

Wahariri / Editors:
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DIWANI YA METHALI
AN ANTHOLOGY OF PROVERBS
IN KISWAHILI

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Dhamira Kuu
Leitgedanke

Mwungwana¹ kalima²
You are as much worth as your word

¹ lady, gentleman

² statement, declaration, word

Dibaji
Preface

While reading Literature in Kiswahili at the Department of African Studies, University of Vienna we got acquainted with a Kiswahili enriched with proverbs, enticing us to probe into the fathomless depth of Swahili thought.

This compilation is the result of extra-mural studies jointly with our lecturer Lourenço de Noronha who moderated our work. He was born in Dar es Salaam where his father worked in the Revenue Office from 1919-1945, went to school in Goa, India, worked in the Public Works Department, Architectural Section in Dar es Salaam from 1950 to 1953 and was a Secondary School teacher in Dar es Salaam and Mbeya from 1961-1972. He then visited Tanzania at regular intervals until 1996. Claudia Dal-Bianco attended lectures on Kiswahili at the University of Dar-es-Salaam during the Winter Semester 2006/07 and Johanna Emig during the Summer Semester 2007. We have kept on improving our knowledge of Kiswahili - since then - through reading and through personal contacts with “native” speakers.

We are presenting these proverbs to students studying Kiswahili, presuming that they have a sound knowledge of Kiswahili grammar and vocabulary. While approaching most of them at two levels with a free translation and an intentional meaning, we take it for granted that the literal meaning should be obvious to these students.

Since Kiswahili knows no gender, the “he” may also be read as “she”, the gender-conflict, however, could also be peacefully settled by clicking the key “delete”.

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1. Utangulizi / Introduction

Terms

Kiswahili is still in the process of defining terms (*istilahi*) needed for a study of Swahili literature.³

Saleh Farsi translates *methali* as “proverbs”⁴, so too, the Kiswahili-English Dictionary of the University of Dar es Salaam. while Velten uses the term *mifano ya maneno*⁵⁶ Johnson has introduced this term in his Swahili-English Dictionary in addition to the existing term *methali*⁷. The articles by Abudu, Chuwa, Massamba and Omari mentioned in the bibliography attached to this introduction, take it for granted that *methali* is the appropriate term for “proverb”. BAKITA which has the final word in such cases, terms “proverb” as *methali* or *methalififi*.⁸

Proverbs are in fact *mifano ya maneno* since the literal meaning acts as a comparison. For example the literal translation of the proverb “*Ulimi hauna mfupa*” is “The tongue has no bone”. The proverb implies that just as the tongue is flexible with no firm bone to control it, so can words be used to speak the truth but can also be misused in lies or demagoguery, subject to the whims of the speaker.

Proverbs are short expressions depicting human experience in stylistic form, easy to remember and pleasing to hear, the primary purpose being to share personal experience with others in the form of a literary phrase. They usually follow the rhyme and meter as prescribed by the literary rules of the prevailing culture. Since a proverb has to be compact and compressed it may neglect the rules of grammar and structure⁹.

Proverbs contain a message deduced from experience and as such they have a local background which needs to be explained. In the course of time proverbs acquire a fixed form which need explanation and interpretation in the context of the local culture. It is, however, not advisable to judge a proverb from the view of the culture of a foreign student studying them. Proverbs - like all oral literature and also folk songs - may vary from person to person and place to place, although the contents may be similar. For example the proverb, “*Kuku wa maskini hatagi mayai*”¹⁰ appears also as, “*Mbuzi wa maskini hazai*

³ Refer to the link [Istilahi ya Fasihi](http://www.swahili-literatur.at) on the website www.swahili-literatur.at

⁴ Swahili Sayings Book 1.

⁵ The term may be translated as “Examples or comparisons in words”. *Methali* or *mithali* also mean “comparison” or “example”.

⁶ Velten, Carl. 1907: 315.

⁷ Johnson, Frederick. 1976 (1939). A Standard English-Swahili Dictionary. Nairobi: OUP.

⁸ BAKITA. 1985. “Istilahi za fasihi zilizopitishwa na Bakita”, in: Kiswahili. Dar es Salaam: IKR, 52/1 & 2, p. 193-206.

⁹ For example the proverb *Ahadi deni* lacks a verb.

¹⁰ The hen of a poor man does not lay eggs.

*mapacha*¹¹ conveying the universal message of a close association between poverty and bad luck, and in a capitalistic society it refers to the “survival of the fittest”.

Proverbs in Kiswahili concern human beings and not animals, birds or plants. If the latter do happen to be mentioned in a proverb, they refer to human beings and their behaviour.

It was suggested to me, to place an English or German proverb as a counterpart to the Kiswahili one, as “Slow and steady wins the race” or “*Eile mit Weile*”¹² for “*Polepole ndiyo mwendo*”. The surface values may have a similar meaning, but I am reluctant to do so because they would distort the flavour of their originality.

Most of the proverbs in Kiswahili have a local context, some, however, are an expression of the universality of human emotion, thoughts and needs, as for example the proverb *Shoka husahau, mti hausahau*¹³.

1.2. Form

1.2.1. Context

Proverbs may be classified on the basis of a grammatical form, their rhythmic form, on the basis of their contents or on the basis of their reference to social situations. This compilation of Swahili proverbs presumes that the target group has a sound knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of Kiswahili and gives preference to the social context.

1.2.2. Brevity

Kiswahili proverbs are concise and free from floral ornaments, even to the extent that they sometimes neglect basic rules of grammar. For example the proverbs *Akili mali*¹⁴, and *Elimu bahari*¹⁵ even ignore the verb.

1.2.3. Constituents

Kiswahili proverbs usually have two constituents. The second one either illustrates the first as in *Mgeni (ni) kuku mweupe*¹⁶, explains the first as in *Usiwashe ta, nyumbani mwa kipofu*¹⁷ or is a result of it as in *Subira yavuta heri*¹⁸. The dividing line between the constituents is usually marked by a pause when speaking the proverb.

1.2.4. Metric form

¹¹ The goat of a poor man does not bear twins.

¹² Haste, but with leisure.

¹³ The axe may forget, but the tree does not.

¹⁴ Knowledge is wealth.

¹⁵ Education (knowledge) is an ocean (boundless).

¹⁶ A foreigner is a white fowl, i.e. attracts attention.

¹⁷ Do not light a lamp in the house of a blind person.

¹⁸ Patience brings happiness.

The proverb *Leo uko, kesho huko*¹⁹ has four words with two syllables in each, the stress being on the preultimate syllable as usual, *Samaki huanza kuoza kichwani*²⁰ is composed of four words with three syllables in each, *Likiwika, lisiwike, kutakucha*²¹ has three words with four syllables in each. This gives a regular prosodic²² pattern. Another common form is 6+6 syllables in each *kipande*, as in *Maji ya kifuu, bahari ya chungu*²³. Proverbs with 8+8 syllables in a line remind us of the *shairi* form. It can be seen in the proverb *Mbio za sakafuni, huishia ukingon*²⁴.

1.2.5. Noun Class

Kiswahili has the capacity to refer to a noun by means of the morpheme of the class to which the noun belongs without mentioning the noun itself, as in *Liandikwalo, halifutiki*²⁵ presuming that the listener will recognise the reference to “*nenoma*”.

1.2.6. Hypothetic Clause

The hypothetic clause – a common form – appears for example in the proverb *Ukifunga kinywa, nzi hakiingii*²⁶. The recommending “do” and “do not” appears often, as for example in *Mtulivu hula mbivu*²⁷ and *Usifuata nzi, usije ukala mavi*²⁸. It is also common to nouns and verbs with “*ni*” or “*si*” as in *Mtu ni watu*²⁹ and *Kusikia si kuona*³⁰.

1.3. Selected themes

1.3.1. Maadili

Maadili, which may be translated as righteous behaviour or ethics, is a basic concept in Swahili thought and literature which is also expressed in proverbs. One of the aspects of *Maadili* is a “word of honour” as seen in the proverb *Mwungwana kalima*³¹. Parents are given due respect in the proverb *Fadili mpe mama, na Mola takubariki*³². The Mswahili is advised to be polite while requesting for something he needs, as in *Atakaye cha mvunguni*,

¹⁹ Today you are there, tomorrow you are not there.

²⁰ A fish begins to rot at its head.

²¹ If the cock crows or not it will dawn.

²² Prosodie bedeutet Silbenbemessungslehre.

²³ A coconut shell with water is an ocean to an ant.

²⁴ If you run on the flat roof of a house, you may topple over.

²⁵ The written word cannot be erased.

²⁶ If you shut your mouth, flies will not get in.

²⁷ A persistent (patient) person eats ripe fruits.

²⁸ Do not follow flies, lest you eat dung.

²⁹ One person is people.

³⁰ Hearing is not seeing.

³¹ A gentleman is as much worth as his word.

³² Give your mother grace and gratitude and God will bless you.

*huinama*³³. Harshness and anger are detrimental to human relations as in *Hasira hasara*³⁴. The loss of a good reputation is considered a disaster as in *Cha kuvunda, hakina ubani*³⁵. The social responsibility of *maadili* appears in the proverbs *Samaki akioza, ni mtungo pia*³⁶ and *Samaki huanza kuoza kichwani*³⁷.

1.3.2. Poverty

Poverty is a frequent theme. It may result from lack of resources, as in *Mkosa jembe halimi*³⁸. It may also result from exploitation where the common man remains unprotected, as in *Ng'ombe na mbuzi ni mmoja, kondoo ni mtu mbali*³⁹. The upper strata of society ridicules the poor man if he crosses the border of poverty, as in *Maskini haokoti, akiokota huambiwa kaiba*⁴⁰ and *Maskini akipata, matako hulia mbwata*⁴¹. Poverty resulting from lack of discipline is mentioned in *Cha mlevi huliwa na mgema*⁴². Poverty may also result from social and family commitments such as burials and marriages, as in the proverb *Kufa, kwa wengi arusi*⁴³. The following proverb expresses a doubt if family members would be willing to help one another in times of need *Mtumai cha ndugu hufa maskini*⁴⁴. The Mswahili believes that wealth should have a social aspect, as in this proverbs *Mali ya bahili huliwa na wadudu*⁴⁵, *Mavi usiyoyala, wayawingana kuku*⁴⁶ and *Maji ya kifuu, bahari ya chungu*⁴⁷.

1.3.3. Women

Except for the love and respect for a mother⁴⁸, proverbs in Kiswahili let women appear as being weak and tending to vanity, although in reality it is they who feed the family through their labour in traditional Swahili society.

³³ The one who needs something from under the bed should bend low.

³⁴ Anger, loss.

³⁵ Stench cannot be relieved even by incense.

³⁶ If just one fish rots, all others on the string will follow.

³⁷ A fish begins to rot at its head.

³⁸ The one who lacks a hoe does not cultivate a field.

³⁹ Cows and goats are similar. Sheep are different. Cows and goats have horns to defend themselves, sheep not.

⁴⁰ A poor man does not find things by chance; if he does, people presume that he has stolen them.

⁴¹ When a poor man gets something, his buttocks shout "*mbwata*". (*mbwata*: Bedeutung?)

⁴² The drunkard's property is consumed by the palm wine tapper.

⁴³ Death for many is a wedding. Relatives, friends and religious institutions profit from the inheritance, the food and the fees for the Koran-Recital.

⁴⁴ One who looks to his brother for maintenance, will die a destitute.

⁴⁵ The wealth of a miser is eaten up by worms.

⁴⁶ Why drive away fowls from the dung which you do not eat anyway? (*ku-winga* to drive away).

⁴⁷ A coconut shell full of water is an ocean to an ant.

⁴⁸ *Fadhili mpe mama na Mola (a)takubariki.*

The proverb *Mume ni kazi, mke ni nguo*⁴⁹ presumes that men are industrious while women fuss over clothes. *Uzuri wa mke nguo, wa ng'ombe kulimwa*⁵⁰ and *Uzuri wa godoro wa nje tu, kwa ndani mna pamba*⁵¹ suggest that women tend to be vain and neglect work. The proverb *Mkeka mpya haulaliwi vema*⁵² implies that a young wife needs a husband to guide her in life. We have included such proverbs to make the students aware of their existence, while keeping in mind that they do not correspond to reality.

1.3.4. The tongue

The tongue in proverbs in Kiswahili is the source of slander in *Ulimi hauna mfupa*⁵³ and disunity in *Ndimi arobaini, mafundo arobaini*⁵⁴.

1.3.5. Love

The proverb *Mpende akupendaye*⁵⁵ encourages a person to respond to love with love. Love is considerate as in *Akipenda, chongo huita kengeza*⁵⁶. Love forgives and ignores harsh behaviour by a beloved person as in the proverb *Teke la kuku, halimwumizi mwanawe*⁵⁷. The proverb *Mwenye kupenda ni jura*⁵⁸ associates love with loss of reason.

Marriage in Islamic society is a *sunna*, a duty, and children are a blessing from God to the extent of the proverb *Mwana kila mwaka, ni kubwa baraka*⁵⁹. Not all proverbs in Kiswahili are meant for immediate implementation.

The possibility that a husband may not be faithful to his wife is suggested in the proverb *Mwanamume ni mbono, hualikia kule*⁶⁰. Some wives may occasionally opt for a lover as in the proverb *Mtu halindi bahari, ipitayo kila chombo*.⁶¹ Proverbs in Kiswahili presume that it is difficult to keep away lovers from a pretty woman as in *Mlinzi hulinda ndege, mke*

⁴⁹ Being a husband means hard work, being a wife means fussing about clothes.

⁵⁰ The beauty of a woman lies in her clothes, the value of an ox in hard labour. The “ox” refers to the husband.

⁵¹ The beauty of a mattress lies on the outer surface, the inside is filled with cotton only. The “mattress” refers to a woman, a wife.

⁵² It is not good lying on a new mat. The “new mat” is a newly married woman. A young wife has a lot to learn.

⁵³ A tongue has no bone.

⁵⁴ Forty tongues, forty knots. Forty tongues, forty opinions.

⁵⁵ Love the one who loves you.

⁵⁶ If one is in love he calls an one-eyed person a squint.

⁵⁷ A hen's kick does not hurt her chick.

⁵⁸ A lover is a fool.

⁵⁹ A child every year is a great blessing.

⁶⁰ A husband is a creeper (*ricinus communis*), he stretches far away.

⁶¹ A man cannot guard the sea, where all the ships pass.

*mzuri halindwi*⁶². The proverb *Mapenzi ni majani, popote penye mbolea huotea*⁶³ reflects a cynical view of love.

1.3.6. Religion

The basic attitude towards God and religion in proverbs in Kiswahili is the verb “*ku-cha*” which may be translated with “to fear”, but also with “to respect”. The proverb “*Kumcha Mungu si kilemba cheupe*”⁶⁴ guides to inner sincerity instead of an outward show. Proverbs like “*Fimbo la mnyonge mlifi Mungu*”⁶⁵ help to spiritually comfort the needy without, however, really relieving them of their desolate state. In fact it would be better to alter unfair structures than to give alms. A belief in *Kudura ya Allah*, i. e. predestination which is characteristic of Islamic beliefs, exists in proverbs in Kiswahili, as in *Jitihada haiiondoi kudura (ya Mungu)*⁶⁶. What reason does a poor man - subject to injustice - have to believe in God? *Maskini hana imani*⁶⁷ refers to the conflict between faith and social injustice.

1.4. The contents

1.4.1. Translation and levels of interpretation

A literal translation is the first stage, as in “A rod which lies far away does not kill a snake”⁶⁸. The next step would be a free translation, “You can kill a snake with a rod in hand.” A translation may also need a comment referring to the local context - if needed. In the case of this proverb one could mention that in the rural areas one usually uses a *mkwaju* or *kiboko* to break the back (spinal cord) of a snake. It prevents the snake from moving. Its head can then be better attacked. The *mkwaju*, branch of a tamarinde tree is strong and flexible. A *kiboko* is a whip made from the hide of a hippopotamus.

The contents of proverbs in Kiswahili can be considered from two levels: the surface meaning and the intentional or applicative meaning. Cultural and ideological references contribute to a better understanding of a proverb.

The surface meaning of *Haba na haba, hujaza kibaba*⁶⁹ is clear. The local Mswahili hearer knows that a *kibaba* is a quart measure of about 700 grams which involves an effort to be filled grain by grain. The intentional meaning is “Small savings accumulate to big accounts.” It may have an applicative meaning if it applies to a particular person in a particular situation.

⁶² A watchman keeps the birds away from the fields, a pretty woman, however, cannot be guarded.

⁶³ Love is like grass, which grows well in any place with sufficient manure.

⁶⁴ Love of God (faith in God) does not need the wearing of a white turban.

⁶⁵ The walking stick of a poor person is paid for by God.

⁶⁶ Human effort does not replace the will of God.

⁶⁷ A poor man has no faith *or* A poor man has no reason to believe in God.

⁶⁸ *Fimbo ya mbali, haiuwi nyoka.*

⁶⁹ Literal translation, “Little and little fills the measure”.

The proverb *Ukila na kipofu sahani moja, usimguse vyanda*⁷⁰ has a clear surface meaning. The Mswahili understands it in the traditional context that the Waswahili male family members and the male guests eat from one common plate, while the female persons have a similar constellation. The blind man may feel that he is a loser if he notices that he is sharing his food with someone he does not see. The intentional meaning “If you have an affair with another person’s wife, make sure that he never sees you”, is not obvious, but a common interpretation. It may have an applicative meaning if a particular man in such a situation is referred to.

The proverb *Hana (kitu) mbele (yake), hana (kitu) nyuma (yake)* has the literal meaning, “He has nothing in front of him and nothing behind him.” It refers – with despise - to a person with a very recent family tradition. The aristocratic families in East Africa take a pride in their long genealogies.

The context of Islamic thought and their world view appears constantly in Swahili proverbs, the main aspects being *Kudura*⁷¹ referring to predestination and *Dunia mti mkavu*⁷² referring to this world as a place of sorrow compared to bliss in heaven.

1.4.2. Mental habits

Mental habits can be formed by traditional customs, by repetition and by society itself. In *Angurumapo simba, mcheza nani*⁷³ confirms authority in traditional society which dare not be challenged. *Anipendaye, nami nampenda*⁷⁴ teaches behaviour through repetition and *Aliyeko juu, mungojee chini*⁷⁵ refers to forming of mental habits in relation to power in society. One of these mental habits is the association of certain animals with a particular behaviour of human beings. A donkey is associated in proverbs in Kiswahili with stupidity and stubbornness, as in *Punda haendi ila kwa kigongo*⁷⁶. The intentional meaning refers to a stubborn person who is too stupid to understand his own duty and the welfare of others. He will have to be forced to do so. *Simba mwenye kimya, ndiye mla nyama*⁷⁷ refers to a silent person who broods trouble, as in “Silent waters run deep.”

1.5. Conclusion

Proverbs in Kiswahili enrich a conversation and enhance the language competence of a speaker, while also being a diplomatic way of getting out of an uneasy situation. During his term of office at a Secondary School in Tanzania Lourenco Noronha was once verbally assaulted by an ultra-nationalist in an aggressive manner with the question, “Why are you,

⁷⁰ If you eat from one plate with a blind man do not touch his fingers.

⁷¹ A popular saying (Volkspruch) in Austria says: “*Ein Weg auf dieser Welt, ist uns von Gott bestellt*”. (6+6).

⁷² This world is a withered tree.

⁷³ Who dares to indulge in play when the lion roars.

⁷⁴ I shall love the one who loves me.

⁷⁵ Wait at the bottom of the ladder for the one who is at the top of it.

⁷⁶ A donkey does not move, except when beaten by a stick. (*gongo/ma-*)

⁷⁷ A lion who moves silently, is the one that eats meat (devours).

an Indian, teaching Kiswahili (Literature) here?” He answered, “*Titi la mama li tamu ...*”⁷⁸ quoting a poem by Shaaban Robert on the Kiswahili language and hinting to the fact that he (Noronha) was born in Dar es Salaam. It amused and calmed his opponent.

⁷⁸ “A milk of (from) a mother’s breast is sweet ...”

2. A selected bibliography

For more recent publications please refer to Literaturliste. Primärliteratur. Sekundärliteratur on the website www.swahili-literatur.at

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Achari yalisha. (Syllables 3+3).

Pickle is an appetizer.

Pickles makes the guest to relish the food.

Intentional meaning: If you need something from someone request for it in a polite and pleasant manner.

Adhabu ya kaburi, aijuaye ni maiti⁷⁹.

The corpse alone experiences its due punishment in the grave.

Intentional meaning: One who has personally experienced poverty, need and suffering, knows how difficult life can be.

Afua ni mbili, kufa na kuona⁸⁰. (Syllables 6+6).

We have only two options on earth, to die or to live.

Intentional meaning: We are sometimes confronted with a situation where we have no choice. It is advisable to accept it.

Afugaye ng'ombe tume⁸¹, mwenye ziwa la kujaza. (Syllables 8+8).

He who keeps a healthy cow will have plenty of milk.

Intentional meaning: You will enjoy the fruit of your labour.

Ahadi (ni) deni.

A promise is a debt.

Intentional meaning: A promise is binding. A trustworthy person keeps his word.

Aibu ya maiti, aijua mwosha. (Syllables 7+7).

He who washes a corpse gets to know its defects.

The Waswahili have their dead washed before burial.

Intentional meaning: You get to know the weak aspects of another person's character through closer contact.

Aisifuye mvua, imemnyeshea.

He who praises rain has been rained upon.

Intentional meaning 1: The moment you presume all is well, trouble is likely to start.

Intentional meaning 2: The one who has profited from something also knows to appreciate it.

Ajidhaniye amesimama, aangalie asianguke. (Syllables 5+5+5+5 or 10+10).

He who believes to be standing firm, should be careful not to fall.

Intentional meaning 1: The moment you presume all is well, trouble is likely to start.

⁷⁹ The Waswahili believe that if a person has led a bad life, an angel comes into his grave and punishes him there. No one else is aware of this punishment.

⁸⁰ The Waswahili believe that destiny rules their lives. *Kudura ya Allah* implies predestination.

⁸¹ "Tume" means "restless". What does it mean here?

Akaaye karibu na moto, huandaliwa mwanzo.

If you sit near to the fire where the food is being cooked, you will be the first to be served.

Intentional meaning 1: Maintain good relations with influential persons. Keep close to those in power. Take advantage of good opportunities. It will help you to prosper.

Intentional meaning 2: You are at an advantage if you be in the right place at the right time.

Akiba haiozi.

Savings do not decay.

Intentional meaning: Put something aside for “a rainy day”.

Akiba si mbi (mbaya), na ingawa kumbi⁸². (Syllables 6+6).

Savings are not bad, even if they are only coconut fibres.

Intentional meaning: Savings will be of benefit to you, even if they be of a meagre value.

Akili (ni) mali.

Knowledge brings wealth.

Intentional meaning: If you acquire higher studies or have learnt a profession, you will be able to maintain yourself.

Akili ni nywele, kila mtu ana zake.

Intelligence is similar to hair. It varies from person to person.

Intentional meaning: Each person is an individual. He has his own way of thinking and behaving, so too, each people have their own mentality.

Akili nyingi huondoa maarifa.

Much intelligence reduces knowledge.

Intentional meaning: If you believe that you are more intelligent than others and ignore good advice given to you, you are likely to underestimate difficulties and go astray.

Akipenda, chongo huita kengeza.

If one is in love, he calls an one-eyed person a squint.

Intentional meaning: Love is considerate. If you sincerely love someone, you will ignore his or her human shortcomings.

Akishindwa sultani, raia huweza nini?

When even the king knows no solution to a problem, what can a citizen do to solve it?

Intentional meaning: Listen to the advice of people more competent than you. Keep within your limits.

Akitaka kaa⁸³, mpe moto.

If he wants a piece of charcoal give him fire.

Intentional meaning 1: If someone is looking for a quarrel, give him “hell”.

Intentional meaning 2: If someone needs help from you, be generous.

⁸² The *kumbi* are kept in a pit for loosening.

⁸³ “Charcoal” stands here for “live charcoal”.

Akomapo mwenyeji na mgeni koma papo.

There where the native stops, the guest should stop, too.

Intentional meaning: If you are living in a foreign country, adapt yourself to the customs of the people there.

Akosaye la mamaye (mama yake), atalamwa la mbwaye (mbwa wake). (Syllables 8+8).

