

Tracing the development of Chinua Achebe's philosophy on sustainable development in his major novels

Salcedo, Francis Xavier R. ✉

De La Salle University, Department of Theology and Religious Education (DTRE), Manila, Philippines
(francis.salcedo@dlsu.edu.ph)



ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

Received: 30 December 2024

Revised: 27 January 2025

Accepted: 15 February 2025

Available Online: 20 February 2025

DOI: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25838

OPEN ACCESS

Abstract

One literary writer whose work extensively deals with issues concerning global sustainable development is Chinua Achebe. He is noted for his novel *Things Fall Apart*, which was in fact groundbreaking in bringing to the attention of his readers the social, cultural and environmental impacts of colonialism and modernization in his African community. He is a prominent figure in literature to those interested in social justice, sustainable development, and ethical progress due to his work as a proponent of balanced and respectful progress. Notably, Achebe's writing highlights the importance of preserving cultural heritage, understanding the human impact of economic development, and respecting the relationship between people and the land. His novels express the disruptions of the already stabilized ways of life through exterior power, among them, by the exploitation of natural wealth and further breakdown of communities' social structures by colonies and worldwide forces. In discussing these aspects, Achebe indirectly brings to the attention of his readers the relevance of sustainable development which respects local culture and the social structure as well as caring for the environment as set by United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No.16. As such, this study will trace the development of Achebe's philosophy on sustainable development based on his five significant novels namely *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). All in all, this study argues that even though Chinua Achebe's contributions to sustainable development may not be as direct as those of an economist, activist, or environmentalist, his influence lies in his transformative ideas around culture, ethics, governance, and society - which are critical components of sustainable development.

Keywords: Chinua Achebe, Africa, colonialism, post-colonialism, social justice, culture, sustainable development, ecology, governance

Tracing the development of Chinua Achebe's philosophy on sustainable development in his major novels

1. Introduction

The environmental challenges facing humanity in the twenty-first century are not only acute and grave, they are also unprecedented in kind, complexity and scope. (Lidstrom, 2015) Driven by the pursuit of economic growth, humanity has exploited the natural world and is moving dangerously close to exceeding climate targets that keep us within safe operating limits. Issues such as deforestation, pollution, loss of biodiversity, resource depletion, climate change, social inequality and poverty are so interconnected that solutions must address the "wicked" and complex nature of our global problems. (Pryshlakivsky & Searcy, 2013). There is indeed so much that needs to be done in order to bring into fruition this passage adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its document *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015): "We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind." With a sense of urgency, this statement emphasizes the importance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all in the here and now.

Sustainable development is the moral imperative of satisfying needs, ensuring equity and respecting environmental limits (representing constraints on human activities) including efforts to maximize economic value (Holden et al., 2014). Robinson (2004) emphasized that sustainable development is a collective institutional response, efficiency gains and a social responsibility. As such, humanity must navigate the dynamic and ever-changing relationships between people and the planet and the future that lies ahead. The emergence of complex sustainability challenges in contemporary society has led to the necessity of searching for more effective approaches to education for sustainable development. Since no single discipline can fully address the myriad issues facing humanity at this point in time, combining diverse viewpoints allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the problem.

Interestingly, research has shown that reflection leads toward a more profound level of engagement with respect to sustainable actions. (Molderez et al, 2021) This underlines that higher education has a role to play in stimulating reflection in light of sustainability. As Hermes and Rimanoczy (2018) point out, in the past decades sustainability in management education focuses mostly on technical aspects with too little room for the humanities which highlights reflection and emotions. This is to say that the humanities, like science and math, produce deep impact among learners and can lead them towards a more personal involvement in addressing global sustainability issues. A holistic approach to learning and teaching sustainability is therefore needed (Hermes and Rimanoczy, 2018) which unites hands, hearts and heads. (Shrivastava, 2010)

