AFRICAN DIPLOMACY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The concept of African diplomacy portrays a distinct style of diplomacy which is current. This is due to the fact that the majority of African states attained their independence over the past five decades. Africa is the second largest continent in the world, it has an array of states and consists of fifty-four (54) countries. The level of political maturity in the continent also covers a wide range as this is defined in terms of when independence was attained and period of existence. Furthermore, the economic conditions in the continent indicate a distinct divide between the poorest of the poor to the middle powers in terms of Gross National Product (GNP) per capita income, another indicator of this level of political maturity is the level of industrialisation and lastly the continent is significantly culturally diverse. Moreover, African states remain cognisant of the pluralities that characterise the continent. Notably, slavery and colonialism have immeasurably affected every fabric of African life (Akinyemi 1982). The practice of diplomacy has been utilised by African states to carry out their foreign policies over the years. It is, however, apparent that in the practice of diplomacy in Africa there are limited successes by states and regional organisations in achieving their foreign policy objectives (Akokpari 2016). It is important to note that the failures in African diplomacy are not only attributed to external actors alone but also visible in intra-African diplomacy. Diplomacy in Africa has experienced some of its failures due to a convergence of factors such as: the quality of diplomacy and mediators; the ubiquity of conflicts; the continent's lack of international influence; Africa's dependence on external actors and; subsequent lack of assertiveness and the inability to stand up to errant leaders within the region whose actions threaten good governance and regional security (Akokpari 2016). Akokpari (2016) indicates that diplomatic skills in Africa are usually tested during periods of conflicts and threats to regional security. Of which in some instances diplomacy is ineffective in attaining the desired outcomes. The danger of this trajectory is that conflicts continue unresolved and threats to governance continue. This article will examine the historical background of African diplomacy by analysing pre-colonial African diplomacy, the impact of colonisation and foreign influence on the continent. Thereafter, the article will investigate the dynamics of post-colonial African diplomacy which led to the emergence of Pan-Africanism and Multilateral Diplomacy and the development of African Diplomacy and diplomatic practice as a whole. This article will then explore the successes and failures of diplomacy in Africa and the justifications of those failures. Lastly, the article will examine the effects of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) revolution on African Diplomacy.

Keywords: African Diplomacy, Multilateral Diplomacy, Information and Communications Technology, Issues, Challenges,

INTRODUCTION

DIPLOMACY DEFINED

According to Akokpari (2016) diplomacy is utilised with the goal of achieving specific objectives and it is often explained in relation to foreign policy. Of which foreign policy portrays interactions beyond the state, diplomacy can apply in both international and domestic environments. The author argues that

diplomacy and foreign policy are usually amalgamated due to the fact that both terms describe the interaction between actors in the international system. In the context of Africa, diplomacy could incorporate interaction between the state and actors within and outside its borders. Diplomacy takes different forms such as negotiations, bargaining and various non-coercive approaches (pure diplomacy) aimed at resolving conflicts. On the other hand, mixed diplomacy is characterized as combining coercive and non-coercive methods. Diplomacy is conducted through bilateral or multilateral means, secret or open and negotiators can opt for either round table or shuttle diplomacy based on the conditions under which negotiations are conducted (Akokpari 2016).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DIPLOMACY IN AFRICA

In order to acknowledge the founding and leading themes in African diplomacy it remains necessary to have an understanding of the historical perspective. In that regard, African diplomacy revolves around the following: the pursuit for justice and equality in international relations; the overriding imperative of development and peace for the continent and; the inclination towards diplomacy which is encapsulated in African solidarity, unity, and integration. It is noteworthy that the rhetoric that informs African diplomacy is its history of marginalization and the continent's relations with the rest of the world which suggests continental vulnerability (Spies 2018). On the other hand, contemporary African diplomacy is not only characterised by negative encounters, but it also encompasses Africa's traditional values and the respect for cultural tradition and authority, preference for collective well thought off decisions and an emphasis on the prioritisation of the community instead of individuals. This is envisaged and expressed through concepts which promote societal selflessness such as Ubuntu (a Nguni word for being human) and Harambee (a Swahili word that means pulling together (Spies 2018).

