

The 2022 Nigeria Prize for Literature (Poetry) Kicks Off

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April 22, 2022



At an event in Lagos today, the entries for the 2022 Nigeria Prize for Literature were handed over to the panel of judges by the Chair of the Prize's Advisory Board, Professor Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo.

Every year, the Nigeria Prize for Literature, sponsored by the Nigerian Liquified Natural Gas (NLNG) accepts a flurry of entries dedicated to a specific genre. Last year, Cheluchi Onyemelukwe took the prize home for the fiction category for her book, *The Son of the House*. The 2022 edition is for poetry and 287 poets are in the race for the laurel which amounts to \$100,000, the highest prize for an author in any genre on the continent.

The Advisory Board also handed over 87 entries for the NLNG's Prize for Literary Criticism, which is a sub-genre of the annual award. Uchechukwu Peter Umezurike was awarded the prize for this category for his intervention in Nigerian literary criticism.

Professor Sule Egya who is a professor of African Literature and Cultural Studies at Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, chairs the panel of judges. Professor Egya is also a renowned poet and novelist who writes under the pen name E. E. Sule. He has written over one hundred scholarly articles and literary essays. His first novel, *Sterile Sky*, won the 2013 Commonwealth Book Prize for the Africa Region. His poetry volumes include *What the Sea Told Me*, which won the 2009 ANA/Gabriel Okara Prize.

Others on the prize adjudication seat are Tóyìn Adéwálé-Gabriel and Dike Chukwumerije. Adéwálé-Gabriel is a poet and narrator. She has worked as a literary critic in *The Guardian*, *Post Express* and *The Daily Times*. She is often described as “the most beautiful and outstanding voice of the new African poetry.” Dike Chukwumerije is a Nigerian Spoken Word and Performance Poetry artist and an award-winning author. Chukwumerije is the author of several books. He is the curator behind Night of the Spoken Word, a live Poetry show and a theatre production, Made in Nigeria Poetry Show. He is also the winner of 2013 Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Prize for Prose Fiction. The NLNG Prize for Literature has other other members of reputable literary profiles, such as Prof. Olu Obafemi and Prof. Ahmed Yerima, serving on its Advisory Board

Speaking at the hand-over ceremony, NLNG’s General Manager for External Relations and Sustainable Development, Mr. Andy Odeh, said some significant strides have been recorded in the Nigeria Prizes. He said NLNG recently launched the website www.thenigeriaprizes.org, a one-point information hub for the Prizes.

Mr Odey adds that “(the) goal with this new gateway is to make information about the Prizes, process, governance, and winning works and winners readily available to members of the public.” He also mentioned that the Advisory Board this year appointed two judges that are practitioners of the poetic trade, who are not from core academia. “Their credentials are solid and they speak to their craft and contributions to the Literary World,” he added.

In her remarks, Professor Adimora-Ezeigbo, encouraged the judges to use the opportunity to put literature on a pedestal and make it an enabler of development in the country.

Annually, the Nigeria Prize for Literature rotates amongst four literary categories of prose fiction, poetry, drama and children’s literature. This year’s award will go to the best collection of poetry written by a Nigerian. OlongoAfrica, as we did last year, hopes to interview the shortlisted authors and review their work in weeks preceding the prize announcement.

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