

Climate change, a challenge to Brand Africa

 By [Thabani Khumalo](#)

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Climate change has turned into the biggest challenge of the century and is one of the main causes of famine, misery, disease, death, desperation and frustration. Our globe is undergoing major climatic changes and as a result we are faced with huge development challenges and opportunities.

Climate change takes place at a time of an increasing demand for food, feed, fiber and fuel, and has the potential to irreversibly derail the world's commitment to community development, peace and prosperity.

Climate change threatens Africa's progress

Threatened with high temperatures, rising and encroaching sea levels, food insecurity, dwindling water supplies, extreme weather-related disasters, accelerated migration, poverty, and depleting energy resources, Africa is already suffering the ill effects of rising global warming and climate change.

The severe and extreme drought faced by the Horn of Africa region (including Somalia), described as the "worst humanitarian disaster", demonstrates the fact that the developing world faces greater climate change challenges than the developed world. Global warming and climate change are threatening Africa's political, economic and social progress. And ultimately the continent's attempts to build a strong and reputable Brand Africa, is undermined.

Brand Africa managed by foreigners

Despite Africa being described as the "The Last Big Emerging Market" with great economic opportunities, images of underdevelopment continue to dominate the perceptions of people inside and outside the continent. In the past, Brand Africa was promoted with influence, creativity, passion and sympathy by foreign countries, donor agencies and most prominently by aid celebrities such as Sir Bob Geldof and Sir Bono.

Such campaigns created a perception of a continent that is beyond hope, devastated by poverty, occupied by disease and death, engulfed in conflict and wars, plagued by corruption and incompetency, and has no coherent solutions to its challenges and aspirations.

Africans took control of Brand Africa

Negative publicity was created despite the continent's stupendous resources that had been proved incomparable with the other continents. With its natural resources - dense rich forest, snow-capped mountains, rivers, lakes, endangered animals, mineral wealth, world-class eco-tourism destinations, globally-renowned African heritage and fertile soil, Africa should be perceived as a land of wealth, peace, health and prosperity.

Tired of being perceived as a destination of donations, Africa declared zero tolerance for undemocratic practices, corruption, wars, and bad human rights records, and ultimately took control of Brand Africa. Africans took it upon themselves to package and market the continent's strengths as a means to build a new Brand Africa.

Somalia's situation destroys Brand Africa

The recent images of the Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia, engulfed in conflict, poverty, tears, thirst, disease, death and desperation created negative publicity for Africa globally. It consolidated the perception that Africa is a continent that needs global donations and sympathy to survive and strive. This is extremely bad publicity for a continent that is striving to build a

positive image and reputation through Brand Africa initiatives. Climate change has become a huge challenge to the success of Brand Africa campaigns.

Brand Africa back to foreigners' control

The situation in the Greater Horn of Africa region has reversed all the gains. Again, Africa is sending SOS messages and images that call for help and donations. As a result, celebrities including Lady Gaga, U2, Justin Bieber, Jay-Z, The Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, Madonna, Sting, and David Beckham are among well-known figures using their Facebook pages and Twitter feeds to urge fans to donate money to help the numerous families starving in the region. This means that the management of the continent's brand is back in the hands of foreign countries, donor agencies and celebrities.

Africa must prioritise climate change management

Africa needs to declare war on climate change through:

- communicating a strong global warning on global warming,
- delivering climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes, and
- encouraging partnerships and commitment between governments, businesses, civil society organisations and citizens.

Need to mobilise masses against climate change or else...

As we did with the 2010 FIFA World Cup, our biggest challenge as Africa is to exploit an opportunity of hosting the 17th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP17) in Durban in 2011 to mobilise its masses to confront climate change collectively, co-operatively, decisively and passionately. Climate change is a huge challenge to the continent's attempts to build a strong and reputable Brand Africa. Until and unless Africa manages climate change competitively, the continent's brand building agenda will be undermined.

ABOUT THABANI KHUMALO

Thabani Khumalo is a researcher, writer and commentator with various radio stations and newspapers and MD of Think Tank Marketing Services, a marketing, communication and media consultancy. Contact him on +27 (0)83 587 9207, tel +27 (0)31 301 2461 or email ttrms.ystd@telkomsa.net.

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