

# Bridging the Gap between Science and Humanities: Language and Literature as Catalysts for Development in Nigeria

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## Abstract

## Original Research Article

This paper explores the critical need to bridge the long-standing divide between science and the humanities in Nigeria's development agenda. It argues that language and literature, particularly poetry, play transformative roles in shaping national values, fostering public engagement, and contextualizing scientific innovations within human experience. Drawing on Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom (1999), the study positions cultural and ethical dimensions as central to holistic development. Through qualitative content analysis, five Danjuma Osu's poems—Before We Grow Insane, Lamentation, We are Cramed, Let Nothing Be Wasted and Sore of the Soul—all from Sore of the Soul by Danjuma Osu and Moses Joseph, are examined. The poems address themes such as leadership, environmental degradation, identity, and social justice, providing insight into challenges often ignored by scientific frameworks. Findings reveal that literature not only gives voice to marginalized perspectives but also critiques systemic policy failures and promotes ethical development. The paper recommends integrating literary studies into science curricula and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations to ensure development that is both technologically sound and socially inclusive.

**Keywords:** Science, Humanities, Integration, Language, Literature, Poem, Development.

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## I INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's development trajectory has been characterized by ambitious economic reforms, infrastructural expansion, and increased investment in science and technology. Over the decades, successive administrations and development agencies have focused heavily on industrialization, digital innovation, engineering, and scientific research as key levers for national transformation. Yet, despite these efforts, the country continues to grapple with critical development challenges such as poverty, unemployment, social inequality, political instability, poor healthcare, environmental degradation, and educational decay. These persistent problems reveal a fundamental gap in the nation's development strategy, one that has largely ignored the cultural, ethical, and communicative dimensions essential for human-centered growth (Akinbobola, 2015). At the heart of this oversight lies the rigid dichotomy between science and the humanities within Nigeria's educational and policy-making structures.

This disciplinary divide has deep roots in colonial and post-colonial educational legacies, where science and technological disciplines were promoted as engines of modern progress, while the humanities - comprising language, literature, history, philosophy, and the arts - were relegated to a secondary status. In contemporary Nigeria, this trend continues as educational policy frameworks heavily prioritize STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) at the expense of language and cultural studies. The result is a fragmented intellectual culture where scientific expertise is often disconnected from the socio-cultural realities it is meant to transform. Policies are written in inaccessible language; scientific initiatives lack community buy-in; and development programmes are often implemented without sufficient attention to ethics, local identity, or public communication (Ekanem, 2020).

Yet, science alone cannot drive holistic development. While it provides tools and solutions, the humanities offer insight into the human condition, moral values, societal behavior, and

collective memory. These are not marginal concerns; rather, they are central to the effective design, implementation, and sustainability of development strategies. Martha Nussbaum (2010) has emphasized that a democracy cannot function properly without the ethical and imaginative capacities fostered by the humanities. Likewise, Amartya Sen (1999) asserts in *Development as Freedom* that true development must be measured not only by economic growth or technological output, but by the expansion of human capabilities, such as the ability to communicate, make informed choices, and participate meaningfully in society.

It is within this context that this paper proposes the integration of language and literature, particularly poetry, into the broader framework of national development in Nigeria. Language is not merely a vehicle for communication; it constructs meaning, shapes identity, and fosters civic consciousness. Similarly, literature reflects, critiques, and reimagines society. Poets, in particular, have long served as public intellectuals, offering moral guidance, cultural preservation, and political critique through the medium of creative expression. In Nigeria, where oral and written literary traditions are rich and vibrant, poetry can serve as a powerful tool for bridging the cognitive and communicative gaps between scientific policy and public reality.

This paper, therefore, sets out with the central objective of exploring how language and literature can serve as catalysts for integrative development in Nigeria. Specifically, it aims to analyze how selected Nigerian poems reflect on key issues such as governance, environmental degradation, identity, and social justice—issues that overlap with scientific and policy concerns. Through a qualitative content analysis of six poems from the collection *Sore of the Soul* by Danjuma Osu and Moses Joseph, the study seeks to demonstrate the relevance of literary discourse in illuminating the ethical, cultural, and emotional dimensions of national development.

