

African Digital Diplomacy in the era of COVID-19: Virtual Introduction to Digital Diplomacy Seminars

24 June – 12 August 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept and practice of digital diplomacy, also referred to as virtual diplomacy, e-diplomacy, mobile diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, and networked diplomacy, was already becoming standard practice before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures implemented globally to contain the pandemic served to accelerate and enhance the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) across many spheres of society. Practices in the international affairs sphere, broadly, and the diplomatic field specifically were suddenly transformed, fast-tracking the uptake of digital diplomacy. If African foreign policy was attempting to embrace the digital turn in diplomacy, the new circumstances left little room for knowledge acquisition, policy and strategy development, skills and capability development and consideration of the potential dangers.

Although it is only a couple of weeks into the new circumstances, the fact that the era of digital diplomacy has arrived calls for education and training, in order to effectively meet the demands of multifaceted diplomatic duties and responsibilities. It is with this goal in mind that the virtual knowledge and skills development seminars have been put in place. The seminars seek to explain and shed light on the “digital” and “diplomacy” nexus during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The sessions are motivated by the fact that African nations have been forced into digital diplomacy in the face of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. This necessitates a deep learning curve.

The seminars will be delivered by a wide range of experts involved in digital diplomacy, including practitioners, scholars, and tech company executives. As the concept and practice of digital diplomacy is still new in Africa, the speakers will focus on two educative areas:

- a) a deep introduction and explanation of what digital diplomacy is, and,
- b) the skills to be deployed for effective operation in a digital diplomacy environment.

COVID-19 provides the context but the understanding and the practical skills will be useful beyond COVID-19 circumstances. Thus, the speakers will essentially serve as trainers offering knowledge on the topic, knowhow for practice, opportunities for implementation and solutions to challenges. The sessions are calibrated principally for professionals, but also for scholars working within the African foreign policy, international relations and diplomacy arenas.

2. OBJECTIVES

The seminars are aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- An introduction to the foundational concepts, theories and methods of digital diplomacy
- Insights into emerging digital practices in the wake of COVID-19 and the innovative approaches that African diplomats can tap
- An introduction to some of the practical digital skill sets that African diplomats need to acquire and use for effective diplomatic and foreign policy work

3. PARTICIPANTS

The sessions are open to participation by the following:

- Foreign service officers from African ministries of foreign affairs and diplomatic missions
- The staff of multilateral organisations such as United Nations (UN) agencies, the African Union (AU) and regional economic communities (RECs)
- Professionals from international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international agencies involved in African diplomacy
- Scholars and academics in the field diplomacy, foreign policy and international relations

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE SEMINARS

There will be 15 sessions convened virtually every Wednesday afternoon (South African time), from 24 June 2020 to 12 August 2020. The exception will be the session on 5 August which will start either early morning or late evening due to the location of the trainer in the Pacific Time zone. Below is the brief description of the sessions:

24 June: Launch Session, 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm

Speakers:

- Prof. Gilbert Khadiagala, Director, African Centre for the Study of the United States
- Ms Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, Chief Executive Officer, South African Institute of International Affairs
- Ms Jennifer Bullock, Acting Consul General for Johannesburg, US Mission in South Africa
- Ambassador Mathu Joyini, Deputy Director General, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Republic of South Africa

Duration: Each speaker takes 10 to 15 minutes to broadly speak on the implications of COVID-19 and the rise in the use of ICTs on diplomacy. Thus, the session lasts 1 hour. This is followed by a 10 minute break.

Session 1: Brief introduction to digital diplomacy and seminar expectations

Speaker: Dr Bob Wekesa, African Centre for the Study of the United States, Wits University

Duration: A 40-minute presentation followed by 20 minutes of Q and A

Note: day one will run for roughly 2 hours

1 July: Foundational Skills and Competences, 2.00 pm – 3.30 pm

Moderator: Dr Bob Wekesa, African Centre for the Study of the United States, Wits University

Session 2: Setting up digital diplomacy hardware and software and demonstration of examples of digital diplomacy at work

Speaker: Mr Loren Hurst, Senior Consultant and New Media Producer, Techniarts Engineering, LLC

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by a 10-minute break

Session 3: Social media methods and tactics for e-diplomacy in and out of crisis times with COVID-19-specific examples linked to foreign public opinion analysis

