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# Proverbial positive psychology: can we leverage African ancient wisdom to promote flourishing?

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## ABSTRACT

A potentially fruitful approach to fostering mental health and flourishing in Africa is to leverage traditional African proverbs and maxims aligned with positive psychology themes and constructs within the framework of positive psychology interventions (PPIs). This paper explores the potential for integrating (African) proverbs into PPIs to foster well-being and flourishing among African populations. I reference specific proverbs to explore their literal, metaphorical, moral, and epistemological import and inherent values, as well as their prospective utilization in promoting positive relationships, kindness and empathy, teamwork and collaboration, gratitude, truthfulness and honesty, and patience and humility, demonstrating how proverbs hold promise for promoting flourishing in the African context. I propose the *CAPPI* (*Customization and Application of Proverbs in Positive Interventions*) framework to guide researchers and practitioners in exploring and incorporating (African) proverbs into interventions. By embracing diverse cultural perspectives, positive psychology can enhance its impact on global well-being and create a more inclusive approach to research and intervention design.

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On the basis of evidence from epidemiological surveys, previous research (e.g., Huppert, 2005; Rose, 1981; Rose et al., 2008) and more recent ones (e.g. Aerts & Boufford, 2023; Hibbard et al., 2017) have argued that the better way to minimize the prevalence of common mental disorders (e.g., depression), at the population level, in the long term, is to identify individuals with potential vulnerabilities and intervene at the general, non-clinical population level. This proposition is based on the evidence indicating that most individuals who developed mental disorders in the cumulative year were previously only languishing but vulnerable (Keyes, 2005, 2012). This is in line with the public health literature that suggests that the prevalence of common health problems (e.g., hypertension, heart failure, substance abuse etc.) in any society correlates with the prevalence of the risk factors or symptoms of the health condition in the general population (Firth et al., 2019). To this end, a wealth of literature has highlighted the limitations of the deficit-focused model (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994) and demonstrated the theoretical and practical values in promoting human strengths and virtues, by generating evidence from empirical research and translating it into activities

and programs to promote the mental health and well-being of both general and clinical population groups (Botvin & Griffin, 2015). A cogent approach to promoting public mental health and reducing the incidence of mental disorders in the general population is to leverage the strengths and resources of the target population. This involves generating and scaling up evidence-based, context-tailored, community- and individual-delivered mental health promotion programs (Eaton et al., 2011; Jordans & Kohrt, 2020). The quest to exploit innate strengths and capacities of individuals, groups, and institutions for their development and well-being aligns with the goals and objectives of positive psychology. Positive psychology is focused on examining and advancing the conditions and processes that contribute to optimal functioning (i.e., flourishing) of individuals, groups, and institutions (Keyes, 2013; Seligman, 2002).

Pioneered by Seligman and colleagues over two decades ago, the overarching goal of positive psychology is to explore the traits, strengths (and weaknesses), and capacities of individuals, groups, and institutions and to harness these attributes to optimize well-being and functioning. This approach to promoting human

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flourishing, championed by Martin Seligman and other scholars since 2000, has garnered the interest and support of several researchers and practitioners. To a large extent, positive psychology has steered a shift in how mental health is operationalized and the frameworks and approaches to understanding and promoting public mental health. Presently, there have been vociferous calls for less emphasis on deficit-focused orientations (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994) in exploring and promoting mental health. Instead, there is a shift toward a competence enhancement model (Botvin & Griffin, 2015) that targets the examination and promotion of traits, virtues, and strengths in people to enhance their mental health functioning and well-being. Generally, positive psychology explores and utilizes psychological constructs, theories, and research findings to develop intervention programs – positive psychology interventions (PPIs) – to help individuals, groups, communities, and institutions to facilitate the identification and use of strengths, gain knowledge, and practicalize skills to enhance their well-being and functioning.

Positive psychology studies have examined human constructs such as kindness, teamwork, hope, gratitude, creativity, optimism, spirituality, and personal growth to theorize, hypothesize, and explore the pathways and mechanisms that promote human functioning and well-being (van Agteren et al., 2021). For instance, constructs such as kindness and teamwork have been employed in the development of PPIs to cultivate friendships and foster the establishment of peer support and social networks (Brannan et al., 2013), thereby enhancing positive experiences that contribute to happiness and protection against depression. Similarly, PPIs that incorporate the constructs of hope, spirituality, and gratitude have been utilized to enhance mental well-being by providing consolation during setbacks and helping individuals cultivate a deeper sense of purpose and connection to others (Falb & Pargament, 2014). Some PPIs have also integrated psychosocial skills (e.g., problem-solving, goal setting), creativity, and optimism to facilitate personal growth and development (Bolier et al., 2013), and to help individuals avoid harmful experiences (e.g., addiction) that decrease well-being (Carr et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021). Generally, strengths-based and health behavior change intervention programs are, in part, meticulously crafted to align with the core values held by the target population (Hendriks & Graafsma, 2019; van Zyl et al., 2023). Yet, although the last decade has witnessed a considerable growth in PPIs in Africa (Appiah et al., 2020, 2022; Guse, 2022), the majority of these interventions have been straightforward replicas of Western-designed models, primarily intended for Western populations. I contend that the key to

designing effective and culturally-relevant interventions for the African context lies in aligning them with the core values and norms intrinsic to African societies. However, the question of what values and psychological constructs should be explored and promoted in the African context, as well as the practical mechanisms and frameworks to expedite their utilization in promoting mental health and positive behavioral changes, has not been well examined.

The overarching goal of this paper is to explore what values proverbs hold in the African context and to examine whether and how researchers can draw on them to inform the design of strengths-based health behavior interventions to promote well-being and flourishing in the African setting. This goal has been completed with several specific aims. Firstly, I revisit the context-wise criticism of existing PPIs; that most interventions are WEIRD (Western-, Educated-, Industrialized-, Rich- and Democratic) and unrepresentative of the experiences and expressions of people across contexts. Secondly, I draw on a consilience of evidence from the literature to highlight the potentiality of proverbs as a repository of epistemological and pedagogical resources that can be further explored and integrated into strengths-based and behavior change intervention programs in Africa. Next, I examine selected Ghanaian proverbs that coalesce around six themes akin to positive psychology concepts and constructs, including positive relationships, kindness and empathy, teamwork and collaboration, gratitude, truthfulness and honesty, as well as patience and humility. I explicate the literal and metaphorical meanings of these proverbs and argue why and how they may be strategically applied in specific PPIs to enhance positive behavioral changes and flourishing. Subsequently, I propose a framework (CAPPI: Customization and Application of Proverbs in Positive Interventions) to guide the integration of proverbs and maxims into PPIs and strengths-based interventions for use in Africa. In the final section, I demonstrate how proverbs are potentially fruitful medium to enhancing well-being and flourishing, particularly in the African context.

