

Rebranding Nigeria



Critical Perspectives On The Heart Of Africa Image Project

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Introduction

Branding has traditionally been associated with products and services, rather than with countries, places and cities. Global companies and corporations and their marketing communications agencies have continued to create and use branding as a distinguishing and strategic competitive factor in the market place, and also in the fierce market drive for consumers.

Brands such as Coca-Cola, Mercedes, Nike, Microsoft, Harvard, Guinness, and Ford are beneficiaries of strong and strategic brand building efforts, this may therefore account for their global brand leadership positions.

Increasingly, governments and countries are beginning to employ branding and marketing techniques to sell their regions and countries to the rest of the world, in order to increase their international profile, attract foreign direct investments and make the places ideal destinations for tourism and trade.

The Nigerian government through the **Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation** (the supervising ministry) launched the Nigeria Image Project (now renamed **The Heart of Africa project**) in July 2004, following in the footsteps of some other African countries which had launched similar image campaigns such as Uganda and their **Gifted by Nature** campaign, and South Africa which launched a **Proudly South African** image programme.

This paper will critically analyse the new discipline of place branding using Nigeria and the Heart of Africa (HOA) image project as a case study.

Place Branding

Compared to product branding, place branding is still a new but growing discipline, much of the available literature in place branding is still largely and loosely embedded in traditional marketing, management and branding textbooks, including series of articles and papers on the discipline written by marketing and branding practitioners.

One of the reasons for lack of readily available resources in the field could be found in the comments made by Wally Olins (1999), who wrote that “the popular assumption is that national branding is a novel concept”. In another paper - *Branding the Nation: The historical perspectives*, Olins warns countries of the risks of ignoring nation branding and predicts that country branding will become normal practice in the future. According to him, the lack of interest and belief in country branding by some sceptics is only as a result of snobbery, ignorance and semantics.

Much of the definitions of branding, if any that exists focuses directly and more on explaining what brand means. Nilson (2000) writes that "A brand is really just a symbol with tremendous potential, and that this symbol can be expressed in many different ways." This is particularly true as such symbols such as the Nike swoosh, the

Mercedes star and the McDonald's golden arches come to mind. Also the American flag with its stars and stripes and the eagle could be easily remembered and readily identified with America.

The brand symbol can also become a distinctive feature from other competing brands, according to Cowking & Hankinson (1996): "A brand is simply a product or service which can be distinguished from its competitors". John Murphy cited in Hart & Murphy ed. (1998) suggests that such distinguishing aspects and brand features could be tangible and intangible. With products, the tangible and intangible values are easily identifiable by the consumers, as they can feel, touch, sample and judge the product before purchasing, this is not the case with services, which the consumers can only judge after experiencing or based on the prior knowledge and information that they have about the service, obtained through third parties such as family, friends, colleagues, the media and through sustained brand identity schemes. These third parties could also influence the decision - making process.

With countries, regions and cities (places), the decision making process is even more complex because the objectives and costs of making mistakes are different from those of products and services. Whereas a consumer could easily afford to spend money on a product without much consideration and with potentially less consequences as a result of dissatisfaction, it is not so simple with companies wishing to invest in a place or with tourists wishing to go on holidays to a place. Both the companies and the holidaymakers are influenced by a lot of other factors because of the huge sums of money involved, and the potential consequences of a making a poor decision. For holidaymakers, this may run into several thousands of dollars and pounds, and so they will consider the social and political environment of the place, its stability, tranquillity and value for money compared to other destinations before making their choice. .

For companies, the figure becomes even higher, often running into hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars and pounds, at the back of the minds of such potential investors will be the security of their investments as well as the rate of return (ROI) on such investments compared to the rates of return on investment in other competing places, the investors decisions will also invariably be influenced by the political, social and economic stability of the place in question. This view is shared by Randall Frost (2004) who wrote that "the image we have of another country says a lot about how we view it as a tourist destination, a place to invest or a source of consumer goods".

If brands are the tangible and intangible attributes of a product, service or place, comprising the brand names, logo, colour, values, customer service levels, price, packaging etc, branding therefore is the continuous and strategic process involved in the creating and managing of these associated brand elements, values and attributes.

A working definition of branding as the marketing and management process that gives a product, service, organization, or personality a unique identity and image such that it is easily and positively identifiable and distinct from the competition, will be adopted in this paper. Place branding will also be defined as the process whereby a town, region, country (place) actively seeks to create a unique and competitive identity for itself, with the aim of positioning it internally and externally as a good destination for trade, tourism and investments.

In this regard, countries such as India, UK, U.S.A, South Africa, China, Wales, Spain and Ireland have succeeded in attracting businesses and tourists to their countries as a result of carefully managed place branding programs, supported by fairly stable political, social and economic environments. UK's "Cool Britannia" and OK: UK, New York's I love NY and Spain's 'Turespana' are examples of place branding campaigns executed to attract both tourists and potential investors to the various places.



Figure 1: Logos of various place branding campaigns

Simon Anholt in his book *Brand New Justice* (2005), writes of the strategic imperative for developing nations to apply branding principles in their trade relations with the developed countries, according to him “more branded export business is most certainly a step in the right direction for an emerging country”, this argument justifies the need for both product and place branding from the perspectives of the developing countries including Nigeria. This is because the rising trend of globalization and the breaking down of international barriers of trade has increased the competition amongst countries and companies for consumers and investments, also known as Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs). Therefore it is the country, place or region that is able to project the most positive image to potential investors and tourists, and also guarantees peace and stability of investment, as well as security of life and value for money that will likely attract tourists and foreign investments.

These views are also supported by Charles Brymer of Interbrand who suggested in the paper *Branding a Country* (2003) that "Countries will compete daily with neighbours or block regions for tourism, inward investment and export sales, There's only so much business that can go around. Those countries that start with an unknown or poor reputation will be limited or marginalized. They cannot easily boost their commercial success".

Other countries also realise the importance of country branding. Mark Leonard of Demos, in the book *Britain TM* (1997) writes of the need for Britain to rebrand itself. According to Leonard "The main reason why this needs to be done is that a gulf has opened up between the reality of Britain as a highly creative and diverse society and the perception around the world that Britain remains a backward-looking island immersed in its heritage". The UK government uses its agencies such as the British Council, DFID, embassies and high commissions etc to promote its national interests and ideals worldwide.

The UK government also actively markets the UK education brand globally through www.ukuniversities.ac.uk, The British Council, The Department For International Development (DFID), UK Embassies and through education fairs organised by the universities in the UK and overseas, according to a publication by the ukuniversities.ac.uk, “In 2003/04 there were 213,000 international students and 104,000 students from other EU countries in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). There are also many more international and EU students on exchange or study-abroad programmes at UK universities. International student numbers in UK higher education institutions have increased by over 60% in the last five years”.

