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Apps4Africa: A new State Department public diplomacy initiative

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ABSTRACT

In 2010 the U.S. State Department funded an “Apps4Africa” contest to encourage development of socially conscious mobile applications for Africa. The initiative marked a significant departure from traditional public diplomacy efforts to expand diplomatic outreach beyond traditional government-to-government relationships. This case study analyses Apps4Africa to reveal its appropriateness as a model for future efforts and concludes Apps4Africa succeeded primarily because it responded to the changing dynamics of the 21st Century.

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1. Introduction

When Apple pervasively announced, “there’s an app for that,” few people could imagine just how true the slogan would become. The mobile web has grown exponentially, and mobile growth will continue to outpace other computing cycles, leading the mobile web to eclipse desktop computer usage by 2015 (O’Dell, 2010). Consumers in the United States are replacing home computers with mobile phones, and, with applications, they can access the internet, share information on social networking sites, read the news online, and more. But mobile technology is not limited to industrialized nations. Between 2003 and 2008, Africa had the fastest growing mobile phone market in the world, in part because mobile phones are more affordable than computers (Smith, 2009). In places like Nairobi, Kenya, and Kampala, Uganda, mobile technology has inspired a burgeoning community of entrepreneurs dedicated to transforming Africa through technology.

Joshua Goldstein and Jon Gosier, both of the software innovation company Appfrica, are using this technology to promote development in East Africa and to encourage young East Africans to solve local problems with technology. While working in East Africa, they recognized that mobile applications, which are used primarily for entertainment and convenience in the United States and other industrialized nations, can serve a different, more socially conscious purpose in other parts of the world. So they partnered with iHub, Appfrica Labs, the Social Development Network (SODNET), and the United States Department of State to create the contest “Apps4Africa.” The contest invited East African citizens to share ideas about how technology can improve their lives and then challenged technologists in the region to create applications to meet those needs. The U.S. State Department funded the effort and worked with the other partners to organize and implement it (Goldstein, Gosier, & Thigo, 2010). Almost two decades ago, Signitzer and Coombs (1992) astutely noted that technology would pull

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more organizations into international public relations, especially the government, and the Apps4Africa contest represents an innovative example of just how important technology can be in outreach.

The United States often engages in development efforts through its Agency for International Development (USAID). However, the State Department Bureau of International Information Programs, not USAID, sponsored Apps4Africa. The initiative, then, marks a significant departure from traditional public diplomacy efforts; it serves instead as an example of a 21st Century Statecraft initiative (Dupont, 2010a, 2010b). First introduced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in May 2009, 21st Century Statecraft initiatives are a response to the changing global environment and seek to expand the conduct of foreign policy beyond traditional government-to-government relationships by leveraging the global ITC network to include people and civil society around the world in the business of diplomacy and development (Dupont, 2010a, 2010b). Those goals fit neatly with the mission and implementation of Apps4Africa.

This article analyzes the 21st Century Statecraft initiative that combines international development, technology, and public diplomacy to reveal its effectiveness as a form of public diplomacy for the United States Department of State and other international outreach campaigns. This evaluation of that effort will yield critical considerations and recommendations for international outreach from the government as well as smaller organizational efforts. In doing so, the history of public diplomacy and the shift to “new” public diplomacy in the United States is reviewed to position 21st Century Statecraft in a theoretical and historical context. Next, it considers Apps4Africa as a single, holistic case study, first evaluating the success of the program and then examining whether or not it can be used as a model for future public diplomacy and international public relations initiatives. This paper concludes with recommendations for public diplomacy practitioners as well as other international communication efforts based on the outcome and conclusions of Apps4Africa.