### **Effective, but WEIRD PPIs**

Findings from several meta-analyses and systematic reviews suggest that PPIs can enhance subjective well-being and minimize psychopathological symptoms, such as anxiety and depression (Bolier et al., 2013; Carr et al., 2021; Hendriks et al., 2020; van Agteren et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2016). However, much of the research comes from a specific Western perspective (Hendriks et al., 2019), prioritize the individual as the central subject of

investigation (Lomas et al., 2021), with their scope and metatheoretical assumptions more aligned to Western value systems (Wissing, 2022). Although recent effort has sought to broaden the scope and methodological approaches of positive psychology to research and practice, many of the frameworks and interventions remain WEIRD – are developed and evaluated from Western perspectives and largely developed with samples from Educated, Industrialized, and Democratic contexts (Hendriks et al., 2019; van Zyl et al., 2023), which may limit their generalizability to other cultural contexts. The third wave of positive psychology calls for a broadening in the scope and methods of positive psychology to individuals and groups from underprivileged societies who are largely presently neglected, underrepresented, and underserved (Lomas et al., 2021; Wissing, 2022). Several guidelines have been developed to offer directions to researchers in designing context-specific PPIs or to adapt existing ones to specific contexts (Hendriks & Graafsma, 2019; Schick et al., 2021; Van Zyl & Rothmann, 2019).

A recent scoping review of PPIs in Africa found that despite the growing number of PPIs over the past decade, the majority of the studies merely replicated existing themes and intervention strategies designed and evaluated from Western perspectives and value systems (Guse, 2022). A recent Editorial that collated works on whether, how, and why PPIs are effective in non-WEIRD contexts also identified, amongst others, the need to adopt broader research (methodological) approaches and draw on the values akin to the cultural norms of the target beneficiaries (Duan et al., 2022).

While findings from these emerging studies hint at the prospect of PPIs contributing to promoting mental well-being in non-WEIRD population contexts (Ng & Ong, 2022; van Zyl et al., 2023), there is need to explore and consider the sociocultural, theoretical, and methodological issues that could possibly constrain the design, uptake, and effectiveness of PPIs in the relatively collectivistically oriented and culturally-laden African context (Appiah, 2022a). For instance, drawing on field experiences and observations from designing and evaluating PPIs and health behavior change programs in the rural settings of Ghana, Appiah (2022a, 2023) argued that although PPIs hold promise for producing positive results in the Africa sub-region, the content, structure of sessions, and delivery approach should be adapted to, or embedded in, the cultural values of the target population and tailored to the needs, capacities, and circumstances of participants, if they are to be effective. Further, Appiah (2023) suggests that PPIs intended for individuals in rural, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and relatively collectivistic settings in Africa should

focus on the needs of target population (rather than a generalized quest to promote mental health), should include context-appropriate strategies to facilitate interpersonal and intra-personal change processes, be implemented by trained session facilitators with a deep knowledge of the sociocultural values and norms of the target group and in the principles and theories that underpin the intervention program, and should draw from the values, norms, and practices akin to the target population. However, the question of which human virtues hold considerable importance in the African context that can be utilized to foster well-being and flourishing across population and contexts has not been well examined. I contend that African proverbs are cultural treasures of wisdom and offer a rich resource to shape strengths-based interventions with a high prospect for empowering individuals and communities towards flourishing.

### **Proverbs as a (epistemological) repository for PPIs**

Proverbs are well-crafted, succinct words of wisdom imbued with a deep knowledge of the sociocultural norms and values of a group, often based on human experiences and insights that are passed on from one generation to another (Agyemang et al., 2015; Appiah et al., 2007; Dei et al., 2018). Historically, most African traditional societies relied on oral, not written communication, to reinforce moral and social precepts (Appiah et al., 2007). Whereas proverbs may merely be considered by people in other contexts as words of wisdom that are used in everyday conversations, they hold much value in most of Africa. Amongst the Akans of Ghana, for instance, a person is considered enlightened and cultured when they use proverbs in their speeches – to enrich their communication with imagery, philosophy, humor, and symbolism (Appiah et al., 2007; Dei et al., 2018). In public engagements, people reserve specific proverbs to end their arguments, share their perspective on a matter under discussion, or provide a summary of a speaker's stance (Appiah et al., 2007). To the extent that proverbs form apart of the everyday discourse in much of Africa, they stand as viable pathways for informing the creation of interventional messages that can appeal to the African peoples. Across Africa, proverbs, in various forms and nature, have been central in discourses to express, summarize, and emphasize one's views and stance. The Rwandan proverb, *'When the occasion arises, there is a proverb that suits it'*, similar to the Ethiopian proverb, *'Speech without proverb is like food without salt'*, as well the Ghanaian proverbs, *'Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten'*;

'Without sleep there is no dream, without proverbs there is no discourse' highlight the relevance and place of proverbs in the daily engagements of the African people (Dei et al., 2018).

Psychologically speaking, many African proverbs incite careful reflection and analysis to decipher their cultural meaning and practical significance, consistent with the approaches adopted by transformative learning theory and the humanistic psychology to education and learning (Dei et al., 2018; Girardi, 2010). The significance of proverbs in African communities cannot be overemphasized. Firstly, the African people use proverbs to enrich and sophisticate speech, despite its brevity (Appiah et al., 2007; Dei et al., 2018; Gyekye, 2002). Secondly, a person who skillfully interweaves proverbs into their speech, appropriately reflecting each proverb's social context, is regarded as wise and enhances their credibility and social status (Appiah et al., 2007; Dei et al., 2018; Wiredu, 2009). Proverbs are not only used to shorten potentially long ideas and statements, but also serve as a form of entertainment. For instance, presently, a growing number of radio and television stations in Ghana (e.g., Peace FM, Kingdom FM, Agoo FM, Nyansapo TV, and Ampa TV) offer time slots for individuals and groups to compete in showcasing their knowledge and prowess in using proverbs, or as a phone-in session where callers are asked to complete an uncommon proverb and explain its literal and metaphorical meanings. Proverbs are also commonly used in newspaper reviews, news, and advertisements on local radio and television stations in Ghana (Agyekum, 2000; Wiafe-Akenten, 2021). Thirdly, people rely on the complexity and completeness of proverbs to address complex human needs and experiences, and are resorted when initiating a difficult discussion, such as when breaking bad news or during a conflict resolution (Dei et al., 2018).