He that is not suckled by his mother, will have recourse to a bitch.

Intentional meaning 1: A good home education is essential for a bright future.

Intentional meaning 2: This proverb teaches us to be satisfied with what we have, even if it may appear to be of meagre value, it could be useful.

Akufukuzaye hakwambii (hakuambii), “Toka!”

The person who wants to drive you away, does not say, ”Get out!”

Intentional meaning 1: When you feel that your presence is unwanted, retire gracefully at the right moment.

Intentional meaning 2: Carefully observe the attitude of others towards you.

Akumulikaye mchana, usiku akuchoma.

He who greets you with a bright light during the day-time, will set fire to your house at night.

Intentional meaning: He who flatters you is a hypocrite. He wants to exploit you.

Akupigaye, ndiye akufunzaye. (Syllables 5+ ndiye+5).

He who beats you is the one who teaches you.

Intentional meaning: Rigid discipline bears fruit in the long run. It is advisable to be strict in educational matters.

Akutendaye⁸⁴ mtende, mche asiyekutenda. (Syllables 8+8).

Retaliate when someone harms you. Be careful when someone is polite to you.

Intentional meaning: Better to have an enemy whom you know well, than to associate with a friendly person whose background and intentions are vague and not transparent.

Akutendaye mlipe⁸⁵.

Intentional meaning: Reward a person who does good to you.

Alalaye usimwamshe; ukimwamsha, utalala wewe.

Do not wake up someone who is asleep; if you wake him up, you will fall asleep yourself.

Intentional meaning 1: Avoid persons and places where you could meet trouble.

Intentional meaning 2: Do not mix up in the affairs of others, you may harm yourself.

Alimaye kandoni mwa njia, ataonwa na maharamia.

He who cultivates near the roadside, will be seen by thieves (robbers).

Intentional meaning: If you are doing well in office and in business be discreet. Do not show off your source of success.

⁸⁴ “*Akutendaye*” means both “one who treats you well” and “one who malteats you.”

⁸⁵ “*Mlipe*” can mean “reward him” but also “take revenge on him”.

Alimaye shamba njiani, sharti alinde mwizi asipate kuiba.

One who cultivates a field on the roadside should guard it well, lest thieves steal the fruits and crops.

Intentional meaning: If you have achieved a high status in society, you must reckon with envy and hatred.

Alisifuye jua⁸⁶, limemwangaza.

He who praises the sun, it shines on him.

Intentional meaning 1: The moment you presume all is well and feel secure, trouble is likely to start.

Intentional meaning 2: The one who knows the benefit of something, is the one who will profit from it.

Ali(ye) juu, yu juu.⁸⁷

He who is on top, is on top.

Intentional meaning: Give a person in high office due respect.

Aliyeko juu, mungojee chini.

He that is above, wait for him below.

Intentional meaning 1: If you climb a ladder you will also have to descend it.

Intentional meaning 2: Give due respect to the less fortunate, you will share their state sometime.

Aliye(ko) kando, haangukiwi na mti.

He who keeps off the roadside will have no tree falling on him.

Intentional meaning: If you avoid exposing yourself to trouble, you are likely to keep safe of it.

Aliyekupa⁸⁸ wewe kiti, ndiye aliyenipa mimi kumbi.

He who gave you a throne, is the same one who gave me a coconut husk.

Intentional meaning: Some are born rich, some are born poor. Do not despise anyone of humble status.

Aliyepandisha wengine ngazini, hupigwa teke menoni.

The one who has helped others climb the ladder, gets kicked in the teeth.

Intentional meaning: Do not expect gratitude from anyone.

Aliyepata fedha, hutaka kuiliza. (Syllables 7+7).

He who has got money, wants to make it sound.

⁸⁶ *Intentional meaning 1:* This proverb refers to the tropical sun, whose rays can cause harm to a person.

⁸⁷ This proverb is usually used when a person is defeated in his struggle against those in power.

⁸⁸ The Waswahili believe in pre-destination known in Kiswahili as *Kudura ya Mungu*.

Intentional meaning: Those who were paupers and then got rich, like to show off.

Aliyetota, hajui kutota.

He who has already sunk, cannot sink deeper.

Intentional meaning 1: A person who owns nothing, does not know the difference between being poor and being rich.

Intentional meaning 2: A person who has lost his reputation, has nothing more to lose.

Amani haiji, ila kwa ncha ya upanga.

There can be no peace, except by the blade of the sword.

Intentional meaning: If you want peace, prepare for war. If you are bold and resistant, you will not be easily subject to ill-treatment.

Ambiwao ngano⁸⁹, naye ana zake. (Syllables 6+6).

The one who is told a story, he has his own story.

Intentional meaning: The one listening to your story knows that you are telling tales.

Amekula ngano⁹⁰.

He has eaten wheat.

Intentional meaning: A person does harm to himself by disobeying the given laws and regulations.

Amepata fimbo⁹¹, atapata mambo. (Syllables 6+6).

He has got an insignia, he also got power.

Intentional meaning 1: Those in power are likely to misuse it.

Intentional meaning 2: Those in power must reckon with being observed.

Amepeleka kilio matangani.

He has sent information about a death to a mourning ceremony.

Intentional meaning: It makes no sense doing useless work.

Amerudisha tende Manga⁹².

He has returned (sent) dates to Arabia.

Intentional meaning: It makes no sense doing useless work.

Amini uonayo, siyo uyasikiayo.

Trust what you see, do not believe what you hear.

Intentional meaning: Trust facts, not rumours. Avoid gossip.

Amnyimaye punda adesi, kampunguzia mashuzi.

He who withholds lentils from a donkey, reduces his farts.

⁸⁹ *Ngano* are a type of fable or a tale in Kiswahili.

⁹⁰ Moslems believe that the forbidden fruit in Paradise was wheat. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate this forbidden fruit, they ruined their own lives. (Velten. 1907: 330).

⁹¹ This proverb refers to *fimbo* as an insignia.

⁹² A name for Arabia, the region of Muscat.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to reduce the possibilities of conflict.

Ana hasira za mkizi⁹³.

He has the temper of a *mkizi* (cuttle-fish).

Intentional meaning: If you are hot-tempered and take rash action, you are likely to harm yourself.

Ana usingizi kama (or wa) pono⁹⁴.

He sleeps like a *pono*-fish.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to laziness and lethargy.

Anakaanga, (sisi) tu chini ya gae.

He fries and we are under the frying pan.

Intentional meaning: The walls have ears. A secret usually leaks out.

Anayekataa (watu) wengi ni mchawi.

He who dislikes associating with others is a wizard.

Intentional meaning: If you avoid people you probably have something to hide.

Anayekuja pasi na hodi, huondoka pasi na kuaga. (*Syllables 10+10*).

He who enters the house without saying, "May I come in", leaves without saying, "Goodbye!"

Intentional meaning: A person whose ways are not transparent, is not trustworthy.

Anayeonja asali, huchonga mzinga⁹⁵.

He who tastes honey, craves out the beehive.

Intentional meaning 1: If you find access to something you longed for, but could not get it, you will then probably find it difficult to observe the proper limit.

Intentional meaning 2: If you want to achieve something, work hard for it.

Anayetaka hachoki, hata akichoka keshapata.

He who wants something does not get tired looking for it. If he does get tired, he has by then already acquired it.

Intentional meaning: Be persistent in your struggle for success.

Angeenda juu kipungu, hafikilii mbinguni.

No matter how high the hawk flies, it will never reach the sky.

Intentional meaning: There is a limit to human achievement.

Angepaa kipungu, marejeo ni mtini.

The eagle may soar upwards, but he will return to his tree.

⁹³ It is said that the *mkizi* jumps out of water when one tries to catch it, thus killing itself.

⁹⁴ Name of a fish, said to be often in a torpid state. (Johnson, F. 1939. A Standard Swahili-English Dictionary. p. 384).

⁹⁵ *Mzinga* means "canon" in the military language. It is also used for hollowed logs of tree trunks which are hung on the branches of big trees and serve as beehives.

Intentional meaning: We may go abroad, we will, however, want to return home one day. We are inclined to go back to our roots.

Angurumapo simba, mcheza nani?

Who dares to indulge in play, while the lion roars?

Intentional meaning: Consider all possible results carefully, before you challenge a person in power.

Anikataaye, nami namkataa.

He who rejects me, I reject him too.

Intentional meaning: Pay back with the same coin.

Anipendaye, nami nampenda, anikataaye, nami namkataa.

He who loves me, I love him, too. He who rejects me, I reject him too.

Intentional meaning: Pay back with the same coin.

-
Apataye, si mwenzio (Original: Apatao, -o probably for the sake of rhyme). (Syllables 4+4).

He who gets rich is no longer your friend.

Intentional meaning: Those who prosper are inclined to forget their origins.

Apewaye ndiye aongezwaye⁹⁶.

He who has already received, is given more.

Intentional meaning 1: This proverb refers to the privileged class getting richer.

Intentional meaning 2: God has his own preference⁹⁷.

Asali na shurubat⁹⁸, hayana ladha moja. (Syllables 7+7).

Honey and syrup do not have the same taste.

Intentional meaning:

Ashibaye, hamjui mwenye njaa.

He who has his fill, does not know the needs of a hungry person.

Intentional meaning: The privileged class cares for its own prosperity, they ignore the underprivileged.

Asimamaye haendi mbio, hajafukuzwa. (Syllables 5+5+5).

The one who stands (firm), does not move (easily/ easily), unless he is chased away.

Intentional meaning: It is not easy to dislodge a dignitary once he is in power.

Asiye na bahati, habahatiki.

He who is unlucky, remains unlucky.

⁹⁶ This proverb originally referred to the belief that God gives each one what He deems to be fit.

⁹⁷ The Waswahili believe in predestination known in Kiswahili as *Kudura ya Mungu*.

⁹⁸ Honey has a natural sweetness, whereas *shurubati* (*sorbeit*) is a sophisticated combination of delicious flavours.

Intentional meaning: One misfortune follows another.

Asiye na kumi⁹⁹, ana moja.

He who does not have ten, has at least one.

Intentional meaning 1: This proverb refers to worries and trouble.

Intentional meaning 2: No one is totally destitute or there is no one with no talents at all.

Asiye na mengi, ana machache.

He who does not have many, has at least a few.

Intentional meaning 1: Even if you do not encounter serious trouble, you will have at least a few things to worry about.

Intentional meaning 2: No one is totally destitute or there is no one with no talents at all..

Asiyefunzwa na mamaye, hufunzwa na ulimwengu.

He who is not taught by his mother, will be taught by the world.

Intentional meaning 1: You will learn through (good or bad) experience in life.

Intentional meaning 2: If your own relatives fail to help you, other people will do so.

Asiyejua maana, haambiwi maana.

He who does not sense the meaning, is not told it.

Intentional meaning: You cannot teach a fool. Do not pour water on a duck's back.

Asiyekubali kushindwa, si mshindani.

He who is not willing to admit defeat, should not enter into a competition.

Intentional meaning: Accept the arguments of a more capable opponent. Acknowledge your own mistakes.

Asiyekubali la mkuu, huvunjika guu¹⁰⁰ (mguu).

He who does not listen to his elders will hurt his foot.

Intentional meaning: If you do not follow the advice of those who are more experienced in life, you are likely to end up in trouble.

Asiyekujua, hakuthamani (thamini).

He who does not know you, cannot estimate your worth.

Intentional meaning: People will get to appreciate your talents and good character in due course.

Asiyekuwapo machoni, na moyoni hayupo.

He who is not in sight, is not in the heart.

Intentional meaning: Even good friends are soon forgotten.

Asiyekuwapo (asiyekuwepo), na lake halipo. (Syllables 6+6).

He who is not there, his share is not there, too.

⁹⁹ This a norm based on the ten fingers of a human hand.

¹⁰⁰ “Guu/ma-” is the augmentative form og “mguu/mi-”.

Intentional meaning: He who is not present will be ignored. If you want to benefit from an undertaking, take an active part in it.

Asiyepo haangukiwi

The one who is not there, nothing will fall on him.

Intentional meaning: He who stands aloof from others avoids difficulties.

Asiyauliza, hanalo ajifunzalo.

He who does not ask questions, learns nothing

Intentional meaning: Do not be ashamed to ask questions.

Atakaye cha mvunguni¹⁰¹, huinama.

If you want something from under the bed, bend low.

Intentional meaning: If you need help from others, request for it in a polite manner.

Atambaaye na nyasi, mtambulie ni nyoka.

If you hear something creeping in the grass, take it for granted that it is a snake.

Intentional meaning: If someone flatters you, take it for granted that he wants something from you.

Atangaye sana na jua, hujua.

He who wanders much about by daylight, knows a lot.

Intentional meaning: You gain knowledge and information by moving around and contacting people.

Aguwaye huangaliwa. (Syllables 5+5).

A sick person is cared for.

Intentional meaning: Give preference to the sick and aged even in difficult times.

Avuaye nguo, huchutama.

He who takes off his clothes squats low.

Intentional meaning 1: Show discretion in public. Do not expose your personal matters to the public.

Intentional meaning 2: If we have done something wrong, we should also accept the disgrace.

Baada ya dhiki, faraja (auch faraji des Reimes wegen).

After hardship, relief follows.

Intentional meaning: Have patience. Time heals.

Baba wa kambo, si baba.

A step-father is not a real father.

Intentional meaning: Blood relationship is stronger than any other.

¹⁰¹ In some Waswahili homes it is customary to store personal effects in boxes and place them under the bed.

Bandu bandu, huisha gogo.

Chip by chip the log is hewed to an end.

Intentional meaning: If you are slow and steady in your work you are bound to succeed.

Banyani¹⁰² mbaya, kiatu chake dawa.

An Indian is a bad person but his merchandise is good.

Intentional meaning 1: Adjust yourself to a situation which may not be pleasant but necessary.

Intentional meaning 2: A person may appear to be bad at first sight, while his good ways remain hidden.

Bendera hufuata upepo.

A flag follows the direction of the wind.

Intentional meaning: A person who has no steadfast character wavers according to time and trends.

Biashara haigombi. (Syllables 4+4).

A trader does not quarrel with his customers.

Intentional meaning: Be polite and listen to the opinion of others if you want to prosper in life.

Bilashi¹⁰³, bilashi, katu haitoshi. (Syllables 3+3+6).

For nothing, for nothing, never satisfies.

Intentional meaning: If you give someone something he has not worked for, he will not appreciate it.

Bilisi wa mtu, ni mtu.

The evil spirit of a person is the person himself.

Intentional meaning: If you do something wrong, you are not the victim of temptation, but you are following your own free will.

Binadamu ni majembe - ukiyaweka pamoja yatagongana.

Human beings are like hoes. If you keep them near to one another they will clash.

Intentional meaning: Where two or more persons live and work together, conflict is due to occur.

Bura¹⁰⁴ yangu sibatili na rehani.

I shall not substitute my own *bura* for a *rehani* belonging to another person.

Intentional meaning: It is better to be content with what you own, than to borrow and show off.

¹⁰² *Banyas* are in fact a caste (*jati*) of traders from Gujerat, India, but *banyas* in this proverb refers to Indians in general. Indian traders and businessmen in East Africa do not always enjoy the confidence of the local population but they have been found to be useful for the public economy.

¹⁰³ Nothing, for no reason

¹⁰⁴ *Bura* and *rehani* are two kinds of cloth, the latter being of superior quality.

Bure ni malio, pasipo na sikio.

It is useless to cry, where there is no one listening to you.

Intentional meaning: Solve your own problems, do not depend on others.

Cha kichwa kitamu, na cha mkia kitamu.

If the head is sweet (tasty), the tail is sweet (tasty) too.

Intentional meaning: If the beginning was good, the end will be good, too.

Cha kuvunda¹⁰⁵, hakina ubani.

Bad smell cannot be relieved even by incense.

Intentional meaning: Once the reputation of a person has been ruined, it is difficult to set it right again.

Cha kuvunja, hakina rubani.

If a ship or a dhow is stranded or damaged, there is little the helmsman can do.

Intentional meaning: There are situations in life where there is little hope of improvement. It is then better to try your luck somewhere else.

Cha mlevi, huliwa na mgema.

The drunkard's property is consumed by the palm wine tapper.

Intentional meaning 1: The one who leads another into trouble, profits from it.

Intentional meaning 2: It is not wise to waste your talents and finances on shallow-pleasure.

Chanda chema, huvikwa pete.

A handsome finger gets a ring put on it. A pretty woman is likely to get a proposal.

Intentional meaning 1: The wealthy, the well-educated and those belonging to the upper strata of society are welcome everywhere.

Intentional meaning 2: The company of an honest person is well appreciated.

Chanzo cha ngoma ni lele¹⁰⁶.

A gentle drum sound initiates a lively dance.

Intentional meaning: A small and humble beginning may lead to huge success.

Chema chajiuza, kibaya chajitembeza.

A good product sells easily, a bad one needs to be constantly advertised.

Intentional meaning: A efficient person does not need to talk much about himself and his work.

Chema hakikai.¹⁰⁷

A good thing does not stay long.

Intentional meaning: Happy days are a passing shadow. Good luck and happiness are fragile and short-lived.

¹⁰⁵ Vunda refers to stench resulting from something rotting.

¹⁰⁶ gentle, soft sound; prelude

¹⁰⁷ This proverb is usually used to comfort a person in trouble.

Chembe na chembe ni mkate.

Grain and grain are bread.

Grain for grain makes a loaf of bread.

Intentional meaning: If you are slow and steady in your work, you are due to succeed.

Chombo cha kuzama, hakina usukani.

The steering wheel cannot help a sinking vessel.

Intentional meaning: There are situations in life where there is little hope of improvement. It is better to try your luck somewhere else.

Chombo kilichopikiwa samaki, hakiachi kunuka vumba¹⁰⁸.

A cooking utensil in which fish has been cooked, stinks.

Intentional meaning 1: It is difficult to forget injustice and harm done to us.

Intentional meaning 2: Once the reputation of a person has been ruined, it is difficult to improve it.

Chovya-chovya yamaliza buyu la asali.

Drop by drop one finishes all the honey in a calabash.

Intentional meaning 1: You will ruin your life if you are addicted to pleasure.

Intentional meaning 2: A person who wastes his riches will end up a pauper.

Chui hageuki mavaa (madoamadoa)

A leopard cannot change its colours.

Intentional meaning: You cannot deny your identity. This proverb is usually used in a negative sense.

Chukua maji, hata ukifikilie maji.

Carry water with you (on your journey) until you find fresh water.

Intentional meaning: Never throw away old shoes until you get new ones. Do not forget old acquaintances.

Chungu kibovu, kimekuwa magae.

The pot which was defect is now a potsherd (a heap of fragments).

Intentional meaning: When things go bad, the worst is bound to follow.

Chungu kikuu, hakikosi ukoko¹⁰⁹.

A cooking utensil which has been used for long usually has *ukoko* at the bottom.

Intentional meaning 1: (Negative meaning) Even in families, communities and firms where all seems to be well, we must reckon with members who behave badly.

Intentional meaning 2: (Children like eating *ukoko*): Do not despair even in difficult times. Some solution will be close at hand.

Chunguni yaingiayo, ni mambo yatufaayo. (Syllables 8+8).

¹⁰⁸ *Vumba* refers to the smell of cooked or fried fish.

¹⁰⁹ *Ukoko* is hard burnt rice at the bottom of a pot.

Things which enter a pot are those which are useful for us.

Intentional meaning: Give preference to item you need.

Chura hana nyoya. (Syllables 2+2+2).

A frog has no feathers.

Intentional meaning: Be loyal to your identity. Do not exceed it.

Chura¹¹⁰ mzuia maji ndovu.

A frog can prevent an elephant from drinking water.

Intentional meaning: Do not underestimate your enemies.

Dau la mnyonge, haliendi joshi¹¹¹. (Syllables 6+6).

The canoe of a poor person does not sail fast.

Intentional meaning: The common man gets punished, for minor transgressions, while the rich get away with crime.

Dawa ya moto, ni moto.

The remedy against fire is fire.

Intentional meaning: It is better to face problems than to run away from them.

Debe shinda, haliachi kutika.

A half filled tin does not stop rattling

Intentional meaning: "Half-educated" persons and those who have got rich overnight like to show off.

Dua la kuku, haimpati mwewe.

The prayer (curse) of a fowl does not reach the kite.

Intentional meaning: The common man has no say. It is difficult for him to overthrow those in power or to change their ways, although they are unjust.

Dunia duwara¹¹². (Syllables 3+3).

The world is a round-about.

Intentional meaning 1: The pleasures of this "world" are an empty promise (short-lived).

Intentional meaning 2: Do no harm to anyone, lest you meet him again in this "small" world.

Dunia huleta jema na ovu.

The world brings good and bad things.

Intentional meaning: Be prepared for pleasure and hardship, both being a part of life.

Dunia¹¹³ mti mkavu¹¹⁴, kiumbe siulemee (usiulemee)¹¹⁵. (Syllables 8+8).

This world is a dead tree, do not trust it.

¹¹⁰ It refers to a frog sitting on the trunk of the elephant.

¹¹¹ *Joshi*/- windward movement of a vessel. *Enda joshi* go fast.

¹¹² "Duwara" is here associated with a circle of dancers ready for a dance which is considered of no benefit for a happy life by Muslim scholars. (*Koran 6,90*).

Intentional meaning: Ultimate happiness lies not in this world, but somewhere else.

Dunia mwenda wa ngisi, kamwe msiliwale (msilisahau).

The world moves like an octopus. Never forget that.

Intentional meaning: The ways of the “world” are unpredictable.

Duniani ni msiba na furaha, kuna ugonjwa na siha¹¹⁶.

In life there is misfortune and joy, there is sickness and wealth.

Intentional meaning: Take things as they come.

Elimu bahari, haina kuta wala dari.

Knowledge is an ocean, it has neither walls nor a roof.

Intentional meaning: The pursuit of learning is like a voyage for life. It will never end.

Fadhili mpe mama¹¹⁷, na Mola takubariki (atakubariki).

Give your mother grace and gratitude and God will bless you.

Intentional meaning: Love and respect your mother.

Fadhili ya nyuki ni moto.

The gratitude which bees receive for their diligent work of collecting nectar is the smoke that men use to expel them and get at their honey.

Intentional meaning: You must reckon with ingratitude from those whom you once helped.

Fadhili ya punda ni mashuzi.

The gratitude of a donkey is a fart.

Intentional meaning: You must reckon with ingratitude from those whom you once helped.

Fadhili ya punda ni teke.

The gratitude of a donkey is a kick.

Intentional meaning: You must reckon with ingratitude from those whom you once helped.

Fadhili za punda, mashuzi; na msihadhari ni ng’ombe.

The gratitude of a donkey is a fart; and the one with no discretion¹¹⁸ is a cow.

Intentional meaning: You must reckon with ingratitude from those whom you once helped.

Fahali wawili, hawakai zizi moja¹¹⁹.

Two bulls cannot live in one cattle-pen.

¹¹³ “Dunia” is the equivalent of “life in this world” which is often considered to be contrary to life in “*peponi*” or “*mbinguni*” by Muslim scholars.

¹¹⁴ Dunia Mti Mkavu is the title of a novel by Said Ahmad Mohammed.

¹¹⁵ *Lema* (1) be unmanageable, be difficult, (2) be crippled, disabled.

¹¹⁶ *Siha* 9/10 Health.

¹¹⁷ You hurt a person most deeply if you abuse his mother.

¹¹⁸ Cows satisfy their natural needs anywhere, even on the road.

¹¹⁹ This proverb takes into consideration the femals there.

Intentional meaning: Where competition is strong, you must reckon with conflicts.

Fanya fundo¹²⁰, kwa siku ya mashaka.

Make a knot for the day of distress.

Intentional meaning: Provide for a “rainy day”.

Faragha ya nyani, huishia ngokoni¹²¹.

The privacy of a monkey ends up at the red spot at his behind.

Intentional meaning: We cannot conceal our failures for long.

Farasi ham(u)wawezi, ndovu mtawalishani^{122?} (Syllables 8+8).

If you cannot control a donkey, how are you going to feed an elephant?

Intentional meaning: If you cannot manage a simple task, how are you going to take responsibility for major affairs.

Fedha fedheha.

Money is a disgrace.

Intentional meaning: Money is a temptation to do evil if misused.

Fedha hutawala vitu vyote duniani.

Money rules all things in this world.

Intentional meaning: Money substitutes human values.

