

1 The Un Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs): What Role for  
 2 Nigerian and African Literature?

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7 **Abstract**

8 Could literature be relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in this giant stride  
 9 by the UN to make this world a better place to live in? Does Nigerian or African literature  
 10 have any precedential capacity that can accord it some vital roles to play in a virtually virgin  
 11 field like the SDGs? This paper provides plausible answers to these questions. It endeavours  
 12 to coin out a synergy between literature and the SDGs. It forays into the inner recesses of the  
 13 three genres in search of existing structures into which the objectives of this vision could  
 14 conveniently fit. The paper argues that such structures exist prior to the launch of the  
 15 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and its relaunch in 2015 as Sustainable  
 16 Development Goals (SDGs). The structures comprise feminist criticism, eco-criticism or  
 17 environmental literature, utopian literature etc. The paper is of the view that the SDGs  
 18 literary criticism emanate from the post-independence disillusionment literary criticism to the  
 19 extent that the latter is the forerunner of the former. Through criticism of governments,  
 20 policies and politicians, literature helps to entrench good governance which is a way of  
 21 eradicating poverty and providing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), better  
 22 healthcare and remedies to diseases. Again feminist criticism in Nigerian and African  
 23 literature has got the capacity to sensitise society on gender equality and present highly  
 24 educated and empowered women as characters in literary works to serve as models.  
 25 Ecocriticism alerts us on the danger of environmental degradation while utopian literature has  
 26 the sheer force of lifting us out of the present anomy so that we can embrace an ethereal world  
 27 where we will forget historical accidents and misfortunes and give a breaststroke to the future.  
 28 The paper concludes with this information?the SDGs literary criticism has a tinge of  
 29 partisanship in it as most writers deploy it to the protest of perceived marginalisation of pe

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31 *Index terms*— post-independence disillusionment literary criticism, sustainable development goals (SDGS),  
 32 environmental literature or eco-criticism, feminist critic

33 **1 Introduction**

34 he Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were set up in September 2000 as Millennium Development Goals  
 35 (MDGs) by the United Nations to achieve certain objectives that could optimally raise the standard of human  
 36 existence on planet earth and thereby enhance the dignity of the human race. These Goals were to be achieved  
 37 within a decade, commencing from 2005 through 2015, although it became impossible to achieve this dream  
 38 within this specific period. ??arah (2012:33) sums up the cardinal points of this global agenda:

39 Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger Promoting gender equality and empowering women Reducing  
 40 child mortality rates Improving material health Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases Ensuring  
 41 environmental sustainability Developing a global partnership for development.

42 However, this vision is pivoted on education as the only reliable and viable instrument of social change and  
43 welfare in the course of history of societies. In line with the aims of this programme, the Sustainable Development  
44 Goals (SDGs) are billed to beget a new system of education known as Education for Sustainable Development  
45 (ESD) and again the Universal Basic Education (UBE). It is hoped that these well tailored functional educational  
46 policies should be capable of transforming the face of humanity. Nzeneri (2010:52-53) in reaction to the SDGs  
47 acknowledges the aspirations of the Adult Education Department (AED) of the University of Port Harcourt in  
48 the ensuing ESD blue print:

49 The Adult Education Department of this University has been fully committed to teaching and research in  
50 environmental adult education and environmental literacy to ensure that people are well informed about their  
51 attitudes and behaviour that guarantee environmental safety and sustainability which are important issues in  
52 the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

53 To ensure that the aim of the international community in SDGs, as lofty as it is, is realised, efforts have been  
54 geared towards organising various awareness campaigns both at national and international levels, which have  
55 given a boost to this noble vision. On the global arena, ever since the inception, such conferences as "World  
56 Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002" (Nwamuo:2010:7) and some others are  
57 meant to help the programme succeed. And "The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment in Rio de  
58 Janeiro, Brazil" (Eheazu: 2011:42), as well as the "Kyoto Protocol" in 1997 on Greenhouse Effects (Eheazu:  
59 2011: 45) were all prelude.

60 At this juncture, pertinent questions we should ask are: what are the roles of Nigerian or African literature  
61 can play in the dawn of the SDGs? Through which perspective could such roles achieve enough visibility and/or  
62 perceptibility in the eyes of readers? However, this paper has sufficiently demonstrated that the SDGs literary  
63 criticism is an off-shoot of the postindependence disillusionment literary criticism which will be discussed in  
64 details hereafter. By and large, a brief definition of literature in the offing is quite necessary to help us relate  
65 literature to the laudable enterprise of SDGs. Charles (2009:2) defines literature as: "that writing we  
66 regard as 'verbal works of art', that writing that is remarked by its fictionality and imaginative import; that  
67 writing in which ideas are wrapped up in symbols, images, concepts; that writing which normally catapults us  
68 into another world of appearance and reality through the powers of the imagination. (Brams (2005:152) notes  
69 that literature "designates fictional and imaginative writing -poetry, prose fiction and drama". To support that  
70 literature is a complex phenomenon, he adds that it could expand its frontiers to philosophical, historical and  
71 scientific writings addressed to a wide audience. It is this wide purview of literature that makes it possible for it  
72 to embrace other fields of knowledge and have vital roles to play there. So, this relationship between literature  
73 and other human endeavours is a creed that has made Nigerian and African literature very relevant par rapport  
74 the SDGs. Having said that, let us examine the SDGs literary criticism in the prism of political disillusionment  
75 in African literary discourse.