Proverbs hold promise as a strategy for improving mental well-being and positive behavior. However, critical knowledge gaps on the values that proverbs offer hold us back, and we have not explored whether and how they can be integrated into the design of context-tailored, potentially effective PPIs. Such effort could have important implications for public mental health: a successful incorporation of widely used, context-specific, and value-laden proverbs into positive interventions may resonate with, and appeal to, the local population and can potentially lead to positive behavioral changes and functioning. Values – both cultural and ethical – vary across contexts and influence people's behavior (Prinzing, 2021; Schwartz, 2017). Much of the so-called universal human values have emerged from, and are informed by, the Western-individualistic cultural orientation and value systems (Schwartz, 2006).

However, empirical research from other contexts, particularly relatively collectivistic, non-Western settings, such as Africa and Asia, have revealed different set of values and what individuals conceive as the good life (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011; Wilson Fadji et al., 2021), challenging the long-held notion that some cognitive and epistemic values (e.g., individual autonomy), previously considered as universal, are not necessarily held in high esteem across all contexts. To the extent that there are possible variations in what is considered valuable virtues, a one-size-fits-all approach to promoting a set of so-called universal values and virtues, is inappropriately narrow (Appiah, 2022a; Ng & Lim, 2019). Psychologically speaking, sub-Saharan Africa, more generally, has unique sets of rich values that make the region viable for positive psychology research and practice.

There have been vociferous calls to design and scale-up context-specific, community-based mental health promotion programs to bolster (positive) mental health and build capacities and strengths of individuals and communities to thrive and flourish (Eaton et al., 2011; Patel et al., 2018). These calls necessitate a reclaim of indigenous cultural knowledges, values/virtue, sages, norms, and maxims to inform research and practice in Africa and the Global South, more generally. Given that proverbs shape people's conception of self, community, and social responsibility and accountability (see Dei et al., 2018), and underpin the social values system and serve as repository of knowledge and epistemology (Appiah et al., 2007; Gyekye, 2002), they are potentially a viable medium and mechanism for facilitating (positive) behavioral changes. Some work exists that chronicles proverbs and their localized understanding and significance (Appiah et al., 2007; Dei et al., 2018). I contend that it is feasible and important to draw on these repositories to explore embedded knowledge and cultural values that are critical for positive and strengths-based behavior change intervention programs. An important caution, however, is that although proverbs are typically used in private and public discourses across the African context, they speak to specific local contexts and thus may not hold the same meaning and value across the region.

### Potentiality of proverb-driven PPIs

In the paragraphs that follow, I explicate the potential epistemological, pedagogical, theoretical, and practical utility of African proverbs in informing the design of context-tailored, strengths-based PPIs to foster (mental) well-being and flourishing in Africa. Altogether, 18 proverbs, grouped under six themes (i.e., positive relationships, kindness and empathy, teamwork and

collaboration, gratitude, truthfulness and honesty, and patience and humility), are used as a proof of concept to demonstrate the potential utility of proverbs in driving context-informed mental health and (positive) behavior change intervention programs in Ghana and Africa, more generally (see Table 1: Supplementary material). I proffer suggestions to illustrate how the proverbs can be harnessed to amplify the acceptance and effectiveness of PPIs in African communities. This paper draws from the proverbs chronicled in the works of Appiah et al. (2007) and Dei et al. (2018), both of which provide comprehensive catalogues and interpretations of hundreds of Ghanaian and African proverbs.

### Relationships/community

Fostering a mutual, positive relationship is a highly prized goal of positive psychology (van Agteren et al., 2021). Current empirical research and PPIs emphasize the importance of building positive, healthy relationships among individuals and groups; positive relationships have shown, for instance, to contribute to greater well-being and overall life satisfaction (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). In the African context, relationships are often conceptualized within a communal framework, emphasizing interdependence, communal values, social connections, and collectivism (Wissing et al., 2020). Generally, family and community are central to relationship dynamics, with an emphasis on shared responsibilities, mutual support, and kinship ties (Logan, 2018). Traditional values such as Ubuntu, which highlights human interconnectedness, serve as guiding principles for the promotion of relationships, cultural norms and rituals; and the art of storytelling are instrumental in nurturing relationships that transcend generations (Murove, 2020). Proverbs and maxims founded on these traditional norms and values are potentials for fostering communal harmony, intergenerational respect, and for maintaining social cohesion (Etieyibo, 2022). In the analysis that follows, I employ three specific proverbs to illustrate the multifaceted, literal, and metaphorical interpretations, as well as to explore the moral, epistemological, pedagogical, and practical implications and potentials of these proverbs in advancing positive relationships and nurturing a sense of community in the African context.

#### **“The eyes don’t cry while the nose sits; the trouble of your kin is your own trouble”**

This proverb emphasizes the importance of empathy, compassion, and interconnectedness in fostering

positive relationships and communication. It conveys the idea that when someone close to you is experiencing difficulties or challenges, it is your responsibility to offer support and assistance. In essence, we should not remain indifferent to the suffering of those close to us, because their problems and challenges are intertwined with our own. This proverb harbors important insight for PPIs in the African context. Firstly, it can be used to encourage program participants to recognize and empathize with the challenges faced by their loved ones. Possibly, this proverb can be integrated into activities that enhance empathy skills, such as perspective-taking exercises, to help participants to develop a deeper understanding of others’ experiences, thereby fostering compassion towards their struggles. Secondly, because the proverb highlights the importance of being present for our kin and offering support during difficult times, it can inform interventions that focus on building and maintaining strong social support networks by encouraging participants to actively engage with their family and friends, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and a willingness to lend a helping hand. Thirdly, by emphasizing the idea that the problems of our loved ones are our own problems as well, the proverb can be utilized to encourage participants to take responsibility for their actions and their impact on others, thus creating a sense of accountability and promoting positive behavioral changes in relationships. Because some people in the relatively collectivistic, often patriarchal, contexts of Africa may be reluctant to share their woes with others so not to bother them (Appiah, 2022b), this proverb can be leveraged to provoke an open and honest communication within families and close relationships, thereby promoting a sense of belonging and connectedness.

