

# **Responsible Management in Africa, Volume 2**

This is one of the broadest collection of essays on *Responsible Management in Africa* that I have come across. Reading this book will open your eyes to African-grounded knowledge that has been suppressed. As we say in West Africa – it will ‘shine your eyes’. The book should be compulsory reading for all students of sustainability and responsible business around the globe.

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November 30, 2021

A few years ago, we witnessed the consolidation of many African Business schools and the creation of some new ones. On that occasion, there was a raging discussion: Should African business schools follow the paths set by further advanced Western business Schools? Should they rather strive to creatively develop some new, original, peculiarly African concepts and points of view? Could ‘ubuntu’ and other traditional concepts be considered important elements contributing to the growth of African and non-African businesses? Maybe! The contribution of Dr Kemi Ogunyemi and her co-editors in their new book is a powerful claim and statement that the second and third options are not only viable but very much alive and productive. The contributions give a deep insight to the treasures of indigenous wisdom and how they contribute to growth and development.

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# **Responsible Management in Africa, Volume 2**

## **Ethical Work and Sustainability**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*to Toyé and Sola Ogunyemi and to Iheanyi and Ngozi Anozie*

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# Foreword

Across the world, the covid-19 crisis, and what comes thereafter, demand a rethink about the present and future of business management and sustainable development. This provides an opportunity to better sensitise Africa's businesses towards endogenous conditions, norms and processes.

Africa is a region where the multidimensional nature of sustainability challenges is painfully exposed. Almost half of the continent's population of 1.3 billion live below a poverty line of US\$1.9 per day. As a continent that has been historically exploited, and still suffers from conflict, corruption and economic disparities, there is a growing interest to motivate researchers to investigate how Africa could play a critical role in transitioning to responsible management and embracing the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs).

This volume of 'Responsible Management in Africa', looks into the philosophies that indigenously support ethical work and sustainability in Africa and captures deep insights about the principled entrepreneurship traditions of several African countries and ethnicities.

The editors premise that the conservation of African traditional values and the identification of virtuous principled entrepreneurs are one way to address the continents' problems, and call for a discourse to study the indigenous ways of working ethically and promoting sustainability in Africa.

The book volume explores the cultural foundations for responsible management in different places including Algeria, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia with the aim of capturing the available wisdom in the quest for solidarity and contextualized sustainability.

## *Capturing the Wisdom*

Associated with Bourdieu's (1997) concept of *habitus*, is to *give meaning to relationships*. This contains a strong, normative component in terms of self-understanding: who I am, who do I belong with, and who can I trust? (Ibrahim, Fowler, and Kiggundu 2021). In Africa, communal living and associational life typically revolve around the proximity of mutual belonging, captured in the east and southern Africa concept of *Ubuntu*, and its equivalents in other regions (Mbiti, 1970).

Intergenerational affinities and relations shape personal and group identity. Care and respect for older ones is part of the culture. Older people have a sense of responsibility towards younger generations which can be seen as promoting sustainability thinking and concern for future generations.

The book focuses on discovering how African philosophy – which is often lived rather than systematically written out – can relay indigenous wisdom that could heal the selfishness in the way businesspeople tend to act, and shows solutions where wisdom that guided many interactions including those relating to trade, entrepreneurship and other activities that drive the dynamics of economies.

From Mauritius in chapter 4 attitudes and behaviors of people engaged in business transactions were found to be guided by traditions, culture and values stemming from Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism beliefs and served to establish sound principles of trade and business decorum in the country. In Eastern Nigeria, chapter 7 takes us through the economic rise of the Igbos through the provision of capital and mentoring in the Igbo apprenticeship.

### ***Cultural Diversity and Solidarity***

Africa is a multi-cultural mosaic like no other region in the world. Because of this heterogeneity, it is imperative to promote unity and common goals (Robinson, 2020). Solidarity emphasizes the need for some level of shared appreciation across cultures, and refers to the expectation that others will generally act in a way that enhances mutual benefit and coordinated action toward collective goals (Macneil, 1980). Solidarity is intrinsically relational and reciprocal (Archer, 2013).