## 76 2 II. Political Disillusionment in African

### 77 Literature and SDGS

78 To state that African literature is proactively bearing criticisms in favour of the SDGs in the larger spectrum of  
79 political disillusionment polemics, which dates back to the early sixties and seventies after rounds of independence  
80 celebrations across the continent, is to say the least. To call such criticism the SDGs literary criticism is another  
81 truth. The SDGs literary criticism, now a modulated version of postindependence disillusionment literary  
82 criticism, therefore was pre-existent as violent diatribes, admonitions, reprehensions and vituperations that  
83 hit so hard on governments of nations at the wake of African independence. Such governments perceived as  
84 erring regimes were led by voluntarist nationalists and patriots bearing in their spleen anti-colonial angst before  
85 independence and who immediately after turned to be the first generation politicians and leaders in the post-  
86 independence era. Unarguably, their governments were characterized by sheer contrast leading to proverbial and  
87 outrageous breach of contract between the rulers and the ruled emerging from gruelling colonial experiences only  
88 to have their hopes and aspirations crushed further by corrupt and dictatorial autochthonous regimes. Rousseau  
89 (Perry et al 1985:407) argues that "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains". This statement is a good  
90 match for the African situation as people thought that by emerging from the colonial shackles liberty had been  
91 won for keep, but they were proved wrong by history. The highhandedness of African leaders choked them with  
92 oppressive powers. This ironical paradox further exploits the fate of a race betrayed by her own sons who took  
93 over the mantle of leadership from her former colonial masters and made life most unbearable for the people,  
94 sowing away to the wide winds that dream of terrestrial paradise, that egalitarian society and that vision of  
95 promise land that were by the corner at the eve of uhuru.

96 Prior to the SDGs literary criticism, postindependence disillusionment critique has engaged African writers in  
97 a dramatic turn from the antagonistic criticism of the colonial era to the post-independence search for meaning  
98 in the ensuing prodigal political jamboree noticed after independence. Self-criticism and self-appraisal which  
99 became the order of the day in literary circles were meant to assess the rulers saddled with the onerous duty of  
100 reconstruction, renovation and rehabilitation of the image and psyche of the African. (Oung (1973:30) makes  
101 reference to these fast waning colonial diatribes:

102 But didacticism and propaganda have become decreasingly outwardly directed and Achebe's projection of his  
103 image of the Ibo past towards Ibos and such internally preoccupying political concepts as Pan-Africanism in such

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104 novels as William Conton's *The African* (1960) and Cyprian Ekwensi's *Beautiful Feathers* (1963) have begun  
105 to replace the inevitably out-ward directed propaganda of anticolonialism.

106 Political disillusionment in African literature, meant to show that the hope of El Dorado is totally elusive,  
107 appears so often in works of literature authored by both Africans and non Africans. Some of them are *The*  
108 *Interpreters*, *A Man of the People*, *Anthills of the Savannah*, *The Devil on the Cross*, *A kind of Fool*, *The*  
109 *New Man*, *Return to the Shadows*, *La Vie et Demie*, *Les Coupeurs des Têtes*, *Il n'y aura pas de paradis*, *Le*  
110 *Vieux Gagne la Belle* and including *Animal Farm* which is a proactive fabulous and satirical tale of all struggling  
111 colonies all over the world that eventually won their independence and had to feverishly manage their domestic  
112 imbecilities. Other works of independence disillusionment in African literature include a floodgate of critical  
113 commentaries, thesis and dissertations. The issue of independence remains a complex one for the fact that even  
114 before its great betrayal by African leaders some Africans according to Eny (1969:185) The failure of African  
115 leaders to deliver the promise made to the people has doused enthusiasm across the land and the ovation that  
116 greeted the liberation from the yoke of colonialism has also suffered similar fate leaving in its trail sober silence  
117 and lethargic shock on one hand and violent reactions on the other. Haegbu (2000: 171) aptly recognizes this  
118 fact:

119 The narrator in *Le Pleurer-Rire* laments that 'since independence nothing has changed'; Wali, the heroine in  
120 *La Nouvelle Romance* calls independence 'colonization readjusted' where "a handful of the privileged' rely on  
121 ancient and out-moulded customs and practice to exploit their people, especially women.

122 And the predicament arising from the disenchantment continues to stoke caustic criticism underpinning the  
123 general ineptitude of the political class and the absurd neglect of the masses. African critics and writers, in their  
124 works, ask questions if Africa has truly gained independence. deji (2000:117) insists that although a change  
125 of guard has taken place, the woes persist:

126 The African writer has always been forced by circumstances of the political and social situation around him  
127 to be combatant. The problems against which he fought during the colonial time have with the coming of  
128 independence, simply changed the people creating them and not their nature. apusin?ki (2003:155) supports  
129 the view of the critics while analyzing Africa's crises after independence. He doubts the ability of African  
130 politicians to lead their countries out of the stalemate and conduct the affairs of the states with the expected  
131 seriousness and vision. So he confirms the fears of African writers when he recalls the inexperience of the leaders  
132 at independence: Cette politique chaotique est l'oeuvre d'hommes sans expérience qui ne sont pas encore en  
133 mesure de prévoir les conséquences de leurs décisions, qui ne sont pas imprégnés du sérieux et de la prudence des  
134 vieux baroudeurs de la politique. (This chaotic politics is the work of men without experience who are not yet  
135 in a position to foresee the consequences of their decisions, who are not serious and do not have the intelligence  
136 of the old political bigwigs).

137 No doubt the African novelist has an axe to grind with the political elite-setting the people free from their grip  
138 through killer novels, novels that shoot guns, novels that wrestle cops into alleys and take their weapons, leaving  
139 them dead, to paraphrase Amiri Baraka. chenim (2010:4) in his own contribution posits that this freedom is an  
140 imperative: Le problème de la liberté est devenu plus aigu après l'acquisition de l'indépendance politique. Ainsi la  
141 littérature africaine post-coloniale est-elle caractérisée par une double tendance qui traduit à la fois la frustration  
142 et l'espoir des nouvelles données socio-politiques et économiques. (The problem of freedom has become more  
143 serious after the acquisition of political independence. Thus post-colonial African literature is characterized by a  
144 double tendency which at the same time represents frustration and the hope of new socio-political and economic  
145 indices).

146 Having taken a critical look at the situation in Africa with the conclusion that African leaders are responsible  
147 for the political and economic crimes against the people, Koné (1997:58) wishes the stubborn greenhorns and  
148 tyrants in firm control of governance should change their mind to embrace democracy: Il nous faut la rigueur  
149 démocratique si les puissants n'ont plus peur de Dieu. Il faut les amener à craindre les institutions. Il faut que  
150 les puissants aient peur de piétiner les faibles parce que ceux-ci seront effectivement protégés par les institutions.  
151 Quand les hommes politiques, et autres potentats sauront que le moindre abus, la moindre faute, mensonge, mot  
152 mal placé peut leur coûter leur place, ils compteront alors avec la population qui les aura mis à la place qu'ils  
153 occupent et la démocratie se conquiert. (We need democratic rigours if the powerful have no more fear of God.  
154 It necessary to make them fear the institutions. It is necessary for the powerful to be afraid of trampling upon  
155 the weak because they should be effectively protected by the institutions. When politicians and other power  
156 brokers know that the least abuse, the least mistake, lie, wrongly used word can cost them their position, they  
157 can therefore count on the population that put them in the position they occupy and democracy wins).