#### **“When you gather firewood, you invite others to light their fire”**

This proverb underscores the importance of generosity, community, and sharing resources. It suggests that when one takes the initiative to gather firewood, symbolizing meeting one’s own needs or pursuing personal goals, it creates an opportunity for others to benefit and fulfil their own desires or aspirations. Thus, when people engage in activities that are beneficial to themselves, they present an opening for others to also benefit and succeed. This proverb offers important lessons for PPIs intended for the African context. Firstly, it highlights the positive impact of generosity on both individuals and the community. Inherently, the proverb could stimulate and encourage participants to develop a mindset of giving and sharing, encompassing not just material

resources but also time, support, and kindness, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and strengthening relationships. Further, the proverb suggests that when one takes the initiative, it invites others to follow suit. This message could serve to create an environment where participants feel encouraged and supported in pursuing their goals and aspirations, hence instilling a sense of collaboration. Thirdly, by symbolizing and equating the gathering of firewood with pursuing personal goals and aspirations, interventionists can leverage the proverb to help participants to identify and pursue their passions, values, and strengths. Lastly, by encouraging participants to align their actions with their sense of purpose and meaning, the proverb can be used to inspire and motivate participants to find and pursue their own paths.

### **“A single broomstick cannot sweep the floor”**

This proverb highlights the importance of collaboration, teamwork, and interdependence in achieving a goal or solving a problem. It suggests that individual efforts alone are not sufficient to accomplish a task or create meaningful change. Instead, it highlights the need for collective action and cooperation to achieve success. This proverb, although short, has several potential applications for promoting positive behavioral changes and flourishing. Firstly, the proverb emphasizes the power of working together towards a common goal. This resonates with a cardinal goal of positive psychology – to foster a sense of teamwork and collaboration. The proverb can be integrated into group activities, team-building exercises, and cooperative problem-solving tasks to help participants to develop a greater appreciation for collaboration and to recognize the value of working together. Secondly, the proverb inherently implies that each person contributes something unique to the collective effort, thus effectively conveying that every individual brings a distinct and valuable element to a group or collective endeavor. This acknowledgment can be a foundation of a PPI that aims to encourage participants to recognize and appreciate the strengths, skills, and perspectives of others, consequently encouraging inclusivity and cooperative behavior.

Another important prospective utility of this proverb is its capability to cultivate a sense of interdependence. The proverb, for instance, underscores the idea that individuals rely on each other to achieve a common objective, thereby emphasizing the interdependence of individuals in various aspects of life. This insight, to some degree, can be incorporated into activities that highlight interconnectivity, such as discussing the impact of

actions on others or exploring the concept of shared responsibility. Of note, the proverb, with its self-implied suggestion that the collective effort is essential for success, can be emphasized in collaborative-driven behavior change intervention sessions to help participants to recognize and value the contributions of each team member. This can spark a sense of pride and unity, and reinforce positive behavioral changes and encourage continued collaboration.

### **Kindness/empathy**

Kindness and empathy – much like relationships – are important constructs of positive psychology research and intervention. Positive psychology research, shows, for instance, that practicing kindness and empathy has numerous benefits, including enhancing well-being and happiness (Passmore & Oades, 2015), improving social connections and reducing stress (Hutcherson et al., 2008), and inspiring others to engage in prosocial behavior (Aknin et al., 2019). Overall, fostering kindness and empathy promotes positive emotions and strengthens interpersonal relationships (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). In the African context, kindness and empathy are conceptualized as integral components of communal relationships and societal well-being (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Acts of kindness are encouraged to promote social cohesion and harmony (Kumar & Epley, 2023). Empathy, more broadly, involves understanding others’ experiences and showing compassion (Gyekye, 2002). Various methods, including cultural practices (e.g., proverbs), community-driven initiatives, and participatory approaches are used to promote kindness and empathy at different levels (i.e., individual, family, and societal) by transmitting values and shared experiences (Gyekye, 2002, 2014). The subsequent discussion utilizes three selected proverbs as vehicles for unpacking the literal and metaphorical connotations, in addition to examining the moral, epistemological, pedagogical, and practical dimensions and potentials of these proverbs in nurturing and facilitating kindness and empathy within the African context.

### **“The good you do for others, you do for yourself”**

This proverb emphasizes the interconnectedness of kindness and empathy and suggests that when individuals engage in acts of goodness and show kindness towards others, they also benefit themselves. The proverb highlights the reciprocal nature of positive actions and the positive impact they have on both the giver and the recipient. Essentially, the proverb suggests that acts

of goodness benefit both the giver and the recipient. This has several important implications for PPIs. Firstly, this notion can be utilized to emphasize the importance of participating in acts of kindness and altruism. This can be used to encourage program participants to proactively seek opportunities to help others, whether through volunteering, random acts of kindness, or providing support to those in need. Secondly, by implying that through acts of kindness individuals can develop empathy and a deeper understanding of others' needs and experiences, the proverb can be used to encourage program participants to empathize, consider different perspectives, and strive to connect with others on a deeper level. Thirdly, the proverb highlights the interconnected nature of our actions and their impact on ourselves and others. This aligns with the goal of positive psychology to advance a sense of interconnectedness among individuals. In this instance, the proverb can be utilized to encourage participants to recognize that their actions influence the well-being of others and the broader community.

#### **“A kind gesture can reach a wound that only compassion can heal”**

This proverb expresses the profound impact of kindness and empathy in addressing emotional pain and suffering. It suggests that acts of kindness have the power to provide comfort and healing to those who are hurting, even when words or solutions may not be enough. It further highlights the importance of compassion and understanding in promoting positive emotional well-being. By conveying the significance of kind gestures, this proverb can be used to encourage participants to engage in small acts of kindness towards others, such as offering a listening ear, providing support, or performing acts of service. The proverb also underscores the role of compassion in healing emotional wounds, making it a potentially viable medium to encourage program participants to develop their empathy skills by seeking to understand others' experiences, perspectives, and emotions. Lastly, the proverb highlights the positive impact of kind gestures and compassion on emotional healing. This insight can be used to educate individuals on the psychological benefits of kindness and compassion, such as reduced stress, increased well-being, and improved relationships.

