THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE REBRANDING OF NIGERIA’S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria as a nation is plagued by different forms of antisocial activities that manifest in virtually every facet of human endeavours. The image of the country has been dented over the years. Globally, Nigeria is rated the third most corrupt nation. Like a bad commodity, Nigerian nation does not ‘sell’ well the global ‘market’ as foreign investors would not want to risk their capital and safety to invest in the country. To create conducive atmosphere that will attract investors, the anti-graft commission - the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was constituted and empowered in 2004 to eradicate all forms of corruption. However, the anti-graft commission is failing to aid the rebranding on the country’s international image. The paper argues that no other institution can change the image of Nigeria better than education. But for a commodity to be rebranded, the makers must first regain credibility.

Keywords: Corruption, Educational Reforms, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

One of the problems facing the world is corruption. In Africa, corruption is largely responsible for the slow pace of development. Nigeria, as a nation has suffered untold setback from independence to date because of the monster called “corruption” which has manifested in different forms today. It ranges from fraud, embezzlement of public fund, money laundry, examination malpractice, certificate forgery, political thuggery, rigging of election, drug and human trafficking, whoredom to mention a few. These arms of corruption have not only dented the image of Nigeria but have also resulted in political instability, economic depression, insecurity of lives and properties occasioned by religious and inter-ethnic crisis, low quality of education system and general underdevelopment.

Sen (cited in Igwe, 2010:89) sees corruption as “the violation of established rules for personal gains and profit… it is a symptom of the dysfunctional relationship between the state and the people characterized by bribery, extortion and nepotism”. The several relationships that
exist between the state and the masses have over the years brought about changes in leadership in the name of fighting or eradicating corruption. For instance, the intervention of the military leadership (juntas) in the Nigerian political arena in 1996 was allegedly due to corruption. The coups and counter coups that culminated in a civil war were linked to corrupt behaviour (Akinola, 2007). The image of the society has not only been defamed but battered in the international scene; so much that every Nigerian who travels abroad is suspected to be criminal, trafficker or ‘drug pusher’. In the wake of democracy in 1999, former President Olusegun Obasanjo in attempt to redeem the lost image of the nation gave concern to the Ministry of Information and National Orientation. The supervising ministry launched the Nigeria new image project in 2004 tagged “The Heart of Africa Project (Nworah, 2006). In 2004, Dora Akinyuli initiated a new branding initiative for the nation tagged “Nigeria, Good people, Great Nation” (Nigeria Curiosity). The conclusion there was that the Heart of Africa Project ‘failed and needed a new approach for rebranding the Nigerian image. What was wrong then? Trying to identify the problem, Akinyuli remarked; “it is only when we believe in ourselves that we can truly make the changes needed in our society, and be in a position to project Nigeria positively to the outside world.” The first step of believing in ourselves is to believe in our education system as a viable instrument for change. It is against this background that the writers write on how Nigeria can be rebranded using education as a tool.

Everything has a name given to it for the sake of identity and recognition. In the business world, manufacturers brand their goods with names that capture the interest of their goods. In other words, the name (brand) attached to the goods (product) either promotes or impairs the sales of such goods. When the latter happens, the manufacturer opts for a change of brand in order to secure a favourable competitive ground in the market. This process is called rebranding.

According to the Wikipedia, “Rebranding is the creation of a new name, term, symbol, design, or a combination of them for an established brand with the intention of developing a differentiated (new) position in the mind of stakeholders and competitors”. In the words of Nilson (2000) “A brand is really just a symbol with tremendous potential…” Thus, rebranding is the giving of a new brand with a new symbol indicating new immense potential.

Although rebranding is associated with industrial products, it is today used for societies and other social institutions. This happens when there is a perceived decay in the standard of values and moral character formation which may manifest in so many anti-social vices. When a society is infested with corruption, dishonesty, greed and insecurity of lives occasioned by violent crimes, rebranding becomes necessary.

DISCUSSIONS

The relative decay and fast degradation of the standard of values and moral character formation that has defamed the Nigeria image demands urgent attention. In the international arena, the Nigerian flag designed to stand for peace and unity, faith and progress, is allegedly a symbol of corruption, fraud, drug trafficking, deceit and many other anti-social vices. In fact, Nigeria according to the 2004 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index is rated the third most corrupt nation in the world out of 146 countries put in focus (Nworah, 2006).