UK remains the primary destination of choice for Nigerian students wishing to study abroad. Mr. Richard Gozney (the British High Commissioner to Nigeria) says that the near comatose educational system in Nigeria and its perennial unpredictability are some of the factors responsible for the increasing exodus of Nigerians who long to acquire education abroad. According to him, “The British High Commission received no fewer than 8000 students visa applications in 2003, by 2004, the number had risen to 12,000, the latest figure on hand in 2005 is 20,000 applications”. The international activities of UK universities make an important and growing contribution to their income and to export earnings for the UK economy, this has been achieved through a successful marketing of the UK education brand and has now made it a favourite destination for foreign students including Nigerian students.

In a related remark to that of Mark Leonard, Wally Olins (ibid) writes that "Countries which have thought most about branding issues have been those, like Britain, with some kind of traditional position, influence and reputation which they seek to change or improve."

This analogy best describes Nigeria and the other developing nations that are still grappling with a myriad of issues, which pose threats to their abilities to attract foreign direct investments.

While there seems to be a growing global trend of the use of traditional marketing and branding techniques to sell places and countries, there are however some who may not agree to such methods. William Drenttel in the article *My Country Is Not a Brand* (2004) writes that "Even nations have become brands... The symbol for a country should not be created by branding experts. When the vocabulary of a nation's foreign policy is the vocabulary of branding, then it is, in fact, selling Uncle Ben's Rice. This transaction, with the vocabulary of the supermarket counter, is not how I envision my country (America) speaking to the rest of the world". This goes to show that there are few voices of dissent but it does not take away the strong argument and need for the adoption of branding principles in the marketing of places.

It may seem therefore that in order to compete effectively in the global market place, and also be able to attract FDI, the way forward for cities, places and countries is to actively adopt branding principles in their various marketing campaigns for their regions or places. Employing branding and marketing techniques however has its challenges, and may also not guarantee complete success if the other variables and factors are not in place, most especially an enabling environment created by suitable policies by a fiscally responsible government. Unfortunately, this has been the case with Nigeria and some of the developing nations.

A wholesale adoption of branding and marketing principles in the place branding process should be viewed with caution, because, according to Olins, despite the similarities between product and place brands, "the idea of a nation as a brand—as Kellogg's Corn Flakes is a brand—is a very big mistake". Olins is also emphasizing caution and care in the application of traditional branding principles to place branding.

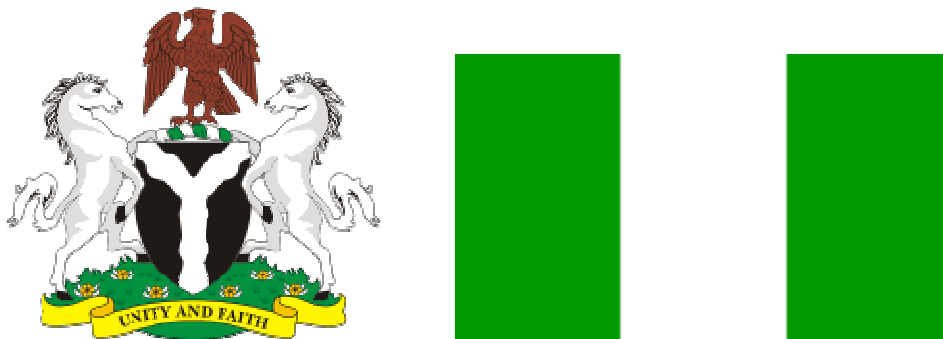
Arguing a case for the application of branding principles in the marketing of places, Peter van Ham, as cited in Rob Ferguson's article *Brand-name Government* (Knowledge Marketing Watch Newsletter, October 2001) says that "a state just like a company requires a strong brand. To rise above the cluttered political landscape, a state must be able to define and promote its vision".

While arguing the need for Canada to rebrand itself, Ferguson writes that, "No state wants to be anonymous. The goal, rather, is to have a brand that makes winning friends and influences easy.... Building a compelling brand with deep, multi-faceted attributes requires a long-term, team-oriented commitment. It will require politicians and bureaucrats to understand how identity is developed, promoted, and maintained...."

Rebranding Nigeria

Nigeria is an oil rich African country with an estimated population of over 130 million people; it also occupies an enviable position as the 6th largest oil producer in the world. Despite these positive attributes, Nigeria's reputation as one of the most corrupt nations in the world, coupled with other socio-political issues has greatly affected its global image and has directly impacted on its attractiveness as a potential investment and tourist destination. According to the 2004 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, Nigeria still ranks as the third most corrupt country in the world in a survey of 146 countries, coming only ahead of Haiti (the most corrupt country) and Bangladesh (the second most corrupt country).

Nigeria's current position is only a slight improvement from its previous positions as the second most corrupt and the most corrupt country in the world in 2003 and 2002 respectively. According to Peter Eigen, the Chairman of Transparency International:



Figures 2 and 3: The Nigerian coat of arms (L) and the Nigerian national flag (R)

“Corruption robs countries of their potentials... Corruption in large-scale public projects is a daunting obstacle to sustainable development, and results in a major loss of public funds needed for education, health care and poverty alleviation, both in developed and developing countries.”

Some Nigerian citizens including the members of the political class have also not helped matters with their ever increasing corrupt and fraudulent practices; these fraudsters are known locally as 419 people, named after the section in Nigeria's constitution which deals with advance fee fraud. The new wave scammers comprising young boys and girls (mainly university students) are called *Yahoo boys and girls*, as a result of their information technology (IT) dexterity and their penchant of perpetrating the scams using the internet, constantly sending unsolicited scam emails using Yahoo and other free email websites to targets all over the world, promising them spurious and ludicrous financial deals. There are however some Nigerians such as Dumebi Agbakoba and Rosemary Ajayi who have started various praise-worthy initiatives aimed at turning the 419 curse on Nigeria into positives. Dumebi's **DoSomething.com** website aspires to be the rallying point for Nigerian youths. According to her 'we are all for harnessing the energy and potentials of the youth, and to channel them away from crime towards more productive sectors of the economy'.

Rosemary Ajayi however uses her **419positive.com** website to counter the negative effects of the 419 scourge on the Nigerian society, according to her '419positive.com is created to be an avenue to highlight 419 positive assets and attributes of Nigeria'.

Nigeria's other problems and brand eroders have also been identified as bribery and corruption, unemployment, poor infrastructural development, over dependence in the oil sector for federal income and revenue, poor work ethics, increasing citizens dissatisfaction and disaffection with the government, political structures and politicians, corporate and large scale organizational irresponsibility, inadequate funding of the educational, health and other key sectors, neglect of the agricultural and other non-oil productive/manufacturing sectors, continued manufacture of poor quality, fake and substandard goods and services, over dependence on imported goods, poorly regulated capital and financial market, tribal, ethnic and religious squabbles, homelessness, poverty and hunger, poor maintenance culture, poor planning, lack of security and disregard for human life and property, armed and petty robbery, and others (Nworah 2004).