2. Review of relevant literature

2.1. History of public diplomacy

Public diplomacy, defined here as the “direct or indirect engagement of foreign publics in support of national security, political, cultural, and economic objectives,” grew in importance in the United States following World War II (Armstrong, 2010, paragraph 1). Following the war, the United States needed to influence people around the globe in order to combat communist ideology (Bardos, 2001). To do so, Congress passed the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, which authorized the State Department to continue information and cultural exchange activities overseas (USIA, 1998). With the Smith–Mundt Act of 1948, Congress directed the State Department to follow six principles for success: tell the truth; explain the motives of the United States; bolster morale and extend hope; give a true and convincing picture of American life, methods, and ideals; combat misrepresentation and distortion; and aggressively interpret and support American foreign policy. Some members of Congress opposed the act and worried government-funded communication would compete with American media companies. These concerns led Congress to prohibit the State Department from disseminating information to domestic audiences; eventually the bill passed with such safeguards in place to allow public diplomacy to become an integral part of American foreign policy (Armstrong, 2008a, 2008b).

In 1952, Eisenhower followed the advice of the Hoover Commission and moved foreign information activities out of the State Department. This move established the United States Information Agency (USIA), an agency that worked to streamline overseas information programs, making them more relevant and effective (Bardos, 2001). The agency assumed responsibility for leading information campaigns and promoting American values abroad. For the rest of the 20th century, the USIA served as the principal organ of American public diplomacy (USIA, 1998). In many ways, this move complicated the ability of the U.S. to respond effectively to foreign, anti-American propaganda. Rethinking public diplomacy to operate within the State Department was a complicated endeavor, and it took several years to accomplish (Lieberman, 2010). Even as the United States struggled to reintegrate the USIA into the State Department, the country faced a plethora of external, global changes that complicated the practice of public diplomacy. New communication technologies such as the Internet, cell phones, and 24-h cable news were changing the world, but that did not mean public diplomacy was obsolete. Instead, the ways the United States conducted public diplomacy needed to change as well, because in many ways information activities were more important than ever.

Unfortunately, at a critical time for public diplomacy following the events of September 11, 2001, the State Department faltered. The new Bureau of International Information Programs, formerly the USIA, was still reeling from the merger. Meanwhile, the State Department itself suffered from a number of underlying issues—including structural and funding problems—that led to systematic failures in many areas (Armstrong, 2010). The lack of effective engagement of foreign publics left a void that needed to be filled. Therefore, slowly and reluctantly, the United States military began to perform information activities. These events soon accelerated, leading to the militarization of American public diplomacy (Armstrong, 2008a, 2008b).

2.2. 21st Century Statecraft

With the inauguration of President Barack Obama in January 2009 and the arrival of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Foggy Bottom, United States foreign policy changed. The new President hoped to engage many groups, including civilians, allies, new partners, adversaries, and institutions. At the State Department, there was a shift to a “new” model of public
dipломатії; Fitzpatrick (2007) додає, що в додаток до його політичних метів, дипломатія стала більш сфокусована на орієнтації  "на обов'язки осіб," яке збільшує його вплив в питаннях внаслідок зовнішніх відносин, що є чинним в розгляді дипломатії (p. 188). Так, Апс4Африка викликає нову можливість для громадян устягнути ідеї щодо публічної дипломатії і, зокрема, у відносинах між їхніми домами і Рідними землями та Ізраїлем, є прикладом того, як нова дипломатія підпорядковується приоритетний перехід від "національних інтересів" до "важливості глобальних комунікацій" (Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383).

Cull (2009) зазначає загальну схему дипломатії 2010 року, яка в 1948 році полягає в тому, щоб керувати інтернаціональним середовищем. Однак спостерігає, що у 2010 році ця схема змінилася на початку нового середовища, що передбачує підпорядкування відносин. Fitzpatrick (2007) приводить "перевагу імовірності" нового дипломатічного середовища, що покладає на імовірність того, що нація може використовувати свої дипломатичні "об'єктиви" (p. 194). Відтоді, зміна комунікації групувалася з одного до іншого, щоб відкривати інформацієні альтернативні кінцівки, які приводять до зміни відділення та розширення поглядів (Fitzpatrick, 2007). "Обдягани люди" тут знову привертають увагу до дипломатії. До того ж, нова комунікація здатна демократизувати інформацію та змінювати ієрархії, припинюючи непереваги, незалежно від громадян, не-правительственних організацій, щоб відображати нові рівні в світі. Спільні соціальні інструменти, таких як Facebook і Twitter, дозволяють змінити ідеї спілкування, особи яких, вирізняються у відношенні до Зунді та дипломатичних питань. Однак, дипломатія, яка інформує свідомість, може бути критично важливою для продовження інтенсивності та уточнення особи на світовому рівні.

