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# African Governments' Foreign Publics engagements: Public Diplomacy in African perspective

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**ABSTRACT:** Scholars over the years have delved into the discourse of states' foreign publics engagements in their foreign policy objectives. This analysis is done generally with the western perspective of public diplomacy with recent Asian scholarship evolving. As a result, this study aims to reflect on public diplomacy from an African perspective. Therefore, it analyses how African governments have been engaging their foreign publics (foreign governments and their citizens) to attract foreign aid, tourism, and investments in their nation-building and development trajectory. The article explores African public diplomacy mechanisms such as diasporas, nation branding, cultural diplomacy, and many others. It also digests some of the challenges confronting African governments in their public diplomacy campaigns, like lack of research, human and financial resources, and lack of coherent foreign policy documents. The article's findings demonstrate that although Africa generally has rich public diplomacy resources, these are not adequately harnessed in most African states' foreign policy. This situation has led to poor foreign policy implementation by most African governments. The study contributes to the public diplomacy scholarship in general and African public diplomacy in particular, which scholars have underexplored. It concludes that scholars should delve into the exegesis of the rich African public diplomacy currencies.

**KEYWORDS:** public diplomacy, foreign communication, Africa, foreign publics, development

## Introduction

■ **This article aims to demonstrate how African countries as a whole attempt to use public diplomacy tools to strategically communicate and build mutually beneficial relationships with their targeted foreign publics. Hence, it adopts a state-centric ontology approach. Foreign publics engagement by countries for various reasons has been an old phenomenon in**

**international relations. Thus, the practice of public diplomacy is as old as diplomacy itself (Kunczik, 1997, 2009; Melissen, 2005). Many countries, especially in the West, have generally adopted a public diplomacy approach in communicating with their targeted foreign audiences to achieve foreign policy objectives. Therefore, almost all the ministries**

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**of foreign affairs (MFAs) in the western world and recently those in Asia have created public diplomacy departments to spearhead the concept of winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of foreign publics for national interest. However, the situation is different when it comes to the African continent. Public diplomacy practice by African countries is seldom discussed.**

With this background, this article sets the tone for African public diplomacy discourse by introducing the general overview of how African governments have communicated with foreign publics to attract foreign investments, tourism, trade, and foreign aid for economic developments. As Whitaker and Clark (2018, p. 2) assert, “development has been perhaps the most constant preoccupation of Africans and outsiders interested in the continent”. Broadly speaking, the overall goal of African public diplomacy is economic development of individual countries. Thus, African public diplomacy can be described as ‘economic development public diplomacy.’ For this study’s purpose and due to the broad scope of Africa’s public diplomacy, the analysis is on Africa as a whole rather than the 54 individual countries with various demographics, economics, and levels of public diplomacy practices. Therefore, the study adopts a continent-wide approach because most outsiders generally consider African countries and people ‘Africans’ or ‘Africa’ (Wekesa, 2020). Also, exploring the entire Africa’s public diplomacy in one study is a daunting challenge, hence the ‘Africa-wide’ approach to this study.

This study is conducted based on the research question of whether African countries practice public diplomacy. This question raises concern for scholars of the field to begin exploring African public diplomacy as a whole and examining individual African countries’ public diplomacy agendas. Academics and practitioners generally have underexplored African public diplomacy, as scholars usually focus on the developed nations’ mode of engaging foreign publics. Asian public diplomacy scholars have recently attempted to de-westernise the concept by examining Asian countries’ public diplomacy practices. Therefore, this work attempts to fill the lacuna of the lack of public diplomacy literature from an African perspective. It critically examines the content of public diplomacy scholarships relating to the topic in its qualitative content analysis method while adopting the *integrated public diplomacy model* as its theoretical framework. Hence the study argues that African public diplomacy has much potential and needs to be given

attention by scholars and practitioners. It also argues that Africa’s diplomacy and international relations are weak; therefore, its public diplomacy mechanisms are weak.

The article is structured as follows: the next section reviews the public diplomacy literature and the theoretical approach underpinning the study’s framework. The following section also explores the state of public diplomacy in the African continent while providing an overview of Africa’s public diplomacy scope. The level of public diplomacy education and scholarship in the African region is also scrutinised. The third section then focuses on public diplomacy mechanisms used by African governments before finalising the entire study.

