

## CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AN ASSET FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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DOI:[10.13140/RG.2.2.11572.94089](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.11572.94089)

### **Abstract**

*Cultural diplomacy is a term, which seems to be quite new in the committee of Nations. This term has been used increasingly often by political scientists, communications experts as well as politicians, yet it still remains an area, which is relatively known. The concept of cultural diplomacy goes with the idea of 'branding' or to put it simply brand management of a country. It may be assumed that the basic principles in building the brand of a country are the same as in the commercial sphere of identity building. It is of note that art and culture are in the forefront of many countries' promotional efforts and should be same for developing countries. These countries should recognize that showing their cultural heritage provides them with an opportunity of showing who they are, creating a positive image and thus helping to achieve their political aim in the international relations. With the method of analysis, this paper aims to explore how cultural diplomacy can be a great asset for the developing countries, especially in Africa. Cultural diplomacy, we have to note, has two primary dimensions. First, it emphasizes the role of culture in relations with other countries' benchmarked through soft power, and secondly it encourages national competitiveness in the global creative economy.*

**Keywords:** Cultural diplomacy, cultural relations, branding, public diplomacy, soft power, developing countries.

### **Introduction**

Over the past centuries, governments have increasingly paid attention to the practice of Cultural Diplomacy. Cummings, (2003) is of the opinion that diplomacy has merited more recognition of recent, through the emergence of cultural dimensions of international relations and development discourses. It is

commonly defined as the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding. Due to the growing importance of cultural dimensions in analyzing the ever-increasing complexity of international affairs, Cultural diplomacy emphasizes the influence that transnational flows have on shaping national identities and foreign perceptions. Its vast ranging areas include cultural relations, cultural co-operation, and public diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy is not just a simple foreign policy tool, but a multi-dimensional process of international cultural politics underpinned by varying national objectives and socio-political contexts. It is a long-term process involving a range of policies, initiatives, and activities for the purpose of advancing national interests. As such, the specific means of strategic implementation differs across countries. This is achieved through the strategic channeling of cultural and media flow composed of texts created within the cultural industries. Specifically, it involves government actors that engage in international cultural politics through utilizing instruments of cultural policy. Cultural diplomacy in the view of Hyungseok, (2013) concerns itself with three major areas of national interests and policy approaches, and these include: cultural identity (social), soft power (political), and the creative economy (economic).

In the thought of Erik, (2014) the idea of Cultural diplomacy, remains a set of activities, undertaken directly or in collaboration with diplomatic authorities of a state, which are aimed at the promotion of foreign policy interests of the state in the realm of cultural policy, primarily by fostering its cultural exchange with other foreign states. In practice, cultural diplomacy can be said to include the following main activities: assisting cultural subjects in the dissemination of national culture and cultural identity, promoting dissemination of the national language of the sending state in the receiving state, promoting and explaining cultural values of the sending state in the receiving state, negotiating international treaties on cultural cooperation and, finally, supporting and keeping up contacts with expatriate communities in the receiving state. However, the structure, as well as the overall intensity of the cultural-diplomatic activities may vary depending on the state and its foreign policy priorities and ambitions. In this paper, we shall engage in exploring the various aspects and understanding of cultural diplomacy with the major aim of establishing how this cultural diplomacy can stand as a great asset for developing countries especially in Africa.

### **Understanding the Concept of Culture and the Identity It Creates**

It is worth reflecting on the concept of culture, as this will make it easier to analyze the concept of cultural diplomacy. Culture and its presentation is very important in the positive creation of a country's image. Czarnowski, (2009) understands culture as the shared heritage, the fruit of the creative and processed effort of countless generations. It is also seen as the body of the objective elements of the communal assets and capable of being disseminated.

Kieldanowicz, (2009) brings out the idea of culture that links the nominal and historical aspects of culture and makes two major differentiations in understanding the meaning of culture. In the strict sense, culture is a value in itself, and has to do with the traditional forms such as painting, literature, music, sculpture, theatre, film. In the wider sense, everything that is not nature is culture. Culture is the civilization created by man. In this sense man can be said to be a creator of culture. According to Klosowska, (1981) culture is seen as defined classes of objects, phenomena and processes or certain types of behaviour. In the philosophical sense culture is understood to be everything which does not grow of itself from nature but comes about from the conscious effort of man, being the effect of thought and human activity. Linton, (1952) on his part defines culture as a set of behaviours people have learned and the elements which are common for members of a certain society and communicated within it. In essence, we can say that, culture is not only the behaviour within a certain society but also the material achievements of members and results of joint undertakings.