#### **“The hand that gives is never empty”**

This proverb accentuates the perspective that acts of giving and kindness are not depleting; instead, they

are enriching and rewarding. The proverb suggests that when we extend generosity and compassion towards others, we create a cycle of abundance and fulfilment, experiencing the benefits of our giving nature. The central message of this proverb is that the hand that gives is never empty, implying that giving leads to receiving. This is an important concept that can be leveraged to encourage participants to reflect on, and express gratitude for, the opportunities they have to give and the positive experiences and connections that result from their acts of generosity. Further, the proverb infers that giving is a source of fulfilment and purpose. This inference can serve as a foundation for PPIs assisting participants to explore their values and passions, to identify causes or areas where they can make a meaningful impact. This proverb can be used to nurture a culture of reciprocity by encouraging participants to embrace the concept of giving and receiving and to encourage them to reflect on the positive emotions and personal growth that arise from acts of giving. By focusing on the inherent benefits of giving, this proverb can inspire individuals to engage in positive behavioral changes.

#### **Teamwork/collaboration**

Positive psychology research explores and promotes the positive outcomes of teamwork and collaboration. Effective teamwork has been associated with job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational performance (Driskell et al., 2018). Collaboration enhances creativity, problem-solving, innovation, fosters positive relationships and communication, and contributes to individual well-being and a positive work environment (Salas et al., 2017). Within the African context, teamwork and collaboration are conceptualized as essential for collective progress and community development. African philosophies such as Ubuntu emphasize interdependence, cooperation, and shared responsibility (Madise & Isike, 2020). Communal values of solidarity and inclusivity (e.g., communal work) promote collaborative efforts and foster teamwork by pooling resources and labor for community projects (Ikuenobe, 2016). Indigenous knowledge systems and oral traditions also encourage collaborative problem-solving and knowledge sharing (Gyekye, 2002, 2014). Much of Africa adopts collaborative leadership approaches, such as consensus-building and participatory decision-making, to foster teamwork and collective action (Madise & Isike, 2020; Salas et al., 2017). The ensuing three proverbs serve as vehicles to elucidating both the literal and metaphorical interpretations, along

with the moral, epistemological, pedagogical, and practical facets of the proverbs in promoting teamwork and collaboration in the African context.

### **“One hand does not tie a bundle”**

This proverb conveys the importance of collaboration, cooperation, and collective effort in achieving success, suggesting that individuals working together can achieve more than they could on their own. The proverb illustrates the value of teamwork and the idea that collective action is necessary to accomplish significant tasks or overcome challenges. By reinforcing the need for multiple individuals to work together, the proverb can be applied to foster teamwork and collaboration among individuals. For instance, it can be harnessed to encourage group activities, team-building exercises, and cooperative projects that require participants to work together towards a shared goal. In addition, the proverb implies that the task at hand cannot be accomplished by a single person, spurring a sense of shared responsibility within a community or group. Moreover, the proverb suggests that every individual has unique strengths that contribute to the collective effort. This understanding can be utilized to encourage participants to identify and appreciate their own strengths and the strengths of others. Lastly, the proverb infers that the combined effort of many can achieve greater results, underscoring the collective impact that can be made through collaboration. This proverb, by drawing attention to the power of collective action, can be employed to motivate program participants to engage in behaviors that promote teamwork, cooperation, and positive change.

### **“One hand washes the other, and together, they wash the face”**

This proverb illuminates the idea of mutual cooperation and support. It proposes that by working together and assisting one another, positive outcomes can be achieved for everyone involved. Fundamentally, the proverb exudes the importance of working together towards a common goal, provoking a sense of collaboration and cooperation among individuals or groups. This belief can be used to encourage teamwork and to emphasize the benefits of collective effort. Additionally, the proverb spotlights the value of interdependence and the strength that comes from working together – this perspective can inform the design of PPIs aimed at building social connections and networks, providing opportunities for program participants to come together and collaborate. Another embedded epiphany is that by combining efforts, individuals can achieve better results;

a useful insight for developing problem-solving and decision-making skills within a collaborative context. Lastly, the proverb insinuates that people are interconnected and have a responsibility towards each other. This is another important assertion that can be leveraged to emphasize the importance of collective responsibility and the impact of individual actions on the collective well-being.

### **“When you help another up a hill, you get to the top yourself”**

This proverb stresses the mutual benefits of helping and supporting others, suggesting that by assisting others in their journey or challenges, individuals also uplift themselves and achieve personal growth and success. Specifically, the proverb underscores the value of selfless acts of kindness, and can be integrated into PPIs aimed at cultivating participants’ altruistic behaviors, thereby encouraging them to help and support others selflessly. Further, with its emphasis on the importance of collaboration and teamwork in achieving common goals, the proverb can be leveraged to inspire people to work together, share resources, and support each other’s progress. This can promote positive behavioral changes that enhance cooperation, synergy, and shared success. Of note, the proverb also reinforces the idea that helping others can lead to personal growth and achievement. The proverb, therefore, can be used to help program participants to develop skills and knowledge that enable them to support others effectively.

## **Gratitude**

A wealth of evidence from the positive psychology literature has shown that practicing gratitude is associated with increased life satisfaction, positive emotions, and decreased depressive symptoms (Cunha et al., 2019). Gratitude interventions, such as gratitude journaling and gratitude letters, have been found to enhance subjective well-being and improve mental health outcomes (Lomas et al., 2014). Empirical evidence suggests that grateful individuals also experience better physical health, improved sleep quality, and stronger social connections (Boggiss et al., 2020), highlighting the importance of incorporating gratitude practices into interventions to promote overall flourishing. In most of Africa, gratitude is conceptualized as a fundamental virtue deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual traditions. Gratitude, more broadly, involves acknowledging blessings, expressing appreciation, and showing humility (Ameka, 2006). African cultural practices, such as libation ceremonies or prayers of thanksgiving, reinforce

gratitude by recognizing the interconnectedness of individuals and their relationships with ancestors, community, and the natural world (Gyekye, 2002, 2014). Promoting gratitude in the African context involves fostering a sense of interconnectedness, cultivating an attitude of appreciation, and emphasizing the importance of reciprocity and giving back (Gyekye, 2010). To shed light on the subject at hand, I have selected three proverbs for in-depth examination, aiming to unveil their literal and metaphorical interpretations, and to delve into the moral, epistemological, pedagogical, and practical aspects and potentials of these proverbs in the advancement of gratitude within the African milieu.

