

***EndSARS* Protest Philosophy as a Reminder of Rebranding Nigeria Campaign's Objectives for Sustainable National Development**

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ABSTRACT

Aim and Objectives: The study is aimed at directing our national consciousness towards the needs to rebrand our national image and values through the possible adoption of the objectives of national character reformation. To rebrand is to change the package of recognition and identity for better marketing and productivity. It is about image representation for positive acceptability in wide global space. The study posited that the problematic cause of rebranding personal and local character for the sole purposes of engendering the needful and conventional factors of Sustainable National Development (SND) were recently the concerns of *EndSARS* Protest Philosophy (EPP).

Methodology: It employed a phenomenological method of enquiry which is hinged on the historical and expository assessment of events and issues.

Findings: Indispensably, there are links of the contents of EPP to the objectives of Rebranding Nigeria Campaign (RNC) as the politically aborted Federal Ministry of Information's programme of National Orientation Agency. It recognised that the RNC re-initiated the national needs for character reformation as a means of achieving vibrant SND, hinged on national unity and integration, and which is also the basis of EPP.

Conclusion: There are tactical and resourceful needs to revisit and adopt the contents of EPP as a basis of national characters reformation for positive realization of SND becomes very economically and politically indispensable, following the trending nature of national consciousness which are away from the national values and identities that we are known for as a people.

Keywords: Rebranding Nigeria Campaign (RNC), National Reformation, *EndSARS* Protest Philosophy (EPP), Sustainable National Development (SND), Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS).

Introduction

Over the times, there have been many calls for the rebranding, reforming or regenerating the courses of Nigerian development values and dignity as a nation whose identity is well known all over the globe.

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These calls are philosophically accessioned on the ethical convictions that the contents and values of the human societies are products of the human minds. The societal change so desired must be of reformed minds. With such quest for change in recent past of Nigerian development, we recall the *EndSARS* protest which has called for national and international interests for a drastic change in political, cultural, moral, social and economic perceptions and orientations as causal dynamisms of development, especially in the “Nigerian Police Force” (NPF).

It must be agreed that the *EndSARS* protest brought in and after some of its objectives as a philosophy of national rebranding of the mindsets of Nigerians, especially the fights corruption and other dehumanization in the society. The socio-political concerns of “*EndSARS* Protest Philosophy” (EPP) for ‘Sustainable National Development’ (SND) were based on the fights against the dehumanizing operations of “Special Anti-Robbery Squad” (SARS) unit of NPF, and then served as EPP’s revolutionary platform to question the developmental operations of other organizational and constitutional sectors of national civilization (Abosede 2020; Abiodun, *et al.*, 2020, Isanbor & Ojebun 2022). The currencies of development cause us as Nigerians to remember the socio-political programme of “Rebranding Nigeria Campaign” (RNC) in line with recent national political and social realities that have based on the protracted *EndSARS* protest which has remained as mark of contemporary Nigerian development history. According to Shodipe, Ifekristi and Omowale (2022: 43):

The need for nation branding usually stems from a country's desire to take control of its narrative away from negative media portrayals or negative national stereotypes. Nigeria's image is perceived as bad due to corruption, selfishness, carefree attitude, and ignorance of both leaders and citizens. As such, there is be need to redeem the image through the concept of rebranding or nation branding. This image laundering approach aims to change the negative narrative and perception held by the international community and instead promotes a better narrative based on what a country can offer and favours the government and its citizens. Countries adopt this approach hoping that other nations will change their attitudes and perceptions towards them from negative to positive and consequently invest their money in such countries.

From many other social analyses of the development challenges of Nigerian in the recent times, the concerns eluded above by Shodipe, Ifekristi and Omolade (2022) were not different from the social and economic causes of the *EndSARS* protest. The consideration of such social change based on the values of character reformation projected the remaking of Nigerian image and revaluation of national consciousness towards collective and common survival and development.