Olins, (2004) states that countries communicate messages about their existence via political, cultural, popular, actions as well as products, services, sport, behaviors, architecture and art. Questions connected with culture constitute a significant, but also a controversial part in the promotion of countries image. As such, the governments of many countries do not perceive its value and often place emphasis on other communication channels. Anholt, (2007) notes that the promotion of culture must be treated seriously, since one cannot fully understand its role in the process of informing about the real spirit and essence of a country. In essence culture plays a great role in the process of enhancing the reputation of a country, as it directs the perception of a country by its recipients to areas that will enable a better understanding of it and its values. Having seen the meaning of culture and the identity it creates for a country, we then take a look at the idea of culture as soft power.

### **Culture as Soft Power**

Nye, (2002) is of the opinion that cultural diplomacy is the best example of the so-called soft power, which is taken to mean the possibility of communicating, via the conduit of culture, of values and ideas, which is in contrast to hard power that is based on the use military instrument. Soft power is the ability to achieve what is desired without resort to coercion or money. It is the result of the attractiveness of a given culture, political ideals and the substance of the policy of a given country. Soft power seen as one of the major areas of cultural diplomacy can be a substitute for traditional forms of power such as military measures, economic sanctions; as these days the preferred method of attaining one's aims and trust are peaceful ones. Melissen, (2005) maintains that soft power is very important in an era of global information and its lack can entail the loss of 'hard power' on the international stage. It has to be noted that no country's power will be potent by merely limiting itself to using the instruments of hard power such as its military and economy.

Bugajski, (2009) claims that, an interest in soft power is the result of a number of factors, such as an understanding of the limitations of hard power or combat power, a greater probability that other countries would like to join in such initiatives, as well as the relative success of certain non-military undertakings. On the other hand, Taylor, (2007) divides the key elements of 'soft power' into long-term ones which includes: cultural and educational exchanges, creation of mutual confidence and short-term ones that include: information disseminated via the media. We shall now trace and analyze the link that exists between public and cultural diplomacies.

### **Tracing the Link between Public Diplomacy and Cultural Diplomacy**

Diplomacy is defined by Cull, (2009) as an international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through mechanisms short of war, and engagement with another international actor. The process of globalization and emergence of the information age characterized by advancements of communication technologies have adjusted the power distribution structure. The engagement of plurality of social actors in conflict is said to have broadened the realm of diplomacy by including new actors, such as- corporations, NGOs, and the civil society. As a result, in the view of Nye, (2013) Public diplomacy, has gained greater significance in foreign policy agendas both as a concept and practice, along with a growing emphasis on soft power, as a staple of daily

democratic politics. In this context, governments of various countries began to utilize Public diplomacy as means to cultivate public opinion abroad, as well as furthering their aims and execution of foreign policies.

Public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are fundamentally compatible, as they are both concerned with management of the international environment and the power dynamics through engagement with a wide range of new social actors. Cultural diplomacy is distinguishable from Public diplomacy on the ground that its primary actors are government agents engaged in international cultural politics- that is the transnational flow of cultural texts. Arndt, (2006) posits that cultural diplomacy can only take place when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests.

Cull, (2006) states that the term public diplomacy was first coined by the former Dean of the Fletcher School, by name Edward Gullion, with regard to the influence of social standpoints in international relations that fall outside traditional diplomacy. This former Dean of the Fletcher School, Edward Gullion, felt that public diplomacy is concerned with the influence of social standpoints on the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. It covers aspects of international relations that fall outside traditional diplomacy such as influencing public opinion abroad, mutual impacting by private groups and pressure groups in one another's countries, reporting on events abroad and their impact on politics, communicating between those whose work, between diplomats and foreign correspondents and the process of inter-cultural communication.

Malone, (1988) considers public diplomacy to be the common term for public undertakings aimed at countries abroad, especially in the fields of information, education and culture. According to him the aim of public diplomacy is to influence citizens of other countries to achieve a positive attitude towards one's country. He opines that this form of communication constitutes two kinds of undertakings. The first is short-term one that consists of shaping opinion abroad that favors the policy of the government of the day. The second has to do with long-term ones that have their aim of familiarizing people abroad with the given country and its citizens.

