

# Greg Mbaijiorgu's *Wake Up Everyone* and the Scourge of Climatic Change on Food Security

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## ABSTRACT

While climatic change induced by natural disasters of flood, drought, pollution, and erosion is inevitable, much still needs to be done in taking proactive and preventive measures by the farmers and government at all levels to mitigate its havoc. Consequences of the destruction of farmlands and rivers are typified by the scarcity of agricultural products and high prices of available ones. In recent times, government intervention has been mostly a scientific forecast of the possibility of flood and drought that could change the climatic conditions in vulnerable states of the federation. There is also the man-induced disaster of destruction of farmlands and relocation of farmers for safety in the raging herdsman/ farmers clash in the North Central zone of Nigeria that is a disincentive to a bountiful harvest. It is on this backdrop that, this paper using content/textual analysis as literary method and approach examines the sensitization of farmers, government at the grassroots level, and other stakeholders on the threat to food security from climatic change in the play, *Wake Up Everyone*. This paper is therefore justified on the strength that it adds to the existing literature on environmental issues as well as the global discourses on food security. Hence, the focus of this paper is on the critical reading of Greg Mbaijiorgu's *Wake Up Everyone* within the context of climatic change on Food security.

**Keywords:** Climate change, food security, wake-up call.

## INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the major challenges to food security in Africa and globally. In recent times it has added considerable stress to our societies and the environment. Fangs of climate change range from shifting weather patterns that threaten food production, to rising water levels that increase the risk of flooding and erosion. The impact of these shifting changes in patterns of weather is global in scope unprecedented in scale and inimical to food security. Many research findings point to the fact that the climatic vagaries that are brought about by climate change have adverse effects on agricultural productivity in Nigeria leading to lowered productive outputs. This situation has led to a shortfall and disruptions in food and has brought about hiking food prices. The era of food insecurity becoming intensified across Nigeria as a result of climatic factors that have limited agricultural productivity. Climate change-induced alterations such as droughts, heavy precipitation, flooding of farmlands; rising temperature, increasing aridity, and soil acidity, changes in relative humidity, and increased evaporation, among others have adverse effects on agricultural productivity and food systems in Nigeria (Kelechi Johnmary Ani, 2022, p. 151). Surely, Nigeria is physically and climatically diverse, and the vulnerability of each geographical zone to sudden and perennial climatic change is determined by the topography and climatic conditions pressing environmental challenges confronting the country including deforestation, desertification, soil degradation, erosion, flooding, and pollution. While the northern states of Nigeria are prone to desert encroachment and drought, flooding pollution and erosion are very rampant in literal southern states. This menace of climate change and environmental degradation can be linked to natural causes and human activities. Consequences of the destruction of farmlands and rivers are typified by the scarcity of food and high prices of available ones. To the farmers, poor harvest and loss of revenue can be devastating and frustrating. Famine on the other hand can unleash unimaginable hunger on the populace.

Government intervention over the years has been through scientific forecasts of possible floods and droughts that could change the climatic conditions in states prone to such natural disasters. However, this does not take into cognizance the security threat of farmers'/herders' clashes that have led to the destruction of farmlands and relocation of farmers for safety in recent times. While the meteorological forecast of weather is hardly taken with the seriousness it deserves by the farmers, government, and agricultural agencies, palliatives to cushion the effects of environmental degradation are like a drop of water in the ocean.

Inadequacies of forecasts and palliatives necessitate more preventive and proactive measures by the farmers, agricultural agencies, and the government. Orientation programs on electronic media should incorporate dramatization of the causes of climate change, its threat to food security, and proactive and preventive measures to be taken to mitigate its devastating effects on the environment and Society. To create more awareness, the participatory nature of drama and the universality of its language on stage and screen should be explored in enlightenment campaigns it is in furtherance of orientation and campaigns to rural farmers eco-theatre becomes inevitable.