## **Foreign publics engagement – theoretical framework**

Public diplomacy is a dimension of diplomatic practice with a solid and long history of enhancing a nation’s soft power currencies, which became crucial in winning the West’s Cold War, argues Nye (2008). Nations that want to wield global influence have no choice but to engage in public diplomacy (Seib, 2016, p. 43). The concept is not new in the practice of international relations and diplomacy (Antwi-Boasiako, 2021b). It deals basically with communication management among diplomatic actors, including states and non-state actors. Public diplomacy’s central tenet of the ability to influence and engage foreign audience to achieve foreign policy pre-existed long before the term itself (Cull, 2008b, 2019; Seib, 2016). Therefore, while the phrase ‘public diplomacy’ is new, its practice is an old phenomenon in international relations (Cull, 2019). Within the last two decades, the concept has become popular in the research fields, making it an effective tool in most nations’ foreign policy implementation agendas in the western world (Antwi-Boasiako, 2021a; Ociepka, 2017).

The concept has no universally agreed definition. Therefore, scholars from different academic disciplines have diverse definitions (Gilboa, 2008). Golan and Yang (2015) believe in this assertion when they argue that despite the increasing body of public diplomacy literature, confusion still exists concerning the term’s meaning and how to differentiate it from other disciplines such as international public relations. For more than fifty years, the ‘father’ of public diplomacy, the US, has not been able to even come out with a single agreed

definition of public diplomacy (Snow, 2015, p. 80). Tuch defines it as

” a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies (Tuch, 1990, p. 3).

Golan and Yang (2015, p. 2) put it as the management of the communication process among diplomatic actors, including non-state actors, with the aim and conviction of reaching out to the target foreign audiences for national interest purposes through various communication means. On one hand, some scholars, such as Fullerton and Kendrick (2017), Rugh (2014), and Hunt (2015) see it as a state-sponsored campaign and communications targeting the international public. For these scholars, public diplomacy is the sole function of a state; hence government becomes the only actor. On the other hand, other scholars like Melissen (2005), Hocking and Melissen (2015), Potter (2002, 2018), and Cull (2008b, 2008a, 2019) incorporate non-state actors into the field’s framework. Including non-state actors and digital instruments in the discipline is known as the ‘new public diplomacy.’

The integrated public diplomacy model introduced by Golan (2013) is among the few public diplomacy concepts in the field. According to Golan, the model has three essential dimensions in the public diplomacy communication art. These dimensions are relational, brand/reputation, and mediated. He argues that these dimensions should be integrated in order to achieve any meaningful public diplomacy campaign. The dimensions are also categorized as short, medium, and long-term perspectives (Golan, 2015). The relational dimension focuses on governments’ long-term relationship management efforts to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with foreign publics. Activities that generate this dimension include soft-power programs such as foreign aid, and educational and cultural exchange programmes. The mediated approach of public diplomacy also attempts to shape and influence framing in the global news media. Thus, it is a short-term dimension. The third dimension, the brand/reputational perspective, explains governments’ nation branding efforts by linking issues and attributes to nations through public relations and marketing tactics (Golan & Yang, 2015, p. 4). The integrated public diplomacy concept underpins this study and serves as a theoretical framework for exploring African

governments’ strategic public diplomacy communication campaigns.

## **The state of public diplomacy in the African continent**

The state of public diplomacy concept in the black continent is examined in this section base on African countries’ history, education, scholarship, and practice over the years. It paints the general picture of African public diplomacy practices and studies. African countries have always conducted public diplomacy as a practice within and outside the continent over the years since scholars (e.g., Cowan & Cull, 2008; Cull, 2008b; Gilboa, 2008; Melissen, 2005) posit that the practice of public diplomacy long existed before the coinage of the term by Edmond Gullion in the 1960s. However, public diplomacy as an academic field of study is recent. As Wekesa (2020) notes, much of Africa’s public diplomacy practice is generally not conceptualised as public diplomacy, which is unfortunate. Therefore, this should not be misconstrued that African countries do not practice public diplomacy.

Historically, African countries have been communicating and engaging foreign publics both within the continent and the entire world starting from the struggle for independence (decolonisation) through the Cold War. For instance, the first president of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, developed public diplomacy campaigns in the early 1960s to achieve his pan-African foreign policy of decolonisation and uniting the newly independent African states (Antwi-Boasiako, 2021b, p. 328). He established the Bureau of African Affairs (BAA) as a public diplomacy department to engage the African publics in what I called ‘pan-African public diplomacy.’ The BAA was also to counter the cold war propaganda by the West and East by offering African states an alternative ideology of ‘non-alignment’ (Asamoah, 2014; Gerits, 2014). The war influenced Africa’s international relations and diplomacy from the middle of the 1950s to the end of the 1980s. Most African countries attained independence within the cold war era; thus, the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, were on a mission in Africa to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the governments and the citizens of the newly independent African states. As a result, both superpowers competed to provide foreign aid to these newly independent African countries (Whitaker & Clark, 2018).