Керівництво Клінтон було призначене, щоб обговорити проблеми, що сталися з Державним департаментом, з ініціативами, які відновили публічну дипломатію, включаючи 21-ві століття дипломатію. Ініціатива 21-ві століття дипломатії загалом узагальнює ідеї використання та розширення нових технологій, що змінюють інфраструктуру, і технології будувати нове покоління і трансформувати їх до використання.

2.3. The Apps4Africa contest

Apps4Africa було створено зусиллями Йошуа Гольденштина та Йона Госера, але перший підтримувався за участь багатьох людей в Африці та США. У Стосунках з Африкою та Американським Departament (Gosier, 2010). На 7 жовтня 2010 року, підкресливши потенціал Демократичної партиї на Кінгсвілл кафедрі та громадського департаменту в Кенії анонсував конкурс на конкурс в iHub в Найробі. З 7 жовтня по 31 вересня, громадські зміни можуть відкрити ідеї для використання нових технологій в Африці, які могли б бути розшукувані або амельоровані з новою технологією, і технології будувати нове покоління і трансформувати їх до використання (Dowd, 2010).

To enter the contest, developers submitted applications through Facebook, Twitter, SMS in Kenya, or the Apps4Africa website (Dowd, 2010). The applications were judged on four criteria: usability of the application; creativeness and inventive-ness of the application; usefulness to citizens, civil society, or governments in East Africa; and potential for the application to benefit other world institutions (Goldstein et al., 2010). On October 6, 2010, the Department of State announced the Apps4Africa contest winners, and Secretary Clinton congratulated them in a video statement. iCow, a voice-based mobile application that allows dairy farmers to track and manage the breeding periods of their cows as well as monitor cow nutrition during the gestation period, won first place. Charles Kithiaka created the application at the behest of an organic farmer in Kenya (Colaco, 2010). Kleptocracy Fighters Inc. won second place with an application that increases transparency by allowing citizens to record real-time information about government activities and corruption. The third place winner, Mamakiba, is application that helps low-income women save and pre-pay for their maternal health needs (Colaco, 2010).

Several projects were awarded honorable mentions, including the Fogs Funeral Announcements, which generates death and funeral announcements via text messages, allowing Kenyans to send these types of messages to friends, family, and others—an important Kenyan custom—without paying for radio and newspaper announcements; the Kenya Constituency Development Fund, which enables Kenyans to track Constituency Development Funds projects in Kibera, the world’s second largest slum, to improve accountability for development funds; and, Ujuzi, which presents information about local resources in an accessible manner, a boon for low-income populations who may not know where to go to get help (Colaco, 2010).

2.4. Apps4Africa partners

The State Department’s partners, Appfrica Labs, iHub, and SODNET, are located in East Africa. Appfrica Labs is an "innovation incubator" based in Kampala, Uganda, where it supports budding technologists and entrepreneurs with funding and expertise. Similarly, iHub in Nairobi, Kenya, is an open space for technologists, investors, tech companies, and hackers to meet and work (Kinyanjui, 2010). Finally, SODNET, or the Social Development Network, is a non-profit, non-governmental organization in Kenya that seeks to influence policy decisions on social development, particularly resource management, globalization, and information. The partners are all part of the East African tech community, a nascent but budding group of technologists, entrepreneurs, developers, students, and others who are passionate about technology and innovation. Despite
low Internet penetration, technology is on the rise in Africa. Mobile phones with SMS technology are affordable and available, which is allowing many to “leapfrog” over technology barriers, skipping desktop computers entirely to start accessing the mobile web (Smith, 2009).

