

Poverty, Food Insecurity And The Rebranding Question in Nigeria

PAUVRETÉ, INSÉCURITÉ ALIMENTAIRE ET QUESTION DE REMODELAGE DE L'IMAGE AU NIGÉRIA

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Abstract: The paper takes a critical look at the current rebranding project in Nigeria in the light of the mounting predominance of poverty and food insecurity in the country. It argues that attempt to upgrade the image of Nigeria within and aboard without putting in place workable structures/programmes of “*solutionalising*” Nigerian endemic problems of poverty, food crisis, unemployment, epileptic power supply, and the likes makes the rebranding project abstract, cosmetic and a wishful thinking. Thus, the paper advocates that the rebranding should begin by addressing the leadership question, poverty, food insecurity, corruption and the decay in Nigerian education system.

Key words: Poverty; Food Insecurity; Image; Rebranding

Résumé: Ce document porte un regard critique sur le projet de remodelage de l'image actuel au Nigeria, en tenant compte de la prédominance croissante de la pauvreté et de l'insécurité alimentaire dans le pays. Il montre que le pays tente d'améliorer l'image du Nigéria à l'intérieur et à l'étranger sans mettre en place des structures / programmes viables pour résoudre les problèmes endémiques nigériens de la pauvreté, de la crise alimentaire, du chômage, de l'alimentation électrique. Tout cela et des choses similaire font de ce projet de remodelage de l'image un projet abstrait, superficiel et

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* Received 15 August 2009; accepted 2 October 2009

un voeu pieux. Ainsi, le document préconise que le remodelage devrait commencer par aborder la question majeure, la pauvreté, l'insécurité alimentaire, la corruption et la décadence dans le système éducatif nigérian.

Mots-Clés: pauvreté; l'insécurité alimentaire; l'image; projet de remodelage

1. INTRODUCTION

Rebranding a Nigeria that does not work fine is just trying to wash the outside of the pot and leave the inside dirty... it would amount to waste of time and resources for us to try to paint the picture of who we are not to the international community.

Alinnor (2009).

Poverty and food insecurity are some of the global problems that have plagued nations like Nigeria with seemingly no workable solution in sight. Attempts at reducing poverty and deprivation seem to have defiled domestic and international development programmes. Undisputedly, Nigerians suffer in the midst of plenty despite numerous poverty eradication and agricultural programmes gulping billions of naira. These and many others have given the country a bad image locally and internationally. In attempt to upgrade the image of Nigeria, projects like the Heart of Africa (HOA) by Obasanjo's administration (1999 – 2007) and most recently the rebranding of Nigeria by the present democratic government have been established. This paper is aimed at examining the rebranding of Nigeria in the light of the precarious challenges of poverty and food insecurity. For the purpose of an enriching analysis, the remainder of this paper is decomposed into five sections. The first dwells on conceptual discourse while the second takes a look at the stark reality of poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria by examining what the statistics are saying. The third attempts a presentation of trends of rebranding schemes in Nigeria. The fourth section focuses on the dilemma and problematique of rebranding Nigeria in the midst of poverty and food insecurity by critically interrogating and analyzing the scheme. The last two sections respectively consider the concluding remarks of the paper and what government must do to move the country forward.

2. CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE

Poverty is a term that has invoked a plethora of definitional response from scholars and professionals. We shall attempt to regurgitate a few of these definitions. Corbett (2009) defines poverty as a condition of having insufficient resources or income. In its extreme form, it is characterized by lack of basic human needs such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, clean water, and health services. Ravallion and Bidani (1994) see poverty as a condition where there is lack of command over basic needs, that is, a situation of inadequate level of consumption; giving rise to insufficient food, clothing and shelter.

This means that poverty incapacitates the victim by placing him below a minimum standard of living. Thus, World Bank Development Report (1990) notes poverty as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living. Closely related to poverty is the concept "poor Person" which simply means a person without job, who cannot help himself/herself or cater for his family. He is handicapped financially and has no farm or business. The person is said to have no parents (in some cases), no education, no good food, clothes and health (Elumidale,Asaolu&Adereti,2006). Poverty is caused by a number of factors such as overpopulation, unequal or poor distribution of income or resources, lack of education, natural disaster, corruption, etc. Because poverty is at the centre of food crisis we turn to the second variable (food insecurity) in this paper.