The 2004 rebranding project initiated by President Olusegun Obasanjo and the 2009 rebranding project was a frantic effort directed towards the redeeming of the Nigerian image in the global scene. These efforts did not/have not given us the desired result, the reason being that rebranding a society is not all about a change in nomenclature. There is nothing wrong with the name ‘Nigeria’. The label, “Nigeria the heart of Africa” or “Good people, Great Nation” cannot in themselves change Nigerian. The problem with Nigeria is attitudinal. The attitude of the
people can only change when the mindset of the people has been redirected. The redirection can be achieved through the rebranding of our education system, our leadership style, the judiciary, the law enforcement agencies and economic system.

The key that opens doors of progress, and development, peace and unity and economic and political stability is education. This therefore implies that, when things are not flowing in the right direction, the quality and efficiency of the education system are questioned. In Nigeria, in spite of the lofty objectives of the education system and the high standard set for attainment as contained in the National Policy on Education (NPE), the quality of the product is questioned. The questionable product of our educational system over the years has led to different educational reforms that had led to changes in the education programmes. The reformation steps that had been taken and the continuous yearning for reforms in the sector portray the inadequacy and inefficiency of the system. Commenting on the above, Iwuchukwu (2008:6) citing Deukheim says:

Educational transformations are always the result and the system of social transformations in terms of which they are to be explained. In order for people to feel, at any particular moment in time, the need to change the educational system, it is necessary that new ideas and needs have emerged in which the former system is no longer adequate.

In Nigeria, there is a crazy shift to foreign countries to acquire a quality education. Such countries as Ghana, South Africa, the United States of America, Japan and Malaysia to mention but a few are preferred to Nigeria. This is just because of the quality of the workability of the education system for solving social problems in their societies. To compound the problem is also a drastic drift of qualified instructors to other countries due to poor conditions of service. According to Okorosaye-Orubie (2007:77) “hundreds of them are lumped together under the term “brain drain”. A situation in which the good brains that should have been the nation builders travel abroad in search of greener pasture; a situation that negatively tells on the education system and the society at large.

The calibre of academics in the Nigerian society, if acknowledged by developed countries as agents of societal growth, should be able to transform our education system. What then is wrong? Iwuchukwu (2008) reacting to that posits that “it is however expected that the idea of reform implies that the old order must change to give way to the dynamics of new values and orientation”. It is not enough to preach reform (rebranding) without new ideas and values introduced in the system. Rao (2003:595) launching on the above remarks:

Universities and colleges in our country, including the professional colleges have never taken interest in encouraging students to study the social, cultural and moral implications of the disciplinary knowledge imparted to them, either by means of appropriate curricular changes or extra-curricular programmes. Nor have they posed much attention to creating awareness among the students regarding our national, social, and cultural goals of development or to their regular and sustained participation in social and cultural programmes.

Based on the above, it is necessary to note that the overall institution of society and the society in general cannot be rebranded without rebranding the education system. Our
educational system is characterized by examination malpractice due to overemphasis on certificates. Everyone wants a certificate to enable him/her secure a white collar job. This situation does not encourage productivity. For instance, a graduate in engineering will be retrained by some multinational companies before they can be employed. This situation calls for expatriates in such companies paying them twice what would have been used for the payment of indigenous employees if they were competent. This is not because the students are dull; the problem is lack of adequate and proper implementation of educational policies and lack of proper articulation of the curricula to meet the prevailing social challenges. Consequently, the education system should be rebranded as a foundation for the rebranding of the entire society. This can be achieved by introducing and properly implementing values education in the educational curricula at all levels of education.

The success or failure of any society in its developmental pursuit is hinged on the leadership and style of leadership. Ugboalah (2005:91) relating the success of entrepreneurship to leadership style, sees leadership as “an exercise…backed by maturity of character, willingness to undertake risk and ability to set goals and work towards achieving that goal. The problem of Nigeria over the years has been that of leadership. Achebe (1983) attributed the trouble with Nigeria to a failure of leadership. This is largely due to the misconceptualized roles of leaders.

Burns cited in Ituen (2003:1) states that leadership is “one of the most observed and least understood phenomena. He further quotes Gardner (1963) who states: “the nature of leadership in our society is very imperfectly understood, and many public about it are utter nonsense. From the dawn of independence to this day, leadership in this country has been undertaken partly due to parochial understanding and myopic view on it. This situation has over the years projected leaders who see their role as their own turn to eat up their own share of the proverbial ‘national cake’. The result of which is greed, fraud, corruption, self-aggrandizement and other anti-social crimes leading to underdevelopment and the disintegration of the society. Corruption has allegedly ushered in the military juntas who recycled this country and devastated it for about thirty (30) years; in which period the concept of leadership was misconceptualized.

