MARKETING AFRICA TO THE WORLD

Bobo Sofiri Brown

President, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR)

PREAMBLE

An attempt to situate the value asset of Africa must commence with an objective assessment of its historic and contemporary profile. A Juxtaposition of the African experience and the emerging global economic order will reveal a marketing nightmare of unusual proportion. My mission, therefore, is to propose a major challenge to the emerging elite of Africa to immediately commence the process of continental brand repackaging and repositioning, using all available socio-political and economic resources at its disposal to avert the total decimation of the continents value asset and its future.

PROFILE

Humanity simply does not recognize its debts and obligations to Africa. In Western imagery, Africa is the "Dark Continent", a potent symbol of a persistent inclination to set Africa and its inhabitants apart from the rest of humanity. The double meaning of the phrase is clear. The "Dark Continent" does not refer only to the depths of Africa's equatorial forest, to the density of its tropical shadows, to the blackness of African skin, or even to a widespread lack of knowledge concerning the continent. Above all, the phrase tacitly labels Africa as the place where a very particular form of darkness is found – the darkness of humanity. In this context, Africa is where people do terrible things, not because the aptitude for such behaviour is characteristic of all humanity, but because Africa is believed to be inherently more barbaric and less civilized than the rest of the world.

That people have behaved barbarically in Africa is undeniable but, as events in other parts of the world have demonstrated time and again, this is not an exclusive African tendency. Indeed, civilization – as an expression of cultured behaviour – is a very transitory feature of the human

story. Civilization is not a predetermined consequence of human progress, as the Victorians believed, with white Anglo-Saxons leading the way, the rest of the world following in the wake, and the Africans straggling several centuries behind. On the contrary, civilization is more like a protective skin of enlightened self-interest that all societies develop as they learn to regulate their interactions with the environment, and with other people, to the long- term benefit of all parties.

Once established for a few generations, civilization might seem durable enough to last forever. But the skin of enlightened self- interest is very delicate, easily eroded, and the human capacity for unspeakable barbarity lies just beneath its surface. Africa's horrors are chilling examples of what people are capable of doing to one another when short-term exploitation has taken over from long-term regulation, when the notion of accountability has been swept aside and the promise of the future is hidden by the trials of surviving in the present.

Africa's tragedies diminish everyone and we hold everything in common — not least our destiny, now that the limits of global exploitation are understood.

CHILDREN OF AFRICA

In terms of ethnic diversity, Africa has over 2,000 groups with Nigeria having the largest concentration – 300. Apart from the large number of different people found in Africa, it is blessed with a great variety of languages, religions and customs. The majority of its people, South of the Sahara, are classified as Negroes, while those in the North and in North-East of Africa are mostly classified as Caucasians.

Below is a brief description of some of Africa's different people.

  i.   The Bantu speaking people – a broad language group of Central, East and Southern Africa;

  ii. The Sudanese – who live in a broad belt stretch across Africa to the southern part of Sudan to West Africa. These include the Akan of Ghana, the Igbo and Yoruba of Nigeria;

iii. The Pygmies – the oldest of the African people, who can be found in the desert parts of the tropics;

iv. The San ("Bush men") and Khoikhoi (Hottentots) – who can be found in the Kalahari Desert and its boarder lands;

v. Non-Africans – these are mainly Europeans who have settled particularly in Southern Africa and parts of Central and Eastern Africa. They also include people from the Indian sub-continent, all of whom are to be found in the eastern coastal area of Southern Africa, Reunion and Madagascar, Islands of Mauritius and parts of East Africa.

vi. Africans in the Diaspora – these are over 10 million Africans living outside the continent, found mainly in the Caribbean, South America, Cuba, the United States and Europe.

THE AFRICAN ECONOMY

More than three fourths of the working population of Africa engages in agriculture and practises different kinds of agric – mixed, plantation, nomadic, pastorialism, commercial ranching, fishing and forestry. Invariably, agricultural products form a very important part of the export trade of most African countries.

A wide variety of minerals are also produced in Africa, the most common and important of these are petroleum and gold. In countries such as Algeria, Liberia, Libya, Mauritania, Nigeria, South Africa, Zaire and Zambia, minerals make up well over 30 per cent of the total value of their export earnings. In recent years, Africa has accounted for about 40 per cent of the world's production of petroleum and natural gas.