Food insecurity or crisis is a situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amount of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be caused by the unavailability of food, insufficient purchasing power, inappropriate distribution, or inadequate use of food at the household level. According to Offiong (2001) food security in sub-Saharan Africa has deteriorated since independence, with food shortages becoming very rampant. It is estimated that about one-quarter of sub-Saharan African population obtain, on average good and bad crop years, less than 80 percent of the daily calorie supply recommended by World Health Organization and Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Nigeria ranked among West African Countries with undernourished population of more than 35 percent (FAO, 2000) B.

Stack Reality of Poverty and Food Insecurity in Nigeria: What the Statistics Are Saying

Poverty and food insecurity is precarious because of government inaction or action. The Human Development Report of 2004 stated that 70.2% Nigerians survive on less than one US dollar daily. Jimoh (1997) observed that urban poverty in Nigeria is serious with 8 out of every 10 urban households living in poverty. This situation is aggravated following the global economic meltdown and the cost of fuel at 120 naira and Kerosene at 80 naira in places like Idah, Anyingba and others in Kogi State.

Demographic and deprivation statistics in Nigeria as shown in the table below are not encouraging and calls for urgent action to reduce the percentage.

The table 1 & 2 above show that poverty in Nigeria is on the increase only declining as shown in table 2 to 42.9% in 1992 and rising sharply to 65.6% in 1996/97 despite poverty eradication programmes executed by the federal and state governments. In 1980, poverty was largely a rural phenomenon with 28% of rural people living below poverty line compared to 17% of urban people. By 1985, it became pervasive affecting both urban and rural people (Ogwumike, 2002).

According to Elumilade, Asaolu&Adereti(2006) Africa harbours most of the poorest countries of the world due to factors like internecine wars and ethnic strife, natural disasters, foreign debt, and corruption. As they further noted, despite the plethora of poverty alleviation programmes which past governments have initiated and implemented, by 1999 when the Obasanjo administration came to power a World Bank's report indicated that Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) was only 0.416 and that about 70 percent of the population was vegetating below the bread line.

Poverty is a global or continental problem. In this regards, Ali, Mwabu and Gesami (2002) observe, poverty rates in Africa are exceptionally high (relative to rates in developing countries) and getting worse. Out of 2.2 billion children in the world, 1 billion are estimated to be in poverty. For the 1.9 billion children from developing world 650 million are said to be without adequate shelter, 400 million with no access to safer water, 270 million with no access to health services. Energy poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is alarming. 547 million people in region are without electricity. In developing countries some 2.5 billion people are forced to rely on biomass- firewood, charcoal and animal dung to meet their energy needs for cooking. In sub-Saharan African nations like Nigeria majority of the population depend on traditional biomass for cooking due to the high cost of kerosene and cooking gas. For example a litre of kerosene is between 85-110 naira. Poverty in Nigeria is getting worse with government paying discouraging attitude to demands of workers and the masses. The situation is compounded by the incessant increase in pump price of energy products (petrol, diesel, kerosene). According to Ita(2004), although the country earned billions of dollars in the last thirty years, the twin factor of corruption and ill-congested government policies have facilitated the growth of poverty in leaps and bounds and public dissention towards the government is at all time high. Jigawa State in a report released during Obasanjo civilian administration was adjudged the poorest in the country leading nine other northern states. Kebbi State followed closely and others in descending order are Kogi, Bauchi, Kwara, Yobe, Zamfara, Gombe, Sokoto and Adamawa (Nwagwu, 2007).

Data on Nigeria food security are not encouraging either. FAO (2000) reported that between 1996-98, the dietary energy supply of the undernourished (kcal/personal/day) is 1620 as against the minimum energy requirement (kcal/personal/day) of 1830 bringing a food deficit of the undernourished to 210.

