

# Interrogating Environmental Activism in Nigerian Drama Using Greg Mbajiorgu's *Wake up Everyone*

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## Abstract

Environmental activism is a multifaceted and ever-evolving movement that addresses critical global issues related to the environment, conservation, and sustainability. In Nigerian drama, environmental activism emerges as a powerful vehicle for ecological discourse, yet its full potential and impact remain underexplored. This study examines the intersection of environmental activism and Nigerian drama with focus on Greg Mbajiorgu's *Wake Up Everyone*. The study addresses the representation of environmental issues in *Wake Up Everyone* as well as assesses the impact of the text on environmental awareness and activism. Adopting a qualitative research design, including textual and thematic analysis, the study investigates how Mbajiorgu depicts environmental degradation, human-nature relationships, and the socio-political dimensions of ecological challenges. Using ecocriticism theory, the study facilitates an examination of the text's efficacy in fostering ecological awareness and catalyzing environmental activism. The findings highlight the transformative potential of literature in fostering ecological consciousness and promoting sustainable practices, establishing Nigerian drama as a significant medium for advancing environmental discourse in our society.

**Keywords:** *Environmental activism, Nigerian Drama, Ecological Awareness, Ecocriticism.*

## INTRODUCTION

Environmental activism is a multifaceted and ever-evolving movement that addresses critical global issues related to the environment, conservation, and sustainability. In recent years, environmental activism has gained substantial momentum, driven by growing concerns about climate change, biodiversity loss, and the degradation of natural ecosystems. Activists worldwide are pushing for transformative change at the grassroots level and by influencing policy and corporate practices. Oghenetega Ohwavorhua notes that “over the years, human activities have marred the natural environment, threatened human existence and spurred widespread concern across various disciplines, especially within the academic world” (88). In the 21st century, the international community has increasingly focused its attention on the pressing environmental issues of climate change, global warming, and ozone depletion.

In response, nations around the world have united under a common cause, embodied in the Earth Charter, which aims to address environmental damage and establish a shared global mission. The first paragraph of The Earth Charter asserts that “humanity stands at a critical juncture in Earth's history, where we must choose our collective future.” It highlights the increasing interdependence and fragility of our world, which presents both significant peril and immense promise. The text emphasizes that despite the rich diversity of cultures and life forms, we are fundamentally one human family sharing a common destiny on a single Earth community.

To advance, we must unite to create a sustainable global society based on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace (The Earth Charter 1). Central to this call is the responsibility of all individuals to one another, the wider ecosystem, and future generations. It champions a united effort to forge a future that prioritizes the well-being of the planet and its diverse inhabitants, appealing for collective action towards a harmonious and equitable world.

In the context of environmental activism, drama stands as an effective mechanism for encouraging individual and collective engagement with ecological issues. Drama makes environmental issues more approachable and emotionally impactful and bringing them into public awareness through the use of compelling stories and true-life situations. Drama gives a concrete and emotional approach to environmental activism, in contrast to abstract data and statistics, and it helps audiences develop stronger connections with the environmental issues at hand. Augusto Boal highlights, “the performative nature of drama allows it to catalyze social and environmental change” (14). Moreover, drama’s influence extends well beyond environmental activism, historically, drama plays a key role in addressing political, social, and cultural challenges. The enduring capacity of drama to inspire transformation stresses its significance as a powerful tool for advancing social progress and promoting meaningful change.

This study employs the qualitative research methodology, specifically textual analysis, and thematic analysis, as a means to critically examine environmental activism and illuminate pressing environmental challenges within the public sphere. These approaches will enable a comprehensive exploration of the selected text: *Wake Up Everyone*. The methodology will utilize local and international academic sources to ensure a rigorous and credible research process.

### **Environmental Activism in Nigerian Literature**

In Nigeria, environmental issues like drought, desertification, oil spills, and flooding pose significant challenges beyond the well-documented struggles of poor governance and the Boko Haram insurgency (Eze 269). According to Norbert Eze, these “ecological crunches” threaten lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure, demanding adaptation and new ways of living” (270). Eze’s assessment of Nigeria’s environmental challenges is compelling, yet potentially oversimplified. While ecological issues undoubtedly exacerbate existing socio-political problems, the interplay is more complex. A more nuanced analysis should consider how poor governance and insurgency contribute to environmental degradation, creating a cyclical pattern of challenges that require holistic, multi-faceted solutions. These ecological threats critically endanger communities and infrastructure, requiring innovative responses and sustainable living practices to mitigate their impact.