It can be said that the pan-African movement led by African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), and Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea for the joint African foreign policy of decolonisation is an example of African public diplomacy practice (Wekesa, 2020). Moreover, the spirit of the new African states echoed by the pan-African movement began to 'rebrand' their countries by adopting new names. This change of names from the old ones the colonists gave to a new one, an African name, also propelled these states to adopt what is now termed 'nation branding,' an essential element of the 'new public diplomacy' (Melissen, 2005) concept. For example, the colonists used to call Ghana the 'Gold Coast,' a name given to the country. However, after independence, it was changed to 'Ghana,' and many African countries, such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Burkina Faso (Ham, 2008; Whitaker & Clark, 2018). This brief African public diplomacy historical traces can be infused into the general public diplomacy field as an African dimension.

Contrary to this historical dimension of African public diplomacy, the continent has become a 'dumping ground' for the West and, recently, emerging powers of Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East's public diplomacy campaigns. Most of these public diplomacy programmes are geared toward the African public. Whitaker and Clark (2018) hold that despite Africa's abundant natural resources and human capital, many countries remain heavily dependent on foreign aid after nearly seventy years of independence. They continue to assert that the sub-Saharan is, unfortunately, the world's most aid-dependent region, although there are enormous variations by country (2018, p. 79). Therefore, Africa's continuous dependence on foreign aid has paved the way for the West and the Asian emerging powers to focus their public diplomacy campaigns on the continent. Consequently, they compete in providing foreign aid.

This aid mostly comes with overt and covert conditions attached, such as purchasing goods and services from the donating country. While attempting to promote Africa's economic development, many donor countries aim to create larger markets for their own state's export. Thus, phrases such as 'US public diplomacy in Africa, China's public diplomacy towards Africa; Russia, Japan, India, the United Kingdom, the European Union's (EU) public diplomacies in Africa' and the like are now common in the public diplomacy scholarship. According to Wekesa (2020, pp. 362–363), literature on Chinese public diplomacy in Africa is almost

50 percent higher than on US public diplomacy in Africa. The western and Asian countries have noticed the public diplomacy potential in the African continent; hence Africa has become a competitive field for the four main giant countries, Russia, China, the US, and the EU, with each adopting different public diplomacy strategies to court African governments and their publics for their 'selfish' individual national interests. The US has its Fullbright visiting foreign student programme, the Chinese with Confucius Institutes, the UK with the British Council, and BBC. India established the India-Africa initiative in 2014, and many other public diplomacy institutes and activities are being rolled out in Africa. These giant countries have also rekindled what is known as 'summit/conference diplomacy' as a public diplomacy tools to court African governments and publics. Thus, there is Russia-Africa summit, US-Africa leaders forum, the EU-Africa summit and China-Africa forum among others.

In terms of public diplomacy scholarship with an African perspective, scholars generally focus on digital African diplomacy (Ayodele, 2021; Bernal, 2020; Manor, 2016; Manor & Adiku, 2021; Wekesa et al., 2021 and many others) in their analysis, while a typical African public diplomacy lack literature with few scholars such as Wekesa (2020), Ndoye (2009) and Antwi-Boasiako (2021b) have explored the general African public diplomacy concept. From the above, one notices that scholars have emphasised the digitalisation of African diplomacy more than the public diplomacy itself since the two are not the same (Gilboa, 2016). Digital diplomacy is a recent subfield of diplomacy and public diplomacy due to the evolution of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and their application in international and diplomatic communications. The most recent one is what is known as diplomacy 2.0 – application of social media in diplomatic communications. Overall, African public diplomacy literature is emerging, especially digital African public diplomacy.

In the opinion of Wekesa (2020, p. 362), on public diplomacy education on the African continent, the field is "in its embryonic stages". However, there are indications of potential growth with various African higher educational institutions offering related public diplomacy courses at the graduate and postgraduate levels. Among them are the universities of Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa – University of Pretoria. According to a survey of some 88 English-language journal papers, theses, book chapters, and other online commentaries on African public diplomacy, the author collected

the following data: the years 2002, 2007, 2008 had only one published literature on African public diplomacy. However, the number increased from 2009 with 2, 2010 (4), 2011 (3), 2012 (3), 2013 (13), 2014 (11), 2015 (13), 2016 (23), 2017 (12) (Wekesa, 2020, p. 362). This brief picture of the rising literature in African academic institutions indicates that most public diplomacy research was done from an 'African-wide' approach rather than individual African countries, as this article also follows the same pattern. Nonetheless, some country-by-country research models are in the literature, focusing on South Africa's public diplomacy, Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Botswana, and Ghana.