2.5. Target audience

Apps4Africa attempted to reach several target audiences. East African developers are one of its primary target audiences, since their participation was necessary for the contest to succeed. East African citizens, businesses, and civil society organizations with problems that can be solved using technology are another primary target audience. They are the people invited to submit application ideas to the contest. The secondary target audience includes international businesses and civil society organizations, particularly those interested in entrepreneurship, technology, and international development. International businesses that have access to investment funds that may benefit the nascent East African technology sector, and international civil society organizations may benefit from some of the applications developed during the contest. Developers from around the world are another secondary audience, as Apps4Africa invited and encouraged them to serve as project mentors to East African developers.

2.6. Apps4Africa message

Secretary Clinton observed that when people think of Africa, too often they think of all of the tragedies and conflicts; instead “we want people to see a more comprehensive picture” (2010). Apps4Africa attempts to change that perception by highlighting the burgeoning technology sector in East Africa. The contest showcases African innovation and talent, and thus conveys a key message: Africa is not a black hole but a place that businesses can invest in and people can look to for good ideas. In short, Apps4Africa reminds the world that Africans can succeed. Another key message of Apps4Africa is that the U.S. wants to build mutually beneficial relationships with Africa. In the past, the U.S. often acted as a benefactor in Africa rather than a partner. International development efforts were not always successful, and sometimes foreign aid actually did more harm than good. Apps4Africa attempts to change that precedent by partnering with local businesses, thus conveying the message that Africans have a stake in their futures.

2.7. Apps4Africa goals

It is important to recognize that the Apps4Africa partners and the State Department had slightly different, but complementary, goals. For Appfrica Labs, the iHub, and SODNET, the Apps4Africa contest goals included: (1) showcasing regional technology talent; (2) promoting the creation of applications that benefit citizens, civil society organizations, or East African governments; and (3) highlighting the power of technology to improve the world (United States Department of State, 2010). The State Department supported all of these goals; however, it also wanted to: (1) build mutual trust and respect by engaging East African individuals, businesses, and civil society; (2) emphasize technology and entrepreneurship in East Africa by encouraging collaboration and skill building; and (3) grow private sector partnerships in East Africa to maximize engagement. These goals sprang from an understanding of Apps4Africa not only as an international development program but also as a public diplomacy program.

The overarching goal of public diplomacy always is to manage the international environment by engaging foreign publics (Cull, 2009). In the 21st Century, the United States seeks to engage foreign publics by expanding the conduct of foreign policy beyond traditional government-to-government relationships and leveraging the global ITC network (Dupont, 2010a, 2010b). Apps4Africa supports this goal in several ways. First, it engages businesses, developers, civil society, and others in East Africa, thus broadening the demographic base of people the United States engages beyond the traditional elite. The contest also utilizes social networking tools and connective technologies and emphasizes business and technology programs in East Africa. Last but not least, Apps4Africa enriches the reach of the State Department by growing and diversifying private sector partnerships (Bureau of International Information Programs, 2010).