Furthermore, cereals, roots and tubers in total constitute 64% diet composition of Nigerian the population. The situation is compounded by the global economic meltdown marked by high cost of tuber and cereals in urban and rural areas. Furthermore, efforts (at federal, state and local levels) aimed at eradicating hunger has been very slow and ineffective. For instance, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) did not feed the nation neither did the Green Land Revolution (GLR) transformed agriculture as reflected in the continuous neglect of agriculture in favour of oil which some have considered as a curse to Nigeria. In other words, food insecurity and hunger has persisted due to faulty agricultural policies and poor implementation characterized by corrupt practices in the distribution of farm subsidies like fertilizer. The economic meltdown currently experienced in the world has not helped matters. For instance, the meltdown and the devaluation of the naira have negatively affected prices of farm inputs. The cost of fertilizer rose in February, 2009 when compared to last year at the same period. A 50kg bag of fertilizer is now sold at 5000 naira in Kebbi State up from 3500 naira at this time last year. Similarly, in Lagos State, fertilizer cost 4700 naira in February 2009 as against 3000 naira last year (FEWSNET, 2009).

The months of May to August are often regarded as hunger season for the southerners in Nigeria while hunger season starts from July to October in the north. By all standards, government should be concerned with alleviating hunger and not the introduction of a rebranding project that has no bearing in making food available for most Nigerians. Obviously, the share of household budget spent on food due to high cost of food items has increased at the expense of disposable income. How would the rebranding of Nigeria and the 150 million Naira approved for the purchase of face caps, handbills, vests and other campaign logistics for the project address this emerging challenges? Enhancing the image of Nigeria should begin by formulating and effectively implementing governmental programmes aimed at addressing the problem of poverty and food insecurity. We cannot continue this way as Offiong (2001) acknowledges chronic hunger saps energy, decreases productivity and increases vulnerability to disease.

3. REBRANDING OF NIGERIA: HISTORICAL AND EMERGING TRENDS

Rebranding of Nigeria a campaign aimed at improving the image of Nigeria locally and internationally is not new. Rebranding and branding are two closely related marketing techniques traditionally associated with products and services. Recently, these marketing techniques (rebranding and branding) have been imported by some countries in their bid to market their cities, services, regions to the rest of the globe thereby increase their international profile, attract or improve their foreign direct investments and earnings from tourism and trade. For instance, Nworah (2006), observe, the Nigerian government through the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation launched the Nigeria Image Project in July 2004, following in the footsteps of some other African States which had launched similar image campaigns such as Uganda's "Gifted by Nature" campaign, and "Proudly South African" image programme. Could this be the fulfilment of an intellectual prediction by Olins (1999) that country branding will become a normal practice in the future?

The emerging trend of rebranding Nigeria appears to be brief and short. In attempt to change the negative international image of the country brought upon it by long periods of military dictatorship and hegemony, the Obasanjo civilian administration (1999 – 2007) introduced an image programme for the country which it called the Nigeria Image Project and which was later renamed Heart Of Africa (HOA) project in 2005 by the then new Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mr. Frank Nweke. Writing on this project, Nworah (2006) notes that the campaign was designed to be informational and orientational. The 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. The Yar'Adua government (2007 – date) through the information and communication Minister, Prof. Dora Akunyili launched and changed the name to Rebranding of Nigeria Campaign in February, 2009 with an initial fund of 150 million naira.

Nigeria's reputation and image globally and locally has been declining. An oil rich African country, the 6th largest oil producer in the world with an estimated population of 140 million people has earned more than \$280 billion since 1973. Rated as the third most corrupt nation in the world in a survey of 146 countries by transparency international corruption perceptions index in 2004, the country has perpetually suffered from collapse of infrastructures and institutions; epileptic power supply, insecurity of lives and properties, endemic poverty; political violence and thug; low or near absence of purchasing power of Nigerians. Other problems include leadership problem, faulty government policies and programmes and poor implementation; high unemployment with a World Bank estimate of 40 million of the nation's youths aged 15 – 24 years unemployed(an estimate considered to be among one of the largest in the world); crimes and assassinations; poor wages/salaries of government workers at Federal, State and Local levels, high dependence on biomass-firewood, charcoal, sawdust stove and animal dung to solve energy poverty; moribund railways, double digit inflation and so on.

It is the realization of the negative effects of these problems on the image of Nigeria, that the Yar'Adua administration considered it imperative to "relaunch" the image project. The objectives of the scheme are briefly summarized as follows:

To give the nation a more positive image home and abroad thereby attracting foreign investment.