However, similar concerns have also inspired Nigerian authors to include ecological issues in their works. Postcolonial writers have been embracing ecocriticism, or the study of literature with the environment, as a tool to investigate environmental difficulties because Nigerian literature has been addressing these issues more and more. As Confidence Gbolo et al. argue, “the environment often acts as a character alongside humans in literary texts, and its violation impacts all characters, highlighting the urgency of an ecological lens in literary analysis” (11). The idea that the environment acts as a character in literature, as they suggest, highlights its profound influence on human experiences within a narrative. This perspective is valuable as it emphasises the importance of integrating ecological analysis to fully grasp the

impact of environmental degradation on the story and its characters. Literary studies require ecocriticism because the environment is more than simply a background; it is a character with agency that can be violated, affecting human characters. Gbolo et al. suggest that instead of viewing the environment as merely a backdrop, we acknowledge its active participation in the narrative. The environment can be described, reacted to, and even influence the characters' actions and choices. This creates a cause-and-effect dynamic and advocates a literary analysis that is more environmentally conscious by acknowledging the importance of the environment and the effects of its infringement. We can understand the deeper issues surrounding our interaction with the natural world and the potential consequences of our actions through ecocriticism.

The interplay of literature and the environment became a new area of interest and an intellectual linking bridge that centres principally on the relationship between literature and the environment. Olughu Michael Ikenna, on the affinity between literature and the environment, notes that the views of Chidi Amuta and Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo strongly fault the criticism of “art for art’s sake” and affirm that “Artistic creations are only as beautiful as their ability to address the social and environmental issues that surround them.” (5). Precisely, Amuta Chidi, argues that “The ontological essence of literature can be found in the degree to which it recycles experience and turns it into an artistic proposal, viewing it as a refraction of social experience via the lens of human imagination” (38). Thus, literature has developed into a potent instrument that individuals use to reflect both themselves and their society. It is in support of this view that Oluikpe, Benson states that “literature is all about man and his society” (3). This claim investigates man as a social creature. It examines personal qualities, vices, and social flaws. It examines the triumphs and failures of man and how they are impacted by the passage of time, the surrounding environment, and society as a whole. It is didactic and seeks to rectify social evils to reform them for the benefit of society.

The origin of literature can be found in society. As argued by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "Literature does not grow or flourish in a vacuum. The social, political, and economic elements of a given society give it life, structure, direction, and even a focal point" (65). It is impossible to overlook the connection between literature and these other forces, particularly in Africa, where contemporary literature has developed against the horrific backdrop of European imperialism and its many forms. Ngugi argument points that people's ways of living, cultures, belief systems, characters, and interpretations of the world around them shape literature and its broad ideas about life. It also represents societal issues like dictatorship, power lust, politics, environmental issues, climate change, etc. It is essential to understanding how man and his society interact. Ezeigbo Akachi Theodora agrees that “The most effective medium for representing reality has always been literature, both written and spoken.” (8). In the same vein Adeseke Ade, adds that “Literature as a concept is “a phenomenon that encompasses all forms of imaginative composition; it depicts events that are consistent and similar to society.” (111). As literary critic Shikha, Kumari posits “Literature is renowned for its ability to capture current themes that are unique to a certain society” (1). He further mentioned that though the world of literature has over the centuries been saturated with works in the areas of the beauty and power of nature, “the concern for ecology and the threat that the continuous misuse of our environment poses on humanity has only recently caught the attention of writers” (1). Throughout history, literature has reflected societal realities and has developed to confront modern difficulties, especially those related to the environment. While past literature praised nature, environmental degradation and climate change have received more attention in more contemporary works.

This change emphasises how literature may help readers comprehend and take action in response to urgent ecological problems by raising awareness and motivating them to do so. The goal of the relationship between ecology and literature is to determine how the latter might benefit society to minimise environmental harm. In an attempt to situate literature within the ecological discourse, Oppermann, Serpil sees literature as thus:

Since literature directly addresses issues of human constructions like meaning, value, language, and imagination, it can be seen as an aesthetically and culturally constructed aspect of the environment. These issues can then be linked to the issue of ecological consciousness that humans must achieve (31).

Interestingly, the description of literature as a construct entwined with ecological consciousness highlights how human values and perspectives are mirrored in literature, and that this is crucial for fostering ecological awareness. Embracing this viewpoint shows how literature influences our comprehension of environmental challenges and promotes a closer relationship with nature. Nigerian literature plays a vital role in confronting the nation's environmental challenges. As Oaikhena, Abigail Onowosemenmen et al. argue, literature serves as a platform to "address and foreground ecocritical issues" arising from "the general abuse of the natural environment" (97). This innate connection between literature and the environment predates the formalisation of "ecocriticism," a critical approach that examines the relationship between literature and the environment. Oaikhena et al. also emphasise that "Eco Literature explores the plunder of the natural environment; this manifests in various ways through the interaction of man with the environment" (98).

This exploitation, particularly evident in Africa's "savage rape of the environment" through resource extraction, has had severe consequences. Nigerian writers have responded by utilising literature to critically examine threats posed to the environment, nature, and society. Eco-literary writings form a crucial aspect of this interrogation. Oaikhena et al., citing Tanure Ojaide, point out that the "senseless destruction of our original neighbours, the trees and animals" has fueled eco-writings in Nigeria" (98). This destructive trend is further emphasised by Niyi Osundare's touching statement in the preface to *The Eye of the Earth*. He expresses his yearning for "biotic wholesomeness" and "socio-economic wellbeing" while lamenting the environmental destruction and its impact on the vulnerable:

Waters are dying, forests are falling. A desert epidemic stalks a world where the rich and ruthless squander the earth's wealth on the invention of increasingly accomplished weapons of death, while millions of people perish daily from avoidable hunger (xvi).