## THE CONCEPT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND FOOD SECURITY

Climate change and food security are issues that have to do with the lives of the human species. There cannot be a good harvest where the climate is not favorably disposed of. Thus, safeguarding food security in the face of climate change also implies avoiding the disruptions or declines in global and local food supplies that could result from changes in temperature and precipitation regimes and new patterns of pests and diseases (Wulf Killmann, 2021, p. xi). This could be eminent due to their high exposure to natural hazards, their direct dependence on climate-sensitive resources such as plants, trees, animals, water, and land, and their limited capacity to adapt to and cope with climate change impacts. Sanober Naheed holds that:

climate change is increasing the frequency of climate-related disasters, creating greater risks of hunger and the breakdown of food systems. The sustainability of our planet is currently a major concern for the global community and has been a central theme for several major global initiatives in recent years. Climate change has prevalent, multi-faceted, and temporal impacts on food security. Higher temperatures, water scarcity, extreme events like droughts and floods, and greater CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the atmosphere have already begun to impact staple crops around the world. The warming climate is already taking a toll on human health, causing widespread hunger and illness that will grow exponentially worse, and will pose a major threat to human well-being (DOI: 10.29328/journal.afns.1001044).

Climate change thus, threatens to reverse the progress made in the fight against hunger and malnutrition. As highlighted by the latest assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change (IPCC), climate change augments and intensifies risks to food security for the most vulnerable countries and populations. Four out of the eight key risks induced by climate change identified by IPCC AR5 have direct consequences for food security: Loss of rural livelihoods and income; Loss of marine and coastal ecosystems, and livelihoods; Loss of terrestrial and inland water ecosystems, and livelihoods; and Food insecurity and breakdown of food systems (FAO UN, 2009, p. ix).

This is to say that, some of these risks induced factors are both natural humans. For instance, the rapid population growth in Nigeria and unmatched agricultural productive output point to an aggravated food security crisis. This condition is attributed to the stresses that are connected with climate change. Climate change undermines the ability of developing countries to meet targeted agricultural output. The persistence of this shortfall indicates an intense food security crisis. Climate change also affects aquatic ecosystems. Sea warming, changes in sea salinity and increasing sea acidity are some of the physical changes that climate change brings. Several incidents of mass aquatic deaths in the Niger Delta are indications of the horrendous consequences of climate change. Such losses threaten the livelihood of riverine communities that are heavily dependent on food and trade (Kelechi Johnmary Ani, et. al. 2022, p. 154).

Based on the above, therefore, it is obvious that, the Niger Delta region in Nigeria has more eco-challenges than any other region. This is simply because some of the climatic or ecological challenges are man-made and natural. In some regions, climatic crises are caused by bush burning. Some regions are affected because of the desert encroachments, especially the Northwest and North East. It thus becomes imperative that all these could form threats to food production and human life because Nigeria is not shielded from the rest of the world in terms of the effect of climate change. This eco-catastrophe is felt in every part of the globe and more and more on African shores. Changes in rainfall patterns across Nigeria have gravely affected the food supply and the rise in the cost of foodstuff in recent times is a testament to the growing effect of climate change. Hence, in Nigeria, the response to these ecological challenges over the years has been that of silencing the voices that dare to speak out either by military might or by monetary inducement in the name of paying compensation. (Emmanuel Ebere Uzoji, 2016, p. 86). It is against this backdrop that this paper attempts an eco-reading of Greg Mbaijorgu's *Wake Up Everyone* as a dramatic response to climate change and food security.

### Conceptual framework

Before the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria caused by years of oil exploration and the attendant agitations and militancy much attention was not given to dramatization of environmental issues in Nigeria. The allusion to the environment by some Nigerian dramatists before the degeneration of protests and agitations of the oil-producing communities in Nigeria to criminality was more of a metaphor to satirize unfolding events in our social reality. While some of these plays have the features of eco-theatre in terms of setting and characterization, environmental degradation caused by natural and human factors is not lucid. This is in conformity with what constitutes eco-theatre, a theatre whose motif and aesthetics are dedicated to exploring environmental degradation and conscious efforts at solutions to problems of climate change. In this regard, many Nigerian playwrights have tried to cross-examine the Nigerian environmental issues in their various works. For instance, Bode Sowande's *Mammy Water's Wedding* exemplified this kind of metaphorical enactment of environmental degradation. In the play, the need for a harmonious living of earth and water is personified in the love affairs of Akinla and Tarrella. A young man (Akinla) based in Lagos, drowns in a rainstorm despite his being a good swimmer. He does not die but finds himself in a world below the sea, among mermaids, called mammy water. Akinla is charmed by Tarella's beauty in the world below the sea. Tarlla decides to help Akinla back to Lagos, but the barrier to their love is the environment. To transform into a human, Tarella is born to a rich Lagos businessman called Adagun-Odo with the name Okuntoro. Adagun-odo trade is waste dumping into the sea, which later sets him on a collision course with the destined love between Okuntoro and Akinla.

