

**REPORT OF THE 28<sup>TH</sup> AFRICAN PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (APRA CALABAR 2016) HELD FROM TUESDAY, MAY 24 – 27, 2016 AT THE CALABAR INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE, CALABAR, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

**PREAMBLE:**

The 28<sup>th</sup> edition of the African Public Relations Association Conference with the theme – ***leapfrogging Africa: the role of Communication*** was formally declared opened on Wednesday, May 25, 2016 by His Excellency, the Governor of Cross River State, Senator (Prof.) Ben Ayade who was represented by the State Commissioner for Information and Orientation, Barr. (Mrs.) RoseMary Effiom Archibong.

137 Delegates drawn from twelve countries namely – South Africa, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Bulgaria, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal and host - Nigeria attended the conference.

The opening was preceded by a one day free orientation programme for Students, Information Officers and Public Relations Practitioners in the employ of Cross River State Government on Monday, May 23, 2016 at the Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence, University of Calabar.

Also, the Public Relations Consultants Association of Nigeria (PRCAN) had a one-day pre-conference interactive session for Consultants in the profession themed – ***“The Business of PR – Managing a successful consultancy”*** on Tuesday, May 24, 2016. The session was presided over by the President of ICCO, Mr. Max Behar in conjunction with Mr. John Ehiguese, President of PRCAN.

A Special Goodwill message was received from the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari with a charge to African Public Relations Practitioners to embrace change for a new Africa to emerge, so as to fulfill the potentials of Africa in the area of attracting investments and good balance of trade.

Apology was received from former President Olusegun Obasanjo, for his inability to attend the conference as Chairman of the Opening Session due to engagements outside the country.

In his welcome address, the Cross River State Governor, Senator (Prof.) Ben Ayade expressed high regard for APRA, commending the body for choosing Calabar for the conference and urged delegates to savour the rich hospitality of the State.

The President of APRA, Mr. Peter Mutie in his address welcomed delegates to Nigeria, urging them to take advantage of the takeaways from the conference to boost the practice of PR in Africa.

The opening session was chaired by Mazi Mike Okereke, an erudite Public Relations scholar and former President of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR)

In his keynote address to the conference, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, who was represented by Mr. Tony Chiejiena, admonished APRA to take the lead in positioning Africa to reverse her current negative narratives and stereotypes that have impeded economic development of the continent.

He also charged governments in Africa to tackle the issue of stronger integration ties and inadequate power supply for citizens to maximize benefits of the use of the social media and other modern communication tools as well as improve economic activities.

Goodwill messages were also received from the President and Chairman of Council, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Dr. Rotimi Oladele, the President of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), Mr. Bart De Vries and Mr. Paul Holmes, who promised to work with APRA leadership in the years ahead.

#### **PAPER PRESENTATIONS:**

Thirteen qualitative, academic and professional papers cataloguing various challenges bedeviling the practice of Public Relations in Africa were presented

during the conference. The papers also provided leeway for leapfrogging Africa in many dimensions.

These papers are summarized thus:

1. **“CREATING VALUE THROUGH CONTENT CREATION AND STORY TELLING”** by **Emeka Opara – Director, Corporate Communications, CSR, Airtel Nigeria**. Mr. Opara apprised delegates of the success story of Airtel Nigeria despite changing names severally in the past. He highlighted the skills of story telling to include core competence in reading wide, deliberate writing which should impress, have rich content and be factual to meet the perceptions and expectations of the customer
2. **Mrs. Tokunbo George – Taylor of Hill + Knowlton** in her presentation on **“MANAGING THE CORPORATE AFFAIRS FUNCTION”** harped on organizations telling their story and avoiding losing reputation. According to her, the key planks of managing corporate communication are to build, manage, maintain and sustain both relationship and stakeholder’s reputation through creativity, passion and massive publicity.
3. The third day of the conference opened with a presentation by **Mr. Max Behar, ICCO President** on **“PITCHING TO WIN IN A VERY COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT”** He enjoined Public Relations Practitioners to take pitching as a serious business which should be paid for by the client. To pitch successfully, one must choose a client; organize your strategy, have knowledge of others pitching, engage a transparent process, have a good project team with attractive campaigns, be skilful and creative so that the pitch will offer tangible value. **Mrs. Takunbo George – Taylor and Mr. Raheem Olabode** in their respective presentations on this topic apprised delegates on the need to have a well-planned and written brief that is smart, specific, achievable, and have realistic content that is valuable.
4. **Mr. Alexis Petje, Sales Manager, Best of Africa, Ornico Group** in her paper, **“INNOVATE OR DIE (CREATIVITY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS”**, urged Practitioners to be very pragmatic, innovative to sell good ideas using skillful strategies that are objective, independent

and capable of raising the profile of organizations among competitors. She opined that a creative unit is a critical component of any PR Department in any organization and therefore should be created.