3. Case study approach and analysis

3.1. Apps4Africa evaluation

Through an examination of the strategic framework for public diplomacy initiatives in the Bureau of International Information Programs, it is possible to evaluate the success of Apps4Africa as a public diplomacy initiative. To do so, this study uses a variety of evaluative techniques, including media impressions, social media measurements, event attendance, and the quality and quantity of applications submitted for the contest. Table 1 presents each of the stated goals for Apps4Africa, the target audience for that goal, and the message, and the technique this study used to evaluate the campaign’s success in meeting the six goals of Appfrica Labs, the iHub, SODNET, and the U.S. State Department in sponsoring the contest.
Table 1
Apps4Africa goals, target audience, messages, and evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target audience</th>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Evaluation technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showcase regional technology talent</td>
<td>Individuals, businesses, and civil society worldwide interested in technology,</td>
<td>East Africa has a nascent but budding technology sector. East Africans</td>
<td>Media impressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>entrepreneurship, and development</td>
<td>can be successful. They can create innovative solutions. New connection</td>
<td>Social Media Buzz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>technologies can help communities achieve development goals. The United</td>
<td>Sentiment Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>States believes that Africans can be successful/create their own solutions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote the creation of applications that benefit citizens, civil society</td>
<td>New connection technologies can help communities achieve development</td>
<td>Number of ideas submitted to the contest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>organizations, or East African Governments</td>
<td>goals.</td>
<td>Number of applications submitted to the contest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals, businesses, and civil society organizations in East Africa with</td>
<td>The United States believes that Africans can be successful/create their own</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>problems that can be solved with technology Programmers/developers in East Africa</td>
<td>solutions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlight the power of technology to</td>
<td>Individuals, businesses, and civil society worldwide interested in technology,</td>
<td>New connection technologies can help communities achieve development</td>
<td>Media impressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve the world</td>
<td>entrepreneurship, and development</td>
<td>goals.</td>
<td>Social media measurements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build mutual trust and respect by</td>
<td>East African individuals, businesses, and civil society organizations</td>
<td>The United States would like to partner with Africans to address</td>
<td>Event attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engaging East African individuals,</td>
<td></td>
<td>development goals. It wants to be partners, not patrons.</td>
<td>Social media measurements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>businesses, and civil society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sentiment analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize technology and entrepreneurship</td>
<td>East Africa individuals, particularly youth</td>
<td>The United States believes that Africans can be successful.</td>
<td>Event attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in East Africa by encouraging</td>
<td>East African businesses and civil society organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social media measurements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration and skill building</td>
<td></td>
<td>The United States would like to partner with Africans to address</td>
<td>Number and depth of partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grow private sector partnerships in East</td>
<td>East African businesses and civil society organizations</td>
<td>development goals. It wants to be partners, not patrons.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa to maximize engagement</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Media impressions

Measuring media impressions provides perhaps the most impressive snapshot of Apps4Africa. Using a variety of search engines, all news stories published between June and December 2010 were collected. From its launch in July to approximately November 1, 2010, the contest garnered more than 4 million media impressions. The published monthly page views for most of the news sources were collected and divided by 30 to find the approximate average number of daily page views. Given that articles were likely to appear on the home page of the news site for one day, daily page views were used as a conservative estimate to calculate media impressions.

Stories about Apps4Africa ran in highly regarded, international publications such as the BBC News (866,667 hits per day), and Joshua Goldstein and Anil Dash were featured on NPR’s Future Tense. An Apps4Africa story also appeared in allAfrica, an African news site that garners 400,000 hits per day. In part, this success is a testament to the strength and clout of the State Department itself. However, high-level support, combined with a compelling story, also helped Apps4Africa gain media attention. Often, stories about the contest ran in the “Technology” or “Business” section of a publication, thus reaching one of the contest’s target audiences: people, businesses, and civil society organizations around the world interested in entrepreneurship, technology, and development. Many of the major African news outlets, including the African Business Journal (circulation 115,00), All Africa (circulation 200,000), and the Daily Nation (12 million monthly page hits), ran stories about Apps4Africa. These three news outlets alone, then, reach a large number of businesses and organizations in Africa and, in the case of the Daily Nation, East Africa directly.

3.3. Social media measurements

At first glance, social media measurements reveal disappointing results. The Apps4Africa Facebook Fan Page only had 20 fans at the time of this analysis, many of whom are from the United States. ihub does not have a Facebook Page, and SODNET only has 11 fans. The Twitter measurement site Mentionmap reveals the Apps4Africa twitter account, @apps4africa, remained relatively inactive. The partners, @african_minute, @statedept, @ihubnairobi, interact with each other and @apps4Africa, but others do not appear to interact with the Twitter name or use the hashtag #apps4africa. Indeed, tracking the Twitter network for @apps4africa shows that while those interested in Apps4Africa are a close-knit, dedicated group, they are also a rather small group.
However, a deeper analysis reveals that while Apps4Africa does not have a broad presence on the social web, it does have a concentrated, meaningful one. Appfrica Labs, which included information about the contest on its Facebook Page, had 477 fans, more than 3000 Twitter followers, and almost 1500 RSS subscribers. Many of those fans, followers, and subscribers are either interested in or involved with the East African tech community. Relevant blogs were located using Google and BlogPulse using the key words “Apps4Africa,” “Apps 4 Africa,” “iHub,” “Appfrica Labs,” “Jon Gosier,” “Joshua Goldstein,” and “SODNET.”