158 As a point of duty, African writers form a united front to tackle the problem of selfish and visionless leadership  
159 of the political class. erumaga's (1969:142) interrogative character, Moses reflects on this problem: 'who talked  
160 about suffering? I'm talking about solution. What are we to do to solve this endemic political mess?' So, the  
161 African novelist has penchant for speaking out rather than remain mute in the face of abrasive annihilation of our  
162 collective heritage and destiny. Just like Camara Laye was profusely upbraided by Mongo Beti for silence over  
163 colonialism in *The African Child*, contemporary critics have spoken against the danger of mutism and passive  
164 posture in the current political anomy that besieges African society. One of them is inadu (2007:14), who  
165 warns:

166 It is this cowardly attitude of keeping quiet, refusing to raise an alarm that encourages impunity, not only

## 2 II. POLITICAL DISILLUSIONMENT IN AFRICAN

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167 among armed robbers and petty criminals but also, and more dangerously for our collective security and our  
168 fledgling democracy, among our public functionaries.

169 Armah approaches the topical issue of political disillusionment in post-colonial Africa with all seriousness. For  
170 him, it is life commitment and ideological pessimism (cynicism) caused by utter distaste for political hypocrisy  
171 in governance. He protests against the rot and decay and deception of the people as opposed to the positive wind  
172 of change they hoped for. The author denounces massive penury which is quite contrastive to the ostentatious  
173 living and stupendous wealth of the leaders, the flamboyant lifestyle of their relations and allies. Sister Maanam  
174 complains in *The Beautiful Ones*: "They have mixed it all together! Everything! They have mixed everything.  
175 And how can I find it when they have mixed it all with so many other things? " ??Armah, 1968:180) This  
176 frustration is coming on the heels of woeful failure of Osageyefo's (Nkrumah's) government to deliver the gains  
177 of independence. The same fate befalls Baako in *Fragments*, who fails to bring economic salvation to his people  
178 after his sojourn abroad for further educational studies and training. On his return, he faces crap poverty-driven  
179 materialism that chokes his very being. The greed that affects all strata of society is yet to dawn on him. In  
180 this novel Armah presents lust as the safety valve for warped corruption in society ??Armah 1969:41-71). One  
181 critical question he poses in *Why Are We So Blest* is the essence of leadership without the people being carried  
182 along. In the case of Africa the people are left behind and this is done in the interests of the West which are  
183 uppermost in the policies and priorities of African governments. Modin ??Armah 1972:221), states:

184 The main political characteristics of African leadership since the European invasion is its inability and  
185 unwillingness to connect organically with the African people because it always wants first of all to connect  
186 with Europe and Europeans.

187 Kourouma also levels unmitigated criticism against selfish and corrupt clique of professional thieves who run  
188 the affairs of governance in Africa with sheer impudence and unconscionable spirit. The kleptomaniacs have  
189 bungled the future of the continent and dashed the hope of the living. This potent danger threatens the survival  
190 of the race. In *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1970:25), he highlights the absence of infrastructures that make  
191 life meaningful: Sans égouts, parce que les indépendances ici aussi ont trahi, elles n'ont pas creusé les égouts  
192 promis et elles ne le feront jamais; des lacs d'eau continueront de croupir comme toujours et les nègres colonisés  
193 ou indépendants y pataugeront tant qu'Allah ne décollera pas la damnation qui pousse aux fesses du nègre (*Les*  
194 *Soleils des indépendances* ??1970:25-26).

195 (Without gutters because the leaders here have also betrayed us, they have not dug the gutters they promised  
196 and they will never do it ; pools of water will continue to gather as always and the colonized or independent  
197 negroes will flounder through them as much as God will not dispell the curse that puffs on the buttocks of the  
198 negro).

199 Kourouma condemns the breach of confidence between the leaders and the people who turned to be their  
200 victims. This happens as a result of the spate of dictatorship and life presidents that litter the continent. Ilagha  
201 (2009:141) calls for the heads of the corrupt leaders:

202 The dilemma couldn't have been better expressed, and yet the solution is clear. What Africa requires is that  
203 corrupt leaders in the mould of Maduabebe and Obasanjo should be hanged on the taut ropes of greed. Let the  
204 mind of God take over from there.

205 Even without proposing outright execution, Kourouma's arguments are full of vigour and violence amid satire  
206 and humour; he raises alarm over the height of political deception, disorder, repression and woeful failure of  
207 the machinery of governance right from the dawn of independence. The leaders have shown their malicious  
208 intention to do the people in in this bargain. This anger is not peculiar to Ilagha. *Les Soleils des indépendances*  
209 marshals out a set of premonitions that will likely set off social unrest in the fictitious Ebony Republic and, by  
210 implication, in all the independent African countries if things fail to improve in the calculation of the ordinary  
211 man. This fact is highlighted by ??ritwum (1979:160): Fama's failure to heed the warning signals of imminent  
212 danger is analagogy of what will befall the rulers of the Ebony Coast if they fail to heed the omens of future  
213 political upheavals. Thus, Kourouma expects the reader to draw implicit parallels between the omens of Fama's  
214 approaching fate and the signs of political unrest in the Ebony Coast Moreover, in the same way the oracular  
215 pronouncements and omens of disasters are always proved right in the novel, Kourouma insinuates that future  
216 political upheavals in the Ebony Coast are inevitable precisely because, unlike traditional Africans, 'the Republics  
217 of Independent Africa haven't set up institutions like the fetish or oracles to deal with disasters.'