### **“When you rise, remember those who helped you climb”**

This proverb intimates the importance of expressing gratitude and acknowledging the support and contributions of others on one’s journey to success. The proverb encourages individuals to recognize and express gratitude towards those who have aided and played a role in their achievements. By highlighting the value of gratitude towards those who have supported us, the proverb can be used to encourage program participants to reflect on and express appreciation for the people who have helped them along their journey and urge them to develop a positive outlook, thereby enhancing their well-being and strengthening their relationships. Further, with its emphasis on the interconnectedness of individuals and the impact of supportive relationships, the proverb can be leveraged to promote a sense of connectedness by encouraging individuals to recognize and honor the contributions of others. This proverb fundamentally fosters a sense of belonging and interconnectedness and can be utilized to enhance social connections and promote positive behavioral changes that strengthen relationships and foster a supportive community. Another important potential utility of this proverb is that it can be leveraged to emphasize the importance of reciprocity and encourage individuals to extend support to others as they have received it. To some degree, the proverb can be used to help program participants to focus on cultivating humility by encouraging them to recognize their own limitations and the contributions of others.

### **“The rain that beats you also waters your neighbor’s farm”**

This proverb expresses the idea that challenges or setbacks faced by one individual can have positive effects on others. It suggests that while one may experience

difficulties, there can be indirect benefits or opportunities that arise from those challenges. Firstly, this proverb conveys the message that even in challenging times, there can be positive aspects or opportunities for others, thus fostering a sense of appreciation for the interconnectedness of experiences. This belief can be integrated into PPIs intended to promote gratitude and perspective-taking to encourage participants to reflect on the interconnectedness of their experiences with those of others. Secondly, the proverb implies that adversities can have silver linings. Similarly, this perspective can be used to formulate PPIs focused on building resilience by helping program participants to reframe challenges and setbacks as opportunities for growth and learning, thereby helping them to nurture a positive mindset and the ability to find hidden benefits in difficult situations. Lastly, the proverb implies that setbacks can lead to growth and development, thus emphasizing the belief that abilities can be developed through effort and experience. This notion can be leveraged to encourage participants to view challenges as opportunities for learning and improvement.

### **“An orphan who expresses appreciation in the evening receives more in the morning”**

This proverb illuminates the value of expressing gratitude and appreciation. It suggests that acknowledging and showing gratitude for what one has, even in difficult circumstances, can lead to receiving more blessings and support in the future. By drawing attention to the importance of expressing gratitude for the blessings and support one receives, the proverb can be used to encourage participants to retrospect and appreciate the positive aspects of their lives, even in challenging situations. Moreover, the proverb stresses the role of expressing appreciation in building positive relationships and communication. This concept can be utilized to emphasize the importance of positive communication skills, such as expressing gratitude, kindness, and appreciation towards others. Lastly, the proverb implies that expressing appreciation can contribute to a sense of self-worth, and lead to more positive experiences, making it viable for nurturing self-worth and self-esteem. This could involve encouraging program participants to recognize and value their own contributions and strengths.

### **Truthfulness/honesty**

Positive psychology research and interventions have examined the constructs of truthfulness and honesty and their role in promoting well-being and positive relationships.

Honesty interventions, such as promoting ethical behavior and emphasizing the value of honesty, have shown positive outcomes, including increased subjective well-being and improved psychological functioning (Rivera et al., 2019; Weziak-Bialowolska et al., 2021). Truthful communication is associated with better psychological health, higher relationship satisfaction, and enhanced overall life satisfaction (Le et al., 2022), highlighting the significance of truthfulness and honesty in promoting personal well-being and cultivating positive social connections. Truthfulness and honesty are highly esteemed concepts in Africa and are promoted through cultural, religious, and educational channels. The Ubuntu philosophy, for instance, emphasizes integrity and trustworthiness, fostering a sense of communal responsibility (Mbiti, 1990). At the national levels, traditional systems like Rwanda's Gacaca courts prioritize truth-telling for healing and reconciliation (Clark, 2010). Overall, truthfulness and honesty are deeply rooted in African cultures and play a pivotal role in facilitating social cohesion and progress. The forthcoming trio of proverbs serves as a conduit for unraveling the dual interpretations - both literal and metaphorical - as well as the moral, epistemological, pedagogical, and practical applications of proverbs in fostering truthfulness and honesty in African communities.

#### **“A witness dies because of his belly”**

This proverb echoes the idea that remaining silent or withholding important information can have negative consequences. It suggests that failing to speak up or testify truthfully can lead to harmful outcomes, both for oneself and others. This belief can be used to ideate a PPI focused on promoting honesty and integrity by encouraging participants to speak up, share their perspectives, and communicate truthfully. A central theme of the proverb is that the witness's silence or dishonesty leads to negative outcomes, an important belief that can be used in designing an intervention program aimed at promoting ethical decision-making by encouraging participants to consider the consequences of their actions and to act in ways that align with their values. Furthermore, by urging individuals to take responsibility for their actions and to speak up when necessary, the proverb can be utilized to encourage participants to take ownership of their words and actions, thereby enhancing responsibility, courage, and the willingness to address important issues.

#### **“The truth may be bitter, but it lasts longer than a lie”**

This proverb conveys the enduring value of truthfulness and honesty. It suggests that although the truth may be difficult to accept or convey, it is ultimately more

beneficial and long-lasting compared to deception or falsehood. By echoing the importance of being truthful and authentic in our words and actions, the proverb can potentially be utilized to foster honesty and authenticity. For instance, it can be incorporated into an assertiveness-focused PPI to encourage participants to communicate truthfully, even when it is challenging. By promoting authenticity, interventions can facilitate positive behavioral changes that enhance trust, transparency, and genuine connections with others. The proverb also suggests that truthfulness is aligned with integrity and ethical conduct - another important dimension that can be harnessed to encourage participants to align their actions with their values and principles. Lastly, the proverb inherently invites individuals to reflect on their own behavior and motivations. This is an important concept that can be used to encourage self-reflection and self-honesty by providing tools and practices for introspection, self-awareness, and self-compassion.

#### **“If a liar has a thousand-year head-start on a journey, a truthful man can pursue and catch him in a single day”**

This proverb accentuates the inherent strength and power of truthfulness. It suggests that even if dishonesty may prevail temporarily, truthfulness will eventually prevail and triumph over falsehood, showcasing the significance of being truthful and acting with integrity. This perspective can inform a PPI that is focused on cultivating honesty by encouraging participants to prioritize truthfulness in their words and actions. In addition, the proverb invites individuals to reflect on their own behavior and the alignment with truthfulness. This is a useful precept that can be used to inspire self-awareness and introspection, and can allow participants to evaluate their own honesty and integrity. Lastly, with the proposition that truth will eventually prevail over falsehood, the proverb can be utilized to promote critical thinking skills by enabling participants to discern and evaluate information critically, thereby equipping them with the ability to identify falsehoods, challenge misconceptions, and seek the truth.