Some analysts see public diplomacy in the context of inter-cultural communication. Ociepka, (2008) places public diplomacy in the context of image that has the aim of creating or reinforcing a positive image of a given entity on the international stage by influencing public opinion and fostering positive attitudes towards the entity; which in turn facilitates the achievement of its aims

in the field of foreign policy. Wang, (2006) on his part thinks that public diplomacy makes it possible for the reputation of the country to be shaped in a way which will determine its place on the international stage. This reputation, he posited is rooted in the public opinion and it also indicates whether the country has the mandate for its undertakings.

In the view of Van Ham, (2001) the world of geopolitics and power is being replaced by a post-modernist world of images and influence. Developing countries in Africa should note that traditional diplomacy is disappearing and the politics of creating an identity is becoming the main focus of activity for politicians and countries. Traditional diplomacy focuses on problems whereas public and cultural diplomacies are focused on values.

Gilboa, (2001) identifies three major variants or approaches of public diplomacy in relation to media. The first he called the basic variant. This refers to the use of the media in countries where the state has a bad image. The aim here is to communicate balanced information about the state. This approach assumes that the population who will be the recipient of such information will exert pressure on their government in order to change the policy towards the state that channels the information. This method was employed by the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

The next one is the non-state transnational variant. In this case the author reiterates that it is not only governments that can engage in diplomacy, but the non-state players can as well have impact on views and opinions that could later influence the decisions that governments have taken. The last approach or variant is the domestic public relations variant. This concerns the use of Public relation agencies and lobbyists by the state in order to conduct public diplomacy. Gilboa stresses that it is more effective than undertakings by the state, as local Public relation agencies know well how to achieve best in any given aim of a country.

Some analysts, like Kunczik, (2009) identify public diplomacy with the notion of public relations played out on an international stage. In each of these areas or approaches of public diplomacy, the creation of a good image of a particular country in an international context is of key importance. Stignitzer, (2009) however, is of the view that both public diplomacy and public relations developed autonomously with public relations springing from the science of communication, whereas public diplomacy from political science and international relations. Szondi, (2005) on his part, stresses that public diplomacy falls within the realm of the foreign policy of countries with international

cultural relations, national branding, tourism promotion and image management in the sphere of international public relations.

With regard to the notion of cultural diplomacy, it is worth noting that some researchers treat it as a part of public diplomacy. Stignitzer, (2009) mentions two functions fulfilled by public diplomacy to include political information and cultural communication. The aim of the first function is to reach target groups abroad by means such as the dissemination of information. Cultural communication, on the other hand, is implemented by the country's Ministry of culture and education departments, concerning areas such as the cinema or art.

Malone, (1988) is of the view that public diplomacy is composed of supporting policy with cultural messages. This policy gathering support for the country's foreign policy is echoed by the aim of cultural communication, namely helping foreign societies better understand a given country and to foster understanding between the citizens of the states in question. This is taken to be a long-term view, and should be separated from politics. Of course, both public and cultural diplomacies serve the national interest of a country; but cultural policy can make its contribution by creating a climate in which policy can be understood better.

Haigh, (2001) opines that the notion of cultural diplomacy has its roots in cultural relations and for him, cultural diplomacy has to do with undertakings taken by states in the sphere of international cultural relations. These cultural relations in the thoughts of Szondi, (2005) aim is to ensure understanding and cooperation between the societies in countries for mutual benefit. He is of the view that, cultural diplomacy has always been one of the pillars of foreign policy in many Central European countries. This cultural diplomacy he argues is strictly connected with a country's government and the achievement of its foreign policy objectives. It has its ultimate aim in familiarizing foreign recipients with the country, its inhabitants, culture, language, and to create a positive image of the country via its culture.

Taylor, (2007) views cultural diplomacy from the perspective of the media and opines that it is an invention of the French from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He makes us to understand that cultural diplomacy is government undertakings, which via the media communicate to other nation's information about themselves, in a supposedly non-political manner. The basic instruments of cultural diplomacy are language teaching, educational exchanges, exhibitions and presentations. But this activity remains a political activity, which serves the national interest under cover of culture, and it must be noted that governments of many countries spend a significant proportion of their budgets in promoting

their culture abroad. The underline aim that propels this promotion of a country's culture abroad will always boil down to the desire for stable progress in all aspects of the country's establishments.

