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UKRAINE'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN AFRICA: ACTORS, NARRATIVES, AND LESSONS FOR SWEDEN

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Introduction

This report maps the Ukrainian actors active in African countries and the narratives they deploy. It forms part of a broader analysis of the contest for influence in Africa, and complements SITE project's work on the impacts of Russian strategic communication on the continent and proactive counter-narratives.

The purpose of this mapping is threefold. First, it identifies alternative frames, actors, and communication approaches already present in the region, providing a baseline against which counter-narratives can be developed and tested. Second, it enables those counter-narratives to be strategically aligned, where relevant, with Ukrainian messaging, so as to maximise coherence and amplification. Third, it highlights opportunities to support Ukrainian actors operating in Africa through targeted assistance.

Throughout, the analysis is oriented toward practical lessons for Sweden. Each chapter closes with a discussion of the implications for Swedish engagement. However, Ukraine's rapid post-2022 reorientation toward Africa — undertaken under the exceptional pressures of wartime diplomacy — offers an instructive case for any external actor seeking to communicate credibly on the continent.

The report is organised in four parts. Section 1 traces the history and reform of Ukraine's Africa strategy and the new institutional architecture established since 2022. Section 2 maps the countries of greatest strategic impact. Section 3 surveys the main actors — governmental, civil society, and African partner institutions — through which engagement is implemented. Section 4 examines communication channels and narrative effectiveness. The datasets underpinning the report, together with a full account of sources, methodology, and limitations, are presented in Appendix A.

1. Building and Reconsidering Strategy: History, Reform, and the New Set-Up

1.1 Why Previous Engagement Was Ineffective

Until 2022, Ukraine's engagement with African states can be best characterised as limited, fragmented, and strategically underdeveloped. Analysts have described this approach as one of "managed distance" which means a posture where Ukraine maintained nominal diplomatic relations without articulating a coherent political, economic, or normative framework for engagement (Rozumna, 2025). This absence of strategic intent was not incidental but the product of structural constraints and long-standing foreign policy prioritisation that consistently placed Euro-Atlantic integration at the centre of Ukrainian diplomatic effort.

The most fundamental structural weakness was the absence of any dedicated Africa strategy until January 2022. Ukrainian foreign policy had remained heavily oriented toward Euro-Atlantic integration, with Africa treated as a peripheral region of limited strategic value beyond transactional trade contacts, primarily in agricultural commodities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine,

2024). As the MFA itself later acknowledged, cooperation with African states had been "historically underemphasized," and no systematic framework for engagement with West, Central, Eastern, or Southern Africa had been developed prior to the full-scale invasion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024, p. 2).

Ukraine's diplomatic infrastructure on the continent compounded this strategic vacuum. As of the end of 2023, Ukraine maintained 11 resident embassies across Africa's 54 states — approximately 20% diplomatic coverage of the continent — with one additional mission in Libya formally listed but suspended since 2015 (Fox, 2024). By contrast, Russia maintained a substantially larger diplomatic network across Africa, with approximately forty diplomatic missions on the continent and a presence in most major African capitals, providing it with considerably broader reach and institutional capacity than Ukraine. This disparity meant that entire sub-regions, particularly West and Central Africa, lacked any sustained Ukrainian diplomatic engagement, severely limiting both bilateral political dialogue and public diplomacy capacity.

Ukraine's communication posture reinforced these structural disadvantages. Rather than proactively shaping narratives about its own interests and values, Ukrainian actors routinely responded to Russian disinformation only after it had already gained traction in African media and political discourse. This reactive orientation reduced Ukraine's ability to define its own international image and allowed Russian narratives to establish themselves in information environments that lacked strong independent media ecosystems capable of critical evaluation (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024).

A fourth structural weakness was the historical memory gap. Ukraine had made genuine contributions to Soviet-era support for African liberation movements including the training of ANC cadres near Odesa and the Ukrainian SSR's co-sponsorship of the 1985 UN draft resolution for comprehensive sanctions against apartheid South Africa. But these contributions were rarely articulated as part of Ukraine's distinct post-independence historical narrative (Lynd, 2022; United Nations Digital Library, 1984). Russia, by contrast, successfully positioned itself as the primary heir to Soviet solidarity with Africa's liberation movements, deploying anti-colonial rhetoric as a core instrument of its soft power strategy across the continent (Tafuro Ambrosetti, 2022; Duursma & Masuhr, 2022). Ukraine's distinct historical role remained largely invisible in African public discourse, leaving Russia to dominate the symbolic landscape of the Soviet legacy.

Finally, Ukraine entered the post-2022 geopolitical competition with a pronounced resource and temporal asymmetry. Russia had begun systematically rebuilding its African presence from the mid-2010s onwards accelerating significantly following the 2014 Crimea annexation and the resulting Western sanctions. These events further incentivised Moscow to seek new geopolitical partners and markets by combining diplomatic expansion with investment in state media (RT Africa, Sputnik Afrique), security partnerships including private military companies, and elite-level political engagement (Droin & Dolbaia, 2023; Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024). By the time Ukraine launched its accelerated Africa strategy in 2022, Russia had established entrenched networks across political, media, and security sectors that had been cultivated over nearly a decade.

Taken together, these factors produced a situation in which Ukraine's presence in Africa was both limited and structurally disadvantaged across every dimension of diplomatic and informational competition. The absence of strategy, weak institutional capacity, reactive communications posture, and invisibility of Ukraine's own historical narrative created conditions in which Russia

could dominate both political and informational space with relatively modest investment. The consequences of that head start continue to define the terms of competition in the African information and diplomatic environment that this report seeks to address.

1.2 The Strategic Turning Point 2022 and the New Architecture

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a decisive turning point in Ukraine's approach to Africa. The war transformed Africa from a peripheral region into a strategic arena of diplomatic contestation, where the votes and positions of African states in multilateral forums carried direct implications for Ukraine's international standing and Russia's ability to project legitimacy. This shift became immediately apparent during the United Nations General Assembly emergency session vote of 2 March 2022, where 28 African states voted in favour of Resolution ES-11/1 condemning Russia's aggression, 17 abstained, 8 were absent, and only Eritrea voted against (Development Reimagined, 2023). In response, Ukraine undertook a comprehensive restructuring of its Africa policy, constructing what can be described as a new strategic architecture across institutional, diplomatic, and communicative dimensions.

The first pillar was the existence of a dedicated Africa strategy. While the Strategy for the Development of Ukraine's Relations with African States was adopted on 14 January 2022 and therefore did not constitute a direct response to the invasion, it established a policy framework that enabled Ukraine to scale up its engagement rapidly once the war began. As noted previously, it was the first Africa-focused strategy in Ukraine's post-independence history. The strategy established objectives across diplomacy, trade, food security, and communication, marking a decisive departure from the ad hoc, transactional engagement that had characterised Ukraine's Africa policy in previous decades.

