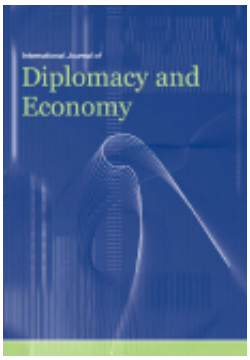
INDERSCIENCE PUBLISHERS
Linking academia, business and industry through research



International Journal of Diplomacy and Economy

ISSN online: 2049-0895 - ISSN print: 2049-0887
https://www.inderscience.com/ijdipe

Leveraging Chinese economic presence in the post-lockdown Ghanaian market space and the growth of China's public relations and diplomacy

Thomas Ameyaw-Brobbey

DOI: 10.1504/IJDIPE.2022.10051186

Article History:

Received:	19 July 2022
Accepted:	07 September 2022
Published online:	06 February 2023

Leveraging Chinese economic presence in the post-lockdown Ghanaian market space and the growth of China's public relations and diplomacy

Thomas Ameyaw-Brobbey

Centre for African and International Studies,
University of Cape Coast,
Cape Coast, Ghana
Email: t.ameyaw_brobbey@yahoo.com

Abstract: Recent research indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected the socioeconomic life of people in sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, the paper's purpose is to explore how the economically bottom-class citizens in Ghana – small-scale vendors – are navigating themselves out of their predicaments. Using a mixed method, I combined a structured questionnaire with unstructured interviews to collect data and examined 384 small-scale vendors in four urban centres with content analysis and SPSS descriptive statistics. I find that Ghanaian small-scale vendors are leveraging the Chinese economic presence in the Ghanaian market space to navigate themselves from the negative impacts the pandemic brought on their socioeconomic life. I argue that China's international image-building effort is growing and achieving desired outcomes in Ghana as a result of pegging economic engagement as a soft power resource. The economic engagements may further Chinese public relations and diplomacy – transforming Chinese cultural assets into soft power. I base the theoretical argument on the new public diplomacy framework.

Keywords: Ghana; China; COVID-19 pandemic; China's economic/business presence; living standard and poverty; small-scale vendors and low-income earners; new public diplomacy; Ghanaian market space; soft power; public relations and image building.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Ameyaw-Brobbey, T. (2023) 'Leveraging Chinese economic presence in the post-lockdown Ghanaian market space and the growth of China's public relations and diplomacy', *Int. J. Diplomacy and Economy*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp.57–80.

Biographical notes: Thomas Ameyaw-Brobbey is an Assistant Professor of International Relations, Diplomacy and Security. His research interests are interdisciplinary, spanning international relations, security, civil conflicts and wars, human security, state-building, domestic governance institutions of developing countries, China-African public relations and sports politics. Currently, he is a member of the following professional societies: ISA, IPSA, ASAA and ACPS. His recent publications (2022) have appeared in *World Affairs*, *Journal of International Studies*, *African Journal of Economic and Sustainable Development*, *Sage Open*, *Africa Review*, and *Insight on Africa.* His other works (Op-Ed) could be found in the *Global Policy Journal*, *National Interest*, *E-International Relations* and *Modern Diplomacy*.

1 Introduction

Evidence indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has left devastating effects on people and governments worldwide, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (African Development Bank, 2021; Amewu et al., 2020; Anyanwu and Salami, 2021; Bukari et al., 2021; Fetzer et al., 2020; Joska et al., 2020). The impacts of the pandemic in the region are not homogenous across geographical areas and socio-economic levels as the low-income groups, including the urban poor are the worst hit (see, e.g., Kazeem, 2020; Le Nestour and Moscoviz, 2020). Therefore, Justinek (2021a) may not be wrong with the assertion that despite the COVID-19 pandemic in our rear view mirror, we might have to abreast ourselves for very turbulent years ahead, turbulences which may likely be more than the peak years of the pandemic. This is because the pandemic not only worsened pre-COVID-19 global problems but has added new complex challenges relating to international relations and politics – creating, highlighting, and validating interstate enmities and public perceptions – global economy – impacting supply chains negatively, exacerbating governmental spending and creating public debts and national deficits (Justinek, 2021a). We might have to pay for these costs long beyond the pandemic itself.

From this premise, the purpose of this paper is to analyse how the economically bottom-class citizens in Ghana, focusing on the small-scale vendors, are navigating themselves out of the socioeconomic predicaments caused by the pandemic. The paper asks this main question. How are the small-scale vendors leveraging the Ghanaian market space to navigate themselves out of the difficulties the pandemic's outcomes – physical and economic lockdown, social distancing, border closures and travel restrictions – unleashed? I employed a mixed research technique and a field survey to answer the question. Using a structured questionnaire and unstructured interviews, the study collected and examined data from 384 small-scale vendors in four urban centres in Ghana – Accra, Tema, Sunyani and Ho – between August and October 2021. The present work defines small-scale vendors as traders operating between Ghc500 (USD90) and Ghc3000 (USD486) business capital. I utilised content analysis and SPSS descriptive statistics. Analysis of the data provides micro-level evidence that the small-scale vendors and low-income earners are exploiting external influences or actors, specifically, the Chinese economic and business presence in the Ghanaian market space to navigate themselves from the negative impacts the pandemic's outcomes brought on their socioeconomic life. Analysis of the data, first, briefly provides micro-level evidence of how COVID-19 threatened the ordinary living standards of the low-income earners, relating to access to income, food, water and medical care and second, evidence of the growth of Chinese public relations and diplomacy due to iterated economic engagements.

This means that the small-scale vendors are leveraging positive outcomes from the Chinese business presence in Ghana, bidding to use it to improve their lives after the economic lockdowns or as an exit route to at least steer their lives back to the pre-lockdown period. Specifically, while COVID-19 increased poverty of the low-income class, deteriorating their personal, household and dependents' living standards, they hope to improve their conditions by leveraging the increasing Chinese presence and influence in the Ghanaian market space through easily accessible and affordable Chinese goods. Consequently, I base the theoretical framework on the new public diplomacy to argue that China's international image-building effort is growing and achieving desired outcomes in Ghana – improved Ghanaian public attitude toward China – as a result of pegging iterated economic engagement as a soft power resource and targeting the

economically-bottom class citizens in the Ghanaian society. Therefore, iterated Chinese economic engagements and resources, to some extent may further Chinese public relations and diplomacy in the grand scheme of enhancing its image abroad.

The perspective of the economically bottom-class citizens or low-income earners could not be representative of the general Ghanaian public. Consequently, it may be erroneous to argue that leveraging the Chinese economic and business presence in the Ghanaian market space by the small-scale vendors suggests that China's international image-building effort is achieving the desired outcomes in Ghana. Nevertheless, official statistics from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) indicate that out of the 89.7% of the private sector employment of the labour force (the economic active population of 15 years and older), 77.1% is private informal, comprising significantly of small-scale businesses and low-income earners (GSS, 2021, p.130). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also estimates in July 2020 that with the country's current population of 31 million, about 14 million Ghanaians are multidimensionally poor (UNDP, 2020). The essence of the related concepts, public diplomacy and public relations, is to communicate with the international public and promote one's national image to people outside a country's geographical boundaries to attract the international public. Thus, the concepts excel in the realm of large numbers. Therefore, the informality of the Ghanaian economy and proof that there are more low-income earners and poor people means that their satisfaction with the Chinese economic presence could bolster China's image building in Ghana.

The finding of this study supports existing literature. First, it supports Afrobarometer's findings that Ghanaians, and generally Africans, have a favourable perception and attitude towards China (Afrobarometer, 2021a; Lekorwe et al., 2016). It also supports works by Marfaing and Thiel (2013) and Obeng (2018) who specifically argued that the Chinese traders and their general economic presence in the Ghanaian market space are supported by the local small-scale traders, contrary to the opposition-held by the large-scale traders. The large-scale Ghanaian traders want the removal of the Chinese from the market due to claims of unfair and asymmetric competition. However, the small-scale traders do not want the Chinese to be removed because they enable the small-scale and low-income traders to engage in business, bypassing the restricted economic networks set up and controlled by the large-scale local traders (Obeng, 2018).

COVID-19-related research is fast growing, studying and providing micro-level evidence of the impact of the pandemic. However, studies that link the relationship between the impacts and public diplomacy and public relations are lacking. This work attempts to fill this void. It also contributes to the existing body of literature on COVID-19 and the growing body of literature on China's international image-building effort and public diplomacy. Again, individuals are the best judges of their lives because the value of living standards lies in the living itself. Therefore, finding solutions to navigate the low-income earners out of COVID-19's socioeconomic predicaments from the perspective of the low-income earners – not the government – will serve policy relevance, guiding policy review and programme planning for national development.

I organise the rest of the paper as follows. In Section 2, after establishing the fast-growing literature on the impact of the pandemic as well as China's public relations and public diplomacy in the next section, in Section 3, examines the theoretical framework. Section 4 briefly describes the research methods. I then set the dynamics of the COVID-19 outbreak in Ghana in the Section 5. Section 6 sets and discusses the research findings where I set forth the argument that as the small-scale vendors are improving their lives by

leveraging the increasing Chinese economic influence, China's international image-building effort stands to gain an elevation. The final Section 7 offers concluding remarks.