There are often similar common concepts that are part of the African cultural heritage many of which promote solidarity and inclusion. Historically in Africa, no individual would prosper at the expense of society, and society would not ignore the situation of any of its members (Oruka 1990).

The book notes this cultural diversity and richness in varying traditions within each African country, and promotes a varieties of concepts which foster solidarity in different traditions and incorporate them into discussions.

The editors in chapter 1 highlight the concept of solidarity and concern for the welfare of others, and call for re-incorporating cultural values which foster responsibility into management education curricula as means to improve the way business is done globally. They identify that when solidarity is practiced, and not just written as theories, social equity will be enhanced and poverty levels will be reduced. Chapter 2 identifies Africa as the least xenophobic of all continents and a model of welcoming the foreigner and explains that nationalism can be civic and liberal without extremism. It calls for the unity of all African peoples and that it should not stop at the level of territorial States. In chapter 8, we see trust-based notions of solidarity among entrepreneurial circles in the informal sector of Tanzania, and examples of financial traditions that sustain the micro-retail sub-sector and livelihoods in urban as well as rural areas. Chapter 10 presents the subsequent post-independence complex society of Zambia and how Africans could responsibly manage their affairs.

### ***Contextualized Relevance***

Management theories develop within a culture. We need to learn more about how non-western political-economic-cultural systems intersect with Africa businesses in real spaces. There is an increased awareness of the need to contextualize

knowledge and to changing thematic priorities related to sustainability. Inclusion of African businesses in an equitable way requires re-missioning and rethinking of how African stakeholders—individuals, communities, native enterprises, social groups, and civil society— can partner to play a role in ethical work and responsible management (Vazquez-Brust and Sarkis, 2022).

The social structure to support sustainable development cannot be rushed (Hofstede, 1993). A more social and less technocratic approach is appropriate for Africa, contextualized relevance requires attention to the *habitus* of African citizens, considerations for indigenous economies and majority livelihoods, and sensitivity to operational conditions.

The book brings up the question of how cultural influences in African countries can contribute to eradicating poverty and indicates that there is no truly African CSR, and that what is currently practiced is a copy of western strategies.

Chapter 5 studies the managerial discretion surrounding corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in Algeria, and the influence of local values and ethics to preserve the value of one's actions, referred to as the "*neya*". Chapter 7 investigates corporate social responsibility prudence in Kenya and reports that most CSR initiatives seem to be imported from the west and are imposed on Africa regardless of the truth that the contexts are not the same. The author calls for CSR actions to be grounded in communalism, traditional philanthropy, and African humanism (*Ubuntu*). In the final Chapter 11, authors call for respecting the diversity and inclusion of alternative narratives in the CSR modules, and a need to develop more strategic business models that inculcate traditional values and Africa ethos into formal organizations.

In my view, there needs to be a balancing act between honoring ethnicities and promoting acceptance and solidarity in Africa, especially when the traditional philosophies embedded in African cultural systems diverge widely from the philosophical underpinnings of western theories. The book exemplifies many African wisdoms, philosophies, and perspectives needed for this very diverse continent and offers something for a broad spectrum of readers to contemplate.

No individual book or volume can cover the scope and depth to address the centuries of sustainability concerns of this economically and marginalized continent. I am pleased that the authors took on the challenges of completing this project and provided a high quality of chapter series covering many viewpoints of Africa work ethics and sustainability.

Much research and scholarship about the continent is still needed, especially connected to responsible management education and the training of a home-based younger generation of African change agents. The more we share about who we are, the more explicit and creative we can become about ways to unite for the better good.

Finally, I know it is a major achievement to have successfully completed this project in this tiring environment. My sincerest appreciation and congratulations to the editors, Kemi Ogunyemi, Amaka Anozie, Omowumi Ogunyemi, and all the contributors.

