

# COMMENT

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## OUTDOOR ADVERTISING: LASAA'S LEASE OF LIFE

LASAA is committed to the growth of the outdoor advertising industry, argues **Idowu Omisore**

The outdoor advertising sector is undeniably a key component of Nigeria's creative economy but fraught with challenges. Research has shown that 60 per cent of the country's total advertising market is domiciled in Lagos State. It is a sector that accounts for N58.9 billion turnover yearly and is responsible for over 100,000 people in its workforce contributing hugely to the revenue of the nation. As such, the survival of the outdoor advertising sector is a matter that cannot be trifled with. Over the years, the industry has been bedevilled with a myriad of problems, some of which have become historical despite several interventions by stakeholders. A case in point is the effort made by the management of the Lagos State Signage and Advertisement Agency (LASAA). Early in the year, the agency's management team went on a fact-finding-cum-familiarisation visit to a good number of outdoor advertising firms. The mission was clear: to find out the challenges facing the industry and possible ways of resolving them.

As widely reported in the media, LASAA later organised a stakeholders' meeting to address the burning issues. According to the Managing Director of the Lagos State Signage and Advertisement Agency, Mr. Mobolaji Sanusi, "In our efforts to ensure sanity... it is important to find lasting solutions to some of the issues that have bedevilled the outdoor advertising industry...." This is a commendable move by the Lagos State Government. No one should be surprised that LASAA decided to rise to the occasion as no responsible regulatory agency would fold its arms and watch the gradual quietus of a sector with such huge potential.

From all issues discussed at the parley, it became apparent that the repugnant issue of media buyers is the real Goliath, not LASAA, as perceived in some quarters. The outdoor advertising practitioners voiced their concerns and spoke of how the media buyers have refused to pay them as at when due and that some go as far as discounting their payments. This situation, according to them, has impacted negatively on their ability to pay permit fees due to LASAA, reason behind the huge debt owed to the agency. Reacting to the appeal made by Mr. Tunde Adedoyin, the President of the Outdoor Advertising Association of Nigeria (OAAAN), Mr. Mobolaji Sanusi explained that the agency would be willing to support the fight against the unfair payment practices of media buyers but that the agency would be crossing its boundaries, if it gets itself directly involved in collecting payments from media buying firms for the outdoor advertising practitioners as suggested by one of the leading practitioners.

He further stated that LASAA does not regulate media buyers. As stipulated in Section 387 of the harmonised Environmental Management and Protection Law 2017, LASAA's job is to control outdoor structures to be used for signage and advertisements; protect the environment from potential adverse impact from visual blights; control the number, size and location of outdoor structures. There are other connected functions but the ones already mentioned will suffice.

It is high time the Media Independent Practitioners Association of Nigeria (MIPAN) looked into the unethical practices of some of its members. In other climes, where global best practices are adhered to, payments are made to outdoor advertising firms 30 days after the issuance of the media purchase order and execution of the project. The



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interesting situation is that some of the media buying agencies are affiliated to foreign media independents. One would have expected them, the Nigerian media buyer affiliates, to imbibe the culture of 30 days payment. Sadly, this is not the case. It is disturbing that 30 days is now turning to 60 days, 60 days to 90 days, and now even turning towards 120 days. This is not the only dimension to this issue. After execution of the campaigns, total amount payable to the outdoor advertising firm is heavily discounted by the media buying agency. The outdoor advertising company gets a cheque with an amount completely different from the one on the media purchase order (MPO) - an amount drastically reduced. This is an unspeakable development that needs to be addressed immediately by both MIPAN and the Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN). There seems to be a conspiracy of silence by all parties.

One would have expected the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), the umbrella body that regulates advertising practice and profession in Nigeria, to have identified and dealt with this intractable problem long before now, considering the fact that OAAAN is seen as a "trade union" under APCON to regulate the outdoor advertising practice in Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, this writer completely agrees that LASAA cannot engage media buyers directly, that would be going beyond its brief as a regulator. OAAAN has to first step up to the plate before it can expect any backing, considering the fact that there are other stakeholders like the MIPAN, ADVAN and APCON involved in this chair.

The highpoint of the stakeholders' meeting organised by LASAA was the formation of a 15-member committee. The committee swung into action, met severally and came up with points of agreement. Having considered the clamour by practitioners that LASAA rates are arbitrary and not empirically verifiable, also that business has been bad due to recession coupled with clients cutting down on advertising budgets, and the complaint that media buyers are discounting their payments; the rates have been reduced as promised by LASAA. Actions, they say, speak louder than words.

By fulfilling its promise to lower the permit and vacant board rates, LASAA has proved the fact that it wants to ease the burden of outdoor advertising practitioners and promote the growth of the industry. In a letter from OAAAN, the body has since expressed its gratitude and acknowledged the responsiveness of the current management of the agency. In their words, "...we must appreciate your sensitivity and responsiveness to the adverse experiences of your constituents and admit that your timely intervention has in no small measure, infused life into the outdoor advertising sector."