Figa¹²³ moja, haliinjiki¹²⁴ chungu.

One stone will not support a cooking-pot.

Intentional meaning: You need to cooperate with others to survive and also to contribute to social development.

Fimbo iliyo mkononi, ndiyo iuayo nyoka. (Syllables 9+9).

A stick in the hand is the one that kills a snake.

Intentional meaning: You cannot kill a snake with a stick that lies far away. If you want to have work done, you must attend to it personally.

Fimbo ya mbali, haiwi nyoka.

A stick (rod) which lies far away does not kill a snake.

You can kill a snake only with a rod in hand.¹²⁵

Intentional meaning 1: What you have in hand is what matters and not what you presume to have.

Intentional meaning 2: There are things in life which we cannot do alone.

¹²⁰ Swahili people used to store their money in a corner of the garment.

¹²¹ Red spot on the monkey’s behind.

¹²² *Tawala* rule

¹²³ Usually three stones as used to support a cooking pot.

¹²⁴ *Injika* put on the stove.

¹²⁵ You usually use a *mkwaju* or a *kiboko* to break the back (the spinal cord) of the snake. It cannot easily move then.

Fimbo ya mnyonge hulipwa na Mungu. or Fimbo ya mnyonge mlifi Mungu.

The walking stick of a weak person is paid for by God.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to be confident in God. This proverb is used when injustice is done to the underprivileged.

Fuata nyuki, ukale asali.

Follow the bee and you will have honey to eat.

Intentional meaning 1: If you are diligent you will succeed in life.

Intentional meaning 2: If you keep in contact with those who are competent and influential you will prosper.

Fumbo mfumbie mjinga, mwerevu huling'amua. (Syllables 8+8).

You may put a riddle to a fool, but it is the clever man who will usually solve it.

Intentional meaning: This proverb is used when you try to hide some matter from someone who, anyway, is informed about it.

Fungato¹²⁶ haliumizi kuni.

The knot does not hurt the firewood.

Intentional meaning: If we work together we shall contribute to the common welfare.

Gae huwa chombo wakatiwe¹²⁷.

A potsherd becomes a vessel in due course.

Intentional meaning 1: A young person who may not seem to be promising may grow up to be a useful member of society.

Intentional meaning 2: Do not ignore matters and items which may seem to be of no value for you at the moment.

Ganda la mua la jana, sungusungu kaona kivuno.

The bark of yesterday's sugar-cane is like a whole harvest for an ant

Intentional meaning: A thing which appears to be waste to one person, may be of use to another one. This proverb may be used in the global context at present.

Gogo limelimwa,¹²⁸ haliwezi kusukumwa.

This log is glued (to the earth), it cannot be pushed.

Intentional meaning: Do not try the impossible.

Gonga gogo, usikilize mlio (wake).

Knock a log and listen to the sound it produces.

Intentional meaning 1: You will recognise the true identity of a person in the course of closer contact.

Intentional meaning 2: Scrutinize a matter carefully before undertaking something.

¹²⁶ This knot refers to the one in the string which is used to bind a bundle of firewood.

¹²⁷ *Wakati wake* in its own time, in due course.

¹²⁸ *Lima* cultivate

Haba¹²⁹ na haba, hujaza kibaba¹³⁰.

A grain plus a grain fills the bushel.

Intentional meaning: If you are slow and steady in your work you are due to succeed.

Habari ya uwongo, ncha zake saba, habari ya kweli, ncha yake moja.

A lie has seven edges, while the truth has just one.

Intentional meaning 1: Lies spread faster than truth.

Intentional meaning 2: The same matter may be interpreted in different ways.

Haidhuru, inadhuru.

Carlessness is harmful.

Intentional meaning: If you are not careful, you may end up in trouble.

Haiko kule afua¹³¹.

There is no good health there.

Intentional meaning: Avoid trouble-areas.

Haina tabibu uwele¹³² wa mapenzi.

There is no cure for love-sickness.

Intentional meaning: Be cautious when in love.

Haishi matendi, ni kama hatendi. (Syllables 6+6).

He who does not finish his work, is like someone who does not work.

Intentional meaning: Anything half-done is of no value at all.

Hajuliki mwema na muovu.

It is difficult to distinguish between a good and a bad person.

Intentional meaning: It is easy to see the surface, but difficult to penetrate behind it.

Hakuna apandaye ngazi, bila kujua njia wa kuteremka.

No one climbs a ladder, if he does not know how to descend.

Intentional meaning: Keep within your limits. Withdraw at the right time.

Hakuna bahari, yaso¹³³ (isiyo) na mawimbi. (Syllables 6+6).

There is no sea without waves.

Intentional meaning: We must reckon with trouble in daily life.

Hakuna kisicho badali (kisicho na badala yake). (Syllables 3+3+3).

There is nothing that cannot be replaced.

Intentional meaning: Do not overestimate yourself.

¹²⁹ chembe au punje ya nafaka

¹³⁰ Quart measure of grain, about 700gram.

¹³¹ afua 9/10 good health

¹³² Uwele/ ndwele 11/10 unpleasant feeling

¹³³ Yaso perhaps on account of the syllables 6+6.

Hakuna kisicho nduguye. (Syllables 3+3+3).

There is no thing without its “brother”.

Intentional meaning: Every pot has its own lid. Consider what befits you.

Hakuna (refu) marefu, yasiyo na ncha. (Syllables 6+6).

There is no length which has no end.

Intentional meaning: There is an end to everything, be it good, be it bad.

Hakuna msiba, usio na mwenziwe. (Syllables 6+6).

There is no misfortune which does not have a “companion”.

Intentional meaning: When it rains, it pours. A misfortune never comes alone.

Hakuna raha isiyo na karaha.

There is no joy without disgust.

Intentional meaning: There are no roses without thorns. We have to reckon with ups and downs in life.

Hali ya kaburi: mwulize maiti. (Syllables 6+6).

Ask the dead man about conditions in his grave.

Intentional meaning: We get to know the needs of others through personal contact.

Halla¹³⁴! Halla! Mti ni macho.

Take care. A splitter may get into your eyes.

Intentional meaning: Do not risk too much.

Hamadi¹³⁵ kibindoni¹³⁶, silaha iliyo mkononi.

By the Prophet! Cash in the loin cloth is a weapon in the hand.

Intentional meaning: A substantial amount of money at your disposal keeps you safe from trouble.

Hamna! Hamna! Ndimu mliwamo¹³⁷.

It is not in it! It is not in it! That is where it is.

Intentional meaning 1: You cannot deny your identity.

Intentional meaning 2: You cannot hide facts for long.

Hamtezi mwenye mti mwenye embe.

The owner of a mango tree does not mock the owner of a mango.

Intentional meaning: This proverb probably refers to the relationship between the upper and lower strata of society.

Hana asili, hana fasili. (Syllables 5+5).

He has no roots and he has no shoots.

¹³⁴ *Halla* is probably derived from "Allah".

¹³⁵ „*Hamadi*“ is derived from the word „*Muhammad*“.

¹³⁶ „*Kibindo*“ is a fold or knot of the loin cloth used as a pocket for money.

¹³⁷ Proposed translation: „*m-li-(ku)wa-mo*“ “there it was”.

His family tradition is very recent.

Intentional meaning: A person is respected if his identity is rooted in tradition.

Hana mbele, hana nyuma. (Syllables 5+5).

He has nothing ahead of him and nothing behind him.

His family tradition is obscure.

Intentional meaning: A person is respected if his identity is clear.

Hapana masika, yasiyo na mbu¹³⁸. (Syllables 6+6).

There can be no rainy season without mosquitoes.

Intentional meaning: Take the unpleasant aspects of life into account.

Hapana siri ya watu wawili.

There is no secret of two people.

Intentional meaning: A secret shared by two people is no secret. Do not confide your secrets to anyone.

Haraka, haraka, haina baraka. (Syllables 3+3+3+3).

Hurry, hurry, brings no blessing.

Intentional meaning: Things done in a hurry end up in a mess. It is advisable to work out things carefully.

Hasara humfika (humfikia) mwenye mabezo.

Loss comes to a negligent person.

Intentional meaning: A person who neglects good advice is likely to end up in trouble.

Hasira, hasara. (Syllables 3+3).

Anger damage.

Intentional meaning: Anger and haste hinder good consent.

Hasira za mkizi¹³⁹, tijara ya mvuvi. (Syllables 7+7).

The anger of the *mkizi* is the gain of the fisherman.

Intentional meaning: Your opponent may profit, if you make rash decisions.

Hauchi-hauchi, unakucha.

It does not dawn! It does not dawn! It dawns.

Intentional meaning: Even if a situation seems to be hopeless, a solution will be appear sometime.

Hayawi! Hayawi! Huwa.

They are not! They are not! They are.

You do not see them, but they are there.

¹³⁸ The rain is needed for cultivating (paddy) rice and other crops. But that is also the season when mosquitoes abound and bring malaria

¹³⁹ It is said that *mkizi*, cuttle-fish, jumps out of water when one tries to catch it, thus killing itself.

Intentional meaning 1: Do not underestimate danger.

Intentional meaning 2: Even difficult times come to an end.

Heri adui mwerevu, kuliko rafiki (mwenzi) mpumbavu.

A prudent enemy is better than a foolish friend.

Intentional meaning: A foolish friend could mislead you.

Heri kenda¹⁴⁰ shika, kama kumi nenda uje.

It is better to have nine items firmly in your hand, than ten others which go and come.

Intentional meaning 1: Keep on the safe side and avoid taking unnecessary risks.

Intentional meaning 2: Greedy persons will not succeed in life.

Heri kufa macho, kuliko kufa moyo.

It is better for the eye to be blind, than for the heart to stop beating.

Intentional meaning: If you have to choose between two evils, you should opt for the minor one.

Heri kukwaa kidole, kuliko kukwaa ulimi.

It is better to stumble with the toe than to stumble with the tongue.

Intentional meaning: It is easier to heal the toe after stumbling, than to repair damage caused by an improper word. A spoken word cannot be called back.

Heri kuliwa na simba, kuliko kuliwa na fisi¹⁴¹.

It is better to be eaten up by a lion, than by a hyena.

Intentional meaning: It is better to live and die in honour, than to profit from dishonesty.

Heri kuwa mbichi, kuliko kuungua. (Syllables 7+7).

It is better to have meat which is slightly raw, than one which is burnt.

Intentional meaning 1: If you have to choose between two evils, opt for the minor one.

Intentional meaning 2: It is better to risk a minor mistake than to go wrong totally.

Heri nusu ya shari, kuliko shari kamili.

It is better to have half a disaster, than a complete disaster.

Intentional meaning: If you have to choose between two evils, opt for the minor one.

Heri ya mrama, kuliko kuzama. (Syllables 6+6).

It is better to go astray, than to drown.

Intentional meaning: If you have to choose between two evils, opt for the minor one.

Hewalla¹⁴² si utumwa. (Syllables 3+3+3).

Saying “Yes, Sir!” does not imply being a slave.

¹⁴⁰ An old word for “nine”.

¹⁴¹ A lion is a symbol of majestic power, while a hyena stands for something mean.

¹⁴² *Hewalla Bwana* comes from the Arabic and can be translated as “Alright! Yes, Sir”. It was used by some Waswahili when speaking with their colonial masters.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to be polite, even if it is humiliating. It has an advantage.

Hewalla! haigombi.

“Alright! Yes, Sir!” No quarrel.

Intentional meaning: If you are polite, you are likely to avoid quarrels.

Hiari yashinda utumwa. (Syllables 3+3+3).

Free (freedom) will is better than slavery.

Intentional meaning 1: It is better to be free and live a frugal life, than to be dependent on others and enjoy prosperity.

Intentional meaning 2: Give preference to work which suits your talents and ability.

Hucheka kovu, asiyefikiwa na jeraha.

He laughs at a scar, who has got no wound.

Intentional meaning 1: He who has not experienced poverty, does not understand the needs of the poor.

Intentional meaning 2: If we take pleasure in the misfortunes of others, we may encounter them ourselves someday.

Humbana nyimbo zake, husahau jina lake. (Syllables 8+8).

They sing his songs to each other but they have forgotten his name.

Intentional meaning: Not all our merits are credited to our account.

Hujui yatakayokukuta¹⁴³.

You do not know what is in store for you.

Intentional meaning: Trust in God.

Hukunyima tonge; hakunyimi neno. (Syllables 6+6).

He denies you a morsel food, but he does not deny you words.

Intentional meaning: Empty words are of no help to a person in need.

Hulimbikwa¹⁴⁴ nazi, juu ya minazi¹⁴⁵.

The coconuts are left on the palm tree.

Intentional meaning: Do not do things in a hurry.

Ihsani haiozi.

Kindness does not rot.

Intentional meaning: Kindness is never forgotten, although it may appear to be so, sometimes.

Ikiwa hujui kufa, tazama kaburi.

If you do not know what death is like, look at a grave.

¹⁴³ The Waswahili believe in *kudura ya Allah*, i.e. pre-destination.

¹⁴⁴ *Limbika* accumulate, hoard.

¹⁴⁵ The coconuts are left on the palm trees until such a time as they are well ripened.

Intentional meaning: You learn through experience.

Isipowasha, hunyeza.

If it (blood) does not (burn) warm up, it (scratches) irritates.

Intentional meaning: Blood is thicker than water. Your family members will be more helpful to you than far-standing acquaintances.

Itakuwaje punda kupanda farasi?

How could a donkey mount a horse?

Intentional meaning: Keep to your own ambience. Live within your means.

Ivumayo haidumu. (Syllables 4+4).

That which makes a big noise does not last long.

Intentional meaning : Apparent dangers are no dangers in fact.

Ivushayo, ni mbovu. (Syllables 4+4).

The vessel which carried you across the river is in a bad condition.

Intentional meaning 1: Kindness which you have experienced should not be forgotten, even in difficult times.

Intentional meaning 2: Do not bite the hand which feeds you.

Iwapo nia, njia hupatikana.

Where there is a will, there is also a way.

Intentional meaning: If you are determined to do something, you will get through.

Jamala yako, haipotei. (Syllables 5+5).

“Your kindness will not be lost.”

“We appreciate what you have done.”

Intentional meaning: This expression is also used in connection with “*Shukrani*” or “*Nakushukuru*” as a way of thanking someone.

Jawabu ya kesho huandaa leo. (Syllables 6+6).

The answer for tomorrow is prepared today.

Intentional meaning 1: Study today the solutions for tomorrow's problems.

Intentional meaning 2: Plan your projects efficiently.

Jicho liliona vilima halistuki na bonde.

The eye that has seen mountains is not terrified by valleys.

Intentional meaning: If you have mastered major problems, minor ones should not affect you.

Jimbi tawika (atawika) jimbi, awikapo tawikia (atawika).

A cock will crow to a cock. When he crows the other one will crow too.

Intentional meaning: People gossip. What one person says, goes round.

Jina jema hung'aa gizani.

A good name shines in the dark.

Intentional meaning: If you are sincere you will have a good reputation. Your presence in society will be appreciated.

Jinga¹⁴⁶ likierevuka, akili hakuna tena.

When a fool becomes intelligent, then there is no more intelligence.

Intentional meaning: When society no longer recognizes fools as fools, then no one is intelligent.

Jino la pembe, si dawa ya pengo. (Syllables 5+si+5).

An ivory tooth is not a cure for a gap.

Intentional meaning: A substitute, however grand, is never equal to the original.

Jitahidi utajidi (zidi¹⁴⁷). (Syllables 4+4).

Make an effort and you will have more.

Intentional meaning: If you work hard, you will prosper.

Jitihada haiondoi kudura¹⁴⁸ (ya Mungu).

Human effort does not replace the will (of God).

Intentional meaning: Have faith in God.

Jivu halijai, gao la mkono¹⁴⁹. (Syllables 6+6).

Ashes do not fill an open hand.

Intentional meaning: Riches which we accumulate will one day be blown off like ash on the palm of a hand.

Jogoo la shamba, haliwiki mjini. (Syllables 7+7).

The country cock does not crow in the town.

Intentional meaning: You feel at home in your own familiar surroundings.

Jua lafanya, kiwi cha macho. (Syllables 5+5).

The sun obscures the eyesight.

Intentional meaning: Too much of a something good, may be harmful.

Jua likitucha, nyota zimepotea. (Syllables 7+7).

When the sun surprises us, the stars are lost from sight.

When the sun rises, the stars get dim.

Intentional meaning: There is a right time for everything.

Jungu bovu, limekuwa magae.

The battered old pot went to pieces.

Intentional meaning: Sometimes things go from bad to worse. A poor person ends up badly. He has no one to help him.

¹⁴⁶ *Jinga/ ma-* is the augmentative of *mjinga/ wa-*.

¹⁴⁷ *Zidi* go beyond, surpass, increase.

¹⁴⁸ *Kudura* 9/10 Predestination.

¹⁴⁹ If you place ashes in an open hand, they will be blown away.

Jungu kuu¹⁵⁰, hakikosi ukoko.

A big pot lacks no crust.

Intentional meaning: When the members of a rich family have eaten their fill, the servants and the poor may scrap the crust from the pot. This proverb may be read in the present global context.

Juzi na jana, si kama ya leo. (Syllables 5+5).

The day before yesterday and yesterday are not the same as today.

Intentional meaning: Times change. Life, too. Do not use the past to evaluate the present.

Kama chanda na pete. (Syllables 2+2+na+2).

Like a finger and its ring.

A finger and a ring are close to one another.

Intentional meaning: We are close and faithful friends.

Kama kitanda, kupata mkeka.

Like a bed which has got a mat.

A bed covered with a bedspread looks attractive.

Intentional meaning: We should pay more attention to the better side of life.

Kama ulimi na mate.

Like the tongue and saliva.

The tongue and saliva are close to one another.

Intentional meaning: We are close and faithful friends.

Kama uta na upote.

Like a bow and bowstring.

A bow and a bowstring are close to one another.

Intentional meaning: We are close and faithful friends.

Kamba hukatika, (mahali) pembamba.

A rope parts where it is thinnest.

Intentional meaning: Influential people are well protected. The blame usually falls on the weak, poor and unlucky.

Kamba ya mbali, haifungi kuni.

You cannot tie up a bundle of firewood with a rope, that lies far away.

Intentional meaning: If you want to have some work done, you must attend to it personally.

Kamba ya milele, ilikata jiwe. (Syllables 6+6).

In the long run even a rope can cut a stone.

Intentional meaning: If you are constant and persistent you are due to have success.

Kanga hazai utumwani (ugenini).

¹⁵⁰ -*kuu* refers to something important or to a person of higher status.

A guinea-fowl does not breed in foreign surroundings.

Intentional meaning: You feel at home in your own familiar surroundings.

Kata pua uunge wajihi.

Cut off your nose so that you may improve your appearance.

Intentional meaning: Maintain your good reputation, even at the price of losing something you treasure.

Kawaida si kama sheria.

A custom is not law.

Intentional meaning 1: An informal agreement need not be binding.

Intentional meaning 2: A person who is accustomed to bad habits, will not give it up easily.

Kawie ufike. (Syllables 3+3).

Even if you are late, you should still come.

Intentional meaning: Better late than never

Kazi mbi (mbaya), si mchezo mwema.

A bad job is not a pleasant game.

It is an honour to work, even if the work be unpleasant.

Intentional meaning: It is better to do mean jobs and earn one's living, than to live at the expense of others.

Kazi isiyokuwa na manufaa, kutenda si ada.

It is not customary to do useless work.

Intentional meaning: You gain nothing by doing meaningless and useless work.

Kelele za mlango¹⁵¹, haziniwasi usingizi.

The noises of the door do not disturb my sleep.

The noises of a door opening and closing does not disturb my sleep.

Intentional meaning: Do not get upset with petty problems and minor difficulties.

Kenda¹⁵² fumbata, si kumi nenda uje kesho.

Hold on to nine and not to ten, which shall go today and may come back tomorrow.

Intentional meaning: Keep on the safe side. Avoid unnecessary risks.

Kenda karibu (na) kumi.

Number nine is near to number ten.

Intentional meaning: Keep steady when difficulties arise, as a solution is never too far.

Kesho si leo. (Syllables 2+si+2).

Tomorrow is not today.

Intentional meaning: This is used when a customer promises to pay tomorrow.

¹⁵¹ This refers to doors which are usually kept open at night and are pushed too and fro by the wind.

¹⁵² „Kenda“ which means „nine“ is no longer in use.

Kiboko pake ni pwani, marejeo ni majini. (Syllables 8+8).

The hippo's place is on the banks (lake shore), it will always return to the water.

Intentional meaning: You are likely to return to your roots.

Kiburi si maungwana (uungwana).

Arrogance does not befit a polite person.

Intentional meaning: A well educated and well situated person is humble and unpretentious.

Kichache hakikutoshi na kingi hakikulishi. (Syllables 8+8).

A little does not suffice for you. A lot will not feed you either.

Intentional meaning: Greed can never be satisfied.

Kichango, kuchangizana.

Small contributions accumulates.

Even a small contribution is of value when a collection is being made.

Intentional meaning: Count the "pence" and the "pounds" will take care of themselves.

Kichwa cha kuku, hakistahamili¹⁵³ kilemba.

A turban does not suit the head of a fowl, which is too small for it.

Intentional meaning: Do not go beyond what befits you and your status.

Kidogo ni tamu¹⁵⁴, kingi ni sumu.

A little is sweet, a lot is poison.

Intentional meaning: Greed ruins.

Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa¹⁵⁵. (Syllables 6+6).

One finger nail alone cannot crush a louse.

Intentional meaning: A bird cannot fly on one wing. All the persons involved in a project should work together.

Kifaranga hakifunzwi kuchakura. (Syllables 4+4+4).

A chick is not taught scratching.

Intentional meaning: Some things are obvious in life.

Kifuniko kilalie vyema (vema).

The lid should fit the pot well.

Intentional meaning: Do not exceed your means and your status.

Kiingiacho mjini, si haramu¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵³ *Stahamili* endure, persevere, be patient

¹⁵⁴ *Chakula kitamu, chakula kingi.*

¹⁵⁵ The Waswahili usually place a louse on the fingernail of the left thumb and crush it with the right.

¹⁵⁶ This proverb makes special reference to change and innovation in society.

That which is fashionable (popular) in town is not prohibited.

Intentional meaning: If something is commonly approved by society, it is usually not bad.

Kikulacho ki nguoni mwako.

The insect which has nested in your clothes is likely the one which will bite you.

Intentional meaning: Those who are close to you, are probably those who will harm you.

Kikuponzacho, ni tumbo¹⁵⁷.

That which causes you to take risks is your stomach.

Intentional meaning: Earn your living by hard work.

Kikuu hukua kwao.

An important matter (thing) develops in its own place.

Intentional meaning: Small saplings grow into big trees, if left in their own native soil. You feel at home in your own surroundings.

Kila (mara) aingiapo simba, mbuzi huichukulia. (Syllables 9+9).

Whenever the lion enters a shed he carries away a goat.

Intentional meaning: Might is right.

Kila aje na shoka, hapo hawezi (kuwa) seremala.

Whoever comes with an axe is not necessarily a carpenter.

Intentional meaning: The true value of a person does not depend on the outer appearance.

Kila anayefuga nyoka, lazima kumuuma.

He who rears a snake, will certainly be bitten by it.

Intentional meaning: If you keep company with bad people you will end up in trouble.

Kila chombo kwa wimbile.

Each vessel throws its own waves. (*Another version:* Every vessel will be wrecked on its own waves.)

Intentional meaning: Each one behaves and works the way he is.

Kila mlango kwa ufunguo wake. (Kila lango lina ufunguo wake)

Each door is to be opened with its own key.

Intentional meaning: The background and talents of each individual should be respected.

Kila mnofu, una mpaka wake.

Each chunk of meat has its own time which it needs for seasoning.

Intentional meaning: The background and talents of each individual should be respected.

Kila mtoto na koja lake.

Every child has its own neck ornament (garland).

Intentional meaning: Every person has its own taste and its preferences.

¹⁵⁷ The need for food commands the Swahili merchants and fishermen to go out on dangerous errands.

Kila mtu ana hiari, katika yake dari.

Every man is free to do as he wishes in his own home.

Intentional meaning: Respect the private life of others.

Kila mwamba ngoma, ngozi huivutia kwake.

One who stretches a skin on a drum, pulls the skin to his side.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to persons who consider their own interests and neglect those of others.