218 This chaotic state of government policies and activities which was generally observed among many newly  
219 independent African states led to outbreak of civil wars and the emergence of war lords. The main objective of  
220 the war lords, contrary to national stability, is the takeover of power to be able to command allegiance and control  
221 national resources for self-aggrandizement. Birahima (Allah n'est pas Obligé 2000:51) sums it up: 'Quand on dit  
222 qu'il y a guerre dans un pays, ça signifie que des bandits de grand chemin se sont partagé le pays. Ils se sont  
223 partagé la richesse; ils se sont partagé le territoire; ils se sont partagé les hommes'. ( When we say there is war in a  
224 country , it means that high way robbers have shared the wealth among themselves; they have shared the territory  
225 among themselves; they have shared the men among themselves), Given the Liberian and Sierra Leonean tribal  
226 wars in the novel, synonymous with display of brazen, brutal and bestial animalism, Kourouma surmises that God  
227 is not obliged to bar men from extreme and uncanny brutality, but has given them the freedom and conscience to  
228 act with discretion or perish. In the same manner, they could manage their affairs in this world with humanistic  
229 tenets or alter them with utter inhumanity. Allah n'est pas Obligé hence cautions erring African leaders not

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230 to wait for divine or Western intervention in cases within their control such as the necessary mechanisms that  
231 should be put in place to stem this tinderbox of reckless bloodletting and self-extirpation. They should take  
232 on the challenge of curtailing the tide of ethnic strife, pogrom, genocide and political treachery that is the root  
233 of Africa's failures. *En Attendant le Vote des Bêtes Sauvages* (Kourouma1998:52-100) reveals in a weird title  
234 the bestiality of African leaders and their bastardization and dehumanization of the Africans especially during  
235 elections. The novel portrays Africa as the den of all manner of horrible dictators and despots. It specifically  
236 treats the rise of President Koyaga of the Golfe Republic to an absolutist Machiavellian ruler through the barrel of  
237 the gun. As it has become the norm, he joins the notorious clique of old reprobates of the continent dissimulated  
238 in fictional anonymity like Emperor Boussouma of Pays aux Deux Fleuves, Tiécoura of la République du Grand  
239 Fleuve, Tiékoroni of la République d'Ebènes and Nkoutigui of la République des Monts and a host of others. These  
240 older political dragons tutor and initiate the relatively younger and inexperienced impish dictators into their cult  
241 and club. *En Attendant le Vote des Bêtes Sauvages* (1998:183) rather compares their fraternity or the African  
242 political arena with the traditional world of hunters where the more experienced train the less experienced in  
243 an adventure of life or death: *La politique est comme la chasse, on entre en politique comme on entre dans*  
244 *l'association des chasseurs. La grande brousse où opère le chasseur est vaste, inhumaine et impitoyable comme*  
245 *l'espace, le monde politique. Le chasseur novice avant de fréquenter la brousse va à l'école des maîtres Chasseurs.*  
246 (politics is like hunting, one enters into politics like into the association of hunters. The big forest where hunters  
247 operate is vaste, inhuman and unkind like space, the world of politics. The amateur hunter before entering into  
248 the forest goes to the school of the master hunters).

249 Indeed, the SDGs literary criticism is an essential part of the post-independence disillusionment critique, a  
250 cell of interwoven body of mega-criticism and a part giving ancillary support to the whole. At the waning of  
251 post-independence disillusionment literary criticism the SDGs literary criticism takes over the relay baton, firmly  
252 positioning itself in a moderate tone by shrinking from the hysteria and tension associated with its source, but  
253 sustained the truly lofty culture of its practiced role as the attorney of the African masses.

### 254 3 III. post-independence disillusionment criticism now vehicle 255 of the SDGS

256 The SDGs could conveniently rely on the success of post-independence disillusionment literary criticism to make  
257 a political statement on the need for African leadership to provide enabling environment for the success of their  
258 programmes.

259 Total political goodwill at national and international levels is what is needed for success in this direction.  
260 Literary gurus especially in Africa through their writings remind governments that allegiance to the UN amounts  
261 to nothing, unless they oblige to good governance in order to make the noble objectives of the SDGs triumph.  
262 Literature has been there proactively with political disillusionment criticism and mention must be made of  
263 pioneer writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Wa Thiong'o, Armah, Jared Angira, Mongo Béti, Odia Ofeimuna, Sembène  
264 Ousmane, J.P. Clark and a host of others. These critics have played the intervention role of the arbiter between  
265 the people and their leaders for good governance and common welfare. In the dawn of the SDGs, the criticism is  
266 unabated. Wa Thiong'o (2007) in *Wizard of the Crow* slams dictatorship or leadership that appears insensitive to  
267 the plight of the masses. The fictitious country of Abur'ria where it thrives is naturally plagued by unemployment.  
268 The 'Ruler' is seen plying the ego trip and strategising on firm hold on power. Wa Thiong'o's major character,  
269 Kam't? contemplates his parents in the midst of his travails in the city: "Write to them stories of the number  
270 of times he had been thrown out of offices like a stray dog? Tell them that those degrees for which they had  
271 paid with years of toil and frugal living could not secure him even bus fare? Oh why didn't he allow the garbage  
272 collectors to bury his body?" (Wa Thiong'o 2007:61). Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* writes that sustainable  
273 development cannot be realised in crisis-ridden civil war situation, a lesson for Nigeria and a country that might  
274 not repeat a mistake in history if it were to face better time in the new millennium. Okediran in *Tenants of the*  
275 *House* reminds politicians that power is transient and leaders who lack decorum and fight like touts in supposedly  
276 hallowed chambers of the National Assembly and before the prying lens of press cameras will never command  
277 the people's respect. ??maraegbu (2009:132) decries the rate of poverty in the country in 'Victim of Poverty':

278 Now I recall his handsome face/Endowed with prowess Physically empowered and enabled/He was a victim of  
279 poverty Like a tramp he wandered about/A stranger in the capital His dream of abundance/ Was besieged and  
280 blocked.