2 Assessing the literature

2.1 Global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The impact of the pandemic is worldwide. Therefore, country- and area-specific studies on the impact of the pandemic are rapidly expanding. In Kenya, e.g., Austrian et al. (2020) prevented micro-level evidence from five slums in Nairobi to show that urban slums had an elevated risk of COVID-19 transmission due to the environmental and socioeconomic conditions in those areas. Nevertheless, the positive side is that the people in the slums had high knowledge of COVID-19, regarding infections and prevention measures although poverty served as a barrier to access sanitizers and obeying government social distancing measures. The pandemic's effect on health has also been featured significantly in recent works. In Ghana, Sarfo et al. (2020) compared the rates of stroke admissions and case fatality between 2019 and 2020 to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health and well-being. Their findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with a significant increase in initial and recurrent stroke admissions as well as case fatalities.

The pandemic in South Africa raises unique challenges to mental health. Government control measures such as lockdowns increased the risk of psychiatric and mental health problems among people with HIV infection and a history of psychological trauma. The lockdowns re-kindled their trauma related to the community-based restrictions during Apartheid while the news of the virus increased their anxieties of being infected and the risk of opportunistic infections, causing anger and domestic violence (Joska et al., 2020). In terms of socioeconomic cost, micro-level evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic challenges many household food security, economic well-being and living standard in Ghana. A specifically scary revelation is that many households, about 57.76% of a sampled population (3905), on several occasions did not get enough food to eat during the peak periods of the pandemic. Moreover, about 50.52% of the households on several occasions were not able to access clean water while 52.22% went without access to medicines and proper medical care (Bukari et al., 2022).

It is important to iterate that due to the pandemic's restrictions such as lockdown and social distancing measures, people's employment and sources of income were affected. Therefore 60.72% of Bukari et al.'s (2022) sample population on several times did not have enough income for daily bread and other household activities. Consequently, 69.04% of the surveyed population suffered from food insecurity and hunger. Based on this premise, it is not difficult to argue that the pandemic is likely to exacerbate hunger and poverty in Ghana. The socioeconomic challenges of the pandemic indicate that Ghana is likely to struggle to meet its SDGs goals. Kesar et al. (2021) concerned about a similar objective – the impact of COVID-19's lockdown measures on employment, livelihoods, and food security – in India. The investigation revealed a significant socioeconomic effect on Indian households as two-thirds of the respondents reported losing employment and a sharp decline in earnings of about 60% of the respondents. Like other places in the world, the negative economic impact, in turn, affected people's ability to access food with 80% reporting a reduction in food intake (Kesar et al., 2021).

Increasing poverty forced a third to seek help through loans to shore up daily expenses (Kesar et al., 2021) with the likelihood of putting further burdens on the households in the post-lockdown period.

Although COVID-19 infection has no respect for economic standings, in most cases, low-income earners are more susceptible to infections than middle- and high-income earners. This is because lack of access to basic housing, water and sanitation means that many low-income earners are crowded in highly populated slum communities in the urban centres where person-to-person contacts are highly common to engender community spread (Asante -Poku and Van Huellen, 2021; Austrian et al., 2020; Paul et al., 2020). In Ghana, e.g., low-income earners in the urban centres are even more prone to infectious diseases than those in the villages or rural areas because the rural environment is less congested and in many instances, houses are quite distant from each other. Moreover, the rural poor are mostly peasant farmers who could stockpile food from their farms to reduce food emergencies during the period of restrictions. However, the urban poor depends on daily economic activities to acquire daily bread, reducing their ability to save for emergencies. Thus they are more likely to flout pandemic protocols in search of food and livelihood.

In some cases, low-income earners' access to information and health education regarding the pandemic may be low due to a lack of formal education. Consequently, in South Africa (Johannesburg) and Ghana (Accra), Durizzo et al. (2020) found that although many of the urban poor engaged in appropriate personal and household hygienic behaviour before and during the pandemic, they mostly flouted social distancing and lockdown rules as about 25–40% of the sampled population were still attending large gatherings, 10–20% were still receiving visitors at home, 30–35% did not stay at home as the governments' request. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the urban poor's lack of cooperation with the pandemic's control measures was more related to poverty than blatant unwillingness to obey (Durizzo et al., 2020).

2.2 China and international public relations and image building

Traditionally, China's conduct of international relations takes a top-down government-to-government engagement with no consideration for the international or foreign public (Wang, 2008; Wang and Lu, 2008) because the Chinese traditional mind is not conscious of the idea of 'international-ness' (Qin, 2007, p.322). The Chinese culture has fashioned an idea among the Chinese that the world is everything under heaven and on earth controlled by the emperor who had the Mandate of Heaven (Kissinger, 2011; Qin, 2007). Consequently, Chinese leaders traditionally see all 'publics' as the Chinese public. That is everybody in the world is Chinese, thus, foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy. However, the Chinese government since the 2000s has invested heavily in international public relations and public diplomacy to build a positive image (Hanauer and Morris, 2014; Jiang et al., 2016) because having a bad reputation in the eyes of the international public can be a serious impediment to development and influence in a globalised world.

International public relations and public diplomacy can be seen as direct and indirect soft power processes and efforts of governments to promote their state's image to people outside their geographical boundaries. China has attempted to shape its international public image through various forms, including culture and people-to-people exchanges. For example, numerous Confucius Institutes– like the British Council – across the world

coordinate technical support, training, and cultural programs between China and foreign nationals. Recently, China falls on numerous scholarship programmes such as the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC) and the Confucius Scholarship to attract worldwide students to China through which the country attempts to socialise them.

By far, iterated economic engagement plays a central role in Chinese public diplomacy and relations conducted in Africa. Chinese economic presence in the African market space has improved the standard of living of many Africans. For example, studies in Ghana and Senegal have revealed that financial barriers restricted small-scale traders and low-income earners from participating in the economy. However, the Chinese presence that made available less costly goods has opened pathways to gainful economic activity, providing communication channels with the local people to bypass financial restrictions (Marfaing and Thiel, 2013; Obeng, 2018). Apart from providing opportunities in the markets, Chinese economic presence in terms of investment in manufacturing and construction has generally affected the public positively. Manufacturing provides jobs, enhances technology transfer and influences various countries' GDP positively (Adunbi and Stein, 2019; Ameyaw-Brobbey and Gupta, 2021).

The world blamed China for the outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 virus (Ameyaw-Brobbey, 2021a; Silver et al., 2020). Realising the danger of having a bad reputation, China took a conscious effort to rebrand its image, undertaking excessive public diplomacy to reach the international public to attempt to change the COVID-19 narrative and portray itself as a responsible global partner. Being successful in beating the virus at home, China extended help worldwide to countries struggling with the virus, filling the leadership void left by the USA and the EU, whom themselves were not in the position to assist. China provided medical assistance and expertise, and equipment, and shared the virus-related information with other countries through virtual conferences. It assisted developed countries like France, Spain, the UK and the Netherlands, and single-handedly saved Italy when it was ditched by the EU (Ameyaw-Brobbey, 2021b; Braw, 2020). Others like Estonia and Lithuania who had fallen out with China received assistance. Chinese medical suppliers arrived in Ghana to be distributed to 17 other African countries. Aid was channelled across the world by Chinese private companies and individuals such as Alibaba and the Jack Ma Foundation in Beijing's name (Ameyaw-Brobbey, 2021b).

Undoubtedly, Chinese public diplomacy during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic was strongly based on assisting other countries. Gauttam et al. (2020) believed that China's active role it played around the world during the peak of the pandemic is a practice of health diplomacy that serves as a soft power tool for China to further its international image-building and leadership ambition. The premise is that although the world blames China for the outbreak and spread of the virus, its demonstration of intent to help others create a strategic opportunity for China to expand its leadership through health diplomatic means, projecting an image of a benevolent leader and wooing people to accept its ideals and values. Consequently, apart from impacting worldwide socioeconomic systems, the pandemic, 'likely will change the post-COVID geopolitical world order', perching China at the top of the global leadership ladder (Gauttam et al., 2020). Smith and Fallon (2020) share a similar opinion. They argue that the COVID-19 aids across the world are healthy diplomatic resources that present China with an opportunity to build its image on the international scene by forging meaningful and long-lasting friendships. Another scholar believes that combining China's increasing health diplomacy that is shaping the perspective of other countries and the US's drive towards

ambivalence, including its inability or unwillingness to lead a global response against the pandemic, we might need to consider 'change' as a keyword for 2021 and beyond (Justinek, 2021b).

Health diplomacy is a 'political activity that meets the dual goals of improving health while maintaining and strengthening the international relations abroad' (Chattu and Knight, 2019, p.151). This relationship between global health and international relations shows that health diplomacy is an important foreign policy tool. Throughout the years, Western countries and their international organisations and institutions have exercised health diplomacy by undertaking immunisation of children, providing medical care to pregnant women and fighting diseases like cholera or malaria in Africa, eliciting ideational attachment and socialisation of African political elites. This is not limited to Western countries. Cuban doctors and medical experts in the rural areas of various African countries also helped establish strong ties between African countries and Cuba, especially in the 1990s. Thus, health diplomacy can be seen as a soft power tool with the potential to improve bilateral relations (Drager and Fidler, 2007; Labonté and Gagnon, 2010). Health diplomacy can be an important public diplomacy or relations tool to attract the ordinary public of other countries because they come directly into contact with foreign doctors and medical experts. However, if an ideational attachment is not established, people tend to forget assistance when their health is regained. Considering the long-term challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought us, it would be prudent that countries put greater emphasis on forms of diplomacy, including health or medical diplomacy and economic diplomacy in their pursuit or quest to achieve soft power. On this basis, Justinek (2021b) see corporate diplomacy, medical diplomacy and soft power as important keywords for 2021.