From the above conception of Nigerian development history along the values of character reformation, the significance of the study is hinged on the recognition that the processes of advancement as objectives of RNC demand that our characters should be readily and strongly devoid of the influences of corruption, bribery and other social, political, moral and economic abuses (Adetolu 2015, Arowolo & Akinola 2018, Aina 2020). This conception of social change was programmed to bringing out politically the needs for collective consciousness in attaining national reformation of citizens’ characters and values towards collective development and national integration (Amadi 2017, Shodipe, Ifekristi & Omolade 2022). Through the valued periscope of RNC, this study looks at possible rebranding national image through the sincere implementation of EPP as a basis for Nigeria history and a vibrant source for the renewed hope for SND.

Research Questions

- 1) What are motivating causes of *EndSARS* as atoms of philosophy for social change and societal reformation?
- 2) How is EPP as a hinged thrust of reminder of RNC’s objectives
- 3) How can these progressive relations of RNC’s objectives and EPP be a basis for the attainment of SND

- 4) What can or must be included in such protest before it can shape the courses of SND?
- 5) What, if anything must be avoided when carrying out such similar protests in the future in order to advance the courses of SND being capable of shaping the development history of Nigerians as a people?

Hence, with the possibilities of answering these questions towards projecting the causes of social change and societal reformations, this study is mainly concern with the possible implementation of EPP as a paradigmatic reminder of RNC's objectives for SND.

Literature Review

SARS and the Thrust of ENDSARS Protest: Showcasing the Bad Faith of Being a Nigerian

The *EndSARS* Protest was a public peaceful reaction and revolution against the criminal and corrupt activities of the SARS unit of the NPF. The NPF is a Federal Institution, and being established by law for the services for personal and public protections and guard duties. The NPF was established under Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution. The Police Act (1990) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) describes the function, structure and operation of the Force (Abiodun, *et al.*, 2020). The Act was originally drafted in 1943, and was reviewed in 1967 (See, Police Act, Cap. 2004). The President and Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces in Nigeria holds operational control of the Force and appoints the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), who is responsible for the command of the Police subject to his directive for public safety and maintenance of public order (Ogbette, Idam& Kareem 2018). In the same vein, the administrative, financial and logistics management of the NPF falls under the authority of the Federal Ministry of Police Affairs. SARS as a part of the Force Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department (FCIID) was a dreaded anti-crime unit of the NPF founded in 1992 by Simeon Danladi Midenda, a retired Commissioner of Police who added the word "Special" to the already existing Anti-Robbery Squad which turned out to be SARS, and it was headed by Anthony Ogbizi, the then Deputy Inspector General of Police.

According to the Amnesty International (2016) one of the challenges of the civilian government which came to power in Nigeria in 1999, was to ensure the respect for and protection of human rights which was in breach during the preceding military era. This challenge has coincided with a wave of crime and violence that has spread throughout the Nation till date. Brutality is one of several forms of misconduct which involves undue violence by security officers, especially, the Police on citizens in a society. This misdemeanour exists in many states and territories in the global system, most especially, in the developing societies. Police brutality refers to the intentional use of excessive force directed towards a state's citizens by the Police officers or security agents (Abiodun, *et al.*, 2020). Empirical studies have shown that torture and other forms of violent abuse could have enduring negative effects on both survivors and perpetrators, and is ineffective for obtaining reliable information in interrogation. In spite of state prohibitions against torture and custodial misconduct by the Police, torture has been reported as being commonly used in police custodies across Nigeria, which is a major reason behind deaths in custody (Aborisade & Obileye 2018). This act of torture and the abuse of especially the youths became rampant across states with different people been harassed daily and called criminals even at first glance.

The national experiences of the *EndSARS* protest has the problem of bad faith to the disfavour of the Nigerians, especially the youths as a people who were desirous of positive socio-political thrusts of SND. Ethically, to be a Nigerian is not is the very bad faith because one has to deny his or her own existential reality and maybe seeking socio-political solace in something that does not exist. But, to be politically denied the developmental needs that are naturally and politically gifted to all Nigerians is a bad faith. The bad faith is a question that can be well understood under the political, religious, ethnical and economic oppressive existential conditions, and it is antithetical to national authenticity as a Nigerian citizen, strongly occasioned and sustained by corruption and mismanagement of public funds (Abosede 2020; Abiodun, *et al.*, 2020, Isanbor & Ojebun 2022). Hence, the Nigerian humanity is put into question and subjected to the panoptical nature of the imperial self of wholeness, and then asking indispensable