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## Chapter 1

# Sustainable Human Ecologies: Principles for Ethical Work in Africa

*Kemi Ogunyemi, Omowumi Ogunyemi and Amaka Anozie*

### Abstract

Ecology is a word commonly used in many circles with a focus on the environment and human interactions with it. Human ecology as a concept studies human interaction with the environment in different cultures. Human cultural backgrounds differ and the way the traditional beliefs influence human activities varies from place to place. In entrepreneurship, traditional values can play a role as they often shape the character of practitioners. In the quest for sustainable development, one cannot underestimate the influence of these cultural tenets in shaping the dynamics of the practitioners' activities. This chapter explores the role of African cultural beliefs, philosophies in cultivating principled entrepreneurship. It presents some traditional values that influenced the mindset of entrepreneurs in the past towards ethical work. These tenets guided the dynamics of trade and responsible management of resources for the benefit of one's community and of oneself.

*Keywords:* Solidarity; principled entrepreneurship; Omoluabi; Ubuntu; sustainability; Africa

## 1. Introduction

The eighth goal of the United Nations' (2016) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to 'promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all'. Statistics have shown that there are about one billion extremely poor people in the world, 60 per cent of

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which reside in just five countries: India, Nigeria, China, Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (United Nations, 2016). The vast majority of people living on less than \$1.25 a day reside in just two regions of the world: Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and they account for about 80 per cent of the global total of extremely poor people. In fact, as of 2015, more than 40 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa still live in extreme poverty (United Nations, 2016). These alarming poverty statistics put side by side with economic growth reported in many other countries present a tableau telling everyone that the benefits of economic growth are not equally felt by all individuals in society or all countries in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Globally, interest is growing in the possibility that sustainability and the conservation of traditional values such as solidarity may help to reduce poverty. Yet, there are people who think that so long as the prevailing market system continues and rich capitalists keep on exploiting the poor, dreams of achieving poverty alleviation will remain mere dreams (Boudreaux, 2015). There are, however, other viewpoints which affirm that free markets are the channel to foster sustainable development even now (Reed, 2015). After all, concern for the welfare of the future generations (sustainability) and for the needs of those people currently in one's community (solidarity) may lead one to be just in one's trade activities. Whatever the position one takes, there is a benefit to be gained from exploring the cultural foundations for responsible management in different places in order to harness the available wisdom in the quest for solidarity and sustainability. Hence, this volume of *Responsible Management in Africa*, looks into the principles that indigenously supported ethical work and sustainability on the continent.

This is in line with certain authors who would support the argument that an imposition of imported values and theoretical frameworks that do not take the culture of the people into consideration in the management education curricula that prepare business professionals for their roles in society are bound to be ineffective for contributing to poverty alleviation and equity (Hofstede, 1993). Such goals when pursued in a manner extrinsic to culture may end up failing to encourage owners and leaders of business enterprises to demonstrate an effective concern for the poor. As inequality and poverty, detrimental to societal wellbeing and to ecological sustainability, are constantly growing and constitute a challenge to the system as it currently is, it is worthwhile to explore whether having recourse to the indigenous ways of working ethically and promoting sustainability in Africa could be one way to resolve these problems.

Our premise is that virtuous individuals are needed in trade and economic activities in general – we need principled entrepreneurs; we need responsible managers, and we need sustainable development in line with United Nations' SDGs. Yet, even with otherwise virtuous people, it is not always easy to make social responsibility attractive and acceptable in the business sphere, as businesses tend to do the minimum they can get away with in terms of justice when they care

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<sup>1</sup>This is one of the indices of the inclusivity of economic growth.

about it at all. Therefore, there is a need to sensitise people to the need to work for the common good.

Thus, the question that we have asked in this book is whether solutions can be found in indigenous wisdom that could heal the selfishness in the way businesspeople tend to act. If tenets in an indigenous market system upheld responsible management, societal solidarity and concern for ecological sustainability, it would be interesting to discover and discuss what it looked like and how it might supply some answers for today's managers. Hence, we look at indigenous concepts and traditions of responsible management in Africa that could illustrate how solidarity and social responsibility was practised by businesspeople in those cultures. In essence, we recommend reminding people about cultural values which foster responsibility. Re-incorporating and incorporating these values would help to improve the way business is done globally.