The second pillar was dedicated institutional leadership. On 12 July 2022, President Zelenskyy appointed Maksym Subkh as Special Representative of Ukraine for the Middle East and Africa to provide sustained political coordination and institutional focus for Africa engagement (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, n.d.).

The third pillar was a comprehensive communications strategy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed the Ukraine–African Countries Communication Strategy 2024–2026 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024), which represents the first systematic attempt to structure Ukraine's external messaging across the continent. Built on a prior internal audit of communication capacities at all African diplomatic missions, the strategy is organised around core operating principles including proactivity, coherence across missions ("one voice"), adaptability to local contexts, and credibility grounded in factual data (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024). Its evidence-based design methodology, drawing on monitoring data about Ukraine-related narratives in African media during 2022 and 2023, reflects a qualitative shift toward strategic, rather than reactive, communication planning.

The fourth pillar was diplomatic network expansion. In December 2022, the government announced plans to open ten new embassies across Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024). By mid-2025, Ukraine had increased its diplomatic presence on the continent from 11 to 18 embassies, expanding direct diplomatic coverage from roughly one-fifth to approximately one-third of Africa's 54 states. While this remained well below Russia's substantially larger diplomatic

network, the pace of expansion represented an unprecedented investment in African diplomatic infrastructure in Ukraine's post-independence history.

The fifth pillar was high-level ministerial diplomacy. Between October 2022 and August 2024, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba conducted four tours of Africa, visiting 16 countries across all five AU sub-regions. Most of these visits became the first-ever visits by a Ukrainian Foreign Minister in the history of the country's bilateral relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024). His successor, Andrii Sybiha, continued this tour diplomacy in 2024. From February 2022 to February 2024 alone, President Zelenskyy held more than 30 meetings with leaders of African countries and pan-African organisations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024), culminating in his April 2025 state visit to South Africa (President of Ukraine, 2025).

These initiatives reflect a dual strategic objective that defines Ukraine's contemporary Africa policy. On one hand, Ukraine must pursue a defensive stance by countering Russian narratives, correcting disinformation, and securing diplomatic support in multilateral forums. On the other, it must build constructive partnerships grounded in shared material interests, particularly in food security, trade, and development. The tension between these defensive and constructive imperatives shapes every dimension of the strategic architecture described above, and navigating it effectively remains the central challenge of Ukrainian engagement in Africa through 2026 and beyond. While Ukraine faces this challenge under the exceptional conditions of wartime diplomacy, the broader need to balance strategic communication with genuine partnership-building is not unique to Ukraine and is increasingly familiar to many Western actors engaged on the continent.

1.3 The Proactivity Over Reaction Principle

At the core of Ukraine's strategic transformation lies a fundamental reorientation from reactive to proactive engagement. This shift is explicitly formalised in the Communication Strategy 2024–2026, where proactivity is defined as "purposefulness and initiative in shaping the information environment, extending beyond reactive responses to the activities of other participants in the communication process" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024).

The principle is significant for reasons that extend beyond operational preference since competitive information environments structurally reward actors that set the agenda. Reactive communication does not just fail to counter adversarial narratives but also amplifies their salience by engaging with them on the adversary's terms. A proactive position, by contrast, allows Ukraine to define the terms of engagement and occupy narrative space before competing messaging can fill it. This insight aligns with a well-established finding in strategic communication theory, which consistently demonstrates the primacy of narrative construction and audience-oriented framing over volume of output as determinants of communicative effectiveness (Bjola & Pamment, 2019; Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle, 2013).

Another important distinction lies between negative-frame and positive-frame communication. Negative-frame communication defined by denial and counter-messaging, tends to reinforce the salience of the claims it contests, even when accurate, by keeping those claims at the centre of discourse. Positive-frame communication builds durable associations and credibility independently of any particular adversarial narrative cycle.

1.4 Lessons for Sweden

Ukraine's post-2022 transformation in its approach to Africa can be translated into a set of strategic lessons applicable to external actors more broadly, and their engagement framework. This section examines the lessons that can be drawn from the Ukrainian experience and considers their relevance for Sweden's engagement in Africa. Taken together, these lessons highlight the difference between symbolic engagement and sustained strategic influence.

The first lesson concerns the foundational importance of strategic coherence. Ukraine's pre-2022 absence in Africa was a result of the absence of a dedicated strategy, coordinated institutional leadership, and systematic communication framework. The adoption of the Africa Strategy in January 2022, the appointment of a dedicated Special Representative, and the development of the Communication Strategy 2024–2026 demonstrate that structural architecture precedes effective messaging. For Sweden, which already possesses substantial Africa engagement across Sida, the Folke Bernadotte Academy, and the Swedish Institute, the lesson is not to build new infrastructure but to bring existing instruments into strategic alignment around shared objectives.

The second lesson concerns local anchoring. Messages framed around European security architecture, the rules-based international order, or Euro-Atlantic solidarity have consistently failed to generate traction in African political contexts shaped by colonial legacies, non-alignment traditions, and competing development priorities (Tisserand, 2025; Götz, Gejl Kaas, & Knudsen, 2023). Ukraine's most effective communication efforts have been those that address issues African societies already care about, such as food security, sovereignty, accountability for the recruitment of African citizens into the Russian military, rather than those asking African audiences to adopt a European frame (Martyshev et al., 2024; INPACT, 2026). For Sweden, the implication is that communication effectiveness depends on the degree to which messaging is genuinely co-designed with African partners rather than translated from European policy positions.

The third lesson is about credibility through consistency and long-term commitment. Ukraine's establishment of 8 new missions across Africa within three years, sustained ministerial tour diplomacy, and food aid delivery to 16 million people are sufficient credibility investments (Martyshev et al., 2024). In environments where external actors have historically entered and exited according to their own priorities, demonstrable sustained commitment is itself a form of strategic communication. For Sweden, a country with decades of Sida programming across the continent, this is already a comparative advantage.

The fourth and final lesson is that effective engagement in Africa ultimately depends on enabling African actors rather than substituting for them. The most impactful elements of Ukraine's communication efforts have not been government-to-audience campaigns but evidence-based content that African journalists, civil society actors, and policymakers could take up in their own voices. For Sweden, which has long-standing experience in institutional capacity support and independent media development, this model represents the most defensible and durable form of strategic communication investment.

Finally, the principle of proactivity carries direct operational implications. As argued above, strategic influence depends less on rebutting competing narratives than on establishing one's own. An effective communication strategy for Africa should therefore be structured around constructive, locally resonant messaging centred on cooperation, development, food security, and mutual

interests, rather than primarily as a counter-disinformation effort. Disinformation must be monitored and addressed, but it should not define the communicative agenda. A strategy that leads with counter-messaging risks reinforcing the salience of adversarial narratives and implicitly cedes agenda-setting power to the actor it seeks to counter. By contrast, a strategy grounded in positive framing is more likely to generate durable credibility and influence.