Although the diplomatic effect of global health assistance cannot be disputed, other scholars claim that in the case of China, this diplomatic effect may not be realised vis-à-vis COVID-19. Undoubtedly, China was more active on the global scene than any other country. But this does not automatically engender the international public to favour Chinese ideals, values and methods. China may win some friends, especially on the intergovernmental level but it is unlikely to substantially shape positive international public attitude in its favour to beat the USA because the world believes that without China, there would not have been COVID-19 in the first place. Thus, the country has a responsibility to solve the problem it has caused. Moreover, the USA's bottom-up diplomatic style establishes ideational attachment more than China's top-down style (Ameyaw-Brobbey, 2021b). Instead of furthering China's public relations and diplomacy, the pandemic may even reduce China's existing strength on the global stage because of the blame for the pandemic's origination, mixed with conspiracies and theories of bio-weapon may validate the global public's negative perceptions of China as a bad state with a regime hiding its weakness, fear and insecurity behind information censorship, venomous nationalism and strict surveillance (Ameyaw-Brobbey, 2021a).

Using health diplomacy, specifically mask diplomacy, China portrayed itself as a Good Samaritan, a responsible and reliable power. The country attempted to change Europeans' narration of China's representation in the COVID-19 outbreak to dissociate itself from the views that its duplicity and authoritarianism provided the platform for the rapid spread of the virus (Verma, 2020). We need to note that fear and confidence mutually motivated the Chinese diplomatic drive across the world towards this end. Global public perception of China is generally unfavourable even before the pandemic and particularly worse in Europe (Cha, 2020; Devlin and Huang, 2019; Silver, 2017; Silver and Devlin, 2020; Silver et al., 2019a; 2019b). These unfavourable views hit a

historic high at the outbreak of the pandemic (Silver et al., 2020). Consequently, the country was scared that the pandemic would worsen this plight and further take a toll on its gains in the international arena (Ameyaw-Brobbey, 2021a). Thus, diplomacy was an international face-saving mission. The early domestic successes over the virus, however, gave Chinese authorities confidence internationally, highlighting the strength of their governance (Verma, 2020).

Despite Verma's (2020) assertion of an attempt to change the COVID-19 narrative in Europe, Kavalski (2021) noted that media representation of the pandemic's outbreak in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has validated the region's position held about China and its identity, accelerating negative perceptions of China as an irresponsible citizen of the global society and a global threat. In what they call 'coronavirus diplomacy' – a specification of health diplomacy – Kobierecka and Kobierecki (2021) see China's drive to shape the narration about the pandemic, portray strength in its governance system and attract people to its values and ideals with medical help across the world as public diplomacy offensive. Undoubtedly, China's coronavirus diplomacy was meant to pursue foreign policy goals in the form of building a favourable image as a trustworthy global partner. The practice was motivated to showcase its gratitude – China's traditional virtue to repay goodwill with greater kindness – for the aid it received at the initial onset of the disease, presenting an opportunity to show itself as an international, responsible power and laying the grounds future cooperation (Kobierecka and Kobierecki, 2021).

Coronavirus diplomacy has disputed and in a way replaced disaster diplomacy. Coronavirus diplomacy is China's attempt to create a more meaningful and lasting peace between itself and those who might not have been friendly before by working together to combat a common enemy – coronavirus (COVID-19 pandemic)to continue amity afterwards (Duran, 2020; Kelman, 2020). From this meaning, it connotes the pursuit of joint action. However, coronavirus diplomacy assumes a derogatory meaning in China. It is understood as China's attempt to make political use of the global crises to gain benefits (Wenting, 2020).

We can see that although the diplomatic and international relations aspects of COVID-19 literature are gradually emerging, they are dominated by health and mask diplomacy, focusing on the diplomatic implications – China's international image and influence – of Chinese medical aid to the world. However, the present work is carving a unique path, showing how the larger Chinese global economic presence would affect and shape its international image and influence – public diplomacy and public relations drive – amid the dilapidating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income earners in developing countries.

3 New public diplomacy of international relations

In a globalised world, statesmen are concerned about the perceptions foreign nationals hold about their states. However, the same globalisation, easy access to information and the growing socioeconomic cost of living make it challenging for an in-depth analysis of information. Therefore, people may be susceptible to falsehood and conspiracies and they may form their perceptions of other states or nations based mostly on clichés that would influence their decision-making. Consequently, governments undertake public diplomacy, that is, they enter the international arena to communicate directly to the foreign public through various tools, attempting to shape, change, or reinforce their behaviour and political attitudes towards the foreign government (Gilboa, 2008; Golan et

al., 2019). Specifically, public diplomacy may be seen as direct and indirect government's processes of communicating with foreign publics and civil societies beyond its geographical territory in an attempt to bring about an understanding of its state's ideas, policies, values, institutions and culture, aiming to attract them to ultimately impact the foreign government. In short, public diplomacy is conducting international public relations.

Foreign publics have always mattered to diplomats, thus, public diplomacy has traditionally been a state-directed process. However, changes have occurred in the frameworks of world politics, presenting new challenges to the traditional way of conducting public diplomacy and making it impossible for the state to conduct public diplomacy and public relations solely (Justinek, 2019). First, democratic accountability and nationalist revolutions of the 19th century have turned citizens into independent observers and assertive participants in politics. Second, globalisation has intensified social networks and expanded social relations beyond traditional boundaries to redefine the concepts of local and international. Third, the technological revolution has implicitly impacted transportation, information and communication, creating a social media world (Justinek, 2019; Melissen, 2005; Sharp, 2009). These factors have made it possible for people to be directly involved in domestic and international political life. Moreover, large and small non-state actors, including individuals, groups, private and multinational companies and supranational and sub-national players develop public diplomacy policies to complement the government's efforts. Consequently, we can talk about new public diplomacy (see, e.g., Melissen, 2005; Seib, 2009; Sharp, 2009; Wang, 2006).

Following Sharp (2009, p.268), I leave the definition of new public diplomacy in this work as 'the processes by which members of the public of both countries can enter into direct relations with one another.' This neither means that government diplomats are unimportant, nor have non-state actors taken over the conduct of diplomacy. However, governments create the environment for the non-state actors including the public of both countries to communicate, enhancing the understanding of each other's ideas, policies, values, institutions and culture to engender attraction. Thus, what diplomats ought to be doing goes beyond their four-walled offices and the direct, discreet and confidential communications with the political elites in the host countries to include communicating directly with the host public to create a receptive environment in the host countries for their own countries' foreign policy interests (Sharp, 2009, p.267). Issues at the grassroots of civil society become the bread and butter of diplomats. In early 2022, e.g., the French Ambassador to Ghana – Anne-Sophie Ave – used Ghana's favourite sport – football – to address the host public by fantasising about a World Cup final featuring Ghana and France, winning the hearts of many Ghanaians. The British High Commissioner to Ghana – Harriet Thompson – took to Twitter to comment on an ongoing politically-related case in the country, receiving mixed reactions from the Ghanaian public. The newly appointed US Ambassador to Ghana – Virginia E. Palmer – took to social media to introduce herself and her family to the Ghanaian public, expressing love for Ghanaian foods, artefacts and the environment.

We can see that new public diplomacy converges interests between states and non-state actors and among non-state actors. Thus, instead of competing, international companies from the same home country, e.g., cooperate, facing up to their social responsibilities to build a positive image for their home country. The catch here is that in the contemporary practice of public diplomacy different types of actors relate and learn vital lessons from each other while working complementarily to influence, shape and

attract the host public towards the values, ideals, policies, institutions and culture of their home state. Hence, new public diplomacy.

4 Methods

I attempted to investigate how Ghanaian small-scale vendors are navigating themselves out of the socioeconomic predicaments COVID-19 brought to their lives. The findings are based primarily on a survey conducted in four cities in Ghana – Accra, Tema, Sunyani and Ho – between August 2021 and October 2021. Data collection was done through a structured questionnaire and unstructured interviews that allowed followed-up questions and discussions. I read out the questions and the associated options, followed byan explanation in Twi (a local language) to randomly sampled vendors. This quickened the process and also catered for vendors who struggled to read or did not want to read, enabling the participation of every vendor I approached. A total of 384 participants (127 males and 257 females) were surveyed. Creswell and Miller's (2000) suggested that a sample size of 15–30 participants is suitable for qualitative research that utilises interview techniques. Vendors' capital ranged between Ghc500 (USD90) and Ghc3000 (USD486).