The project is targeted at re-orienting Nigerians, changing the negative attitudes of Nigerians, making Nigerians to believe in themselves, inculcating optimal spirit of patriotism in Nigerians and at the same time, celebrating our very best before the international community (Ujah; 2009) and

To make Nigeria a good destination for tourism and investment in sub-Saharan Africa (Nworah B, www.globalpoltician.com).

According to Solomonsydelle (2009), the rebranding campaign reinforces that Nigerians do not have much faith in their government because overtime the government (past and present) has not fulfilled its duties to the people, many of whom remain poor or lack basic infrastructure and necessities. Similar view had earlier been expressed by Afrobarometer (2006) that at the time of political handover in 1999, many Nigerians expressed hopes for a "democracy dividend" that would expand political liberties, improve the performance of government, encourage accountability among leaders, and revive the ailing economy. Unfortunately, these expectations have been slow to emerge and recent public opinion surveys reflect this disappointment and frustration with the country's emerging democracy characterized by political violence, corruption, ineffective government, unresponsive leaders, and economic deprivation. How does the rebranding scheme provide solution to these problems and challenges?

4. THE DILEMMA AND PROBLEMATIQUE OF REBRANDING NIGERIA

Although advocates of the rebranding project believe that it is an effort worthy of support because Nigeria's image needs to be upgraded there are questions to ask such supporters. For instance, why must government commit huge resources to upgrade the image of a country characterized by poverty, hunger, insecurity, unemployment, energy poverty (epileptic power supply), food insecurity, underfunded education system, low productivity, corruption, violence in the Niger Delta? Is government by this project not treating the symptoms rather than the root cause of the bad image of Nigeria locally and internationally?

Expressed differently, how is rebranding of Nigeria going to ensure 24 hours electricity essential in the industrialization of the country to meet up with vision of Nigeria becoming one of the twenty most developed economies in the world by 2020? Better still, to what extent is the rebranding of Nigeria going to ensure security of lives and properties, high purchasing power of Nigerians; good roads across the country; well funded and managed tertiary institutions and improve health facilities and accessibility? In what way(s) is the campaign going to address the brain drain problem in the country and solve the

problem of youth restiveness and spate of kidnappings in the Niger Delta region by organizations such as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta People (MEND)?

Attempt to provide answer to these questions reveals the dilemma and the cosmetic nature of rebranding Nigeria without first addressing these problems through well implemented governmental policies and programmes devoid of corruption and bazaar mentality. In the eyes of analysts and scholars, the campaign is not just generating debates of cynicism and acrimony but is seen as an exercise in futility designed to waste public resources highly needed in this era of global economic meltdown, devaluation of the naira and poor oil price.

This point has been rightly acknowledged some years back that the federal government (state and local inclusive) lacks fiscal discipline, especially in the choice of projects. Projects like the Abuja National Stadium (A.N.S) and the hosting of the 8th All Africa Games gulped billions of naira and served as a conduit pipe in siphoning scarce resources from the national treasury (nigeriabusinessinfo.com, 2003).

The futility of the exercise is expressed in *Punch* when it notes that with the epileptic power supply, moribund railways, double digit inflation and interest rates, persuading the global community that the nation is an investment haven is certainly going to be a herculean task (Edremoda, 2009). The *Punch* further expressed the dilemma thus:

The state of social services is also difficult to market. The teachers are on strike, 10 million kids are out of school, and education is ailing. The nation's appalling health statistics indicate poor access to clean water, absence of sanitation, and lack of basic health facilities. It is known globally that Nigeria is a place where people die needlessly from easily preventable ailments.

The Heart of Africa Project "launched by former Information Minister, Chief Emeka Chekelu in 2004 was dropped by the Yar Adua administration on the grounds that it was externally driven and not people-oriented or home-grown. The question is how many Nigerians were consulted before the current Rebranding scheme was launched? To put it mildly, the scheme is simply cosmetic, artificial and hypocritical and will not serve the interest of the masses who are crying for a change. Alemika (2008) supports this view by noting that Nigeria has a legacy of planning the people out of development. That is, the tendency for planners to pay attention to figures or rhetoric rather than give priority to enhancing the capacity and welfare of the people. For instance, the vision 2020 as presently conceived and implemented is meaningless to the average Nigerian citizen who will not be impressed even if the country is rated by international economists as one of the ten leading economies yet he/she cannot get adequate food, secure proper shelter, receive adequate or self-fulfilling education, access health care, uninterrupted electricity and safe water; gain employment with living wage, enjoy his/her freedom and rights, and participate in a free and fair election to elect representatives of his choice (Alemika, 2008:9).