We propose that promoting African responsible market philosophy may help sustainability in at least two ways, first in ensuring that a concept of solidarity, and concern for the welfare of others, is moved to the forefront in a stable way. If these are re-adopted by African people in business as values proper to their culture and identity, they are more likely to be long lasting. If they are adopted by non-Africans to whom these approaches may appeal, the effect will spread and further help to establish solidarity and sustainability globally. In the second place, when solidarity is lived, and not just written as theories, social equity will be enhanced and poverty levels will be reduced, and once the immediate challenges for survival and wellbeing are resolved, people can be more concerned with the environment and with sustainable development.

In the first volume of the book, we reflected on the extent to which African indigenous wisdom is oriented towards the common good and therefore supports responsible management. In this second volume, we turn our attention to discover how African philosophy, which was and is often simply lived rather than written out systematically, can be used to do responsible business in a way that supports shared value creation and sustainability. Ultimately, we hope to discover an effective African philosophy, or to propose one, that can contribute to resolving inequalities and alleviate poverty all over the world. Finally, in the last chapter of this book, by examining the cultural notions that foster market solidarity, one can propose them as building blocks for management education curricula so that a concern for the welfare of others is fostered among business professionals.

To illustrate the relevance of indigenous philosophies for these purposes, this introductory chapter looks at traditional African (specifically Nigerian) values which may foster ethical and responsible action in business. It looks at how concepts in African culture could encourage solidarity and inclusion.

## **2. Human Ecology Theory and Sustainability**

Human ecology is the study of how human social systems relate to and interact with the ecological systems on which they depend (Marten, 2001). Human ecology also refers to an interdisciplinary approach to studying the human environmental systems. It is a field of research that attempts to combine understanding

of the biophysical agents of the human environment with the social and psychological dimensions of human health. What differentiates the study of human ecology from the ecology of other animals are culture and its effects (Dyball, 2012). While other biological species show behavioural adaptation to their surroundings, socio-cultural adaptation is the prime mechanism through which human beings respond to environmental change. As higher animals, human beings adapt to their environment through a process of interaction with their fellow humans and also by leveraging on historical evolution and social institutions. Human beings have an innate ability to conceptualise future occurrences. Artistic creations have enabled men to adapt tradition and culture to suit their ecologies. Humans have also developed tools and technologies in order to further strengthen their ability to access resources from the environment and to rapidly change the efficiency with which the resources can be transformed to useful products. They have developed characteristics of cultural adaptation, social and individual interaction, art and creativity and technology (Dyball, 2012).

*Human ecology theory* is a way of looking at the interactions of humans with their environments and considering this relationship as a system. In this theoretical framework, biological, social, and physical aspects of the organism are considered within the context of their environments. These environments may be the natural world, reality as constructed by humans, and/or the social and cultural milieu in which the organism exists. Gerald Marten (2001) uses human ecology and complex systems theory as a framework to examine economic systems and other social institutions and their impact on the natural environment. In particular, he discusses human ecology as a tool for resolving issues of sustainable development and environmental problems by understanding the complex interrelationship between human social systems and the ecosystem (Marten, 2001).<sup>2</sup>

### **3. Do African Philosophies Foster Principled Entrepreneurship?**

Much of the research on culture and business tends to focus on main effects of culture. In a general sense, an immediate challenge for the field is to map out other more complex effects of culture systematically and integrate these effects routinely into substantive theories and practices (Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005). A more complex conceptualisation of culture is therefore needed to allow a more complex view of cultural effects. Culture can be an antecedent, a

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<sup>2</sup>'Human Ecology Theory'. International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family. . *Encyclopedia.com*: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/reference/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/human-ecology-theory> (October 3, 2016).

moderator or a mediator, and a consequence, and its effects may be domain-specific and are subjected to boundary conditions. The study of culture together with socio-economic variables is common, but cultural change is also interwoven with political variables which may also add to, moderate, and/or mediate the effects of culture. So, the interplay between politics and culture needs to be studied to see how they affect economic growth. In the current study, a deeper understanding of how the indigenous system retained inclusivity sheds light on what could be done to enrich the contemporary system and redirect it to inclusive growth.