question: How the Nigerian humanity surviving in the midst of these dehumanised conditions of high rate of unemployment, insecurities, underemployment, hunger, starvation, street begging, poor education facilities, non-payment of salaries and wages, poor healthcare, and the likes. The prevailing conditions of bad faith for the Nigerians who desire a better, vibrant and sustainable working Nigeria as a nation were seen as the propelling forces and concerns that initiated the *EndSARS* protest as basis of achieving SND.

The Basis of RNC for the Understanding of EPP

In the year 2017, Nigerians launched a social media campaign with the hash tag *#EndSARS* to document private and public abuses and extortions by SARS officers and demand the total overhaul and abolition of the Unit (Ujene & Orji-Egwu 2018). The nationwide demonstrations against Police officers of SARS continue to gain momentum across States (WANEP 2020). In October 2020, the campaigners moved from social media using the *#EndSARS* to organized, peaceful protests in Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, Osun, Benin, Ughelli, Warri, Ilorin, Ogbomosh, Owerri, Jos, Kaduna, Calabar and other Nigerian cities and states, threatening to continue if the government refused to disband the force (WANEP 2020). According to Vanguard Newspaper, the protestors made a five points demand to be met by the Federal Government of Nigeria (Vanguard 2020). Topping the list was the immediate release of all the persons arrested during the protests as well as justice and compensation for all who died through police brutality in Nigeria. Next to the above is an independent body to be set up within 10 days to investigate and prosecute all reports of police misconduct. Also, the psychological evaluation and retraining of SARS operatives before they are deployed to any other police unit. Finally, the protesters requested an increase in the salaries of officers in the Nigerian police. It is important to note that the *#EndSARS* protest was a means some Nigerians used to unleash their anger against not only the brutality of the Nigerian Police, but poor governance which has led to excruciating poverty that caused hardship in the country.

The police criminality and brutality, poor government's decision making and lack of trust on the political office holders were seen as the basis of the *EndSARS* protest. The protesters mainly youths recognised that, normally, every government that values her image will prevent protest of this kind because it gave a bad image of the country in the International environment, especially the way in which the protest dismissed by Government's commanded military shooting at the protesters at the Lekki Tollgate in Lagos (Isanbor & Ojebun 2022). It was a massacre that should have attracted the attention of International Court of Justice, but, the action was dismissed by the Federal Government as mere political propaganda and rumour. Moreover, the *EndSARS* protest is clear evidence that there is a wide gap between the government and young Nigerians who still feel disgruntled over the way and manner the government has handled the call to end Police criminality and brutality before the protest.

However, before RNC, there was 'Heart of Africa' (HOA) Project which was launched by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's Presidential Administration in the year 2005. This was initially launched in 2004 as Nigeria Image Project (Amadi 2017, Shodipe, Ifekristi & Omolade 2022). The HOA failed in known time as customary of many political initiatives and programmes. According to many Nigerian political and social thinkers, HOA failed because: proper image analysis was not examined by the agencies concerned, no strong political wills to make the project work in the first, the stakeholders involved were not directed actual brand to achieved, and ultimately, the media were not properly induced or contracted to project the ministerial initiatives towards achieving such social, economic and political reforms. As a revitalization of HOA Project's objectives on the remaking of Nigeria's Image in the faces of the increasing phenomena of corruption, bribery and miscarriages of justice, RNC was thought of as a better socio-political platform for the projected national re-engineering of minds towards the attainment of SND.