The MFAs mostly carry out State-led public diplomacy practices in conjunction with other selected institutions. African public diplomacy is also coordinated by the various African ministries of foreign affairs and their diplomatic missions. Therefore how African states communicate and engage their targeted foreign publics is the responsibility of the MFAs as the coordinator of governments' public diplomacy efforts. In an online review of websites of MFAs of 18 African states in 20018, Wekesa (2020, p. 364) concludes that only two out of the 18 African countries, namely South Africa and Uganda, had specified public diplomacy departments. Wekesa assumes that public diplomacy campaigns may be done under different departments such as information, communication, or public affairs at the various African MFAs and their embassies. However, the number has increased since then as Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, Rwanda, and many others have reshaped their MFAs to include public diplomacy units. It is worth noting that public diplomacy is a costly enterprise, and therefore, a country aiming to delve into it should be prepared in finance and human resource

Even the US public diplomacy department, considered the 'father' of modern public diplomacy, still cries for finance (Rugh, 2014). Therefore it is understandable when MFAs of the developing world like Africa do not have designated public diplomacy departments. Anholt (2015) asserts that public diplomacy is not for developing countries because of the expensive cost of campaigns. Thus, public diplomacy is for advanced countries, while nation branding is for developing states. However, I believe that developing countries can conduct public diplomacy equally since there is no one-size-fit for all, irrespective of the cost involved. The developing world like the African countries have lot of public diplomacy capitals like culture and diaspora which can be easily sourced as public

diplomacy tools. The advent of social media has also made public diplomacy communication more accessible and cheaper, thereby giving a platform to the less-endowed countries to shine their potentials which was hidden under the traditional government-to-government diplomacy.

The state of public diplomacy on the African continent is weak generally due to many factors. The issue is that public diplomacy emanates from diplomacy; therefore, if a country's diplomacy is weak, its public diplomacy campaigns have no strong foundation. Unfortunately, the case is with Africa. Its diplomacy generally is still struggling to gain momentum after long colonial imperialism. The weakness of African diplomacy is on account of many factors such as lack of proper articulated foreign policies, cronyism, emasculation of foreign policy mechanisms by presidents and prime ministers, the vulnerability in the international relations arena, lack of resources, and rampant wars in a number of its countries (Wekesa, 2020, p. 360).

## **African governments' public diplomacy instruments**

In the realm of international community of countries, each state aims to protect national interests through diverse possible approaches. Public diplomacy is one of them because each country wants to wield what Nye (1990, 2004, 2008) terms 'soft power.' Public diplomacy is a common tool for wielding this power (Nye, 2004). Over the years, the powerful countries have dominated the struggle for 'soft and smart power'; however, the developing countries have not been silent completely. The African countries led by their governments have adopted different public diplomacy tactics and activities based on the needs and strengths of the individual African country to communicate with their targeted foreign publics for tourism, investment, trade, and foreign aid. Put simply, for economic development objectives. Besides, enhancing individual African governments' international reputation and image remains a high priority for African public diplomacy over the years for the above-stated purposes. These communications have been championed by the individual African MFAs and their embassies which are the first point of contact for foreign publics intending to invest, tour, and partner with the selected country. In the discussion below, some of the African states' public diplomacy outreach campaigns are explored in areas such as diaspora, nation branding, culture, and international public

relations consultancy, under the realm of the integrated public diplomacy model discussed earlier.

African diasporas, that is, peoples of African descent anywhere and everywhere who connect with their African countries of origin, have been crucial foreign agents of African governments' public diplomacy strategies. Historically, the diasporas have been a great source of the pan-African movement for decolonisation as most became leaders of the new African independent states (Wekesa, 2020). For example, Kwame Nkrumah returned to Ghana to lead the fight for independence and afterward relied on the diaspora in his foreign policy of Pan-Africanism to liberate the rest of the African states. Therefore, African states communicated with their diaspora long before the term 'diaspora diplomacy' coinage. However, in those times, there were no structured state-led institutions to engage, build, and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with the diaspora for nation-building as it is presently happening.

