

Nov 04, 2016 by [Adam Clayton Powell, III](#)

“Kampala Model” of U.S. Public Diplomacy in Africa praised; Results Include iCow ^[1]

WASHINGTON – U.S. embassies in Africa have created new models for public diplomacy, models which are already producing significant advances. That was the word at a conference here last week from Bruce Wharton, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy for the Bureau of African Affairs. Wharton, who was appointed last year, described the “Kampala model” of public diplomacy, named for the perhaps unique structure in the American embassy in Uganda. “In this model all agencies are entitled to PD support,” said Wharton, “and all agencies are expected to follow and support the PAO’s lead.” Yes, you read that correctly: at the U.S. Embassy in Uganda, according to the Secretary, PD is in the lead. “Strong PD leadership ensures that foreign publics receive consistent information about the U.S.,” he continued, “and that programs such as Embassy Kampala’s game show-based, national HIV/AIDS education campaign are stronger and more successful.”

Another example cited by Wharton was to apply technology to longstanding agriculture challenges. The U.S. invested \$50,000 in a local contest, and the result was the creation of “iCow.” “The resulting contest boosted tech development in East Africa, brought disparate groups together for the first time, and led to a number of useful applications,” said Wharton. “The winner was ‘iCow,’ a cellphone-based app to track the gestation period of cattle.” The success of iCow has led to U.S.-sponsored contests elsewhere on the continent. “This effort is now being replicated in other parts of Africa to explore practical responses and adaptations to climate change,” he said. “In both contests, the USG imprint is light, and most of the organizational and promotional work is done by our partners. But the results -- stronger institutions, economic opportunities, development, and support for African solutions to African challenges -- are all right in line with US policy in the region.”

One of the more striking PD efforts combined mobile phone technology and a Presidential visit. “Liz Trudeau, our press officer in Pretoria, used the South African MX.it platform (the text message-based social media platform most popular among South African youth) to invite people to ‘Ask President Obama a Question’ just before his 2009 travel to Ghana,” said Wharton. “Over 300,000 responses in three days drew enormous attention to the President’s travel and speech, gave us insight into young Africans’ opinions, and created new connections between the U.S. and the next generation of African leaders.” Yet another benefit, according to the Secretary: MXit is partially owned by Naspers, a major African media group, which gave “Ask President Obama” prominent play in its print publications.

Another mobile-based PD initiative “combined text messaging with the Ushahidi on-line mapping platform and Miss Guinea’s star power to create a successful citizen-driven election observation effort for Guinea’s first elections,” said the Secretary. “While not up to Carter Center standards for observing elections, this program let Guineans know that the U.S. was paying attention, and gave them a sense of confidence in and ownership of this first real elections in the country’s 52 years of independence.”

Finally, Wharton noted that these and other PD efforts have attracted praise in high places,

quoting from an article in Foreign Policy magazine: “Interested in Africa? Probably the best ‘follow’ is the U.S. Embassy in South Africa (@USEmbPretoria), whose wide-ranging feed is a model of good Twitter etiquette and “21st-century diplomacy.” Secretary Wharton made his remarks at “The Last Three Feet,” a conference at George Washington University, co-sponsored by the Public Diplomacy Council and the Walter Roberts Endowment.

This report is based on Secretary Wharton's remarks at a private meeting last month. He has verified that the quotes in this report are as they were delivered at George Washington on November 3rd.