#### **Patience/humility**

Positive psychology research and interventions have underscored the significance of patience and humility in promoting well-being and positive outcomes. Empirical studies have shown that cultivating patience is associated with greater life satisfaction, reduced stress, and improved interpersonal relationships

(Lavelock et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2017). Patience interventions, such as mindfulness meditation and delayed gratification exercises, have demonstrated positive effects on patience and overall well-being (Cuthbert et al., 2018). Similarly, humility interventions, including perspective-taking exercises and gratitude practices, have been linked to increased psychological well-being, prosocial behavior, and improved relationships (Kesebir & Kesebir, 2012). Within the African context, the concepts of patience and humility are deeply ingrained in cultural values and belief systems, shaping interpersonal relationships and societal harmony. African societies embrace the virtue of patience as a means to navigate life's challenges and maintain inner calm (Gyekye, 2002). Humility is regarded as a sign of wisdom and respect, emphasizing the importance of modesty and selflessness (Gyekye, 2002, 2010). African communal values and extended family structures also encourage patience and humility in fostering cooperation and social cohesion (Gyekye, 2002, 2014). Through oral traditions, storytelling, and role modeling, African communities nurture the cultivation of patience and humility as essential qualities for personal growth and harmonious coexistence. The following three proverbs are instrumental in explicating the dual nature of proverbs, encompassing both literal and metaphorical interpretations. They also provide insight into the moral, epistemological, pedagogical, and practical utility of proverbs in nurturing patience and humility in African societies.

**“If you work slowly and carefully skinning the ant, you see its intestines”**

This proverb highlights the value of patience, attention to detail, and thoroughness in accomplishing tasks. It suggests that taking time and being meticulous can lead to a deeper understanding and awareness of the intricacies of a situation or task. Firstly, the proverb encourages individuals to work slowly and carefully, implying the importance of being fully present in the task at hand. This standpoint can be utilized to teach participants to engage in tasks with heightened attention and focus. Secondly, the proverb emphasizes the value of working slowly and not rushing through tasks – an important mindset that can be used to encourage participants to develop patience and persistence in their endeavors. Thirdly, the proverb implies that the process of working slowly and carefully is as important as the final outcome. This proverb would be particularly beneficial for PPIs seeking to teach participants to shift their focus from solely seeking outcomes to embracing the process of engaging in tasks.

**“To learn, you must be willing to listen”**

This proverb underscores the importance of active listening and openness to acquiring new knowledge. It suggests that in order to gain understanding and learn from others, one must be receptive and attentive to what is being said. By highlighting the value of active listening, which involves giving full attention to the speaker and seeking to understand their perspective, the proverb can be leveraged to enhance active listening skills, such as paraphrasing, asking and clarifying questions, and showing empathy. Further, the proverb suggests that listening requires an open mind and a humble attitude. This conception can be applied to encourage participants to embrace diverse viewpoints and be receptive to feedback and new information, thereby facilitating positive behavioral changes that enhance perspective-taking, empathy, and constructive collaboration. Lastly, the proverb implies that active listening involves self-awareness and the ability to set aside personal biases or assumptions. This notion can be used to encourage participants to reflect on their own listening habits and biases, thereby promoting self-awareness and self-improvement.

**“The one-eyed man should not laugh at the blind”**

This proverb lays prominence on empathy and the importance of treating others with respect and understanding, regardless of their shortcomings or limitations. It cautions against ridiculing or belittling those who are less fortunate or facing challenges. Firstly, the proverb highlights the need to understand and share in the feelings of others. This can be relevant for a PPI that aims to develop empathy – by encouraging participants to understand the experiences and challenges of others. Secondly, the proverb suggests that no one is free from limitations or challenges, an important tenet that can be used to emphasize the importance of humility and recognizing one's own imperfections. Thirdly, the proverb underlines the importance of treating others with respect, regardless of their circumstances. PPIs aiming to promote a culture of respect and inclusivity can use this proverb to inspire participants to value diversity, embrace differences, and avoid judgment or ridicule.

**Incorporating (African) proverbs into PPIs: the ‘CAPPI’ framework**

I contend that the incorporation of (African) proverbs into the design and implementation of PPIs represents a robust avenue for promoting well-being and flourishing in Africa. African proverbs are deeply rooted in the

cultural heritage of the continent, and they often encapsulate wisdom, resilience, and communal values (Appiah et al., 2007; Dei et al., 2018). They can be utilized in group-based PPIs, for instance, to provide program participants with practical guidance, encourage positive thinking, and foster a sense of connection to their cultural identity. Interventionists and practitioners can leverage these cultural resources in their program design efforts to help participants to connect with local values and foster a sense of empowerment and resilience in their communities. Given the dearth of research dedicated to the integration of African proverbs into PPIs, I propose a practical framework that draws on existing knowledge and practices in both positive psychology and African cultural traditions. I outline a five-step, iterative practical framework (*CAPPI: Customization and Application of Proverbs in Positive Interventions*) that can guide researchers and practitioners to integrate (African) proverbs into positive psychology research and interventions.

*Step 1: Identify relevant positive psychology themes:* African proverbs cover a wide range of topics, including community, family, wisdom, resilience, spirituality, and several other concepts of importance. The first step towards integrating proverbs into PPIs is for researchers to identify the specific themes and domains within positive psychology that they intend to promote in a population group. I would argue that much of African proverbs align with common themes and domains of positive psychology, including gratitude, resilience, social connections, spirituality, communal well-being, hope, compassion, perseverance, and several others. Since there are often several hundreds of proverbs in specific geographically and ethnically diverse contexts, a useful start-off point is to identify a set of positive psychology themes of interest, a priori. To ensure that the intended positive psychology themes are akin to existing proverbs and values, researchers can conduct a systematic analysis of the proverbs, consult with cultural experts, and consider existing research that explores how the target population conceptualizes and expresses well-being.