African diasporas have been incorporated into the African public diplomacy campaigns. As Bravo (2015), Kennedy (2020), and Ociepa (2017) assert that diasporas are essential public diplomacy agents of soft power resources for their countries of origin, citing Mexican, Irish and Polish (Polonia) diasporas as an example. In addition, African countries like Ghana and Somalia have established diaspora departments in their foreign affairs and embassies to steer the state-diaspora relationship connection and protect them through consular diplomacy. Moreover, diasporas have been an enormous source of investment, tourism, knowledge, and skill transfer from their home origins. For instance, according to the 2020 World Bank report on diaspora remittances to Africa, remittances remained resolute in the waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the diaspora remittances to North Africa increased to \$56 billion, while those to Sub-Saharan Africa were \$42 million, respectively (Report, 2020).

Since the 1990s, governments have established formal institutions and offices to engage diaspora energies and connections as diplomatic and development agents (Kennedy, 2020). This growth is also seen in African countries, where many governments have created state institutions responsible for diaspora engagement. African diaspora institutions such as Ghana's Diaspora Affairs Bureau (2014), Zimbabwe's National Diaspora Directorate (2016), and many others have all been set up to incorporate diaspora in the public diplomacy strategies. Institutionalisation of state-led engagement

with emigrant communities has become globalised in the global south and north, respectively. While the global north establishes diaspora institutions for foreign policy achievement purposes, the global south creates them for economic development (Kennedy, 2020, p. 214).

Moreover, African countries generally have organised different programmes to attract their various diasporic communities. For instance, the government of Ghana initiated the 'Year of Return' programme in 2019 for diaspora tourism as part of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of enslaved Africans in the Americas. Within that period, the tourism sector in Ghana recorded a tremendous growth of 18% in international arrivals, while total airport arrivals increased by 45% for the year (see <https://www.yearofreturn.com>). The Ghana Tourism Authority organised it in collaboration with the Tourism Ministry and the Office of Diaspora Affairs at the Office of the President. According to the Minister of Tourism Barbara Oteng Gyasi, the 'Year of Return' campaign injected about \$1.9bn into the Ghanaian economy (Mitchell, 2022). This is one of the many events African governments adopt in their strategic public diplomacy campaigns. However, the diaspora state-led programmes could be enhanced to meet the needs and demands of the various African diaspora communities around the globe.

Again, in engaging their diaspora in public diplomacy campaigns, African governments organise diverse programmes such as homecoming summits, presidents, and prime ministers meeting their diaspora communities on official state visits to a particular country. All these activities aim at harnessing diaspora capital for development purposes by encouraging their citizens living abroad to invest in the home country. In addition, the African Union (AU), as the continental body, has also recognised Africa's diaspora role in public diplomacy and nation-building by involving diaspora representatives in programmes in 2003 by recognising the diaspora as Africa's 'sixth region' in addition to five within the continent (Whitaker & Clark, 2018).

Diasporas are involved in home countries' development through economic and political participation. In an economic sense, remittances have been huge, while politically, many African countries have legalised dual citizenship and voting rights for their diasporas. Diaspora communities also participate in the political activities in their host countries in many ways, such as protest, lobbying, contesting for political positions, and many others. Therefore, they become essential as public

diplomacy agents for their countries of origin in order to influence the host country. The diaspora dimension of African public diplomacy mechanisms aims to establish a long-term relationship with foreign publics. This aspect falls into Golan's integrated public relations model's relational approach.

Over the years, African MFAs and embassies have communicated with the foreign publics through various means such as organising cultural events, celebrating national feasts like Independence Day, diaspora engagement activities, and many others. While these are worth mentioning, there is, however greater need for improvement in their communication models as generally, they stick to the two-way asymmetrical models of press agency and public information. These African embassies have also attempted to incorporate what is known in the academic circle as 'digital public diplomacy' in their communication strategies. Most of them have websites and social media accounts. However, a study by Manor (2016) shows that African digital diplomacy is at a latent stage. Although most African diplomats and diplomatic institutions are in the digitalisation process, it may take a long time based on the capacity and strength of the individual African state. While African ministries of foreign affairs and diplomatic missions have gone 'digital' generally, there is much to be done in this perspective because there is one thing to be 'digital' and another to be 'active digital.' For instance, research conducted by Antwi-Boasiako (2022; 2021b) on Ghana's embassies' presence on social media indicates that these diplomatic missions, although present on social media, do not update their social media accounts – abandoned them for months and years, and also the few that do update them, do not respond to their followers. In line with this, the digital communication channels used by these MFAs and embassies have become a 'noticeboard' rather than a means for building dialogic communication. African digital public diplomacy needs to be enhanced by governments to meet the demands of the time.