Cultural diplomacy in the opinions of the authors of this paper can be seen as the promotion of a country through widely understood culture that has to with ideas, history, art, a system of values and tradition. It aims to foster mutual understanding between nations. The concepts of public and cultural diplomacy are intertwined with the concept of 'branding' or to put it simply brand management. It may be assumed that the basic principles in building the brand of a country are the same as in the commercial sphere of identity building. Both concepts are based on the task of creating a proposition or undertaking, usually based on emotion-based values that may be transformed into symbols that are clear and flexible and that should be effective to impact in many situations and many target groups.

It is becoming obvious that countries today compete with one another on the global market and just as is the case with products, one of the aims before them is to maintain their competitive advantage over other countries. The brand of a country is linked with its economy, exports, tourism and direct investments. All of these contribute to the promotion of a country. Looking at this process from the other perspective it may be said that a country that has a good brand promotes tourism, inflow of direct investments and export; it is on that ground that we assert that cultural diplomacy stands to be a great asset for the developing countries, mainly in Africa.

### **Cultural Diplomacy: an Asset for Developing Countries**

Cultural diplomacy may be conducted within three major spheres: in a particular country, abroad or utilizing media, that may reach within a country as well as abroad. All these three spheres should interact as it is not only a case of promoting a country's image to foreigners but also to its own citizens. As such cultural diplomacy should necessarily begin at home.

The relationship that have existed between culture and development in recent discussions, have significantly transformed the relationship between culture and government over the past few decades. Cultural dimension has been increasingly incorporated in social, political, and economic agendas of governments. This has resulted in institutional and policy approaches serving a diverse array of national interests in local, national, and international contexts. As such, culture is now widely adopted as a resource, (Yudice, 2000) capital, (Bourdieu, 1984) and power

(Nye, 2004); and we can expect the economy and the polity of the developing countries to be globalized, to the extent that they are culturalized. It is a truism that today cultural awareness of other peoples and nations is essential to international cooperation and successful commerce. Cultural diplomacy, we have to state, is operating within a wider context of globalization and growing cultural dimensions of national interests.

Cultural policies and programs are generally manifested in the notion of diverse activities encompassing the aesthetic expressions aimed at transforming the anthropological sense. From a governmental perspective, Singh, (2010) is of the view that cultural dimension pertains to the notion that power is either effecting or constraining particular outcomes or transforming or constituting the identity of the actors and the issues themselves. It has to be made clear that cultural policies and programs should aim at bringing out the aesthetic dimensions of the country and making such attractive to foreign countries.

A great number of competing messages transmitted through transnational flow of cultural industries has reinvigorated the importance of cultural diplomacy in particular as a form of international communication. For a country, the primary aim of modern cultural policy is creating economic value through the accumulation of cultural capital. The new economy is knowledge-based, and is acquired through institutions that are shaped by culture; as such we can say in line with Feigenbaum, (2001) that the cultural wealth of nations is the key to the new economy. Cultural wealth or accumulation of cultural capital remains the prime objective of cultural diplomacy. It pertains to governments informing and influencing foreign audiences to advance national interests with cultural power fostered through instruments of cultural policy.

Cultural policy, as a tool of cultural diplomacy has been approached through two ideological streams namely: *cultural rights and cultural diversity*. UN Declaration of Human Rights, (1948) states that everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, and to share in the scientific advancement and its benefits. This principle is manifested in domestic cultural policy through two major approaches: *cultural democracy (elitism)* and *democratization of culture (populism)*. These two major approaches address the ways in which national culture is defined and developed.

As such, the practice of cultural diplomacy is concerned with government's role in developing national culture, as well as communicative dissemination abroad amidst the existing cross-sectoral and transnational cultural flow. Cultural diplomacy pertains to the multi-purposive process of promoting the country's

culture through utilization of cultural policy instruments under the dual aspects of cultural and rights and diversity; both in terms of political representation and increased share in the global cultural market.

Isar, (2010) opines, that the true actors of cultural diplomacy are rather government agents and envoys joining nationalism and internationalism and engaging in what Raymond Williams calls the practice of 'cultural policy at display.' Based on the development of domestic cultural industries underpinned by politics of identity, cultural diplomacy relates to global competition through two paradigms: *soft power (political)* and *the creative economy (economic)*. Culture serves a communicative function of channeling cultural industries texts to foster desirable socio-cultural outcomes amongst foreign citizenry. The way in which culture is adopted in practice also differs from state to state. We shall now look at these two paradigms that cultural diplomacy employs in global competition.