The need to lead the country to gain a relative place of pride and honour in the global arena calls for the urgent need for rebranding the leadership role to enable leaders function effectively and efficiently. These cannot be achieved without rebranding the leadership at all levels through reorientation of the expectations of the masses. This becomes necessary because, Nigerian leaders, both military and civilians alike pursue their private or sectarian interests hence do not exhibit the spirit of nationalism. Reorientation would help to disabuse the hearts of the leaders of the engraved inscription, ‘this is my turn’ in their hearts. Reorientation would help the leaders and would be leaders to shy away from ethnocentric values and interest and cling onto national values and interest. Our national peace is threatened because “we are yet to have a leader to tell us that we belong to the same nation” (Njoku 2009:235).

The leadership of this great country should be reoriented or rather be made to understand that success in leadership is meeting the yearning desire and aspirations of the masses. When a leader fails to achieve this, he/she becomes an enemy to the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in the high and low places… those that seek to keep the country divided… those that make the country look big for nothing before the international circle.” (Akinnnola, 2007:15). For the country to stand right in the global circle, the leadership mind set must first be rebranded. Rebranding here stands for attitudinal change from ‘self first’ to ‘society first’.

Leaders are not only those who stand as the executive heads of nations, states or local governments alone. They are also those who sit in the administrative seats of different areas of
government. They include the judges, the ministers, the lawmakers, the police officers and so on. The judiciary is the third arm of government. It is the hope of the common man. It is responsible for the interpretation of the law and defending the rights of the individuals. Ironically, in Nigeria, the judicial arm of government is negatively influenced by the executive leaders. The judiciary that is supposed to be the watch-dog of governance is allegedly used as a tool for self justification while in office and when out of office. This occurs particularly in a corruption plagued society. Igwe (2010:107) remarks, “.. In a rapacious corrupt system, the ruling elites use public resources at their disposal not only for self aggrandizement but also to buy over the competitive elites…” the competitive elites here include the military, the judiciary, and the legislature. Politicians and military leaders buy over the judges of our courts, making them to be blind over the law. Commenting further Igwe adds “corruption has a damaging effect on administration, development and efficiency. Corruption also affects professionalism… and leads to frustration on the part of the few honest public officials.”

Today, the judiciary is no longer influenced by the executive alone. They are also dubious in themselves, turning cases upside down. Letting conspicuously seen criminals and corrupt leaders go scot free without finding the weight of the law. Perhaps it is in the realization of this whole truth that former President Olusegun Obasanjo initiated the due process principle which was amplified by late President Musa Yar’adua. Igwe (2010) lamenting on the frustrating standard of administrative officers, the judiciary inclusive, states:

Another fallout is that damage to administrative efficiency and development stems not only from the likely incompetence of the benefactor of the patronage that also from the general demoralization of the technically competent subordination to those with political clout but inept.

When the judiciary subordinates to the political influence of hungry men, they are bound to be blind to the rule of law of the land. Rebranding the judiciary does not imply changing the name of courts. It does not imply changing the location of the Nigerian court either. It implies changing the attitude and conduct of the personnel that constitute the judiciary. It implies giving a meaning to what the law of the land should be. It means dispensing judgement without fear or favour and to eschew themselves of bribery and corruption, the twin monsters that have defamed the judiciary dethrones ethnic interest and sentiment from the throne of judgement and make the throne to be no respecter of persons, regarding some personalities as ‘sacred cows’ and some scapegoats.

Before independence in 1960, the economic mainstay of the country was agriculture. Palm produce, groundnut, cocoa and other agricultural produce were exported to other countries. In fact, 1955, when the regional allocation was based on derivational percentage, the western region had the lion’s share because of the regions high level of cocoa produce from which the highest earning in the nation was realized Kosemani and Okorosaye-Orubite (2000). The nation started experiencing joyful trouble when crude oil was discovered and exploited in 1960 at Oloibiri in Bayelsa state, formerly Rivers State. The oil boom in the 70s gave joy to the nation because of the high exchange rate in favour of the country. On the other hand, it was troubled because the rich vegetation of the country was compromised with the oil discovery. This situation gave way to a near extinction of farming, fishing, mining etc., as everything depended on the crude oil for survival and the running of government. The total dependence on oil gave birth to corruption of the highest order and misappropriation of funds with further expectations of more money from the oil.
It is common knowledge that the economic state of any nation, to a large extent, determines the level of development and transformation of that society. On a general note, Africa in the 70s-80s was economically depressed and unstable. Nigeria the paradoxical “wealthy but poor country,” was no exemption. Adetuls (2009:33) lamented on how the “insurgencies, recurrent ethnic clashes and very bloody wars that dotted the African landscape” have devastated the African economy. Conflicts have the capacity to severely constrain any nation.