Overall, the study took a mixed method, blending the qualitative technique of content analysis with a limited quantitative technique of IBM SPSS version 23's descriptive statistics. The mixed technique 'give[s] us different, complementary pictures of the things we observe' (Lune and Berg, 2017, p.2). Following the Ghana Statistical Service's (GSS) (2019) variables for measuring poverty and living standards (see also, Afrobarometer, 2021b), the study briefly determined the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic to enable a query on how the impacts are been mitigated in the post-lockdown period. I observed ethics by explaining the purpose of the study to the respondents to assure non-responsibility. The precise questions were:

- From the time Ghana recorded the first COVID-19 case, through to all the periods of lockdowns and restrictions, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: enough food to eat; enough clean water for home use; medicines or medical treatment; enough fuel to cook your food; a cash income.
- How do you think you would be able to recover from the pandemic shock and improve your condition better than in the pre-COVID-19 period? [multiple responses apply]

5 Ghana's COVID-19 outbreak, response and excesses

Following the rapid global spread of the COVID-19 virus, Ghana's government initiated preparatory measures aimed at controlling the spread and reducing the disease's impact in the likelihood that it hit the country. It set up the National Technical Coordinating Committee in January 2020, tasked with the duty to access the country's readiness, resilience and preparedness to handle the outbreak. The government strengthened the committee's capacity with a commitment of GH¢572 million to enhance detect, contain, and prevent measures (Ministry of Health, 2020a). The first two cases of COVID-19 in Ghana were imported from Norway and Turkey, reported on 12 March 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2020b), and followed by rapid growth in both imported cases and infections

within communities. The government formulated measures to control the virus by adopting the WHO guidelines, supplemented with its unique approaches. It made mask wearing mandatory and encouraged other behavioural changes like frequent hand washing and sanitisation. It imposed a nationwide travel ban and social restrictions on 16 March that affected public gatherings.

It also instituted quarantine and airport testing measures for international arrivals and foreign nationals arriving from countries with 200 or more COVID-19 cases (Amewu et al., 2020; Kenu et al., 2020). The government closed international borders completely on 21 March 2020 but lifted air travel restrictions on 1 September 2020. However, land and sea borders remained closed until 27 March 2022, the same day it lifted other control measures including mask-wearing. The government further imposed a partial lockdown of hotspots – Greater Accra Metropolitan and Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Areas – starting 30 March 2020 for three weeks (Amewu et al., 2020; Ansah, 2020; Asante and Mills, 2020). The lockdown restricted the movement of people, excluding those working in essential service sectors. Intra-city commercial vehicles operated but with a reduced number of passengers, doubling transportation charges. In the post-lockdown period, the government through the security agencies ensured social distancing, mask-wearing and a ban on social gatherings.

Undoubtedly, these measures took a heavy toll on the government's finances. The Ministry of Finance's (MoF) early assessment of the likely budgetary impacts of the pandemic revealed a grim picture. The government was expected to lose GH¢ 5.68 billion in oil revenue and GH¢ 2.25 billion in non-oil revenues (MoF, 2020). The cost of COVID-19 response programs – the National Preparedness and Response Program and the Coronavirus Alleviation Program – was expected to increase to GH¢ 572 million and GH¢ 1.20 billion, respectively. Consequently, 2020 projected real GDP growth rate was expected to decline from 6.8 to 2.6% (MoF, 2020). In response, the government ran to the IMF in April 2020 and obtained an IMF loan of $1 billion (IMF, 2020). The government also petitioned the World Bank and was supported with an initial amount of $100 million in April 2020, followed by additional financing of $130 million in November 2020 to fight COVID-19 (The World Bank, 2020a; 2020b). At the micro-level, the pandemic had devastating effects on people's socioeconomic life, especially those in the informal sector and low-income earners as prices of food, water, service delivery, transportation and the general cost of living increased to compound poverty in the country (Amewu et al., 2020; Asante and Mills, 2020; Bukari et al., 2021, 2022). The government responded by introducing a three-month tax holiday (Mensah and Boakye, 2021, p.9). It also absorbed the water and electricity bills for the poorest consumers from April 2020 to the year ending (Nkrumah et al., 2021, p.2).

Existing studies show that small-scale and low-income earners have been hard-hit (Bukari et al., 2021, 2022; Durizzo et al., 2020). As low-income earners earn little from their daily economic activities, they usually live hand-to-mouth and are unable to save for future unforeseen circumstances. Consequently, they become susceptible to economic shocks that are associated with human and natural disasters like pandemics in the form of livelihood loss. Therefore, they were more exposed to sidestep the COVID-19 measures not because they were not law-abiding citizens but to search of daily bread. The government used security agencies, particularly, the military and police to enforce COVID-19 control measures. Civilian and news reports indicate that the military brutalised people who flouted the protocols (Asante and Mills, 2020; Wemakor, 2020). It created opportunistic repression (Davenport, 2007; Grasse et al., 2021) where the pandemic provided a window of opportunity for the government to assert and solidify

control by legitimising repression. News reports of the military beating up civilians with brutal force increased (see, e.g., Wemakor, 2020).

Owing the essential services the urban market centres provide, they were excluded from the mandatory lockdown. However, the government instituted measures to enhance hygienic conditions in the markets through fumigation and disinfection. In March 2020, the government embarked on the first phase of fumigation and disinfection exercises in the major market centres in Accra that were replicated nationwide between late March and early April 2020, covering at least 1806 markets across the country (Asante and Mills, 2020). The second phase began in Accra on 19 July 2020. The mass spraying was extended to all tertiary institutions and schools in July 2020 after three months of closing down the schools. Direct observation of the major markets in Accra and across the country will instantly give a vivid picture of the insanity and unhygienic conditions under which businesses take place and food is sold and bought. Evidence shows that this situation is not different across Africa but the various municipal authorities have done extremely little to improve sanitation and hygienic conditions (see, e.g., Asante and Helbrecht, 2019a; Awuah, 1997; Battersby and Watson, 2019).

However, although the government's disinfection exercises aimed to improve market hygiene as a means to cut the surface spreading of the COVID-19 virus (Asante and Mills, 2020), several analysts and experts of virology in the country questioned the brain behind the exercise. In the first place, fumigation is internationally banned. Secondly, the existing cases in the country at the time were imported, suggesting human or person-to-person transmission rather than interspecies transmission. Thirdly, Ghana runs open or outdoor market spaces with full ventilation unsuitable for COVID-19 virus to habit. Fourthly, schools had been closed down for three months, thus, impossible for COVID-19 viruses to stay in those classrooms (The Fourth Estate, 2021). The WHO had earlier warned against spraying or fogging indoor spaces such as classrooms and offices, and outdoor spaces such as streets, sidewalks and marketplaces because it is ineffective in removing contaminants outside of direct spray zones, are not routes or reservoirs of infection and would pose adverse health effects or harm to people undertaking the exercise and those who utilise the sprayed spaces (WHO, 2020, p.3).

Analysts have asserted that the government's fumigation and disinfection exercises were a shrewd move to divert COVID-19 funds into personal coffers through bribery and corruption. Specifically, the government used COVID-19 intervention as a window of opportunity to revamp years of stalled fumigation projects that had been the subject of corruption allegations in the country. The country's Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development had sole-sourced the disinfection and fumigation contract to a company called Zoomlion Ghana Limited (Ghana Business News, 2017; The Fourth Estate, 2021). Thus, before the COVID-19 spraying contract, Zoomlion Ghana Limited had a standing contract with all the various assemblies and some ministries in the country to undertake monthly fumigation and disinfection exercises in certain indoor and outdoor spaces (The Fourth Estate, 2021). Therefore, it is extremely difficult to understand why a new contract was signed with the same company to undertake the same functions at the same places in the name of COVID-19. Moreover, some assemblies have even indicated that they have the resources to undertake these functions in their localities (The Fourth Estate, 2021).

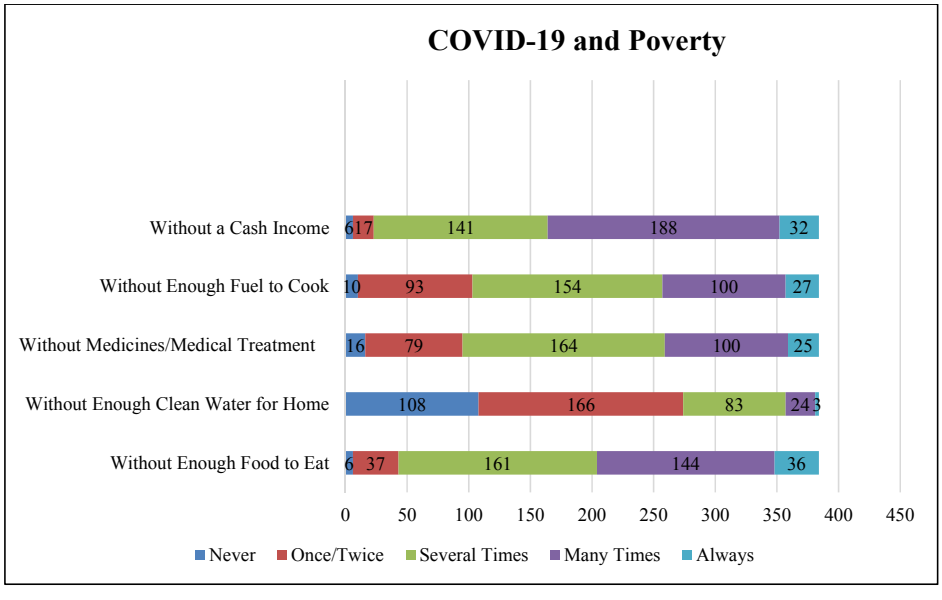
It is important to note that The World Bank, in 2013, debarred Zoomlion Ghana Limited from participating in any World Bank Group-funded project due to bribery and corruption charges (The World Bank, 2013). Domestically, the company has been deeply mentioned in some corruption scandals but it has succeeded in winning over successive

governments. Between March 2013 and February 2019, governments' shady deals with the company cost the country millions of dollars and investigations have revealed that the company colluded with some Assemblies to defraud the state (Bokpe, 2020; Joy Online, 2019; Salim, 2017; The Fourth Estate, 2021). It is not difficult to see that the spraying exercises were driven by commercial interests rather than public health interests. The government's reckless spending and selfish activities were utterly against the spirit of public health safety standards. The political leadership was unconcerned about the consequences of their actions regarding public safety, comfort and socioeconomic impact on the state and the people so far as their selfish commercial interests were satisfied in preponderance. Thus, the people must fend for themselves in the post-lockdown recovery.