Moving forward, OAAAN needs to take responsibility for the future of its industry by showing sincerity and commitment in dealing with the challenges affecting the sector. For a long time now, OAAAN perceived the Lagos State Signage and Advertisement Agency as the predator that wants to kill the outdoor advertising business but events have proved otherwise. LASAA, on the other hand, should accommodate OAAAN, a plea made by the body. While making efforts to create a favourable environment for the outdoor advertising business to flourish, LASAA should continue to do its best to be a listening regulator.

*Omisore, an advertising buff, wrote from Lagos*

## NOW THAT THEY ALL WANT RESTRUCTURING

**Emenena Bright** argues the need to hold the presidential candidates to account on restructuring

It is understandable that the Nigeria political terrain has become this charged as it is only about six months to the general elections. While all the elections are important, the most significant remains the Presidential election. This is because the direction of a nation is akin to the nation's chief executive officer; in our own case, the president. This is further made so by our system of government, our political structure, our form.

No doubt, every nation has her peculiarities and it is such peculiarities that determine the way the nation is governed. While the players are all warming up for the task ahead, it is important to keep focus on the issues. With the incumbent and the party in power obviously leaving no stone unturned even if it means trouncing on the constitution to ensure they retain power it appears the issues have been relegated to the back seat. On the other hand despite all the opportunities offered by the incumbent by their perpetual failures and unforced errors, the opposition has failed to take advantage and so have remained the lesser of both players. Understandably, they are the opposition and are naturally will be most likely behind in the race of who heads the affairs of government in the next dispensation. Still, in comparison to what obtained about three years ago when the party in power now was in opposition, there is still a lot of ground to be covered if they are to make serious impact.

Every election has its peculiarities and the votes are driven by specific factors. They are rarely the same for every election year. In the last election, the then opposition made the most important

of the factors to drive the votes in the fight against corruption. So the last election became a referendum on corruption. What then should drive the votes in 2019? It is now a common rhetoric that Nigeria has never been this divided since the post-civil war. This division has given rise to all manner of insurgencies thereby making insecurity to be at its peak. Daily, people get killed in droves and it doesn't seem there is an end in sight to all these. Our government does not bother. They are in perpetual denial all in a bid to perpetuate themselves in power. Our Army is regularly overrun and the dead are secretly buried without such recognition and respect befitting of soldiers who died in the battle field so the rest of us may be safe. The issues are many, and will not be solved by a single action. So no one is under the illusion that restructuring is the magic wand that solves the myriad of problems. However, the problems have a nexus and identifying that nexus is a panacea for the solutions we sought. It is widely believed that most of these problems have roots that are easily traceable to the present structure. Our politico-economic form has not profited us irrespective of our belief, region or religion. In his speech in July 2016, at the late Gen. Usman Katsina Memorial Conference, Atiku Abubakar did posit that the present system which has largely evolved from the need to put us together almost at all cost especially following the civil war has not helped any region. Not even the North, which is viewed by many as the only beneficiary of the present system. He has therefore continued to talk about the need to change our political structure of form. Unfortunately, while this position of his has

earned him a place in the hearts of many, some persons, especially those in power have continued to deride him and tag him as merely playing politics. It is ironic that despite not turning up for the popular 2014 National Conference where the discussion of our form or structure held, the ruling party went ahead to include in its manifesto the promise to change our political structure. That this manifesto won them the election only goes to show that amongst other promises, the citizens believed their promise to restructure Nigeria. Having been in power for more than three years now, not a single bill or any other action has pointed to intent to fulfilling this promise. As a matter of fact, every effort by anyone to discuss the issue has been turned down blatantly by the president. Now as the election season approaches fast, they have all began to turn around. Even those who have never mentioned a word about restructuring and have openly argued that there was nothing wrong with the present system, are all now shouting "restructuring." This is so especially as the opposition party continues its search for a worthy candidate to fly its flag in the next presidential election. The denial and refusal to see our structure as an albatross to our national growth and development cuts across the aisle and just saying they support restructuring now should not be enough to win the votes of the delegates. It is now very important that the candidates' long time position on the issue of restructuring be well analysed and debated. Like they dangled "fighting corruption one electorate" we must refuse that they do same with this very important issue, now that they all want restructuring.

Only a few days ago there was an ongoing debate between the former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar and Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo on the same subject. What was obvious is that despite any disagreement by the vice-president's characterisation of the former vice-president's restructuring as merely geographic, even the little expressed by the Professor would have gone some distance in achieving fiscal federalism. Hypocrisy was in full glare that a former Attorney General of a state that led his then state to the Supreme Court on those issues as expressed by him in that article can be part of a federal administration that today has turned down every attempt and effort to have the discussion on restructuring. Having faulted his stance on restructuring by Atiku Abubakar following the vice-president's earlier speech in the United States, the 180° about-turn is in the least defensive. It was however a worthy debate, Nigerians only wished that Atiku Abubakar (a front runner for the presidency in the upcoming election under PDP) and President Muhammadu Buhari were the ones engaging in it, considering that the professor's position has not affected anything in this administration.

It is hoped that Atiku Abubakar will get the ticket of the PDP and then an opportunity to debate these issues with the president who is set to be the ruling party's candidate. We do hope that for the sake of decency, the need to deepen our democratic culture and national interest, President Buhari will accept the invitation to a debate when the time comes.

*Dr Bright, a medical practitioner, wrote from Warri, Delta State*