Long periods of military dictatorship which saw the country's national treasures pillaged, and citizens' rights abused have also contributed to the negative international image that Nigeria has. However, a civilian democracy is now in place since 1999, which is committed to changing the negative perceptions that the world has about Nigeria, and also gain some respect for Nigeria in the international community. In 2004, the Olusegun Obasanjo government launched an image project for the country which it called the Nigeria image project at the time, the project was **renamed in 2005 by the new Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mr Frank Nweke**, and is now called the Heart of Africa (HOA) project.

Planned as an informational and orientational campaign, the HOA project received an initial government contribution of 600 million Naira (about \$3 million), with the expectation that the private sector will also contribute towards the project as part of their corporate social responsibility.

Nigeria's huge human and material resources have been described variously as a curse by certain commentators including Prof. Pat Utomi of the Lagos Business School, who suggested in a paper – **Managing the curse of oil** (2003), that any revenues above \$15 a barrel from the sales of Nigeria's crude oil be placed in a special account which he called future fund, and left for a couple of years, so as to prompt the government and Nigerians into defocusing from oil, and seek alternative revenue sources as was the case previously before the discovery of oil in Nigeria. Utomi and other commentators justify their position by also arguing that the proceeds from the sales of Nigeria's natural resources only sponsor the corrupt and lavish lifestyles of successive regimes in the country, which have consistently failed to invest such proceeds back into the country, and have also failed to improve existing social systems and infrastructures, factors necessary to attract foreign investors. These have also negatively rubbed off on Nigeria's image.

In 2004, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), at a public forum in Lagos, Nigeria, concluded that Nigeria's poor external image is denying it much needed foreign investment to accelerate its economic growth.

According to the 2004 UNCTAD report, FDI flow to Nigeria was 1.2 billion dollars in 2003 and 1.3 billion in 2002. This is a pittance for such a country with huge potentials and prospects. Recent figures from the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) indicate that Nigeria attracted a total of \$35 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) between June 1999 and July 2005, an average of about \$5.8 billion a year and almost the total of UK's yearly earnings of £4 billion from foreign students attracted by the UK education brand. According to Mustapha Bello, the Chief executive of the NIPC, "the FDI inflows were not only in the oil and gas sector but also in the telecoms, ICT, manufacturing and services sectors".

These figures are disappointing for a country such as Nigeria with its huge human and materials resources, and potentials. It is the realization of the negative effects of some of these issues mentioned previously, on Nigeria's image as a potential investment country that the government of Nigeria launched the Nigeria Image Project in July 2004. Nigeria's Minister of Information at the time of the launching, Chief Chukwuemeka Chikelu said the project will be informational and orientational in nature, and would involve both the media, advertising and public relations practitioners.

Branding Products, Services and Places.

From the traditional branding point of view, the brand building process is best represented by the Brand Equity model (Brandt and Johnson, 1997) as follows:

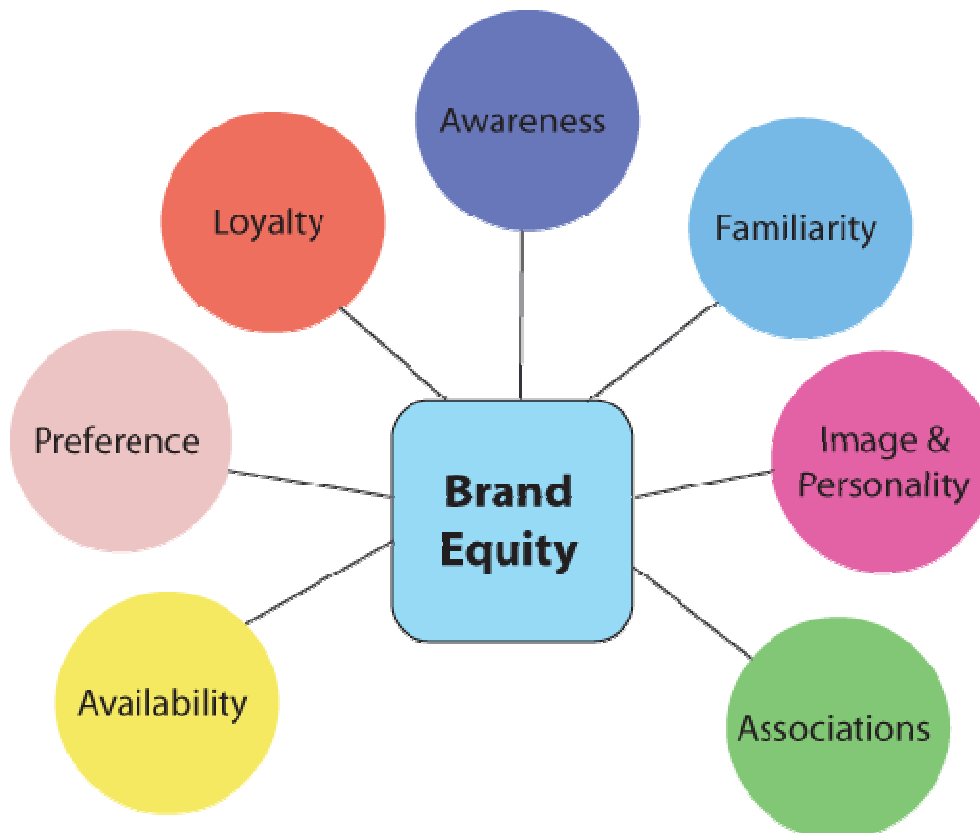


Figure 2: The Brandt and Johnson Brand Equity model

According to Brandt and Johnson, "Brand equity is the unique set of real and/or perceived distinctions attached to a brand by customers.... Brand equity lives only in the hearts and minds of customers".

There are also several other models and descriptions of the product or service branding process. While they may differ in approach, a common thread of understanding runs through them. These have been condensed into a brand-building matrix as follows:

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>EXPERIENCE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer perceptions • Customer service • Actions of sales, delivery and other staff • Brand evolution over the years, changes to any aspect of the brand must reflect the changing market demands • Seeing and believing/seeing and disbelieving 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>QUALITY</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tastes and levels of service • Ingredients and raw materials used • Product and service durability • Guarantees and warranties • Cutting-edge technology • Country of origin effect
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>IDENTITY</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong and visible • Memorable names • Logos and colours • Sponsorships • Packaging etc • Shelf position and display • Vehicle displays and branding • Corporate uniforms 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>COMMUNICATION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public relations and advertising strategies • Quality letter heads and writing materials • Internet presence • News releases, sponsored press articles etc • Other verbal and non-verbal means used in communicating • Road shows and events

Figure 3: The Brand-Building Matrix

Brymer (2003) however suggests that although the principles of branding apply equally to countries as they do to products and services, the methods may differ. According to him, "Creating a branding program for a country demands an integration policy that most countries do not possess—the ability to act and speak in a coordinated and repetitive way about themes ...are the most motivating and differentiating [steps] a country can make."

