

Linguistic and Cultural Conceptualisations of Health and Well-Being

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The third Sustainable Development Goal of the UN is to “[E]nsure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. The question has to be asked whether people everywhere and globally understand and think of “healthy lives” and “well-being” in the same way as the UN and other global institutions understand them. The WHO Constitution defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." A further definition that is evoked is that health is a state of balance, an equilibrium that an individual has established within themselves and between themselves and their social and physical environment (Sartorius 2006) Even though these three aspects of health would seem to be general I would argue that these perspectives lose out on two dimensions crucial for understanding health in Africa: spirituality and interdependent self. Similarly, concerning well-being there is growing evidence that African models of well-being are different from the western hegemonic understandings of the concept (e.g. Serpell 2022). Using an interpretive anthropological linguistic and cultural semantic approach I will explore some lexical and grammatical resources as well as discursive and cultural practices to discover the conceptual content of the phenomena of health and well-being in various African lingua-cultures. It will emerge that these terms are not understood in the same way as the UN or WHO understandings. There is the need for the localization and contextualization of these terms in order to be able to operationalize the SDG3.



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References

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