6 Leveraging Chinese economic presence and China's image-building effort

Pre-existing structural problems engendered by bad governance in sub-Sahara Africa, including low economic diversification, high informality, overreliance on import and export and weak economic institutions caused the pandemic to hit the region hard (see, e.g., Asante-Poku and Van Huellen, 2021; Couch et al., 2020). The African Development Bank (AfDB) reveals that about 30 million Africans became extremely poor in 2020, and 39 million more were projected to be extremely poor in 2021 (African Development Bank, 2021). The three weeks economic lockdown in Ghana caused the GDP to fall by 27.9% (Amewu et al., 2020), while 14 million Ghanaians became multi-dimensionally poor (UNDP, 2020). Ghanaian small-scale vendors are among the low-income earners who were significantly hit socioeconomically as Figure 1 shows.

Figure 1 COVID-19 on living standard and poverty



Source: Author's Survey Findings.

Question: *From the time Ghana recorded the first COVID-19 case, through to all the periods of lockdowns and restrictions, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: enough food to eat; enough clean water for home use; medicines or medical treatment; enough fuel to cook your food; a cash income*

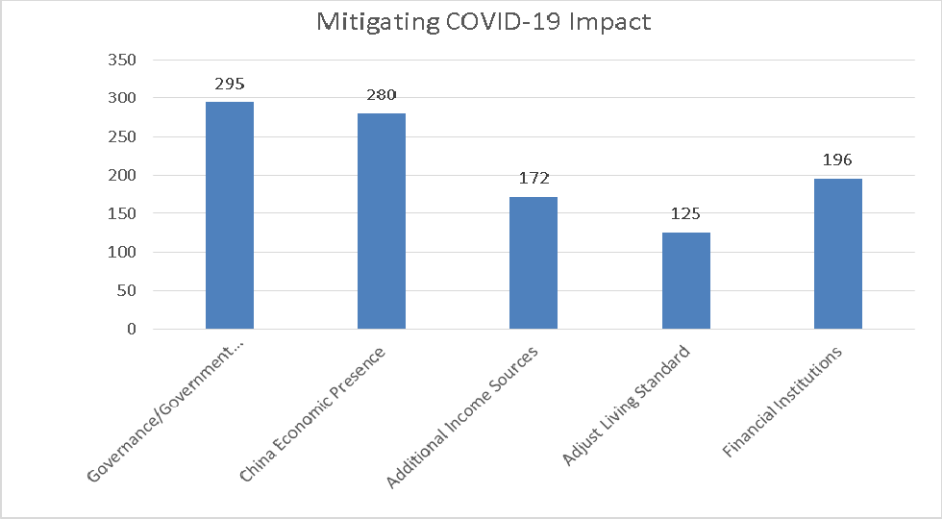
The market centres where some of the small-scale traders operate were excluded from the lockdowns because they provide essential services. Apart from feeding and clothing the population, marketplaces employ the majority of the urban population and support and sustain the livelihoods of many households (Asante and Helbrecht, 2019a; 2020), and provide huge sources of daily revenue for city authorities (Asante and Helbrecht, 2019b). Nevertheless, the pandemic and the restrictions prevented people from engaging in economic activities due to COVID-19 fears or obeying government regulations. This deprived the small-scale vendors of customers, reducing their cash income. Moreover, about 65% of the global economy, particularly China, was under lockdown, impacting on global supply chain (Deloitte, 2020). This situation created shortages, increased demand and price hikes beyond the income levels of low-income earners. The price increment of goods and food meant that small-scale vendors could buy fewer items than they used to buy. Consequently, without a cash income and the increase in goods and services, in turn, eroded the business capital of the vendors to the extent that in most instances, they had to go without enough food, medical care and fuel to cook.

Nevertheless, through a content analysis, the small-scale vendors believe that they can leverage the Chinese economic presence in the Ghanaian market space to recover from the pandemic difficulties as shown in Figure 2. It is natural for people to fall on their governments to solve socioeconomic difficulties. Therefore, the high number of references to the Chinese economic presence – almost on par with references to the government – has more research significance than the obvious reliance on the government. Today, we can see that globalisation and international economic and monetary policies that frown on restrictive markets in favour of open economies or markets have ensured global economic interdependence. This has enabled interconnection between non-state actors of powerful countries like China and developing ones like Ghana, enhancing public diplomacy and economic diplomacy. Although the economic diplomatic role of the non-state actors is new, official state diplomats have long performed diplomatic functions that are economically related or they have dealt with economic matters in the course of their duties, albeit such function has long been given low priority (Justinek, 2019). Nevertheless, the economic content of diplomacy, that is, international business and economic diplomacy have grown rapidly since the end of the Cold War. Justinek (2019) argued that recently, civil society, in tandem with new media, driving human rights agenda has made the economic content of diplomacy (economic diplomacy) more visible, at least since the 2008 financial crisis. This period of a steady growth of economic diplomacy coincided with the Chinese going out policy (Shambaugh, 2013) and re-entry into Africa (Bassan, 2021).

Undoubtedly, China has gained tremendous influence globally even before the COVID-19 outbreak. According to Justinek (2021b), the importance and role of China in the COVID-19 discussions, narratives surrounding the country about the pandemic and its role in coordinating a global response, as well as directly involved in addressing helping countries of the world navigate out of the pandemic's predicament make 'China' a keyword for 2021. Since the 'going out' initiative encouraged in the 1990s under Jiang Zemin became an official government policy in the early 2000s, Chinese businesses and

entrepreneurs have ventured into the international market, including Ghana. The 'going out' policy encourages Chinese firms and entrepreneurs to invest in international markets, establish their presence and acquire international skills and experience (Shambaugh, 2013). Chinese businesses in Ghana range from small- and medium-scale owned by private individuals or partnerships to large-scale joint partnerships or Chinese government-controlled firms.

Figure 2 Mitigating COVID-19's socioeconomic impact



Source: Author's Survey Findings.

Question: *How do you think you would be able to recover from the pandemic shock and improve your condition better than in the pre-COVID-19 period? [Multiple responses apply*]

In the case of Ghana, years of protracted bad governance with no conscious policy of economic reforms have structured the Ghanaian economy in a way that the entire economy depends largely on imported goods for daily sustenance so that the networks of political and economic elites and bourgeoisie can control the economy with preponderant corruption. This has allowed Chinese goods to dominate the Ghanaian market space which the small-scale vendors rely on for their trade because such goods are more affordable but of less quality. A vendor selling mobile phones on a table in Accra noted that:

> 'Everybody knows that the phones are Chinese-made. But they buy because they suit the pockets [budgets] of people, especially the youth and the students. Even the high earners buy from us because everybody is struggling to recover from the pandemic. Business is picking up and I am certain that our recovery will be rapid. But the only problem is that the government is not doing well so the Ghana cedi is falling and prices are increasing (communication with vendor, Accra, 20 August 2021).'

The huge presence of Chinese goods in the Ghanaian market space contributes significantly to improving the living standards of people, enabling them to afford certain

household items that were hitherto reserved for the rich. Chinese consumer and non-consumer products, including food, clothing and textiles and technological and electrical devices have influenced people's tastes, and to some extent, shaped positive Ghanaian attitudes towards China.

Under new public diplomacy characterised by changes in the global system and the influence of large and small non-state actors, the Chinese economic presence in Ghana shows public diplomacy in action. For example, the COVID-19-related aid Alibaba and the Jack Ma Foundation channelled across the world was significant public diplomacy in practice. The aid was an attempt to transform an aspect of Chinese cultural assets such as a traditional virtue to repay goodwill with greater kindness into soft power. We may see soft power as attracting people of other countries to like or support your values and ideals without coercion or payment. However, Alibaba and the Jack Ma Foundation were neither working directly for the Chinese government nor were they sent by the government although the Chinese government benefitted from the positive image this private aid engendered. Similarly, the many private Chinese businesses, trading companies, and construction firms in the Ghanaian market space and across Africa significantly shape the host public image of China where positive and negative conducts of the businesses shape corresponding imageries of Chinese soft power. Therefore, the private entities and companies – with no links to the Chinese government or embassy – develop and conduct public diplomacy functions so far as the Ghanaian public sees their presence as an exit route from their economic hardship.