Pre-colonial African Diplomacy

The origin of African diplomacy is not easy to trace with most research on the subject matter being fixated on the practice of diplomacy itself. The African continent is wellknown as the "cradle of humanity" as it was home to the earliest human settlers and language as a means of communication was established. Spies (2018) alludes that the earliest records of diplomacy are inscribed clay tablets which date back to antiquity. Of which, the cuneiform writing that appeared on the tablets provides details of Egypt's relations with its neighbours that manifested in trade agreements, political alliances, and peaceful resolution to conflict.

Furthermore, early pro states in central and southern Africa included chieftaincies with limited or no centralised bureaucracy. Subsequently, some of these pro states as in the rest of Africa transformed into modern empires which grew through conquest, migration, trade alliances and integration to other states. Natural resources such as gold in the Southern African Kingdoms of Mapungubwe in the eleventh and thirteenth century and Zimbabwe in the twelfth and fifteenth attracted traders from parts of Africa and beyond the continent. Notably, intracontinental diplomacy was as vital as Africa's growing relations with explorers, missionaries and traders from Europe and Asia. However, rivalry and conflict shaped the structure of intracontinental relations (Spies 2018). It is important to note that, precolonial Africa was not as chaotic, backward and a "dark continent" as depicted by early colonial historians. Instead, it was home to advanced political organisation ranging from empires and kingdoms to city states and chieftaincies. The diplomacy that existed among these centrally organised political entities produced a rich tapestry of relations which was facilitated by abundant trade and the existence of customary law (Spies 2018).

Colonisation and Foreign Influence in Africa

During the course of human history foreign individuals and groups including traders and explorers were in contact with Africa. One of

the first foreign occupations in the African region occurred during the maritime exploration of the Phoenician city states in 1500 BCE-539CE which created various colonies in North Africa. Of significance is modern day Tunisia formerly known as Carthage which was invaded by Greece before it was razed by the Roman Empire in 146 BCE. This resulted in one of the longest diplomatic spats in the world to end the colonisation, which involved mayors of the cities of Carthage and Rome to conclude a symbolic treaty to end the two millennia old conflict. Of which, this was followed by the spread of the Muslim culture into North and East Africa from the seventh century. By the thirteenth century in a more politically organised strategy the continent was penetrated by the Ottoman Empire. Resultantly, the Islamic cultural and diplomatic traditions were imprinted on the growing societies of the Sahara and Sahel. The collective religion and jurisprudence of the region aided the exchange of embassies within North Africa and the Arab world, a diplomatic brotherhood that has continued in contemporary times (Spies 2018).

Significantly, Europe left the most permanent and profound impact on Africa's diplomacy. European mercantilism backed by superior rule shifted the customary norms of international behaviour. This resulted in Africa being partitioned by the colonial powers and this was formalised at the Berlin Conference in 1884-1885, a process that was dubbed the "Scramble for Africa". The established indiscriminate boundaries triggered destruction that led to the social and political cohesion of African societies. Of which intra-African diplomacy ceased to exist. This was because interstate relations of the continent became an extension of diplomacy among European powers (Spies 2018).

Notably, colonisation in Africa lasted longer than anywhere else in the world. Consequently, its diplomatic stamp continued after the colonies became nominally sovereign. In an attempt to forestall the continental chaos caused by colonialism, colonial era boundaries were ratified by the Organisation of African Union (OAU) in 1964. This, however, led to the emergence of territorial conflicts. The Horn of Africa even after the colonial era has failed to attain full peace (Spies 2018).

Countries such as France, Britain, Belgium, and Portugal left the most significant diplomatic legacy in Africa. These countries were not only European colonists their rule lasted until the post-World War II period due to the peculiar history of the twentieth century. However, after the war, global momentum for decolonisation increased and the liberation of subjugated regions grew. In the second half of the twentieth century decolonisation driven by the birth of dozens of African states triggered the only ever reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In 1965, due to pressure from a growing General Assembly, the council's number of elected non-permanent members increased from six to ten (Spies 2018).