Kila mwenye choo, huenda jaani¹⁵⁸.

Those who need “to answer nature’s call” go to a rubbish heap.

Intentional meaning: If you have a problem, look for a solution yourself.

Kila ndege, huruka kwa ubawa (pl. mbawa) wake.

A bird flies with its own wings.

Intentional meaning: Depend on your own efforts to maintain yourself..

Kila ndege mwenye mkia ni lazima aringe.

A bird which has a (colourful) tail, dances (shows off).

Intentional meaning: People with wealth tend to display it.

Kila tawangu¹⁵⁹, ina mfuniko wake.

Every *tawangu* has its own lid.

Intentional meaning: Every individual has its own way of life.

Kilemba cha kuku, tunu kutunukiwa.

A cock’s comb, a gift given to it.

Intentional meaning: Take care of your good fortune.

Kilichomo baharini, kakingojee ufukoni.

What has fallen into the sea, wait till it appears on the shore.

Intentional meaning: Once you have plunged yourself into trouble, the situation is bound to get worse.

Kilichomo mtamani, ni mtama.

What is in the millet is millet.

Intentional meaning: We are what we are.

Kilio huanza mfiwa, ndipo na wa mbali wakaingia.

The close relatives begin the wailing, those from afar follow suit.

Intentional meaning: If we need help from others we should first make an effort to help ourselves.

¹⁵⁸ This proverb refers to villages where there were no W.Cs.

¹⁵⁹ *Tawangu* is a basket with a lid.

Kimbuji na kimbuji hununua ngazi.

“Little goat” and “little goat” will together buy a boat.

Intentional meaning: Thrift and hard work bear (bring) wealth.

Kimya kingi, kina mshindo mkuu.

A long silence is followed by a mighty noise.

Intentional meaning: When all is quiet, the enemy is preparing for war.

Kinga na kinga, ndipo moto uwakapo.

One log after the other keeps the fire burning.

Intentional meaning: If you are steady in your work, you will succeed.

Kinolewacho, hukata.

A knife which is constantly sharpened, cuts well.

Intentional meaning: If you repeat certain remarks constantly, even if they are lies, people will believe them.

Kinyozi hajinyoi, na akinyoa kujikata.

A barber does not shave his own beard. If he does so, he will hurt himself.

Intentional meaning: No one is self sufficient. We need one another.

Kinywa ni jumba la maneno¹⁶⁰.

The mouth is (like a) large building containing words.

Intentional meaning: A mouth offers the possibility to speak, be it of use to society or harmful.

Kiovu chako, si chema cha mwenzio.

What is bad for you need not be good for your neighbour.

Intentional meaning: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

Kiozacho hutoa uvundo.

What rots, stinks.

Intentional meaning: Evil and injustice will become public sooner or later.

Kipenda cha moyo ni dawa. (Kipendacho moyo ni dawa.)

What the heart desires is like medicine to it.

Intentional meaning: This proverb is used when a person strives to get something he longs for.

Kipofu haonyi¹⁶¹ njia. (Syllables 3+3+3).

A blind man cannot show the way.

Intentional meaning: Consider well whom you choose as your friend.

¹⁶⁰ Kinywa ni Jumba la Maneno was the title of a project for Swahili-Literature of the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1967.

¹⁶¹ The causative form of “ona” is “onyia” and “onyesha”. “Onya” means “to show” and also “to warn”.

Kipofu hasahau fimbo yake.

A blind man does not forget his walking-stick.

Intentional meaning: Do not neglect the essential things in life.

Kipya kinyemi, ingawa kidonda.

A novelty has its charm, even if it is a sore.

Intentional meaning: Something or someone new or foreign attracts attention. This proverb is usually used in a negative sence.

Kiroboto kwa kimoja chanda¹⁶², bila kucha huwezi kuvunja. (Syllables 10+10).

The flea sitting on your finger, you cannot crush it without your nails.

Intentional meaning: It is necessary to get rid of “trouble makers” with all the means at your disposal.

Kisebusebu¹⁶³ na kiroho papo.

Refusing and wanting at the same time

Intentional meaning: Do not waver. Stand firm.

Kisichofanana na mwenyewe, ni cha kuiba.

That which does not resemble the owner is a stolen item.

Intentional meaning: This proverb is used when speaking of a child who behaves well, like its parents.

Kitanda usichokilalia, hukijui kunguni wake.

You cannot experience the bugs of a bed unless you have slept on it.

Intentional meaning: It is difficult to understand the situation of a marginal sector of society, unless you share their life.

Kitumbua changu, sikitie (usikitie) changa.

My cake, do not put sand into (on) it.

Intentional meaning: Do not meddle with my life.

Kivuli cha fimbo, hakimfichi mtu jua.

The shadow of a walking stick cannot protect you from the sun.

Intentional meaning: Do not depend on people with meagre means to help you.

Kivuli cha mvumo, huwafunika walio mbali.

The shadow of a *deleb* palm tree (*Borassus flabellifera*) provides shade for those who are far away.

Intentional meaning: An influential person can protect his friends. It is good to keep in good touch with him.

¹⁶² “*kimoja chanda*” and not “*chanda kimoja*” for the sake of a rhyme.

¹⁶³ “*kisebusebu*” means “pretending not to like something, while really wanting it.”

Kiwi¹⁶⁴ cha yule, ni chema cha yule; (hata¹⁶⁵ ulimwengu kesha).

A thing which is bad for one, is good for another.

Intentional meaning: This proverb can be considered in the global context.

Kiwi heri kukipata, kama kukikosa kamwe.

It is better to get a glare, than to be totally blind.

Intentional meaning: It is better to accept a minor evil, than to have a total loss.

Kizuizui (Kiziwi) mgonjwa macho, hawezi kabisa.

The deaf man who gets an eye disease, is totally disabled.

Intentional meaning: We must reckon with the case where we could be totally helpless.

Kobe atakufa asipojikuna nyumaye mwenyewe.

The tortoise will die without ever having scratched his own back.

Intentional meaning: Some people do not achieve a high purpose in life.

Koko¹⁶⁶ haidari maji.

Koko is seldom reached by water.

Intentional meaning: A person should not be affected or influenced by his surroundings. He should be able to maintain his own bearings.

Konzi ya maji, hayafumbatiki.

A handful of water cannot be grasped.

Intentional meaning 1: It is not possible to carry water in a strainer.

Intentional meaning 2: The needs of different persons differ.

Kuagiza, kufyekeza. (Syllables 4+4).

To order, to get swept away.

Intentional meaning: If you just give orders and leave others to do the work, it will not be done properly.

Kuambiana kupo, kusikilizana hapana.

To tell one another, is there. To listen to one another, is not there.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who is not prepared to listen to good advice.

Kuchamba kwingi, kuondoka na mavi¹⁶⁷.

To clean much, to leave with excrement.

Intentional meaning: In spite of much cleaning after nature's call, you may be still left with excrement. Do not be too fastidious.

¹⁶⁴ “*Kiw/vi-i*” means “wooden door latch”. “*Kiwi/vi-*” also means “glare”, “dazzle”. “*Kiwi cha macho*” means “blindness from glare”. “*Kivi/vi-*” also means “greediness”, “gluttony”.

¹⁶⁵ “*hata*” can mean “even” and “until”.

¹⁶⁶ The *koko* is the fruit of a kind of mangrove tree which grows in swamps but its branches are high.

¹⁶⁷ Another version with a reverse meaning: *Kuchamba kwingi, mwisho huondoa mavi.*

Kuelekeza si kufuma.

One who aims, does not always hit the target.

Intentional meaning: We have to reckon with drawbacks in life.

Kufa kikondoo, ndiko kufa kiungwana.

To die like a sheep, is to die like a gentleman, lady.

Intentional meaning: Solve your difficulties in a calm manner.

Kufa kwa jamaa, harusi.

The death of a relative is a wedding.

Intentional meaning: The death of a family member is an advantage to those who hope to inherit his wealth. Some people profit from the needs of others.

Kufa kwa mdomo, mate hutawanyika.

When the lips “die”, the saliva spreads.

Intentional meaning: When the head of a family departs, the family members scatter. This proverb may also refer to leaders and Heads of Department in general.

Kufa kwa wengi, ni arusi.

A death is for many a wedding.

Some people are interested in the food served after a funeral.

Intentional meaning: Social parasites always find a way to survive.

Kufa ni mashinda kondo¹⁶⁸.

Only (the enemy's) death is victory in war.

Intentional meaning: A living enemy is a constant danger.

Kufa ni sunna (suna¹⁶⁹). (Syllables 2+ni+2).

Dying is duty.

Intentional meaning: No one can escape death.

Kufa, kufaana.

Death benefits.

Intentional meaning: The death of a family member is an advantage to those who hope to inherit his wealth. Some people profit from the needs of others.

Kuinamako ndiko huinukako.

Where there is bowing there is rising.

Intentional meaning: If we fall, we have the possibility to stand again. If we make a mistake, we can correct it and start anew.

Kuishi kwingi, ni kuona mengi. (Syllables 5+ni+5).

To live long is to see much.

¹⁶⁸ “Kondo” (9/10) means “war”. Another word for war is *vita*.

¹⁶⁹ “Suna” means “reliable tradition”, “meritorious deed”.

He who lives long, has the opportunity to learn much.

Intentional meaning: You gain knowledge through experience.

Kujikwaa si kuanguka, bali ni kwenda mbali.

If one stumbles, one need not necessarily fall. One should go ahead.

Intentional meaning: You learn by doing mistakes.

Kukopa harusi, kulipa matanga. (Syllables 6+6).

Borrowing is like a wedding, repaying is like a funeral service.

Intentional meaning: It is easy and convenient to borrow money but difficulties arise, when it comes to return it.

Kukosa (mali), si ila. (Syllables 3+3).

Poverty is no shame.

If you are poor you lack nothing.

Intentional meaning: Wealth is something we acquire. It cannot be our identity.

Kuku havunji yayile (yai lake).

A hen does not break her own eggs.

Intentional meaning: You should not ruin your own life and that of your family members.

Kuku mgeni, hakosi kamba mguuni.

A new fowl soon gets a string wound round its leg.

The string wound round the leg of a fowl refers to its owner.

Intentional meaning 1: A new possession or a new relationship is well cared for.

Intentional meaning 2: The strange ways of a foreigner are noticeable.

Kuku mwenye watoto, halengwi jiwe.

One does not throw stones at a hen with chicken.

Intentional meaning 1: Do no harm to those who need to be protected.

Intentional meaning 2: Avoid causing trouble.

Kuku wa maskini hatagi mayai.

The hen of a poor man does not lay eggs.

Intentional meaning

The rich prosper. The poor man has no opportunity to improve his status.

Kula kutamu, kulima mavune.

Eating is pleasant, cultivating is tiresome.

Intentional meaning: Earn your bread by the sweat of your brow.

Kula nala, kushiba sishibiki.

I eat but get no satisfaction.

Intentional meaning: I am disillusioned in life.

Kulea mimba si kazi, kazi kulea mwana.

It is not difficult to nurse a pregnancy, but it is hard work bringing up a child.

Intentional meaning: Respect your parents who have devoted their lives for your upbringing.

Kulenga, si kufuma. (Syllables 3+si+3).

One who aims, does not always hit his target.

Intentional meaning: There may be a difference between what you intend to do and what you really do.

Kumbatie mnazi, ukaupande.

Embrace the palm tree so that you can climb it.

Intentional meaning 1: You will have to accept many unpleasant situations if you want to succeed in an undertaking.

Intentional meaning 2: Do not miss the opportunity to secure whatever stands to your advantage.

Kumcha Mungu, si kilemba cheupe.

The faith in God (lit. the fear of God) does not lie in the wearing of a white turban.

Intentional meaning: Outward appearances are not important.

Kumla ngutu si kazi, kazi kumwosha.

It is a pleasure to eat a king-fish, the trouble lies in cleaning it.

Intentional meaning: It is sometimes more difficult to plan a project than to implement it.

Kumpa mwenzio si kutupa, ni akiba ya mbeleni.

To give to a friend is not wasting, it is provision for the future.

Intention meaning: The help we give to others comes back in some way or another.

Kuna punda kupanda farasi?

Is there a donkey that would mount a horse?

Intentional meaning: Do not go beyond your ability and status.

Kunako matanga, kumekufa mtu. (Syllables 6+6).

Where there is mourning, there must also be a dead person.

Where there is smoke, there must be fire.

Intentional meaning: You should make a note of signs and signals before undertaking something.

Kunguni wengi, kitanda hakaliki.

Too many bed bugs, you cannot sleep on it.

Intentional meaning: There is a limit to the amount of annoyance you can take.

Kupanda mchongoma, kushuka ndio ngoma. (Syllables 7+7).

One may climb a thorn-tree, but getting down is indeed a “dance“.

Mchongoma (Flacouria indica) is a shrub with thorns often serving as a hedge.

Intentional meaning: When you do something wrong in a rash manner, the problem lies in getting out of it.

Kupata kukuelekeapo, furaha na kupata.

When a gift (getting) comes your way, just rejoice and take it.

Intentional meaning: Take what you get.

Kupotea njia, ndio (ndiyo) kujua njia.

To lose the way is to know the way.

If you lose your way, you are bound to search for your destination intensively.

Intentional meaning: You learn by making mistakes.

Kusikia, si kuona. (Syllables 4+4).

Hearing is not seeing.

Hearing something, does not imply also having seen it personally.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to attend to important matters personally.

Kutaka lisilokuwa, ni maana ya ujinga. (Syllables 8+8).

To want something which does not exist is foolish.

Intentional meaning: If you go in search of wealth does not imply that you will also get it.

Kutu kuu, ni la mgeni.

Old rust is for the guest.

One brings out costly and valuable items which are seldom used in honour of a guest.

Intentional meaning: Treat a guest with due respect.

Kutwanga nisile unga, nazuia mchi wangu. (Syllables 8+8).

If after pounding I do not eat flour, I shall withhold my pestle.

If after pounding for another person, I get no flour for myself, I shall not do it again.

Intentional meaning: You have a right to enjoy the fruit of your labour.

Kuuliza, si ujinga.

Asking a question is not being foolish.

Intentional meaning: You learn by doing research and making inquiries.

Kuvuya (kuvuja) hailingani na wazi.

The leaking (of the house) does not compare with being outdoor.

During the rains it is better to be inside even if the roof leaks.

Intentional meaning: Opt for the lesser evil.

Ku(m)washia taa pofu, ni kuharibu mafuta. (Syllables 8+8).

Lighting a lamp for a blind person is a waste of kerosene.

Intentional meaning: It is no use helping a person who does not know to appreciate it.

Kuzima koleo, si mwisho wa uhunzi. (Syllables 6+ni+6).

Cooling the tongs is not the end of forging.

Intentional meaning: Things come and pass, life goes on.

Kwa mwoga huenda kicheko na kwa shujaa huenda kilio.

A timid person is accompanied by laughter, a bold person by lamentation.

Intentional meaning: He who avoids danger stands usually on the safe side. He who takes rash risks meets trouble.

Kwamba mimi ng'ombe ni bora, ningali gandamwa na kupe?

If to me the cow is good, do you think the ticks will bother me.

Intentional meaning: Love makes you bear adversities.

Kwanza kuvua, kwisha kuanua¹⁷⁰.

First fish (then dry the fish), then take them out of the sunshine (to eat).

Intentional meaning: Do things in the proper order.

Kweli iliyo uchungu, si uwongo ulio mtamu.

The truth which is bitter, not the lie which is sweet.

Intentional meaning: The unpleasant truth is better than a pleasant lie.

Kwenda mbio, si kufika.

Running fast does not imply having already arrived.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to be slow and steady.

La kuvunda, halina ubani.

There is no incense to cover the smell of something which is rotting.

Intentional meaning: It is difficult to help a person whose life is already ruined.

If your reputation is ruined, it is not possible to set it right again.

La kuvunja, halina rubani.

A vessel running aground needs no helmsman.

Intentional meaning: It is difficult to help a person whose life is already ruined.

La leo, lipa leo.

Eat today, pay today.

Intentional meaning: Avoid debts.

(Jeraha) Lake mtu halimpatishi, bali humchefusha.

One's fouling wound does not make a person sick, but merely disgusts him.

Intentional meaning: Family members usually accept difficulties and misfortune and keep together.

Lambiwalo liko (liko), na likiwa haliko, li njiani laja. (Syllables 7+7+7).

That of which is said, "It is there, it is there", even if it is not there, it is on its way. It is coming.

Intentional meaning: If we have patience, we shall also get what we hoped for.

Leo ni leo, asemaye kesho, ni mwongo.

Today is today. He who says "tomorrow" is a liar.

Intentional meaning: Do not postpone for tomorrow, what you can do today.

¹⁷⁰ This refers to fish which is first dried up in the sun and then brought home.

Leo uko, kesho huko. (Syllables 4+4).

Today you are there, tomorrow you are not there.

Intentional meaning: Life is short.

Liandikwalo, halifutiki. (Syllables 5+5).

That what is written down, cannot be erased.

Intentional meaning: A word given in writing is binding.

Liandikwalo ndilo liwalo.

That what is written down, is there.

The Waswahili believe in pre-destination i.e. *Kudura Allah*.

Intentional meaning: That what “God” has destined must come to pass.

Lifaalo kueleza lieleze, lisilofaa limeze.

That what is worth explaining, explain it. That what is not worth, swallow it.

Intentional meaning 1: Do not waste your time doing useless work.

Intentional meaning 2: It is better to keep quiet, than to difuse evil matters

Likitoka liote.

When the sun comes (shines), bask in it.

Intentional meaning: Make hay while the sun shines. Take advantage of every good opportunity which comes your way.

Likiwika, lisiwike, kutakucha, twende zetu. (Syllables 4+4+4+4).

If the cock crows or not, it will dawn. Let's go ahead.

Intentional meaning: Whatever happens, life goes on. Do not hesitate to proceed.

Lila na fila, hazitangamani.

The case of *Lila* must not be confounded with that of *Fila*.

A popular explanation: “*Lila*” stands for “Good” and “*Fila*” for “Evil”.

Intentional meaning: Good and evil do not go together. You will have to opt either for good or for evil if you are forced to face the choice.

Lililopita hupishwa.

That which has passed is put aside.

Intentional meaning: Do not warm up a stale soup. You should not open up wounds which have already healed.

Lisemwalo lipo; ikiwa halipo, lipo nyuma linakuja.

What is being talked about is here; if it is not here, it's on the way.

Intentional meaning: You cannot avoid what you have already said.

(Neno) Liwalo lolote, na liwe.

Come what may and may it stay there.

Intentional meaning: Whatever happens, let it happen, life goes on. You should not hesitate to proceed.

Liwapokuwa, lakuwa.

When it is to be, it will be.

Intentional meaning: What happens, let it happen. Life goes on.

Lumbi haendi dhalali¹⁷¹.

The chameleon does not go about aimlessly.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to be honest, yet we should try and adapt ourselves to a given situation.

Maafuu hapatilizwi. (Syllables 5+5).

One does not punish a silly (lunatic) person.

Intentional meaning: Some persons are born with certain defects. We should not blame them for that.

Macho hayana pazia.

Eyes have no curtain.

Intentional meaning: The eyes register everything that is within view. An intelligent person should filter the pictures.

Maembe, hasara ya mwembe.

Mangoes are a loss for the mango-tree.

Mangoes are beaten down by people passing by with sticks or dropped down by stones. They destroy the branches.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to children who cause their parents sorrow.

Mafahali wawili, hawakai zizi moja.

Two bulls cannot not live in the same shed.

This proverb refers to the bulls and the female members of their species.

Intentional meaning: Competition can be tough.

Mahaba haiwi mlango. Moyo hauna kishiko. (Syllables 8+8).

Love is not a doorway, the heart has no knob.

Intentional meaning: Love has no limits.

Maisha hayana pato, hutupita kama ndoto. (Syllables 8+8).

Life has (brings) no profit (gain). It passes away like a dream.

Intentional meaning: Life is short. We shall take nothing with us.

Maiti haulizwi sanda.

A corpse is not consulted about the shroud for its burial.

Intentional meaning: A needy person is not asked to make a choice. A needy person has no choice.

¹⁷¹ “Dhalali” is probably made to rhyme with “haendi”. “Dhalala” means “without any reason, for nothing”.

Maji hufuata mkondo.

Water follows the current.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who follows others without scrutinizing if their behaviour is good or bad.

Maji hutelemkia bondeni, hayapandi kilimani.

Water flows down a valley, it does not climb a hill.

Intentional meaning 1: A person behaves the way he is.

Intentional meaning 2: This proverb is used when a person who is surprised about something very usual.

Maji ukiyavulia nguo, huna budi kuyaoga.

If you take off your clothes near water, you must bathe in it.

Intentional meaning: Do not leave things half-done. If you start something, you must also complete it.

Maji usiyoyafika, hujui wingi wake.

You cannot know the extent of the water (sea), unless you have been there.

Intentional meaning: You cannot understand a situation, unless you are confronted with it personally.

Maji ya kifuu, bahari ya chungu. (Syllables 6+6).

A coconut shell full of water is an ocean for an ant.

Intentional meaning: That what may be waste for the rich could suffice for the daily needs of the poor.

Maji ya moto, hayachomi nyumba.

Hot water does not burn a house.

Intentional meaning: Ignore trivial matters.

Maji ya mpondo, hayataki tanga. (Syllables 6+6).

Shallow waters (lit. Water in which the punter's pole has to be used) requires no sail.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who exaggerates minor items.

Maji ya nazi, yataka uvugulio tu.

Coconut juice needs only a small hole to leak through.

Intentional meaning 1: Some people always find a reason for quarelling.

Intentional meaning 2: This proverb is used when someone is looking for an opportunity to make something public.

Maji yaenda njia yake. (Syllables 5+5).

Water flows down its way.

Intentional meaning: A person behaves the way he is.

Maji yakijaa, hupwa; mpanda ngazi, hushuka. (Syllables 8+8).

When the tide is high, it ebbs; he who climbs a ladder comes down again.

Intentional meaning: Those who are in high office must reckon with setbacks.

Maji yenye kumwagika, hayakuwa kuzoleka. (Syllables 8+8).

Water once spilled cannot be brought back.

Intentional meaning: Words once spoken cannot be taken back.

Majumba makubwa, husitiri mambo. (Syllables 6+6).

Big houses conceal a lot.

Intentional meaning: Persons in high office have a lot to conceal.

Majuto hayeshi (hayaishi). (Syllables 3+3).

Regret never ends.

Intentional meaning: The mistakes which we have done cannot be erased.

Majuto huja kinyume.

Regret follows the act.

Intentional meaning: You will usually realise too late, that you have committed a mistake.

Majuto ni mjukuu, mwishowe huja kinyume. (Syllables 8+8).

Regrets are like a grandchild.

Intentional meaning: Consider well what you intend to do. You will usually realise too late, that you have committed a mistake.

Makaa hayaoki (hayakoki) nyama.

Charcoal does not fry meat.

Intentional meaning: Nice words do not solve problems.

Mali (ni) kama maua, furaha huyaua.

Wealth is like flowers. Joy causes them to dry up.

Intentional meaning: The joys of wealth are a passing shadow.

Mali ya bahili, huliwa na wadudu.

The wealth of a miser is eaten up by worms.

Intentional meaning: Enjoy the fruit of your labour, instead of hoarding your wealth.

Mama wa kambo, si mama.

A stepmother is not a mother.

Intentional meaning: Blood is thicker than water.

Mambo ya mbele, giza ya wele¹⁷². (Syllables 5+5).

Matters of the future lie in the darkness of destiny.

Intentional meaning: We do not know what life has in store for us.

Mambo ya nyumba, ni kinga.

The affairs of the house are secret.

Intentional meaning: Do not wash your dirty linen in public.

¹⁷² “Wele” means “female breasts” and also a “corn of millet”. What does it mean here?.

Maneno matamu, humtoa nyoka pangoni.

Pleasant words will draw a snake from its hole.

Intentional meaning: Kindness can win the favour of an enemy.

Maneno mengi si haja, maneno mengi si huja¹⁷³. (Syllables 8+8).

There is no need for many words. Many words do not make an argument convincing.

Intentional meaning: Let you talk be short and precise.

Mapaka wengi, hawagwii panya wengi.

Many cats do not (sieze) catch many mice.

Intentional meaning: If many persons try to guide a project the result is usually confusion.

Mapaka wengi, hayamkamati panya.