2. Mapping Countries of Impact

2.1 Ukraine's Priority Framework

Ukraine's engagement with Africa since 2022 reflects a transition from generalised outreach to a structured prioritisation model. While the Ukraine–African Countries Communication Strategy 2024–2026 does not prescribe a fixed list of priority states, it sets out a multi-dimensional framework for identifying countries of strategic importance. The criteria include economic potential, political influence, participation in multilateral institutions, security cooperation prospects, diplomatic presence, cultural ties, humanitarian engagement, and the structure of national media ecosystems (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024).

This approach reflects a broader shift in Ukrainian diplomacy toward differentiated regional strategies, grounded in the explicit acknowledgement that Africa is not a monolithic entity but a continent of 54 highly diverse states with distinct political economies and communication environments. Accordingly, Ukraine's prioritisation model emphasises flexibility and contextual adaptation, concentrating limited diplomatic and communicative resources where they can generate the greatest strategic return.

Applied in practice, this framework produces a tiered structure of engagement, distinguishing between core partners, high-priority emerging partners, and strategically significant but more complex environments.

Tier 1 — Core Countries (existing embassy presence and high political value)

The first tier includes countries that combine high geopolitical relevance with an established Ukrainian diplomatic presence. These states function as anchors for Ukraine's political, economic, and communication strategy across the continent.

South Africa occupies a uniquely influential position. As a member of BRICS, the G20, a founding member of the African Union, and the first African state to assume the G20 presidency in December 2024, South Africa plays a critical role in shaping continental and global governance debates (Rozumna, 2025). Its foreign policy tradition of non-alignment has produced a cautious official stance on the war in Ukraine. However, survey evidence indicates that South African public attitudes are not uniformly aligned with the government's posture. Afrobarometer data from 2023 show significant ambivalence among citizens, with perceptions of Russian influence declining and a substantial share of respondents expressing neither support for Russia nor alignment with the government's neutrality framing (Afrobarometer, 2023). This divergence between elite positioning and societal attitudes makes South Africa a particularly important target for public diplomacy and strategic communication.

Kenya represents a key East African partner by virtue of its diplomatic activism, comparatively stable political environment, and sustained engagement in multilateral forums. Ambassador Martin Kimani's statement to the UN Security Council on 21 February 2022 — which framed Russia's violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity in the context of African experiences with decolonisation and post-colonial sovereignty — became one of the most widely cited African diplomatic interventions in the early phase of the conflict and placed Kenya at the forefront of principled African engagement on the issue (Permanent Mission of Kenya to the United Nations, 2022). Kenya's highly developed digital ecosystem, particularly its active X community, makes it a significant node in Africa's information landscape, where online discourse frequently shapes media coverage and political debate (Nyabola, 2018). Kenya's role as a major food security stakeholder, directly exposed to disruptions in Ukrainian grain exports, further reinforces its strategic relevance.

Nigeria, as Africa's most populous country and one of its largest economies, represents a critical mass market for both diplomacy and communication. With a population of more than 230 million, Nigeria's influence extends beyond West Africa into broader continental dynamics. Its media environment is equally significant: Facebook alone reached approximately 37 million Nigerian users in early 2024, while radio remains a dominant medium in rural and northern regions (Marketing Analytics Africa, 2024). This combination of scale and media diversity makes Nigeria central to any continent-wide communication strategy.

Egypt serves as a strategic bridge between Africa and the Middle East. As one of the largest economies in North Africa and one of the world's major wheat importers, Egypt has direct economic stakes in Ukraine's agricultural exports. Prior to 2022, Egypt sourced approximately 80% of its wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia combined, making it acutely vulnerable to disruptions in Black Sea grain supply chains (Martyshev, 2025). Egypt's large digital audience with more than 45 million Facebook users as of January 2024 also provides substantial reach for public diplomacy efforts (Marketing Analytics Africa, 2024). Its strategic location and role as a regional economic and security hub further enhance its importance in trade and geopolitical networks.

Ethiopia, as the host of the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, holds unique institutional importance within continental diplomacy. Engagement with Ethiopia therefore provides indirect access to AU institutional processes and broader multilateral decision-making. Ethiopia's role as a major actor in the Horn of Africa's security dynamics reinforces its strategic relevance, although its media environment remains constrained, combining rapid digital expansion with significant restrictions on press freedom and internet access (Freedom House, 2024).

Taken together, Tier 1 countries represent high-impact environments where political influence, economic relevance, and communication potential converge. Sustained engagement in these states produces multiplier effects across regional and continental systems.

Tier 2 — High Priority (recently expanded engagement)

The second tier includes countries where Ukraine has intensified engagement through recent diplomatic expansion, high-level ministerial visits, or targeted partnerships. These states represent emerging priorities that are not yet fully institutionalised but offer significant strategic opportunities.

Countries including Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Senegal, Morocco, Mozambique, Angola, Zambia, and Mauritius fall into this category. Many have experienced increased diplomatic

interaction with Ukraine since 2022, including ministerial visits and the opening or planned establishment of new embassies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024).

The strategic value of this group lies in their regional connectivity and relative political stability. Ghana and Senegal are frequently cited as comparatively stable political systems in West Africa, with active civil societies and relatively open media environments, though democratic consolidation varies across the group (Freedom House, 2024). Rwanda and Morocco, while more centralised politically, play important roles in regional security and economic integration. From a communications perspective, Tier 2 countries are particularly important because they generally possess functioning media ecosystems and growing digital audiences, enabling both traditional and digital outreach. These environments are conducive to the development of locally embedded narratives and partnerships with journalists, civil society actors, and research institutions.

Tier 3 — Strategic Importance / Planned Engagement

The third tier consists of countries that are strategically important but present higher levels of political, security, or informational complexity. These include future engagement targets and regions where Ukraine's current influence remains limited.

For instance, Madagascar illustrates the strategic dimension of resource-driven engagement. The country possesses significant deposits of critical minerals that are increasingly important in global supply chains and attract sustained interest from major external powers (Yager, 2024). Institutional fragility and limited state capacity create governance vacuums that historically invite the kind of external security and political entanglement that Russia and other disruptive actors have exploited elsewhere on the continent. For Sweden and Ukraine, this combination of resource significance and institutional vulnerability makes Madagascar a strategically relevant environment in which an early and credible presence through development cooperation, civil society support, and media capacity building would serve both immediate partnership objectives and longer-term resilience goals.