Niyi Osundare contrasts human greed and environmental destruction. His appeal for "socio-economic wellbeing" and "biotic wholesomeness" highlights how urgently sustainable practices are needed. Accepting his viewpoint emphasises how morally necessary it is to confront ecological damage while putting justice and the well-being of people first.

Nigerian literature has a strong tradition of engaging with environmental issues and connecting them to broader social justice concerns. One prominent example is "the writing that has emerged from the Niger Delta region, much of which deals with the negative ecological and human impacts of extensive oil extraction in the area" (Ezeabasili 77). However, these Nigerian environmental writers who include Tanure Ojaide, Helon Habila, Ken Saro Wiwa, Odia Ofeimun, Niyi Osundare and Kaine Agary among others have articulated a way of re-imagining the (Nigerian) environment that melds socio-economic existence with environmentalism. Writers like Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was tragically executed in 1995 for his

activism, forcefully spoke out about the environmental damage and economic exploitation inflicted on the Niger Delta by both colonial powers and multinational oil corporations. Other authors like Helon Habila, Chinelo Okparanta, and Nnimmo Bassey have highlighted through fiction, poetry, and nonfiction the extensive pollution and loss of land that local communities have suffered (Okuyade 81). Nwagbara, Uzoechi a literary critic argued that “they have called for a prioritisation of green discourse for better leadership and socio-economic relations, as well as environmental sustainability” (6). Nigerian authors play a crucial role in environmental movements by raising awareness and mobilising public opinion through their creative works. Literature gives voice to marginalised communities and spurs action for both ecological and human rights in the face of rampant exploitation of the country's land and people.

According to Olughu, Michael Ikenna. “Environmental devastation triggers ecological activism, a deliberate effort to instill values and consciousness for environmental restoration” (2). This activism arises from the need to address the harmful human activities impacting Nigeria's environment. Adesanmi, Pius highlights the role of literature in raising awareness and inspiring action, citing Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Soja Boy's Motobike* as “a rallying cry for environmental justice and Nnimmo Bassey's poetry as a voice for the voiceless” (78). These interventions envision a harmonious future between humans and nature, empowering communities and audiences. Egba notes that Nigerian poets like Tanure Ojaide lament “the loss of nature through deforestation and pollution in works such as *Delta Blues & Home Songs*, while novelists like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie portray the emotional impact of displacement due to environmental degradation in *Half of a Yellow Sun*” (98). Beyond individual suffering, Nigerian eco-literature critiques narratives that perpetuate environmental injustice.

Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* (Soyinka) explores the interconnectedness of human actions and environmental consequences, portraying a world where the neglect of nature leads to societal decay. Similarly, Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* critiques “land exploitation and the resultant environmental degradation, weaving in themes of resistance and social justice” (Osofisan). In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Ola Rotimi explores the inevitability of natural consequences following human actions, stressing the need for a harmonious relationship with the environment (Rotimi).

Tess Onwueme's *Then She Said It* (2002) portrays the harsh realities faced by women in the Niger Delta, whose lives are severely impacted by pollution and ecological damage (Onwueme). Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* reflects on the social and environmental repercussions of oil exploration, highlighting the suffering inflicted on local communities (Yerima). Niyi Osundare's dramatic works, although primarily known for his poetry, engage deeply with themes of environmental justice and human responsibility, and urge readers and audiences to consider their role in preserving nature (Osundare). Julie Okoh's *Edewede* addresses the consequences of industrial pollution and its impact on local communities, presenting a powerful narrative on environmental degradation (Okoh).

Ojo Bakare's *The Gods and the Scavengers* portrays the environmental conflicts arising from resource competition and highlights the struggles of various ethnic groups whose livelihoods are directly tied to the land (Bakare). Effiong Johnson's *Oil Cemetery* provides an important reflection on the environmental degradation caused by oil spills and underlines the impact on local communities and the urgent need for remediation (Johnson). These playwrights, through their works, illuminate the public on environmental challenges, critique unsustainable practices, and ensure that these issues remain at the forefront of our collective consciousness.



Nigerian eco-literature and drama are not merely about lamenting the present or critiquing the past; they are potent forces for imagining and advocating for a more sustainable future. Nelson O. Alyebo and Victoria Omaji Ogba argue that "writers have always been preoccupied with making their societies conducive for human habitation" (44). They see writers as entertainers and as "visionary agents of social change" who challenge readers' consciousness and contribute to societal transformation (Alyebo & Ogba 44).

This transformation can encompass liberation from oppressive traditions, political injustices, and environmental degradation, though its effects may not be immediately apparent. As Nixel Smith suggests, literature acts as a tool for people to gain new perspectives on themselves and their situations and ultimately use that understanding to try and improve their lives (qtd. in Alyebo & Ogba 44). Alyebo and Ogba infer that literature "poses an insidious challenge to the consciousness of the readers, which is capable of propelling them to necessary actions" (44). This suggests that writers hold significant power: the ability to educate and inspire action on environmental issues. Those who focus on the connection between humans and their environment use their writing to teach readers responsible ways to interact with the world around them.