Needless to say, the role of the humanities in developing the imagination of readers is significant because humanity's inability to properly imagine climate change and the catastrophic events it signals makes responding to them a monumental challenge. (Skrimshire, 2010) Climate change experts and environmental humanists alike agree that the climate crisis is, at its core, a crisis of the imagination (Marshall, 2014; Hartman, 2017) and much of the popular imagination is shaped by fiction. In his 2016 polemic *The Great Derangement*, anthropologist and novelist Amitav Ghosh takes on this relationship between imagination and environmental management, arguing that humans have failed to respond to climate change at least in part because the fiction they have written fails to believably represent it. Ghosh explains that climate change is largely absent from contemporary fiction because the cyclones, floods, and other catastrophes it evokes simply seem too "improbable" to belong in stories about everyday life (*The Great Derangement* 27). Climate change evades our imagination because it poses significant representational challenges. (Poray-Wybranowska, 2021)

2. Issues on Sustainable Development and Chinua Achebe

This paper analyzes Chinua Achebe's main novels because his fiction brings his readers to not just imagine but also represent the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial after shots of daily life in Nigeria that capture and render visible the impacts of the disruption of traditional ways of life by external forces, including the exploitation of natural resources and the erosion of community structures due to colonial and global influences. (Brown 2021) The potential effect of Chinua Achebe's literary works is explored in this paper to demonstrate that literary works have considerable potential as an innovative approach and enabler for reflection to broaden the reader's understanding of sustaining developmental goals in the global setting. Achebe's literary and cultural impact arises from his manner of interlacing African cultural and linguistic traditions, often those of his own Igbo people, with Western-influenced fictional discourses. (Lynn, 2017) Achebe became a prominent figure in literature for those interested in social justice, respect for traditional cultures and environment, and ethical progress through advocating balanced and respectful approaches to progress. His writing points out the significance of cultural heritage preservation, realization of human impact through economic development, and respect toward the relationship between people and the land. Much of the narrative he expressed in his novels point to disrupted traditional life patterns by powerful interference external from humans, including the exploitation of natural resources and the tearing down of community structures of colonial and global influences. (Choudhury, 2014) In addressing these issues Achebe indirectly calls people to adopt sustainable development through respect for local cultures and social structures and the protection of the environment (United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No 16) in his different writings.

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe (1930–2013), popularly known as Chinua Achebe was a Nigerian novelist, poet, critic and professor and is widely regarded as one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. He was raised by evangelical Christian parents in the village Ogidi in Igboland, Nigeria and received an early education in English, but grew up surrounded by a complex fusion of Igbo traditions and colonial legacy. He studied at the University College, a British-style university, originally intending to study medicine, but eventually changed his major to English, history, and theology. After graduating, Achebe worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in Lagos and later studied at the British Broadcasting Corporation staff school in London. During this time, Achebe likewise began his career as a writer. Having been taught that Igbo values and culture were inferior to those of Europeans, and finding in Western literature only caricatured stereotypes of Africans, he conceived of an African literature that would present African characters and society in their full richness and complexity. (Gikandi, 2000) Starting in the 1950s, he helped to found a new Nigerian literary movement that drew on the oral traditions of Nigeria's indigenous tribes. Although Achebe wrote in English, he incorporated Igbo vocabulary and narratives in his writings. Many of his novels dealt with the social and political problems facing his country, including the difficulties of its postcolonial legacy.

His novels have been translated into thirty languages, he has been awarded honorary doctorates by universities in North America and Britain, he has been elected an honorary fellow of the Modern Language Association, has in recent years been nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature, and has likewise been the subject of numerous critical essays published in journals throughout the world. From the early years of his postcolonial reflection in *Things Fall Apart* to his more complex critiques of postcolonial African leadership in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe's works evolved as a response to changing socio-political landscapes not just in Africa but all the world over, inasmuch as he remains grounded in his belief on the importance of cultural identity, social justice, and the preservation of native traditions and values. (Kambaji, 1994) It thus seems timely to collect enlightening insights in his novels so that interested readers, critics, educators and learners become aware of the relevance of his perspectives and approaches in light of the numerous challenges facing contemporary global societies.

