks of broom tied together can never be broken by a hand, no matter how powerful a man is. But separate them and keep them in sticks, even a month old child can break them. This shows that more results are achieved when many hands are on the deck. For instance, only the Hausas, the Igbos, the Yorubas or the Ijaws or Igalas cannot do it alone. For Nigeria to achieve its national development to the brim, all the tribes must come together and work together.

There many languages in Nigeria, let differences in language not cost us our destiny as a nation. Let us learn to speak with one voice not minding our language differences. Is Hausa man waiting to be told that he is a brother to the yorubas? Does an Igbo man not know that he is a brother to Ijaws or Igalas? saying it is stating the obvious. All the tribes in Nigeria are brothers and sisters and should always relate as such. Let us debunk tribalism and hatred and become real dears to one another, so that Nigeria can achieve its national development.

**Conclusion**

It is clear what the main contention here is, that proverb is of vital importance to national development, and should be fully recognized. Proverbs displays great potential through its inculcation of sound cultural values, and other manifestations of humane and wholesomely human behavior. Used to appeal, advise, curse, adjudicate, condemn, conceal, embellish, hint, comment, commend and educate. Proverbs exploit the total socio-cultural experiences of a people and encapsulate these in oblique, terse, picturesque and metaphorical mnemonic expressions. Whether in Nigeria or African, then, proverbs remain an important tool for nation building, national realization, reconstruction or sanitization.

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