### **Synopsis of *Wake Up Everyone*.**

*Wake Up Every One* is the story of the struggles of an environmental activist, Prof. Aladinma, a retired Professor of Agricultural Extension whose tripartite love for his country, his Ndoli community, and theatre forced him to stay back in Nigeria to establish an experimental drama troupe known as Green Theatre. A justified motivation for Desmond Orji, a PhD student of the University of Manchester, North-East England to choose to carry out a fieldwork on Drama and the War Against Climate Change in Africa by using his latest play, *A New Dawn* as one of the case studies for his PhD thesis. Combining his exposure, experience, and learning, Professor Aladinma not only forms a theatre group but also a Farmers' Co-operative Society using both avenues to carry out extensive enlightenment programs against the destruction of the forest, climate change adaptation to farmers, villagers and so on which empowers the villagers into the acquisition of requisite knowledge and practice of new behaviours that mitigate the harmful consequences of degrading their land and crop harvest and consequently the environment.

He goes a step further to provide new improved seedlings for farmers, teaching them new and safer ways of producing and using fertilizers. He had become too popular and powerful among the villagers who benefited from his wisdom and guidance so much so that his courage and selfless service is feared by both his enemies and politicians. He was never one to get tired of declamations on his lifelong passion and commitment to a green environment. In the end, a riot breaks out as their river is flooded and the recalcitrant L.G. Chairman is declared enemy.

### **Environmental Activism in *Wake Up Everyone***

The importance of environmental activism is growing as we address pressing global issues, including pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change. Prominent scholars such as Rachel Carson, who discussed the negative consequences of human activity on ecosystems in her book *Silent Spring*, have brought attention to the need for proactive measures. The problem facing humanity now, according to Carson, is to "prove that we are masters of ourselves, not only of nature" (72). This demonstrates that developing self-control and taking responsibility for our actions to preserve the environment, rather than trying to master nature, is the real difficulty. Our actions and decisions seem to be the biggest obstacle facing us.

The narrative of *Wake Up Everyone* critiques the environmental negligence prevalent in society, particularly the detrimental effects of multinational corporations on local ecosystems. Aladinma's activism resonates with the ideas of environmental literacy and active citizenship, as underlined by David Orr, who argues for the importance of fostering stewardship of the planet. Orr states, "Environmental literacy is not just about knowing facts; it's about understanding the relationships that sustain life" (95). To engage in meaningful activism, one must possess a greater understanding of ecological interdependencies. It makes clear that genuine environmental consciousness necessitates a comprehensive comprehension of how our actions affect the environment around us.

The character of Professor Madukwe Aladinma in Mbajiorgu's *Wake Up Everyone* serves as an embodiment of environmental advocacy. He represents the ideas of deep ecology, which promotes a radical change in how people view nature and other living things, acknowledging that all living things have inherent value independent of how useful they are to human needs. In addition to providing free agricultural extension services and using theatre as a teaching tool to increase public understanding of environmental issues, Professor Aladinma is shown as a committed person who interacts with his community.

Despite belonging to a higher class, he feels an obligation to lift his community out of poverty and ignorance rather than look down on them. Informing local legislators on the effects of climate change is one of his endeavours; he says, "If we do not act now, the consequences will be dire for our children and their future generations." (Mbajiorgu 3). His words reflect his urgent call to action and stress the long-term repercussions of inaction on future generations. This reminds us that the decisions we make now will have an impact on the world we live in tomorrow. Through Aladinma's dialogues, the play reveals the alarming environmental changes and instills a sense of urgency for collective action.

**PROF. ALADINMA:** You see, Mr. Chairman, you don't need a degree in Earth Sciences to know that our world is changing. The notion of change, as a matter of fact, goes back to the Ancient Greeks and beyond. Heraclitus first articulated it, and modern Sociology has confirmed it over and over again. Even the cosmic system is characterised by constant and interminable changes. Babies over time become old men and women, just as seedlings after several years turn into giant trees. But the changes we are witnessing nowadays are extraordinary and frightening. Where are the harmattan bonfires? Our people gathered round them in the past to warm their bodies, where are they now? Natural disasters now occur in unprecedented magnitude; earthquakes here and there, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, and... (1)

Professor Aladinma's character illustrates how human activity has worsened these problems by drawing comparisons between historical accounts of change and the current ecological catastrophes. He argues, "The changes we are witnessing today are unprecedented and largely caused by human activities" (Mbajiorgu 1). This debunks the common belief that today's environmental problems are unavoidable or a product of a natural cycle and stresses how human-caused they are. It lays the entire burden on human decisions and actions. The Chairman's interruption reflects a common sentiment that natural disasters are inevitable. He states: "But these are expected, Prof. Aladinma. Doesn't the Bible say that in the last days, things like these will happen, and..." (Mbajiorgu 1). This viewpoint contrasts with Prof. Aladinma's emphasis on the unprecedented and anthropogenic nature of contemporary environmental challenges. The Chairman's invocation of biblical teachings represents a faith-based interpretation that absolves humanity of responsibility and accepts environmental degradation as a predetermined outcome.