3. Tracing Achebe's Philosophy on Sustainable Development in His Major Novels

Achebe's novels focus on Africa, specifically Nigeria, and the changes it underwent over time. He explores four key moments of his people's history. First, he looks at Nigeria's ancient past and then moves on to highlight the negative effects of colonialism. In *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, he emphasizes the dangers that occur when foreign culture and mindset of the colonizer is imposed on the colonized. In *No Longer at Ease*, he puts the spotlight on the difficulties of the colonized people struggling for freedom and preserving their land, traditions and cultural identity. In *A Man of the People*, he foregrounds the greed and corruption of the colonizer which have embedded themselves among the natives even after the colonizer had departed and the natives have already gained their independence. Finally, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, he brings to life the difficult task of reclaiming the good things of the past and making it present once again in modern Nigeria. All in all, Achebe writes with a great sense of social responsibility in his novels which probe deeply into Nigeria's history and challenges. (Bhatt, 2021)

A. "Things Fall Apart" (1958): The Clash of Cultures and the Tragedy of Colonialism

In *Things Fall Apart* (referred to as *TFA* hereafter), Achebe explores the devastating effects of British colonialism on African societies:

"The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (TFA, 176)

Achebe even uses the locust invasion as a metaphor of the coming of colonial forces in order to demonstrate how external forces can exploit and destabilize natural and social systems:

At first, a fairly small swarm came. They were the harbingers sent to survey the land. And then appeared on the horizon a slowly moving mass like a boundless sheet of black cloud drifting towards Umuofia. Soon it covered half the sky, and the solid mass was now broken by tiny eyes of light like shining star-dust. (TFA, 56)

Though the novel is a critique of the destructive force of colonialism, it also emphasizes the richness and complexity of pre-colonial African culture, particularly the Igbo society in which the novel is set:

"The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honor the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers. Men and women, young and old, looked forward to the New Yam Festival because it began the season of plenty—the new year. On the last night before the festival, yams of the old year were all disposed of by those who still had them. The new year must begin with tasty, fresh yams and not the shriveled and fibrous crop of the previous year." (TFA, 36)

A dramatic confrontation in the Twenty-Second chapter of *TFA* yields inferences that are relevant to this paper. At an annual ceremony held in honor of the earth goddess, Enoch, an overzealous convert to the Christian faith, commits "one of the greatest crimes a man could commit" against the clan, namely, "to unmask an egwugwu [a titled elder who impersonates an ancestral spirit] in public" (TFA, 171). Having reduced Enoch's "compound ... to a desolate heap" (TFA, 173), a group of egwugwu proceeds to the church to confront the Reverend James Smith and his interpreter,

Okeke: Ajofia . . . the leading egwugwu of Umuofia . . . addressed Mr. Smith . . . "Tell the white man that we will not do him any harm," he said to the interpreter. . . . "But this shrine which he built must be destroyed. . . . It has bred untold abominations and we have come to put an end to it. . . ." Mr. Smith said to his interpreter: "Tell them to go away from here. This is the house of

God and I will not live to see it desecrated." Okeke interpreted wisely to the . . . leaders of Umuofia: "The white man says he is happy you have come to him with your grievances, like friends. He will be happy if you leave the matter in his hands." (TFA, 174-175)

Okonkwo is the central character and protagonist of the novel. He is a powerful and respected leader in the Igbo community of Umuofia, who is known for his physical strength, skills as a warrior, and his strong work ethic. As European colonialism and Christianity begin to infiltrate Igbo society, Okonkwo has to grapple with how to balance these changes against his commitment to traditional Igbo customs and values. His strict following of conventional norms and his frivolous behavior lead him to debacle. As the novel progresses, Achebe subtly points out that the many mishaps which happened to Okonkwo were but the result of his many offenses particularly his act of killing of a boy from a neighboring village named Ikemefuna who was close to him, which turned the Earth-goddess into an avenging fury and put a landmark on Okonkwo that he was destined to die. (Emenyonu & Nnolim, 2014). At the end of the book, *TFA*, Obierika leads the District Commissioner and his men to "the tree from which Okonkwo's body was hanging:

"Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him," said Obierika . . . The District Commissioner changed instantaneously. The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs. "Why can't you take him down yourselves?" he asked. "It is against our custom," said one of the men. (TFA, 190)

Philosophy on Sustainable Development:

- **Cultural Pride and Identity:** Achebe's philosophy here is rooted in a deep respect for African traditions and the complex social and political systems that existed before colonial rule. Okonkwo, the protagonist, represents traditional Igbo virtues such as strength, masculinity, and the importance of familial and communal ties.
- **The Destructive Nature of Colonialism:** Achebe depicts how European missionaries and colonial administrators systematically undermine the indigenous cultures, religions, and social structures. It is a tragedy, not only for Okonkwo but also for his entire community, that their traditional values clash with the imposed foreign systems, religious as well as political.
- **Nature Suffers in the Death of a Person:** In Igbo cosmology, nature and the spiritual world interlink so closely. Nature usually responds whenever actions disturb the social or spiritual order. Silence, darkness, and tension in the world of nature following the killing of Ikemefuna point out that the action not only appears tragic but an offense against the order of the universe.