His comments succinctly capture the challenges countries face in their branding efforts. Nigeria for instance has a highly bureaucratic government structure; there is large scale duplication of efforts in several government ministries, agencies and departments connected with the Image project. This makes coordination of the Heart of Africa Project problematic, as several of these government departments all lay claim to being responsible for one or several aspects of the project. There are countless spokespersons constantly releasing information to the media, such that it becomes difficult to have a central coordinating point, a strategy or war room of sorts. Whereas with corporations, information is better managed by a unit of the business, or employees can easily be indoctrinated with selling the business' ideals and image, this is almost impossible with countries, where reaching a consensus amongst the millions of its citizens is an impossible task.

Nigeria's case is also made more difficult because of its multi-ethnic composition. The cultural, language and religious differences make any wholesale agreement impossible as the citizens still have primordial attachments to their immediate and core ethnic regions. Long years of political and religious bickering between the three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa and the Igbos) have made reaching a national consensus on major issues (including the image project) almost impossible.



Figure 4: MEND members and kidnapped oil workers

Lately the clamour for more political and resource control by the regions has taken a whole new dimension, with the spate of violence, killings and kidnappings of expatriate oil workers in the Niger Delta region by the members of separatist militia groups notably the **Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF)**, and the more militant **Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta People (MEND)**.



Figure 5: Mujahid Asari Dokubo, leader of the NDPVF

The continued detention of NDPVF's founder and leader, **Alhaji Mujahid Asari Dokubo** seems to have escalated the unrest in the region; these unsettling activities in the region are reported daily in the global media and contribute to the global perception of Nigeria as a politically and economically unstable country. Some commentators have observed that rather than waste its resources executing an image campaign, the Nigerian government should look inwards and try to contain the activities of some of these insurgent groups, they claim that only then would the world start taking Nigeria seriously as any action to the contrary amounts to building a house on a shaky foundation, because peace, security and stability of lives, properties and investments remain the core influencers in a country's ability to attract both tourists and FDIs.

Place Branding In The Nigerian Context

Applying the steps in the place branding process (as postulated by Brymer) in the context of Nigeria and its Heart of Africa Project may help in trying to understand the process and challenges facing regions and countries that plan similar image programmes.

The cooperation and involvement of representatives of governments, business, the arts, education and the media.

This does not yet seem to be happening in Nigeria's case, because all the relevant stakeholders are still not singing with one voice. Like I mentioned earlier, this may be difficult to achieve because of Nigeria's multi-ethnic compositions. Also the actions of government officials particularly President Obasanjo's planned third term bid, which was eventually scuttled by the national assembly makes Nigerians, and the media to suspect government's motives and also its policies and intentions, even when some of such policies may be in the longer term interest of the country.

It does seem however that some members of the organised private sector are backing the image project, judging from the large representations during the 2004 official launch. Some of these business organisations are also expected to donate both cash and materials towards the image campaign in addition to government's initial contribution of about 600 million naira (\$3 million), either as a demonstration of their corporate social responsibility, or as a goodwill gesture to the present government in anticipation of favourable policies and patronage. The much anticipated donations to the project is yet to materialise though, some of the corporate entities and individuals chose instead to contribute hugely to President Obasanjo's personal project – **The Presidential Library** in anticipation of winning government and political patronage, this seems preferable to

the longer term prospects of building a better image for Nigeria, in the hope that such contributions to the library project will eventually translate into commercial gains for the contributors.

The US\$50million (N7 billion) project modelled after the library projects of past American presidents raked in N4 billion (\$20 million) at the launch, excluding the unannounced US\$20 million said to have been donated by the oil majors operating in Nigeria. There were also other donors offering sums below N100 million. At this time, Obasanjo's plans for a third term in office was still very much in top gear before being eventually rejected by the National Assembly, the donors had given in anticipation that the third term bid would succeed so that they would carry on with business as usual, and winning political patronage. Major donors to the library fund according to Vanguard Newspaper's Kolade Larewaju include:

1. Mike Adenuga (owner of Globacom, Consolidated Oil etc) - N 250 million
2. Aliko Dangote & friends (Chairman of the Dantata group) - N211 million
3. Femi Otedola (owner of Zenon oil and other businesses) - N200 million
4. 36 State Governors - N360 million
5. Ogun State Governor (Gbenga Daniel) - N 100 million
6. Consortium of Nigerian Banks - N 622 million
7. Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA) Community - US \$ 1 million
8. Obasanjo Holdings - N 100 million
9. Ocean and Oil - N50 million
10. Peoples Democratic Party (Obasanjo's ruling political party) - N 25 million
11. Sunny Odogwu - N100 million
12. Arisekola Alao - N100 million
13. Michael Ibru - N 50 million
14. Oba Okunade Adele Sijuwade (Ooni of Ife) - N10 million

Source: Kolade Larewaju, Vanguard newspaper. Sunday, May 15, 2005

Nigerians condemned both the idea of the presidential library and the donors, arguing that it was such wanton display of executive irresponsibility and flagrant display of ill-gotten wealth that affect the image of Nigeria in the international community, rather than the many commentaries of Nigerians in the media about the sad state of affairs in their country, as the government would have people believe. The general feeling at the time was that it will take an honest and sincere government, willing to carry Nigerians along and provide for the socio-economic needs of the citizens, to get all concerned stakeholders to begin to work constructively together, including collaborating on the image project.

Determining and carrying out an image perception audit both nationally and internationally.

There wasn't any reported image audit carried out by the Nigerian government before the launching of the Image project, although information posted on the website of **Alder Consulting**, the consultancy appointed initially by the Nigerian government to manage the project claims that there was wide consultation amongst Nigerians both at home and

in the diaspora. Government's decisions may have been based on the several negative media reports both locally and internationally. Some of these have been recognised and termed brand eroders by the Heart of Africa project managers. It may not be difficult to decipher Nigeria's current image in the eyes of the rest of the world, constant reports in the foreign media though sometimes largely exaggerated harp on the issues of financial scams, political instability occasioned by constant religious and ethnic riots and clashes, corruption, economic mismanagement and poor infrastructural development etc.

On the positive side, Nigerians have been judged in an international poll by the UK New Scientist magazine to be the friendliest and **one of the happiest people on earth**; Nigeria's population as the largest market in Africa, the abundance of natural resources and skilled workforce all count in Nigeria's favour. Exploits of Nigerian intellectuals, academicians, sports men and women are also well documented; the country has been most favoured in football competition which has since turned into a national hobby culminating in an Olympic gold medal in football at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. Nigerian - born footballers have also continued to fly the flag of the country both on and off the pitch as they light up European and other leagues with their skills, most notably Augustine Jay-Jay Okocha, Kanu Nwankwo, Obafemi Martins, and John Fashanu etc. In America, the likes of Akeem 'the dream' Olajuwon, Emeka Okafor and Michael Olowokandi who play in the National Basketball Association's (NBA) elite league help to project the positive image of Nigeria.