Concerning branding, Ham believes that,

states failing to establish relevant brand equity will not successfully compete economically and politically in the new world system. Without branding, they would not be able to attract investments, tourists, companies, and factories; expand exports, and reach a higher standard of living (in Gilboa, 2008, p. 67).

Generally, states compete internationally for investment, tourism, and political power; therefore,

Ham (2008, p. 120) believes that a country or continent should stand out from the international competition by embracing nation branding in its public diplomacy. Again, the international relations stage is like a marketplace of competing ideas. Nevertheless, place or nation branding must not be classified as a concept for only the advanced and powerful countries that can afford it. Even the small and developing countries join what Ham (2008) calls the 'brandwagon' since the argument is that the unbranded region or country has challenges attracting economic and political attention on the global stage.

In line with the above and as mentioned earlier, nation branding has been part and parcel of African governments' communication strategies with foreign publics since the post-independence change of country names. Within the African context of public diplomacy, the concept of nation branding was hugely championed by South Africa in 2002 after it emerged from the apartheid system (Grunig, 1993; Wekesa, 2020). It has to re-brand its new image with the 'Brand South Africa' initiative. The country also used its 2010 FIFA World Cup hosting to enhance its nation branding agenda. It might be argued that South Africa is the most successful African country with a nation branding campaign, with most of the research on African nation branding being South African based (Wekesa, 2020, p. 363). Besides, other African states have also attempted the nation brand concept. At least 13 sub-Saharan African countries such as Botswana, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, and others have initiated state-led nation branding campaigns. For instance, the government of Ghana has established the 'Brand Ghana' policy to portray a positive national image and reputation to attract tourism, investments, and trade. Kunczik (1997, 2009) and Taylor and Kent (2006) believe that developing countries attempt to create a positive national image for nation-building and development purposes. The goal of African public diplomacy through nation branding campaigns is generally for developmental purposes.

As part of their public diplomacy and nation branding campaign strategies, most African governments employ the services of international public relations agencies to help establish a positive national image on the international scene. For instance, Ghana employed a US-based public relations consulting firm, Jefferson Waterman International, a communication company stationed in Washington DC, on four different occasions between 2001 and 2014 (Kiambi, 2017, p. 58). The firm



was to help enhance Ghana's image in the eyes of the US government and publics to attract investment, tourism, and foreign aid. International public relations consultancy firms are generally known for engaging the services of foreign countries, especially developing countries (Grunig, 1993; Ndoye, 2009). These international PR agencies have become one of the fundamentals of African governments' public diplomacy instruments in courting western governments and their publics for investment and foreign aid. Thus, over the years, African countries such as South Africa, Uganda, Libya, and many others have relied on these foreign PR companies to create a positive national image through access to the international media or to lobby at the corridors of power (Grunig, 1993). Additionally, as Kiambi (2017) argues, a country wishing to manage its international reputation must use strategic communication tools to reach its target foreign audiences. These tools range from mass and social media, public diplomacy, and public relations tactics to nation branding tactics.

African governments use the one-way communication tool – monologue, sometimes to give speeches, make proclamations and often African MFAs and embassies do press releases and public information as part of the public diplomacy outreach efforts. According to Cowan and Arsenault (2008), this method is a crucial advocacy tool that public diplomacy practitioners can and should utilise to raise awareness about their country's policies, identities, and values. African states mostly use this one-way foreign communications method in their international advocacy campaigns. Advocacy in public diplomacy, according to Cull (2008a, p. 32), "is an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by undertaking an international communication activity to promote a particular policy actively, idea or that actor's general interests in the minds of a foreign public". According to Golan's integrated model, since Africa does not have its own international broadcasting media, advocacy is highly used in African public diplomacy, although it is a short-term public diplomacy tool.

Regarding cultural diplomacy as one of the taxonomies (Cull, 2008a) of public diplomacy, African governments attempt to make their rich cultural resources known abroad by organising cultural events such as music festivals and sports activities like the African Cup of Nations, exhibitions, and African foods across the globe. Moreover, they are also using their diaspora communities to showcase it internationally. This is part of the continent's relational approach toward its public diplomacy.