By contrast, the Sahel region including Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, represents one of the most challenging environments for Ukrainian engagement. Following a sequence of military coups and a decisive pivot toward Russian security partnerships, including Africa Corps (formerly Wagner Group) deployments, these states present a heavily restricted information environment characterised by elevated disinformation intensity, declining press freedom, and an information architecture increasingly shaped by Russian state and proxy actors (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024). The rupture of diplomatic relations with Ukraine by both Mali and Niger following the Tinzaouaten incident in August 2024 further reduced Ukraine's direct engagement capacity in this sub-region (Bowden, 2025). At the same time, recent military setbacks suffered by Russian-backed forces in northern Mali, including attacks that forced withdrawals from key positions around Kidal and inflicted losses on the Africa Corps, suggest that Russia's security footprint in the Sahel may be more fragile than official narratives imply. All in all, the Sahel remains a critical arena of geopolitical competition in which narratives of sovereignty, security, and external influence are actively contested, with consequences that extend well beyond the sub-region itself.

2.2 Lessons for Sweden

Ukraine's experience in Africa provides a number of transferable lessons for external actors, but their application must be informed by Sweden's particular strengths, interests, and established relationships across the continent.

A first lesson concerns the importance of institutional geography. Political coordination in Africa is shaped to a significant extent by the AU and its eight recognised Regional Economic Communities, most relevantly ECOWAS in West Africa, SADC in Southern Africa, and the EAC in East Africa, which function as the primary collective frameworks for diplomacy, security coordination, and economic integration (African Union Commission & New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021). Countries that host AU institutions or carry structural influence within these bodies offer disproportionate strategic leverage, because engagement with them provides indirect access to wider regional and continental networks. Ethiopia as AU host, Nigeria within ECOWAS, Kenya within the EAC, and South Africa within SADC each serve this anchoring function. For Sweden, prioritising such institutional nodes aligns naturally with a strategy of maximising impact through networked rather than purely bilateral engagement.

A second lesson addresses a structural gap in Sweden's current Africa posture, and it is the relative neglect of Francophone West Africa. Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire are both members of ECOWAS, maintain comparatively stable political systems, and retain more open media environments than the neighbouring Sahel states that have experienced coups and deepening Russian security entanglement. Their proximity to Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger gives them a particular regional sensitivity. Political and informational developments in those countries land directly on Senegalese and Ivorian civil societies and elites in ways that create genuine receptivity to evidence-based narratives about what Russian engagement produces in practice. For Sweden, this context exposes a structural gap: the absence of a dedicated Francophone West Africa strategy. Addressing it would require strengthening French-language communication capacity and establishing direct partnerships with Francophone media and civil society actors, enabling Sweden to engage through trusted local channels rather than relying solely on European institutional messaging.

A third and overarching lesson is the importance of operating simultaneously at national, regional, and continental levels. Countries that combine domestic political stability, media openness, and institutional connectivity within regional bodies offer the most effective platforms for scalable partnerships. This principle reinforces the country selection already advanced in Section 2.1, while adding the specifically Swedish operational criterion: the presence of pre-existing bilateral trust and institutional relationships that can be activated rather than built from zero.

Taken together, these lessons point toward a model of Swedish engagement that is strategically concentrated, institutionally networked, and grounded in existing comparative advantages.

3. Main Actors

Understanding Ukraine's engagement in Africa requires mapping the institutional ecosystem through which policy is implemented. Since 2022, Ukraine's approach has evolved into a multi-

actor model, combining state institutions, civil society, and African partners. This ecosystem enables both formal diplomacy and more flexible, network-based engagement across political, cultural, and informational domains.

3.1 Ukrainian Government and Diplomatic Actors

Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the Department of Public Diplomacy and Communications is responsible for implementing the strategy and coordinating messaging across all diplomatic missions. A significant institutional development was the appointment of Maksym Subkh as Special Representative of Ukraine for the Middle East and Africa by [Presidential Decree](#) on 12 July 2022. It became the first position of its kind in Ukrainian diplomatic history, created to strengthen regional coordination and provide dedicated political oversight for Africa engagement.

Ukraine's embassies in Africa serve as the operational backbone of this engagement. As of mid-2025, Ukraine maintained 18 diplomatic missions in Africa, including resident embassies in South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria, Angola, Tunisia, and several newly established missions. These missions combine traditional diplomatic functions with media engagement, economic outreach, and strategic communication. However, staffing and resource constraints remain significant: many missions operate with limited personnel and carry accreditation responsibilities extending well beyond their host country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2024).

An important complementary actor is the Ukrainian Institute, a public institution established by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2017 and affiliated with the MFA. Its mandate is to promote knowledge and understanding of Ukraine internationally, develop cultural relations between Ukraine and other countries, and support international cooperation in the creative industries, education, and science (Ukrainian Institute, n.d.). Its work in Africa, including press tours for South African journalists, participation in literary and cultural festivals, and support for the Centre for Global Ukrainian Studies at the University of Pretoria helps address Ukraine's historical visibility gap on the continent and builds non-political connections that complement formal diplomacy (Rozumna, 2025; President of Ukraine, 2025).

A further dimension of Ukraine's communications infrastructure is the Ukraine Communications Group (UCG), a multilateral coordination platform launched in 2024 by the United States and Poland and co-organised through the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies. It brings together Ukraine's MFA alongside more than ten European countries, Canada, the EU, and NATO to coordinate strategic messaging, counter disinformation, and amplify Ukrainian voices in global information environments (Community of Democracies, 2024). The UCG's operational focus on coordinated messaging across partner governments directly supports the "one voice" principle formalised in the Communication Strategy 2024–2026.

Taken together, these actors reflect a transition in Ukraine's diplomatic model from a predominantly reactive and bilateral posture toward a more coordinated, proactive, and institutionally networked approach that combines centralised strategic direction with flexible communication tools adapted to diverse African contexts.

3.2 Ukrainian Civil Society and Diaspora Actors

Civil society and diaspora actors play a crucial role in extending Ukraine's presence beyond formal diplomatic channels. These actors provide local legitimacy, flexibility, and sustained engagement, particularly in environments where state diplomatic capacity is limited or recently established.

The Ukrainian Association of South Africa (UAZA) is the most prominent Ukrainian diaspora organisation on the continent. Registered as a non-profit organisation in South Africa in 2017 (NPO #189-705), UAZA unites South Africans and Ukrainians living in South Africa and has been actively involved in cultural diplomacy, public events, and awareness campaigns related to Ukrainian history and identity (UAZA, n.d.). Its activities since 2022 have included Holodomor commemorations in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban; protests at the 2023 BRICS summit in Johannesburg; policy briefs developed jointly with ISS Africa ahead of the African Union Mid-Year Coordination Meeting in Accra; and sustained engagement with South African mainstream media. In contexts where Ukraine lacks large diaspora communities UAZA demonstrates the model that well-organised, deeply embedded civil society actors can punch significantly above their numerical weight.

The Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" is a Kyiv-based analytical organisation whose work on Ukraine-Africa relations contributes directly to Track 2 diplomacy — the non-governmental, expert-level dialogue that runs parallel to official diplomatic channels and frequently prepares the ground for formal policy positions (Ukrainian Prism, n.d.). Its 2025 assessment of Ukraine-South Africa bilateral engagement represents the most detailed publicly available analytical mapping of that relationship, covering diplomatic architecture, civil society activity, and strategic communication across the bilateral relationship (Rozumna, 2025). Ukrainian Prism researchers have also participated directly in UCMC press tour events alongside African journalists, presenting analysis of Russian disinformation strategies in the Global South (UCMC, 2024). Organisations of this kind play a critical but underacknowledged role in any foreign policy communications ecosystem. They produce the documented, citable policy narrative that diplomatic actors can draw on without generating it themselves, and they enable expert-level exchanges that create durable relationships independent of the bilateral political temperature at any given moment.

The Ukraine Crisis Media Center (UCMC) has been particularly active through its Unfold Ukraine to Global South project, implemented in cooperation with the Open Society Foundation and funded by the International Renaissance Foundation (UCMC, 2024). In August 2024, UCMC organised a press tour during which African journalists visited the Okhmatdyt children's hospital as well as the Chernihiv region and the village of Yahidne, where Russian forces had held the entire civilian population captive in a school basement for 28 days in March 2022. The tour brought together journalists from Gambia, Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria (UCMC, 2024). By giving African journalists direct access to the physical and human consequences of the war, the project generated first-hand reporting that carries credibility in African media contexts precisely because it cannot be characterised as Ukrainian government messaging.

On the humanitarian side, the Bring Kids Back UA initiative, a presidential programme implemented primarily through the Save Ukraine charitable organisation facilitated the return of 449 children to Ukrainian-controlled territory during 2024, with the total reaching 2,000 by February 2026 (Bring Kids Back UA, 2024; Anadolu Agency, 2026). The initiative carries significant communications weight in Africa: documenting the forced transfer of children by Russia

is among Ukraine's most resonant humanitarian narratives on the continent, as it connects to universal values that require no European framing to activate and that African civil society actors can take up in their own voice.

The broader Ukrainian civil society media infrastructure includes UkraineWorld, an English-language multimedia platform run by Internews Ukraine that operates in five languages and maintains a network of over 300 international journalists and experts (UkraineWorld, n.d.). Significantly for this report's scope, in November 2024 UkraineWorld entered a formal partnership with the Ukrainian Institute to engage audiences specifically in Africa, Asia, and Latin America by producing joint podcasts on shared experiences of war, post-colonialism, and famine (Internews Ukraine, 2024). These are themes with direct resonance in African public discourse that do not require audiences to adopt a European frame, and the partnership signals a recognition within the Ukrainian civil society media ecosystem that Global South audiences require dedicated content strategies rather than repurposed European-facing output. Other Ukrainian media organisations including Euromaidan Press and Hromadske Radio contribute to the international information infrastructure but do not have documented Africa-specific programming; their relevance to the continent is therefore indirect, depending on amplification through African partner outlets rather than direct audience reach.

Beyond the efforts of Ukrainian state and civil-society actors, important counter-narratives also emerged from within African civil society itself. A particularly illustrative case emerged in February 2026, when families of Kenyan citizens recruited under false pretences to serve in the Russian army held a public demonstration in Nairobi, one day after Kenya's National Intelligence Service presented a classified report to parliament revealing that more than 1,000 citizens had been deceived into military service through a trafficking network involving rogue officials (Al Jazeera, 2026a; Al Jazeera, 2026b; Awich, 2026). The Nairobi demonstration generated substantial international media coverage and gave the recruitment issue a human face that formal Ukrainian government communications had been unable to achieve. This case illustrates a principle with direct implications for Sweden's engagement strategy: affected community voices carry narrative weight that state-adjacent actors cannot replicate, and the most durable communications infrastructure is one that enables such voices rather than substituting for them.

3.3 African Partner Institutions

Ukraine's engagement in Africa relies heavily on collaboration with African institutions that provide local expertise, credibility, and access to domestic audiences. These partnerships are essential for ensuring that engagement is grounded in local realities rather than externally imposed narratives. The actors captured in this overview span four distinct categories: policy think tanks, academic institutions, security research bodies, and religious institutions.

Policy think-tanks constitute the most active tier of African institutional partnership. The South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) is the most consequential. Founded in 1934 in Cape Town and located since 1944 on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, SAIIA is an independent public policy and foreign relations think tank organised around four research programmes: Foreign Policy; African Governance and Diplomacy; Economic

Resilience and Inclusion; and Climate and Natural Resources (SAIIA, n.d.). Its direct relevance to the Ukraine file is well documented. SAIIA has participated in Track 2 discussions on peacebuilding narratives, sanctions, and the role of middle powers, specifically addressing how the war in Ukraine has affected African security, food systems, and geopolitical alignments (Eguegu, 2023).

The Brenthurst Foundation has played a distinct and more openly advocacy-oriented role. A survey commissioned by the Foundation found that 74.3% of South Africans regarded Russia's invasion of Ukraine as "an act of aggression that must be condemned," with only 12.7% considering it an acceptable use of force (The Brenthurst Foundation, 2022). The same survey data further revealed that three-quarters of ANC voters (about 74%) held the same view, demonstrating that the government's position of strategic ambiguity was out of step not only with the general population but with its own electoral base (The Brenthurst Foundation, 2022). A parallel poll found that 58% of Zimbabweans held the same condemnatory position, similarly contradicting their government's stance (The Brenthurst Foundation, 2023). The Foundation's analytical output directly addresses Ukrainian strategic interests in Africa, including an analysis of the diplomatic asymmetry between Ukraine and Russia on the continent (The Brenthurst Foundation, 2024).

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS Africa), the largest independent research institute in Africa dealing with human security, is headquartered in Pretoria with regional offices in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Dakar (ISS Africa, n.d.). In March 2024 ISS co-hosted a seminar bringing together South African and Ukrainian experts to discuss regional security architecture, nuclear safety, and the deportation of children. The event was co-organised with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation, and UAZA (ISS Africa, 2024; IJR, 2024). ISS articles are distributed across African media via Daily Maverick and Premium Times, extending their analytical reach significantly beyond specialist audiences.

Academic institutions represent a newer but highly significant dimension of Ukraine's African engagement. The Centre for Global Ukrainian Studies at the University of Pretoria, the first formally documented bilateral academic partnership between Ukraine and an African institution, was established in April 2025. It has become the first Ukrainian studies hub on the African continent, with a platform spanning post-colonial memory, sovereignty studies, and reconstruction themes (President of Ukraine, 2025). Separately, the Boris Balinsky Symposium at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) provides a complementary model of academic diplomacy. Jointly organised by Wits and the Embassy of Ukraine over 10–11 April 2024, the symposium honoured Ukrainian-born embryologist Boris Balinsky as a symbol of shared scientific heritage; the event was initiated by the Ukrainian Embassy approaching the Wits Vice Chancellor to jointly host the symposium, with Balinsky's foundational textbook on embryology cited as the touchstone for the academic relationship (University of the Witwatersrand, 2024).