Prof. Aladinma's response dismisses the fatalistic interpretation of environmental changes as signs of the "last days" and redirects the focus towards scientific understanding and proactive measures. "Leave last days alone, let's face our environment scientifically" (Mbajiorgu 1). He advises the Chairman to set aside eschatological predictions and engage with environmental issues through a scientific lens. Prof. Aladinma's response represents a shift from relying on religious explanations to advocating for a scientific understanding of environmental issues. Prof. Aladinma challenges the Chairman's invocation of biblical teachings; he stresses the importance of addressing ecological problems through evidence-based analysis and human accountability. Aladinma's enumeration of specific human activities contributing to environmental degradation highlights the tangible actions that need to be addressed to mitigate the crisis. He states, "Look at the deforestation, the pollution, the loss of biodiversity. These are all caused by human activities like logging, mining, and unsustainable agricultural practices" (Mbajiorgu 2). This interchange provides concrete instances of how human actions directly impact the environment and shows the need for targeted interventions and policy changes. It moves the discussion beyond abstract concepts and towards specific, actionable solutions.

Moreover, Prof. Aladinma's critique of religious rhetoric points to the need to prioritise practical solutions over passive acceptance of predetermined narratives. His dialogue reflects a broader societal tension between faith-based interpretations and scientific inquiry in understanding and addressing complex environmental challenges.

**PROF. ALADINMA:** (Cuts in): The Bible teaches you what? I am amused when men whose actions contradict the basic principles of Christianity punctuate every statement, they make with biblical references ... What we are witnessing now is nothing else but planetary reactions to man's mindless activities, period. Our soil and rivers have become unproductive because of chemicals and oil spillages. The floods and erosions we experience are caused by senseless attempts to reclaim wetlands. What about the carbon monoxides from power generators and poorly maintained automobiles, and the unfriendly substances flared up into the air by oil companies on a daily basis? The problems of our world today are caused by us and yet we are reluctant to find solutions to them (13).

The dialogue portrays a grim reality of environmental destruction brought about by human actions. It argues that our planet is reacting negatively to our "mindless activities," highlighting issues like chemical pollution, wetland destruction, and air emissions from vehicles and industrial practices. The author emphasises the cause-and-effect relationship, stating that problems like unproductive soil and floods are directly linked to human actions. As a literary approach, Ecocriticism provides a framework for analysing these tensions and advocating for a more holistic understanding of the human-nature relationship. Looking at Shallow ecology as a branch of ecocriticism, as exemplified by the Chairman's perspective, focuses on environmental issues primarily from a human-centred viewpoint. It often prioritises short-term benefits and economic interests over long-term sustainability. In contrast, deep ecology, embodied by Prof. Aladinma, recognises the intrinsic value of all living beings and advocates for a fundamental shift in the relationship between humans and the natural world (Glottfelty and Fromm 96). This approach reveals the interconnectedness of all life forms and the need for a more ecocentric perspective that considers the well-being of the entire ecosystem.

The playwright uses Professor Aladinma as a mouthpiece for environmental responsibility. He advocates for proactive measures, like building a dyke, to address potential environmental problems like future floods. This brings into line with the concept of



environmental sustainability, which emphasises long-term solutions to protect the environment. To sensitise these operators and the rest of us to meet the need for environmental sustainability, the playwright uses Prof. Aladinma to propel the plot of the play. Professor Aladinma pushes the story forward by urging the local government chairman to support building a dyke. This dyke, would protect the riverside community of Ndoli, a coastal area, from future floods. However, the chairman rejects this preventative measure, dismissing it as a waste of time. He politely asks Professor Aladinma to write a formal proposal, but this is likely just a way to avoid the project altogether.

**CHAIRMAN:** I told him to prepare a proposal. When he brings it, I will let you have a look at it. It is better you witness the madness with your own eyes (9).

The play critiques environmental leadership through the Chairman's response to Professor Aladinma's proposal. This discourse reflects a theme of governmental apathy towards environmental issues. The Chairman's dismissive attitude ("there is nothing in the purse"), despite Professor Aladinma's well-researched plan and UNDP funding (80%) exposes a lack of concern for the environmental problems plaguing the community – overflowing waste, blocked drainage, erosion, and unsanitary living conditions. The neglect of these multi-national companies is sickening to any right-thinking person with a conscience, and the matter is aggravated when they indulge further in the dirty politics of bribing and pitching the leaders of these affected communities against their poor people, who end up bearing the brunt of diseases, poverty, and untimely deaths. The conversation between the L.G. Chairman and his former partner-in-crime, Jango gives a little insight into this conspiracy syndrome:

**CHAIRMAN:** I saw in the oil spillage incident, a grand opportunity to get back at the multinational oil companies. When the event occurred, I got a fiery lawyer that has been at the vanguard of environmental issues to institute a legal action against the oil companies. When they perceived the legal consequences and the attendant damages likely to result from it, they resolved to invite me, as the plaintiff, for alternative dispute resolution (11).

