

Politicians' words can damage nation brand



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"Every time politicians open their mouths, whatever they say has the potential to market or de-campaign their countries," Zimbabwe deputy prime minister Arthur Mutambara said, speaking at the [Brand Africa Summit](#) today, Thursday 29 September 2011, at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg.

Mutambara warned politicians to be careful when speaking given that their words can easily damage the image of their countries. He said national branding is a mix of perceptions in terms of how people, especially investors, perceive a country.

Change negative perceptions

"If you are not happy about what people are saying about your nation brand, then what are you doing in Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya or any part of the continent to change those negative perceptions?" Mutambara asked.

"National branding is not about slogans, it is about what you do and what they think, that matters. If one does not change the negative perceptions they will become realities. In Africa we are good at talking and planning, but weak in implementing. We must walk the talk. It cannot be business as usual. If you don't position your country, the media will do it for you - it will give you names such as a country of cholera, corruption or dictatorship.

"A brand must transcend political affiliations and nation brand building should not be the sole property of the ANC or any other political party, but it should be a responsibility of the DA, IFP, private sector and any ordinary citizens. It is not enough to have a national branding, we must also work towards a regional branding. It must be taken it personally because we will never be respected as Africans unless Africa has done well as a continent. This goes the same for individual countries," he told delegates.

Relevance and determination

Relevance and determination will help the aspirations of the brand. Mutambara described tourism, governance, exports, culture, investments and people as the hexagon of national branding.

"There is a direct link between nation brand and country competitiveness," Mutambara said, warning delegates that Africans must close the gap between potential and actual.

Switzerland is the world's most competitive nation, according to the Global Competitiveness Index 2011, while BRICS

countries rank as follows: Brazil is 53th, Russia 66th, India 56th, China 26th and South Africa 50th.

As Africa struggles to build and maintain strong levels of sustainability, Miller Matola, CEO of the International Marketing Council (IMC), said the only way the continent can succeed in this area is through moving beyond the limitations of aid by putting in place effective government infrastructure through policies, institutions, and reinforcing a co-created destiny.

Delegates, including journalists, from countries such as China, Brazil, Russia, India, Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt and Japan, among others, are attending the second edition of the Brand Africa Summit, which is hosted by Brand South Africa and the Brand Leadership Academy.

This year's conference is themed 'Proactive leadership as a catalyst for inspiring growth, reputation and competitiveness in Africa'.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA: @SIKITIMEDIA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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