Development of Achebe's Thought:

In *TFA*, Achebe creates the basis for his philosophy of African cultural preservation and resistance to the destructive forces of colonialism. The novel stresses that African societies were not "primitive" but were instead highly organized, with their own systems of justice, governance, and spirituality.

B. "No Longer at Ease" (1960): The Conflicted Identity of the Westernized African

No Longer at Ease (referred to as *NLE* hereafter), presents the story of Obi Okonkwo, a young Nigerian man who returns from studying in England to work as a civil servant in the newly independent Nigeria. The novel is centered on the tension between traditional African values and the Westernized, modern identity that Obi assumes. In *NLE*, Achebe presents the reader with a portrait of the critic as a student of literature. Brought up on Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot (*NLE*, 20) among others, Obi is a graduate in English who read "Conrad . . . for his degree" (*NLE*, 103). He feels extremely comfortable talking to the Chairman of the Public Service Commission on "modern poetry," "the modern novel," and, specifically, on novelists ranging "from Graham Greene to

Tutuola" (NLE, 42-43). It is not surprising, therefore, that Obi brings the sensibility of a student of literature to bear on the action of *NLE*. When the traders with whom Obi is traveling to Umuofia

"burst into song again . . . Obi . . . tried to translate it into English, and for the first time its real meaning dawned on him. . . . On the face of it there was no kind of logic or meaning [to] the song. But as Obi turned it round and round in his mind, he was struck by the wealth of association that even such a [seemingly] mediocre song could have. . . . In short . . . , thought Obi, the burden of the song was "the world turned upside down." He was pleased with his exegesis and began to search in his mind for other songs that could be given the same treatment. (NLE, 49-50)

Obi's education and orientation force him to attempt to "examine critically . . . the mainspring of his actions" (NLE, 146) and enable him to experience the aesthetic pleasure that comes with being "struck by the wealth of association" that what, on the surface, seems to be no more than "a mediocre song," could have. *NLE* suggests that the critic who examines the action of Achebe's texts "critically" and more often than Obi does "the mainspring of his actions" would, "in doing so, . . . [uncover] a good deal" (NLE, 146) beyond the author's well-documented accessibility and deceptive simplicity.

Philosophy on Sustainable Development:

- Western Education vs. Traditional Values: Obi's conflict is between his Western education and the expectations of his traditional Igbo family. Achebe looks at the alienation and internal conflict that come from this cultural divide.
- The Morality of Postcolonial Leadership: Through Obi's life choices and ethical dilemmas (particularly involving corruption and his relationship with his parents), Achebe critiques the moral compromises faced by those who navigate the postcolonial African world. Obi's struggle symbolizes the broader challenge of reconciling modernity with the traditional values of African societies.

Development of Achebe's Thought:

This novel better clarifies Achebe's involvement with the moral complications of postcolonial identity. Although *NLE* is still a book focused on cultural conflict, it expands Achebe's critique to include internal contradictions of the African intellectual and professional who is schooled in the West but returns home to serve within postcolonial governments. Achebe moves beyond condemning colonialism to the question of integrity of this new African elite.

"Arrow of God" (1964): The Struggle for Power and the Crisis of Leadership

In *Arrow of God* (referred to as AG hereafter), Achebe shifts his attention from the clash between the religious leadership and the political and colonial systems that came with the British. In the prologue to Achebe's third novel, *AG*, we see the Chief Priest, Ezeulu, reflecting on "the immensity of his power over the years and the crops and, therefore, over the people [of Umuaro]" (3). When the Chief Priest tries to push the limits of that power, he comes to understand that "no man however great [is] greater than his people" (AG, 230). As the spiritual leader of his people, Ezeulu is caught between the responsibility of maintaining the traditional ways of his people and the pressures of colonialism. He even says, "The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well, you do not stand in one place". (AG, 153) More noteworthy is that these lines cover a central theme of the novel regarding the need of adjustment and change of perspective in leadership. Ezeulu wrestles with tradition against rapidly changing realities brought on by colonialism and internal dissent. The failure to adjust his perspective leads him into isolation and the eventual crack of his authority. Instead, the passage highlights how it is necessary to appreciate various viewpoints in a complex, evolving world. One of the metaphorical passages that suggest abuse of power in *AG* is Ezeulu's reflection on the precarious nature of leadership and authority: "But a man who brings ant-infested faggots into his hut should not complain