Speaker: Prof. Corneliu Bjola, Oxford Digital Diplomacy Research Group

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A

Note: day 2 runs for 1 hour 40 minutes

8 July: Navigating Challenges, 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm

Moderator: Dr Felix Mutunga, African Centre for the Study of the US, Wits University

Session 4: Identifying and fighting disinformation on social media

Speaker: Mr Thomas Kent, Columbia University

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by 10 minutes break

Session 5: The African context of conspiracy theories, manipulation, misinformation and disinformation and sharp power

Speaker: Dr Patrick Maluki, Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies, University of Nairobi

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by 10 minutes break

Session 6: Fact-checking skills, tools and resources for African diplomats

Speaker: Mr Lee Mwititi, Africa Check

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A

Note: day 3 runs for 2 hours and 20 minutes

15 July: The Strategy and Policy Sphere, 2.00 pm – 3.30 pm

Moderator: Dr Yarik Turianskyi, South African Institute of International Affairs

Session 7: Initiating, developing and implementing digital diplomacy policies, strategies and action plans

Speaker: Ambassador Bruce Wharton, Former US Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by a 10-minute break

Session 8: The challenges and opportunities of African digital diplomacy

Speaker: Dr Patrick Endong, Calabar University

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by a 10-minute break

Session 9: Approaches to developing a digital diplomacy training strategy

Speaker: Mr Steven William, US Consulate in Cape Town, South Africa

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A

Note: day 4 runs for 2 hour 20 minutes

22 July: Digital economy and branding, 2.00 pm – 3.30 pm

Moderator: Mrs Tinyiko Kumalo, Chief Director, Diplomatic Academy & International School, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Republic of South Africa

Session 10: The intersection of the digital economy and digital diplomacy during and after COVID-19

Speaker: Mr Paul Kukubo, African Centre for the Study of the US, Wits University

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by a 10-minute break

Session 11: Digital diplomacy, place and nation branding during and after COVID-19

Speaker: Dr Bukola Adesina, University of Ibadan

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by a 10-minute break

Session 12: A diplomatic perspective on the challenges and opportunities presented by digital diplomacy

Speaker: Mr Andries Oosthuizen, Director Diplomatic Training & International School

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A

Note: day 5 runs for 2 hour 20 minutes

29 July: Communicating with impact, 2.00 pm – 3.30 pm

Moderator: Dr Felix Mutunga, African Centre for the Study of the US, Wits University

Session 13: Introduction to digital storytelling

Speaker: Prof. Imani Cheers, George Washington University

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by a 10-minute break

Session 14: Leveraging digital diplomacy for humanitarian and crisis communication

Speaker: TBA

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by a 10-minute break

Session 15: Media-based and journalism-driven digital diplomacy

Speaker: Ms Marissa D. Scott-Torres, Director, Africa Regional Media Hub, US Mission to South Africa

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A

Note: day 4 runs for 2 hour 20 minutes

August 5: Africa in a global setting and training agenda, 4.00 pm - 6.00 pm

Moderator: Dr Yarik Turianskyi, South African Institute of International Affairs

Session 16: Leadership & reputational security in the era of COVID-19

Speaker: Prof. Nicholas Cull, University of Southern California

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by 10-minute break

Session 17: Key skills and capabilities for the 21st Century African digital diplomat

Speaker: Prof. Jay Wang, Centre on Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California

Duration: 40-minute presentation, 20 minutes of Q and A.

Note: day 6 runs for 2 hour 20 minutes

August 12: Conclusion, 2.00 pm – 3.10 pm

Moderator: Dr Bob Wekesa, African Centre for the Study of the United States, Wits University

Session 18: Thinking ahead: strategies for the next wave of innovations on diplomacy and what the future portends

Speaker: Dr Ilan Manor, Oxford Digital Diplomacy Research Group

Duration: A 30-minute presentation, 10 minutes of Q and A, followed by 10 minutes break

Session 19: Closing and next steps

Speakers: Prof. Gilbert Khadiagala, African Centre for the Study of the United States, Wits University

Ms Tinyiko Kumalo, Chief Director for Diplomatic Training, Research and Development, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Republic of South Africa

Duration: 20 minutes

Note: day 7 runs 1 hour 10 minutes