RNC was a project ministerially initiated by Prof (Mrs) Dora Akunyili. RNC was designed and championed by her as a Minister of Information under Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's presidential administration. RNC was launched at the Shedun Musa Yar'adua Centre Abuja on the 9th February 2009. The logo of the campaign which was: "Nigeria: Good People, Great Nation" was unveiled on the 17th March 2009 (Amadi 2017, Shodipe, Ifekristi & Omolade 2022). For national media outfits and

politicians, it was a good slogan as a logo to revive the faith and trust of Nigeria as a country and Nigerians as a people especially in the development perceptions of many international and diplomatic bodies and agencies. But, according to Vanguard's Viewpoint on the 19th July 2010, with the title: "Rebranding: The Journey so far", eluded that many Nigerians may have been of the opinion that the slogan should have been: "Nigeria: Good People, Corrupt Leaders" or "Nigeria: Good People, Failed Nation." This criticism as a cynical suggestion strongly indicated and long indicating the weighty influences and effects of bad and corrupt leaderships have been a foundation for Nigeria as a failed nation which has been occasioning the mindsets of many Nigerians historically.

From all indications, the ministry initiated the program to re-market the real values of Nigerian national identity in the global perceptive indexes of development (Adetolu 2018, Arowolo & Akinola 2018; Aina2020). This project was directed toward fighting the roots of corruption in the minds of many Nigerians, especially those who have sunk deep into it and those were and are intending to go into it as a way of financially and monetarily alleviating and elevating themselves, and ultimately, as a way of life (Kunde 2014, Isanbor & Igboin 2020). With such development, there were socio-philosophical calls for or drives toward character orientating and positive value rebranding or remaking in the institutionalization of the principles of common good and solidarity in the minds of many Nigerians that have been bedevilled by the effects of insecurity, secessionist agitations, electoral flaws, immigration crimes, corruption, smuggling, arms dealing, a crippled economy, poverty, ill-functional public amenities, structural unemployment, advance fee fraud '419', human trafficking amongst other vices (Amadi 2017, Shodipe, Ifekristi & Omolade 2022). As such, there have been cries and agitations for national reformation which are embedded in re-making or rebranding our characters and values towards attaining SND. Then, RNC was anchored on this tripod objective towards achieving a positive change in the perceptual index of SND:

1. Attitudinal change (Re-orientation)
2. Revival of old cultural Values
3. Instilling of Patriotism in the citizens

The objectives of RNC were centred on redesigning the valued images of Nigeria as a product in the world's market competing among other countries (Kunde 2014). It is on this basis of reshaping and remarketing the Nigerian national image, at home and abroad, that the youth positively and non-violently revolted as a form of protest against the criminal and brutal activities of the personnel of the SARS unit of the NPF. These activities were heavily unreasonable and marked with bribery, corruption, robbery, extortion and extra-judicial killings by the personnel of SARS. Although, after the protest, as parts of the demands of the protest, the Federal Government through the Police Commission and Ministry of Police Affairs submitted to have established Special Weapon and Tactical Team (SWAT) in replacement of SARS for better and more refined representation of NPF. This was greeted by the masses as part of rebranding the image of Nigeria in the global affairs. But, over two years after the protest and the pronouncement of the establishment of the SWAT unit of NPF, no evidence of its existence and operations are visible to the eyes of any Nigerian, rather, the resurgence and resurfacing of same SARS in different unclassified nomenclatures of the old pattern of operations.

From the limitations of development occasioned by the increase of internal insecurity, social brutality, criminality and extra-judicial killing, the *EndSARS* protesters mainly as youths developed the tranches of philosophy of SND along the ironical valuation of *EndSARS* as it is peculiar to Nigerian development history (Isanbor & Ojebun 2022). Taking as a basis of analytical interest; this essay calls for the rebranding of EPP for possible, vibrant, viable and conscientious oriented change for the realization of SND. As unanimously recognized, according to the protesters, the *EndSARS* will necessarily leads to or comes to represent developmentally the following points of national reformation and rejuvenation, especially in the faces of the current demands for SND:

E- Education and Economy Reforms

N- National Constitution Reforms:

D- Debt Accountability

S- Security Reforms

A- Anti-People Policies Cancellations

R- Restructuring

S- Save Cost of Governance

With these of social and political reforms, the *EndSARS* protest remains a collective concern for SND. It becomes asocial incident that has always remained fresh in the minds of the many Nigerians, as it agitated against the ill-treatment meted upon Nigerians by SARS, ranging from police brutality to molestation and so on (Abosede 2021, Abiodun, *et al.*, 2020, Isanbor & Ojebun 2022). Charitably, during the *EndSARS* protest, a lot of persons lent their supports to the movement through items of cash and kind and a really remarkable factor was when a group took charge of the finances and through a transparent system of records, gave daily accounts of the expenditure at the protest ground. This is because, there was a collective common interest toward rebranding national image and the achievement of collective survivals in the faces of social alienation, subjugation and suppression by persons and agencies that suppose to protect them (see, Isanbor & Ojebun 2022). It was characterized initially by a peaceful agitation, but ended violently as a result of the extra-judicial killings that later emerged. In the midst of these agitations and the arousal of patriotic spirit in these youths, a corresponding reaction which would have helped in addressing the concerns of these agitators would have been expected from the government. The response from the government was rather spontaneous as seen in the Lagos Tollgate massacre, and the seeming replacement of SARS with the SWAT of NPF.

Such response on the part of the government questioned the call for a historical national consciousness on the human values and for the respect for the development placement of the youths in national survival consciousness along the values of history of development associated with culture of social uprisings, violence and conflicts. According to Isanbor and Ojebun (2022: 214):

Through the *#EndSARS* protest, the government's denial of the Lekki tollgate massacre has the indispensable level of political corruption and the lack of democratic culture in Nigeria, simply due to the lack of the values of truth and the imposing influences of national insincerity and dishonesty. It was simply the factual separation of truth from the faulty relations between politics and democracy, a union of governmental insincerity. Such deficiency has increased the level of political deceit, betrayal, politically motivated violence, and abuse of political power and privileges, since the politicians are very sure to do anything, irrespective of its moral and ethical questionings, can go away with it, without fears of sanctions. These are matters of truth for national development. The *EndSARS* protest was about telling the national truth for the realization of vibrant and integral national unity and development.

Methodology

Being the speculative and phenomenological research, the methodology adapted to achieving the needed results on the connection of emerging goals of EPP with the governmental initiative of RNC's objectives for the realization of SND is based on historical and expository accounts of the courses of social and political changes in contemporary Nigeria as an entity of lived experiences. It is historical as it assessed the basic relevance of RNC's objectives to that of EPP. It is also expository as it is directed towards analysing the thrust values of EPP for the elimination of corruption and brutality inherent in NPF and other governmental sectors in achieving SND.

Result and Discussion

Rebranding Nigerian Minds: EndSARS Protects as a Paradigm for New Nigerian History

The thrust workability of rebranding protest of national entity like Nigeria is about telling and accepting the truth about ourselves as a people and then striving for influential change by monitoring the responsible actions and valued choices we exercised (Isanbor & Igboin 2020). In order to achieve EPP, we have to remind us of the challenges of RNC which were not pragmatically and socially different from that of *EndSARS*. This is to move the needle of development and growth to a significant vantage point which democracy as a mode government demands from the people and the leaders to periodically examined themselves over time. For example, it demands that Nigeria needs leaders who are knowledgeable as well as the masses who can discern their future by properly elect their leaders for the achievement of SND. The challenges have been that:

- We are face with the lack of national cohesion and patriotism which have been from the weighty influences of ethnicity, tribalism, nepotism, religious particularistic bigotry and intolerance, and personal interests as against national interests.
- Lack of creative and peaceful environment for the ease of doing business especially for the external and international investors.
- Fundamental increases in the socioeconomic effects of unemployment underemployment, hardship, insecurities of all kinds and poverty. These are resulting to the increase in fraud, robbery, banditry, human trafficking, illegal and force migration, ritual killing and likes.
- Corruption in public service and governmental administration. These have been making managerial looting and embezzlement of public funds very easy and pleasant for the perpetrators, and then detrimental to national growth and development.
- Lack of reformation approach to the values of national unity and development by government, in which they have been neglecting the interests, initiative and demands of trade and labour unions, educational agencies, NGOs, research agencies and the media

The EPP necessary projected the undying need for the review of the national constitution that will indispensably guarantee the restructuring process and policy for SND. For EPP, these are courses for socio-political changes to be made in the National constitution, especially the courses of the dissolution of powers from the central to the states for the control of their states' owned resources and management and then contributing to the management of federal government characters. This existing Federal system that is constitutionalised is said to be regretted by many ethnic groupings, governmental actors and agencies as many of the ethnic groupings and interest groups are said to be governmentally neglected or abandoned by the Federal Government due to poor allocation and under-funded projects or presences in their constituencies. Needless to say that Nigerian political leaders lack the understanding of commerce and financial technology favourable to the economic development of the country. In other words, majority of our political leaders are clearly not qualified for the task ahead of them, and this becomes worse each day as political positions are now seen solely as a means of self-enrichment and no interest is therefore placed in the true essence of service.