The natural harmonious relationship between earth and water that is essential to food production and healthy living is destroyed by Adagun-odo's act of dumping waste into the sea to pollute it. The dramatization of Adagun-odo atoning for his sins of environmental degradation is spiced with thematic songs just as the symbiotic relationship of the earth and sea is personified in the marriage of Akinla and Tarella. The sensitization on the sanctity of the environment is captured in these two stanzas of the songs:

#### First stanza

People of the world, don't

Wreck the world.

People of the world, don't

Pollute the sea

People of the world

Let us reflect

People of the world, don't

Wreck the earth

People of the world, don't

Spoil the earth

People of the world don't

Wipe out the world. (58)

**Second stanza:**

Toxic waste in water is horrible

Water pollution is bad

Pollution in the forest is bad

Filth at home is bad

Air pollution is horrible

Polluting the sky is bad (59).

The lesson in this play Sowande avers "is that pollution is a serious problem which has serious consequences for the quality of life on earth" (iv). Consummation of the love affairs of Akinla and Tarella (Okuntoro) is thus a token of faith that a healing bond can occur between the earth and the sea.

Furthermore, tears, sorrow, and blood that trailed the militancy of youth of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as characterized by kidnapping, hostage taking, killings, and bunkering inspired an artistic approach to the struggle for emancipation. This manifested in plays and poems that capture the travails of the oil-producing communities for awareness of national and international communities. While the cineastes dramatized the agitations, militancy, degraded environment, blood bath, death, and trauma, the playwright emphasizes psychological and emotional trauma and senselessness of killing the innocent ones caught in the web of the violence. These scenarios are aptly re-enacted in Yerima's *Hard Ground* (2005) and *Little Drops* (2009). *Hard Ground* depicts the psychological and emotional trauma that a family has to contend with when the fate of its son is in the hands of the dreaded militant leader, Don. Yerima's craftsmanship to Azeez Akinwumi Sesan "is seen in how he fuses family tension with national tension. Deceit, treachery, and secrecy which had been frustrating efforts aimed at reconciliation, rehabilitation, and resolution in the Niger Delta crisis played out in the home of Baba and Nimi, the protagonist' (187). *Little Drops* unfolds the travails of women in the confrontation between Niger Delta militant youth and the armed forces. In recalling their ordeal, they lament how the militancy in the region has caused family dislocations and unending trauma as a result of the loss of loved ones including husbands' brothers, children, and pupils. The play concludes with an appeal for the laying down of arms for dialogue (Sesan, 2021, p. 89). One can summarize these crises as a response by the Niger Delta militants to the ecological disorders found within the region as a result of air and water pollution which is the concern of this paper.

## **THE PLAY, WAKE UP EVERYONE**

Set in an agrarian community of Ndole land in Southeast Nigeria, the play, *Wake Up Everyone*, dramatizes Professor Aladinma's crusade against the devastating effects of environmental degradation occasioned by climate change and human activities. The approaches of the retired professor of Agricultural Extension and

drama enthusiasts to sensitization and mobilization against climate change and threat to food security are through official eye method, extension services to the farmers, and dramatization.

The official eye approach is dramatized in his visits to the local government chairman to advocate for proactive and preventive measures to mitigate impending floods and the consequences on food production. However, the chairman who rose to power through the activism of protest and agitation over the degraded environment and the attendant loss of his father turned a deaf ear to the advocacy and advice of Professor Aladinma. The extension services method entails an enlightenment campaign on species of seeds to plant, when to plant, and how to plant in difficult times of climate change. This was stepped up with dramatic enactments of causes of climate change and its devastating effects on food production, and the traumatic experience of dislocation of families and death of loved ones. The eventual occurrence of the flood as forecasted by Professor Aladinma and its trail of destruction of farmlands and properties instigated mass action of the peasants of Ndole land against the recalcitrant chairman.