In manufacturing, with few exceptions such as South Africa and Egypt, the manufacturing sector of the economy is not yet fully developed. African countries are basically suppliers of raw materials and foodstuff.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Africa has great challenges which cripple its feeble attempts at industrialization. These challenges are entrenched and more of their acquired negative social and moral cultures. To effectively market Africa, these challenges have to be understood and addressed. Among them are the following:

i. High level of illiteracy: Most African countries have illiterate and semi-literate populations. This limits their human resource potentials and cripples all efforts at significant development in all spheres;

ii. Shortage of capital: Most African countries are poor. Arising from their illiteracy, they are unable to convert their abundant natural resources to wealth. This has led most African countries to invite foreign companies to come and set up strategic industries. Invariably, when they do, most of the profits are taken out of the country;

iii. Shortage of skilled labour: The high level of illiteracy in most African countries makes this obvious. The effect is that Africa remains a source for raw materials and at best tertiary institutions;

iv. Smallness of the market: The low GDP of African countries confers low purchasing power on their citizens. Thus, in spite of their population, the market economy of the continent is small. This manifests in low demands, which discourages foreign productive investments.

v. Political instability: African countries have the highest indices of political instability, despotic rulers and military dictatorship. The effect is that the risk factor in most African countries is very high.

vi. Ethnic clashes/communal wars: Africa is a continent with the highest number of ethnic groups. These ethnic interests bring about a rise in political power play, resulting in ethnic and communal wars and invariable decimation of its manpower;

vii. Corruption: According to Transparency International, most African countries and their leaders top the list of the world's most corrupt countries;

viii. Shortage of food: In spite of their agricultural potentials, most African countries suffer from acute shortage of food. This is due to their subsistence method of farming, land ownership structure, as well as inadequate storage and preservative facilities;

ix. Diseases: Ignorance, poverty and some cultural believes and lifestyles have made Africa a base for most common diseases. Most common are malaria, Ebola virus and the dreaded HIV/AIDS.

MARKETING AFRICA

For Africa to attract any form of interest from the international community, efforts have to be made to make it attractive, desirable and marketable. In other words, there is an urgent need to brand Africa positively to facilitate easy marketing to the world. To achieve this feat, I have categorized the strategies for marketing Africa into two: *internal* and *external*.

Internal Branding

An internal branding is compulsory for Africa because, as people say, charity begins at home. For successful internal branding, the twin strategies to pursue are:

i. Attitudinal change: The way Africans view themselves should change. Africans see themselves negatively as underdeveloped and helpless. We should make deliberate efforts to re-orientate ourselves and change the mindsets of our people; and

ii. Image and reputation management: This goes beyond the routine public relations and investor relations functions. Managing a reputation is an essential part of the marketing process. African nations should have a reputation that is faultless, transparent and consistent to attract the world. To achieve these, steps to be taken include:

a. Developing a sense of patriotism: African nations should create the machinery to deal heavily in imbibing a sense of pride and patriotism in the minds of its people. Africans should be proud to be Africans; we should invest heavily on communicating African dance, drama, religions, morals and values to our citizenry. This is to be accentuated by exemplary leadership in relation to values, compassion, humility and transparency in dealing with its citizenry;

b. Establishing a seal of good governance: African nations should imbibe a system of admirable good governance in terms of its stability, legitimacy, transparency and dividends. When a system of good governance exists, corruption and political instability will reduce, thereby improving the image of the continent;

c. Raising visionary leadership: African countries should raise visionary leaders; they must appoint as leaders men of great forthrightness, vision and charisma. Such leaders must be transparent, humble, compassionate and responsive to the people;

d. Establishing poverty alleviating social welfare schemes: African countries must imbibe social welfare schemes to help eradicate poverty, sickness and diseases. Schemes such as provision of basic social needs, e.g., power, water and housing, etc., ensure stability within the nations and reduce feelings of uncertainty among the citizenry;

e. Investing in education: Investing in the education of African people should be given top priority. If this is done, illiteracy will be eliminated and a significant increase will be observed in its active working population, and in its gross national income and productive capabilities;

f. Growing the number of African entrepreneurs: When there is a significant increase in the educational empowerment of Africans, more people will acquire the needed skills to generate and create wealth;

g. Empowering women: Africa is faced with the challenge of manpower under- utility. When the African woman is empowered with skills and education, the total human workforce will invariably increase. The woman should also be given rights such as the girl-child education, employment of women in male dominated workplaces, and elimination of debasing social beliefs, e.g., female circumcision;

h. Providing health: African nations should overcome the crippling effects of diseases, sickness and death which decimate its working population, thus lowering gross national production. The HIV and AIDS epidemic should be strongly curtailed. A healthy continent is a secure, safe and wealthy one;