Africa's high number of refugees and diaspora is a great resource for cultural diplomacy. Therefore various African governments have set up state institutions to coordinate this aspect of their foreign engagement since African immigrants and migrants are a mechanism of international cultural transmission. For instance, the African diaspora communities in Ireland celebrate 'African Day' every year in May as part of the African Union celebration Day. During this celebration at the Phoenix Park in Dublin, various African cultural activities are showcased, ranging from food, music, dance, African clothes, and fundraising. I believe it is an occasion to promote Africa and its culture. This African cultural diplomacy fits into the integrated public diplomacy model as a relational and long-term approach to engaging foreign publics.

International broadcasting uses radio, television, and the internet to communicate with foreign publics. In the history of public diplomacy, most advanced countries such as the US, the UK, and Germany adopted this method and are presently using it in their public diplomacy agendas. The US has CNN; the UK has BBC World and Sky News, DW for the Germans, while the Arab world has Al-Jazeera. None of the African countries has any international broadcasting radio or television. It is the opposite where these advanced countries have established continental branches of their various international broadcasting stations in Africa – mainly in South Africa. Therefore in terms of international broadcasting as part of the mediated level of integrated public diplomacy model, African governments are at the mercy of the Western states. Africa's bad international press coverage, of the usually one-sided report of only the negative events, has also buried the potential of African public diplomacy. This situation also compels the African public diplomacy communicators to double their strategies to counter this bad foreign media coverage, which has tarnished the entire continent's image over the years. Although not all the international media give bad coverage, most of them present mostly bad news to the globe, especially to the foreign public.

Most foreign publics form opinions about a country through international news and social media. Hence, negative reportage about Africa has made foreign publics have a negative image of the continent in their minds, although most of them have never stepped foot on the continent. Many studies have found clear correlations between foreign media coverage and perception of foreign countries (Gilboa, 2008). The advent of social media has given a platform to the small and developing

countries' public diplomacy, which under the traditional international media, these states would not have such platforms. Most African governments have employed international public relations consultancy companies on various occasions to put their positive stories in these international media (Kiambi, 2017). They believe these foreign PR firms can help access these international broadcasting media channels.

## **Challenges encountering African public diplomacy**

There are numerous difficulties African diplomatic missions face regarding implementation of public diplomacy programmes in their various embassies and consulates. This section highlights only a few of them. One of the most pressing challenges facing African public diplomacy is its lack of what Cull (2008a) termed 'listening.' I prefer to put it as a lack of research in its foreign communication engagement campaigns. Research is key to successful public diplomacy. Unfortunately, most African MFAs and embassies departments responsible for public diplomacy outreach programmes have no research unit. Listening or research precedes any successful public diplomacy. Research in public diplomacy is "actor's attempt to manage the international environment by collecting and collating data about publics and their opinions overseas using that data to redirect its policy or its wide public diplomacy" (Cull, 2008a, p. 32). Contrary, African states have not responded to foreign opinions central to their public diplomacy. The lack of this vital aspect in public diplomacy has made African governments unable to connect research to public diplomacy policymaking. For any public diplomacy campaign or foreign communication by states to be meaningful, research must be conducted on the targeted foreign publics. Understanding one's audience is essential for effective and strategic communication. As Dayton and Kinsey (2015, p. 268) note, the only reliable way for strategic communicators to understand those they are trying to communicate with is through research. In this way, communication becomes a two-way concept leading to relationship building. This makes African states' foreign communications look primarily one-way. Unfortunately, one-way communication is generally ineffective for establishing positive and effective relationships. Thus, African governments' public diplomacy campaigns are still at the press agency

and public information models of two-way asymmetrical communication (Grunig et al., 2006).

Among the challenges impeding the proper functioning of African public diplomacy is the lack of human and financial resources. As I stated elsewhere in this study, public diplomacy is an expensive enterprise; therefore, countries aiming to conduct it must be prepared financially and in terms of personnel in order to have a fruitful public diplomacy campaign. For human resources, public diplomacy practitioners (usually public affairs or information officers) must be stationed, if not all, in most of the strategic diplomatic missions of African states. These practitioners should be well-trained and must be good at programme and personnel management, interpersonal and communication skills, as well as reporting and staying informed on various issues and topics (Rugh, 2014). Conversely, it is generally challenging to get data on how many staff is employed or trained by various African embassies to handle public diplomacy. Besides, there is no fixed rule of the number of staff employed to carry out effective public diplomacy campaigns. It all depends on the policy of the country conducting it. For example, as of January 2008, Ghana's Ministry of foreign affairs had 854 personnel, and 365 out of them were employed at the Headquarters (working at home at the Ministry in Accra), while only 214 of them were stationed at various Missions abroad (Brandful, 2013, p. 56). Brandful adds that there are over 275 vacancies needed to be filled. This scenario illustrates that the small and developing countries generally do not have much personnel to carry out public diplomacy programmes compared to the advanced states. For instance, in 2013, the US State Department had 1552 public diplomacy positions, constituting about 8.4 percent of the total number of (18,540) the country's diplomatic and consular positions (Rugh, 2014, p. 23). Consequently, the number of US public diplomacy staff in 2013 was more than Ghana's entire foreign service personnel.