In order to guide this inquiry, the following research questions are posed: In what ways do language and literature contribute to an inclusive understanding of development in Nigeria? How do selected Nigerian poems address themes that intersect with scientific and developmental challenges such as governance, healthcare, and the environment? What ethical and communicative insights can literature provide that are often missing in technical or policy-driven development approaches? And how can interdisciplinary collaboration between science and the humanities be institutionalized in Nigeria's educational and policy frameworks?

## II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The term development has historically been associated with economic growth, measured by increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), industrial output, and infrastructural expansion. However, contemporary scholarship argues that this narrow, economics-centered view fails to capture the full spectrum of human needs and societal transformation (Todaro & Smith, 2011). Thus, development is now widely conceived in three interrelated dimensions: economic, humanistic, and cultural.

The economic dimension of development focuses on improving income levels, employment opportunities, industrial productivity, and infrastructure. While this remains a core aspect of development, it alone does not guarantee societal well-being. The humanistic dimension extends beyond material prosperity to include access to healthcare, education, political participation, gender equality, and personal freedoms. Amartya Sen (1999), in his seminal work *Development as Freedom*, defines development as the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. For Sen, poverty is not merely the lack of income, but the deprivation of basic capabilities to lead the kind of life one values. Development, therefore, must aim at enabling people to function effectively in society by removing "unfreedoms" such as illiteracy, discrimination, and lack of public voice.

In parallel, the cultural dimension of development emphasizes identity, values, heritage, language, and belief systems. Culture shapes how communities perceive change, adapt to innovation, and relate to one another. It also influences policy implementation, especially in multicultural societies like Nigeria, where development interventions must be context-sensitive to avoid resistance and failure (UNESCO, 2013). Hence, culture is not an obstacle to development but a resource that must be engaged critically.

In Nigeria, science is often elevated as the primary driver of development, while the humanities are undervalued. This has led to an unbalanced developmental approach that produces technically sound but socially disconnected policies (Ekanem, 2020). Yet, science and the humanities are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they offer complementary insights that can enrich policy formulation and execution. For instance, scientific knowledge can provide technical solutions, but humanistic understanding ensures that these solutions are ethically informed, culturally appropriate, and effectively communicated.

Language and literature, two key areas within the humanities, play pivotal roles in this integrative approach. Language is the medium through which knowledge is transmitted, social identity is formed, and civic participation is enabled. It is not neutral; it encodes ideologies and power structures, shaping how people understand and engage with the world (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). In multilingual societies like Nigeria, language can either empower or exclude populations depending on its use in education, policy, and public discourse. When development communication is rendered in foreign or elite languages, vast segments of the population remain alienated from processes that affect their lives. Language is not merely a tool for relaying information; it is a medium through which people construct meaning, negotiate power, and form social bonds (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986).

Literature, particularly poetry, offers a mirror to society's struggles, dreams, and values. Through metaphor, imagery, and narrative, it humanizes data, critiques injustice, and gives voice to the voiceless. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Niyi Osundare, and Tanure Ojaide have historically used literature to address national issues such as corruption, environmental degradation, and cultural alienation. Literature thus serves not



only as a record of historical experience but also as a tool for ethical reflection and transformative imagination (Achebe, 1975).

### Theoretical Framework: Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*

The theory of *Development as Freedom* propounded by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has emerged as a seminal contribution to the discourse on global development. In contrast to traditional approaches that equate development with economic growth, Sen offers a more inclusive and human-centered understanding of what it means for a society to develop. At the heart of this theory is the idea that freedom is both the means and the end of development.

Sen identifies five instrumental freedoms necessary for a society to flourish: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. These freedoms, though distinct, are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. For example, access to quality education (a social opportunity) enhances an individual's ability to participate in political processes, while political freedoms, in turn, can ensure accountability in the distribution of resources and services. Sen's emphasis is clear: development must remove the "unfreedoms" that prevent individuals from achieving their full potential, including poverty, ignorance, ill health, and social exclusion.

This theoretical framework is particularly instructive when examining the persistent divide between science and the humanities in Nigeria. The country's development policies have largely been guided by a technocratic model that privileges science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) over the arts, literature, philosophy, and language studies. This disciplinary hierarchy has led to a fragmented development agenda that often overlooks the ethical, cultural, and communicative dimensions of societal transformation.