I. Curbing religious intolerance: This is a very sensitive issue in Africa which often brings about instability in the political, economic and social life of the people. If not effectively curtailed, the human resources of the continent will continue to be decimated;

j. Empowering Africans with information technology skills: Africa should invest in acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge of IT to catalyze its revolution. This

will quickly close the gap between it and the developed world, turning it from being just a raw-material goods producer into an industrial giant;

k. Promoting inter-regional associations: The roles of these associations cannot be over-emphasized – they bring about uniformity, better platforms for trade, a united front and better leverage for the development of all sectors of the African economy;

l. Creating roles for institutions such as NEPAD to play : The institutions can bring about public enlightenment on their functions and play an excellent role in that regard. The objective is to re-orientate the Africans by giving them new visions and articulating those visions through visual communications, e.g., dance drama, village shows, religious shows, etc. In doing these, the truth must be told about situations and the hope of a way forward must be shown to the citizenry;

m. Promoting industrialization : Most African countries are mainly producers of raw materials and suppliers of foodstuff. The development of manufacturing industries is to be encouraged. Africa should be a generator of manufactured goods. To achieve this, certain measures must be encouraged, such as job creation and significant reduction in the importation of manufactured goods;

n. Promoting tourism : Africa is blessed with an abundance of tourist sites and sounds, particularly in the East and Northwest of Africa. Nevertheless, every country on the continent possesses the unique abilities to be potential tourist sites. This is very important to the economy because money derived from tourism is an important source of foreign exchange. It provides employment; as the national cultures and handcrafts are also enhanced and promoted. It is obvious that tourism opens great avenues for potential business creation and opportunities by foreigners "who come first just for holiday making";

o. Fighting corruption: There is an urgent need to redefine Africa's values and reward system from an overtly materialistic one to one of actual ethical growth. The get-rich-quick syndrome and the general Machiavellian ideology of acquiring power and wealth should change. African youths should be encouraged and taught the virtue of working hard for their achievements in life; and

p. Providing good transport system: Transportation is a key factor in economic development. Therefore, the need for a good transport system in Africa cannot be over-emphasized. African leaders must vigorously pursue multilateral agreements

between African countries to make this a reality.

External Branding

Given that the internal branding should have made substantial and qualitative impact on Africans in terms of a re-orientation of their mind sets, improvement and growth of products and services distribution, the elimination of uncertainties such as instability and corruption will be greatly reduced.

An external branding of Africa is necessary to:

• Deliver the best possible image for Africa internationally;

• Imbibe pride in the African culture, history, products, nationalities (flag & colour) and its people; and

• Foster the "Proudly African" slogan as a patriotic campaign theme for the motivation of Africans. Therefore, to position Africa as a player and the first choice in the international sphere, Africa should project a certain distinct and peculiar image to the world.

WHAT IMAGE SHOULD AFRICA PROJECT?

i. Land of opportunities – Africa is a land yet untapped, it is virgin. It has much reserve for exploitation. Africa must make great effort to use its huge potentials, which will make it enviable to the world. It has an abundant supply of natural, human and mineral resources and power.

ii. Economic giant – The continent should be projected as an economic giant after certain issues which the internal branding must have taken care of;

iii. Cultural base of the world – Africa is very rich in culture; its ethnic diversity should become a positive attribute. The world should see it as the bedrock of culture and civilization. Therefore, Africa should portray itself in the aspect of symbolic wealth, i.e., as a continent that is rich in culture;

iv. Tourism – Africa should be portrayed as a tourist continent. The opportunities within the tourist industry of any African country are immense. A calculated effort should be

made by key players to market Africa as a continent for tourists all over the world;

v.   Quality – The African continent should portray itself as a land where quality products and services are obtainable. This will bring about positive perception of the continent from the outside world. This will bring about an increase in direct foreign investment.

THE WAY FORWARD

External Image and Reputation Management

In packaging road shows, I propose the commencement of MINEX 2004 and an all-encompassing presentation of the best of Africa in terms of its *people, products* and *potentials*. This will bring all the 53 African countries together for a week in a conducive environment of buying and selling, brainstorming, having interactive sessions, showcasing African arts and music in one of the most strategic countries on an annual basis. The world will then be presented with a picture of the African continent with the huge embodiment of an unspoilt and natural sphere of the dawn of a new era.

Re-orientation of Africans in the Diaspora

Deliberate effort should be made to re-orientate the minds of Africans in the Diaspora. This should be done by flooding all avenues of telecommunications – Internet, televisions and electronic literature, etc., to transmit the positive values and sense of pride in Africa to them. It is an important step because, basically, Africans in the Diaspora are potential marketers of Africa itself.

To market to the world, all stakeholders within the African countries must work together to create positive attributes for it and grow its equity. Nevertheless, a change is required to alter the realities and warped perception of Africa. It is pertinent to take urgent measures to overcome the poor perceptions of Africa. There must be deliberate and concerted efforts by all stakeholders to bring about the reality of a branded Africa.