It must be pointed out that as advocated by the rebranding scheme, Nigerians need value reorientation and attitudinal change. This is because an average Nigeria desire to: (i) finish secondary school (ii) get into a tertiary institution preferably a university (iii) finish his or her degree and get a waiting job (iv) rent a house (v) buy a flashy car not minding whether the spare parts are available or not (vi) start building a house (vii) start stealing from his employer to enable him finish his building project and stop paying the murderous rent (viii) become an expert in shady deals because of his bazaar mentality (ix) seek to become a godfather, breed and groom people in this evil act and the circle continues.

Put differently, the ethical and moral values of the Nigerian society have become so bad and require urgent and decisive therapy.

Certainly, this decisive therapy is not the rebranding of Nigeria. Rebranding will not stop unstable policies of government, electoral malpractices and thuggery neither will it end the marginalization of the Niger Deltans in terms of infrastructural development and put an end to corruption in governmental establishments. Alinnor (2009) casts doubt on the workability of the scheme by noting that the people or countries the government is trying to sell the good image of the nation to all have representatives in Nigeria who give them real feedbacks and get the rest from the internet. A good product sells itself and

may not need too much adverts. The scheme is going to be an exercise in futility if the problems highlighted in this paper are not adequately addressed and the orientation and attitudinal behaviour of Nigerians changed. Leadership is not a child's play.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As much as the image of Nigeria needs to be upgraded at home and abroad rebranding is certainly not the solution as it amounts to treating the symptoms rather than the root cause(s). The ideas behind the scheme are cosmetic, abstract and not convincing. With total oil and gas reserves respectively estimated at 32 billion barrels and 157 trillion cubic feet (Orogun, 2004), Nigerians are praying and hoping for a government that is responsive to their needs and the design and implementation of policies / programmes aimed at ensuring political stability, economic prosperity, employment, access to good health facilities, sustainable development and better educational system. Whether there will be a quantum-leap in realizing this hope is predictably slim.

6. WHAT GOVERNMENT MUST DO

The following recommendations are made

First, in view of the fact that corruption is the major bane to Nigeria problem of poverty, food crisis, underdevelopment, epileptic power supply, etc. public officials who are corrupt should receive worse treatment and not be celebrated Nigerians. To do this, institutions charged with the responsibility of combating corruption must be strengthened and be made independent free from government interference. Also important is the need to ensure that staff of such agencies is free from corrupt practices.

Second, the leadership problem should be addressed by adopting God's leadership style characterized by honesty, faithfulness, transparency, love and justice. The need to constantly depend on God for wisdom and direction must be emphasized in governance. Prayers cells in government offices must be established where men with holy hands meet to make prayers and supplications to the God who answers prayers and rules in the affairs of men.

Third, the problem of unemployment can be solved by empowering the youths through training, cultivation of entrepreneurship spirit and financial support. This can only work when the whole exercise is void of corrupt practices. Money budgeted for poverty eradication programmes should get to the poor and not the rich.

Fourth, to end the problem of strike and brain drain our educational system must be adequately funded especially tertiary institutions and funds allocated to the sector should be judiciously used. There is need to increase the pay of academic staff in order to enhance their morale, job satisfaction and thereby harvesting the best from them.

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TABLES

Table 1: Demographic and Deprivation Data in Nigeria(1992-2002)

Year	Pop.(Million)	Urban Pop.(%)	Poverty percentage	Actual poor pop(M)
1992/93	96.8	38	59.2	59.3
1996/1997	102.3	42	70.2	71.8
2002	120.9	45	70.2	93.2
2015 Estimate	161.7	55.5	66.9	108.3

Source: i.UNDP (2003). Human Development Report.www.hdr.undp.org

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Table 2: Poverty Level in Nigeria 1980-1997

Year	Est.Total Pop.(m)	Pop. In poverty(m)	Poverty Level (%)
1980	65	17.7	27.2
1985	75	34.7	46.3
1992	91.5	39.2	42.9
1996/97	102.3	67.1	65.6

Source: Federal Office of Statistics (2001) in Elumilade,Asaolu&Adereti,2006,p.67