Many cats cannot catch a mouse.

Intentional meaning: If many persons try to guide a project the result is usually confusion.

Mapema maivu, mapema maovu. (Syllables 6+6)

Early ripe, early rot.

Intentional meaning: Everything in life is a passing shadow.

Mapenzi ni kikohozi, hayawezi kufichika. (Syllables 8+8).

Love is like a cough, it cannot be concealed.

Intentional meaning: Love cannot be concealed.

Mapenzi ni majani, popote penye mbolea huotea¹⁷⁴.

Love is like grass. It grows anywhere, where there is manure.

Intentional meaning: Wealthy persons attract attention.

Mara changu, mara chako. (Syllables 4+4).

It is now mine, it will be yours.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to money. The poor will one day prosper.

Masikio hayapiti kichwa.

The ears do not grow beyond the head.

Intentional meaning: Do not go beyond your means.

Maskini akipata, matako hulua mbwata¹⁷⁵.

When a poor man gets something, his buttocks shout “*mbwata*”.

Intentional meaning: A person who has had nothing, likes to boast about the little he gets.

Maskini haokoti, akiokota huambiwa kaiba (akaiba).

¹⁷³ “*Huja*” probably consists of the “*hu-*” as habitualis and “*-ja*” meaning “come”.

¹⁷⁴ This is one of the cynical proverbs in Kiswahili.

¹⁷⁵ Meaning of *mbwata*?

A poor man does not find things by chance; if he does, people presume that he has stolen them.

Intentional meaning: The rich disregard the poor.

Maskini na mwanawe, tajiri na mali yake.

A poor man and his child, (are like) a rich man and his wealth.

A poor man and his child are helpless. A rich man and his wealth are symbols of might and power.

Intentional meaning: The rich and those in power exploit the poor and the lower social strata.

Mavi usiyoyala, wayawingana¹⁷⁶ kuku? (Syllables 7+7).

Why drive away fowls from the dung which you do not eat anyway.

Intentional meaning: Why cling to riches and surplus which the unprivileged would badly need.

Mavi ya kale hayanuki.

Old droppings (dung) do not stink.

Intentional meaning: Forget and forgive.

Mawingu, dalili ya mvua.

Clouds are the sign of rain.

Intentional meaning: Assess a situation carefully before you undertake anything.

Mbaazi ukikosa maua, husingizia jua.

When a pigeon-pea plant has no flowers, it blames the sun.

Intentional meaning: We tend to blame others for our own shortcomings.

Mbinu hufuata mwendo.

The arm follows the movement of the leg.

Intentional meaning 1: Children behave like their parents.

Intentional meaning 2: The behaviour of a person corresponds to his mentality.

Mbio za sakafuni, huishia ukingoni. (Syllables 8+8).

Running on a roof ends at the edge.

This proverb refers to flat roofs in areas with little rain. If it has no railing one is likely to topple over.

Intentional meaning: If you take too big a risk, you are in danger of ending badly.

Mbiu ya mgambo, ikilia ina jambo.

When the ox-horn *mgambo* is blown, something important has happened or is to take place.

Mbiu ya mgambo used to be blown to call people to listen to proclamations.

Intentional meaning 1: Take notice of the signs of time.

Intentional meaning 2: If something takes place or happens, it must also have had a cause, a reason.

¹⁷⁶ “*Winga*” means “drive away”.

Mbizi haliwi na funo¹⁷⁷ .

The leopard is not eaten by the antelope.

Intentional meaning: The lower strata of society cannot oppose those in power.

Mbuzi wa maskini, hazai (mapacha).

The goat of a poor man does not bear (twins).

The poor person probably does not own a goat.

Intentional meaning: The rich grow richer and the poor become poorer.

Mbuzi wa mkata¹⁷⁸ , atakufa tasa.

The poor man's goat will die barren.

Intentional meaning: Misfortune after misfortune usually strikes the same person.

Mbwa hafi maji, akiona ufuko.

A dog does not get drowned if it sees a shore.

Intentional meaning: Even a destitute person has a chance to survive.

Mchagua jembe, si mkulima.

One who is fastidious about choosing a hoe is not a good farmer.

Intentional meaning: An efficient and well qualified person can manage his task with meagre means and simple tools.

Mchagua nazi, hupata koroma.

One who selects coconuts with great care gets an unripe one.

Intentional meaning: If you are too fastidious you end up with a wrong choice.

Mchakacho ujao, haulengwi na jiwe.

One should not throw stones into a bush from where a crackling noise comes.

Intentional meaning: It is better to wait and observe the situation before going ahead.

Mchana semani usiku lalani.

Talk during daytime, sleep at night.

Intentional meaning: There is a proper time for all things.

Mchawi mpe mwana amlee.

Give the witch-doctor your son, so that he may bring him up.

Intentional meaning: Hand over a person who gives trouble due responsibility and he will change his ways and improve.

Mcheka kilema, hafi bila kumfika.

He who laughs at a cripple will not die before becoming one himself.

Intentional meaning: If you mock those in trouble, your turn will come someday.

¹⁷⁷ *Cephalophus natalensis*, duiker, a type of antelope.

¹⁷⁸ “*Mkata*” means “a destitute person”.

Mchele mmoja, mapishi mengi.

Rice is all one, but there are many ways of cooking it.

Intentional meaning: It is the way you deal and associate with others which makes the difference. It's not what you say, but how you say it.

Mchelea mwana, kulia hulia yeye.

The one who fears that his child will cry, will cry himself someday.

Intentional meaning: If you are lenient while educating your children, you will regret it later on.

Mcheza hawi kiwete, ngoma yataka matao¹⁷⁹.

A dancer should not be a cripple, since dancing calls for grace.

Intentional meaning: If we decide to do something we should also choose the right resources and infrastructure.

Mcheza kwao hutunzwa.

One who dances at someone's home, is also paid for it.

Intentional meaning: A labourer has a right to his wages.

Mcheza na tope, humrukia.

He who plays with mud, will get splashed.

Intentional meaning: If you ask for trouble, you will get it.

Mchezea zuri, baya humfika.

The one who (carelessly) plays around with good things, will end up with evil matters.

Intentional meaning: If you are careless with your money you will waste it.

Mchimba kisima, hakatazwi maji.

A well-digger is not refused water.

A well digger is a man of importance. He is treated with courtesy.

Intentional meaning: One who works hard, has a right to earn his living.

Mchimba kisima, hakosi maji.

A well-digger is never short of water.

Intentional meaning: One who works hard will be able to maintain himself.

Mchimba kisima, huingia mwenyewe.

He who digs a pit, will fall into it himself.

Intentional meaning: If you wish harm to others, you yourself will end up with trouble.

Mchimba kisima, humtia mtuwe (mtu wake).

He who digs a pit, will land one of his own people in it.

Intentional meaning: If you wish harm to others, you yourself and your family will end up with trouble.

¹⁷⁹ “*Tao/ma*–“ means “arche, curve”. What does it mean here?

Mchofu halali kitanda cha mbali.

A tired man cannot sleep on a distant bed.

Even a tired man cannot sleep in a bed which is not within his reach.

Intentional meaning: A thing in hand is what is of use to you.

Mchonga mwiko, hukimbiza mikono yake.

The maker of wooden spoons saves his hands from (being burnt by) the fire.

Mwiko is a long wooden ladle which is used when cooking.

Intentional meaning: When we undertake something, we also intend to profit from it.

Mchovya asali, hachovyi mara moja.

The one who dips his finger into honey, does not do it just once.

Intentional meaning: If you find something you like, you are inclined to want more.

Mchuma janga, hula na wakwao.

The one who “plucks” trouble, eats it with his family.

Intentional meaning: A person who gets himself into trouble, brings suffering on his whole family.

Mchumia juani, hula kivulini.

One who plucks fruits in the sun, eats them in the shade.

Intentional meaning: Enjoy the fruits of your labour.

Mchungu haziki.

A shepherd does not bury.

A shepherd does not bury the sheep he has slaughtered, but eats the meat.

Intentional meaning: A person who has earned something by hard work knows to appreciate it.

Mema na mabaya ndio ulimwengu.

There is good and evil in this world.

Intentional meaning: Accept both joy and sorrow in life.

Meno ya mbwa hayaumani. Simba na simba hawauani.

The teeth of a dog do not hurt (bite) one another.

Two lions do not kill one another.

Intentional meaning: Brothers and sisters do not harm one another, even if they quarrel.

Mfa maji, hukamata maji.

A drowning person tries to hold fast to water.

Intentional meaning: When you are in difficulty, you should accept any help available.

Mficha uchi, hazai.

One who hides his sexual organs, will never have a child.

Intentional meaning: If we need help we should not be ashamed to ask for it.

Mfinyanzi hulia gaeni.

A potter eats from potsherd.

Intentional meaning: This proverb is used when a person does not profit from his profession, his ability and his talents.

Mfuata nyuki, hakosi asali.

One who follows bees, will never lack honey.

Intentional meaning: If you work hard you will earn your living.

Mfukuzwa kwao, hana pa kwenda.

He who is driven away from his home, has nowhere to go.

Intentional meaning: Keep in good contact with your family and your relatives, as they will help you when you need assistance.

Mganga hajigangi.

A doctor does not cure himself.

Intentional meaning: Even an expert in an academic field needs to consult a colleague.

Mgema akisifiwa tembo, hilitia maji.

If the palm-wine taper is praised, he dilutes the palm-wine with water.

Intentional meaning: You are likely to lose your bearings if you earn success and awards.

Mgeni hachomi chaza mtaani akanuka.

A stranger does not roast an oyster in a village and gets blamed that it smells.

Intentional meaning: The unusual behaviour of a foreigner should be met with due consideration.

Mgeni ni kuku mweupe.

A stranger is a white fowl.

Intentional meaning: A stranger is very noticeable. He is being observed. He should be careful about his behaviour.

Mgeni ni ya kingewa¹⁸⁰ huruka akenda (akaenda or aende) kwao.

A stranger is like a kite. He will fly away and go home.

Intentional meaning 1: Treat a stranger with courtesy even if you do not agree with his ways. He will leave in due course.

Intentional meaning 2: Do not be too attached to a foreigner. You will be alone when he leaves.

Mgeni njoo, mwenyeji apona.

Let a guest come so that the host may benefit.

Intentional meaning: Guests and foreigners usually enrich a host. They usually bring gifts, knowledge and their culture.

Mgonjwa haulizwi uji.

A sick person is not asked if he wants porridge or not.

¹⁸⁰ I cannot find the meaning of *kingewa*. I have substituted it with *mwewe*.

The Waswahili consider *uji* to be a very simple meal.

Intentional meaning: If a person needs help do not wait for him to ask for it..

Milima ya mbali, haina mawe.

Distant mountains have no stones.

Mountains appear to be beautiful and romantic from a distance. You cannot see the stones and rocks.

Intentional meaning: You do not notice the defects of a person until you are familiar with him.

Miye nyumba ya udongo, sihimili vishindo.

I am a mud hut, I cannot stand shocks.

Intentional meaning: This proverb is used when someone tries to avoid trouble.

Mja hana hiari¹⁸¹.

A human being has no choice.

Intentional meaning: Accept the difficulties in life. It is the will of God.

Mjeledi¹⁸² humpasa farasi, na hatmu (hatamu) humpasa punda.

A harness fits a horse and a bridle fits a donkey.

Intentional meaning: A well disciplined staff does not need constant control.

Mjinga akierevuka, mwerevu yupo mashakani.

If a fool grows clever, the wise man begins to doubt.

Intentional meaning: This proverb is used - with special reference to corrupt politicians – to warn persons who are inclined to cheat and fool others.

Mjumbe hauawi.

A messenger should not be killed.

Intentional meaning: The one who gives orders is to be blamed and not the subordinate person who carries them out (implements them).

Mkamatwa na ngozi, ndiye mwizi.

One who is caught with hides is a thief.

Intentional meaning: Be careful about what you say, do and own.

Mkamia maji hayanywi, akinywa humkwama.

One who squeezes out water does not drink it, if he does, it chokes him.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who would have liked to have something done but was not able to do it, the way he would have liked to have it done.

Mkata (maskini) hana kinyongo.

A poor man does not despise anything.

Intentional meaning: The poor appreciate even that what the rich ignore or despise.

¹⁸¹ The Waswahili believe in *Kudura ya Mungu*, i.e. Predestination.

¹⁸² “*Mijeledi*” means “whip, lash”.

Mkata haisi (hajui), kula na mkwasi.

A poor man does not know how to eat with a rich man.

Intentional meaning: The patterns of behaviour between the social classes vary.

Mkata hapendi mwana.

A poor person does not love his child.

In fact, he cannot afford to show his love by buying gifts.

Intentional meaning: Respect even those who cannot afford to live according to common standards.

Mkate mkavu wa nyumbani ni bora kuliko nyama ya shuwa ya pengine.

Dry bread in one's own home, is better than good *shuwa* meat in some other place.

Intentional meaning: It is better to be content with what you have than to want what the more prosperous own.

Mke ni nguo, mgomba kupalilia¹⁸³.

A wife is (needs) clothes, a banana-plant needs weeding.

Intentional meaning: We can either keep together or part depending on how we deal with a matter and how we associate with a person.

Mkeka mpya, haulaliwi vema¹⁸⁴.

It is not good lying on a new mat.

Intentional meaning: A young employee needs to be trained for his work.

Mkono mmoja, hauchinji ng'ombe.

A single hand cannot slaughter a cow.

Intentional meaning: A community needs to work together.

Mkono mmoja, haulei mwana.

One hand cannot bring up a child.

Intentional meaning: A family needs to keep together.

Mkono mtupu, haulambwi (haurambwi).

An empty hand is not licked.

Intentional meaning: No one takes notice of a poor person who has nothing to offer.

Mkono usioweza kuukata, ubusu.

Kiss the hand which you cannot cut off.

Intentional meaning: It is better to compromise with an enemy, than to suffer loss. If you cannot beat them, join them.

Mkono wa kuume, haukati wa kushoto.

¹⁸³ This is one of the cynical proverbs in Kiswahili.

¹⁸⁴ The intentional meaning that a newly married wife needs to be tarined for life by her husband is cynical and should therefore be ignored.

The right hand does not cut the left one.

Intentional meaning: Do not harm yourself and your family.

Mkosa jembe halimi.

The one who lacks a hoe, does not cultivate a field.

A poor man who cannot afford a hoe, will also not afford a field. A vicious circle.

Intentional meaning: A poor person is doomed to end in poverty.

Mkosa titi la mama, hata la mbwa hulamwa.

A child who was not nursed with the mother's breast will suck even the teat of a bitch.

Intentional meaning: He who lacks a good home education is likely to go astray.

Mkuki kwa nguruwe, kwa mwanadamu mchungu.

A spear for a pig, pain for a human being.

Intentional meaning: One does not feel the spear that is stuck into the pig, but one will feel it if it is stuck into one's own flesh. Consider what you would feel like if you intend to harm others.

Mkulima ni mmoja, walaji ni wengi.

The farmer is but just one person, those who eat (the fruit of his labour) are many.

Intentional meaning: Your work benefits a whole community.

Mla cha uchungu, na tamu hakosi. (Syllables 6+6).

One who eats bitter things, does not lack sweet ones.

Intentional meaning: Every cloud has a silver lining.

Mla kuku wa mwenziwe, miguu humwelekea.

One who eats his neighbour's fowl, will be betrayed by his footprints.

Intentional meaning: Do not deprive others of their rights.

Mla kwa miwili, hana mwisho mwema. (Syllables 6+6).

He who eats with both hands, will come to a bad end.

The left hand which is used to clean the anus after "answering nature's call" is considered to be unclean. It should not touch food.

Intentional meaning: Do not do anything which may hurt others.

Mla mbuzi, hulipa ng'ombe. (Syllables 5+5).

One who eats a goat, pays for it with a cow.

If you accept a small gift from someone, you will pay heavily for it.

Intentional meaning: If you rely on aid from others you may have to pay heavily for it in return.

Mla nawe hafi nawe, ila mzaliwa nawe. (Syllables 8+8).

One who eats with you, will not die with you, but he that is born with you, will.

Blood is thicker than water.

Intentional meaning: It is better to depend on your own family members, than to depend on strangers.

Mla sumu hakufa, amekufa aliye(i)pika.

The one who ate the poison did not die; it was the one who “cooked it” who died.
Slandering others may be dangerous.

Intentional meaning: Slandering others may be dangerous for you personally.

Mlenga jiwe kundini, hajui limpataye.

One who flings a stone amid a crowd, does not know whom it hits.

Intentional meaning: Whatever we do has an effect on others.

Mlevi wa mvinyo hulevuka, mlevi wa mali halevuki.

The one whom wine made drunk has long since become sober; the man whom wealth makes drunk never gets sober.

Intentional meaning: The greed for money and riches can never be satisfied.

Mlimbua nchi, ni mwana (wa) nchi. (Syllables 6+6).

He who enjoys the first fruits of a country, is a son of the country.

He who pioneers, owns the land.

Intentional meaning: You will profit from something if you closely associate with it.

Mlingane sawasawa, kama kombe na kahawa. (Syllables 8+8).

Live in harmony together like the cup and the coffee in it.

Intentional meaning: This is a wish expressed by the parents to their children on their wedding way.

Mlinzi hulinda ndege, mke mzuri halindwi¹⁸⁵. (Syllables 8+8).

A watchman keeps the birds away from the fields. A pretty woman cannot be guarded.

Intentional meaning: An intelligent person can distinguish between good and evil on its own. He does not need any control mechanism.

Mlipomaliza kula, heri toka kwa ajila. (Syllables 8+8).

When you have finished eating leave the host's house immediately..

Intentional meaning: Keep at a reasonable distance from other people's affairs.

Mmoja hashui chombo.

One man cannot launch a boat.

Intentional meaning: We need to work together.

Mngelegeza demani, chombo ki juu ya mwamba.

If you loosen the ropes of the main sail, the ship will be on the rock.

Intentional meaning: Once your finances and your reputation are ruined it is difficult to set things right again.

Mnyonge hana hasira.

A poor man is never angry.

¹⁸⁵ “A pretty woman is a prey to lovers” is one of the cynical proverbs in Kiswahili.

Intentional meaning: A poor man knows that he is always a loser. He has no choice but to be humble.

Mnyonge hupata haki, ni mwenye nguvu kupenda. (Syllables 8+8).

The poor man gets his rights, if the powerful (rich) person approves it.

Intentional meaning: Might is right.

Mnyonge, msonge. (Syllables 3+3).

A weak person, push him.

Intentional meaning: Bad luck accumulates on the same person.

Mnyonyore haunuki, hupendeza maua yake.

A Barbados Pride (*caesalpinia pulcherrima*) has no scent, but its flowers are beautiful.

Intentional meaning: The good reputation of a person need not be mentioned in public. It is evident.

Mnywa maji kwa mkono mmoja, kiu yake ni pale pale.

One who drinks water with just one hand, finds his thirst is still there.

This proverb refers to the custom of drinking water from a tap or from a fountain with the cupped palms of both hands.

Intentional meaning: We can achieve success if we are fully devoted to our work.

Moja shika, si kumi nenda rudi.

Hold fast to one, not to ten which go and come.

Hold fast to the one which you already own, instead of looking for some other ten which you will probably never get.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to keep on the safe side and to avoid taking unnecessary risks.

Moja shika, kumi hutapata.

Hang on to one. You will not get ten.

Hold fast to the one which you already own, instead of looking for some other ten which you will probably not get.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to keep on the safe side and to avoid taking unnecessary risks.

Moto hauzai moto.

Fire does not give birth to fire.

After a fire has burnt out, only ashes remain.

Intentional meaning: A pupil is not always as efficient as his teacher, a child as his parents.

Moto huzaa moto.

Fire begets fire.

Intentional meaning: Quarrels cause more quarrels.

Moto na vita, usianze kabisa, huwezi kuvimaliza.

Fire and war, never start them. You will not be able to control them.

Intentional meaning: Avoid trouble.

Moto wa kumvi, hudumu.

A fire of chaff (under the ashes) continues.

A quiet person remembers.

Intentional meaning 1: Do not estimate the value of a person by his outer appearance.

Intentional meaning 2: A quiet person has probably a lot of knowledge and exxperience to offer..

Moyo wa mzee, bahari.

The heart of an elder is like an ocean.

Intentional meaning: Old people who have experienced the hardships of life are generous in return.

Mpanda farasi wawili, hujishuka miguu miwili.

One who rides two horses at the same time, will land on his two feet.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to opt for one way and one solution.

Mpanda farasi wawili, hupasuka msamba.

One who rides two horses at the same time, will fall and split asunder.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to opt for one way and one solution..

Mpanda ngazi, hushuka.

One who climbs up a ladder, has to also cimb down.

Intentional meaning: If you attain a high position in society, you have to reckon with attacks and a fall.

Mpanda ovyo, hula ovyo.

One who is careless in sowing, will also reap accordingly.

Intentional meaning: We shall succeed in life if we work hard and systematically.

Mpandaji mbegu njema, huvuna mavuno mema.

The one who sows good seed will harvest a good crop.

Intentional meaning: If we are honest and sincere we shall prosper.

Mpenzi hana kinyongo.

A lover has no evil (hatred, resentment) in mind.

Intentional meaning: If you love someone, you will ignore his shortcomings.

Mpiga ngumi ukuta, huumiza mkonowe. (Syllables 8+8).

One who beats a wall with his own fist, hurts his own hand.

Intentional meaning: Avoid conflicts with persons who are more influential than you.

Mpofuka ukongweni, hapotewi na njia. (Syllables 8+8).

He who becomes blind in his old age, does not lose his way.

Intentional meaning: A long experience helps you to survive..

Msafiri kafiri.

A traveller is like an unbeliever.

Intentional meaning: A traveller has to eat what he gets. He has to also adapt himself to the local customs. He is sometimes compelled by circumstances to act contrary to his convictions.

Msafiri maskini, ajapokuwa sultani.

A traveller is a helpless person, even though he be a ruler.

Intentional meaning: There are situations in life when money and status are of no help.

Msafiri ndiye aliye pwani.

A traveller is one who is on the coast.

Since ships were the only means of travelling, one had to be on the coast in time. If not he would be left behind.

Intentional meaning: Do not postpone important events for the last moment. (*Abudu*).

Msaidi wa kulima, huvunja jembe mpini. (Syllables 8+8).

The one who helps the farmer breaks the shaft of the hoe.

Intentional meaning: The work you do yourself is well done.

Msasi haogopi miiba.

A hunter does not fear thorns.

Tree thorns are minor items which do not disturb a seasoned hunter.

Intentional meaning: If you want to succeed in life you will have to face the problems involved.

Msema kwa mbili, hula kwa miwili. (Syllables 6+6. Mbili = is reckoned as 2 syllables)

The one who speaks with two tongues, eats with two hands.

Intentional meaning: One who has the “gift of the gab” will profit.

Msema kweli, hakosi kitu. (Syllables 5+5).

One who speaks the truth, does not lack anything.

Intentional meaning: If we are honest we shall enjoy the confidence of others.

Msema kweli, hana wajoli¹⁸⁶.

The one who speaks the truth has no friends.

Intentional meaning: Truth may be pleasant but it also hurts.

Msema pweke, hakosi.

One who talks to himself, cannot go wrong.

Intentional meaning 1: If you are in trouble consider your own mistakes first.

Intentional meaning 2: If you avoid people you will also avoid trouble.

Mshale kwenda msituni, haukupotea.

If an arrow goes into a forest, it does not mean that it is lost.

¹⁸⁶ “*Mjoli*” means “a descendant of a freed slave”.

Intentional meaning: This proverb is used when the results of a project are not yet visible.

Mshale usiyo na nyoya, hauendi mbali.

An arrow which has no feathers, does not go far.

Intentional meaning: We cannot implement a project if we lack the basic requirements, even if they are of negligible value.

Mshika mawili, moja humponyoka.

One who holds two things, will lose one.

Intentional meaning: It is difficult to get all we see and want.

Mshoni hachagui nguo.

A tailor does not select his cloth.

It is the customer who chooses the material. The tailor works with what is given to him.

Intentional meaning: Each one of us has his own responsibility in society.

Msi¹⁸⁷ chake ni mwenda zake. (Syllables 4+ni+4).

The have-not walks the road.

Intentional meaning: A poor person is not welcome anywhere.