Effects of Colonisation and Foreign Influence in Africa

Consequently, deep-rooted interests of European powers in their former colonies such as investments, military bases, and large expatriate communities, has ensured that relations of patronage continue to define diplomacy. The cultural divisions reminiscent of the colonial partitioning have been reinforced by the political culture in which African civil servants were trained during pre-independence (Spies 2018). Of which, these cultural divisions have been institutionalised through bureaucracy inherited from colonial masters. In the same vein, the training of African political elites at prestigious European institutions by colonisers has continued in the post-colonial era and has propagated colonial tutelage. African diplomats still receive training in the capitals of former colonial powers which has been made almost unavoidable by the absence of diplomatic training centres in Sub-Saharan Africa. In essence such training is valuable, but also has implications due to the fact that diplomats are meant to represent the essence and interests of their sending states. However, participation in a foreign training program can make them identify with the

objectives of the donor state as well (Spies 2018:4).

On the other hand, political schisms along European linguistic lines remain visible in Africa especially between the Francophone and Anglophone states, Africa's two largest official language groupings. This reveals how colonial powers have also continued to play a prominent role in the political affairs of African states. Britain for example, which was Zimbabwe's former coloniser, took a leading role during Zimbabwe's aftermath of its land reform programme between 2000-2008 and advocated for the diplomatic isolation of former President Robert Mugabe and his administration. At the same time Britain was investing in its other former colonies such as Ghana and Botswana which showed good governance credentials. Another example is France which has continued to showcase its military presence and availed itself to lead UNSC sanctioned interventions in former French colonies such as Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, and the Central African Republic (CAR). In the Great Lakes region, Belgium has devoted special diplomatic resources such as establishing an additional Belgian ambassadorial position named the Special Envoy to the Great Lakes region, aimed at dealing with conflict resolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Spies 2018).

In addition, it is important to note that during the Cold War period Africa was used as a proxy battleground by superpowers and their allies. In that regard, with the world divided along ideological lines, Africa has become a hub for ideological manoeuvring motivated by the continent's abundance of natural resources and facilitated by vulnerable leaders in the continent and unstable new states (Spies 2018).

Post-Colonial African Diplomacy

In the postcolonial era, African states who had limited foreign policy experience, infrastructure and bureaucratic understanding, and inadequate human resources ventured into the diplomatic world at a disadvantage. The continent's first crop of diplomats represented states operating for the first time with a certain international identity. Some of the new political entities were forced mergers of splintered ethnic groups and historic rivals which meant that political elites and diplomats appointed often had more in common with other elites in neighbouring states if they shared the same ethnicity or historical kinship than they did with their own citizenry (Spies 2018). Rwanda and Burundi have the Hutu and Tutsi people, of which their diplomats in their postcolonial states transcended and still do their primary transnational ethnic affiliation. This is done to represent their states that came into existence as arbitrarily demarcated political units.

On the other hand, some first-generation African leaders in the postcolonial era tended to be dictatorial to ensure control over an entire sovereign territory. Of which, this was reinforced by a history of armed liberation struggle whereby when they assumed political leadership their military kin were frequently on the receiving end of political and diplomatic patronage (Spies 2018). Significantly, militarised governments did not interact well with the conduct of international diplomacy which generally entails restraint, tact and compromise attributes and is not usually associated with the military. Another factor is that authoritarian states which are weak, were characterised by power being usually vested in individuals instead of public institutions. In such scenarios, the development of professional diplomatic culture and infrastructure is neglected. Diplomatic positions when created in such instances tend to reflect nepotism and cronyism instead of professional and apolitical service to the state (Spies 2018).

Since the end of the Cold War, democratisation in Africa intensified and moves were made to professionalise the civil service. African governments that faced socioeconomic challenges were unlikely to channel scarce resources into capacity building within the foreign service. In the present day, African states have struggled with reaching levels of diplomatic representation that would allow them to participate fairly in global forums. This is premised on the fact that diplomacy is expensive and the upkeep of a large number of

resident missions is not an option for African states. Most African states have limited resources to sufficiently staff missions which results in staff managing the full continuum of a given embassy's geographic and functional responsibilities. Instead, governments then prioritise multilateral diplomatic missions to maximise diplomatic opportunities. In the contemporary world, African states still struggle to attend the wide range of concurrent committees and conventions that depict the modern diplomatic environment (Spies 2018).