5. **“FORMULATING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY THAT ADD VALUE TO THE BUSINESS”** – a paper delivered by **Mr. Jerry Sawyer** on behalf of **Jill Hamilton (Weber Shandwick Africa)**, Public Relations Practitioners were tasked to always identify a problem before formulating any communication plan. The campaign goals must be clearly defined with key messages that can move the customer. He charged Practitioners to do well to always plan for any attack in any well thought-out communication strategy.
6. Speaking on **“REPUTATION MANAGEMENT FOR COUNTRY BRANDING”**, Mrs. Robyn **De Villiers**, whose paper was presented by **Mr. Yomi Badejo-Okusanya**, pointed out that in African countries today, business is more trusted than Government. She emphasized that branding is central to a country’s reputation. The paper challenged countries in Africa to stand up to have her brand that can attract businesses and patronage from other continents.
7. **The Cross River State Commissioner for Information and Orientation, Barrister RoseMary Effiom Archibong** in her presentation on the **“FUTURE OF TOURISM IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF CROSS RIVER STATE**, opined that Africa is naturally endowed in agriculture, Environment and Culture which have remained largely untapped in the past. She used the successes of Cross River State in the last one and half decades in Carnival Calabar as well as boost in tourism offerings that have made the State the preferred destination for business and leisure to urge African nations to embrace tourism as alternative revenue source to boost their economy.
8. **“THE BENEFITS OF HOSTING INTERNATIONAL EVENTS FOR A COUNTRY BRANDING”** – a paper presented by **Mr. Justin Green, former President of Ireland Public Relations Association** used documentary evidences of the massive benefits from different sectors of a country’s development citing the 2014 Brazil World Cup, the Rugby World Cup in South Africa and the

London 2012 Olympics, among others. He charged African Countries to aggregate resources to provide infrastructural facilities that can attract such massive international events that would serve as a catalyst for drawing businesses, job creation and export. The paper challenged practitioners to develop a tracker and measuring system to gauge the brands in Africa.

9. **“MEASURING THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION ON THE BOTTOM-LINE”** – this was presented by both *Mrs. Nkiru Olumide Ojo of Stanbic IBTC Bank, Nigeria* and *Mr. Francois Van Dyk of Ornico Group*. The two practitioners harped on the need to measure the impact of Public Relations activities and this can be achieved when Practitioners break free from the traditional PR to scientific approaches that provides analytical statistics and measurement of outcomes of Strategic Communication.
10. *Dr. Chuks Osuji, a legendary professional in Public Relations* in his paper, titled **“MANAGING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES”**, condemned the old theories of top-down to listeners, suggesting integrated communication strategy in these days of digitalization. He posited that today’s communication must be fact-based while communicators must endeavour to wear a toga of credibility at all times.
11. Similarly, the *Corporate Affairs Director of Unilever, Mrs. Oluwasoromidayo George*, in her paper titled **“THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE ATTAINMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPEMNT GOALS (SDGS)”** passionately preached the need for APRA and all practitioners to start positioning themselves through effort aimed at nipping in the bud the disintegrating and emerging poverty resulting from population explosion. She advocated for resilience, awareness creation aimed at getting the citizenry involved in all activities targeted at achieving the SDGs.
12. Mr. Bart De Vries, President IPRA dwelt extensively on the topic – **“EFFECTIVE STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT”**, with a take home point that the wider the circumference with the stakeholders, it will definitely engage

the stakeholders in business. He summed it up by saying that Public-Private Partnership efforts, all influence stakeholder engagements.

13. In their presentation on **“SECURITY COMMUNICATION: HOW NOT TO COMMUNICATE DURING CRISIS”**, the Nigerian Army Acting Director, Public Relations, ***Colonel S. K. Usman***, and that of the Nigeria Police Force, ***Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Bisi Kolawole***, posited that proper planning is necessary to communicate rightly during crisis, using the proper channel to achieve targeted results. They advocated for national interest to be the overriding consideration in all security communication situations while also providing for preventive crisis management.

27/5/15

**RAPORTEURS:**

1. **Gbenga Ojo**
2. **Benedict Okache**
3. **Frank Hogan**