Sen's theory provides a compelling justification for integrating the humanities, particularly language and literature, into Nigeria's development strategies. It also encourages interdisciplinary thinking, challenging the artificial boundaries between academic fields. In line with this, the call to bridge the science-humanities divide in Nigeria is not simply an academic concern but a practical necessity. Development is a multifaceted process that must draw on multiple forms of knowledge. Science and technology may provide the means, but the humanities offer the moral compass and communicative tools needed to guide those means toward humane ends.

### III METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore how Nigerian poetry reflects and engages with issues of national development. Qualitative research is appropriate for this inquiry because it allows for an in-depth analysis of language, symbolism, and context—core features of literary

texts. Specifically, the method of content analysis is employed to examine recurring themes and metaphors in a selection of poems from the collection *Sore of the Soul* by Danjuma Osu and Moses Joseph. Content analysis enables the researcher to systematically interpret how poetic language critiques societal issues such as governance, healthcare, environmental degradation, and marginalization.

Poetry is used as data in this study due to its unique ability to humanize complex developmental challenges. In Nigeria's literary tradition, poetry serves as both a reflective and critical voice, often articulating the concerns of marginalized communities and interrogating the ethical failures of leadership. As Nussbaum (2010) observes, literature fosters empathy, imagination, and moral awareness, qualities essential for inclusive and ethical development. The selection of poems was guided by four key criteria: thematic relevance to national development, the use of indigenous language and imagery, the diversity of poetic voice and perspective, and the socio-political significance of the subject matter. The five poems analyzed - *Before We Grow Insane*, *Lamentation*, *We are Cramed*, *Let Nothing Be Wasted* and *Sore of the Soul* - address pressing issues in Nigerian society while employing language that invites both reflection and action.

### IV POEM ANALYSIS

#### A. BEFORE WE GROW INSANE

*I reasoned of  
The black ant  
With airs of avant garde;  
Pregnant of energetic feeling  
Of objection to reading depravity;  
It's dream to eulogize a dirge  
Sung on the burial of lethargy*

*I reasoned of  
The seemingly insignificant stature  
Of the soldier ant  
With a harvest head, teeth alert  
As a knight waiting for rapture  
I wonder its Creator's pleasure*

*That to delicacies guide-  
To in leisure live without erasure  
It's miniature stature and stride despite-  
Its head tucked to the trunk  
Through its wasp-waist bunk.*

*Then I reason of  
Its sense to anticipate the season,  
To organize and regulate  
When of danger dreams a reason,  
Its sense of airs articulate*

*With ease I pray:  
O, Ant lend us your brain,  
Before we grow insane. Pg 3, 4*



The poem "Before We Grow Insane" uses the metaphor of ants - specifically the black ant and soldier ant - to reflect on discipline, foresight, and communal responsibility, critiquing the disordered state of Nigerian society. It praises the ants' instinct to organize, prepare, and act purposefully, contrasting this with human lethargy, moral decline, and irrationality. The poet's prayer to "lend us your brain" symbolizes a desperate call for ethical reawakening and structured thinking before societal collapse ensues.

In relation to bridging the science-humanities gap, the poem demonstrates how literature can humanize scientific observation, turning biological insight into moral reflection. It shows that poetry can foster civic consciousness, cultural critique, and ethical vision which are elements critical to inclusive development. Thus, the poem exemplifies how language and literature serve as essential tools alongside science, contributing to a more holistic and human-centered approach to national progress.

## B. WE ARE CRAMED

*We wait, we weep  
Like a saintly woman  
Indicted of promiscuous pregnancy*

*We travail and our tears prevail  
On our complaining cheeks  
For briars and thistles offer for our romance*

*The four winds agile awake  
Padlocking the gates  
Of the collapsing world*

*Left at the mercy of the cold  
We are cramed and caked-  
Our brows polished by sweat*

*Our throats await a pamper  
Of sweet mothers  
Yet out mothers' nipples are blighted. Pg11*

The poem "We Are Cramed" presents a haunting metaphor for societal suffering and developmental neglect. Through images of weeping, labour, and deprivation, it captures the collective anguish of Nigerians "left at the mercy of the cold", a metaphor for abandonment by governance and failed systems. The reference to "mothers' nipples... blighted" powerfully symbolizes the failure of nurturing institutions, such as education, healthcare, and leadership, to sustain the people.