The Emergence of Pan-Africanism and Multilateral Diplomacy

African states developed an incentive for the continent's international relations to be expressed collectively. This resulted in the fostering of multilateralism, a modern mode of diplomacy recognised for multi-stakeholder involvement and transparent processes (Spies 2018). African multilateral diplomacy was developed because of the continent's desire for liberation from foreign subjugation, of which the African diaspora also got involved. The term Pan African was then developed by Henry Sylvester Williams and has become a recurrent theme in African diplomacy. This led to the establishment of an African Association aimed at promoting the rights of people of African descent.

Ghana was the first sub–Saharan African state to gain independence under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, a Pan Africanist. Nkrumah led a group of African leaders (Casablanca Group), the leaders pushed for decolonisation to be followed by integration of the continent and advocated for a Union of African States (United States of Africa). The aim was for Africa to have one voice and advocate to counter marginalisation. The Monrovia Group which was more moderate advocated for close cooperation instead of integration among the newly independent African states. The OAU was founded in 1973 its successor from 2000 was the African Union (AU), which has become the hub of African multilateral diplomacy. In spite of the fact that African diplomacy was initially driven by Pan Africanism, Africa's quest for integration has resulted in the emergence of smaller integration projects (Spies 2018).

The Development of African Diplomacy

Since African states gained independence, they have been advocating to be treated as equals in a world they had experienced suppression. In that regard, African diplomacy has transformed the demographics of international relations and impacted the nature of the global diplomatic agenda. After African states attained sovereignty, it was now essential for them to develop socioeconomically in order to break the cycle of unequal relations with the rest of the world (Spies 2018). This inspired the notion of development in the diplomacy of African states portrayed through a new style of diplomacy that was more confrontational rather than conciliatory. Africa's diplomatic impetus also pushed for a revamp of the world economic order. The aim was to eliminate exploitative trade and financial relations and to ensure that development was a reality for everyone in the world. As a result of consistent lobbying the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank announced a debt cancelling initiative for the most Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) of the world (Spies 2018).

In essence, Africa's collective diplomacy has proved to be successful with regards to issues of development. The recognition of Africa's collective diplomatic identity has become an established movement and rising powers and organisations now tend to engage Africa as a diplomatic unit. This acknowledgement of Africa can be revealed through African summits hosted by external actors of which some have become institutionalised. These include the Japanese Tokyo International Conference (TICAD), the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the United States-Africa Leaders Summit amongst others (Spies 2018).

MODERN DAY DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE IN AFRICA

Conflict Resolution

The ultimate litmus test to the effectiveness of diplomacy in Africa are conflicts which are common in the continent (Akokpari 2016). The continent commonly utilises mediators from regional bodies such as the African Union (AU). The AU has been a principal mediator in the majority of the conflicts in the Central African and the Great Lakes region. South Africa, a regional leader in southern Africa, has played a mediatory role on behalf of the AU, in several conflicts in Burundi, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho and the Central African Republic (CAR). In Burundi 2003, South Africa helped in brokering peace between the opposing factions and assisted in the conduct of post conflict elections (Akokpari 2016).

In terms of military intervention, this is emerging as a common alternative to resolving disputes in Africa. In essence, military intervention is applied to either end conflict (peace enforcement) or where a ceasefire has been achieved to keep peace (peacekeeping) (Akokpari 2016). Military intervention almost without exception is considered or used where pure diplomacy has failed. In the context of Africa, military intervention remained an exception and not the rule during much of the 1980. This is besides the Nigeria led OAU intervention in Chad. Notably, military intervention remained an exception due to the fact that the 1980s coincided with the height of the Cold War during which assisted by proxies the US and Russia fought Africa's wars overtly and sometimes covertly. In turn, this provided limited scope for OAU intervention. On the other hand, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states guided how the OAU conducted matters. In that regard, the Cold War period limited the use of military intervention as a tool of diplomacy (Akokpari 2016).