It is the recognition of the need to change the perception of Nigeria by Nigerians, who remain largely cynical and critical of government's projects as a result of past experiences with successive governments, that the project managers have included internal orientation as a core thrust of the HOA project, this is good thinking because it is only happy and satisfied citizens that will be motivated to sell their country to outsiders. It will be a big boost for the project managers if they can successfully sell the project to the over 15 million Nigerians who live abroad, who in turn will be able to extend the communication continuum and relay the ideals of the project to friends, associates and colleagues in their respective countries of residence.

The project managers have named the internal reorientation programme aimed at reorienting, inspiring and motivating Nigerians PRIDE, an acronym for Patriotism, Resourcefulness, Integrity, Distinction and Enterprise.



Figure 6: The PRIDE logo

PRIDE as the internal part of the HOA campaign remains largely unknown in Nigeria because the HOA team haven't quite promoted it, choosing instead to concentrate on the external part of the campaign. This approach can be likened to a situation of placing the cart before the horse; PRIDE should have been the priority during the first

phase of the HOA project as it would have helped to win the hearts and minds of Nigerians, who may then assist in the second phase of selling Nigeria to external audiences. This view is also shared by Chris Ngwodo who submitted in his paper – *The task of re-branding Nigeria*, that “Much of the change itself has to be internal at first, entailing a shift in the cultural and ethical reorientation of society. A new Nigeria will be first of all a new ethic, philosophy and an attitude that will get us believing in ourselves again”.

PRIDE should have been made the anchor of all efforts at rebranding Nigeria. To date, the **Mothers Summit** organised by the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation in May 2006 and the **sensitisation seminar** on the Heart of Africa project organised for the personnel of first line agencies of government and allied organisations remains the only tangible activities that have taken place as part of the PRIDE campaign.

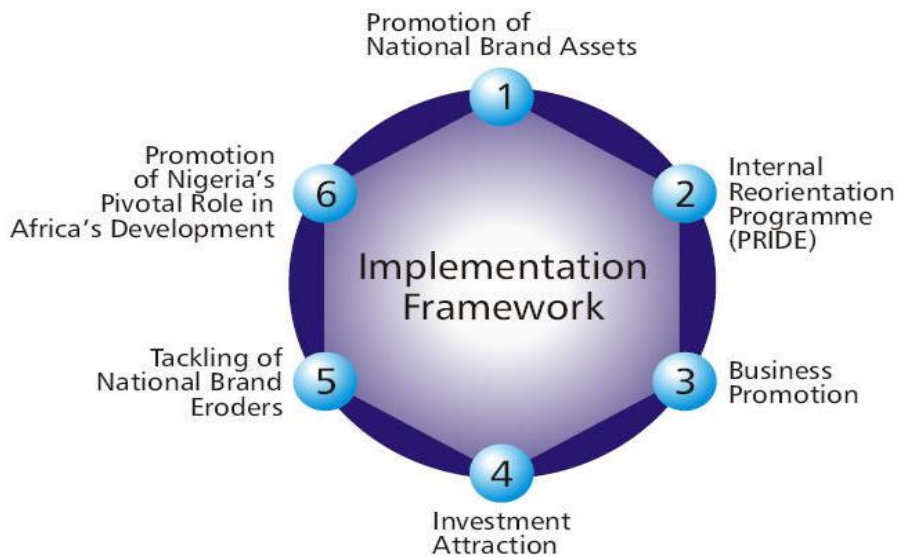


Figure 7: The Heart of Africa Project implementation framework

The HOA project implementation framework summarising the key focus of the campaign fails to indicate the periods when the various activities listed would be taking place, this may therefore have led to the confusion and the haphazard approach adopted by the project team who seem to favour a strategy of simultaneous implementation. Such a strategy may have worked under different circumstances where there is some form of national consensus on issues, and where there is a reasonable amount of trust and goodwill on the parts of the government, its officials and the citizens. This is hardly the case in Nigeria, hence my suggestion that PRIDE should have been the focus of the project team at the initial phase.

Consultation with opinion leaders and carrying out a country SWOT analysis.

The project managers seem to be managing the Image project top - down. Polls in local Nigerian newspapers suggest that large majority of the country's opinion leaders that live

outside Lagos and Abuja have not heard about the project, some others do not believe in it arguing that Nigeria should focus on socio-economic reforms and putting its house in order, after which it could then open its doors to the rest of the world. The HOA project team however may have carried out a country specific analysis, which informed the project implementation framework published on its website – www.heartofafrica.com. The government therefore needs to do more in this regard, and reach out to Nigerians; they could do these through civil societies, social clubs, community development associations, traditional rulers, schools and colleges, the media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other opinion leaders, or socio-political organisations of interest.

Creating a strategy using known professional models.

The HOA project team may benefit very much from the *Everett Rogers Diffusion of Innovations theory*. Carefully crafted communication messages have not been produced to sell the HOA project first to the citizens (who would then sell the country to the external audience). Diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. Rogers categorised the adopters and numbers of any new innovation or idea as follows: innovators (2.5%), early adopters (13.5%), early majority (34%), late majority (34%) and laggards (16%). Each adopter's willingness and ability to adopt an innovation would depend on their awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Some of the characteristics of each category of adopter include:

- innovators - venturesome, educated, multiple info sources, greater propensity to take risk
- early adopters - social leaders, popular, educated
- early majority - deliberate, many informal social contacts
- late majority - skeptical, traditional, lower socio-economic status
- laggards - neighbours and friends are main info sources, fear of debt

The HOA project team should have targeted many people on the different adopter categories with their messages, starting from the early adopters who would then use their influence to pass down the message to those in the other categories in a trickle down effect. However, given that decisions are not authoritative or collective, each member of the social system faces his/her own innovation-decision which Rogers suggest may follow a 5-step process:

1) Knowledge – when people become aware of an innovation and have some idea of how it functions. This can be achieved by the HOA team through media campaigns using a combination of traditional and mass media of communication; including inter-personal communication involving opinion leaders i.e. church leaders, community chiefs, school teachers, Nollywood film actors etc.

2) Persuasion – when people form favourable or unfavourable attitudes toward the innovation. This process may be greatly influenced by the credibility of the source, the message may be viewed negatively if it is coming directly from the Nigerian government,

but may be viewed positively if the message is being delivered by a third part whom the person likes, or trusts such as through opinion, church and community leaders.

3) Decision – when people engage in activities that lead to a choice to adopt or reject the innovation. There may be other factors that may affect this stage of the process, such as influence by family, friends and peer groups, incentives offered or perceived consequences of action/inaction. A good example here is the way Nigerians adopted the Buhari/Idiagbon **War Against Indiscipline** (WAI) campaign in 1984. The high adoption rate of the campaign was mainly as a result of the perceived consequences at the hands of the military enforcers of non-compliance.

4) Implementation – when people put an innovation into use. Implementation would occur if the adopters perceive the benefits, and also feel that the change agents are sincere and honest.

