

Unlocking Africa's potential through PR

PR practitioners must strive to reposition the profession by developing programs that are measurable, so as to demonstrate the value and contribution of PR in the strategic leadership of government and business. This was one of the final resolutions taken by the public relations community in Africa at the 30th annual congress of the Federation of African Public Relations Associations (FAPRA), in Kenya last week.

The historic 30th anniversary celebrations of the Federation of African Public Relations Associations (FAPRA), coincided with the All Africa Public Relations Conference, which was held at the Safari Park Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya, the birthplace of FAPRA, from 8 - 10 June 2005. The theme of the conference, which was officially opened by Kenya's Vice President, Dr AA Moody Awori, was 'Unlocking Africa's Potential'.

The three day conference was attended by 130 participants, drawn from seven African countries including: Ghana, The Gambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa and hosts, Kenya, as well as representatives from United Kingdom and Belgium. A total of 12 papers and speeches were presented, with syndicate sessions for in depth deliberation on issues raised.

Observations, resolutions and recommendations from FAPRA 2005:

- The role of PR on the continent is not well appreciated, recognised and facilitated as strategic in management and governance, therefore, PR practitioners should be part of the strategic management team to provide the requisite counsel on communications, corporate image and reputation management.
- PR practitioners should have the requisite skills, knowledge and information to be able to give the required counsel and produce the impact that would reposition the profession.
- The enduring negative and ugly image acquired over time due to slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, political abuse and mismanagement, is hindering the overall projection of the image of Africa globally, thus inhibiting the efforts towards poverty reduction and economic recovery. Therefore, PR should support the dismantling of the legacies of corruption, political patronage, bad governance, etc. The PR practitioner's role in this challenge is pegged on management of information to empower the citizenry to demand accountability of their leaders, participate in development and hence change the image of Africa.
- PR practitioners must support and get involved in continental and regional development initiatives, such as NEPAD, EAC, SADC, AU, ECOWAS, etc. Therefore FAPRA should proactively engage the political and economic leadership to empower the continent.

- There are serious gaps in government communication. Therefore, African governments should recognise the role that PR would play in the development agenda, and support the development of PR through appropriate legislative frameworks, policies, structuring and staffing. The PR practitioner has a leading role in telling the African story, the African way, to market Africa.
- FAPRA should entrench CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives) in PR practices, not for enlightened self-interest, but for the genuine welfare and development of communities in Africa.
- National PR associations should take the lead in re-orientating politicians and senior management on the role of Public Relations in government and public affairs.
- PR practitioners in Africa should become part of the world campaign on Accreditation and Ethics as a means to enhance professionalism within PR on the continent.
- FAPRA should collaborate with other continental and global associations involved in the development of media transparency.
- FAPRA should be in the forefront to adopt global approaches in communication, including the use of ICT, and adapt these to the African situation.
- FAPRA should champion good governance and use PR as a means to increase the democratic space in Africa. This should include influencing the enactment of legislation on freedom and access to information.
- FAPRA should ensure wide distribution of these recommendations as part of the strategy to inform the stakeholders about the activities of the Association.

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