281 The persona above is struck with the same fate Kam't? faces. So it is an indication that both disillusionment  
282 poets and novelists are united in this fight against man-made hunger and impoverishment in the land, hence  
283 advancing SDGs' view of poverty as a disease and supporting the programme for its eradication. Gomba uses  
284 poetic rhythms from the Niger-Delta to condemn the pauperisation of the people of the area by political leaders  
285 and oil companies. He submits that robbery, looting and pillaging are taking place; and as far as that trend  
286 continues unabated, poverty must be the lots of the land. In *The Ascent Stone*, Gomba (2014:179) accuses the  
287 international community of conspiracy of silence in the face of harsh conditions and pain the Ogoni and the  
288 Niger-Deltans live in while oil wealth is being carted away from their domain:

289 The world dances on our skulls/ Foul is fair in the politics of oil I weep for the children of Oloibiri and  
290 Ogoni/They eat dust the children eat dust/But up there in Abuja and Lagos/ Their oil oils sex and power But

291 faraway in London and Washington/Their oil lubricates power and Sex/ I weep for the children of the Niger  
292 Delta/They are the children of the ravaged nations/The world has cotton in its eyes/The world applauds the  
293 trophies of robbery/ Soldiers and hangmen are sent to calm us The world has cotton in its ears/The blood of my  
294 people keeps record The blood of my people bears witness Gomba (2014:128) joins the militants with the culprits  
295 claiming they compound the people's woes under the pretext of fighting for their freedom and welfare while they  
296 steal the oil themselves for selfish ends:

297 We collude with those who pillage the land./We collude with those who who murder us./It is time to purge  
298 this house of thieves. Amongst our loudest guns, where is the border/ Between militants and miscreants?/It  
299 is time to clean the house. There is a problem With us, more with us, perhaps much more. At this juncture,  
300 Gomba's poetic invocation, as powerful as it is, becomes admonition to whoever goes to the house of equity that  
301 must come with clean hands. This is the evidence of his fairness in judgement and clarity of vision. And this  
302 stealing motif pervades the length and breadth of his poetic universe.

### 303 4 IV.

### 304 5 Specific Literary Structures for the SDGS Campaign

305 Without a modicum of doubt we reiterate the fact that literature in general and the post-independence  
306 disillusionment literary criticism in particular are at the service of the SDGs. Among such structures they  
307 provide for this special UN programme are ecocriticism, feminist criticism, utopian literature and literature of  
308 social awareness etc. The SDGs may have become contingent for poor countries at the turn of the millennium,  
309 yet they remain basic infrastructures and features existing in advanced societies. African literature has continued  
310 to beckon on governments across the continent to come up with programmes that will improve the lot of their  
311 people. This clarion call comes in specific forms of literary criticism. Let us examine them in turn and see how  
312 they relate to the SDGs.

### 313 6 a) SDGs and Eco-criticism

314 All modern literary criticism in Africa based on material or ecological welfare which we know as ecocriticism  
315 emanates from post-independence disillusionment criticism. Eco-criticism has emerged as a new trend in literary  
316 criticism in Nigeria and Africa, especially in the Niger-Delta to support the clamour for better economic and  
317 environmental conditions of living for people in coastal regions. Besides, it inadvertently fits into the master plan  
318 of the SDGs for sustainable environment. Eco-criticism cuts across the traditional genres of prose, drama and  
319 poetry. ??wamuo (2010:9) buttresses this point:

320 Environmental sustainability is of course very topical in contemporary literature owing to its support to  
321 animate an inanimate species. This realisation has in fact led to the development of the concept of ecocri-ticism  
322 which deals with the relationship between literature and the physical environment. ??kpewho (1993:18) criticises  
323 the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta as he deplores the exploration activities of oil giants which  
324 have left the area devastated and the people in hardship since their agrarian and marine life has been truncated.  
325 Tonwe, one of the characters of his epistolary novel, Tides writes that an activist, "Bickerbug had begun to  
326 show pictures of the devastation done to the Niger Delta environment by oil exploration, deforestation of on-  
327 shore sites, desecration of traditional shrines, evacuation and tearing up of whole villages and farmlands, vast  
328 area of oil spillage and great quantities of aquatic life destroyed in the wake?" Agary ( ??006) makes a huge  
329 contribution to environmental literature and the creation of its awareness. The eponymous heroine is a cultural  
330 hybrid born of a Greek sailor and an Ijaw lover. Her complexion has blended with the environment that is  
331 rapidly losing its lush greenness and turning yellow due to soil degradation resulting from oil exploration and the  
332 accidents of spillage and gas flaring. In Yellow-Yellow, Agary conceives of ubiquitous phenomenon of one colour  
333 which characterises Ijawland and the entire Niger-Delta ecosystem. The narrator of the novel, Zilayefa, a.k.a.  
334 Yellow-Yellow, describes one of these disasters:

335 During my second to last year in secondary school, one of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village  
336 broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother's farm included?"Zilayefa, bring me my bathing  
337 soap and sponge.?"What happened?" I asked."And bring my towel too," she said, ignoring my question.

338 "What happened?""Oil, Zilayefa, she said, and turned away from me, walking toward the river?A group of  
339 people, painted in the same black as my mother covered from head to toe, was marching to see the Amananaowei,  
340 the head of the village. I joined them to find out what had happened. It turned out some of them had also lost  
341 their farmland that day (Agary:2006:1-2).

342 Agary treats environmental degradation as a real menace to life and a source of despair and worry to the  
343 victims. The people the work presents here are such that their destiny is tied to the environment that sustains  
344 their numerous aspirations. But the destruction means cutting them off from the umbilical cord that links them  
345 to that life. To this extent, Yellow-Yellow informs her audience that

346 The day my mother's farmland was overrun by crude oil was the day her dream for me started to wither,  
347 but she carried on watering it with hope. The black oil that spilled that day swallowed my mother's crops and  
348 unravelled the thread that held together her fantasies for me. She was able to find new farmland in another  
349 village, but it was not the same (Agary: 2006:10).