when lizards begin to visit him." (AG, 59).

Philosophy on Sustainable Development:

- The Dangers of Power and Authority: Achebe critiques the role of traditional authority figures like Ezeulu, whose rigid adherence to tradition, though well-intentioned, creates a rift between him and the people he governs. Ezeulu's authority is ultimately questioned, not just by colonial forces, but by his own people.
- The Spiritual and Temporal: Achebe explores the idea of religious and political authority as intertwined yet fraught with contradictions. The clash between indigenous beliefs (represented by Ezeulu) and the intrusion of colonial politics is central to the narrative.

Development of Achebe's Thought:

AG deepens Achebe's criticism of leadership in that, even the traditional leaders, upholding indigenous beliefs, may become tyrannical and disconnected from the people whom they serve. The novel has provided a more nuanced view on the governance of postcolonialism, asking whether the African societies could really revert to their traditional systems or had to adapt to new models of leadership and be more inclusive.

"A Man of the People" (1966): Satire of Postcolonial Corruption and Leadership

A Man of the People (referred to as *MP* hereafter) is a biting political satire that decries the corruption and moral decay of postcolonial African political leaders. In this novel, Achebe quotes a proverb that Chief Nanga invokes to explain his corruption and refusal to relinquish power: "A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes does not expect to be drenched again." (MP, 37) It signifies the selfishness and greed of politicians in post-independent periods who consider personal interests before the service of people. The passage captures the novel's criticism of corruption and moral decay in newly independent African nations, emphasizing how leaders betray the ideals of independence.

The novel also tracks the relationship between a young, idealistic teacher named Odili, the protagonist, who reflects on the problems of postcolonial governance: "The trouble with our new nation was that none of us had been indoors long enough to learn to be good tenants." (MP, 38) This line suggests that the lack of political experience and preparation among African leaders after independence contributes to poor governance and societal instability. It marks one of the novel's main themes: the quest to create a working, just political system in the wake of colonialism.

For the commoners, their hopelessness and helplessness to fight against corruption are vividly told in these words: "Let them eat; after all, when white men used to do all the eating, did we commit suicide?" (MP, 123) It shows how colonialism's systemic exploitation molded the people to accept such acts from their new masters. It likewise highlights the complicity of the populace in sustaining corrupt systems and shows how difficult it is to achieve meaningful change when citizens are disengaged or disillusioned.

Philosophy on Sustainable Development:

- Corruption in Postcolonial Leadership: Achebe is aimed at the African political elite of this period. This newly minted elite inherits structures of colonial power, molds them according to its desires, and transforms them to satisfy individual greed. Such depictions of opportunism and selfishness in the novel would make it obvious that these leaders of newly independent nations have actually imbibed many exploitative traditions of colonialism.
- The Betrayal of the People: Achebe paints leaders who leave the cause of the people and hold on to their wealth and power, implying a frustration with the postcolonial state and its ability to live up to the rhetoric of independence.

Development of Achebe's Thought:

MP marks a shift from the focus on cultural and religious issues to a sharp critique of the political systems emerging in postcolonial Africa. Achebe moves from examining the moral decay within traditional systems to a full-scale critique of the political elite, who, in his view, had betrayed the hopes of their people. The novel suggests that postcolonial Africa, far from being a utopian society, is struggling under the weight of corruption and misrule.