### **Soft Power and the Creative Economy: Major Paradigms of Cultural Diplomacy**

The national competitiveness within the framework of international hierarchy of cultural prestige is implicated in two paradigms namely: soft power and the creative economy. These independent paradigms refer to socio-political and economic implications of cultural diplomacy. Castells, (2000) has it that, with the rise of 'the network society', issues that have traditionally been considered of domestic concern, has been given an international dimension, and vice versa. Various national policies now have international ramifications. The capacity of a nation to attain positive foreign support is measured through soft power. This concept of soft power has gained much attention in the recent decades and has gone through various reformulations.

Nye, (2009) defines power as the ability to affect others in order to obtain the outcomes you want, which can be achieved through three or more ways, such as: threats of coercion, inducements and payments; as well as attraction that make others want what you want. The varying understandings of state power have gradually been reduced to two categories such as 'hard' or 'soft'. The understanding of soft power, in the opinion of Nye, is primarily concerned with getting others to change their behaviors to your liking as result of attraction.

Cultural diplomacy is primarily associated with soft power. Nye explains culture as one of three sources of a nation's soft power. He identifies three sources of a nation's soft power as its culture, political values, and foreign policies that has an internationally consented credibility and moral authority. Snow, (2009) opines

that soft power is culture power. He suggests in pragmatic terms the three ways the advantage of soft power of a country is measured. These include: firstly, when culture and ideas match prevailing global norms; secondly, when a nation has greater access to multiple communication channels that can influence how issues are framed in global news media; and thirdly, when a country's credibility is enhanced by domestic and international behavior.

However, governments today emphasize the multilateral notion of cultural diplomacy underpinned by principles of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, with the aim of enhancing their credibility and effective advancement of foreign policy objectives by shaping the global norm of values and ideas through culture. Cultural diplomacy aims to foster soft power through legitimizing the foreign policy of a nation in conjunction with the global cultural norm. This is achieved by utilizing the transformative and constitutive power of culture to target foreign citizenry.

Villanueva, (2010) stresses that cultural diplomacy is a constitutive camp that can help attain universalistic and normative foreign policy objectives, like befriending other nations, the building of a sound communications channels with societies abroad, and the understanding and appreciation of culture different from ours. Although soft power primarily concerns the socio-political influence of public opinion and culture abroad through fostering positive national image and advancing foreign policy objectives, Anholt, (2010) states that, it has significant economic implication as well. Firstly, understanding the culture of other people and nations is essential not only for international cooperation, but also for successful commerce in increasingly global markets. Secondly, the text of cultural industries is partly dependent on national branding, which is fostered through soft power, and promoted through the process of cultural diplomacy.

The socio-political implications of culture are inter-related to the economic dimensions within the global creative economy. Developing countries of Africa should know that engagement in international cultural politics encompasses competition in the global market place of the creative economy. The instruments of cultural policy required for cultural diplomacy include development of domestic cultural industries. While cultural policy aims to develop cultural industries domestically and foster cultural identity, Cultural diplomacy concerns itself with the foreign audience development in the global cultural market.

## Conclusion

The culture is an important aspect of international relations because of globalization and advancements in communication technologies that now reconfigure the power dynamics between different social actors. Cultural diplomacy serves as an important aspect of successful bi-lateral and multi-lateral diplomacy and should be geared toward sound pragmatic implications.

Cultural diplomacy should not be viewed narrowly as a tool of foreign policy under the remit of public diplomacy, but rather as a multi-purposive process of international cultural politics, achieved through utilizing cultural policy instruments. It aims to singularly advance national interests through channeling the transnational flow of cultural industries. This encompasses the transformative and constitutive nature of culture in aesthetic and anthropological sense. When culture is viewed as a resource, capital, and power; then national cultural identity becomes a significant policy concern for various nations. Culture as such should be seen by developing countries, both as a commodity as well as means of social transformation.

The multi-dimensional process of cultural diplomacy is assessed through two paradigms of national agendas, that is- socio-political and economic. The first, which is the socio-political paradigm of national interest, is benchmarked by soft power. With this paradigm, Governments should aim to deploy the constitutive and transformative nature of culture by targeting foreign public. The second paradigm addresses the economic agenda. It pertains specifically to increasing market share in the global creative economy; as a branded culture remains an increasingly significant source of economic development.

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