The literature suggests that cultural dimensions are multi-layer or multi-faceted. Some cultural elements are stable, whereas others are dynamic and changing. We expect to find deep insights in the field segment of this study which will help in the development of interventions to re-embed responsibility and solidarity in our world and result in more inclusive growth. Through our data, we have examined how cultural beliefs can influence human ecology and economic growth in the direction of responsibility and sustainability as core principles for entrepreneurship.

The question of what African philosophy is, has been ongoing for decades, with the almost unanimous conclusion that ‘*communality*, as opposed to individuality, is ... the essential attribute of an African Philosophy’ (Oruka, 1990, p. 15). Also, African philosophy is often lived and not just theoretically proposed. A typical Yoruba man is respected for his hard work and his content with what he gains from his handwork. This man is described as *omoluabi* in the Yoruba encyclopedia. Different trends in African philosophy emphasise different aspects of the culture and way of life. Specifically, ethno-philosophy draws from community life, from the customs, poems, taboos, religions, songs, dances and values lived by members of a community and is compared to folk philosophy (Oruka, 1990). Philosophical frameworks may be derived from critical reflections, even though they are lived by whole communities. This is perhaps why Oruka (1990) declares that one of the tasks that all modern students and teachers of philosophy in Africa may find rewarding is to research the African sagacious thoughts and find out the aspects that are critical and philosophical in a proper sense, that is, in a sense that they are a product of critical reflection and not examples of popular superstitions or myths.

Authors have argued that a renewal of trust and cooperation is necessary for building a world class management system (reference). Such a system could be based on indigenous foundations which are modernised for efficacy so that they can transform Africa in a sustainable way (Ajadi, 2012). Ajadi argues that one major challenge for economic progress in Nigeria is the low levels of trust, and corresponding deficit of social capital. Reminding Africans of the traditional perspectives that guided principled entrepreneurship in the past could heal this gap. For example, the concept of *omoluabi* and its concomitant implications for a good character (*iwalewa*<sup>3</sup>), social responsibility and concern for the welfare of

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<sup>3</sup>Character is beauty.

others (*eniyani laso mi*<sup>4</sup>) could stimulate interest, innovation and action with regard to ways to do business responsibly and sustainably. In support of this, thinkers argue that, in traditional Africa, the individual was rich or poor only to the extent that the society was rich or poor. Culturally, in the past, no individual would prosper at the expense of society, and society would not ignore the situation of any of its members (Oruka, 1990). The members of society *had one another's back*. Mhando and Mhando (Chapter 8) narrate the important place of trust among businesspeople in Tanzania.

Authors argue that free markets and trade access is the way to alleviate poverty on a long-term basis and to foster development of African countries (Moyo, 2009). But if free markets are to provide relief, the market philosophy must be robust enough and adequate to the task. A market philosophy which is sustainable should include elements from African culture. Hence, the need to find out what traditional notions of virtue resonate with the African – both entrepreneurs and policy makers. By extension, these could provide perspectives to review the market system globally. As Van der Colff (2003) says, values such as *ubuntu* should not only be seen as African values but also as human values that are important in establishing both an enabling organisational culture and a set of skills and competencies appreciated in most organisations.

Following our introduction to the chapter and our attempt to set the context for an insightful discourse, we go on now to describe our inquiry into traditional African notions of solidarity and values for principled entrepreneurship. We used a dual approach – one quantitative and the other qualitative. First, through a survey in Nigeria, we gathered information about the indigenous understanding of solidarity over a widespread range. Then, through an analysis of the findings of chapter contributors who used various research methods, we were able to get deep insights about the principled entrepreneurship traditions of several African countries and ethnicities – Algeria, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia. We discuss our findings and then make our recommendations for the future of responsible management in Africa and globally.

#### 4. A Look into the Past

For the first part of the research, the sampling was convenience-based and depended on snowballing. Participants were assured of confidentiality and requested to respond sincerely. The survey instrument was developed, based on

#### Wisdom Nugget

The concept of *omolu-abi* and its concomitant implications for a good character (*iwalewa*<sup>5</sup>) □ social responsibility and concern for the welfare of others (*eniyani laso mi*<sup>6</sup>) could stimulate interest, innovation, and action with regard to ways to do business responsibly and sustainably.

<sup>5</sup>Character is beauty.