5) Confirmation – when people evaluate the results of an innovation-decision already made. Confirmation means re-evaluating and re-validating already made decisions. If Nigerians were to adopt the government’s PRIDE campaign and then discover afterwards that the government through its various actions are working against the objectives of the programme, it might lead to their discarding already adopted behaviours and processes, and even attempt to sabotage and work against the programme out of frustration.

Not adopting the Diffusion of Innovation model in the HOA project is a huge error on the part of the government because it should have tried to sell the image project to home-based Nigerians and to the millions of Nigerians who comprise the diaspora, and who are in better positions to represent Nigeria in their different countries of residence.

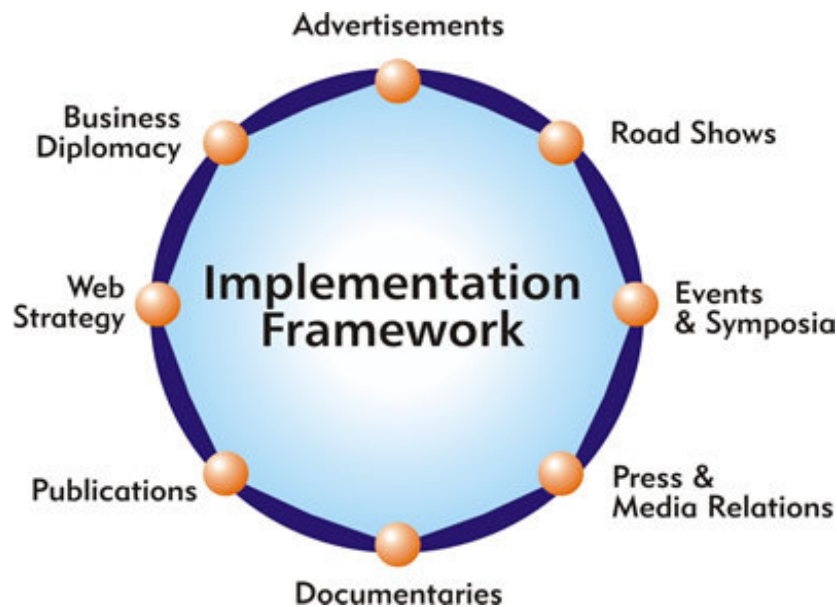


Figure 8: The Heart of Africa project strategy

The HOA implementation strategy which identifies the channels that the government intends to use in disseminating information about the HOA project seems well thought out, but the major challenge is in the actual implementation. Such a framework would

have been effective in an ideal world, but not in Nigeria with its various political and socio-economic challenges, which the Nigerian government should first attempt to tackle.

Design a program to make the strategy tangible through improvement programs and campaigns.

Tangible campaign about the HOA project is still limited to the occasional reports in the local media, which claim that the Nigerian government plans to feature Nigerians such as Akeem Olajuwon (ex-NBA star), Sade Adu (Grammy award-winning artist), Oluchi Onweagba (super model), Philip Emeagwali (world renowned computer scientist), Jay-Jay Okocha (football player), Emeka Anyaoku (former Commonwealth secretary-general) and others in a series of testimonial advertisements in the international media. So far, this has not yet occurred and the effectiveness of such testimonials is also doubtful, especially because the enabling environment is still largely lacking.

The only sustained campaigns so far are the ‘**Welcome to Nigeria**’ commercial which ran in CNN, and featured President Olusegun Obasanjo in a testimonial role. The advertisement generated so many furores and **criticism** both in the local and foreign media that it had to be pulled eventually. The butt of the criticisms was the unprofessional manner in which the advertisement was produced; it got to a point that **Alder Consulting issued a statement** distancing itself from the advertisement which many agreed was an embarrassment to Nigeria, in a bid to protect their professional image. The irony of the whole charade was that Alder, the consultancy appointed to manage the HOA project was bypassed by government officials in the production of the advertisements, who went ahead to produce a less befitting and mediocre advertisement because of their desire to line their private pockets through over inflated media invoices. Alder Consulting also teamed up with the federal ministry of information and national orientation in organizing the 2-day National Conference on the Nigeria Brand and Economic Development tagged **Mind the Gap 2006**. The event presented a good opportunity to get both the states and local governments involved in the process of Rebranding Nigeria, but it remains to be seen if they were even invited.



Figure 9: Nigerian values to be promoted by The Heart of Africa Project

To Alder's credit, the consultancy has produced a CD-ROM showing Nigeria's many brand assets and values that the HOA project plans to showcase, although this has not yet been done but it indicates a level of professionalism on their part, showing that they are quite ready to do their best for Nigeria in managing the HOA project, if given the resources and free hand to run the project.

Create a system to link together the different organizations and departments that can be part of the brand.

Coordination is a major challenge facing the HOA project, which is being supervised by a Project Team comprising officials of the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, other Ministries, Agencies as well as experts in brand management. The project also comprises a Business Support Group made up of eminent persons who are expected to deploy their wealth of experience and goodwill to actualise the objectives of the Project. This Group was formally inaugurated by President Olusegun Obasanjo in January, 2005. It does appear as if the structure is already cumbersome, and this will affect decision making. Surprisingly, Nigerian business and service providers have not been encouraged to adopt a Made In Nigeria or Proudly Nigerian logo in their branding, just like the Proudly South African logo which was heavily adopted and supported by South African businesses. No such logo has been designed; this process will require a lot of sensitisation amongst Nigerian businesses to get them on board, and to commit to this. More so, the HOA project is being perceived as "another government white elephant project", conceived as a conduit for siphoning public funds and so has continued to create dissent and cynicism amongst the citizens.

While such criticisms may be a bit harsh and unfair on the part of the government and the project team, it has to be said that the government is also contributing to such insinuations

especially with the Obasanjo CNN advertisements, and the lull in activity since the launch of the project.

Let actions count.

Although the Nigerian government has carried out some political and economic reforms, a lot still needs to be done to restore the confidence and faith of both its citizens, potential investors and the rest of the international community, as the facts on the ground still leave much to be desired. To the credit of the government, its fight against corruption is beginning to yield dividends, although cynics maintain that such efforts are targeted only against enemies of the government and the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). In the financial sector, the Central Bank of Nigeria is championing reforms, this has resulted in the re-capitalisation of Nigerian banks and **whittling down of the number of banks** from 89 to just 25, thereby restoring some confidence in the economy, as it appears that the days of failed banks due to fraud and under-capitalisation are over. The sweeping reforms in the sector earned Nigeria's Central Bank Governor, Prof. Charles Soludo the 2005 **Global Central Bank Governor of the Year** Award by the Banker magazine, a subsidiary of London's Financial Times (FT) newspaper.

In the other sectors, little but steady progress is being recorded which the government hopes will rub-off positively on the image of Nigeria internationally. In June 2006, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a Paris-based international agency that fights drug trafficking and financial crimes expunged Nigeria's name from the list of non-cooperating countries and territories in the fight against money laundering and other financial crimes. Nigeria was placed on the FATF list of non-cooperating countries in July 2001, having been adjudged to be in substantial breach of efforts aimed at checking money laundering and drug trafficking.