E. "Anthills of the Savannah" (1987): The Crisis of Postcolonial Africa and the Role of the Intelligentsia

Like Achebe's earlier novels, *Anthills of the Savannah* (referred to as AS hereafter) is a novel set in a fictional African country facing political unrest and authoritarianism. The novel is centered on the lives of intellectuals, activists, and journalists who have to confront the reality of a repressive government. The narrative centers on the friendship between three key characters and their efforts to understand and resist the political crisis. Here, Achebe highlighted the importance of storytelling in preserving history, culture, and lessons in this novel for future generations:

"It is only the story that can continue beyond the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story...that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence." (AS, 124)

In the context of the novel, the passage cited above shows the role that art, literature, and oral tradition play against tyranny and in ensuring the memory of the voices of the oppressed. Achebe underlines that the stories endure and are not transitory while political power is.

One of the book's central themes is actually well encapsulated in its criticism of authoritarian leadership and includes the corruption and isolation of power: "The warlords who preside over the affairs of this world know only how to erect walls around their strongholds and establish watch towers at the gate." (AS, 120) Achebe applies this line to address how leaders often tend towards ensuring their self-preservation and control over the betterment of their people. It reflects the novel's exploration of the failure of leadership in post-colonial societies, where leaders often alienate themselves from the very people they claim to serve.

Ikem, one of the central characters underscores the responsibility of intellectuals and artists to challenge societal norms and provoke critical thought: "Writers don't give prescriptions. They cause headaches!" (AS, 60) Instead of offering easy solutions, Achebe states that the function of a writer is to challenge authority, reveal injustice, and provoke reflection. This reflects Ikem's role as a dissident journalist who uses his writing to critique the regime, even at great personal risk. In Achebe's terms, writers, with their tongues dipped "in the brew of prophecy," "can sit under [their] thatch and see the moon hanging in the sky outside." (AS, 115) These seers see things not partially but wholly; they see the divinity beneath the visible world; hence, Emerson calls this "a high kind of seeing" which "reattaches things to nature and the whole," a noetic or visionary imagination which sees connections, analogies, correspondences, where prosaic vision sees only disorder, distortions, differences, and multiplicity. (Muoneke, 1994) This prophetic imaginative seeing "finds meaning in apparent meaninglessness of ordinary experience" (Waggoner, 168).

Philosophy on Sustainable Development:

- The Intellectual in Society: Achebe questions what the role of intellectuals and artists should be in shaping the new African postcolonial societies. Characters like Beatrice, Chris, and Ikem make the point to stand up to tyranny, using intellect and art to be able to bring about change in society.
- The Cycle of Corruption: In the same manner that *MP* decries the problem of political corruption, *AS* inveighs against the dangers of authoritarianism and how power can corrupt even the best intentions of men. Achebe argues about how African elites are incapable of establishing just and democratic

societies. He demonstrates how the postcolonial state continues to grapple with problems which characterize the colonial period.

Development of Achebe's Thought:

AS is rather more mature and complex in visions of postcolonial Africa. Achebe seems to transcend mere criticism at the corrupt political leadership as he now looks into the failure of intelligentsia and activists to challenge truly oppressive systems. The novel equally probed the question as to whether African societies, having inherited the legacies of colonialism, could better be moved away from all this with a re-imagined, inclusive, and more just political future.

4. Conclusion: Achebe's Contribution to Promoting Global Sustainable Development

Tracing elements of sustainable development in Achebe's major novels shows how his ideas have evolved from a focus on cultural and moral challenges posed by colonialism to a more comprehensive critique of the postcolonial African state. His early works, particularly *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, emphasize cultural pride and the importance of preserving a nation's identity in the face of colonial disruption. He delves deeper into questions of power and leadership in traditional societies in *Arrow of God*. From *A Man of the People* to *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe concentrates on the political reality of postcolonial Africa, targeting corruption, authoritarianism, and the incapacity of new leaders to act based on the ideals of independence. References to the fall of a proud man (Okonkwo), a corruptible Civil Servant (Obi), a headstrong Chief Priest (Ezeulu), a demagogue (Nanga), or a dictator (His Excellency) are characteristic of the main stereotypes in the five main novels of Achebe which underline his "understanding of the complexity of historical processes" (McEwan, 2001), his "theme. .. of tradition versus change" (Palmer, 1972), "the vivid picture" the novelist is said to paint "of Igbo society" (Carroll, 1980), and the sensitive artist's indictment of postcolonial excesses.