One may argue that new public diplomacy is still state-directed because the implementing state creates an enabling environment to engage its non-state actors. Based on this premise, Kim (2017, p.302) explained that new public diplomacy is a 'government's concerted efforts to achieve credibility, trust, and mutuality through two-way, symmetric communications to deal with public opinion between that government and foreign or global publics by engaging non-state actors and fostering partnerships as a means of embedding foreign policies with soft power'. Kim's definition is detailed but not different from what I established earlier as 'the processes by which members of the public of both countries can enter into direct relations with one another' (Sharp, 2009, p.268). From here, we can see that new public diplomacy is not merely a technique of foreign policy. It pursues soft power, thus, transcending foreign policy techniques. Consequently, the Ghanaian public, especially the small-scale vendors' direct communications with Chinese businesses improve their living standards while aiding the latter to conduct public diplomacy to transform their country's soft power resources into soft power. Moving diplomacy away from the hierarchical state-centric model and engaging non-state actors enables new public diplomacy to manage two-way and symmetric communications, pursuing collaborations between the publics or the companies of two countries to achieve their respective goals.

We need to note that a basic difference between public diplomacy and other forms of diplomacy is that the object of public diplomacy is the people and not the host governments. However, the end of all forms of diplomacy is to ultimately influence the policies of the host governments. The idea behind public diplomacy is that attitude of the host people will influence the policies of their government. When the host public accepts the values and ideas of the foreign state, the host public can pressure and demand changes in their domestic political direction for the government to respond more favourably to the foreign government as the audience cost theory predicts (Baum, 2004; Fearon, 1994). The international public serves as moral agents who can put pressure on

international institutions and world politics. Therefore, Ghana, as a democratic country – although may be weak or flawed, resembling populism – whose governments seek the mandate of the people – largely informal and low-income earners – through periodic general elections, an extremely positive attitude of the Ghanaian public toward Chinese soft power could greatly pressure Ghanaian governments to respond positively to Chinese foreign policy.

A clothing vendor comprehensively explains how the ordinary Ghanaian on the street thinks about the Chinese.

> 'We [Ghanaians] are always telling bad stories about them [Chinese]. Everybody has one thing or another against the Chinese, whether true or false, we say it. At the onset of the virus, we heard and saw many videos about them, I do not know whether they were true or not but we laugh at them. Someone told me that they brought the virus because they want to destroy the world. They do not go to Church so the devil can use them easily. Maybe it is true that they are bad people. But sincerely, we need to laugh at ourselves because they produce everything and bring us some to eat. We eat FuFu (Ghanaian dish) but it is the Chinese who manufacture the FuFu pounding machine for us. I heard that they even bring us the FuFu flour. Recently, I heard that they are even bringing us gari (Ghanaian dish), although we have cassava throughout Ghana.
>
> We say that they are dirty and do not eat well so they brought the virus. But they bring us all the clothing and shoes we wear and all the things you see in the market. Without the Chinese, many of us have no work, no income, we cannot eat and feed our children, and many people cannot wear clothes and shoes in Ghana. Even now we take second-hand clothing from China. We say their things are not quality but we cannot do it ourselves. Some of us can recover from the pandemic shock only by selling low-priced Chinese clothing and shoes and the business is good. So it means that many of the customers also can survive only by wearing clothes from China. They are bad people but they have some good things we can learn. I think that the government should send some people to go to China to learn from them. The government should make it compulsory for our children to learn some of their [Chinese] ways. The government itself needs to learn from the Chinese government (communication with a clothing vendor, Accra, 17 August 2021).'

The vendor's proposals at the end of the speech are instructive here. They suggest some form of admiration for Chinese ideas, values and solutions – the realm of soft power – due to the socioeconomic opportunities the Chinese present even amid some negative perceptions and wild beliefs. I must iterate that public diplomacy transforms a country's assets into soft power resources that will attract the host public. In many countries, the assets are derived from the culture and traditions, institutions and policies seen as legitimate. However, economic products or goods have become important assets of the Chinese in Ghana and most developing countries through Chinese non-state actors. The conduct of public diplomacy by these non-state actors embodied in private and joint businesspeople and firms are in a way reversing the attitude of Ghanaians towards the more intangible and significant assets of culture, values, policies and solutions of China from not knowing and not liking to the opposite direction, hence achieving soft power.

7 Conclusions

This work has explored how the small-scale vendors in Ghana are attempting to recover from the socioeconomic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this paper show that although the small-scale vendors were deeply affected by the pandemic, they are optimistic about recovering by taking advantage of the Chinese economic presence in the market space. I have analysed and argued that the Ghanaian public's confidence in the economic opportunities the Chinese engagement provides will go a long way to boost China's international image-building effort in Ghana. Chinese economic presence in Ghana, spearheaded by private firms and businesspeople has assumed new public diplomacy, attracting Ghanaians and drawing attention to the potential soft power resources such as the culture, values and ideas of China. The new public diplomacy framework has shown that in our globalised world, diplomacy goes beyond the hierarchical state-centric model of international relations.

Consequently, diplomats are not only formal officials appointed by the states to represent states' interests in other countries. However, non-state actors, including private businesspeople, firms and organisations serve as diplomats and, in some cases, their diplomatic impacts yield more results than the officially appointed diplomats. Furthermore, contemporary officially-appointed diplomats perform functions that transcend the traditional discreet and confidential communications with the political elites in the host countries to include communicating directly with the host public. The revolutions in technology, information and communications, creating and expanding social media have aided this diplomatic work. Since Ghana's independence, China and Ghana have established friendly relations. However, the relationship has always been limited to the intergovernmental level. New public diplomacy is fostering a new kind of two-way communication between the Ghanaian and Chinese public towards desired interests and goals.

Although public diplomacy is aimed at the foreign public in the host country and separated from public affairs (aimed at domestic audiences), the boundaries between the two are increasingly becoming blurred because of the interconnectedness of global social networks and relationships. Information directed at a domestic audience easily spills over across boundaries to reach international audiences, and vice-versa (Kim, 2017; Melissen, 2005). Because the object is the public, measuring the success of the Chinese public diplomacy effort in Ghana must be assessed according to whether or not it improves or enhances the Ghanaian public's evaluation of China's soft power resources. Two major ways to achieve this task are conducting a sampling survey and using unstructured interviews. This work employed both methods and the detailed analysis here shows that Chinese public diplomacy in Ghana is gaining an elevation due to the leveraging function of the Chinese economic presence.

References

Adunbi, O. and Stein, H. (2019) 'The political economy of China's investment in Nigeria: Prometheus or Leviathan?', in Oqubay, A. and Yifu Lin, J. (Eds): *China-Africa and an Economic Transformation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.192–215.

African Development Bank (2021) *African Economic Outlook 2021 – from Debt Resolution to Growth: the Road Ahead for Africa.* African Development Bank, Abidjan. Available online at: https://afdb-org.cn/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AfDB21-01-AEO-main-English-highlights-1.pdf (accessed on 23 December 2021).

Afrobarometer (2021a) *Summary of Results: Afrobarometer Round 8 Survey in Ghana in 2019*, Afrobarometer. Available online at: https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/summary-results-afrobarometer-round-8-survey-ghana-2019-0/ (accessed on 11 December 2021).

Afrobarometer (2021b) *Questionnaire: Ghana round 8 questionnaire*. Available online at: https://www.afrobarometer.org/survey-resource/ghana-round-8-questionnaire/ (accessed on 12 June 2022).

Amewu, S., Asante, S., Pauw, K. and Thurlow, J. (2020) 'The economic costs of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa: insights from a simulation exercise for Ghana', *European Journal of Development Research*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp.1353–1378. Doi: 10.1057/s41287-020-00332-6

Ameyaw-Brobbey, T. (2021a) 'A lost chance for what? COVID-19 and its repercussions on global public opinion of China's development model and international leadership', *Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp.172–190. Doi: 10.14254/2071-8330.2021/14-3/11.

Ameyaw-Brobbey, T. (2021b) 'A critical juncture? COVID-19 and the fate of the U.S.-China struggle for supremacy', *World Affairs*, Vol. 184, No. 3, pp.260–293. Doi: 10.1177/00438200211024622.

Ameyaw-Brobbey, T. and Gupta, U. (2021) 'Chinese businesses and transnational knowledge transfer under constrained environment: results from the field in Ghana', *African Journal of Economic and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp.51–73.

Ansah, M. (2020) *Akufo-Addo Announces Partial Lockdown of Accra, Kumasi, Tematо Curb COVID-19 Spread*, Citi Newsroom. Available online at: https://citinewsroom.com/2020/03/akufo-addo-announces-partial-lockdown-of-accra-kumasi-tema-to-curb-covid-19-spread/ (accessed on 7 January 2022).

Anyanwu, J.C. and Salami, A.O. (2021) 'The impact of COVID-19 on African economies: an introduction', *African Development Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp.S1–S16. Doi: 10.1111/1467-8268.12531.

Asante, L.A. and Helbrecht, I. (2019a) 'Changing urban governance in Ghana: the role of resistance practices and activism in Kumasi', *Urban Geography*, Vol. 40, No. 10, pp.1568–1595.

Asante, L.A. and Helbrecht, I. (2019b) 'Conceptualising marketplaces in Anglophone West Africa: a sexpartite framework', *Geo Journal*, Vol. 85, No. 1, pp.221-236.