With the mindset for the possible implementation of EPP for SND, there is a clarion call on all the Nigerian youths and all well-meaning Nigerians that it is high time we held the bull by its horn. It is high time we all went out to bell the cat by ourselves. It is high time we showed these leaders of ours that there is the youthful spirit that can help in developing our country. As demanded by RNC, it is high time we expressed our patriotism to our country by defending it from the flaws that bedevil it. If this is not done, posterity will never be our friend but our accuser. This can only be done when we all trope out *en masse* just as we did in the protest to end the operations of SARS, to participate reasonably and purposefully, in the 2023 election and ensure that bad leaders are ousted out and vote leaders that will possibly implement

EPP for SND; then and only then, will the youthful spirit replete in us be effectively used, and indeed the justice the youths seek for the youths killed at the Lekki tollgate be actualized. It is high time we went back to the drawing board and ensure that we change the political trajectory by reasonably electing our leaders, by making sure we shun all sorts of vote buying, election apathy and political thuggery and corruption. Nigerian youths and all well-meaning Nigerians, just as they did in the *EndSARS*, troop out en-masse in the forthcoming elections slated for 2023, and allow their voices heard in the votes they render.

The *EndSARS* protest is a pilot scheme that test-ran the socio-political powers of the Nigerian youth community. It is the beginning of a development revolution, reformation and renaissance from positive and effectual rebranding and reengineering Nigerian mindsets towards the set goals of SND. Little wonder, an erstwhile President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo asserted in 2017 that “we are sitting on the keg of gunpowder when it comes to the youths.” In 2022, the youths came out strong to defend their rights in the *EndSARS* protest; and it is expected that in 2023, they will come out *en masse* to oust out self-recycling bad leaders who have failed them as a people. Thus, the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson become apt at this point, namely that “the world belongs to the energetic.” Such philosophy of social reformation and engineering currently recognised that the Nigerian youths are vibrant and intelligent, and when they are reasonably and purposefully coordinated, they can bring the needed growth we all need in this country as a people with common interest and survival.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, we have been assessing the development values of EPP as the functional reminder of RNC’s objectives for the realization of SND. With consciousness for the values of national unity and development, we reminder ourselves of the indispensable valuation of the *EndSARS* protest as it is related to the challenges of insecurity, criminality and extra-judicial killings in the country, that were associated to the activities of SARS units of NPF. These development challenges have led to differences in key factors for measuring national political, social and economic development, where investors are finding no reasons to stake their business due to the known fears of insecurity and other strong weights of corruption in the country. Therefore, with the consciousness for SND, EPP becomes a beacon of hope for the possible rebranding of Nigerian socio-political landscapes and image and to help build an independent society where creative initiatives are welcomed, not a place where promises are made without plans to achieving them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made as modes of achieving EPP:

- Governments should ensure that EPP should not be politically downplayed as one of the issues in the past that they allowed to be overtaken by political mediocrity and nonchalance.
- Government should endeavor to fully honor the promises made on the institutionalization of SWAT as a replacement of SARS in order to rebuild people’s confidence in the NPF towards national image rebranding and reformation for SND.
- The courses of *EndSARS* protest which had actually and reasonably brought the power of the youth especially towards effecting social change and engineering should not be allowed to die down or fizzle away, such social resolve by the youth is indispensably necessary to change the socio-political values and landscaping of the country for its realization of SND.
- To change the political trajectory of the country, we need to be practically conscious of what unite us rather than on what divide us as a people with common goal for common change, especially the management of our common resources

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