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350 The fact that this new farmland is not the same with the destroyed one indicates that there is alteration  
351 in its natural chemistry and in the owner's hope and aspirations toward it and which has come to stay; this  
352 definitely has damaging consequences. It is the destiny of nature itself that man through his economic activities  
353 has changed, which echoes in the ecological and biological systems. It also suggests that humans who are meant  
354 to survive in these systems have been alienated from them. As the chances for the sustenance of the environment  
355 slip, the survival of human beings in it dims:

356 Farming and fishing, the occupation that had sustained my mother, her mother, and her mother's mother no  
357 longer provided gain., I had witnessed lands claimed by massive floods during the rainy season, the earth slowly  
358 melting into the rivers. Women rowed their canoes farther and farther away to find land for farming (Agary:  
359 2006: 39) Akpan (2009) pays his dues to environmental literature by dedicating "Luxurious Hearses" largely  
360 to eco-criticism. He goes on first announcing the rapid encroachment of desertification to the southern coastal  
361 region of Nigeria by capturing the movement of cattle rustlers southward in search of water and green vegetation  
362 which is indicative of this fact:" Shehu, was a cowherd who had migrated with his cattle from Khamfi in the  
363 north, away from the widening Sahara, to the rain forest of the delta" (Akpan:2009:211). From that springboard,  
364 Akpan (2009:213) launches himself into the heart of his criticism: "But these were hard times. Due to decades of  
365 oil drilling, the soil was losing its fertility. Rivers no longer had fish, and, worse still, repeated oil fires annihilated  
366 hundreds of people each time". In the dialogue between two passengers of the bus in the story, Akpan (2009:285).  
367 recounts various activities of the major oil companies that negate the sanctity of the ecosystem: "I am going  
368 back home to farm as my ancestors did before oil was discovered in my village!" "which farm?" Monica said.  
369 Farmland no dey for delta o! Mobil, Shell, Exxon, Elf??All of dem done pollute every grain of sand." "I will fish,  
370 then." "Fish ke? Dem done destroy the river?no fish". I fowodo has also made a long standing contribution to  
371 eco-criticism and the damage done to the Niger Delta area by reckless destruction of amphibious and agrarian life  
372 in that part of the world. In 'Homeland', he writes: What are the things that grow here?/Those that grow from  
373 stone, lacking Life and root, flesh and water/Things cut as caps/For the baldness of Stone/ And what are the  
374 harvests here?/Of corn crippled before teething Of tuber poorer than the planted head?(Otiono and Okenyodo  
375 2006:159-160)

376 Osundare is a pro-earth poet and crusader. He is one of the trail blazers among the younger generation of  
377 writers; he joins political and eco-criticism in this poem entitled 'They too are the Earth': They too are the  
378 earth/the swansongs of beggars sprawled out in brimming gutters/ they are the earth/under snakeskin shoes  
379 and mercedes tyres/ the sweat and grime of/millions hewing wood and hurling water/they are the earth/moody  
380 every pore like naked moles ?? Orji:2003:51).

381 Osundare criticises extreme poverty and indirectly calls the attention of the leaders to woes of the down-trodden  
382 in society. At the same time, he makes reference to the earth as a sign of his concern on the environment. However,  
383 environmental literature in Nigeria could not be justifiably discussed outside the works of Ojaide, who has, by all  
384 standards, proved to be one of the greatest and most insightful writers of this field. However, it could rightly be  
385 said, without any fear of contradiction, that he like Osundare is a leading light among artists and critics with keen  
386 interest in the quest for awareness on environmental degradation and the search for permanent solutions. His  
387 poetry has gone a long way in highlighting these problems and raising concern about their ugly consequences.  
388 "The Community development officer" decries the use of indigenous elements by the so-called Multi-national  
389 companies to frustrate the yearnings of the host communities to obtain justice after outright destruction of both  
390 terrestrial and aquatic lives: I met one community liaison officer/transformed from a stick into a fat neck/ &  
391 when there was an oil slick/ it didn't matter to him/there was a gas explosion/it didn't matter to him/his people  
392 died the death of grasshoppers/it didn't matter since death is their portion/for as long as he sat in a big chair  
393 of/ the air-conditioned office with a fat salary ??Ojaide:2006:29-38).

394 It is plain to perceive a cry against, first, betrayal, then, calamity behind the major concern which is  
395 environmental disaster. And guided by a special technique of irony, the poet trains his tone to the climactic device,  
396 within which he demonstrates how the community development officer could sacrifice the entire community and  
397 its ecosystem for self-indulgence, symbolised herein by his haunch stature and fat salary. "The Activist" also  
398 highlights the theme of betrayal. Here the villain is Professor Ede, a native of Roko and a consultant to Bell  
399 Oil Company. Fire has gutted the community as a result of the exploration activities of this firm. Having been  
400 commissioned to enquire into the cause of the accident, he ends up with the following report:

401 The villagers set their village on fire because they wanted to extort money from Bell Oil Company.

402 People have become lazy and want an easy way to make money. None of those villagers has a farm as they  
403 used to; none of them carries (sic) out fishing in waters proverbially rich with all kinds of fresh and salt water  
404 fisher. The villagers only sit at home drinking illegal gin and playing both drafts and eko games (Okoroegbe:  
405 2012: 187).

406 In 'At the Kaiama Bridge', Ojaide further laments the adverse effects of exploration activities on not only the  
407 physical environment, but also on the people's culture and tradition, their belief system and superstition. All  
408 the people get in return are poverty, disease, poor infrastructures as shown by 'the wobbling Kaiama Bridge' in  
409 line 48 and the frustration of helplessly seeing resources being taken away from their land. So he writes:

410 Oil spillage has fuelled water hyacinths/ to multiply astronomically across rivers/Refuge gods are taking the  
411 last route/before the entire waterway is clogged. /Neighbours are surrendering their homes/to destruction by the  
412 fires from above./Others have the soil burning underfoot,/their shield of green mere ashes ??Ojaide: 2007:25-32).

413 Drama is not left out in the eco-criticism. Mbajjorgu (2011) has left a print in the sand of time with an  
414 exhilarating piece on climate change entitled: *Wake up Everyone*, set at the fictitious Ndoli L.G.A. located  
415 in a coastal region under the menace of environmental disaster arising from unprecedented flooding. Like  
416 Osundare, Mbajjorgu integrates political criticism into eco-criticism. He flares the multi-national oil companies  
417 for politicising their atrocities against host communities by sponsoring candidates that will protect their interest  
418 in elections while human lives and the entire ecosystem perish. In a similar way, they are behind the election  
419 victory of the chairman of Ndoli who is an ex-militant. Apart from paying him three hundred million Naira for his  
420 father's death in a case of oil spillage, they bankroll his campaign to the office in order to help them defeat other  
421 victims clamouring for justice. Chairman Ochonkeya is there for his pocket as his name signifies and for those of  
422 his former colleagues in the creek who come from where they hide to join him to loot the treasury, For this reason,  
423 he feels very reluctant to sponsor an environmental protection project spearheaded by a round character, Prof.  
424 Aladinma, an agriculturist and theatre artist who uses the stage to sensitive people on the hazardous effects of  
425 climate change. The Professor highlights the problems facing Ndoli.