During the post-Cold War era military intervention gained momentum as a diplomatic tool in conflict management. The end of the Cold War reduced Africa's strategic importance to the West. Furthermore, western governments were no longer as interested in protecting afflicted African administrations that previously served their interests (Akokpari 2016). This is despite the fact that western countries remained interested in supporting Africa's peacekeeping and peace-making attempts with financial resources and logistics. In light of the West's retreat and evolution of the "African solutions to African problems" that was made popular by the UN 1992 Agenda for Peace. This left Africa with no choice but to adopt military intervention as a key tool of diplomacy in conflicts. Currently, in terms of conflict resolution the main notion of diplomacy is the use of military force. In the DRC and CAR where conflict had threatened to get out of hand, the key regional response after mediation had failed has been the military alternative (Akokpari 2016).

SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF DIPLOMACY IN AFRICA

Akokpari (2016) contends that an observable trend has been detected that has revealed the common failure of foreign policies in Africa to achieve desired objectives. Of significance is Africa's evident lack of diplomatic clout on the global stage which has made it malleable and prone to pressures from external actors (Akokpari 2016). Akokpari (2016) argues that the vital instruments needed for Africa to enhance its prospects of attaining diplomatic success are in short supply. The lack of essential instruments has been magnified by the proliferation of factors such as the ubiquity of the conflict, Africa's pliability and vulnerability in the international system and the dearth of aggressive leaders and diplomatic mechanisms (Akokpari 2016). Of which these significant deficits result in short-lived diplomatic outcomes. Moreover, the AU's diplomatic accomplishments have seen limited achievements in various major regional and international issues which has resulted in it conforming to the directives of external actors.

The significant limitations to diplomacy in Africa include conflicts in the Ivory Coast in 2010 and Libya in 2011, the shortcomings of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the AU to influence diplomatic power were revealed. Resultantly, to resolve the conflicts the contribution of France and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was required. Currently, ECOWAS and the government of Nigeria are struggling to diminish the insurgency of Boko Haram.

On a positive note, the effectiveness of the continent's diplomacy is largely seen in conflict situations, where states and regional blocs are expected to contain, cease, and control disputes (Akokpari 2016). Notable diplomatic successes in Africa include the successful termination of the Liberian and Sierra Leone conflicts of which diplomacy had in the past failed to mitigate threats to security. In Zimbabwe during its 2008 period of instability, peace was established by mediators from the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE "FAILURE" OF DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE IN AFRICA

Significantly, the use of military force as a tool for diplomacy has been successful in ending conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast and Burundi. Military force has however failed to restore peace and security in other conflict areas within Africa. The Libyan conflict was not successfully resolved by the AU, Somalia has not experienced peace for over two decades and conflicts have continued to cause insecurity in the Eastern DRC and Northern Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram (Akokpari 2016). The African region remains affected by these persistent conflicts which have compromised the credibility of its diplomacy. Africa remains determined to resolve its conflicts, however, diplomatic resources of regional organisations such as the AU are not sufficient. The AU has faced challenges in dispatching peacekeepers in areas of conflict timeously.

The main cause of diplomatic failures is attributed to the absence of effective mechanisms that are in place. This is premised on the fact that although military interventions remain a prevalent diplomatic instrument, peace-making and peacekeeping efforts are limited due to low financing, poor training and being ill equipped (Akokpari 2016). In the instances whereby mediation is utilised as a tool for diplomacy, negotiators are usually unskilled and lack the adequate negotiating skills and tend to be inexperienced about the background of conflict. The AU tends to make use of former Heads of States as mediators which has had its fair share of challenges and successes. Former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, served as the AU mediator in various conflicts. Notably, he served as a chief mediator in Zimbabwe between the ruling party and the opposition where he engineered a Government of National Unity (GNU). Mbeki's GNU approach was deemed as a success, however, Akokpari (2016) argues that he utilised shortcut approaches to conflict resolution, which was highlighted by the willingness to commiserate or protect errant leaders in the name of African solidarity.

Another major factor is Africa's lack of political and economic influence in the global system which has continued to portray the continent as vulnerable. This has hindered diplomatic options when dealing with actors within and external to the continent. On the other hand, Africa's inability to criticise liable leaders and peers has also limited diplomatic efforts. This is evidenced by regional organisations such as the AU who have not reached the level where they can castigate African leaders who threaten the security of their citizens or pursue policies that can generate conflict (Akokpari 2016).

