

The XCELing Train

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Barth E. Emuekpere, Publisher/EIC

Nigerians must let Akunyili be

Truth, and the courage to tell it are two inseparable prerequisite for excelling in this business. I'd rather tell the truth and be in the bad books of some, than join the bandwagon that will lead us nowhere. When Dora Akunyili was appointed a few months ago to head the nation's information ministry, I was among those who cried out. My reason, like so many others was not in any way hinged around her competence or otherwise on the job. However, I belong to the school of thought that felt the position as the government spokesperson may lead her to compromising her already respectable character, judging by her commendable performance as the Director-General of NAFDAC. To so many Nigerians they would rather have Akunyili continues at NAFDAC than become a spokesperson of the government.

Interestingly, since her assumption of office, Nigerians have added another word to their lexicon. Wherever you go, like MTN would say, it's a matter of re-branding. The akara-seller on the street has her own concept of re-branding, the bus driver, the average civil servant as well as top government officials all have their varying concepts as well. Ironically, to some, the entire concept of re-branding Nigeria is a laughable fallacy, an impossibility and worse still, a scam to waste government's scarce resources, in the face of the much-talked-about global economic recession.

More worrisome is the fact that even senior government officials have at various times made jest of this noble campaign. We may recall that at the very formative stage of this campaign, even the National Assembly threatened her with an arrest for failing to appear before the *reverend lawmakers*. But for seeming ignorance, such threat wouldn't have been necessary for a woman desirous of righting the wrongs being meted on us by the western media.

To worsen matter, one of the most powerful Nigerians in terms of official hierarchy, in reaction to some persons lateness to an official event in Abuja recently, sarcastically remarked "*is this how we are going to re-brand Nigeria?*". That, to me was an exhibition of ignorance at the highest level. If such a highly placed leader, who many will look up to, can make such a derogatory remark about a national campaign, then we do not need any more discouragement, as that alone coming from such a respected quarter is more than enough. Some have even asked funny questions like "*is Nigeria a brand?*", *How do we re-brand a nation where corruption is the order of the day?* And so many others.

Before I continue, perhaps, a look at the definition of the word **Brand**, may help to unravel some of these puzzles. The Chambers Dictionary has as part of the definition of Brand "*...to fix a mark of infamy upon, to stigmatize...*" In all truth is

Nigeria not stigmatized, suffering from ill repute and public disgrace? The same dictionary defines brand-image as "the impression that the public has of a product or person", and what these definitions simply mean is that contrary to popular opinion, brand does not refer to products only, but persons also, and by implication, a people - Nigeria.

Perhaps, where most Nigerians get it wrong is when they fail to recognise the line of demarcation between **re-branding and re-engineering**. Whereas, re-engineering focuses on achieving attitudinal change and character reformation, Akunyili's re-branding is targeted at changing the perception of Nigeria in the eye of the globe, with a simple formula; letting the world hear the good of our land as a counter to the negatives they hear.

Let us face it, can those nations branding us as corrupt, fraudulent and anything evil, claim to be saints? Are there no fraudulent and corrupt people in their midst? After all, the worst crimes in the world today are perpetuated in the developed countries.

The mere fact that the world sees Nigeria in a negative perspective does not make it true. Such perception in most cases is a function of the information at their disposal, and the onus lies on us to tell the world the true story. Or do we simply fold our hands and accept it without doing anything to change the erroneous perception? After all, if countries like Malaysia, Kenya, Botswana and most recently, Angola are leaving no stone unturned in efforts aimed at re-branding their countries, then where has Akunyili gone wrong in charting this new course of re-branding our nation? Take South Africa for instance, whereas it is common knowledge that the republic ranks very high on issues of violent crime, has that stopped them from telling their story in their own way? That is simply what re-branding is all about, telling your story your own way.

Re-branding is not anything near lying about what is not, but about telling your own side of the story. Could we say as Nigerians in all honesty, that there is nothing good about Nigeria? If we think otherwise, then what have we done, first as individuals and collectively as a nation to correct this negative perception the world hold about us. Have we told the little good tale we have? Is it right that an entire nation is branded in the negative because a few miscreants engaged in some infamous act?

Students of history will tell us better that at a time in history, the United Kingdom was adjudged the worst corrupt nation in the world. It took the nation conscious and concerted efforts, spanning over a period of 50 years, aptly dubbed the *Victorian Era*, to get to where they pride themselves as near-zero corruption level today.

Don't get me wrong. I do not in any way condone evil or any act of criminality. I have never met Dora Akunyili one on one, my closest to her was at the VIP lounge of the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja, where we all waited amongst other dignitaries for our flight. But the truth remains that what catalyses me, is the passion I have for our fatherland. It is my believe that our country and continent can be great, but first, we must believe in ourselves and our ability to make it work.

Even against the risk of been branded an *Akunyili disciple*, I make bold to say, we must do a rethink, give her a chance and let her be! There's no doubt that *the re-branding Nigeria project is one of the nation's most ambitious and rewarding project*. We must all rally-around this project and make it work in the interest of our generation and the generation unborn. For if the world continue to see us in the negative, it doesn't matter what we do internally, we shall continue to suffer from the bug of de-investment and dissociation. The rest is yours to decide.

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Back to business, in this edition, we have put together for your reading delight several interesting packages. From our celebration of Nigerian-born Philip Emeagwali, the *Maths whiz* on our XCEL PEOPLE, through the life and times of the greatest entertainer of all time, Michael Jackson, the marvel called EYO FESTIVAL, a cultural pride of Lagos, the reawakening of the giant tourism potential in Taraba State, by Gov. Danbaba Suntuai and a lot more, to the free XCEL FASHION SPLENDOR magazine inside, you are no doubt in for another mind-blowing experience. Enjoy the ride!

Barth E. Emuekpere