Religious institutions constitute a less immediately obvious but geopolitically significant category of African partners. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa became structurally aligned with Ukraine's ecclesiastical position when Patriarch Theodoros II recognised the Orthodox Church of Ukraine on 8 November 2019 (Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2019). This decision the Russian Orthodox Church cited as the direct justification for establishing

a rival Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa on 29 December 2021, transforming the continent into a theatre of ecclesiastical competition that mirrors the political conflict (FPRI, 2024).

Finally, it should be noted that a comprehensive list of Ukrainian actors and their African partner institutions is provided in the online annex to this report, offering a more detailed mapping of institutions, initiatives, and partnerships across the continent. However, one important caveat applies: informal civil society groups, academic and research institutions are likely underrepresented in this mapping. Due to the decentralized and often informal nature of academic cooperation, research projects, and individual scholar networks, many relevant actors operate below the level of formal visibility captured in publicly available datasets. As a result, the actual scope of Ukraine's academic engagement in Africa is likely broader than reflected in the attached list, underscoring the need for further systematic mapping in this area.

4. Communication Channels, Narrative Effectiveness, and Strategic Implications

The analysis of Ukraine's strategic communications in Africa demonstrates that the effectiveness of communication channels and narratives depends on their alignment with local media environments, audience expectations, and political contexts. The African information space is characterized by high fragmentation, linguistic diversity, and uneven media access, requiring differentiated approaches rather than uniform messaging strategies (Nyabola, 2018).

Across the continent, communication operates through a multi-layered ecosystem, combining digital platforms, traditional media, and interpersonal networks. While Africa has more than 384 million social media users, digital communication does not replace traditional media but instead coexists with it in a hybrid environment (Marketing Analytics Africa, 2024). As a result, successful strategic communication requires platform-specific adaptation and cross-channel integration.

4.1 Communication Channels: Reach, Trust, and Influence

Digital platforms play a central but differentiated role in Africa's information environment. Facebook remains the dominant platform for broad outreach and community-level messaging, particularly in large markets such as Nigeria, Egypt, and South Africa, where it commands the largest social media user bases on the continent (DataReportal, 2024). Its strength lies in scale and accessibility, making it suitable for mass communication and narrative dissemination.

YouTube occupies a distinctive position in the African digital landscape, functioning simultaneously as an entertainment platform, a news source, and a long-form political communication channel. According to the 2025 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, over half of surveyed populations in Kenya (54%) and Nigeria (49%) use YouTube for news on a weekly basis, a figure significantly above the global average of 30% and comparable to the highest-usage markets in Asia (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2025). This makes YouTube the second most important platform for news consumption after Facebook in these key markets, and the primary

vehicle for video-based strategic communications, including the campaigns run by UkraineWorld, Euromaidan Press, and the Ukraine Communications Group across East and West Africa.

Telegram plays a structurally different but equally significant role. Unlike Facebook or YouTube, Telegram's encrypted, channel-based architecture makes it a primary tool for closed-group information circulation among activists, journalists, military networks, and political operatives. Its importance for the Ukraine-Africa file is specifically adversarial. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies has documented how pro-Russian and Wagner-linked Telegram channels were central to disinformation operations surrounding the 2023 coups in Niger and Burkina Faso, disseminating fabricated documents, including forged claims that Ukraine was selling weapons to African countries, and amplifying anti-UN narratives across the Sahel (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024).

X (Twitter), while smaller in user base, plays a disproportionate role in agenda-setting among elites, including journalists, policymakers, and activists. Its importance is particularly evident in Kenya and Nigeria, where it shapes public debate and media coverage and functions as the primary arena of elite political contestation online (Nyabola, 2018; Kimutai Sawe et al., 2025).

Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are increasingly important for engaging younger audiences, who constitute a majority of the population in many African countries. These platforms are most effective for identity-driven and visual narratives, rather than policy-oriented communication, and their role in political mobilisation has grown significantly since 2022 (Kimutai Sawe et al., 2025).

Despite rapid digital growth, traditional media remain indispensable. Radio continues to be the most widely accessed medium across sub-Saharan Africa. Afrobarometer data from 39 countries show that radio remains the most-used news medium, reaching audiences across gender, income, and urban-rural lines more equitably than any digital platform (Afrobarometer, 2024). Local-language broadcasting significantly enhances both reach and trust, making radio a critical channel for inclusive communication, particularly in rural areas and among lower-income populations.

National television and well-established independent newspapers retain comparatively higher public trust than social media across most African markets. The 2025 Reuters Institute Digital News Report records 84% of Nigerians and 73% of South Africans worried about distinguishing real from fake news, while Afrobarometer data shows social media is trusted by only 38% of Ghanaians, compared to 48% for privately owned broadcast and print outlets (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2025; Afrobarometer, 2023). This credibility gap makes partnerships with established African broadcasters and newspapers strategically valuable for narrative legitimisation. At the same time, television audiences are declining across major markets, and newspaper readership has fallen from 30% to 24% of adults across sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade (Afrobarometer, 2024). A communications strategy that relies on established media for legitimacy must therefore combine that channel with platforms that actually reach the intended audience.

An important structural shift identified in this analysis is the decline of international broadcasting capacity, most acutely following the suspension of Voice of America services in Africa in March 2025. This development removed a source of trusted information for tens of millions of listeners including up to 80 million via the Hausa service alone, and created an information gap that

competing actors, including Russian state media, are actively seeking to exploit (Reporters Without Borders, 2025).

Finally, people-to-people channels, including press tours, academic exchanges, and cultural diplomacy, are consistently identified in the public diplomacy literature as the most credible and impactful forms of engagement. These mechanisms generate locally produced content and first-hand experience, which carry greater legitimacy than external messaging (Pamment, 2013).

4.2 Narrative Effectiveness: What Works and Why

Empirical evidence from Ukrainian strategic communications between 2022 and 2026 demonstrates that narratives resonate when they connect directly to African interests and are supported by verifiable data, while abstract or externally framed messages tend to fail (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024; Meduza, 2025).

One of the clearest examples of an effective narrative is the food security and partnership framing, operationalised through the Grain from Ukraine initiative. Launched in November 2022, on the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor, the programme has supported approximately 16.2 million people across countries in Africa and the Middle East, making it the most tangible and sustained Ukrainian humanitarian engagement on the continent (Martyshchev et al., 2024; Martyshchev, 2025). Its effectiveness lies in its direct material impact, which grounds communication in visible outcomes rather than abstract claims, and positions Ukraine as a contributor to African food security rather than a European conflict actor seeking African support. The deliberate symbolic timing of the launch by linking Ukraine's own historical experience of state-engineered famine with its present role in addressing food insecurity, created a historically resonant narrative layer that reinforced the programme's credibility without requiring audiences to adopt a European frame (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, n.d.). This campaign illustrates one of the most consistently validated principles in strategic communication theory: in low-trust environments, credibility derives from demonstrated material commitment rather than from the volume or sophistication of messaging (Pamment, 2013).