The L.G. Chairman views the oil spill as an opportunity to challenge the "multinational oil companies," this suggests a fight against an unequal power structure. Their legal action highlights the concept of environmental justice, where communities seek legal recourse for environmental harm. The corporation's shift towards "alternative dispute resolution" can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid public scrutiny and potentially lighter penalties, revealing their prioritisation of profit over environmental responsibility. When curiosity drives Jango to ask:

**JANGO:** Choi!! Na lie - o - o, na lie, how the mata come take disappear nah?

**CHAIRMAN:** Through my lawyer, of course. We agreed that they pay three hundred million naira.

**JANGO:** Three hundred million kalatus? My fada, my fada!

**CHAIRMAN:** Yes, three hundred-million-naira cash, and in addition, they agreed to bankroll my political bid to be the Chairman of Ndoli Local Government Area, on the condition that I don't make any further case on behalf of the other affected farmers.

**JANGO:** Shuu! So na so de mata die, just flow comot like water for river?

**CHAIRMAN:** Sure, that was it.

Chairman's initial intent to hold the oil companies accountable through a lawsuit ("fiery lawyer") is replaced by a narrative of personal gain. The bribe of 300 million naira and political campaign funding highlights the corporations' strategy of silencing dissent. This act undermines environmental justice by portraying how corporations can manipulate local leaders with financial incentives to abandon their communities' interests. The Chairman's lack of response on behalf of the other impacted farmers is another example of how corporate money silences environmental advocacy. This supports the play's earlier criticism of environmental injustice. The LG Chairman portrays these community leaders as the main enemy because of their greed and violence, thus it is astonishing to see how callous he was in how he settled the remaining farmers.

**JANGO:** Wetin happen to the other farmers wey the gbese shake? I mean the other people wey the flood tackle nah! You scratch their back?

**CHAIRMAN:** For what? Did the spillage cost them their lives like it did my father? Well, I simply called them together when I was vying for this position and gave each of them a bottle of gin and a bag of rice, and they happily carried me into this well-padded leather seat (12-13).

The play employs a dramatic turn to draw attention to the effects of the environment at work. The Chairman rejects Professor Aladinma's repeated attempts to persuade him, demonstrating a disdain for environmental warnings. This shows the tension that exists between proactive sustainability and immediate needs. The phrase "doomsday arrived" implies to a catastrophic environmental event. Dimkpa's complaints reveal the challenges that Prof. Aladinma's "green initiatives" encountered when confronted with climate change.

**DIMKPA:** And who is the stubborn weed here that has denied the tender plant a chance to feel the sunlight? Me or that fellow in your midst who calls himself Okosisi? Ewh! Go to my farmland, go there now, and you will see nothing but an empty womb. (Pause.) Oh! I, Dimkpa, Okaji of Ndoli! The great yam farmer whose efforts had never been flouted nor ridiculed in the past, not by the weather, not by spirit, not by man or woman. I, the pride of yam harvest, whose hands mother earth has always blessed with bounty, now does not have even a yam tuber to boast of this harvest season (15).

Dimkpa, previously a successful farmer, now blames himself for his past stubbornness, using the metaphor of a weed blocking a plant's sunlight. This suggests his regret in refusing Prof. Aladinma's teachings on new farming methods, perhaps methods aimed at sustainability in the face of climate change. His past success followed by his current struggles with barren land highlights the potential consequences of not adapting to new approaches. Dimkpa reflects, "I am stubborn, arrogant, self-willed, and now I suffer for it" (Mbajiorgu 16). This admission reveals his acknowledgement of how his refusal to adapt has led to his current plight, emphasising that his past decisions have directly contributed to his struggles. It highlights the importance of flexibility and openness to new ideas in agriculture, particularly in the context of environmental sustainability.

The challenges faced by Dimkpa and his community are not merely due to ignorance or indifference but stem from a profound lack of knowledge about sustainable practices. He queries his friend, "Then why didn't you tell me about the new species of seed yam from Professor Aladinma that can do well in our water-prone soil?" (Mbajiorgu 18). This question shows the critical need for education and awareness in implementing effective agricultural strategies that can withstand the adverse effects of climate change. Dimkpa's narrative can be

analysed through the lenses of both shallow and deep ecology. Shallow ecology, which focuses on the need for sustainable practices primarily to benefit human survival and economic stability, is reflected in the new farming methods that Professor Aladinma advocates. These methods aim to preserve the land's productivity to ensure the community's continued prosperity, as noted by Arne Naess, who emphasises that "shallow ecology often prioritises immediate human-centred solutions" (Naess 92). However, Dimkpa's initial rejection of these methods shows the community's struggle with ignorance and resistance to change, which shallow ecology attempts to address by advocating for pragmatic solutions.