426 Chairman: How, for instance? Prof, Aladinma: Good, that is why I am here. You see, as it concerns this  
427 area, Ndoli land, which is under your care, I foresee flood because of the likely overflow of the river. Already  
428 the farmers are complaining that their farmlands have become unproductive, and the fishermen say fishes have  
429 disappeared from the rivers and streams ??Mbajjorgu: 2011:14).

430 However, it is worthy of note to state that this drama is well sketched and the theme will never be boring; and  
431 the characters are named in a bid to reflect whatever values they stand for. Looking at it critically, one observes  
432 that the SDGs especially ESD as well as sustainable environment are well spelt out in its themes.

### 433 7 b) The SDGs and Feminist Criticism

434 Many literary works are replete with the SDGs ideals for gender equality. Most writers have taken the lead  
435 in the emancipation of women by creating virtuous female characters that are imbued with the qualities that  
436 exceed those of men. As we have earlier noted that there are already existing structures into which the SDGs  
437 can fall, one is reminded of the awareness created by feminist works of pioneer African authors in this field.  
438 Their imagination brings about female characters that refuse to be gagged by tradition owing to their education.  
439 Some of these women are Juliette in Guillaume Oyônô Mbia's *Trois Prétendants?un mari ??1964*) Margaret Fafa  
440 Nutsukpo. Moreover, some feminist writers no longer create women characters who bemoan their fate in fiction,  
441 but those whose capacity is enhanced, so that they can compete with men. Achebe could now be counted among  
442 such writers despite his antecedents in *Things Fall ??part* (1958) and *Arrow of ??od* (1960). In *Anthills of the*  
443 *Savannah* (1988), there is a new vision and laudable female characters with laurels abound such as Beatrice, who  
444 obtains a first class Honours in English from the University College, London. She has a good job, a car, a flat  
445 and a maid to tender her domestic chores. Comfort has got her flat where she accommodates her fiancé and is  
446 able to push him out when she discovers that he is not intelligent enough to be addressed as her man. Elewa,  
447 a lady of a low estate is able to find her way into the love world of Ikem, a renowned poet and editor of the  
448 *National Gazette ??Achebe:1988:78*). All these give the women in the novel prime status. Moreover, the main  
449 female character in the novel, Beatrice is portrayed not only as a modern educated lady, but one who is wise and  
450 knows her rights. Chris, her fiancé could not get away with his disposition to silence and indifference in the wake  
451 of Beatrice's unanticipated invitation by Sam, the de facto ruler of Kangan. Chris receives a thumping rebuke  
452 for this behaviour when the fate of her girl friend hangs in the balance and for waiting for the worst to happen  
453 to her before he reacts. Beatrice is able to notice that Chris is simply and most cowardly encysting himself from  
454 danger and by so doing he exposes a woman he claims to have loved to risk: 'BB, you never told me it was to  
455 Abichi.' 'Please, let me finish. I am carried off to this strange place and my future husband retires to his bed,  
456 sleeps well, wakes up and listens to the BBC at seven, has his bath, eats his breakfast and sits down afterwards  
457 to read the papers. Perhaps even take a walk in the garden. And then, finally at midday you remember the girl  
458 you asked to keep all the options open. You pick up the phone and tell her oh, you're back!' ??Achebe: 1988:  
459 112).

460 By attacking male chauvinism, Achebe drives home the objective of the SDGs on gender equality and women  
461 empowerment.

462 Nwachukwu-Agbada is another feminist writer by virtue of his avowed criticism of patriarchy. His novel, *God's*  
463 *Big Toe* is a harsh admonishment of traditional adherents who place too much emphasis on the male child with  
464 a resultant slight on the female child. He lays bare the ugly consequences of relying on the male child since in  
465 most cases it turns out to be an illusion. This is the case of Azu Anuka, who pampers Onwubiko for being an  
466 only son. The author berates the gender imbalance depicted in Azu Anuka's neurotic behaviour-equating his  
467 eight daughters and even his wife to nothing, ready to sacrifice them for the hedonist joy, life and survival of  
468 Onwubiko. He attacks further the bestial act of always getting a woman pregnant and dragging her to the theatre  
469 more often than necessary in search of one or more male children. Thus, he decries Azu Anuka's reaction each  
470 time he is repelled by fate:

471 The first issue was a female. The second was also female. Third, the fourth. The fifth. All girls. On each day  
472 of delivery, Azu Anuka's face was as long as a fiddle. Nobody questioned his reaction. It was normal to be sad  
473 at the arrival of a female issue. When the sixth child came, it was a boy, Azu went into his bedroom, brought  
474 out his double barreled gun and shot several times into the air ??Arungwa:2008:103).

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475 In one of her essays, Helen Chukwuma argues that men and women are of course different but complementary.  
476 Therefore the striving of one to be like the other is no doubt defeatist and irrelevant. And capping one superior  
477 or inferior can apply to any sex depending on the circumstance. Therefore eliminating these complementarities  
478 creates this futile notion of superiority and inferiority ??Chukwuma: 2007: 144). In sum, all these feminist  
479 apologists automatically provide very vital avenues for gender equality.