A statement by the **Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)** says that “the delisting by the FATF means that Nigeria is now free of drug-related encumbrances that can impede inflow of foreign investment and economic growth. It also shows that Nigeria's fight against financial crimes through the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is working”. This may seem like a chest thumping PR exercise but the commission appears bent on its mission to fight financial and economic crimes in Nigeria. Information on its website details its active fight to rid Nigeria of this malaise that has bogged down its development since independence. Particularly worthy of praise is its name and shame policy, although these have been abused in the past, and innocent people still under investigation had been prematurely cast in a way that would make them seem guilty on the EFCC website.

Nigeria's president, Olusegun Obasanjo also believes that Nigeria's de-listing would, together with the ending of its indebtedness to the Paris Club, the nation's **BB Minus** rating of its long-term credit status by Fitch Rating, help to attract greater foreign investment to the country. In addition to the setting up of the EFCC, the Nigerian government has also introduced some anti-corruption measures including the setting up of The Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) as well as The Office of Due Process, Budget Monitoring and Implementation in the presidency. According to recent reports, the **Office of Due Process** has so far saved Nigeria over 396 Billion Naira (\$3 Billion) in the past 3 years.

The Inspector-General of the Nigeria Police (**Tafa Balogun**) was removed from office in 2004, and sentenced to serve a 4 years and 8 months prison sentence for corruptly enriching himself to the tune of over 10 Billion Naira (\$100M), also the Minister of education, Prof. Fabian Osuji and four others, Senators Ibrahim Abdulazeez, John Azuta Mbata, Emmanuel Okpede, Badamasi Maccido and a member of the House of Representatives, Dr. Garba Shehu Matazu, and the senate president (Senator Adolphus Wabara) were all implicated in a 50 Million Naira (\$500,000) bribery scandal, the senate president resigned as a result and is currently being prosecuted at an Abuja High court by the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), alongside the other accused senators and Minister. Also the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Mrs. Mobolaji Osomo has been sacked over the manner in which her ministry handled the sales of federal government houses in Lagos.

Perhaps the Obasanjo government's biggest legacy in its fight against corruption is the impeachment of the governor of Bayelsa state, **Chief D.S.P. Alamiyeseigha** for corrupt practices.

A summary of the reform programmes of the Obasanjo government may suffice here, to indicate its seriousness at sanitising the Nigerian economy and social system, and thereby improve her image in the international community. These include the N25 Billion Banks Capitalisation policy of the Central Bank of Nigeria, the Political Reforms Process which culminated in the stalemated National Political Reform Conference (NPRC), Educational reforms which has led to the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE), licensing of private universities and the reduction in grants and subventions to government universities. Others include the setting up of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), charged with the responsibility of tackling and ridding Nigeria of corruption, the setting up of the Budget Monitoring and Implementation Office (also known as Due Diligence) in the Presidency, the introduction of the Nigeria Image Project (now renamed The Heart of Africa Project), the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), Deregulation and Privatisation of key public enterprises etc.

Despite the little progress already made on these fronts by the Obasanjo government, especially to tackle corruption, some commentators are alleging that there is still a lack of political will on the part of the government to tackle corruption; they regard the few reported cases as witch-hunting of political opponents, arguing that there are still no serious and concerted efforts to prosecute known offenders, who are widely believed to have stolen billions of dollars from government treasury and stashed them away in foreign bank accounts. They quickly point accusing fingers at several past government officials including **Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida** (IBB), Nigeria's former military dictator who is still walking about a free man with plans of contesting for the presidential elections in 2007. This must have prompted the statement by Francis Arthur Nzeribe, a Nigerian Senator, to the chairman of EFCC (Mallam Nasir El-Rufai) that, "EFCC goes after "small thieves" and spares bigger thieves in government.". Continuing he also told him that "We have heard all these things you have said since 20 years ago. You are simply rendering lip service to the fight against corruption and going after small boys who just collect small money".

This lack of confidence in the government's anti-corruption drive may be because of what Effective Business Survey Nigeria Limited (EBS), an independent research organisation described as the selective way in which the government through the EFCC investigates,

arrests and prosecutes corrupt public officers, in a recent poll by the organisation, 51 percent of the respondents scored the EFCC low, while 39 percent believed otherwise, with 10 percent undecided. Also, the US government through one of its envoys in Nigeria, expressed similar feelings from the American government, at a recent weekly media briefing Michael L. McGee said that merely arresting people connected with financial crimes is not enough proof of the country's seriousness to combat corruption, according to him, 'When you have hundreds of cases that were brought and you have thousands of people that were investigated and you have one conviction (Amaka Anajemba) from the EFCC, what does that tell you?'

The efforts of some state governors and officials should be commended here, most especially Donald Duke who is one of the few governors that have actually implemented programmes that have directly impacted on the lives of his people.



The Tinapa Business Resort

He has gone a step further with his Tinapa project (Africa's premier business resort); a project which when completed would put his state and Nigeria on the map of world tourism. The state government has also set up well-designed and maintained websites – www.tinapa.com and www.crossriverstate.com which serves as its windows to the world. The Calabar and Cross River brands have steadily improved as strong Nigerian brands during Governor Duke's stay at the government house.

Another state which recently impressed is Kwara state. Kudos to the state governor, Bukola Saraki who has managed to attract sacked Zimbabwean farmers to the state, and have kept faith with them despite the criticisms his government received over the move. Some of the criticisms were rather unfair and seemed ill-informed as the potential economic benefits to the state and her citizens were obviously overlooked by the critics. The Kwara state government recently scored another PR coup which would help project the image of the state further; it successfully exploited the opportunity of the **ThisDay music festival** and invited the star attraction Jay-Z to Kwara state to commission some government projects. During his visit to the state, **Jay-Z was honoured by the Emir of Ilorin**, Alhaji Ibrahim Sulu Gambari and also had a road named after him - *Shawn "Jay - Z" Carter Road*.



Photos L-R: Jay-Z riding a horse on his turbaning day & commissioning the road named after him

It is indeed a positive thing for the state to have Jay-Z dressed up in native *aso oke* attire riding the traditional horse during his turbaning ceremony. Such images beamed across the world are actually priceless and could help to project the Kwara state brand further. However for this PR coup to actually impact on the economy of the state, the Kwara state government must also complement its efforts with good governance.

Abuja, Nigeria's capital city has also done well in this regard and seems to be enjoying a new lease of life, conscious efforts by the federal capital territory (FCT) minister Mallam Nasir El-Rufai and his team to sanitise the city appears to be paying off, some of these efforts though have come at a heavy price such as homelessness for the residents of the houses demolished during the various rounds of demolition exercises in the city. Residents however appreciate the changing face of Abuja and the various recreation parks now available for their use. The FCT minister has embarked on policies to change the face of the city which sometimes appeared controversial. His ban on *Okada* (commercial motorcycles), importation of London cabs and vigorous pursuit and implementation of the Abuja master plan has led to the demolition of illegal structures in and around the city, and has in so doing reclaimed back lands which have now been transformed into parks for the enjoyment of city residents and visitors. Nigeria's capital city has also consolidated efforts at re-branding its image through music, art, tourism and business.