The continent's lack of influence is also evident in its interactions with external actors which is ensued by having weak bargaining power with external actors. This in turn makes Africa vulnerable and exacerbates its dependence on external actors for markets, aid, and investments. The majority of Africa's trade is with the EU. On the other hand, Africa's production structure has not seen significant

diversification since independence besides few oil producing countries (Akokpari 2016). The majority of African economies portray the trappings of the colonial economy that places emphasis on extractive resources and not value addition. Consequently, Africa is forced to look for markets beyond its continent.

Africa depends largely on external actors for Official Development Assistance (ODA) to supplement its budget. This comes in the form of external bilateral and multilateral aid for credit to finance development programmes and foreign assistance for major capital investments such as road railways, mining and for infrastructural development (Akokpari 2016). The AU relies on the EU, China, and the US for financial support to enhance its budget. The continent also relies on external actors for information and technological knowledge, since science is a driving force of growth and development in industrialised countries, a gap that needs to be filled in Africa. This dependency on external actors inevitably diminishes Africa's diplomatic weight in bargaining and negotiations on the international stage (Akokpari 2016).

With the above being said, these factors have resulted in a number of peace agreements in Africa failing to lay the foundations for sustainable peace. This is despite the fact that according to the United Nations (UN) Peace Agreements Database, 42% of all peace agreements relate to Africa (Adetula et al. 2018). The recurrent landscape of conflicts in Africa due to weak political institutions and structures has also played a major role. It is important to note that peace negotiations might fail if the parties involved feel that they were pressured into accepting an outcome. On the other hand, agreements usually disintegrate if the parties involved do not implement the agreement in good faith (Adetula et al. 2018). This is evidenced by the current crisis with regards to the agreement that was signed in 2015 that aims to end the South Sudanese civil war. A fragile peace agreement was reached between two opposing ethnic groups, the agreement was facilitated by the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD). The peace agreement was

unsuccessful as the two rival groups resorted to conflict again. The non-acceptance and noncompliance with peace accords results in the emergence of political instability and societal tension as evidenced in South Sudan. Similar scenarios are also found in Mali, the Central African Republic, Burundi, Zimbabwe, and Kenya (Adetula et al. 2018).

Notwithstanding, the regional grouping of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a crucial role in the post-election instability and the attempted coup in the Gambia in 2017. The ECOWAS successful negotiation warranted the appointment of democratically elected President Adama Barrow and the exit of former President Yahya Jammeh. In essence, ECOWAS prevented a potential crisis without resorting to conflict. ECOWAS peacebuilding capacities proved efficient in this case (Adetula et al. 2018).

Notably, a number of peace agreements in Africa have brought about temporary peace but have failed to tackle structural violence that continues to occur in communities. This fosters disgruntlement and the emergence of future conflicts. Significantly, there is need for a paradigm shift in the comprehension of peace and conflict (Adetula et al. 2018). This entails that instead of the absence of conflict, peace should be understood as a combination of factors such as economic opportunity, access to justice, good governance, and the degree of gender equality. Furthermore, conflicts should be viewed as a result of the systemic oppression intrinsic in society's cultural, economic, and political structures. With this being said, this will assist mediators and facilitators of peace agreements to address the socio-economic drivers of conflict, namely, gender inequality, unequal distribution of resources and corruption (Adetula et al. 2018). On the other hand, the inclusion of civil society organisations in peace talks could increase the legitimacy of the negotiations and enhance public buy in. Subsequently, if citizens believe that their interests have been exemplified well, they are likely to feel a sense of responsibility to maintain peace (Adetula et al. 2018).

EFFECTS OF THE ICT REVOLUTION ON AFRICAN DIPLOMACY

The introduction of the Internet and social media has revolutionised almost all human industries such as business sectors, education, government structures which have all migrated to the internet (Endong 2020). This development has given rise to a variety of digital cultures such as e-commerce, e-government, e-banking, online education, and hashtag activism. Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic has inadvertently magnified the apparent Internet mania, by convincing humankind that shifting to digital is essential. The pandemic justified already established internet-based paradigms such as online education, e-marketing, e-government, and other digital cultures. Diplomacy has not been unscathed by the transition to digitization and data-based solutions to human problems. Of which, digital diplomacy has brought about a sense of newness to the field of diplomacy, which has affected the core functions of diplomacy such as negotiation, representation, and communication (Endong 2020).