Msi chembe wala uta, si muwani.¹⁸⁸

A man with neither a morsel nor a bow and arrow is not a warrior.

Intentional meaning 1: We should plan our projects carefully.

Intentional meaning 2: An efficient politician needs a sharp tongue.

Msika mavi, hayaachi kumnuka.

The one who touches dung, will continue to smell of it.

Intentional meaning: If we ruin our reputation it is difficult to restore it.

Msitukane wagama, na ulevi ungalipo. (Syllables 8+8).

Do not abuse palm-wine tapers, while drinking is going on.

Intentional meaning: Be polite to those, whose help you still need.

Msitukane wakunga, na uzazi ungalipo. (Syllables 8+8).

Do not abuse midwives, while child-bearing continues.

Intentional meaning: Be polite to those, whose help you still need

Mstahamilivu, hula mbivu.

One who is patient, will eat ripe fruits.

Intentional meaning: It is worth being patient.

Mtaka cha mvunguni, sharti ainame.

One who wants to fetch something from under the bed must bend low.

¹⁸⁷ “Msi” is a person who lacks something. “Msi mali” is “a destitute, a poor person”.

¹⁸⁸ “Ua” means “to kill”, “muwani” means “one who kills”.

In some Waswahili homes it is customary to store personal effects in boxes and place them under the bed.

Intentional meaning: If you need help from others, you should request for it in a polite manner.

Intentional meaning 2: If we need something we should work for it.

Mtaka nyingi nasaba, hupata mingi misiba.

One who boasts of his ancestry unduly will bring plenty of trouble upon himself.

Intentional meaning: The more we talk about ourselves the more we expose ourselves to scrutiny by the public.

Mtaka unda, haneni.

One who desires to create something, does not announce it.

He who sincerely wants to do something, just does it. He does not fuss about it.

Intentional meaning: It is not advisable to publish our projects in public.

Mtaka yote kwa pupa, hukosa yote.

One who is greedy to want everything, misses all.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to reduce our needs to our financial limits.

Mtegemea nundu, haachi kunona.

He who relies on a hump, will not fail to grow fat.

He who eats heavy food, will gain weight.

Intentional meaning: He who relies on a person with wealth or learning, will not fail to benefit from him.

Mtego bila ya chambo, haunasi.

A trap without a bait does not catch prey.

Intentional meaning: We cannot implement a project if we lack the due requirements.

Mtema kuni chake¹⁸⁹, akuonye¹⁹⁰.

Let the woodcutter warn you.

Let the woodcutter show you the wound, which he got when chopping the wood.

Intentional meaning: Learn from experiences which others have made.

Mtembezi, hula miguu yake.

An (aimless) wanderer eats his feet (wears away his feet).

Intentional meaning: One who just roams about doing no work, wastes his life.

Mtenda jambo asiishe, ni kama asiyetenda.

If someone undertakes something, he should not give up. Otherwise he would be like one who has done nothing.

Intentional meaning: Finish the work you have started.

¹⁸⁹ Kidonda chake

¹⁹⁰ “Onya” is the causative of “ona”.

Mtenda mema hasemi, akisema hatendi.

One who helps, does not speak about it. If he does so, he does not help.

Your left hand should not know what your right hand does.

Intentional meaning: Your left hand should not know what your right hand does.

Mteuzi haisihi tamaa.

A connoisseur never comes to the end of desire.

Intentional meaning 1: The desire for knowledge has no limits.

Intentional meaning 2: Some persons end up in accumulating things of low worth (*vitu duni*).

Mti hauendi, ila kwa nyenzo. (Syllables 6+6).

A tree trunk does not move except by use of a lever.

Big trees are used for shipbuilding. They are transported down to the beach along a path of *nyenzo*, i.e. smooth round poles laid parallel to each other.

Intentional meaning 1: This proverb refers to a task which can be achieved only by special means.

Intentional meaning 2: A person in high position cannot be persuaded to leave. He must be forced out.

Mti huchongewa, ni (na) tundaze (tunda zake or matunda yake).

If a tree is trimmed, it bears fruit.

Intentional meaning: The value of a fruit-tree is assessed by the fruit which it bears. The reputation of parents is assessed by the behaviour of their children. The reputation of a teacher is assessed by the level of knowledge of his students.

Mti huponzwa na tundaze.

A tree is brought into danger by its fruits, since people come to steal them.

A tree becomes attractive to thieves when it bears fruit.

Intentional meaning: The poor man has nothing to fear. The rich and those in power need to be protected.

Mti upigwao mawe ni mti wenye matunda. (Syllables 8+8).

The tree people throw stones at is the tree that bears fruit.

Intentional meaning: The poor man has nothing to fear. The rich and those in power need to be protected.

Mti wenye matunda, ndio hupigwa mawe. (Syllables 8+8).

A tree bearing fruit is struck by stones.

People throw stones at trees bearing fruits trying to drop them down.

Intentional meaning: One who is rich or holding high office is likely to be confronted with the envy of others.

Mtomwa mwiba, hawi mtembezi.

He who has been pierced by a thorn does (cannot) not walk.

Intentional meaning: He who has experienced trouble avoids the circumstances that led to them.

Mtondoo haufi maji.

The *mtondoo*-tree (*calophyllum inophyllum*) does not lack water (die in water).

Intentional meaning: You will prosper in surroundings which are familiar to you.

Mtoto akibebwa, hutazama kisogo cha mamaye (mama yake).

When a baby is carried on its mother's back, it looks at the nape of her neck.

Waswahili women usually carry their children, tucked in cloth, on their backs.

Intentional meaning: Children follow the behaviour of their parents..

Mtoto akililia wembe, mpe.

When a child cries for a razor, give it to him.

Intentional meaning: Let one learn by (from) experience, even if he has to suffer.

Mtoto umleavyo, ndivyo akuavyo.

As you bring up a child, so will it grow up.

Intentional meaning: Children follow the behaviour of their parents.

Mtoto wa nyoka, naye nyoka.

The child of a snake is a snake.

A being can give birth to its own species only.

Intentional meaning: A child follows the behaviour of its parents.

Mtu akimpa maskini kichache, Mungu humruzuku kingi.

If you give a poor person a little amount, God will pay you back in plenty.

Intentional meaning: It is worth sharing our wealth with the less fortunate.

Mtu apandacho (kitu), ndicho avunacho. (Syllables 6+6).

That what a person plants, is that what he reaps.

You will reap that what you sow.

Intentional meaning: You are personally responsible for what you do.

Mtu asiye na akili, usifuatane naye.

Do not follow a person, who has no brains.

Intentional meaning: Follow a blind man and you shall land in a pit.

Mtu haendi na utwao¹⁹¹ tu, huenda na uchao¹⁹² pia.

This translation makes sense: Man does not walk by day alone, but goes by night as well.

Intentional meaning: You should make provision for lean years.

Mtu hakatai wito, hukataa aitwalo. (Syllables 8+8).

A person does not object to being called, he objects to what he is called for.

Intentional meaning: Scrutinize a matter carefully before you accept or reject it.

¹⁹¹ *Chwa* refers to sunset. *Kumekuchwa* resembles “Good Evening”. *Twa* is another version of *chwa*.

¹⁹² *Cha* refers to sunrise. *Kumekucha* resembles “Good Morning”.

Mtu halindi bahari, ipitayo kila chombo¹⁹³.

A man cannot guard the sea on which vessels of every type travel.

Intentional meaning: “Mtu” refers to a husband and “chombo” refers to his wife.

Mtu hasafiri nyota ya mwenziwe. (Syllables 6+6).

No man travels by his friend’s star.

Intentional meaning: Do not depend on others.

Mtu huenda na uchao, haendi na utwao.

One goes out at daybreak, but not after sunset.

In the rural areas wild animals come out in search of food after sunset.

Intentional meaning: Give preference to tasks which are due to lead to success.

Mtu hujikuna ajipatiapo.

A person scratches himself there where his hand can reach.

Intentional meaning: Whatever we do should be within the limits of our resources.

Mtu huulizwa amevaani, haulizwi amekulani.

A person is asked about what he is wearing, not about what he has eaten.

We usually notice the clothes of a person, but we do not know if he has had something to eat or not.

Intentional meaning: The outer appearance of a person may be misleading.

Mtu mbuga hawezi kujenga nyumba.

A nibbler cannot build a house.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who has failed in mutual love with his wife or is not able to maintain a family.

Mtu ni watu. (Syllables 2+ni+2).

One person is people.

Intentional meaning: A community is made up of individuals. We need one another.

Mtu pweke, ni uvundo.

A lone person is stench.

A person who isolates himself from society, does not enjoy its benefits.

Intentional meaning: If you keep in contact with society, you will have a better chance to survive.

Mtulivu, hula mbivu. (Syllables 4+4).

A persistent man eats ripe fruit.

Intentional meaning: If you are patient and persistent you succeed.

Mtumai cha ndugu, hufa yu (hali) maskini.

¹⁹³ This is one of the cynical proverbs in Kiswahili.

A person who does not make an effort to maintain himself, but rather depends on an inheritance or the income of his relatives will die a pauper.

Intentional meaning: Do not depend on others.

Mtumi (mtume?) wa kunga, haambiwi maana.

A messenger who carries a confidential message, is not told its meaning.

Intentional meaning: Keep confidential matters confidential.

Mtumikie kafiri¹⁹⁴, upate mradi wako. (Syllables 8+8).

Serve even an unbeliever to attain your own ends.

Intentional meaning: If you are in difficulty, you should accept any help available.

Mtungi usivunjike, na maji yasimwagike.

Do not let the water jar break, that the water may not be spilt.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to take precautions.

Mtunza bahari, siye msafiri.

A person who watches the sea is not the traveller.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who pretends to know something, but is ignorant.

Mtupa jongoo, hutupa na mti wake.

One who throws away a centipede, throws it away together with the stick, which he used to pick it up with.

Intentional meaning: If you want to give up a bad habit, you should avoid the company of those who mislead you.

Muhogo mchungu, usiuchezee. (Syllables 6+6).

Do not play with bitter casava.

Bitter casava is poisonous.

Intentional meaning: Avoid trouble. Do not take serious matters lightly.

Mume ni kazi, mke ni nguo¹⁹⁵. (Syllables 5+5).

A husband is hard work, a wife is clothes.

Intentional meaning: A man needs to work hard in order to maintain his family. The pride of a woman lies in her clothes.

Mume wa mama ni baba.

The husband of your mother is your father.

Intentional meaning: Our parents deserve our respect inspite of their shortcomings.

Mungu akikupa kilema, hukupa na mwendo wake¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹⁴ *Kafar* in Hebrew refers to people living in villages and with a low grade of education. *Kafir* among Moslems refers to a person who does not accept the islamic concept of God.

¹⁹⁵ This is one of the cynical proverbs in Kiswahili.

¹⁹⁶ The Waswahili believe in *Kudura ya Allah*, i. e. predestination.

When God gives you lameness, he also gives you a way to walk.
Intentional meaning: God shows you a way, if you are in trouble.

Mungu akukinge.

May God protect you.

Intentional meaning: This is one of the ways of ending a letter: “*Nakuaga nikikutakia heri na baraka. Mungu akukinge.*”

Mungu hamfichi nafiki.

God does not conceal a liar.

Intentional meaning: A liar will be detected sooner or later.

Mungu hapi kwa mvua, wala hanyimi kwa jua. (Syllables 8+8).

God does not give rain alone, nor does he withhold sunshine.

Intentional meaning: Rain and sun are a gift of God.

Mutashi asio kitu, n’akae (na akae) akitamani. (Syllables 8+8).

The person who has not got it (what he is longing for), let him just sit and long for it.

Intentional meaning: We should learn to control our desires.

Muuliza hujibiwa ili apate fahamu. Syllables 8+8).

The one who asks will receive an answer so that he may understand.

Intentional meaning: We can learn from others by question and answer.

Muumwa na nyoka, akiona ung’ongo, mara hushituka.

The one who has been bitten by a snake, when he sees a palm rib he will be startled.

Intentional meaning: If you have experienced trouble you are likely to be cautious.

Mvazi wa nguo moja, akifua huvaani? (Syllables 8+8).

One who wears (owns) only one garment, when he wants to wash it, what will he wear?

Intentional meaning: Make provision for a rainy day.

Mvua haina hodi.

The rain does not wait to be invited.

Intentional meaning: Trouble comes when you do not expect it.

Mvumbika mbichi, hula mbivu.

One who stores unripe fruit, gets to eat it when it ripens.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to make provisions for the future.

Mvungu, mkeka.

The space under the bed is like a mat.

The open space under the bed may be a hiding place for snakes and insects.

Intentional meaning: You may meet trouble in unexpected places.

Mvuvi anajua pweza alipo.

A fisherman knows where to look for an octopus.

Intentional meaning: If we need help it is advisable to look for a competent person.

Mwacha asili, ni mtumwa. (Syllables 5+5).

He who renounces his origin (ancestry), is a bold person.

Intentional meaning: It is not advisable to renounce our own identity and to replace it with that of a foreign culture.

Mwamini Mungu, si mtovu.

He who trusts in God, lacks nothing.

Intentional meaning: Our life is attached to a thin tread which does not lie in our hands.

Mwana kidonda, mjukuu kovu.

One's own child is a sore; but one's grandchild is a scar.

Intentional meaning: Our own affairs and our own country are closer to us than a foreign one.

Mwana kila mwaka ni kubwa baraka. (Syllables 5+5).

A child every year is a great blessing.

Intentional meaning: Children make life worth living.

Mwana mkaidi hafaidi, mpaka siku ya Idi.

A naughty child does not notice its wrong until the day of the Id-Festival.

Intentional meaning: This child will get no new clothes and presents on Id-Feast, if it has been naughty.

Mwana mkubwa nawe, ni mwenzio kama wewe.

The child who grows up with you is like your own brother.

Intentional meaning: Family members keep together.

Mwana mtukutu hali ugali mtupu.

A troublesome child does not eat plain *ugali*.

Ugali is the staple food of the common man in some parts of East Africa. It is usually eaten together with a side dish (meat, fish or vegetable) which a poor person sometimes cannot afford.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who makes an effort to maintain himself rather than to depend on others.

Mwana wa ndovu, hawi mkovu. (Syllables 5+5).

The son of an elephant is never a dwarf.

Intentional meaning: A child inherits the good reputation of its parents.

Mwana wa simba, ni simba.

The child of a lion is a lion.

Intentional meaning: A child follows the behaviour of the parents.

Mwanadamu atakufa, jina lake litakaa.

A person will die, but his name will remain.

Intentional meaning: Our reputation is what matters more than our material wealth.

Mwanaharamu¹⁹⁷ alitiwa chupani, akatoa chanda.

The illegitimate child was put in a bottle but he stuck his finger out.

Intentional meaning: A will be detected sooner or later.

Mwanakuku, haparaniwi.

The young chicken does not have someone else to scratch the earth for him

To scratch the earth in search of food.

Intentional meaning: Young people have to learn to stand on their own feet.

Mwanamaji, hutaraji kufa maji.

A sailor expects to die at sea.

Intentional meaning: Every profession has its own risks.

Mwanamume ni mbono, hualikia kule.

A man is like a castor-oil creeper. It stretches out far away.

Men have interests even outside their own home.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a married man with relations to women other than his own wife.

Mwangata (mwangaza) mbili, moja humponyoka.

Two lights (lamps), one will drop.

Intentional meaning: It is not advisable to follow two paths at the same time.

Mwanzo kokochi, mwisho nazi.

The beginning is a bud, the end is a coconut.

Intentional meaning: A humble start may lead to a major success.

Mwanzo wa chanzo¹⁹⁸, ni chane mbili. (Syllables 5+5).

The beginning of mat-making is two slips of raffia leaf.

Intentional meaning: It takes two to make a bargain. It takes two to achieve something worthwhile.

Mwapiza la nje, hupata la ndani. (Syllables 6+6).

One who curses someone in public, brings it on his own home.

Intentional meaning: Avoid evil for yourself and for others.

Mwegama hagwi, ila mwega kugwa.

The one who is supported does not fall, unless the one who supports him falls.

Intentional meaning: This proverb usually refers to politicians and those in power.

Mwekaji kisasi, haambiwi mwerevu.

One who contemplates vengeance, is not called wise.

¹⁹⁷ The word *mwanaharamu* is rude. It should not be used.

¹⁹⁸ “*Chanzo*” means “beginning” and refers here to “mat-making”.

Intentional meaning:

Mwema hamali, kuchwa hajali.

The good porter takes no notice of sunset.

Intentional meaning: A dedicated worker does not count the minutes.

Mwema huwa muovu, aliyetaka myeye (mwenyewe). (Syllables 7+7).

A good man becomes bad, he wanted it himself.

Intentional meaning: If you do good to people e.g. lend money to a friend, he will quarrel with you when you claim it.

Mwenda bure si mkaa bure, huenda akaokota.

One who travels for no apparent purpose is not like one who sits down with no purpose.

Intentional meaning: A traveller usually gains knowledge abroad and also comes back with something valuable.

Mwenda mbio, hujikwaa kidole.

One who is in a hurry, stubs his toe.

Intentional meaning: You are at a disadvantage if you deal with important matters in a hurry.

Mwenda mbizi nchi kavu, hujipujua usowe. (Syllables 8+8).

The man who dives on the dry beach will bruise his forehead.

Intentional meaning: If you ask for trouble you will also get it.

Mwenda pole hajikwai, akijikwaa haumii.

One who walks carefully, does not stumble. If he stumbles she does not get hurt.

Slow and steady wins the race.

Intentional meaning: You should avoid taking important decisions in a hurry.

Mwenda pole, haumii miguu.

One who walks carefully, does not hurt his foot.

Intentional meaning: You are at an advantage if you deal with important matters carefully.

Mwenda taratibu, hataki tabibu. (Syllables 5+5).

The prudent walker needs no doctor.

Intentional meaning: You are at an advantage if you deal with important matters carefully.

Mwendo hauishi, wa hii dahari¹⁹⁹. Sisi hatuwezi, kuvunja safari. (Syllables 6+6+6.+6)

The course of the world never stops. We cannot break our journey.

Intentional meaning: Life goes on. It has its own way.

Mwenye ashiki kalewa.

A lover is drunk.

Intentional meaning: A person in love does not act rationally.

¹⁹⁹ “Dahari” means “eon”.

Mwenye bahati, humpa swifati.²⁰⁰ (Syllables 5+5).

A lucky person, people praise him

Intentional meaning: People who are influential will be flattered even if they do not deserve it.

Mwenye chake, hakosi cha mwenziwe.

One who has his own property does not need that of his neighbour.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to be self-reliant.

Mwenye chongo, halali kwa tani.

A hunchback cannot lie on his back.

Intentional meaning: Avoid attempting the impossible.

Mwenye ghadhabu, mbele yake husimama shetani.

The devil stands in front of an angry person.

Intentional meaning: Forgive and forget.

Mwenye huba, hana dawa, ila kwa muhibiwa. (Syllables 4+4+ila+4).

He who is in love will find no medicine except close to his beloved.

He who is in love will find comfort close to his friend.

Intentional meaning: Do not forsake the one whom you love, who loves you.

Mwenye kelele, hana neno.

One who makes noise, has nothing to say.

Intentional meaning 1: Do not trust people who make empty promises.

Intentional meaning 2: Do not take notice of boisterous people.

Mwenye kisu kikali ndiye alaye nyama. (Syllables 7+7).

One who has a sharp knife will eat meat.

Intentional meaning: If you are well prepared for the task you will succeed.

Mwenye kovu, haliwai²⁰¹ na kidonda.

One who has a scar, does not forget the sore. A burnt child fears the fire.

Intentional meaning: It is difficult to forget the harm done to us.

Mwenye kovu, usidhani kapoa.

Do not consider a person with a scar to be healed.

Intentional meaning: What has happened is not yet past. Keep at a reasonable distance from persons who have done harm to you.

Mwenye kubeba, hachelei kuchuna.

He who carries (a beast which he has slaughtered), does not hesitate to skin it.

Intentional meaning: Enjoy the fruit of your labour.

²⁰⁰ What does “swifati” mean?

²⁰¹ What is the meaning of “haliwai”?

Mwenye kuchamba mno, huchubuka.

Too much washing (of the anus after “answering nature’s call”) wears the skin.

Intentional meaning: If you are fastidious you will do harm to yourself.

Mwenye kukusaidia, ndiye rafiki kwa nia. (Syllables 8+8).

The one who helps you, is indeed a friend with good intentions (a true friend)

Intentional meaning: A friend in need is a friend in deed.

Mwenye kupanda ngazi, na mwenye kushuka ngazi, hawapeani mkono.

The one who goes up the ladder and the one who descends do not hold hands.

Intentional meaning: Those who “have” will not share with those who “do not have”.

Mwenye kupenda ni juha, wala hana maarifa. (Syllables 8+8).

One who is in love is a fool, he knows nothing.

Intentional meaning: Affection blinds reason.

Mwenye kutafuta, hakosi kupata. (Syllables 6+6).

The one who searches will find it.

Intentional meaning: The one who searches for something will not fail to find it.

Mwenye kuumwa na nyoka, akiona ung'ongo hustuka.

One who was bitten by a snake, is startled even when he sees a strip of a palm-leaf.

Intentional meaning: We tend to avoid persons and places where we met with trouble.

Mwenye macho, haambiwi tazama.

One who has eyes (one who can see) is not told to look.

Intentional meaning: If you are competent in a subject you will also be able to deal with the matter yourself.

Mwenye meno, huweza kucheka.

If you have sound teeth, you will have a broad smile.

Intentional meaning: If you are rich do not be afraid to show it.

Mwenye ndimi mbili, hula na miwili.

He that has two tongues eats with two hands.

Intentional meaning: A dishonest man is usually successful. He will “have his hand in many pies.”

Mwenye nguvu, mpishe.

Let a strong man pass.

Intentional meaning: You cannot resist a person stronger than you. You should live and work within your limits.

Mwenye njaa, hana miiko. (Syllables 5+5).

A hungry man does not observe taboos.

Mwiko/miiko is something which is forbidden by tradition or by religious practice.

Intentional meaning: A person is likely to accept or do anything in order to survive.

Mwenye pupa, hadiriki kula tamu.

A hasty person (who cannot wait for the fruit to ripen) does not get to eat the sweet ones.

Intentional meaning: If you do things in a hurry you are likely to go wrong.

Mwenye shibe, hajui mwenye njaa.

A well-fed person does not know the needs of a hungry one.

Intentional meaning: This proverb teaches us to share our wealth with the less fortunate.

Mwenye shida ya joto, ndiye anayekoka moto.

He who needs warmth, lights a fire.

Intentional meaning: If you need help, you will also have to find means of getting it.

Mwenye shoka, hakosi kuni.

One who owns an axe, does not lack firewood

Intentional meaning: If you have a profession or have learnt a trade you will have to succeed.

Mwenye tumbo, ni tumbole, angefunga mkaja.

She who is pregnant, is pregnant, even if she wraps herself in a *mkaja*.

Mkaja is a cloth worn by women round the stomach after giving birth to a child.

Intentional meaning: We are usually at a disadvantage, if we pretend to be what we are not, if we try to hide what has already leaked out.

Mwenzamba, mmoja humwacha.

He who has two comrades, will leave one aside.

Intentional meaning: Opt for the one way and the one destination.

Mwenzako akinyolewa, wewe tia maji.

When your companion is being shaved, you too put water (be prepared to be shaved, too).

Intentional meaning: If you see your neighbour or your neighbouring country in trouble, be prepared for the same.

Mwenzokupata bahati, silale (usilale) mlango wazi. (Syllables 8+8).

When your friend gets a stroke of luck, do not go to sleep with an open door.

Intentional meaning: It is not advisable to be near to the wealthy or those in power. When they get into trouble, your turn will follow.

Mwenzowakinyowa, kichwa chako nawa. (Syllables 6+6).

When they shave your friend, wash your head.

Intentional meaning: Be ready for trouble when it happens to your neighbour.

Mwewe hadhuriwi, na dua la kuku. (Syllables 6+6).

A kite is not harmed by a hen's curse.

Intentional meaning: When a kite takes a chicken, a hen cannot resist. "Might is right."

Mwezi na mtembezi, kiza na mwizi.

Moon and traveller, darkness and thief.

A traveller needs the moon, a thief needs darkness.

Intentional meaning: An honest person has nothing to hide.

Mwezi ukitokea, nyota zitapotea. (Syllables 7+7).