In Nigeria the conflicts are beyond real wars. Kofi Anan the ex-Secretary General of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) is acknowledged for his statement, the real boundaries are not border boundaries but are between the developed and the undeveloped, the weak and the strong, the poor and the rich, the educated and the uneducated. Bariyelo (2009:193) posited that a depressed economy is one in which economic activities are slowing down, largely due to reasons associated with excesses, abuses, panic and other vagaries of life.

In Nigeria a whole lot of uncertainties and instabilities and vagaries of life abound. The activities of the movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), in the recent past almost wrecked the economy of Nigeria particularly in the oil sector. Many lives were wasted. It later resulted in kidnapping; a ‘business’ inimical to economic development. The insurgence of the Islamic sect ‘Boko Haram’ is not only a threat to the unity of the country but a serious threat to the economic development of the nation, the level of fraud and, looting of money by political leaders is another ravaging factor. Then nation needs an economic rebranding for a rebranded Nigeria. To achieve the above, there should be economic rebranding through:

- Creation of job opportunities: this can only be achieved through creating a safer society that will attract local and foreign investors.
- Prudent use of earnings from oil and gas through building infrastructure that will enhance development.
- Diversification of economy through the development of agriculture.
- Establishing a strong institution for the regulation and control of the excesses of financial institutions.
- Stemming the impact of globalization on the Nigerian economy (Baiyelo, 2008).

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004), acknowledge education as an instrument “per excellence” in the transformation of any society. This is largely due to the role of education in the transmission of the cultural values from one generation to another and the preparation of people for the even participation in nation building. In fact, Dienye (2004) sees education as the meeting point where individuals are trained, enlightened and prepared to fit into the various social institutions. These institutions include; the political, religious, economic and family institutions. In view of the above, education should be the first instrument through which the Nigerian society that can be rebranded. This can be achieved through the inclusion of peace education in the education curricula. Gamut (2009) sees peace education as the process of educating the citizenry of a society in the dynamics of conflict in order to promote peace making skills in homes, schools and communities. In his words, “peace education openly acknowledges its purpose as education to facilitate the achievement of peace and related sets of social values”.

Nigeria is identified with anti-social crimes and social crisis. This condition leads to insecurity of lives and properties and relative absence of peace. No meaningful development can take place in a society of rancour and acrimony. The attitude of Nigeria towards violence will be changed for good if peace education is initiated and implemented in the education systems. The essence of societal existence is valued (Kalusi, 2000). It is in the realization of this truth that the FRN (2004) in her NPE emphasized that education should be directed towards the attainment of national objectives. Obviously, the national objectives are the values of the
nation. Section 7(b) of the NPE states that, the national education goals can be achieved through the “inculcation of the type of values and attitudes for the survival of individuals and the Nigerian society.” It is therefore expected that instructors in the education system should strive to inculcate the desired values of the society. Lofty as the values are, neither the NPE nor the school curricular spell out methods for the teaching of these values to learners. Consequently such values as respect for elders, sanctity of human lives, tolerance, honesty, transparency, commitment to work, respect for law and order, truthfulness and other related values are rather explained than taught. The effect of which is a near absence of the above in the ideological vocabulary of the learners.

For Nigeria to be rebranded, appropriate and effective measures of transmitting the desired values that will transform the society be introduced in our education policies and curricula. Gbamanja (1997:105) sees the curriculum as “an organisation or a prescribed pattern of subject matter which addresses the needs, problems, desires, values, and dreams of a society, designed to be achieved through the school”. From the above, all that is embedded in the schools curricular and are the expectation of the society that teachers should deliver same to the society through the production of people who should live up to expectation. Regrettably, Gbamanja (1997: 106) goes ahead to say that:

“It appears that curricular content of the well planned educational systems has become a political football and it has become so homogenized that one hardly sees the direction to which education is giving...until...curriculum experts and academicians find alternative curricular content, African nations will be a nation at risk.”

The above points to the fact that the professional teachers are the enforcers of the educational curricula are passively involved in the design of the curricular that will develop the nation. No nation can rise above the quality of her teachers (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2002).

The quest for educational reforms over the years points to the inefficient and inappropriate values for transforming the society. Curriculum designs and development should be practically controlled and supervised by professional teachers who are also experts in it; the school administrators should transform the school system by engaging ‘refined’ and cultured people who should be role model in their conduct and attitude. This is consistent with Maduagwu (1998) suggestions that, “whatever society puts into the education system, education gives back to the society”. If the society must be transformed, then the school should first be transformed for rebranding Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria as a nation demands a new look in all ramifications in order to gain respect in the committee of nations. The educational system should be reformed and should take priority position in the federal government projects. There should be the establishment of specialised training institutions for the continuous professional development of those involved in the education system.

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