A second high-impact example is the narrative that Russia is using African citizens as cannon fodder in its war effort. This narrative gained prominence following the February 2026 report by INPACT/All Eyes on Wagner, which documented 1,417 African recruits from 35 countries, including hundreds of confirmed casualties (INPACT, 2026). The data was derived from Ukraine's *Hochu Zhit* ("I Want to Live") programme, a governmental surrender and prisoner identification initiative operated by the Coordination Headquarters on the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Hochuzhit, n.d.). By documenting direct consequences for African citizens, the campaign reframes the conflict in Ukraine as an issue with immediate domestic implications for African societies that requires no reference to European security architecture. Notably, this narrative produced observable significant political outcomes, including the February 2026 Nairobi protest by families of missing Kenyan fighters and the subsequent National Intelligence Service report presented to parliament (Al Jazeera, 2026a, 2026b; Igunza, 2026).

A third example is the long-term dissemination of Ukraine-relevant analysis through African media platforms, particularly via the Institute for Security Studies (ISS Africa). ISS Today articles, distributed through outlets such as Daily Maverick and Premium Times, provide sustained and credible coverage of geopolitical issues affecting Africa (ISS Africa, 2024). Research on media

trust in Africa consistently shows that locally embedded and regionally respected institutions are significantly more effective in shaping public opinion than external government messaging, a finding well established in the public diplomacy literature (Pamment, 2013; Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2025).

In contrast, the most prominent example of ineffective narratives is the long-standing emphasis on territorial integrity and the occupation of Crimea and Donbas. Despite systematic deployment since 2014, this narrative has failed to generate consistent support among African states, as reflected in repeated abstentions in United Nations General Assembly votes on Ukraine-related resolutions (Götz, Gejl Kaas, & Knudsen, 2023; Tisserand, 2025). The primary limitation is its lack of direct relevance to African audiences, particularly when presented without linkage to broader issues such as sovereignty or economic impact that resonate in African political culture.

Framing Ukraine primarily as part of a broader Western geopolitical agenda has proven not only ineffective but counterproductive. Analysts and African foreign policy experts confirm that alignment with Western institutions can reduce credibility in African contexts due to historical legacies of colonialism and perceived double standards in the application of international law, particularly following the escalation of conflict in the Middle East after October 2023 (Meduza, 2025; Götz, Gejl Kaas, & Knudsen, 2023). This dynamic contributed to declining support for Ukraine-aligned positions in multilateral forums over time.

A particularly instructive example of a counterproductive narrative was the Tinzaouaten incident in August 2024. Following a major attack by Tuareg rebels and allied groups against Malian and Wagner-linked forces, public comments by Ukrainian officials were widely interpreted as suggesting Ukrainian support for the operation. Although Ukraine denied direct involvement, the statements triggered a severe diplomatic backlash, leading Mali and subsequently Niger to sever relations with Kyiv and prompting condemnation from regional organisations (Bowden, 2025). The episode illustrates how messaging that resonates within a wartime or military logic can generate unintended costs in African contexts, where concerns about sovereignty and external interference often carry greater political salience than geopolitical competition with Russia.

Finally, narrative effectiveness is closely tied to channel selection. While digital campaigns have been deployed in key countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, the absence of sustained engagement with local-language radio platforms such as RFI Kiswahili and RFI Hausa, together reaching tens of millions of listeners across East and West Africa, represents a significant structural gap (France Médias Monde, 2024; Afrobarometer, 2024). Given that radio remains the most widely accessible medium across large parts of sub-Saharan Africa, this limits the reach of otherwise effective narratives.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that successful narratives simultaneously should meet the following criteria: be evidence-based, directly relevant to African audiences, and delivered through trusted and context-appropriate channels. Conversely, narratives fail when they are abstract, externally framed, or misaligned with local communication ecosystems.¹

¹ A broader set of narratives, including their effectiveness and evidence status, is provided in the narratives table available as an online appendix to this report.

Caveats and limitations. Several important qualifications apply when interpreting these findings.

First, this overview captures overt strategic communications rather than covert influence operations. Ukrainian campaigns are, by design, transparent and attributable, whereas competing actors frequently operate through proxy networks and concealed channels. Measured impact may therefore underestimate the relative effectiveness of Ukrainian efforts in environments where covert amplification plays a significant role.

Second, effectiveness assessments are constrained by data availability and attribution limitations. While some campaigns such as Grain from Ukraine and the recruitment exposure are supported by clear evidence of reach and political impact, others lack publicly available metrics on audience engagement, behavioural change, or long-term perception shifts. This is particularly the case for digital campaigns, where platform-level data is either proprietary or incomplete. Thus, effectiveness classifications should be read as analytically informed assessments rather than empirically measured outcomes.

Third, the analysis is subject to regional and linguistic representation bias. Anglophone markets such as Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa are substantially better represented in both reporting and data collection than Francophone, Lusophone, and Arabic-language environments, despite the latter being critical arenas of Russian influence activity. This suggests that the current analysis may systematically understate both opportunities and challenges in non-Anglophone contexts.

Fourth, campaign outcomes are shaped not only by communication strategy but by structural factors beyond any actor's control: perceptions of Western foreign policy double standards, historical relationships with the Soviet Union, and domestic political dynamics within African states. Declining support for Ukraine-aligned positions in multilateral forums cannot be explained by communications performance alone; it must be understood within a broader context of global credibility gaps, particularly following the escalation of conflict in the Middle East after October 2023 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024; Tisserand, 2025).

Fifth, the temporal scope of the analysis (2022 to 2026) captures a period in which many campaigns are still active and whose effects are therefore still accumulating. Strategic communication effects are often long-term and cumulative. Cultural diplomacy initiatives, academic partnerships, and media ecosystem investments may produce limited measurable impact within the analysis window while generating durable influence over a longer horizon.

4.3 Strategic Implications and Recommendations for Sweden

The analysis of communication channels and narrative performance in Africa reveals that effective engagement is primarily a function of strategic alignment between content, delivery mechanisms, and local relevance.

1) Prioritising proactive, interest-based communication. Evidence from Ukraine's Africa engagement since 2022 demonstrates that narratives framed around abstract geopolitical principles such as territorial integrity, the rules-based international order, Euro-Atlantic solidarity have limited resonance when presented without explicit linkage to African priorities (Tisserand, 2025). As this analysis of Ukraine's Africa outreach concludes, primarily moral appeals will not succeed in Africa. By contrast, narratives directly tied to food security, economic partnership, and verifiable

human impact have generated substantially higher engagement and tangible political consequences (Martyshchev et al., 2024; INPACT, 2026). For Sweden, this means structuring communication strategies around issues already salient in African contexts rather than framing engagement as a response to Russian narratives or as an extension of European policy positions.