A number of highly targeted, prominent blogs carried articles about Apps4Africa. For example, Akira Chix, a blog for female developers in East Africa, promoted the contest, and its members actually developed and submitted an application (Odour, 2010). A number of other blogs in East Africa, as well as international blogs interested in technology and development, discussed the contest and thus informed businesses and civil society organizations about it. Today, most news sites are “social,” and they allow their readers to share stories on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. People shared “African tech-entrepreneurs take on the world,” an article that appeared in the Sunday Nation, part of the Daily Nation, almost 29,000 times. Nine other articles were shared on Facebook, where they appeared in the newsfeeds of hundreds of people.

Finally, when discussing social media impact, it is necessary to consider not only how often something was mentioned but also what was said. Social Mention, a search platform that searches user-generated content such blogs and social media platforms, indicates that out of more than 200 social media mentions of Apps4Africa, only four contained negative words. The other mentions were either positive or neutral. Given the criticism of past United States international development projects, as well as criticism of the United States Government and the State Department in general, this indicates Apps4Africa was well-received by the target audience.

3.4. Event attendance

Apps4Africa benefited from the combination of local partner involvement and State Department clout. The involvement of high level officials ensured the contest announcement received attention in East Africa. Following the announcement, Apps4Africa partners Appfrica Labs, iHub, and SODNET worked to publicize the program to developers throughout the region. The partners were aware of the constraints of spreading the word about Apps4Africa, so they traveled to all of the countries invited to participate—Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda—to hold workshops for software developers and civil society leaders (Apps4Africa, 2010). These workshops proved to be very successful, judging from attendance, personal reports, and workshop results. Apps4Africa held a 24 h “hackathon” at the iHub in Nairobi that sold out, drawing a crowd of developers interested in working on their applications among peers. Some of the leading technologists in Africa attended (Hathaway, 2010). In addition to publicizing the Apps4Africa contest, workshops like the iHub hackathon helped the State Department build partnerships through people-to-people interactions. Supplanting media outreach with face-to-face meetings proved to be a powerful way to reach people, and it demonstrated the commitment of the partners and the State Department to making Apps4Africa a success.

3.5. Quality and quantity of application submissions

Partner efforts to publicize the event, in combination with the State Department’s outreach, led to 60 ideas submitted from all over East Africa. Twenty-three of those ideas were developed into actual applications. At the onset of the contest, critics feared the applications generated by Apps4Africa might not realistically address the problems East African citizens face. The results have quieted those fears, as the applications the contest produced show broader public utility than applications in the United States (Amsler, 2010).

4. Evaluation and conclusions

4.1. Apps4Africa evaluation

Based on media impressions, social media measurements, event attendance, and the quality and quantity of applications submitted, Apps4Africa appears to be at least a moderately successful public diplomacy program. While it was not as widely publicized as the partners might have hoped, it did reach its primary target audiences. Thanks in large part to iHub, Appfrica Labs, and SODNET, East African developers and East African individuals, businesses, and civil society organizations interested in technology, entrepreneurship, and development learned about the contest. The number and quality of the contest submissions support this assertion. Twenty-three application submissions may not initially sound like an impressive number, but when taken in context with the size of the technology community in Africa, the difficulties developers in Africa face, and the time it takes to build an application, the number is actually indicative of strong participation.