In the context of bridging the science-humanities divide, this poem illustrates how literature can voice public suffering, critique failed development models, and humanize policy discussions. While science may offer data on poverty or collapse, poetry conveys the lived emotional experience of that breakdown. The poem becomes a form of civic engagement, demanding ethical reflection and empathetic response from policymakers. It underscores the importance of integrating

literary insight into development planning, aligning with the argument that language and literature are crucial for fostering inclusive, human-centered progress in Nigeria.

## C. LAMENTATION

*In our churches  
We speak in tongue  
We pray ceaselessly  
We cast and command forces  
Our knees crack and cringe  
At worship when we visit Jerusalem  
Yet, in the midst of many matters  
We lose our manners for manna*

*We bath our sanctuary  
With washings of ablution  
To chant our prayers in sanctimony  
Morning, noon, evening with adoration  
Of solemn supplications  
Yet we lose our manners for meaner*

*Many prayers offered  
Yet many problem unsolved  
Who is our God and where is He?  
Does He not answer prayer still?  
Our dealers run after the  
World, all in pandemonium and woe  
It could be that God has turned  
Away from us for our love  
For fat filths*

*And this God may not hear us  
Where the rich milk and breast of the poor  
The poor dry and dehydrate  
For milk unreplaced*

*The mentors MEAN nonsense  
So the disciples have no case  
Do we have to reconsider..  
The dense mess  
And abrogates of bloody advocates?  
The hurrah to leukemia. pg 12*

The poem "Lamentation" is a powerful critique of religious hypocrisy, moral decay, and leadership failure in Nigerian society. Despite intense religious devotion, depicted through fervent prayers, pilgrimages, and rituals, the poem laments the persistence of societal problems, corruption, and inequality. It questions divine silence in the face of human suffering, suggesting that national dysfunction stems not from divine neglect but from ethical collapse and exploitative leadership: "Where the rich milk and breast of the poor / The poor dry and dehydrate."

In the context of bridging the science-humanities gap, this poem illustrates how literature, particularly poetry, can unveil the moral and spiritual crises that often underlie failed development efforts. While science may provide technical solutions, literature exposes the ethical void that hinders progress. By



giving voice to societal frustration and interrogating cultural contradictions, the poem affirms that language and literature are indispensable tools for development—offering critical insight, cultural accountability, and the moral grounding that science alone cannot provide.

#### D. SORE OF THE SOUL

*That ox  
The ox that  
Treads out the corn  
Is muzzled by knocks.*

*And the labourer  
His wages summarily withdrawn  
To substitute with wages of pen-paper talks*

*A sore on the brow s sorry sore of the soul. Pg 54*

The poem "Sore of the Soul" uses stark, symbolic imagery to portray the exploitation and dehumanization of honest labour in Nigerian society. The ox that "treads out the corn" being "muzzled by knocks" evokes the silencing and suffering of those who sustain the system. Likewise, the labourer whose rightful wages are replaced with empty rhetoric "pen-paper talks" highlights the failure of policy to translate into justice or tangible well-being.

In relation to bridging the science-humanities gap, the poem demonstrates how literature captures the emotional and ethical consequences of flawed development. Where scientific data may reveal income disparities or unemployment rates, poetry like this gives voice to the inner pain and injustice experienced by the oppressed. The "sore of the soul" is a metaphor for the deeper societal wounds that cannot be healed by technology alone. Thus, the poem affirms the necessity of integrating humanistic insight into national development discourse to ensure that progress is both ethical and inclusive.