Photos L-R: Abuja's city gates and scenes from the 2005 Abuja carnival

The annual **Abuja carnival** modelled after the Rio de Janeiro carnival, *Abuja Rocks @ 30* (an entertainment package to celebrate the city's 30 years and strengthen the consciousness of unity in Nigeria) and the proposed Abuja tower are some of the efforts

aimed at repositioning Abuja as a good destination, such efforts would also help to stretch the Abuja brand further.

Hopefully the governments that will emerge after the 2007 elections would build on the foundations already laid by the Obasanjo government and some of the state governments.

Olins (Ibid) also proposes a 7-point country-building plan, which partially agrees with Brymer's classification. These are:

- *Set up a working party made up of representatives of government, industry, the arts, education and the media.*
- *[Do an] image perception audit*
- *Consult with opinion leaders*

Create a central idea or theme on which the strategy is based. Nigeria, the heart of Africa has been adopted as the theme of the HOA project, but the theme has also received **criticisms** because of its lack of originality, as other African countries such as Kenya, Uganda and even Libya have ran campaigns in the past with the same theme, there is a higher expectation that the project team should have chosen a unique theme rather regurgitating what other countries had used in the past. Even from the geographical point of view, Nigeria does not lie in the heart of Africa.

Chief J.K Randle, former president of Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria (ICAN), and social critic shares similar views, according to him the title, *Heart of Africa*, has made the project to fail *ab initio*. “Africa, to the West, conjures an image of famine, poverty, corruption and primitivism, for a country to say it is the heart of a continent with such negative image means it has made itself unmarketable” He suggested that a campaign titled *Hope of Africa* or any other good title would have served the purpose of the project.

- *Develop ways of articulating the central idea visually.* This has been done in the various publicity materials created by the HOA project team, such as the CD-ROM containing the logo, brand values and assets to be promoted, as well as the HOA implementation framework etc.
- *Synchronize message themes to suit particular audiences.*
- *Create a liaison system through the working party to launch and sustain the program.* The launching part appears to have gone on successfully but it is in the project sustenance that there appear to be difficulties. There have been speculations that the project may be discontinued if there is a change in government in the 2007 elections, this places the HOA project sustenance in serious doubt as it may go the way of previous government schemes which gets abandoned whenever a new government takes over.

Best Practices

The task of rebranding a country in order to attract tourists and foreign investors is never left at the hands of branding and marketing professionals only. It is also important for the leaders in the country to embark on public and economic diplomacy. In this regard, Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo has done quite well in his quest

to attract foreign investors and also to re-integrate Nigeria into the global community, after years in the cold as a pariah caused by the economic policies and the human rights violations of past military juntas.

The dividends from Obasanjo's global junketing are starting to trickle in, though critics argue that, that hardly justifies the huge costs incurred on behalf of the tax payers during such travels when he is accompanied by a large retinue of aides. To his credit, and that of some members of his government including Mrs. Ngozi Okonji-Iweala, former World Bank vice president recruited to as Finance Minister, and later as External Affairs Minister, Mrs Oby Ezekwesili, formerly the head of the Office of Budget Monitoring and Implementation in the presidency, and now the Minister of Solid Minerals, Prof. Charles Soludo, former chief economic adviser to the president and now the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria and a few others, the Paris Club of creditors agreed to **reduce Nigeria's external debt stock** by 60 per cent. In effect, about \$18 billion of the \$30.848 billion external debt owed 14 members of the club by Nigeria was cancelled. This was attributed mainly to the government's economic diplomacy and its many reform programmes. Nigeria capitalised on this gesture and was motivated to offset its debt stock, in order to have a fresh start. The oil windfall occasioned by the Middle East crises enabled it to accumulate funds which it used in **paying off** all its Paris club debts.

President Obasanjo has also inaugurated an International Investment Advisory Council, headed by Baroness Lynda Chalker, the former United Kingdom Minister for Overseas Development as part of its effort to attract foreign investments.

Writing to support economic and public diplomacy as practiced by the US, Diana B. Grant (2002) (quoting from the US State Department website) defines public diplomacy as "The practice of engaging, informing and influencing key international audiences in order to advance the interests and security of the United States". Nigeria seems to have adopted this definition, which should also apply to every country of the world that actually wishes to promote itself to the world for political and economic reasons.

Conclusion

I have tried in this paper to highlight the benefits to countries as well as the steps in creating a place branding program. I have also tried to use the Heart of Africa project as a case study to highlight good and bad practices.

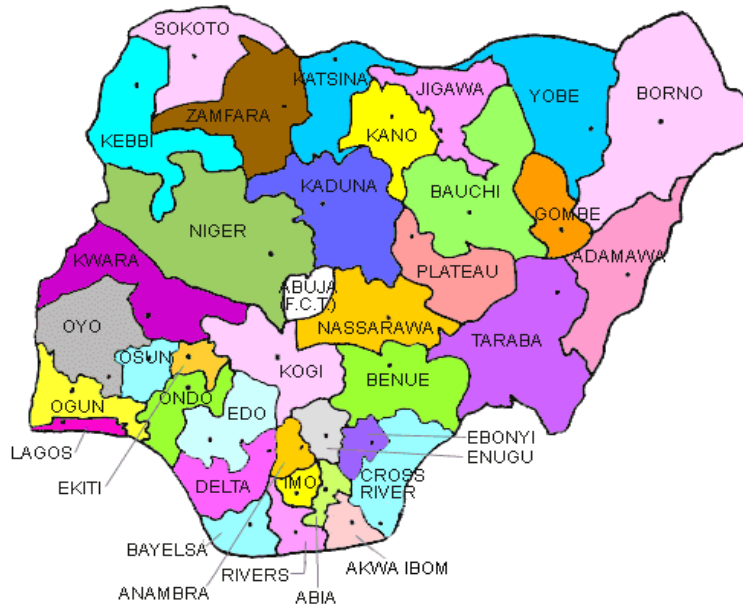
It must be said however, that putting all these steps into practice, and hiring professional branding experts to manage such a program may still not guarantee that the country will attract investors, nor will the country experience the desired image change. This is because of the existence of other extenuating factors in the environment; these factors may include global economic downturn.

Also, the market forces of demand and supply of global capital play a major role in determining where tourists chose to go, and where investors place their money. This is also influenced by the actions of other competing countries, because in international

business investments, there are no sentiments; investors seek maximum yield, return and security on their investments, which only a politically and economically stable country may guarantee.

Finally, any place, country or region planning an image campaign must first look inwards and try to put its house in order first, before going all out to launch an international campaign to attract tourists and investors.

Appendix



Appendix 1: Map of Nigeria showing the 36 states and the FCT (Abuja)



Appendix 2: HOA information materials showing the 10 facts publication and HOA CD-ROM

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