*Step 2: Proverb selection, interpretation, and translation:* In the second step, researchers embark on the critical tasks of handpicking, providing comprehensive explanations for, and effectively translating a set of proverbs that bear a strong resemblance to the chosen positive psychology construct. Because proverbs often contain metaphoric language and cultural nuances, a practical strategy to identifying relevant and applicable proverbs for a chosen PPI theme is to consult with local experts, linguists, and native speakers. This consultation will also ensure accurate translation of the

selected proverbs into local African languages while also preserving their intended meanings, particularly if the program intervention sessions will be delivered in the local dialects of the participants. Using a research-committee approach, the researcher and the local experts explore the underlying meaning, cultural nuances, and intended import and value of the proverbs and how they can be applied to promote well-being and positive behavioral changes in the local context.

*Step 3: Integrate proverb into PPI:* Working together with local experts and informants, the researcher incorporates the selected proverbs into the PPI, using creative and culturally appropriate methods. This can include written materials, storytelling, visual aids, digital platforms, group discussions, art, music, or even drama. For instance, a proverb emphasizing the importance of community could be incorporated into a group-based gratitude exercise, where program participants express gratitude to others in their community. It is important to ensure that each proverb is aligned with the specific positive psychology theme or attribute that resonates with its core message and that the proverb, the intervention content, and the delivery strategy are culturally sensitive and resonate with the target population. Specifically, proverbs can be used in a group-based intervention program to introduce a new lesson, to help explain the theoretical underpinnings of the session's theme or construct, and to facilitate discussions of their practical applications. In breakout sessions, proverbs can also be leveraged to guide further discussions of a theme and to explore lessons embedded in a role play. Lastly, proverbs can be useful in the recap and conclusion of an intervention program session. Here, session facilitators can use specific proverbs to summarize the overarching lesson and message of a session theme.

*Step 4: Pilot and evaluate interventions:* Because the therapeutic effects of proverbs are partly based on the meanings that people ascribe to them, it is necessary to pilot-test the proverb-integrated program sessions to determine whether and how people understand the proverbs, the meanings they ascribed to the proverbs, and potential of the proverbs for enhancing well-being. One strategy for piloting a draft proverb-based program is through focus group discussions with a sample of the target population group. During group activity and discussion sessions, participants can be asked to share their understanding of the proverb, assess its cultural relevance, suggest related proverbs, and to provide practical example situations in which the proverbs can be applied to promote well-being and positive behavioral changes. Findings from this formative, pilot

study can serve as valuable resource for scaling up, using mixed-method research designs including pure or quasi randomized controlled trials. A potentially practical strategy to boost interest in the program activities and reduce attrition is to ensure that the delivery format is suited to the local context, such as through group-based discussion and activities. This could enhance participation and practicalization of skills, especially when working with groups and communities in the rural, socioeconomically disadvantaged settings where a significant proportion of the population may not have attained formal education (Appiah, 2022a, 2022b, 2023; Appiah et al., 2022). It is important and laudatory to evaluate the impact of the interventions on the target population's well-being and flourishing, considering both individual and community-level outcomes, and using measures that are adapted to the context (Appiah et al., 2020; Appiah, 2022b). Of note, it may also be useful to adopt stringent, but context-suitable designs in the program implementation and evaluation. For instance, a quasi- or cluster- rather than pure randomized controlled trial design, may be an appropriate approach when working in close-knitted, relatively collectivistic communities in order to minimize contamination effects by clustering communities, instead of recruiting both intervention and controlled groups from the same communities. Qualitative data can be collated to explore participants' experiences and impressions of the program, post-intervention (Appiah et al., 2021).

*Step 5: Long-term sustainability and dissemination:* Researchers should endeavor to share the results of the program evaluations and the lessons from the implementation with relevant stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. If their studies suggest a positive and promising results, this would provide evidence to advocate for the integration of (African) proverbs into PPIs in policy and programmatic initiatives. In this regard, there would be need to collaborate with local organizations and institutions to ensure the sustainability and long-term implementation of proverb-driven, co-developed strengths-based PPIs for specific contexts. A probably feasible approach to doing this would be to empower local practitioners and community leaders to generate and facilitate the interventions, ensuring the transfer of knowledge and skills. Additionally, researchers would need to partner with local organizations and policymakers to integrate the interventions into existing health and well-being initiatives (Appiah, 2022b; Hendriks & Graafsma, 2019; Schick et al., 2021; Van Zyl & Rothmann, 2019).

## Conclusions

This paper sheds light on the unexplored capacity of African proverbs to enrich PPIs aimed at fostering the well-being and flourishing in the African context. I argue that many of the themes and attributes of interest to positive psychology, such as positive relationships, kindness, truthfulness, patience and humility, and honesty and integrity align closely with the African values and norms, often finding expressions through proverbs. I contend that African proverbs, in a broad sense, are repositories of ancient and widely acknowledged set of wisdom, which have the potential to contribute to the advancement of positive psychology research and interventions in Africa. If successfully integrated, proverbs could further enrich existing PPIs, most of which are based on Western perspectives and values systems and may therefore not fully capture the cultural nuances and values of African communities (Appiah, 2022b).

This paper sets out to demonstrate the inherent strengths and profound wisdom encapsulated within these age-old sayings. Using a set of proverbs, I elaborate the literal and metaphorical meanings and potential applications to demonstrate how (African) proverbs could offer valuable insights into promoting positive relationships, gratitude, patience, humility, kindness, empathy, teamwork, collaboration, and truthfulness. I assert that the inherent richness of proverbs can serve as a powerful tool for fostering well-being and flourishing within African communities. I propose the *CAPPI* framework (*Customization and Application of Proverbs in Positive Interventions*) to guide researchers and practitioners in this endeavor. This framework encourages customization and thoughtful application of (African) proverbs in positive interventions, ensuring their alignment with specific cultural contexts and desired outcomes. The CAPPI framework can help researchers and practitioners to unlock the full potential of African proverbs to enhance the effectiveness of their strengths-based, behavior change PPIs. As clearly articulated in the third wave of positive psychology (Lomas et al., 2021; Wissing, 2022), it is crucial for positive psychology to broaden its scope and methodology to embrace diverse cultural wisdom and traditions. Proverbs and maxims that align with the goals of positive psychology can be leveraged to create a more inclusive and holistic approach to promoting well-being and flourishing across different cultures of Africa, propelling the discipline beyond its WEIRD foundations and become truly universal in its impact. I would argue that by integrating (African) proverbs into positive psychology research and interventions, we tap into a wealth of cultural wisdom that resonates deeply with African communities, thereby

enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of these interventions. This paper is intended to spark further research and inspire practitioners to embrace the richness of African proverbs, ultimately contributing to the advancement of positive psychology and the well-being of African peoples.

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