<sup>6</sup>People are my vesture.

<sup>4</sup>People are my vesture.

the conceptual exposition of the issues, in such a way as to gather knowledge about the experience of Nigerians of a traditional free market system and of indigenous concepts of solidarity. Apart from basic demographic data such as gender, age and ethnicity, participants were asked to indicate how familiar they were with the indigenous culture of the ethnic groups to which they belonged and how much contact they had with these groups. Then, a definition was proposed, and their views were sought. For example,

Solidarity means an active concern about the needs of others within one's community. Solidarity is also defined as unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group. It means actively engaging in whatever helps others other than one's immediate family and friends. Is there a word or phrase or saying in your culture that expresses this concept or a similar one?

They were then asked how valuable they found solidarity personally, for their family and for their community as well as the source of their interest in solidarity. This last question provides some degree of triangulation to ensure validity, since their understanding of solidarity could have come from sources other than the indigenous. They were also asked to indicate the degree of importance they would ascribe to solidarity for solving today's societal problems and to share their perception of the enablers and inhibitors of solidarity.

Coming to the more critical segment of the tool, they were asked for customs in their culture that traditionally fostered solidarity and for any differences between the concept of solidarity those customs embodied and the actual way of life and business today. A similar inquiry process was followed with the expressions *ubuntu*, *omoluabi* and 'free market system', starting with the definitions:

*Ubuntu* (a Nguni Bantu term of South African origin roughly translating to 'human kindness') refers to behaving well towards others or acting in ways that benefit the community. Such acts could be as simple as helping a stranger in need, or much more complex ways of relating with others. A person who behaves in these ways has *ubuntu*. He or she is a full person.

*Omoluabi* is a Yoruba philosophical and cultural concept to describe a person of good character. The *omoluabi* concept signifies courage, hard work, humility and respect. An *omoluabi* is a person of honor who believes in hard work, respects the rights of others, and gives to the community in deeds and in action. Major traditional Yoruba values for the *omoluabi* are as follows: hard work, integrity, diligence, self-reliance, honesty, and social responsibility.

And

A free market is a system in which the prices for goods and services are determined by the open market and consumers, in which the laws and forces of supply and demand are free from any intervention by a government, price-setting monopoly, or other authority. In a free market system, the government does not interfere in business activity in any way.

They were also asked about indigenous practices that encouraged protecting or conserving environmental and natural resources or protecting the poor or helping them to improve their economic status. Finally, all respondents were given an opportunity to provide any further insights or information on the themes.

For the second part, contributing authors to the book investigated responsible management practices in their countries of origin or domicile following common guidelines and with the same goal – to find out what were the traditional ways of doing ethical work and promoting sustainability in Africa.

## 5. Findings and Discussion –In Two Parts

For the first approach, the first respondents’ ages ranged from 18 to 45 years of age and were 30% female. They were mostly familiar with their cultures – Yoruba and Edo. Their interest in solidarity had been mostly fostered by their families and their religion. In their words, solidarity ‘is very important because, in today’s world people take advantage of people, some need someone to stand up for them’ and ‘due to the heterogeneity of our country, unity is the key to promote oneness’. They find selfishness the greatest inhibitor of solidarity, which they value because it entails ‘concern for minority, poor and oppressed people’ and for ‘the peace it brings forth’.

Some of the indigenous practices confirmed by respondents as expressions of solidarity were organising savings systems or thrift collectors for the economic empowerment of other individuals; joint projects to improve the wellbeing of the community, for example, jointly building wells etc.; catering for employee’s family’s needs; applying fairness in profit distribution in joint businesses; and promoting the formation of active unions for different groups of workers. One respondent identifies *omoluabi*, in her culture, as meaning the same as *ubuntu*. Another brings up a new term: ‘*ohuranlowo*’, which describes and praises a person as ‘a helper’. In another respondent’s tradition, the equivalent of *ubuntu* is to acclaim the person as ‘*kind-hearted*, ... simply means it is inborn, the person is very open to things’.

Almost all the respondents considered the traditional modes of trading in their culture comparable to modern markets. The erosion of cultural values is ascribed to

### Wisdom Nugget

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