Achebe's writings emphasize the fact that the traditional Igbo worldview regards the environment as a living being with gods and spirits ruling over it. The rituals of the New Yam Festival in *Things Fall Apart* demonstrate gratitude to the earth for its fertility and reflect the cycle of life. These cultural practices enforce respect for the environment and sustainability. In Igbo cosmology, nature and the spiritual world interlink so closely. Nature usually responds whenever actions disturb the social or spiritual order. Silence, darkness, and tension in the world of nature following the killing of a person point out that the action not only appears tragic but an offense against the order of the universe. Sacred groves, rivers, and forests are thought of as homes for spirits, and are handled with great care and caution. This religious sensitivity breeds an ethic of respect for life and environmental conservation. Achebe frequently uses proverbs and metaphors taken from nature to pass on wisdom. The proverb in *Arrow of God* that states, "A man who brings ants-infested faggots into his hut should not be surprised when lizards pay him a visit," gives expression to the result of disrupting harmony with nature. These sayings demonstrate an awareness within a culture that humans and their surroundings are interlinked.

With varying degrees of emphasis, all of Chinua Achebe's analyzed novels in this paper explore the use and abuse of power by those who wield it. (Owusu, 1991) For him, corruption is not exclusive to the colonizer or the white man. The real oppressors are the destructive attitudes of greed, corruption, disrespect of culture and traditions, abuse of nature, and adopting wrong policies. Readers can learn from Achebe that good governance is fundamental to achieving global sustainable development and eradicating extreme poverty. As he pointed out in his novels, bad governance fosters social inequality, poverty, deprivation, political instability, political conflict, and poor policy-making. This clearly underlines that every nation needs improved governance structures and processes, especially strong institutions, to ensure sustainable economic growth and development that will significantly reduce poverty. Good governance is critical in bringing about prosperity through sustainable use of resources, mutually beneficial trade, effective economic management, productive citizen engagement, religious and ethnic harmony, conflict resolution, social service provision, regional cooperation, and rule of law, while reducing or eliminating reliance on foreign assistance and meddling by international organizations.

Reading the novels of Achebe underlines how critical literacy involves an analysis and critique of the power relationships among texts, language, social groups, and social practices. It shows us ways of looking at texts of all kinds (print, visual, spoken, multimedia, and performance texts) to examine and challenge the attitudes, values, and beliefs that lie beneath the surface. It empowers teachers and students to truly participate in a democratic society (a just society regardless of race, culture, class, gender, or sexual orientation) and move literacy beyond text to social action. In this sense, fiction is therefore more than just a product of imagination for texts can transform our understandings about social inequity, privilege, and pedagogies of discomfort in teaching about the dangers of both colonialism and postcolonialism, greed and the misuse and abuse of the environment. Noticeably, Achebe initiated to re-world Africa in his novels to foreground its distinctive identity and culture. By opposing the parameters of the universalism that negates Africa (Choudry, 2014), Achebe created a cultural space for Africa in the twentieth century intellectual readership and in the process also provided a cultural space for all colonized peoples.

As human beings, we have the power to challenge and transform our different types of oppressions, be it corruption among our leaders, abuse or misuse of our natural resources and climate change. Like Achebe, we should call the attention and point out the shortcomings not just of the government and NGO leaders but even of our very own people, in their respective milieus and “examine their servitude with them” and “teach them both that they are victims and that they are responsible for everything, that they are at once the oppressed, the oppressors, and the accomplices of their own oppressors” (Sartre 1988). Indeed, Achebe fulfilled his prophetic role by leading his readers to a deeper awareness of the dangers caused by greed, racism and bad governance which lead to disruption of traditional ways of life, including the exploitation of natural resources and the erosion of community structures. May Achebe’s valuable insights continue to echo and challenge people all the world over to embrace concrete actions in protecting this world which is our only home, safeguard our culture and traditions while seeking economic growth, development and sustainability.