When the moon appears, the stars disappear.

Intentional meaning: When one item goes to an end a better one awaits you.

Mwiba wa kujitoma, hauambiwi pole.

A thorn that pierces itself is not pitied.

Intentional meaning: If one fortunate item ends another one waits for you.

Mwili wa mwenzio, ni kando ya mwilio (mwili wako).

Your companion's body is next to yours (far from yours).

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who has no feeling for the troubles and difficulties of others.

Mwindaji hawezi kupumzika, ila baada ya kupika.

The hunter cannot rest, until after the cooking.

Intentional meaning: An hardworking person does not rest until his work is complete.

Mwizi huenda na mwizi, mlevi na walevi.

A thief goes with thieves, a drunkard with drunkards.

Intentional meaning: People who share similar views keep together.

Mwizi hushikwa na mwizi mwenziwe.

A thief is caught by a fellow thief.

Intentional meaning: If we wish to implement a task, we should employ a person who is familiar with the matter.

Mwizi, siku zake ni arobaini (saba).

The days of a thief are just forty.

Intentional meaning: You will not get off with dishonesty in the long run.

Mwogopa mwana kulia, ye (yeye) mwenyewe atalia.

The father who is afraid that his child will cry will cry himself.

Intentional meaning: If you are lenient with your children they may go astray.

Mwomba chumvi, huombea chunguche (chungu chake).

He who asks for salt, does so for his own cooking pot.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who follows his own interest and exploits the community.

Mwosha, hadhuru maiti.

The washer of corpses, does no harm to the deceased.

Intentional meaning: A person who knows the secrets of another, does not make them public.

Mwosha huoshwa.

The corpse-washer is washed in his turn.

Intentional meaning: If you help others, they will help you in return.

Mwungwana akivuliwa nguo, huotama.

A gentleman, robbed of his clothes, will crouch down.

Intentional meaning: A person should be able to maintain his respect even in unpleasant situations.

Mwungwana (ni) kalima.

A lady, a gentleman is a statement.

Intentional meaning: You are as much worth as your word.

Mzaha, mzaha, hutumbuka usaha.

Joke, joke, discharges pus.

Do not dismiss even a small scratch, as if it were nothing. It may go bad.

Intentional meaning: Do not ignore minor defects in your personal life.

Mzigo wa chungu, chembe cha mchele. (Syllables 6+6).

A grain of rice is a heavy load for an ant.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person of humble origin who has attained success in life. He has reason to be happy and proud of it.

Mzigo wa mwenzio, ni kanda la usufi. (Syllables 7+7).

Your companion's burden is no more than a load of kapok to you.

Intentional meaning: You do not feel the difficulties others encounter.

Mzika pembe, ndiye mzua pembe.

The one who buries ivory is the one to dig it up again.

Intentional meaning: A person who is familiar with a subject matter will also be able to explain it. This may refer to a teacher, a professional or an artisan.

Mzoea kunyonga, kuchinja hawezi.

He who is used to strangle, cannot slaughter.

Intentional meaning: A person who is used to get what he needs the easy way, will not make an effort to work hard.

Mzoea punda, hapandi farasi. (Syllables 6+6).

One who is accustomed to ride on a donkey, will not ride on a horse.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who has grown up in humble circumstances but lost his bearings when encountered with prosperity.

Mzoea twaa, kutoa ni vita. (Syllables 6+6).

For one who is used to receive, giving is war.

One who is used to receive gifts from others, finds it difficult to donate anything to anyone.
Intentional meaning: It is advisable to give and take, to take and give.

Mzoea udalali, duka haliwezi.

He who is used to auctioning, will find it difficult to run a shop.

Intentional meaning: An expert in one subject matter need not be an expert in another.

Mzungu wa kula, haufundishwi mwana.

The process of eating is not taught to a child.

Intentional meaning: Many matters are obvious in life.

Na tuone ndipo twambe, kusikia si kuona. (Syllables 8+8).

Let us see first and then speak; hearing is not seeing.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who has the habit of making known matters which he has not scrutinized if they are true or not.

Nazi haishindani na jiwe.

A coconut is not stronger than a stone.

A stone is sometimes used to open the husk and to break a coconut shell.

Intentional meaning: You cannot withstand those in power.

Nazi mbovu, harabu ya nzima.

A rotten coconut placed in a heap spoils the wholesome ones.

Intentional meaning: The influence of one evil person in society can be detrimental to all.

Ncha na ncha, hazichomani. (Syllables 5+5).

Two (sharp) points do not stab one another.

Intentional meaning: Even if brothers and sisters quarrel, they do keep together.

Nchi hunywa maji.

The earth drinks all the water.

Intentional meaning: Words are like water, once spoken they never return.

Ndege hulindwa, mke halindwi²⁰². (Syllables 5+5).

A bird can be guarded (in a cage), a wife not.

Intentional meaning: A pretty wife can easily be a prey to lovers.

Ndege mjanja, hunaswa na tundu bovu.

Even a shrewd bird can be trapped in a spoilt cage.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to beware of those who may mislead you.

Ndege mwiga, hana mazowea.

A bird that imitates others does not get used to a place of its own.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who lives in a foreign place and is obliged to follow the customs there.

²⁰² This is one of the cynical proverbs in Kiswahili.

Ndimi arobaini, mafumo arobaini.

Forty tongues, forty (broad tipped) spears.

Intentional meaning: When people get together, you have to reckon with conflicts.

Ndiwe ulotia²⁰³ (uliotia) moto, sasa moshi umo moto²⁰⁴. (Syllables 8+8).

You started the fire, now you have smoke in your eyes.

Intentional meaning: If you ask for trouble you will also get it.

Ndovu halemewi na pembe zake.

The elephant is not weighed down by his own tusks.

On the contrary the elephant wears his tusks proudly.

Intentional meaning: Persevere even when difficulties arise.

Ndovu wanapopambana, ni nyasi zinazoteswa. (Syllables 8+8).

When elephants fight, it is the grass which is trampled.

Intentional meaning: Wenn two persons quarrel a third person suffers. This proverb refers to children whose parents quarrel or civilians who are affected by war.

Ndovu wawili wakisongana, ziumiazo ni nyika.

When two elephants push one another, what suffers is the grass.

Intentional meaning: Wenn two persons quarrel a third person suffers. This proverb refers to children whose parents quarrel or civilians who are affected by war.

Ndugu chungu, jirani mkungu.

A brother is as useful as a cooking pot, and a neighbour is as useful as a cooking pot lid.

Intentional meaning: You are closer to your brother than to your neighbour.

Ndugu mwui²⁰⁵, afadhali kuwa naye.

A bad brother is better than no brother.

Intentional meaning: Keep close to your brothers and sisters even if you disagree.

Neno la mbali, ni usiku wa giza.

A distant word is darkness of night.

Vague words with no commitment resemble the darkness of the night.

Intentional meaning: Things which are postponed, are lost.

Neno ulikataalo, ndilo Mungu apendalo. (Syllables 8+8).

A word which you reject, is exactly that one which God loves.

The Waswahili believe in pre-destination, *Kudura Allah*.

Intentional meaning: It is difficult to understand God's ways.

Ngoja! Ngoja! huumiza matumbo.

²⁰³ One syllable is reduced.

²⁰⁴ “Mato”, instead of “macho”, rhymes with “moto”.

²⁰⁵ “Ua” means “to kill”, “mwui” is “one who kills”.

Wait for a minute! Wait for a minute! harms the stomach.
Intentional meaning: Do not keep things pending.

Ngoma ikivuma, hupasuka.
If the drum sounds loud it bursts.
If the drum sounds loud, one day, it is bound to burst.
Intentional meaning: Do not overstrain yourself.

Ngoma ivumayo, haidumu.
A drum which is beaten loud, does not last long.
Intentional meaning: Do not overstrain yourself.

Ngoma ivumayo haikawii kupasuka.
A drum which is beaten loud bursts soon.
Intentional meaning: Do not overstrain yourself.

Ng'ombe akivunjika guu hukimbilia zizini. (Syllables 8+8).
If (when) a cow gets its leg broken, it returns to the cowshed.
Intentional meaning: We usually think back of home when trouble arises.

Ng'ombe haelemewi na nunduye.
A cow is not overburdened by its own hump.
Intentional meaning: Difficulties are bound to come your way. Persevere. You will find a way out.

Ng'ombe na mbuzi ni mmoja, kondoo ni mtu mbali (or mtu kando ni kondoo).
Cows and goats are similar. Sheep are different.
Cows and goats have horns. Sheep not.
Intentional meaning: Wealthy people and those in power protect one another. The common man stands alone and unprotected.

Ng'ombe wa maskini, hazai mapacha. (Syllables 6+6).
The cow of a poor person does not bear twins.
A poor person usually does not own a cow.
Intentional meaning: The poor remain poor and the rich get richer.

Ngozi ivute imaji.
Stretch hide while it is still fresh.
Make hay while the sun shines.
Intentional meaning: Take advantage of a profitable situation.

Nguo za kuazima, hazisitiri matakoto.
Borrowed clothes do not hide the buttocks.
If the owner demands back the clothes you borrowed from him, you will have to go naked.
Intentional meaning: Do not depend on others for your needs.

Nguruwe aendalo, ndilo atendalo.

The way a pig goes, so too does he behave.

Intentional meaning: “Pig” is a negative reference for a Muslim Mswahili. In a general context this proverb refers to the fact that we cannot jump across our own shadow.

Nguvu ya kulungu, imo miguuni. (Syllables 6+6).

The strength of the antelope is in its legs.

Intentional meaning: God has given us the ability to maintain ourselves.

Ni heri mbichi, kama ya kwoka²⁰⁶. (Syllables 6+6).

Better raw than over-cooked or burnt.

Intentional meaning: Better something than nothing. It is better to have a small income which we have earned honestly than to have enormous sums from illegal sources.

Ni heri yazidi kama kupungua.

Better too much than too little.

Intentional meaning: This proverb probably refers to having good friends.

Ni jambo lipi, lisilo na nduguye, na mwamu wake.

Is there anything which does not have a “brother” and an “in-law?”

Intentional meaning: Whatever you may do, it is bound to have some effect on you.

Ni wachache walimaji, na wako wengi walaji. (Syllables 8+8).

The farmers are few, the eaters are many.

Intentional meaning: An individual can be of benefit to many.

Nia njema ni tabibu, nia mbaya hugaribu. (Syllables 9+9).

A good intention is like a medical doctor, an evil intention is destructive.

Intentional meaning: We may not be able to implement all our good intentions, but it is good to start a day with one.

Nifae la mvua, nikufae la jua. (Syllables 7+7).

Help me during a rainy season and I shall benefit you during the dry season.

Intentional meaning: “One hand washes another” (in a good sense).

Nifae siku ya jua, nitakufaa siku ya mvua.

Help me on a sunny day, I will be of benefit to you on a rainy day.

Intentional meaning: “One hand washes another” (in a good sense).

Nimekula asali udogoni, utamu ungali gegoni²⁰⁷.

I ate honey in my childhood, and its sweetness is still in my mouth.

Intentional meaning: Keep fond memories alive.

Nimekupaka wanja, wewe wanipaka pilipili.

I anointed you with *wanja*, you in return anoint me with red pepper.

²⁰⁶ “*ku-koka moto*” means “to make fire”.

²⁰⁷ “*Gego*” means “molar” (Backenzahn).

Wanja is used by women to blacken their eye brows.
Intentional meaning: I helped you, but you harmed me.

Njaa ya leo, ni shibe ya kesho. (Syllables 6+6).
One who has hunger today will have enough to eat tomorrow
Intentional meaning: Those who sow in tears will reap in joy.

Njia mbili zaumiza.
Two roads hurt.
One cannot follow two roads at the same time.
Intentional meaning: You will succeed if you are honest and straightforward.

Njia mbili zilimshinda fisi. (Syllables 6+6).
The hyena who followed two roads at the same time failed to reach a destination.
The hyena is considered to be a sly animal.
Intentional meaning 1: However sly you may be, you cannot hide facts for long.
Intentional meaning 2: A greedy person can not decide what to take first.

Njia ni rafiki. (Syllables 3+ni+3).
On the road you meet friends.
Intentional meaning: Keep in contact with with “people”. They will assist you in your daily tasks.

Njia ya mwongo fupi.
The path of a liar is short.
Intentional meaning: You cannot fool too many people for too long.

Njia ya siku zote haina alama.
A regular path has (needs) no signpost.
Intentional meaning: Keep on the safe side. Avoid conflicts and risks.

Nyama ya usiku, haina mafuta (or hainoni). (Syllables 6+6).
Meat of the night has no fat.²⁰⁸
Intentional meaning: You should know what you acquire and with whom you associate.

Nyani haoni kundule²⁰⁹, huliona la mwenziwe. (Syllables 8+8).
An ape (a baboon) does not see its own backside, but that of another.
Intentional meaning: Some people do not notice their own faults but those of others.

Nyoka, mlinzi wa pango lake.
A snake guards his own hole.
Intentional meaning: Keep to your ambience.

Nyota haionekani mchana.

²⁰⁸ Needs a more suitable translation.

²⁰⁹ Mkundu wake

A star cannot be seen in daytime.

Intentional meaning: Every item in life has its due place and its due time.

Nyumba haifugwi nyoka, kwanza umwambie toka. (Syllables 9+9).

A snake is not reared in a home. Order him to get out.

The snake has a split tongue. It is a symbol of a liar and intriguer.

Intentional meaning: Avoid contacts with people who are likely to harm you.

Nyumba haikimbii.

A home does not run away.

Intentional meaning: The doors of your home are always open to you even if you had turned your back to it.

Nyumba ulaliapo, huijua ichujapo. (Syllables 8+8).

In the house where you sleep, you also know where it leaks.

Intentional meaning: We understand certain items in life better if we experience them personally.

Nyumba usiyolala ndani huijui ila yake.

You cannot know the defects of a house you have not slept in.

Intentional meaning 1: We get to know a person better after a long contact with him.

Intentional meaning 2: We understand the needs of others if we experience them ourself.

Nyumba ya simba, haiingii ila simba.

Only a lion enters a lion's den.

Intentional meaning: Keep to the place and status which is accorded to you.

Nyumba ya udongo, haihimili vishindo.

A mud hut cannot withstand great shocks.

Intentional meaning: If you are weak and timid you will not get through life.

Nyuni ndogo, kitundu kidogo.

A little bird for a small cage.

Intentional meaning: Keep to your status and means. Do not go beyond that.

Nzi (also inzi) kufa juu ya kidonda, si haramu.

There is nothing wrong, if a fly dies on a sore.

It is its own fault if a fly rests on a sore and dies there.

Intentional meaning: Keep away from ill deeds. You may get into trouble.

Nzi kufia tuini, si hasara.

It's no loss (to anyone), if a fly drowns in a sweet coconut drink.

It is better for a fly to die in a sweet coconut drink, than to live in filth.

Intentional meaning: It is better to accept some humiliations and to live a comfortable life, than to be proud and live in dire poverty.

Pabaya pako, si pema pa mwenzako.

Your own bad place is bad, that of your companion's is no better.

Intentional meaning: It will do you no good to seek comfort somewhere else that in your own home.

Padogo pako, si pakubwa pa mwenzako.

Your own small place is not as big as that of your companion.

Intentional meaning: Your own home, however humble, is the best place for you.

Painamapo, ndipo painukapo.

Where it slopes down, is where it slopes up.

Intentional meaning: Joy and sorrow are common in life.

Paka hakubali kulala chali.

A cat can never be made to lie on its back.

Intentional meaning: It is not advisable to force someone to act contrary to his own convictions.

Paka hapendi matama, matashi yake ni nyama. (Syllables 8+8).

A cat does not like millet his desire is meat.

Intentional meaning: Give each one his own dues.

Paka wa nyumba, haingwa²¹⁰.

A cat belonging to the house is not chased away.

Intentional meaning: Keep in close contact with your parents, brothers and sisters.

Palipo na kuku, simwagi mpunga. (Syllables 6+6).

Where there are chickens, I do not spill rice.

Intentional meaning: Speak only in the company of those who are entitled to listen.

Palipo na wengi ndipo pana (maneno) mengi.

Where there are many people, there are also many words.

Intentional meaning: We have to reckon with controversy in a public meeting.

Panapo wengi, hapaharibiki neno.

Where there are many, no word is destroyed (lost).

Where there are many people, nothing goes wrong.

Intentional meaning: A council helps to find the right solution.

Pao kwa pao, kamba hukata jiwe.

Constant rubbing of a rope will cut a stone.

Intentional meaning: If you keep on repeating something, even if it be a lie, you are likely to get your way.

Pema usijapo, pema; ukipema, si pema tena.

²¹⁰ “Winga” means “to chase”.

A good place you don't go to, is a good place; if you go there too often, it isn't a good place any longer.

Intentional meaning: Familiarity breeds contempt.

Penye dhiki, hakuna chuki.

Where there is suffering there cannot be hatred.

Intentional meaning: When you see someone in trouble, you should forget all existing ill feelings.

Penye kuku wengi, usimwage mtama.

Where there are many fowls, do not scatter millet.

Intentional meaning: Speak only in the company of those who are entitled to listen.

Penye mafundi, hapakosi wanafunzi.

Where there are experts, there will be no lack of students seeking knowledge.

Intentional meaning: A good teacher has good students.

Penye mawimbi, ndipo penye mlango²¹¹. (*Syllables 5+ndipo+5*).

Where there are many strong waves, land is near.

Intentional meaning: When difficulties arise, be sure that some solution is near.

Penye mbaya wako, hapakosi mwema wako.

Where you have an enemy, you will also surely find a friend.

Intentional meaning: Every cloud has a silver lining.

Penye nia ipo njia.

Intentional meaning: Where there is a will, there is a way.

Penye udhia, ndipo penye rupia.

Where there is trouble, that is the place for a rupee.

Rupia is a demonination of Indian currency which was in use in Tanganyika, especially in Zanzibar.

Intentional meaning: Money can assist to solve problems, both legally and illegally

Penye urembo, ndipo penye urimbo²¹². (*Syllables 5+ndipo+5*).

Where there is beauty, there is also a catch.

Intentional meaning: Beware of traps and baits.

Penye wazee, haliharibiki neno (no word is lost).

Where there are old people, the word is not destroyed.

Intentional meaning: The company of elderly people is (usually) safe.

Penye wengi, pana (maneno) mengi. (*Syllables 4+4*).

Where there are many people present, there is also much talk.

²¹¹ „Mlango“ does not refer to the door of a house, but to a port.

²¹² „Ulimbo“ means „glue“.

Intentional meaning: Enjoy good company.

Penye wengi, pana Mungu. (Syllables 4+4).

Where there are many people, God is there.

Intentional meaning: A community living in communal peace enjoys God's blessing.

Pesa na zawadi hufanya miadi. (Syllables 6+6).

Money and presents make commitments.

Intentional meaning: If you accept a gift you have to reckon with obligations in return.

Pilipili usiyoilala, yakuwashiani (yakuwashia nini)?

How can you feel the pungent taste of red pepper which you have not eaten.

Intentional meaning 1: Keep at a reasonable distance from matters which do not concern you. They may turn out to be like hot peppers..

Intentional meaning 2: How can you know the needs of others, if you keep aloof of them.

Pofu hasahau, mkonjo wake.

A blind person does not forget his walking stick.

Intentional meaning: We should know our limits.

Pungu huenda mbio, mbinguni hafikili.

Even if an eagle flies high, it cannot reach the clouds.

Intentional meaning: Our achievement has its limits.

Punge moja ya mtama, ni bora kuliko almasi.

A grain of millet is better than a diamond.

Intentional meaning: Wealth alone does not make us happy.

Pwagu²¹³ hupata pwaguzi.

A thief catches an even more notorious thief.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person to claims to be competent in a matter but is betrayed when the really competent person arrives.

Radhi ni bora, kuliko mali. (Syllables 5+5).

Blessings are better than wealth.

Intentional meaning: Respect others and live in peace with them.

Radhi ya jogoo, yampamba koo. (Syllables 6+6)

The pleasure of a cock makes the hen beautiful.

Intentional meaning: Man and woman compliment one another.

Rahisi inavunja upesi.

Cheap items are ruined soon.

Intentional meaning: Take your time and do things thoroughly.

²¹³ „Pwagu/ma-“, means „a cheat“.

Riziki ya wagama-tembo, mikononi mwa walevi.

The income of the wine-tapsters is in the hand of the drunkards.

Intentional meaning 1: The loss of one may contribute to the income of another.

Intentional meaning 2: Do not waste your income on void pleasures.

Saa haingoji mfalme.

Time does not wait for a king.

“Saa”, the “hour” is the appointed time of death. The angel appointed for this task is *Nduli* in Kiswahili, *Azra'il* in Arabic. This angel is the “*mtwaa-roho*”, the “Taker of Souls” who knows no delay.

Intentional meaning: No one can escape or delay death.

Saburi ni ufunguo wa faraja.

Intentional meaning: Patience is the key to relief.

Sahani ukifunika, kilichomo husirika.

If you cover a plate, its contents remain secret.

Intentional meaning: Do not wash your laundry in public.

Samaki akioza, ni mtungo pia.

If just one fish is bad, all the fish on the string will follow.

Small fishes are bundled together with a string which is passed through their necks. Such a bundle, called *utungo*, is offered for sale.

Intentional meaning: One person can influence a whole group of persons.

Samaki huanza kuoza kichwani. (Syllables 6+6).

A fish begins to rot at its head.

Intentional meaning: Corrupt leaders ruin the state, religious institutions and society in general.

Shauri baraka.

A good advice is a blessing.

Intentional meaning: Make a note of the good advice given to you.

Shibe ya mtu mwingine hanilazi mnene.

The satisfaction of someone else does not send me to bed well-fed.

Intentional meaning: Give priority to your own needs. “Charity begins at home.”

Shibe ya nguo, ni kilemba.

The finishing touch for good clothes is the turban.

Intentional meaning: Complete whatever you undertake to the last detail.

Shika! shika!, na mwenyewe nyuma.

Hold! Hold! He himself stands behind.

You give orders and stand idle.

Intentional meaning: Do not expect others to do all the work for you.

Shimo la ulimi mkono haufutiki²¹⁴.

A pit dug by the tongue, cannot be covered up by the hand.

Intentional meaning: You can achieve more by the spoken or written word, than with the force of your arm or with a weapon.

Shoka husahau, mti hausahau.

The axe forgets, the tree does not.

You may forgive, but you can never forget.

Intentional meaning: It refers to children who have been punished unjustly by their parents, to persons who have been unjustly offended and to those who have experienced injustice and cruelty.

Shoka lisilo mpini halichanji kuni.

An axe with no handle does not split firewood.

Intentional meaning: You need a qualified person for a particular task.

Shusha nguo na sitara.

Let down the dress and the veil.

Intentional meaning: Be honest and frank.

Si kila mwenye makucha, huwa simba.

Not every being (creature) which has claws is a lion.

Intentional meaning: If one claims to be competent for a task, he should also prove it.

Sikio halilali na njaa.

An ear does not go to bed hungry.

Intentional meaning: There is always something to gossip about.

Sikio halipiti kichwa.

An ear does not surpass the head.

Intentional meaning: One should not try to be cleverer than those who know better.

Sikio la kufa, halisikii dawa.

A dying ear does not feel the medicine.

Medicine cannot help a deaf ear.

Intentional meaning 1: Once your reputation is ruined, it can never be replaced.

Intentional meaning 2: "What cannot be cured must be endured".

Siku moja utapata kilango cha jaha.

One day you will find a lucky star.

The Waswahili believe that a star named "Jaha" brings good luck to a person who sees (discovers) it. "Kilango" is a tiny opening in the roof which enables the residents to observe the stars in the sky.

Intentional meaning: You, too, will find your way to prosperity - someday.

²¹⁴ „Futa“ means „erase, wipe off“.

Siku njema, huonekana asubuhi.

A good day is evident (already) in the morning.

Intentional meaning: “Tomorrow starts today.”

Siku utakayokwenda uchi, ndiyo siku utakayokutana na mkweo.

The day you go naked, is the day you will meet your father/mother-in-law.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who led a sincere life but got into trouble owing to a single false step.

Simba mwenda kimya, ndiye mla nyama. (Syllables 6+6).

The lion which moves silently, is the one that eats meat.

Intentional meaning: Persons who appear to be inconspicuous may be of harm to you.