## **SENSITIZATION AND MOBILIZATION AGAINST THE THREAT OF CLIMATE CHANGE TO FOOD SECURITY IN *WAKE UP EVERYONE***

Segmented in three Acts with eight scenes through characterization, dialogue, and pantomime fused with songs and dances, the playwright's sensitization and mobilization on the threat of climate to food production are the three levels sensitizing the government at the grassroots, enlightenment of the peasant farmers and enactment consequences of ignorance and nonchalant attitude. The play opens with the visit of Professor Aladinma to the local government with a brilliant proposal to tackle the menace of climate change and the attendant degradation of the environment as typified by flooding, pollution, and erosion. Not even the suggestion of counterpart funding state, the local government and the oil companies could convince the local government chairman who is not on the same page with the professor. The selfish motive of the chairman is being reluctant to approach. The oil companies are captured in this response to the Chairman in the play:

**CHAIRMAN:** (He points his glasses at Prof in strange defensive mode) Listen, this Local Government headquarters was recently refurbished by Zodiaqc Oil, the three eighteen seater buses and two Toyota Hilux trucks out there were donated by Continental Petroleum, my sport utility vehicle and two hundred and fifty KVA soundproof generating set that is powering this Local Government Secretariat came three weeks ago as birthday gift from the MD of Diamond Oil, and don't forget that all these oil companies came together to raise a campaign fund with which I ran the election for this position. I have not even started thinking of how to pay back the money and you are asking me to go back to them, cap in hand like Oliver Twist, asking for more? With due respect for your concern for this community Prof. I don't think this local government is ready to get involved in such projects. After, all, it is based on more speculation (24).

The above statement confirms the personal interest of political elites above communal interest in the oil-producing states of Nigeria has been a major hindrance to palliative and rehabilitative packages of the government at all levels and the oil companies aimed at empowering impoverished peasants and rehabilitating polluted rivers and barren soil.

In Act One, Scene Two, the impact of Professor Aladinma's extension services to farmers in terms of orientation on species of seed yam to mitigate the devastating effect of sudden climate change unfolds as the Cooperative Society of Local Farmers rejoices over bountiful harvests. It was while the farmers were still basking in euphoria of heading the advice of an agricultural expert, that Dimkpa lamented his poor harvest for being lackadaisical;

**Dimka:** 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 man or woman I, the pride of yam harvest, whose hands mother earth has always blessed with a bountiful harvest, now does not have even a yam tuber to boast of, this season (34).



This nonchalance attitude of Dimkpa is not unconnected with the primordial belief of attributing climate change and poor harvest to the wrath of the gods. Dimkpa's ignorance and disdain for a scientific method of processing and transforming animal wastes and decomposed organic substances into natural fertilizer is exposed in this mockery of the process;

DIMKPA: My wife attended that one she said he taught our farmers how best to process cow dung, dog shit, fowl shit, goat shit, and shit of Agama lizard into fertilizer. (They laugh). What arrant nonsense! Why must I meddle with all the different excrements on earth before putting my seed yam into the soil (they laugh) (36).

In Act Two, Scene One, dramatic aspects of the sensitization and mobilization against the devastating effects of climate change on the environment and food production are enacted in a rehearsal session of the drama troupe of Professor Aladinmu in his, rehearsal studio. This is heralded with songs and exercises that advance into reflection on causes of climatic change, the global dimension, oil exploration, and the side effects of spillage and pollution. The militant reaction against environmental degradation is also captured in the ruminative dialogue of Obioma and Nweke. The sensitization in the lamentation of causes and effects of climate change on environment and food production is spiced up with a rendition of the theme song that goes thus;

Wake up! Wake up everyone x 2

To build our world a new no burning down our bushes no polluting our rivers

Mo more deforestation

To guarantee our future

No greenhouse gas emission

No heating up our planet

Wake up!

Let's stop oil pollution.

No more flaring of gases

No cutting down our forests

Wake up!

Let's stop oil pollution

No more flaring of gases

No cutting down our forests

Wake up ... (65).