5. References

- Achebe, C. (1988). *Anthills of the Savannah*. Heinemann.
- _____. (1965). *Arrow of God*. Heinemann.
- _____. (1966). *A Man of the People*. Heinemann.
- _____. (1960). *No Longer at Ease*. Heinemann.
- _____. (1958) *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann.
- Bhatt, K. K. (2021). Themes, issues and concerns in the novels of Chinua Achebe: Response to colonialism. *International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanity*. 12, 1, 30-36.
- Brown, A. (2021) A Review of Opinions on the Novels of Chinua Achebe. *Scholarly Journal of Science Research and Essay*, 2 (4), 118-134. Retrieved from [http:// www.scholarly-journals.com/SJSRE](http://www.scholarly-journals.com/SJSRE)
- Carroll, D. (1980). *Chinua Achebe: Novelist, poet, critic*. London, England: Macmillan.
- Choudhury, M. (2014). Challenging universalism: Chinua Achebe’s re-worlding Africa. *Studies in literature and language*. 8, 3, 134-139. CSCanada. DOI: 10.3968/5099
- Emenyonu, N., & Nnolim, E. (Eds.). (2014). *Remembering a legend: Chinua Achebe*. Africa World Press.
- Ghosh, A. (2016). *The great derangement: Climate change and the unthinkable*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gikandi, S. (2000). *Reading Chinua Achebe*. Routledge.
- Hartman, S. (2017) Climate Change, Public Engagement, and Integrated Environmental Humanities. *Teaching Climate Change in the Humanities*. Siperstein, S. et al. (Eds.) Routledge, 2017, 67-75.
- Hermes, J., and Rimanoczy, I. (2018). Deep learning for a sustainability mindset. *Int. J. Manag. Educ.* 16, 460–467. <https://doi:10.1016/j.ijme.2018.08.001>
- Holden, E., Linnerud, K., and Banister, D. (2014). Sustainable development: Our common future revisited. *Global Environmental Change* 26, 130–139.
- Kambaji, C. T. (1994). *Chinua Achebe: A novelist and a portraitist of his society*. Université Catholique de Louvain.

- Lidstrom, S. (2015). *Nature, Environment and Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Poetics of Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes*. Routledge.
- Lynn, T. J. (2017). *Chinua Achebe and the politics of narration: Envisioning language*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marshall, G. (2014). *Don't Even Think about It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*. Bloomsbury.
- McEwan, I. (2001). *Atonement*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Molderez, I. et al. (2021) The Role of Poetry in Promoting a Sustainability Mindset: Walter Benjamin as a Guide Toward a Slow Journey. *Frontiers in Sustainability*. 2, 2-24. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsus.2021.694317>
- Muoneke, R. O. (1994). *Art, rebellion and redemption: A reading of the novels of Chinua Achebe*. Peter Lang.
- Nnolim, C. (2011) Chinua Achebe: A re-assessment. *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*. 48, 1, 39-50.
- Ogbaa, K. (2021). *The life and times of Chinua Achebe*. Routledge.
- Ogude, J. (2015). *Chinua Achebe's legacy: Illuminations from Africa*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Owusu, K. (1991). The Politics of Interpretation: The Novels of Chinua Achebe. *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 37, 3, 459-470. Johns Hopkins University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.0.0668>
- Palmer, E. (1972). *An introduction to the African novel*. London, England: Heinemann.
- Poray-Wybranowska, J. (2019). *Climate change, ecological catastrophe, and the contemporary postcolonial novel*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Priyanka, M. & Kumaraswamy, M. (2019). Eco-Criticism As Perceived By Chinua Achebe In Things Fall Apart. *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities*. 7, 2, 118-125.
- Pryshlakivsky, J., & Searcy, C. (2013). Sustainable development as a wicked problem. *Managing and engineering in complex situations*. Springer.
- Robinson, J. (2004). Squaring the circle? Some thoughts on the idea of sustainable development. *Ecological Economics*. 48, 4, 369-384.
- Shrivastava, P., Ivanaj, V., and Ivanaj, S. (2012). Sustainable development and the arts. *Int. J. Technol. Manag.* 60:23. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTM.2012.049104>
- Simatei, P. (2000) *Chinua Achebe: Novelist as Critic*. Bayreuth African Studies.
- Skrimshire, S. (2010) *Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination*. Continuum.
- Saikia, Nirupa. (2015). The Post-Colonial Reality in Chinua Achebe's Novels. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 3, 1, 88-94. Retrieved from <https://www.eltsjournal.org>
- Sartre, J.P. (1988). *What is literature?* (B. Frechtman, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1948)
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations General Assembly.
- Waggoner, H. (1974) *Emerson as Poet*. Princeton UP.