## 480 8 c) The SDGs and Utopian Literature

481 When too much had been probably written on political disillusionment in African literature and there were  
482 calls for a truce in order to avoid boredom, a strand of it branched off to become utopian literature. Utopian  
483 literature came as psychological therapy to cushion the effects of monotonous repetitions and make Africans  
484 forget the enormity of the present and look up to the future for its promise. In the era of the SDGS literary  
485 criticism, utopian literary criticism has become another facility literature offers them in their drive to change the  
486 world for a better place. It is a special project for the future also known as literature of escape. For instance, in  
487 Africa, and because of the ugly historical experiences, especially since independence, many a critic has canvassed  
488 for the use of utopian literature to soothe the pain of Africans by luring them to the world of El Dorado. Nnolim  
489 (2009:101) calls for a change in vision by African writers owing to his belief 'That African literature in the 20 th  
490 century was not a happy one: it was lachrymal: it was a literature of lamentation, a weeping literature following  
491 Africa's unhappy experience with slavery and colonialism'. Osundare supports Nnolim when he writes that "the  
492 cry is deeper than the wound" ??Uwatt:2005:378). According to ??wamuo (2010:11-12), to concentrate themes of  
493 the corpus of writings on novelties like the domains of film and video studies, performance art, detective fictions,  
494 children's literature and Sustainable goals is how to tune in to utopian literature. He agrees with Nnolim that the  
495 millennium literature should be forward-looking and able to redefine the African personality in the 21 st century  
496 and give it a new image, so that we will no longer busy ourselves talking about where the rain started beating  
497 us by harping on the twin evils. As part of retour aux sources (Back-to-Africa movement), ??nolim (2009:21)  
498 argues that it is likely to impede African and world development plans and directly the success of the SDGs.

## 499 9 The SDGs and Literature of Social Awareness.

500 This is a new approach to literary criticism that appears beneficial to the SDGs. It sensitizes the public especially  
501 on current issues pertaining modern life and which affect society. Beatrice in Anthills of the Savannah rebukes  
502 Chris for trying to have sex without condom. Similarly, Wa Thiong'o latest novel, Wizard of the Crow could  
503 easily be so classified for its campaign against HIV/AIDS virus, the search for whose solution is one of the  
504 Sustainable Goals. Kam?t? also receives a stern rebuke from Nyaw?ra for thinking of love-making without  
505 adequate protection. In the novel, we see a kind of feminism typical of Wa Thiong'o (2007:91): 'Don't you know  
506 about the virus? Pregnancy is life. The virus is death.' 'I don't have the virus.' How do you know? And if you  
507 know about yourself, how do you know that I am not carrying AIDS, Syphilis, gonorrhoea (sic) or any other STD?  
508 The author here targets perhaps a local population in Kenya and East Africa where there are reports of  
509 endemic incidence of AIDS virus.

## 510 10 Conclusion

511 It is very clear that just as literature has social functions it has important roles to play in the realisation  
512 of the SDGs especially in Africa. By playing the role of a watch-dog to governments, political leaders and  
513 democratic institutions, under the auspices of the postindependence disillusionment and the SDGs literary  
514 criticisms, literature contributes to change that goes a long way in improving the welfare of society and mankind.  
515 Such change has multiplying effects that could go around the SDGs. For instance, good governance no doubt  
516 means improved health conditions and social infrastructures; it has to do with eradication of diseases, reduction  
517 of maternal and infant mortality rates. Literature, writers and literary critics should not waiver in this great onus  
518 and so should governments of nations, the UN and its Agencies as well as international organisations indicate  
519 willingness to be partners in progress in the efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

520 However, literature, by virtue of its nature and function, plays a vital role as an umpire, urging African  
521 leaders and their people to recognise their respective and mutual obligations in the contract. Nevertheless,  
522 African literature has displayed its capacity to toe ethnic lines. In other words, partisanship manifests in literary  
523 productions as most writers utilize the medium of SDGs literary criticism to defend and protect either personal  
524 or regional interests and/or bring to the fore group protests and recriminations. The gamut of literary works  
525 from the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria has conferred on itself a peculiar identity in this regard. Almost all critics of  
526 ecocriticism cited above, namely: Okpewho, Ojaide, Ifowode, Akpan, Agary, Gomba and Ilagha; including those  
527 without mention, like Ikiriko and Saro-Wiwa, the forerunner are indigenes of the area. What we have noticed  
528 over the years is that a large number of works and writers have sprung from there using literature and the SDGs  
529 literary criticism as instrument of combat and echo chamber for what they perceive as ignominious <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Un Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs): What Role for Nigerian and African Literature?

Africains pour défendre les Blancs en Afrique centrale et en Afrique australe ?W.W. signifie White Wall, c'est-à-dire Mur Blanc. Mais le paradoxe, c'est que cette organisation n'est pas composée uniquement de Blancs; elle comprend également de très nombreux notables noirs qui luttent maintenant, par une alliance avec les Blancs de l'union Sud-Africaine, de la Rhodésie et du Portugal, pour que ceux-ci puissent rester en Afrique. (It is an organisation financed by South Africans for the defense of Whites in central and south Africa ?W.W.W. which means White wall. But the paradox is that this organisation is not made up of only Whites ; it equally includes a large number of Blacks, who now fight in alliance with Whites from South African union, from Rhodesia and Portugal, in order that these ones could remain in Africa).

Figure 1:

Feminist writers especially in Nigeria include Flora Nwapa (Efuru:1966) , Buchi Emecheta (Second Class Citizens:1975; The Bride Price:1976), Phaniel Egejuru (The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten), Ifeoma Okoye (Behind the Clouds:1982; Chimere:1992), Zainab Alkali (Stillborn); other female critics are Helen Chukwuma, Akachi Ezeigbo, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Rose Acholonu, Chioma Opara, Chinelo Ojukwu and

Figure 2:

## 530 .1 Year 2017

531 Year 2017

532 The Un Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs): What Role for Nigerian and African Literature? V.

## 533 .2 d)

534 government's neglect of the goose that lays the golden egg. The Niger-Delta example shows that literature can  
 535 easily be put to the service of militant ethnic nationalism and by so doing it assumes a political posture. This  
 536 could give readers clues on why Achebe should write *Anthills of the Savannah* to correct his former records  
 537 flawed by gender stereotype and publish his swansong, *There was a Country* before he died to gallantly registers  
 538 his conviction of and appertaining to Biafra. In the same vein, we see the reason female writers all over the  
 539 world always incline to feminism. They are peculiar cases anyway. Literature is not all about partisanship or  
 540 sectionalism. Pioneer writers like Gabriel Okara and J. P. Clark are of the Niger-Delta extraction, but not  
 541 ecocritics. All the same, there are enough proofs that literature itself, disillusionment criticism or the SDGs  
 542 literary criticism could not in any way be apolitical, especially in the Nigerian and African set-up.

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