In terms of finance, unfortunately, there is no data on individual African states' public diplomacy budgets. Thus it is difficult to know how much is or has been spent on public diplomacy, that is expenditure on press, social media, cultural activities and information, PR activities abroad, and others (this could be an area of further research). However, it can be inferred that since African foreign affairs ministries and embassies usually complain of a lack of funds or a massive reduction in their annual budgets, the consequences of this situation

also affect how these diplomatic missions carry out public diplomacy. To cite Ghana as an example, in 2015, 2016, and 2017, the Ministry of foreign affairs and its embassies were allocated a total budget of GHC271,324,510.00, GHC300,893,182.00, and GHC 398,676,632.00 (€39 million, €43 million and €58 million) respectively (MFARI Budget Report, MTEF PBB for 2018-2021, 2017). Also, from 2016 to 2018, it was allotted a total budget of 885 million Ghana cedi, about (€128 million) (ibid, MFARI Budget Report). These amounts were far below the financial needs of the Ministry. This barrier has contributed to the lack of established separate 'public diplomacy departments' in most African foreign ministries and embassies compared to the West and Asia MFAs. African public diplomacy funding and staffing could be increased by individual states depending on the foreign policy vision of the government. However, foreign public perceptions on African issues are always crucial because they can affect the behaviour and attitude of foreign governments toward individual African states or the entire continent. Therefore, public diplomacy will likely remain a significant character of African diplomacy if African governments could boost its funding and staffing. Nevertheless, countries like South Africa, Egypt, and Ethiopia are generally doing well concerning public diplomacy campaigns despite the above-stated challenges. Other African states could learn from these countries to enhance their foreign public engagement activities in the future.

## Conclusion

This study articulates that African states' foreign communications with their targeted audiences for nation-building are still at the 'traditional public diplomacy' level. The state becomes the key actor providing government-to-government overseas communications at this level. However, these African states' public diplomacy efforts should move to what scholars term 'new public diplomacy' (Melissen, 2005; Pamment, 2012), which focuses on building relationships in foreign communications and including non-state actors. Public diplomacy has evolved from the 'old or traditional' to the 'new or modern' form embracing more actors and networking with foreign stakeholders.

Since the post-colonial era, African countries have practiced public diplomacy with their own peculiar characteristics. African public diplomacy

has evolved slightly over the years. Although public diplomacy towards Africa by the advanced countries has made the continent become a 'dumping ground' for various western and Asian public diplomacy strategies, I believe the two – African public diplomacy and public diplomacy towards Africa can work hand in hand as the two makes a potential source for academics and practitioners to explore the relationships

As an initial trajectory of the African public diplomacy discourse, this article lays the foundation for scholars to build on for further public diplomacy research from an African perspective. The study presents a general overview of how African states attempt to communicate and engage foreign publics for economic development through tourism, investment, trade, and foreign aid attraction campaigns. In addition, the analysis in this introductory work of African public diplomacy demonstrates that African states practise public diplomacy based on individual states' foreign policy goals. It is worth highlighting discrepancies in how public diplomacy is conducted even in developed countries. Hence, public diplomacy practices vary based on the foreign policy ideology and approach the conducting state adopts. Therefore, African public diplomacy also varies among African countries because of the different strategies applied by individual states. Through their MFAs and diplomatic missions, these states adopt public diplomacy tools such as diaspora, nation branding, international PR consultancy firms, culture, advocacy, media relations, and many others. Although African public diplomacy faces some challenges, it has the potential to grow, as the analysis of this study depicts. Public diplomacy education and literature have been growing since 2000 in the continent. Some African universities, e.g., in Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda, offer graduate and postgraduate research courses relating to public diplomacy, with research theses on public diplomacy growing. Indeed, African countries practice public diplomacy; however, scholars have underexplored this aspect of the foreign public engagement narratives. In line with the above, this article challenges public diplomacy and international relations scholars to balance the field's scholarship narratives by exploring the rich African public diplomacy currencies. There is still a huge gap between African public diplomacy literature and the western and Asian public diplomacy literature.

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