At the current time, Apps4Africa appears to have been a successful public diplomacy program, but that is a subjective assertion based on many subjective techniques. It is important to evaluate the success of Apps4Africa not in black and white but in shades of grey. For this particular public diplomacy program, the black and white results may actually be less important than the actual conceptualization, support, and execution of the contest from the U.S. and its partners abroad. A tenant of 21st Century Statecraft is the importance of partnerships. By working with private organizations to host the contest, the
State Department forged important regional partnerships in East Africa and set a precedent for future innovative diplomatic efforts. Its dedication to being partners, not patrons, elicited a positive response from opinion leaders in the region, and so the contest was well-received.

It is too soon to evaluate Apps4Africa in its entirety. The final—and most salient—judgment will depend on whether the applications inspired by the contest actually are developed and utilized by individuals, businesses, and civil society organizations in East Africa. When and if private investors fund some of the applications created for the contest, the contest may be considered a resounding success, but that is something that has not happened yet. But, as a 21st Century Statecraft initiative and one of the first times the State Department attempted to navigate a changing environment by trying something different, Apps4Africa should be acknowledged as a success. It identified and reached its target audience, communicated the intended message, and supported strategic imperatives of the State Department, while also building partnerships and creating advocates for the United States in East Africa and demonstrating the power of new media in diplomacy.

4.2. Recommendations

Apps4Africa as an international outreach effort is an early model for future public diplomacy programs; however, given the different regions and audiences the State Department engages, using any program as a model, no matter how successful, might not be representative of the issues at hand. However, public diplomacy practitioners as well as international outreach and communication, particularly in disparate areas, may be informed by some of the features of Apps4Africa that worked well, as these parts can serve as “best practices” for future endeavors. For example, Apps4Africa succeeded in part because of the dedication and enthusiasm of Appfrica Labs, iluh, and SODNET. These partners were already committed to advancing the East African tech community before the State Department started working with them, and they were well-positioned to promote the contest. By picking its partners carefully, the State Department helped to ensure the contest would be well-received. The value of strategic partnerships in international outreach is clear, and partners abroad who live and understand the nuances of the context for the strategic communication intervention may be critical to the campaign’s success. As Wise (2009) notes, “long gone are the days when diplomats, for example, work with only other diplomats” (p. 128). These public–private partnerships may also bolster credibility, given mounting suspicion of the trustworthiness and efficacy of government efforts (Wang, 2006).

Apps4Africa enjoyed high-level support at the State Department. Secretary Clinton embraced the project, and Under Secretary McHale and Ambassador Ranneberger made it a priority. Their involvement gave Apps4Africa momentum and helped the contest receive “buy-in” from others at the State Department and the partners in East Africa. Joshua Goldstein and Jon Gosier began with a vision for how to use a mobile application to promote commerce and development in East Africa; through a federal partnership they were able to convert that idea to a successful international outreach effort. In addition, Apps4Africa succeeded because it supported strategic objectives and spoke to a well-defined target audience. Therefore, public diplomacy practitioners and others involved in international outreach might observe that Apps4Africa demonstrates the importance of outlining and following strategic objectives as opposed to using the “spaghetti against the wall” method to conduct public diplomacy. In the past, huge public diplomacy programs endowed with generous funds and resources have failed because they did not understand or reach the target audience (Armstrong, 2010). In contrast, Apps4Africa required few resources, but it dovetailed with State Department goals, and its message resonated with the target audience, so it succeeded. Such organized vision should inform and inspire future efforts for international outreach.

In its efforts to provide a broad base for evaluation of the success of Apps4Africa through a case study approach, this study provides a review of several media measures of success that should be tested in isolation in great depth. The initial picture that emerges is encouraging and also indicative of the need for future research on the success of Apps4Africa and other innovative public diplomacy efforts.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Apps4Africa succeeded primarily because it responded to the changing dynamics of the 21st Century, combining public diplomacy, communication technology, and international development to form a new kind of diplomacy. This new diplomatic outreach reflects an awareness that the United States is judged not only by what it says but also by what others say about it. Public diplomacy needs to build partners and relationships, and it must engage individuals, businesses, and civil society organizations—not only other governments. Century Statecraft initiatives such as Apps4Africa combine action with communication, which distinguish them in the information age.

References