Simbiko haisimbuki, ila kwa msukosuko. (Syllables 8+8).

A thing that is firmly fixed cannot be dislodged, except by pushing it constantly.

Intentional meaning 1: Troublemakers must be eliminated by force.

Intentional meaning 2: Dictatorship and exploitation must be eliminated by force.

Simpandi punda, asiye na mtandiko.

I do not ride a donkey which has no saddle.

Intentional meaning: Consider well what you do.

Sirudishe tende Manga²¹⁵.

Do not send dates back to Manga.

Intentional meaning: Avoid meaningless work.

Sisi ni chanda na pete. (Syllables 2+ni+2+na+2).

We keep together like a finger and its ring.

Intentional meaning: We are close and constant friends.

Sitafuga ndwele, na waganga wengi.

I shall not suffer illness, while there are many doctors (near me).

Intentional meaning: Even in dire situations help is near at hand.

Sitaki kupigwa na yangu.

I do not want to be beaten by my own (money).

Intentional meaning: If you lend money, you are bound to make enemies.

Subira yavuta heri (kilicho mbali).

Patience draws near happiness (which is far away)

Intentional meaning: It is worth being patient.

Suluhu hawi, ila kwa mikuki.

Peace does not come except with spears.

Intentional meaning: “Fight for your rights.”

²¹⁵ „Manga“ is a name for Arabia, especially in the region of Muscat.

Sumu ya neno, ni neno. (Syllables 2+ya+2+ni+2).

The poison of a word is a word.

Intentional meaning: Resist force with force.

Tai wameona mfu.

The vultures have seen a corpse.

Intentional meaning: Trouble is ahead of you.

Tamaa mbele(ni), mauti nyuma(ni). (Syllables 5+5).

Desire first, death afterwards.

Intentional meaning: Be careful before taking risks. Do not desire too much.

Tamu tulikula sote, na uchungu vumilia. (Syllables 8+8).

We have all eaten sweet things. We should also be able to bear the bitter ones.

Intentional meaning: Take life as it comes, for better and for worse.

Taratibu ndiyo mwendo. (Syllables 4+4).

Being careful is speed.

Intentional meaning: Be careful and you will reach your destination soon.

Tawala ngumi, linda ulimi. (Syllables 5+5).

Control your fists, guard your tongue.

Intentional meaning: Avoid violence, avoid gossip.

Teke la kuku, halimwumizi mwanawe.

A hen's kick does not hurt her chick.

Intentional meaning: If the one who loves you happens to insult you, you will forget it soon.

Tembo hashindwi na mkonga wake.

An elephant will not be overpowered by his own trunk.

Intentional meaning: Family members keep together even if they disagree occasionally.

Tongo²¹⁶ hasahau fimbo yake.

The blind man does not forget his stick.

Intentional meaning: Avoid taking risks.

Tulingane sawasawa, kama sahani na kawa. (Syllables 8+8).

We shall keep together like a plate and its cover.

The conical shaped cover *kawa* is used to protect the food from flies.

Intentional meaning: Friends do not part, they hold together.

Tumbiri kukosa bungo, alisema: Li utungu (uchungu, chungu). (Syllables 8+8).

When the monkey missed to get the *bungo*-fruit, he said, "It is bitter".

²¹⁶ „Tongo“ means „discharge from the eyes“. „Chongo“ means a “one-eyed person”.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to lame excuses.

Tunza shamba lako tutatunza shamba letu.

Take care of your field. We shall take care of ours.

Intentional meaning: We should not meddle with other people's lives and affairs.

Ubaya, hatima yake mbaya.

The end of evil, is an evil person.

Intentional meaning: If you do harm to others you will finally ruin your own life.

Ubishi mwingi, huvuta matata.

Controversial discussions create problems.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to persons who like to question everything.

Uchesi wa mtoto, ni anga la nyumba.

The laughter of a child lights up the house.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to the joy of having children in marriage.

Uchungu wa mwana, aujua mzazi.

The labour of childbirth is known to the mother.

Intentional meaning: Each one knows his own difficulties and problems.

Uchwelewapo na jua lala pale.

When (If) you are surprised by the sunset, sleep right there.

Intentional meaning: If you are taken by surprise by something you did not expect, do not despair.

Udongo upatilize (ukande), uli maji.

Work the clay while it is still wet.

Make hay while the sun shines.

Intentional meaning: Take advantage of the good possibilities at your disposal.

Udongo uwahi, ungali maji.

Work the clay while it is still wet.

Intentional meaning: Take advantage of the good possibilities at your disposal.

Udugu wa nazi, hukutania chunguni.

The brotherhood of coconuts is met in the cooking pot.

Slices of the fruit from different coconuts get together when put into a cooking pot.

Intentional meaning: People of different origin (with different ideologies and opinions) attempt to co-operate when it is already too late.

Uji moto, hauzimi kwa ncha ya ulimi.

Hot soup is not cooled with the tip of the tongue.

Intentional meaning: Be cautious about items which or persons who may cause you harm

Ukamba hukatika pabovu.

The rope breaks at a rotten place.

Intentional meaning 1: The weak point of a person's character is usually the reason for his downfall.

Intentional meaning 2: The poor and underprivileged are usually the source of social unrest.

Ukienda kwa mwenye chongo, nawe fumba jicho.

If you go to the home of an one-eyed person, shut one eye.

Intentional meaning: It is not advisable to show off your status or higher education, when you are in the company of less privileged people.

Ukienda kwa wenye chongo, vunja lako jicho.

When you are among one-eyed people, pull out your own eye.

Intentional meaning: It is not advisable to show off your status or higher education, when you are in the company of less privileged people.

Ukifunga kinywa, nzi hakiingii.

If you shut your mouth flies will not get in.

Flies are a symbol of bad words.

Intentional meaning: If you restrain your talk to a minimum you are likely to avoid trouble.

Ukikosa titi la mama, hata la mbwa huamwa²¹⁷.

If you lacked your mother's breast, you will suck even that of a bitch.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to the value of a good home education.

Ukila na kipofu sahani moja, usimguse vyanda.

If you eat from one plate with a blind person, do not touch his fingers.

If you do so, he may have the feeling that someone is preventing him from eating.

In traditional Swahili society the male members of the family and the male guests eat from one plate.

Intentional meaning: (Knappert) If you have an affair with another person's wife, make sure that you get near to her husband.

Ukiona kwako kunaungua kwa mwenzako kunateketea.

If you find your house is on fire, you may be sure that your neighbour's house is burning much more.

Intentional meaning: This proverb is used to comfort people in trouble saying that others may be in a worse situation.

Ukiona neno, usiposema neno, hupatikani na neno.

If you see something and say nothing, you will not be caught by the word.

Intentional meaning: If you see something and say nothing, you will have no trouble.

Ukiona neno, usiseme neno. (Syllables 6+6).

If you see something, say nothing.

²¹⁷ „Nyonya“ means „suck“, „lamba“ means „lick“.

Intentional meaning: There is no need to comment on everything you see.

Ukipewa shibiri²¹⁸, usichukue pima. (Syllables 7+7).

If you are offered a span, do not take a couple of yards.

Intentional meaning: It is advisable to be modest in your needs and demands.

Ukitaja nyoka, shika kigongo (fimbo) mkononi.

When you mention a snake, have a stick ready in your hand.

Intentional meaning:

Ukitaka cha mvunguni, sharti uiname.

If you want something which is under the bed you must bend low.

In some Waswahili homes it is customary to store personal effects in boxes and place them under the bed.

Intentional meaning: If you need help from others, you should request for it in a polite manner. If you want to keep your employment you will have to (be humble and) follow the directives of your employer.

Ukitaka kula nguruwe, chagua aliyenona.

If you want to eat pork, choose a pig which is fat.

Intentional meaning: If you want to make (dirty) money, do it the big way.

Ukitaka kula wali, vumilia jua kali. (Syllables 8+8).

If you want to eat rice, endure the hot sun.

Intentional meaning: “Earn your bread by the sweat of your brow.”

Ukitaka kusafiri, ngoja pwani kwa bahari.

If you want to travel, wait on the sea coast.

Intentional meaning: Take advantage of the good opportunities at your disposal.

Ukitaka nyumba njema, utie msingi mwema. (Syllables 8+8).

If you want a peaceful home, lay a good foundation.

Intentional meaning: Avoid conflicts.

Ukitamani amani, ukae kwako nyumbani. Raha tafuta moyoni, furaha upate ndani. (Syllables 8+8+8+8).

If you desire peace, stay at home. Look for happiness in your heart, so you may have joy inside.

Intentional meaning: Avoid conflicts.

Ukiujua (upande) huu, huu²¹⁹ huujuu.

If you know this side, you do not know this.

²¹⁸ „Shibiri“ is a span from the outstretched thumb to the outstretched little finger, about nine inches.

²¹⁹ Perhaps „upande ule“ meanibng „that side“.

Intentional meaning: You cannot know everything. Consult others in matters you do not know.

Ukiviona vyaelea (vyaolea) vimeundwa.

When you see vessels passing on the ocean, remember that someone has constructed them.

Intentional meaning: It is good to admire what others have done. It is better to construct something yourself.

Ukiwa na mali, hukosi amani. (Syllables 6+6).

If you have money you will not lack peace.

Intentional meaning: Money will not make you happy, but it may calm you.

Ukoo wa chui, haukosi marangirangi.

A leopard never lacks its colours.

Intentional meaning: You cannot deny your identity (*Usually used in a negative sense*).

Ukubwa ni jaa.

A person in a high position is a dustbin.

Intentional meaning: A person in a high position must be prepared to listen to complaints and accept criticism.

Ukuu si pembe, kama mtu ataota.

High status is not a horn, (not) like a human being who grows.

Intentional meaning: High status has to be acquired by hard work.

Ukuukuu wa kamba, si upya wa ukambaa.

A worn out coir-rope is better than a new rope made from raffia.

Intentional meaning: Do not run after novelties.

Ulimi hauna mfupa.

The tongue has no bone.

The tongue can be twisted in any direction.

Intentional meaning: You can speak the truth and also tell lies with the same tongue.

Ulimi unauma kuliko meno.

The tongue hurts more than the teeth.

Intentional meaning: The spoken word can cause more harm than a wound from a bite.

Ulipendalo hupati, hupata ujaliwalo. (Syllables 8+8).

You do not always get what you desire, you will get what is destined for you.

The Waswahili believe in pre-destination, i.e. *Kudura Allah*.

Intentional meaning: You will get what God has destined for you.

Ulipopika (better: upikapo) samaki, huachi kunuka vumba. (Syllables 8+8).

If you cook fish you will smell of it.

Intentional meaning: Each one is responsible for his own life.

Ulivyoligema utalinywa.

The way you have tapped the palm wine, you will also have to drink it.

Intentional meaning: You will have to bear responsibility for what you have done.

Umejigeuza pweza, unajipalia makaa? (Syllables 8+8).

Have you changed into a cuttle-fish, that you heap live embers on yourself?

Intentional meaning: If you ask for trouble you will also get it.

Umwepuke, mwenda-pweke. (Syllables 4+4).

Avoid a solitary person.

“Solitary” also refers here to an elephant or a buffalo who can be very aggressive when they are alone.

Intentional meaning: It is difficult to foresee trouble.

Una(po)gombana na wakwezi, nazi imeliwa na mwezi (mwizi).

While you quarrel with the one who knocks down coconuts, a thief has already eaten (stolen) them.

Intentional meaning: When two persons quarrel a third person profits.

Unamlaumu mwewe, kipanga yuwasha²²⁰ kuku.

You are blaming the hawk, while the falcon is killing the chickens.

Intentional meaning: The common man is usually punished for petty crimes while those in office get off with major ones.

Ungalijua alacho nyuki, usingalionja asali.

Had you known what bees eat, you would not have wanted to taste honey.

Intentional meaning: “Ignorance is bliss.”

Uniponye kwa jua, nitakuponya kwa mvua.

If you protect me from the sun, I shall protect you from the rain.

Intentional meaning: “One hand washes another.” (In a positive sense).

Upaa wa kanga u mdogo hauchukui mzigo.

The head of a guinea fowl is small. It does not carry a load.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who has accepted a responsibility he is not able to bear.

Upishi ni kuni.

Cooking is firewood.

One needs firewood for cooking. One needs a bait for catching fish.

Intentional meaning: Estimate your needs before you start work.

Ushikwapo, shikamana. (Syllables 4+4).

When you are held, hold on to others.

Intentional meaning 1: If someone offers you friendship, hold on.

²²⁰ “Yuwasha” is probably “yu waisha”, probably meaning “he finishes (eats) them”.

Intentional meaning 2: If you find a good place to live in, stay there.

Usiache kanaanua kwa kutega.

Do not neglect the undoing of a trap (that has caught some prey) before you set it again.

Intentional meaning: Be content with what you have, before you look for something better.

Usiache mbachao²²¹ (mbacha wako?), kwa msala upitao. (Syllables 8+8).

Never give up your own old prayer-mat for one which you see while passing by.

Intentional meaning: Do not risk something new while the present one functions.

Usicheze na simba, ukamtia mkono kinywani.

Do not play with a lion by putting your hand in its mouth.

Intentional meaning: Avoid places which could endanger your health, reputation and life.

Usifuate nzi, usije ukala mavi.

Do not follow flies lest you eat dung.

Intentional meaning: Bad friends will ruin you.

Usijifanye kuku mweupe.

Do not pretend to be a white fowl.

White fowls are rare.

Intentional meaning: Do not want to be more than that which deems your status and education.

Usile lililovunjika, usivunje lililo zima.

Do not eat (use) what is broken. Do not break what is whole.

Intentional meaning: Keep to your status and to your means.

Usimkanie vyanda vitano.

Do not deny that he has five fingers.

Intentional meaning: Do not trust anyone, he may be a thief.

Usinivike, kilemba cha ukoka.

Do not put a grass turban on my head.

A turban is usually made of fine cloth. Grass in this context is something cheap.

Intentional meaning: Do not flatter me.

Usioweza kukata, ubusu.

If you cannot cut it, then kiss it.

If you cannot beat them, join them.

Intentional meaning: If you cannot resist someone you do not appreciate, do not fight with him but look for a compromise, try to come to terms. Avoid conflicts.

Usipokuwako, na lako haliko. (Syllables 6+6).

If you are not there your share will not be there.

²²¹ „Mbacho/mi-“ means „old mat“ and „msala/mi-“, a prayer-mat used by Muslims.

Intentional meaning: If you do not co-operate you will not enjoy the benefits of the project.

Usipoziba ufa, utajenga ukuta. (Syllables 7+7).

If you do not fill up a crack in time, you will have to build a new wall.

Intentional meaning: Try and solve problems wherever you meet them. Do not postpone urgent matters.

Usisafiriye²²² nyota ya mwenzio. (Syllables 4+4).

Don't travel under another person's lucky star.

Intentional meaning 1: Keep to your own identity.

Intentional meaning 2: Do not meddle in the private affairs of others.

Usisahau ubaharia, kwa sababu ya unahodha.

Do not forget what it is to be a sailor just because you are now a captain.

Intentional meaning: If you are in high office, do not forget your humble beginnings.

Usitukane wagama, na ulevi ungalipo. (Syllables 8+8).

Speak no evil of palm-wine tapers as long as drinking continues.

Intentional meaning: Be polite to those whose help you still need.

Usitukane wakunga, na uzazi ungalipo. (Syllables 8+8).

Speak no evil of midwives while childbirth is going on.

Intentional meaning:

Usiwashe taa, nyumbani mwa kipofu.

Do not light a lamp in the house of a blind person.

Intentional meaning: Do not invest in unproductive work.

Usiyavuke maji, usiyoweza kuyaoga.

Do not cross water that is too deep for bathing.

Intentional meaning: Do not overestimate yourself.

Uso wa samaki, hausikii viungo.

The face of the fish being cooked, does not feel the spices.

The fish being cooked does not notice the spices used.

Intentional meaning: It is of no use talking to someone, who is not interested in the talk.

Uta hauui bila upote.

A bow does not kill without a string.

Intentional meaning: It is difficult to survive and succeed alone.

Utapata ujaaliwalo, hutapata ulipendalo.

You will get what is destined for you. You will not get what you desire.

The Waswahili believe in pre-destination, *Kudura Allah*.

Intentional meaning: You will get what is destined by God for you.

²²² Usifikiri naye

Uungwana haufai, bora ni ndirima²²³.

Being a gentleman does not meet one's needs, it's money which helps.

Intentional meaning: Instead of sweet words it is better to give substantial financial assistance.

Uwongo hauongoi²²⁴.

Dishonesty does not help.

Intentional meaning: A dishonest person cannot be a good leader.

Uwongo wa mwenye nyumba si ukweli wa mpita njia.

The lie of a house-holder is not equivalent to the truth of a passer-by.

Intentional meaning: What a native says is more easily accepted than that what a foreigner says, even if the statement of the foreigner is true.

Uyaamini machoyo, siamini (usiamini) masikio. (Syllables 8+8).

Believe your eyes, do not believe your ears.

Intentional meaning: The ear records what others say, the eye "interprets" what it sees.

Uzuri wa mkakasi, ndani kipande cha mti. (Syllables 8+8).

An ornament casket may be beautiful, but inside it is only a piece of wood.

The outer case of such caskets is made of metal decorated with ornaments.

Intentional meaning: The outer appearance of a person can be misleading.

Uzuri wa mkakaya ukipata maji basi. (Syllables 8+8).

The beauty of a *mkakaya*-tree (*delonix regia*) is of no value, since it only provides useless sap.

It does not provide timber.

Intentional meaning: A meaningless friendship is worth nothing.

Uzuri wa mkakaya, undani hauna kitu.

The beauty of a *mkakaya*-tree (*delonix regia*) is of no value, since it is hollow.

It does not provide timber.

Intentional meaning: A meaningless friendship is worth nothing.

Uzuri wa mke ni nguo, wa ng'ombe ni kulima.

The beauty of a woman lies in her clothes, the value of a cow in cultivating

Intentional meaning: This is one of the cynical proverbs in Kiswahili which need no comment.

Vikombe vikikaa pamoja, havina budi kugongana.

If cups are put in one place, they are bound to clatter.

²²³ What does „*ndirima*“ mean? Has it something to do with “*denar*”, a currency?

²²⁴ „*Ongoa*“ means „reform, convert, set right“.

Intentional meaning: Wherever people live in a community, you must reckon with conflicts.

Vita havina macho.

War has no eyes.

War is blind. War is brutal.

Intentional meaning: Every conflict, even in a family, could be brutal

Vita na moto, havina mato²²⁵.

War and fire are blind.

Intentional meaning: Every conflict ends up with loss on both sides.

Vita vya panga, haviamuliwi na fimbo.

A fight with swords cannot be settled with a stick.

Intentional meaning: You cannot settle a conflict with empty words.

Vita vya panzi neema (furaha) ya kunguru.

A fight between grasshoppers is a joy to crows.

Intentional meaning: When two persons quarrel, it is usually another person who profits from it.

Vyanda (original version: zanda) si sawasawa.

The fingers (of a hand) are not equal.

Intentional meaning: Children of the same family may have different characters.

Wa kuume, haukati wa kushoto.

The right hand does not cut the left one.

Intentional meaning:

Wacha kujivika, kilemba cha koka. (Syllables 6+6).

Do not put a turban of grass-stalks.

Intentional meaning: Do not listen to flattery.

Wakata kanzu, mtoto hajazaliwa.

They are sewing clothes, but the child is not yet born.

Do not count the chickens before they are hatched.

Intentional meaning: You should not rejoice over an item, before you know the results.

Wakati wa hari, watu wa gombea kisima kimoja.

In times of heat (drought) people quarrel over the one (only) well.

Intentional meaning: In times of shortage conflicts are bound to arise.

Wakisha tia chanda, watatia na mkono, wakisha tia mkono, watatia na mguu.

When one puts in a finger, one puts in one's hand. If one puts in one's hand, one puts in one's leg.

²²⁵ „Macho“ means „eyes“. „Mato“ is a version of „macho“ to rhyme with „moto“.

Intentional meaning: If you are lenient and kind, others will take advantage of you.

Walimu wawili hufundana.

Two learned persons learn from one another..

Intentional meaning: A teacher always has something to learn.

Wanao usawa gani, hakimu na baradhuli. (Syllables 8+8).

What equality is there between a wise man and a fool (idiot).

Intentional meaning: It is not worth teaching a fool.

Wapiganapo tembo, nyasi huumia.

Where elephants fight, the reeds get hurt (the grass gets trampled).

Intentional meaning: When persons holding office quarrel or fight, the common man suffers. This proverb also refers to civilians who suffer during wartime.

Waraka hauishi maneno.

A letter does not end the words.

There is more to say than what one can put into a letter.

Intentional meaning: Heartfelt feelings go deeper than the written words. Try and maintain personal contacts.

Waraka ni nusu ya kuonana.

A letter is half as good as seeing each other.

Intentional meaning: This phrase is used when saying farewell.

Watafutao, wapata.

The searchers will find.

Intentional meaning: There is a lot we can still learn.

Watatuavu, hutatua.

Intentional meaning: It is the intelligent people who find solutions.

Watu wawili hawashibi: mtaka elimu na mtaka ulimwengu.

Two persons are never satisfied. The one who wants knowledge and the one who wants the world (riches).

Intentional meaning: Learning is a life long process.

Wawili si mmoja. (Syllables 3+si+3).

Two persons are not one person.

Intentional meaning: Two persons can jointly solve a problem better than one person.

Weka siri moyoni, kunena ni kutolea.

Keep your secrets in your hearts. If you speak you would give it away.

Intentional meaning: Do not confide a secret to anyone.

Wema hauozi.

Kindness does not rot.

Intentional meaning: A good deed is not easily forgotten.

Wengi wape. (Syllables 2+2).

Give in to the majority.

Intentional meaning: “The voice of the people is the voice of God.”

Werevu mwingi, mbele kiza.

Much cunning is followed by darkness.

Intentional meaning: People whose ways are crooked will some day end in disgrace.

Wewe nifae la jua, nitakufaa la mvua.

Help me on a day of sunshine (sunny day). I will help you on a day of rain (rainy day).

Intentional meaning: “One hand washes another”. (In a positive sense.)

Wimbo huja ngomani.

A song comes during a dance.

Intentional meaning: You learn by doing. You learn from experience.

Wimbo takuja (utakuja) ngomani.

The song will come during the dance.

Intentional meaning: You learn by doing. You learn from experience.

Wimbo wa kufunzwa, haukeshi ngoma. (Syllables 6+6).

A song brought from outside, does not let a dance last overnight.

Intentional meaning: If you are pretentious your reputation will not last.

Ya kunya, haina wingu.

A sudden rain shower has no clouds.

Intentional meaning: Be prepared for all events in life.

Ya pwani yakijaa huja ndani, yakipwa huenda nje.

When the tide is in, the water comes inside. When it is out, it goes out.

Intentional meaning: The future is unpredictable. Take things as they come.

Yaliyopita, yamepita, yaliyobaki, tuyatupe. (Syllables 9+9).

What is past is past. What is left, let us throw it away.

Intentional meaning: Every day is a new start.

Yamko kuingia sahali, kutoka ni uthakili²²⁶.

It is easy to get involved in a matter, but it is hard to get out of it.

Intentional meaning: Be careful about what you say and do.

Yapitayo hayabadiliki, na yajayo hayaelimiki. (Syllables 10+10).

The past cannot be changed and the future cannot be known.

Intentional meaning: Every step in our life is predestined by God (a Swahili belief).

²²⁶ „Thakili/-“ is a situation which causes trouble, hardship, distress.

Yapitayo hugeui, wala yajayo hujui. (Syllables 8+8).

You cannot change the past nor do you know the future.

Intentional meaning: Every step in our life is predestined by God (a Swahili belief).

Yu fahali nyati na mali hapati. (Syllables 6+6)

He is a buffalo bull, but he will never be rich.

He is big and strong but has no brains.

Intentional meaning: This proverb refers to a person who has achieved nothing in life although he had good opportunities at his disposal.

Ziba ufa ukutani ukuta usianguke. (Syllables 8+8).

Fill in the crack in the wall lest the wall fall.

Intentional meaning: Confront all difficulties face to face and look for a solution.

Zito huwa pesi (nyepesi) ukilichukua. (Syllables 6+6).

A heavy burden becomes light when you bear it.

Intentional meaning: You solve your problems by confronting yourself with them.

Tamati