Asante, L.A. and Helbrecht, I. (2020) 'Urban governance and its implications for the micro-geographies of market trading in Ghana: a case of the Kotokuraba Market Project in Cape Coast', *Geo Journal*, Vol. 85, No. 1, pp.1203–1225. Doi: 10.1007/s10708-019-10018-0.

Asante, L.A. and Mills, R.O. (2020) 'Exploring the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic in marketplaces in urban Ghana', *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 55, No. 2, pp.170–181. Doi: 10.1177/0002039720943612.

Asante-Poku, N.A. and van Huellen, S. (2021) 'Commodity exporter's vulnerabilities in times of COVID-19: the case of Ghana', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienne D'études du Développement*, Vol. 42, Nos. 1/2, pp.122–144. Doi: 10.1080/02255189.2020.1857225.

Austrian, K., Pinchoff, J. and Tidwell, J.B. et al (2020) 'COVID-19 related knowledge, attitudes, practices and needs of households in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya', *SSRN Electronic Journal*. Doi: 10.2139/ssrn.3576785.

Awuah, E. (1997) 'Mobilizing for change: a case study of market trader activism in Ghana', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp.401-423.

Bassan, M. (2021) 'China's soft power in Africa: promoting alternative perspectives,' in: Baykurtand, B. and Grazia, VD (Eds): *Soft-Power Internationalism: Competing for Cultural Influence in the 21st-Century Global Order*, Columbia University Press, New York, pp.181-207.

Battersby, J. and Watson, V. (2019) *Urban Food Systems Governance and Poverty in African Cities*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Baum, M.A. (2004) 'Going private: public opinion, presidential rhetoric, and the domestic politics of audience costs in U.S. foreign policy crises', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 48, No. 5, pp.603–631. Doi: 10.1177/0022002704267764.

Bokpe, S. (2020) *Supreme Court Gives Five Reasons Why Auditor-General can't Surcharge Zoomlion*, The Ghana Report. Available online at: https://www.theghanareport.com/supreme-court-gives-five-reasons-why-auditor-general-cant-surcharge-zoomlion/ (accessed on 3 July 2022).

Braw, E. (2020) *The EU is Abandoning Italy in its Hour of Need*, Foreign Policy. Available online at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/14/coronavirus-eu-abandoning-italy-china-aid/ (accessed on 17 May 2020).

Bukari, C., Aning-Agyei, M.A. and Kyeremeh, C. et al. (2022) 'Effect of COVID-19 on household food insecurity and poverty: evidence from Ghana', *Social Indicator Research*, Vol. 159, No. 1, pp.991–1015. Doi: 10.1007/s11205-021-02766-9.

Bukari, C., Essilfie, G. and Aning-Agyei, M.A. et al (2021) 'Impact of COVID-19 on poverty and living standards in Ghana: a micro-perspective', *Cogent Economics and Finance*, Vol. 9, pp.1–23. Doi: 10.1080/23322039.2021.1879716.

Cha, J. (2020) *People in Asia-Pacific Regard the U.S. more Favorably than China, but Trump Gets Negative Marks*, Pew Research Center. Available online at: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/25/people-in-asia-pacific-regard-the-u-s-more-favorably-than-china-but-trump-gets-negative-marks/ (accessed on 2 September 2020).

Chattu, V.K. and Knight, W.A. (2019) 'Global health diplomacy as a tool of peace', *Peace Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp.148–157. Doi: 10.1080/10402659.2019.1667563.

Couch, K.A., Fairlie, R.W. and Xu, H. (2020) 'The impacts of COVID-19 on minority unemployment: first evidence from April 2020 CPS microdata. Doi: 10.2139/ssrn.3604814 (accessed on 19 June 2022).

Creswell, J.W. and Miller, D.L. (2000) 'Determining validity in qualitative inquiry', *Theory into practice*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp.124–130. Doi: 10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2.

Davenport, C. (2007) 'Licensing repression: dissent, threats, and state repression in the United States', *Minnesota Journal of International Law*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp.311–333. Available online at: https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/mjil/232.

Deloitte (2020) *Economic Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Economy of Ghana: Summary of Fiscal Measures and Deloitte Views*, Deloitte Ghana. Available online at: https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/gh/Documents/about-deloitte/gh-economic-Impact-of-the-Covid-19-Pandemic-on-the-Economy-of-Ghana_06042020.pdf (accessed on 1 July 2022).

Devlin, K. and Huang, C. (2019) 'Few Europeans confident in Xi as he seeks to extend Chinese economic influence in the region', *Pew Research Center*. Available online at: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/03/22/few-europeans-confident-in-xi-as-he-seeks-to-extend-chinese-economic-influence-in-the-region/ (accessed on 4 August 2020).

Drager, N. and Fidler, D.P. (2007) *Foreign policy, trade and health: At the cutting edge of global health diplomacy*, Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 85, No. 3, p.162. Available online at: https://www.scielosp.org/article/bwho/2007.v85n3/162-162/en/.

Duran, B. (2020) *It's Time to Come Together for Coronavirus Diplomacy*, SETA. Available online at: https://www.setav.org/en/its-time-to-come-together-for-coronavirus-diplomacy/ (accessed on 12 July 2022).

Durizzo, K., Asiedu, E. and Van der Merwe, A. et al. (2020) 'Managing the COVID-19 pandemic in poor urban neighborhoods: the case of Accra and Johannesburg', *World Development*, Vol. 137, pp.1–14. Doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105175.

Fearon, J.D. (1994) 'Domestic political audiences and the escalation of international disputes', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3, pp.577–592. Doi: 10.2307/2944796.

Fetzer, T., Witte, M. and Hensel, L. et al (2020) 'Global behaviors and perceptions at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic', *PsyArXiv*. Doi: 10.31234/osf.io/3kfmh.

Gauttam, P., Singh, B. and Kaur, J. (2020) 'COVID-19 and Chinese global health diplomacy: geopolitical opportunity for China's hegemony?', *Millennial Asia*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp.318–340. Doi: 10.1177/0976399620959771.

Ghana Business News (2017) *Ministry Gives Sole-Sourced GH¢98m Fumigation Contract to 11 Jospong Companies – Report*, Ghana Business News. Available online at: https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2017/09/05/ministry-gives-sole-sourced-gh%C2%A298m-fumigation-contract-to-11-jospong-companies-report/ (accessed on 3 July 2022)

Ghana Statistical Service [GSS] (2019) *Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 7 (GLSS 7): Main Report*, Poverty trends in Ghana 2005–2017. Available online at: https://www.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/GLSS7%20MAIN%20REPORT_FINAL.pdf (accessed on 9 January 2022).

Ghana Statistical Service [GSS] (2021) *Ghana 2021 population and housing census: general report volume 3E – economic activity.* http://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2021%20PHC%20General%20Report%20Vol%203E_Economic%20Activity.pdf (accessed on 3 January 2022).

Gilboa, E. (2008) 'Searching for a theory of public diplomacy', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 616, No. 1, pp.55–77. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25097994.

Golan, G.J., Manor, I. and Arceneaux, P. (2019) 'Mediated public diplomacy redefined: foreign stakeholder engagement via paid, earned, shared, and owned media', *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 63, No. 12, pp.1665–1683. Doi: 10.1177/0002764219835279.

Grasse, D., Pavlik, M., Matfess, H. and Curtice, T.B. (2021) 'Opportunistic repression: civilian targeting by state in response to COVID-19', *International Security*, Vol. 46, No. 2, pp.130–165. Doi: 10.1162/isec_a_00419.

Hanauer, L. and Morris, L.J. (2014) C*hinese Engagement in Africa: Drivers, Reactions, and Implications for US Policy*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.

International Monetary Fund [IMF] (2020) *Ghana: request for disbursement under the rapid credit facility-press release; staff report; and statement by the Executive Director for Ghana*. International Monetary Fund, IMF country report no. 20/110. Available online at: https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/04/16/Ghana-Request-for-Disbursement-Under-the-Rapid-Credit-Facility-Press-Release-Staff-Report-49337 (accessed on 12 June 2022).

Jiang, F., Li, S. Ronning, H. and Tjonneland, E. (2016) 'The voice of China in Africa: media, communication technologies and image-building', *Chinese Journal of Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp.1–7. Doi: 10.1080/17544750.2016.1141615.

Joska, J.A., Andersen, L. and Rabie, S. et al. (2020) 'COVID-19: increased risk to the mental health and safety of women living with HIV in South Africa', *AIDS and Behaviour*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp.2751–2753. Doi: 10.1007/s10461-020-02897-z.

Joy Online (2019) *Auditor-General describes Zoomlion as 'fraudulent, Drain on Country*, Joy Online. Available online at: https://www.myjoyonline.com/auditor-general-describes-zoomlion-as-fraudulent-drain-on-country/ (accessed on 3 July 2022).

Justinek, G. (2019) 'Human rights gaining momentum in international business (economicdiplomacy and international economic law)', *International Journal of Diplomacy and Economy*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp.163–176.

Justinek, G. (2021a) 'Editorial: despite the crisis still in our rear view mirror, we might have a very turbulent 2022 ahead of us', *International Journal of Diplomacy and Economy*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp.85–87.

Justinek, G. (2021b) 'Editorial: change, corporate diplomacy, medical diplomacy, soft power and China are the keywords for the year 2021.'*International Journal of Diplomacy and Economy*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp.1–3.