Naess asserts that "deep ecology advocates for a more profound ethical transformation that respects nature beyond its utility to humans" (99). Aladinma's approach to environmental education and his efforts to instil this consciousness in the community reflects a commitment to deep ecology, promoting not just sustainability for human benefit but a deeper respect and care for the environment. The challenges Aladinma faces, as illustrated by Dimkpa's initial resistance, show the tension between these two ecological perspectives. While shallow ecology provides practical solutions to immediate problems, deep ecology demands a more profound cultural and ethical transformation—one that Aladinma is striving to achieve in Ndoli land. Ultimately, the problem in Ndoli land is not merely ignorance or nonchalance but a lack of knowledge that encompasses both the practical benefits of new methods and the deeper ethical considerations they entail.

Aladinma recognises that artistic expression can communicate harsh truths more powerfully than scientific data alone. His theatre troupe serves as a medium for environmental consciousness-raising, making the invisible impacts of human actions on nature brutally visible through storytelling and metaphor. It is anticipated that through locally based drama, the public will be able to comprehend the complexities of the science behind the changing climate. Changing the way people speak, live, and obtain resources becomes an essential first step in persuading them to reconsider their destructive behaviour against the settings that support their way of life. They are mostly farmers and fishermen., and despite adhering to outdated and patriarchal methods of doing things, they are now able to perceive and feel that their fields are not producing enough food and that there are no fish in their rivers, as Mazi Chinedum informs his spouse "There are not even fingerlings in the rivers," (55). One of the play's masterful strategies for persuading the public—and the audience, for that matter—that climate change is not a mere fabrication of the wealthy is to highlight the conditions of the unyielding land and the desolate rivers and the increasingly real truth of their presence. Notable was Mbajiorgu's strategy for creating a professor and giving him the knowledge necessary to comprehend the theory and applications of climate change, domesticate his knowledge, and encourage regular farmers to address the changing climate with practical plans.

To provide a thorough dramaturgy, he developed a character in the role of a scientist equipped with three distinct ways to teach his people about climate change: his expertise in science as a professor of agriculture, his creative ability as a playwright, and his involvement in local theatre. His moral position and inspiration are added to that. His experimental play has its roots in his community, and he chooses to remain in his hometown to use his skills to help the area grow despite his connections abroad as a family man and scholar. He employs a two-pronged approach. While he likely engages in personal conversations to raise awareness, Act Two Scene One and Three highlights his more impactful strategy – his experimental drama group. This collective entity functions as an apparatus for heightening awareness and fostering consciousness. We see this through Obioma, one of the actors, who uses a question to confront

his fellow actors – Adaora, Ekene, and Nweke. Obioma doesn't directly accuse them, but his question, "What have you done?" compels them to reflect on their environmental impact. He follows this by stating the consequences – "Biodiversity minimization and emission of harmful and dangerous substances into the atmosphere,"(39) emphasising the key issues. This approach is effective because it creates a space for learning and reflection. Instead of simply lecturing, the play allows the audience (and even the actors themselves) to face with the realities of their actions. Obioma's question acts as a springboard, prompting the audience to consider their own contribution to climate change and its potential consequences. When they respond negatively, he begins to reel out some of the adverse effects:

**OBIOMA:** They are numerous, where do I even begin. (Counting with her fingers as she lists them.) Increase in global atmospheric temperature, melting of polar ice, rising sea temperatures, sea level rise, appearance of radiation related cancers, change in the pattern of precipitation. change in agricultural yield, proliferation of a thousand other diseases and health problems, even diseases that we thought had gone away in some countries are coming back in full bang; Diarrhoea outbreak in America, Tuberculosis epidemics in London, Cholera epidemic in Haiti. And countless natural disasters which you have been lamenting about, yet, we go on destroying the soil and trees that act as natural sinks for the absorption of carbon. (To the imaginary audience.) Why? why? Why are we so destructive? (39).

This method of engaging with the issue is likely more impactful than just verbal explanations, as it fosters a deeper understanding of the problem and its urgency. Obioma's initial question about "biodiversity minimization and emission of harmful substances" sets the stage. Here, we see a more detailed list of the consequences – rising temperatures, melting ice caps, sea level rise, and changes in weather patterns. These all fall under the umbrella of climate change, directly linking human actions to its devastating effects. The mention of "radiation-related cancers" adds another layer of urgency, which highlights the potential health risks associated with a warming planet. The play doesn't shy away from the bleak realities. It goes beyond broad statements about "adverse effects" and digs into specific issues like changes in agricultural yield, a critical factor for food security. The mention of "a thousand other diseases" further reveals the widespread impact of environmental degradation on human health. This comprehensive approach ensures the audience understands the gravity of the situation and the interconnectedness of environmental problems. Obioma's speech reinforces the play's environmental activism and highlights the devastating consequences of environmental disasters.

**OBIOMA:** The signs are here with us, brother, it's doom, doom and nothing but doom. We hear stories of mass graves for victims of Tsunamis and earthquakes, and how the stench from decomposed bodies forestalled all attempts to dig up causalities buried under the rubble, new outbreaks of epidemics, collapse of municipal services and news of thick forests, skyscrapers and Golden castles flaring like volcano, and huge truckloads of military men drafted to assist the rescue team yet the wildfire refuses to go off (41).