Endong (2020) argues that digital diplomacy is a global phenomenon, however, the dominant Euro-centric character in most available literature tends to suggest that the concept of African digital diplomacy is more of a myth than reality. The author argues that African digital diplomacy scholars have addressed issues related to the diplomatic revolution subtly and in general terms and toned-down African experiences. The literature available also suggests that Africa is trailing behind the rest of the world with regards to the Internet and social media penetration. It is important to note that, African governments have however embraced digital diplomacy since the mid-2000s. Digital diplomacy has become an accepted idea in the African continent and the concept is not new to governments, diplomats, and diplomacy scholars within the continent. According to Endong (2020), evidence suggests that the first order digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world is narrowing significantly. This suggests that although the continent still lingers behind western countries in terms of internet

penetration, computer infrastructure and internet accessibility. African governments, however, appear to be as equally committed to engagement as their western counterparts. Digital diplomacy in Africa, however, is still yet to catch on and become vibrant in the realm.

Some African leaders are active on social media, however, still a significant number of African leaders are not active on social media as some are even paranoid with regards to sophisticated forms of digital diplomacy. The COVID-19 pandemic has altered this with African countries who were usually phobic to the use of social media rendering it one of their public diplomacy objectives. In light of this, African leaders, diplomats, and other government officials have had to integrate digital tools to their modus operandi due to social distancing engendered by the pandemic (Endong 2020).

In spite of Africa's progress in embracing digital diplomacy the continent continues to be faced with principal challenges such as poor policy formulation, low internet penetration and rural-urban digital divide and digital illiteracy among the population and also within the governance structures and low democratic culture (Endong 2020). In essence, the future of African diplomacy is not as desolate as suggested by Afro pessimist analysts. Even though Africa still has low levels of internet and social media penetration, poor digital diplomacy policies and second level digital divide between African diplomats and their western counterparts. African governments and diplomats have seen the need to welcome the more sophisticated forms of digital diplomacy (Endong 2020). This has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with acceleration of the smart society concept that has plunged African states into the world of digital diplomacy. In hindsight, educating diplomats and government officials in digital diplomacy could be essential to ensure that current and future diplomats are acquainted with the field of diplomacy both its traditional, modern, and digital forms (Endong 2020).

Furthermore, there is also need for more research to be conducted in digital diplomacy and diplomacy as a whole and bring in the African perspective and do away with the westernized view of African diplomacy (Endong 2020). This would go a long way in raising awareness as the area is still less explored. In addition, African countries should invest in research so that African governments can see external entities, experts, and scholars as relevant sources of expertise from which they can utilise to develop innovative foreign policies.

CONCLUSION

This article provided an overview of Africa's diplomatic landscape from its pre-independence era to its post-independence era and the present-day. In that regard, it is apparent that Africa's diplomacy has been influenced by a number of factors. Although Africa's diplomacy has evolved over the years the basic aspects of the challenges in African diplomacy remain evident. This is illustrated by a wide range of factors such as the effects of colonialism and foreign influence, uniquity of conflicts that drain African diplomatic resources and the continent's limited influence in the international system which emanates from its reliance on the international system. With these factors combined this demonstrates how Africa has to a certain extent been debilitated in its ability to negotiate with both domestic and international actors with limited to non-diplomatic weight (Akokpari (2016).

However, that in spite of the factors that have handicapped the African continent. The continent should strive to further strengthen intracontinental diplomacy more as a first step, through the emphasis of Pan Africanism. The establishment of this core foundation of diplomacy is vital as a stepping-stone to then further strengthening the continent's diplomacy with external actors. On the other hand, the African region should untangle itself from the shackles of colonialism and utilise its intra-regional arrangements more to boost its economic developmental prospects which will

increase its weight on the global platform. With this being said, Africa is making headway in its diplomatic practice efforts, however, there is room for more to be done.

On another note, in doing this research we observed that there is limited literature with regards to African diplomacy. Of which, there is need for the continent to invest in its research sectors so as to ensure that more literature is published which could help in raising more awareness about African diplomatic practice. This could in turn facilitate the continent in receiving more acknowledgement on the international scene.

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