Kavalski, E. (2021) 'The end of China's romance with Central and Eastern Europe', *Global Media and China*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp.77–99. Doi: 10.1177/2059436421994442.

Kazeem, Y. (2020) 'Across Africa, a reliance on the informal sector threatens effective coronavirus lockdowns. *Quartz Africa*. Available online at: https://qz.com/africa/1831785/coronavirus-citizens-in-africas-informal-economy-try-to-survive/(accessed on 26 April 2020).

Kelman, I. (2020) *China's Coronavirus Diplomacy*?, The Polar Connection. Available online at: https://polarconnection.org/china-coronavirus-diplomacy/ (accessed on 3 June 2022).

Kenu, E., Frimpong, J. and Koram, K. (2020) 'Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana', *Ghana Medical Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 2, pp.72–73. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gmj.v54i2.1.

Kesar, S., Abraham, R. and Lahoti, R. et al. (2021) 'Pandemic, informality, and vulnerability: impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods in India', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienned'études du Développement*, Vol. 42, Nos. 1/2, pp.145–164. Doi: 10.1080/02255189.2021.1890003.

Kim, H. (2017) 'Bridging the theoretical gap between public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy', *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp.293–326. Doi: 10.14731/kjis.2017.08.15.2.293.

Kissinger, H. (2011) *On China*, Penguin Press, New York.

Kobierecka, A. and Kobierecki, M.M. (2021) 'Coronavirus diplomacy: Chinese medical assistance and its diplomatic implications', *International Politics*, Vol. 58, No. 1, pp.937–954 Doi: 10.1057/s41311-020-00273-1.

Labonté, R. and Gagnon, M.L. (2010) 'Framing health and foreign policy: lessons for global health diplomacy', *Globalization and Health*, Vol. 6, No. 14, pp.1–19. Doi: 10.1186/1744-8603-6-14.

Le Nestour, A. and Moscoviz, L. (2020) *Five Findings from a New Phone Survey in Senegal*, Center for Global Development. Available online at: https://www.cgdev.org/blog/five-findings-new-phone-survey-senegal (accessed on 26 June 2022).

Lekorwe, M.A., Chingwete, M.O. and Samson, R. (2016) *China's Growing Presence in Africa Wins Largely Positive Popular Reviews*: *New Data from 36 Countries*, Afrobarometer Round 6, Dispatch No. 122. Available online at: https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r6_dispatchno122_perceptions_of_china_in_africa1.pdf (accessed on 19 April 2019).

Lune, H. and Berg, B.L. (2017) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow.

Marfaing, L. and Thiel, A. (2013) 'The impact of Chinese business on market entry in Ghana and Senegal', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 83, No. 4, pp.646–669. Available online at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/24525679.

Melissen, J. (Ed.) (2005) *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Mensah, E.A. and Boakye, K.A. (2021) 'Conceptualizing post-COVID-19 tourism recovery: a three-step framework', *Tourism Planning and Development.* Doi: 10.1080/21568316.2021.1945674.

Ministry of Finance [MoF] (2020) *Statement to Parliament on Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Economy of Ghana*, Ministry of Finance (MoF), Accra. http://www.mofep.gov.gh/sites/default/files/news/MoF-Statement-to-Parliament_20200330.pdf (accessed on June 2022).

Ministry of Health (2020a) *Press Release: Update on Preparedness on 2019 Novel Corona Virus (2019-nCOV) Outbreak*, Accra. Available online at: https://www.ghs.gov.gh/covid19/downloads/covid_19_press_release_31_Jan.pdf (accessed on 6 January 2022).

Ministry of Health (2020b) *First confirmed COVID-19 cases in Ghana*. Ghana Health Service,Accra, 12 March. Available online at: https://ghs.gov.gh/covid19/downloads/covid_19_first_confirmed_GH.pdf (accessed on 6 January 2022).

Nkrumah, R.K., Andoh, F.K. and Sebu, J. et al. (2021) COVID-19 water and electricity subsidies in Ghana: how does the poor benefit? *Scientific African*, Vol. 14. Doi: 10.1016/j.sciaf.2021.e01038.

Obeng, M.K.M. (2018) 'Chinese traders in Ghanaian markets: a bag of threat and opportunities.' *Review of Social Studies (RoSS)*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp.45–70.

Paul, A., Chatterjee, S. and Bairagi, N. (2020) 'Prediction on COVID-19 epidemic for different countries: focusing on South Asia under various precautionary measures', *medRxiv*. Doi: 10.1101/2020.04.08.20055095.

Qin, Y. (2007) 'Why is there no Chinese international relations theory?', International Relations of the Asia-Pacific, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp.313–340.

Salim, A. (2017) *CHRAJ Completes Zoomlion Investigations after 8 Years*, Ghana Guardian. Available online at: https://ghanaguardian.com/chraj-completes-zoomlion-investigations-8-years (accessed on 3 July 2022).

Sarfo, F.S., Mensah, N.O. and Opoku, F.A. et al. (2020)'COVID-19 and stroke: experience in a Ghanaian healthcare system', *Journal of the Neurological Sciences*, Vol. 416, pp.1–4. Doi: 10.1016/j.jns.2020.117044.

Seib, P.M. (Ed.) (2009) *Toward a New Public Diplomacy: Redirecting US Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Shambaugh, D (2013) *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Sharp, P. (2009) *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations,* Cambridge University Press, New York.

Silver, L. (2017) *How people in Asia-Pacific View China*, Pew Research Center. Available online at: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/16/how-people-in-asia-pacific-view-china/ (accessed on 2 September 2020).

Silver, L. and Devlin, K. (2020) *Around the World, More See the US Positively than China, but Little Confidence in Trump or Xi*, Pew Research Center. Available online at: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/01/10/around-the-world-more-see-the-u-s-positively-than-china-but-little-confidence-in-trump-or-xi/(accessed on 3 July 2020).

Silver, L. and Devlin, K. and Huang, C (2020) *Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries*, Pew Research Center. Available online at: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=eb7869cf33-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_10_01_02_57&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-eb7869cf33-400966022 (accessed on 10 October 2020).

Silver, L. and Devlin, K. and Huang, C. (2019a) *People around the Globe are Divided in their Opinions of China*, Pew Research Center. Available online at: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/05/people-around-the-globe-are-divided-in-their-opinions-of-china/ (accessed on 2 September 2020).

Silver, L. and Devlin, K. and Huang, C. (2019b) *China's economic growth mostly welcomed in emerging markets, but neighbors wary of its influence*. Available online at: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/12/05/chinas-economic-growth-mostly-welcomed-in-emerging-markets-but-neighbors-wary-of-its-influence/ (accessed on 4 August 2020).

Smith, N.R. and Fallon, T. (2020) 'An epochal moment? The COVID-19 pandemic and China's international order building', *World Affairs*, Vol. 183, No. 3, pp.235–255. Doi: 10.1177%2F0043820020945395

The Fourth Estate (2021) *The COVID-19 spraying scandal initiated by President Akufo-Addo*, YouTube. Available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNnzBXGp1D8 (accessed on 6 July 2022).

The World Bank (2013) *Enforcing Accountability: World Bank Debars Ghanaian Company for Sanctionable Misconduct Relating to a Waste Management Project in Liberia*, World BankGroup. Available online at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/09/25/world-bank-debars-ghanaian-company-sanctionable-misconduct-waste-management-project-liberia (accessed on 11 June 2021).

The World Bank (2020a) *World Bank Group Supports Ghana's COVID-19 Response*, World Bank Group. Available online at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/02/world-bank-group-supports-ghanas-covid-19-response (accessed on 11 June 2022).

The World Bank (2020b) *Ghana – COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Project – Additional Financing*, World Bank Group. Available online at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/loans-credits/2020/11/10/ghana-covid-19-emergency-preparedness-and-response-project-additional-financing.

UNDP (2020) *Ghana's Multidimensional Poverty Index Report*, UNDP. Available online at: https://www.undp.org/ghana/publications/ghana%E2%80%99s-multidimensional-poverty-index-report (accessed on 12 June 2022).

Verma, R. (2020) 'China's 'mask diplomacy' to change the COVID-19 narrative in Europe', *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp.205–209. Doi: 10.1007/s10308-020-00576-1

Wang, H. and Lu, Y-C. (2008) 'The conception of soft power and its policy implications: a comparative study of China and Taiwan', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 17, No. 56, pp.425–447. Doi: 10.1080/10670560802000191.

Wang, J. (2006) 'Localising public diplomacy: the role of sub-national actors in nation branding', *Place Branding*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp.32–42.

Wang, Y. (2008) 'Public diplomacy and the rise of Chinese soft power', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 616, pp.257–273.

Wemakor, J. (2020) *COVID-19 Lockdown: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, Ghanaweb. Available online at: https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/COVID-19-lockdown-The-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly-931711 (accessed on 11 May 2021).

Wenting, X. (2020) *Serbian Ambassador Hails Bond with China, Slams Accusations of 'Coronavirus Diplomacy'*, Global Times. Available online at: https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1184189.shtml (accessed on 12 July 2022).

World Health Organization [WHO] (2020) *Cleaning and disinfection of environmental surfaces in context of COVID-19: interim guidance*. Available online at: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332096/WHO-2019-nCoV-Disinfection-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed on 17 June 2022).