#### E. LET NOTHING BE WASTED

*Let the thought thoughtless brain  
Be converted for condiments  
To sweeten the dishes of them that reign  
And cuddle at love feast moments  
Let nothing be wasted*

*Our population overflow  
Be reduced let our children  
Between ages one and four  
Be sold to foreign lands at least to the barren  
For good prices.  
Let nothing be wasted*

*Let our fathers foreskin  
Be recircumcised  
And be used for cloth  
In spite of pain of the exercise  
Let nothing be wasted*

*Let us turn our neighbours'  
Blood into graceful oil to eat our yam  
Or let them pay twice to free terrors  
Their children, to make our economy swell  
Let nothing be wasted*

*To make our mail runners  
Not to faint on the highway  
Those who turn our opposers  
Be turned mules for the hard ways  
Let nothing be wasted*

*Let the idle toddlers  
Who only eat without contribution  
To our economic gains be let to smugglers  
Who promised to boost our wealth for good distribution  
Let nothing be wasted.*

*Let our eunuchs  
Be castrated again  
Sell their testicles and buttocks  
For our barren women to fertility regain  
Let nothing be wasted*

*Let our ladies' unborn children  
Conceived through hollow wedlocks  
Be forced out to feed the soil  
So they can scout well for good lucks  
Let nothing be wasted. Pg 38*

The poem "Let Nothing Be Wasted" by Danjuma Osu is a searing satire that interrogates the ethics of utilitarianism taken to a grotesque extreme. Layered with irony, sarcasm, and violent imagery, the poem critiques the commodification of human life, the erosion of moral values, and the horrifying consequences of a development model that prioritizes material gains over human dignity. Each stanza presents an exaggerated solution to societal or economic problems, couched in the recurring refrain, "Let nothing be wasted." This phrase, ordinarily associated with thrift and resourcefulness, is here turned into a chilling mantra for systemic dehumanization.

The poem opens with the line, "Let the thought thoughtless brain / Be converted for condiments," mocking the societal tendency to discard or devalue individuals considered unproductive or intellectually deficient. In a development context, this may represent how populations that do not fit into the elite technocratic mold—such as the illiterate, the unemployed, or the poor—are treated as waste. The ironic suggestion that such brains could "sweeten the dishes of them that reign" underscores the cynical exploitation of the marginalized to sustain the comfort of the ruling class.

The subsequent stanzas intensify the satire by presenting horrifying, imaginary policy proposals that parallel real social injustices: selling toddlers to the barren, using foreskins for clothing, and turning neighbours' blood into oil. These grotesque metaphors mirror actual exploitative practices: child trafficking, organ trade, and systemic violence. They are

exaggerated to expose the ethical bankruptcy of leadership and a development ideology that values profit over people. The poet is essentially confronting the cold rationality of technocratic governance, where everything, including human life, becomes a commodity.

In the line, “Let them pay twice to free terrors / Their children, to make our economy swell,” the poet alludes to how insecurity and systemic violence are monetized through ransom, extortion, and the politicization of national crises. The government and elites appear complicit in sustaining chaos for economic or political gain. This verse speaks to failed governance, predatory capitalism, and the absence of moral leadership, issues that scientific or economic solutions alone cannot address.

One of the poem’s most striking stanzas reads:

“Let our eunuchs / Be castrated again / Sell their testicles and buttocks / For our barren women to fertility regain.”

Here, the poet critiques the objectification of bodies, particularly in the medical-industrial and reproductive sectors, where bodies are mined for their utility without consent or dignity. It also satirizes scientific advances in fertility or biotechnology that are embraced without ethical reflection. This illustrates the urgent need for the humanities to check and guide scientific progress, ensuring that development respects human rights and cultural values.

In the final stanza, the poet turns to “ladies’ unborn children / conceived through hollow wedlocks” proposing that they be aborted to “feed the soil,” metaphorically connecting moral decay with sacrificial fertility. The reference to “scouting well for good lucks” underscores the desperation and moral compromise that often accompany poverty and social instability. It critiques a society where development is not people-centered, and where individuals are pressured to trade their values for survival or advancement.

The poem is a compelling literary case for the integration of humanistic inquiry into the discourse of national development. It reveals that when development is driven solely by scientific reasoning, economic goals, or state policy without ethical reflection, empathy, or cultural literacy, it risks becoming inhumane and even monstrous. While science may offer solutions to technical problems, it does not interrogate whether those solutions are just, inclusive, or morally acceptable.