His references to mass graves from tsunamis and earthquakes, epidemics, and wildfires show a picture of ecological collapse. This portrayal aligns with the play's message about the urgency of addressing environmental issues. Obioma's focus on the human cost - stench from bodies, overwhelmed rescue teams - adds emotional weight to the environmental discourse, stressing the human suffering caused by environmental problems.

Professor Aladinma persists, despite resistance from villagers who hold traditional beliefs like Anayo who blames the gods for fish scarcity (58), and those who prioritise short-term gains like Mazi Chinedum's initial scepticism about sustainable hunting practices and declaims, "Our hunters are beginning to see the folly of their crude strategy of setting the entire village forest on fire in their attempt to catch a tiny bush rabbit"(60). This reflects the challenges of environmental discourse in overcoming cultural beliefs and economic pressures. To commence our exploration, let's look into solutions that are currently being utilised in different parts of the globe. We will receive an account from Desmond, a doctoral researcher visiting from England, regarding efficacious strategies for climate change mitigation abroad.

As I am talking to you now, the Japanese are building quake-resistant houses, the Chinese are constructing houses that can float on water in case of flooding, and the Germans and other nations of Europe are producing green vehicles powered by all kinds of biological wastes or oxygen. India has now introduced cyclone detection tracking systems and tsunami warning devices (53).

Desmond doesn't stop at just sharing global solutions; he even offers practical advice specifically for the local leaders in the play.

If this flood occurs, it will increase the vulnerability of local farmers. The government must put together a planned process and take deliberate steps to create institutions and structures that will stimulate the adaptive capacity of rural dwellers to the threat of climate change (54).

Obioma's further performance as the local government chairman, Edwin Ochonkeya, reinforces this critique during his electoral campaign, complaining:

I was a farmer before oil spillage, and pollution robbed me of my farmland just as the changing climate has denied many of you your sources of livelihood. You see, before this plague of climate change, the oil companies had milked our land dry, but have given nothing to nourish it. Am I not speaking the truth? (69).

He criticises the practices of oil companies in the Niger Delta – gas flaring and neglect of oil spills. He stresses how corporations prioritise profit over environmental well-being and community health. This exposes a power imbalance where corporations operate with impunity, leaving local communities to suffer the consequences. Mbajiorgu's employment of a metatheatrical device, specifically a play nested within the primary narrative, the dramatist constructs a multi-layered critique that simultaneously addresses environmental concerns and the systemic forces that perpetuate such issues.

His confrontational encouragement points to one of the harsh realities of environmentalism that often involves upending existing power structures, economic interests, and political inertia. As scholar Wapner argues in *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics*, "environmental campaigns are inherent 'conflicts over resources' that inevitably exacerbate tensions between the goals of economic growth and ecological sustainability"(124). Effective environmental activism thus requires the courage to question and disrupt the very institutional forces tasked with managing human-environment relations. Like the dissidents who sparked the modern environmental justice movement by protesting discriminatory pollution policies, Aladinma exhibits a willingness to be a thorn in the side of the establishment for the greater good.



A key tenet of Aladinma's activism is the recognition that transformative environmental change requires community-wide commitment and participation. He diligently works to educate stakeholders at all levels of society, deeply aware that top-down policies and technological solutions alone are inadequate without shifting cultural attitudes and fostering public participation. This inclusive educational approach is represented through Ugodiya's testimony, "We had series of meetings with the Professor on what species of yam to plant, when to plant and how to plant it in this difficult time of climate change." (16) through the process of conducting workshops, town halls, and open forums to disseminate sustainable agricultural techniques ranging from crop choices to organic methods, Aladinma ensures his interventions percolate through the fabric of the community.

These outreach efforts mobilise grassroots collaboration, enabling collective environmental action across the village. This grassroots educational approach forms the bedrock of effective environmental activism worldwide. Scholars like Arjen Wals emphasise how "environmental education that takes participants' backgrounds, circumstances and experiences as a starting point is vital for mobilising public ecological ethics and sustainable citizenship" (196). Through anchoring his pedagogical discourse within the cultural frameworks inherent to Ndoli's agrarian demographic, Aladinma facilitates widespread resonance and acceptance of his environmentalist ideological precepts.

Aladinma's integration of Indigenous wisdom into his environmentalism is a powerful rejoinder to the frequent criticism that mainstream sustainability discourses marginalise and appropriate native cosmovision. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith posits in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, "Indigenous communities have long contested the dominance of Western, Eurocentric constructs of development and conservation that erase their ontologies, value systems, and lived experiences" (58). Through his culturally grounded praxis, Aladinma represents how indigenous knowledge systems can be not mere ethnographic relics but dynamic, lived philosophies that drive localised solutions to socio-ecological crises.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored how *Wake Up Everyone* employs drama as a means of environmental activism in Nigeria. The findings show that the play criticises political corruption, corporate exploitation, and public ignorance as major contributors to ecological decline. Through the character of Professor Aladinma, the play advocates for deep ecology, community education, and practical involvement as solutions. It demonstrates that drama can raise awareness, challenge power structures, and motivate collective action. Finally, the play confirms that sustainable change depends on grassroots participation, ethical leadership, and a shift in environmental awareness.

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