

Swahili SOLUTION & EXPLANATION

Swahili has numerous noun classes, although in this problem we only see three of them (labelled I, II and III). Noun classes are like genders in more familiar languages, in that they determine the forms of surrounding words (adjectives, verbs). You can see what's happening if you make a table of the different word forms:

	Nouns	Singular	Plural
I	Man	<i>mtu</i>	<i>watu</i>
	Child	<i>mtoto</i>	<i>watoto</i>
	King	<i>mfalme</i>	<i>wafalme</i>
II	River	<i>mto</i>	<i>mito</i>
	Umbrella	<i>mwavuli</i>	<i>miwavuli</i>
	Bag	<i>mfuko</i>	<i>mifuko</i>
III	Island	<i>kisiwa</i>	<i>visiwa</i>
	Spoon	<i>kijiko</i>	<i>vijiko</i>
	Potato	<i>kiazi</i>	<i>viazi</i>

Adjectives	I Sing	I Plur	II Sing	II Plur	III Sing	III Plur
Good		<i>wazuri</i>		<i>mizuri</i>	<i>kizuri</i>	
Long			<i>mrefu</i>	<i>mirefu</i>		
Large			<i>mkubwa</i>	<i>mikubwa</i>	<i>kikubwa</i>	<i>vikubwa</i>
Small	<i>mdogo</i>		<i>mdogo</i>	<i>midogo</i>		<i>vidogo</i>
Bad	<i>mbaya</i>	<i>wabaya</i>				<i>vibaya</i>

Verbs	I Sing	I Plur	II Sing	II Plur	III Sing	III Plur
Have	<i>ana</i>	<i>wana</i>	<i>una</i>		<i>kina</i>	
Be enough				<i>inatosha</i>	<i>kinatosha</i>	<i>vinatosha</i>

As we can see, the agreement between nouns, adjectives and verbs appears in the form of prefixes to the roots, which we can summarize as follows:

Class I roots: *tu* 'man', *toto* 'child', *falme* 'king'

Class II roots: *to* 'river', *wavuli* 'umbrella', *fuko* 'bag'

Class III roots: *siwa* 'island', *jiko* 'd spoon', *azi* 'potato'

Adjective roots: *zuri* 'good', *refu* 'long', *kubwa* 'large', *dogo* 'small', *baya* 'bad'

Verb roots: *na* 'have', *natosha* 'be enough'

From the above tables we can summarize the system of prefixes as follows:

	Noun		Adjective		Verb	
	Sing	plur	sing	plur	sing	plur
Class I	<i>m</i>	<i>wa</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>wa</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>wa</i>
Class II	<i>m</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>i</i>
Class III	<i>ki</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>vi</i>

As a further generalization we can note that the noun and adjective prefixes are always the same.

So now we can make the translations. In some cases the forms have already been seen, but in others (in bold) we have to compose them using the above 'rules': Notice the word order in noun phrases – the adjective follows the noun.

- 1 The small children have good spoons.

Watoto wadogo wana vijiko vizuri

- 2 A long umbrella is enough. *Mwavuli mrefu unatosha*

- 3 A bad potato has a good bag. *Kiazi kibaya kina mfuko mzuri*

- 4 Good kings are enough. *Wafalme wazuri wanatosha*

- 5 A bad river has large children. *Mto mbaya una watoto wakubwa*

- 6 The rivers have long islands. *Mito ina visiwa virefu*

- 7 The Swahili for 'princes' is probably *wakuu*. Because the singular starts with *m-*, 'prince' is either Class I or Class II. The nouns in Class I are all humans so 'prince' is probably in this class too. Alternatively, you could note that the words for 'man' and 'child' are in the same class (I), so 'king' and 'prince' probably will be too. In either case, the prefix for Class I plurals is *wa-*. But this is only (highly) probable, not definite. We cannot say for sure which class a noun belongs to if its singular begins with *m-*.