## **V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

The analysis of the selected poems - Before We Grow Insane, We Are Cramed, Lamentation, Sore of the Soul, and Let Nothing Be Wasted reveals that Nigerian poetry serves not only as a mirror to the nation's socio-political and developmental crises but also as a platform for ethical reflection, civic consciousness, and cultural critique. These poems, drawn from Sore of the Soul by Danjuma Osu and Moses Joseph, illustrate the immense potential of language and literature in enriching

Nigeria’s development discourse beyond the narrow confines of scientific and economic reasoning.

Thematically, the poems address critical issues that intersect with development, such as bad governance, exploitation, inequality, spiritual and moral decline, infrastructural decay, and the commodification of human life. Through metaphor, irony, and personification, the poets articulate the deep emotional and ethical dimensions of these realities, which are often overlooked in technocratic or statistical assessments of national progress. For instance, Before We Grow Insane employs the ant as a symbol of disciplined civic order and foresight which are qualities urgently needed in Nigeria’s disoriented development agenda. Similarly, We Are Cramed captures the hopelessness and suffocation felt by the masses, echoing the alienation that results when policies are made without human-centered considerations.

Moreover, Lamentation interrogates the contradiction between Nigeria’s intense religious devotion and its moral and institutional failures, revealing the cultural and ethical disconnect that impedes genuine progress. Sore of the Soul highlights the betrayal of honest labour and the dehumanization of workers under exploitative economic systems, while Let Nothing Be Wasted offers a grotesque yet powerful satire on utilitarianism gone awry, emphasizing the dangers of development that lacks ethical guardrails.

Across all five poems, a common thread emerges: the failure of development models that exclude the humanities and ignore the human condition. While science and technology are essential for national advancement, the poems suggest that without the guiding insights of literature, language, and ethics, such advancement risks becoming morally hollow, socially unjust, and emotionally alienating.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study affirms the indispensable role of language and literature as catalysts for integrative, ethical, and inclusive development in Nigeria. Through the analysis of five selected poems from Sore of the Soul, the research demonstrates that literature not only reflects societal conditions but also critiques, humanizes, and envisions alternative futures. It reveals the profound insights that poetry offers into leadership failure, civic decay, moral confusion, and the alienation of the human person in a development paradigm dominated by technocratic rationality.

As Amartya Sen’s Development as Freedom posits, true development is about expanding human capabilities, not merely increasing GDP or deploying infrastructure. Literature, in this context, plays a crucial role in shaping those capabilities by nurturing empathy, civic awareness, cultural memory, and ethical reasoning. Thus, bridging the gap between science and the humanities is not a luxury but a necessity for Nigeria. Without the interpretive, imaginative, and moral frameworks offered by the humanities, scientific progress may advance but human society may remain stagnant or even regress. A harmonious fusion of scientific knowledge and literary wisdom



is essential for building a Nigeria that is not only developed but humane, just, and reflective.

Literature gives voice to the voiceless, critiques systems of oppression, and reminds us of the human soul behind every statistic and structure. Therefore, it must be positioned as a core resource in Nigeria's quest for sustainable national transformation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, several recommendations emerge for policymakers, educators, and development practitioners in Nigeria:

- i. National development strategies should actively incorporate insights from literature and humanities scholarship. Poets and literary critics should be engaged as part of interdisciplinary development think-tanks to ensure that policies reflect human realities and cultural nuances.
- ii. The Nigerian education system, particularly at the tertiary level, should promote curricula that bridge science and the humanities. Engineering, medicine, and technology students should take courses in literature, ethics, and communication to foster a more holistic and empathetic worldview.
- iii. Government and private sector stakeholders should invest in literary festivals, creative writing programs, and the promotion of indigenous languages. These platforms not only preserve cultural identity but also provide spaces for civic engagement and developmental critique.
- iv. Interdisciplinary forums should be established where scientists, social scientists, humanities scholars, and artists can collaboratively address national issues. Such collaborations can produce more inclusive and responsive models of development.
- v. Ministries of culture and education should support the publication, teaching, and performance of literary works, especially poetry, that tackle national challenges. These texts can be used as civic tools in community engagement and policy advocacy.

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