2) Addressing the structural gap in local-language and traditional media. Digital platforms offer scale but not universality. Radio remains the most widely accessed news medium across sub-Saharan Africa, reaching audiences across income, age, and geographic lines more equitably than any digital platform (Afrobarometer, 2024). International broadcasters with extensive local-language presence including RFI Hausa, which reaches tens of millions across West Africa, and RFI Kiswahili, based in Nairobi and serving East Africa, are among the most significant information channels on the continent (France Médias Monde, 2024). The suspension of Voice of America's (VOA) Africa services in March 2025 further intensified this gap by removing one of the continent's largest independent broadcasting presences, affecting over a thousand community radio partner stations and tens of millions of listeners (Reporters Without Borders, 2025). Sweden, with its decades of Sida-funded media development programming across sub-Saharan Africa is exceptionally well positioned to scale investment in local-language content production and distribution (Sida, n.d.). The most immediate strategic opportunity is to support content replacement for the VOA gap, channelled through existing partners such as DW Akademie and RFI, rather than creating parallel infrastructure from scratch.

3) Working through trusted local intermediaries rather than direct government communication. Research consistently demonstrates that African audiences place higher trust in local media, civil society organisations, and regionally embedded institutions than in external state actors (Pamment, 2013; Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2025). The ISS Africa model, by producing policy-relevant analysis distributed through high-credibility outlets including Daily Maverick and Premium Times, illustrates how externally supported but institutionally independent organisations can shape discourse effectively at continental scale (ISS Africa, 2024). Sweden already contributes to institutions of this kind through Sida and the Folke Bernadotte Academy, which maintains active programming in Africa and Ukraine simultaneously, giving it a structurally unique convening position (FBA, n.d.). The strategic priority is therefore not to build new communication channels but to scale and coordinate existing partnerships, enabling African institutional actors to develop and circulate narratives in their own voices rather than relaying Swedish or Ukrainian messaging.

4) Addressing structural gaps in the African information ecosystem. The analysis documents a significant and growing imbalance between the reach of democratic and non-democratic media actors in Africa, driven both by the systematic expansion of Russian state media infrastructure such as RT's presence in Algeria, Sputnik Afrique's Francophone operations, African Initiative's on-the-ground networks, and by the retraction of Western public broadcasting capacity (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024; EUvsDisinfo, 2025). Sweden is well placed to address this imbalance not through counter-messaging, but through structural investment: supporting investigative journalism capacity, fact-checking infrastructure, data-driven reporting, and media sustainability, i.e. all areas in which Sida and Swedish civil society organisations have established track records (Sida, n.d.). This approach serves both the immediate communications objective and the broader democratic resilience agenda that is central to Swedish foreign policy.

5) Prioritising evidence-based and human-centred narratives. The narratives that have demonstrated the highest resonance in Africa share a common architecture: they are grounded in verifiable data, centred on African experience, and connected to issues that African audiences already care about independently of the conflict in Ukraine. The “cannon fodder” documentation campaign built on prisoner identification data from the HochuZhit programme (hochuzhit.com), investigative journalism, and verified casualty reporting is the clearest model (INPACT, 2026; Al Jazeera, 2026a). Sweden should support initiatives that strengthen the data collection, investigative capacity, and cross-border storytelling infrastructure that makes this kind of narrative possible, rather than focusing resources on message production or dissemination campaigns. Such an approach aligns with the core insight of public diplomacy knowledge where credibility and authenticity are not properties of messages but of institutions and relationships built over time (Pamment, 2013).

Alongside these recommendations, the analysis points to several failure modes that Swedish engagement should explicitly guard against. Narratives that frame Ukraine primarily as a Western cause, or that rely on abstract moral appeals without tangible African relevance, have consistently underperformed and can actively reinforce non-alignment sentiment (Tisserand, 2025; Meduza, 2025). Any communication linked to Ukrainian military operations, or perceived as interference in African political affairs, risks producing the kind of diplomatic backlash documented after the Tinzaouaten incident, where a single mismanaged communication event severed Ukraine's diplomatic relationship with Mali and generated regional criticism (Bowden, 2025). Sweden's contribution should be structured in ways that give African institutional partners genuine ownership of narratives and avoid any appearance of co-opting African civil society for a European political agenda.

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Appendix A. Data and Methodology

Three datasets underpin this report, covering actors, narratives, and campaigns in Ukrainian strategic communications toward Africa between 2022 and 2026. No classified material, proprietary data, or confidential communications were used. The compilation process drew on four categories of publicly available information: official documents and communications from Ukrainian government institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President's Office, and the Coordination Headquarters on the Treatment of Prisoners of War; publications, event records, and analytical output from African and international think tanks, research institutes, and civil society organisations; reporting by African, international, and specialist media outlets, including investigative journalism products and wire services; and academic literature on African media, public diplomacy, and Russian information operations.

Each entry in the datasets was compiled based on a minimum of one verifiable open source. The datasets were assembled iteratively over the course of the project, with entries updated as new evidence became available. All source URLs were checked at the time of entry.

However, several limitations apply and should be kept in mind when interpreting the analysis in this report.

First, open-source coverage is structurally uneven. Anglophone and Francophone markets such as South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, and Senegal, are substantially better documented than Lusophone, Arabic-speaking, or smaller Francophone West African markets. This means that actors, narratives, and campaigns operating primarily in Portuguese, Arabic, Hausa, Kiswahili, or other local languages are likely underrepresented in the dataset relative to their actual significance on the ground.

Second, the dataset captures overt strategic communications rather than covert operations. Ukrainian intelligence activities in Africa are by definition not fully documentable from open sources. Where covert elements have been reported by credible investigative journalism or confirmed by official statements, they are noted, but the dataset does not intend to provide a complete picture of Ukrainian activity on the continent.

Third, the dataset is subject to a visibility bias toward high-profile events and institutionally active actors. Informal communications, diaspora-level networking, interpersonal relationships between diplomats and local contacts are largely invisible to open-source analysis.

Fourth, the time boundary of the dataset (2022–2026) means that legacy relationships and historical communications pre-dating the full-scale invasion, which continue to shape African perceptions of Ukraine, are captured only to the extent that they surfaced in post-2022 sources. Ukraine's pre-independence history and its Soviet-era connections to African liberation movements are treated in the analytical sections of this report but are not systematically mapped in the dataset itself.

Fifth, effectiveness assessments for individual narratives and campaigns reflect the analytical judgement of the research team based on available evidence of resonance, uptake, and real-world consequences. They are not the product of survey data, audience research, or controlled measurement, and should be read as analytically informed assessments rather than empirically measured outcomes.

Taken together, the three datasets constitute an open-source mapping of Ukrainian strategic communications in Africa currently available in the public domain. They are offered here as a working tool: a foundation for the policy analysis developed in Sections 2 and 3 of this report, and a baseline for tracking and assessing future developments.



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