Professor Aladinma's passion for deploying music, dance, and drama as strategies for social mobilization and mass enlightenment is thus an eye opener on the relevance of eco-theatre in the orientation of mostly illiterate rural farmers on what constitutes climate change, its effects on food production and the proactive and preventive measures to avert poor harvest. The edge this dramatic mode has over the mass media of radio, television, and social media is its participatory nature in terms of their involvement in the presentation and the use of their artistic idiom of songs and dances.

Overcoming the technical language barrier of the sciences through the medium of drama could change the mindset of the conservative and recalcitrant ones in the Nigerian agrarian communities of attributing devastating effects of climate. Change to supernatural sources. This deep-seated belief in superstition came to the fore in the lamentation of MuziChinedum (fisherman) and Anayo (farmer) over poor catches and harvest in Act Three scene two:

ANAYO: Forget Prof Aladinna and all his shit about climate. There is nothing like climate, it is just that the gods are angry with us. You made sacrifices to the gods before the last harvest season, didn't you?

MAZI CHINEDUM: I did. You see, I expressed fear in the past, but why should the gods be angry with us? Where have we gone wrong?

ANAYO: Someone may have done something that provoked the wrath of the gods. Do you remember last year when the priest of Ndoli River refused to make the annual sacrifice to the deity of the river, remember, the river changed its course and headed to the priest's compound well until he rushed and quickly made the necessary sacrifices and the river returned to its normal course.

MAZI CHINEDUM: (waves his hand). That is superstition the river changed its course by accident.

ANAYO: You called that superstition? Is that superstition to you? If it happened by accident, why did the river return to its normal course immediately the necessary sacrifices were made?

The deduction from this dialogue on superstition is that, while we are not averse to the traditional ways of preventive rituals against the devastating effects of climate change our illiterate farmers should also embrace the scientific methods being spearheaded by the likes of Prof. Aladinma for the dual approach to mitigating environmental degradation and poor harvests that may result from sudden climate change.

The reality of the scientific forecast of impending flood by Prof. Aladinma Stares the people of Ndoli in the face when the flood finally came living in its trail destruction of farmlands, loss of lives and property. Now convinced of the wake-up call of Prof. Aladinma which was initially received with reservations, the farmers now mobilize themselves to vent their anger on the local government chairman over his nonchalant attitude towards proactive and preventive measures of fortifying the river banks against flooding for food security. In the play in focus, the lackadaisical attitudes of government at the grassroots to proactive and preventive measures aimed at checkmating the effects of climatic change on agricultural products are dramatized. This entails farmers taking measures to prevent floods in collaboration with the government. Adapting the scientific method of weather forecast to change primordial beliefs of ancestral gods as enacted in the play. Processing and transforming organic animal wastes and decomposed organic substances into fertilizers which can also guarantee a bumper harvest. Unfolded in the dramatic universe is the nonchalant attitude of the political leaders to issues of climate change. Through dialogue and play- within-a-play, effective strategies for combating climate change are enacted

## CONCLUSION

Critical reading of the play, *Wake Up Everyone* revealed an exploration of courses of climate change globally and nationally, and it is devastating effects on the environment, globally and nationally. It is devastating effects on the environment and society and threat to food production are enacted in three acts of eight scenes. Sensitization and orientation through drama are at the three levels of conscientizing the rulers at the grassroots, enlightenment of peasant farmers on a new farming method to checkmate adverse effects of climate change, and disorienting their minds of relying solely on appeasing gods to mitigate the threat of climatic change to food security. Taken together, this study suggests that Government all levels should pay more attention to proactive and preventive measures to mitigate the effects of climate change on food production. This entails among others channeling more funds to environmental protection than palliative measures of compensation after the disaster.

Agricultural extension workers in local government should go beyond the supply of fertilizer and seedlings to orientate the farmers on climate change and scientific methods of preventing its menace. This approach will enable the farmers to key into global best practices for tackling climate change, and make them distill the crusade in such a manner that, it becomes a way of life among them

The ritual approach of appeasing the gods to prevent flooding and drought for bountiful harvest should be synthesized with the scientific approach of heading the advice of a meteorologist with the adaptation of improved seedling and planting methods to avoid being caught unaware.

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