



The South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF):

# An Exploration of Knowledge Diplomacy Within South Africa-Sweden Relations

By Sven Botha and Helin Bäckman Kartal

## Abstract

Science diplomacy has been an endeavoured area of cooperation between Sweden and South Africa despite Sweden's reluctance to practice science diplomacy. However, the introduction of the South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF) in 2017 remains an under-explored phenomenon of knowledge diplomacy. Using Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy (focus on higher education, research, and innovation; diversity of actors and partners; recognition of different needs and the collective

use of resources; reciprocity; and the building and strengthening of relations between states), this paper argues that SASUF is an essential frontier for knowledge diplomacy in the context of South Africa-Sweden relations. The employment of Knight's framework finds that SASUF can indeed be classified as an example of knowledge diplomacy. In conclusion, a new research agenda on knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden relations is proposed.

## Introduction

The Kingdom of Sweden and the Republic of South Africa have shown signs of leaning towards the practice of science diplomacy, with the former being slightly more reluctant than the latter to embrace science diplomacy. Regardless, both states have displayed an appetite for knowledge diplomacy. Over the last decade, the phenomenon of knowledge diplomacy has become an ever-present diplomatic practice within the context of South Africa-Sweden relations via the South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF). A joint statement released by SASUF partner universities in May 2019 following the conclusion of the second SASUF Research and Innovation Week noted: 'As two countries at the opposite end of the globe, we reali[s]e that cooperation is key to our future prosperity as countries' (SASUF, 2019: 1). Such an acknowledgement suggests that SASUF should be considered as a means of knowledge diplomacy. Using SASUF as its case study, this paper argues that Sweden and South Africa engage in knowledge diplomacy via SASUF. This argument is made by employing Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy as an analytical framework to a random sample of SASUF projects. In making this argument, it is important to note that the authors simply wish to illustrate the practice of knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden Relations; it is beyond the scope of this paper to comment on or assess any power dynamics that may exist between South Africa and Sweden when both states practice knowledge diplomacy. This delineation is desired as SASUF is an ongoing project. Hence, a more accurate and in-depth assessment of power relations will be at hand once SASUF concludes its work. Following this introduction, the authors provide a brief historical overview of SASUF, after which the conceptual considerations are discussed, namely the intersection between education diplomacy, science diplomacy, academic diplomacy, and knowledge diplomacy. Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy are unpacked and clearly defined to firm up the analytical framework to be used in this paper. Thereafter, the framework is applied to the case study with some practical examples. These examples are drawn primarily from project reports submitted to SASUF, thus offering the authors some frontline insights into the work of SASUF. Finally, the conclusion will summarise the main arguments and findings of this paper while also highlighting some areas of further academic interest.

## The South Africa-Sweden University Forum: A brief overview

The South Africa-Sweden University Forum, or SASUF, was founded in 2017 by means of a joint application being made to the Swedish Foundation for Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT) by an array of vice-chancellors from a number of South African and Swedish universities. STINT viewed the application favourably and SASUF was born with an initial three-year lifespan spanning from 2018–2020 (South Africa-Sweden University Forum [SASUF], 2023a). At the conclusion of the second SASUF Research and Innovation Week in May 2019, the then-36 partner universities issued a Joint Declaration, calling on their respective governments to support their collaboration (Uppsala University, 2019):

*The universities participating in SASUF call on their respective governments to promote collaborations and networking linked to the United Nations Agenda 2023 through research and educational cooperation between South Africa and Sweden by facilitating the following:*

- *To support flexible mobility of academic staff, students encompassing undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral students as well as post[-doctorial] fellows and provide exchange opportunities for administrative officials by strengthening existing funding structures and creating new ones where gaps exist.*
- *To facilitate the development of early career academics through the initiation of grant programmes to enhance collaboration and networking between South Africa and Sweden.*
- *To ensure appropriate flexible funding schemes to facilitate partnerships in research and education between South Africa and Sweden.*

This call has resulted in the emergence of a number of programmes, including virtual exchange grants, the SASUF Papers Grants, and the completion of three Research and Innovation Weeks (see Table 1), with both countries taking turns to host this event. At the conclusion of its first collaboration cycle in 2020, SASUF has connected 3,000 students and educators from both South Africa and Sweden via 70

projects to date (SASUF, 2023a). Following its initial successes, SASUF was given a three-year extension in 2021 and will continue to function until 2024. SASUF concentrates on six themes (SASUF, 2023a), including:

1. Climate change, natural resources, and sustainability
2. Education for a sustainable society
3. Social transformation through change (knowledge and social development strategies)
4. Health (Understanding the burden of disease in Sweden and South Africa)
5. Sustainable urbanisation, travel, and tourism in the 21st Century
6. Digital technologies, big data, and cybersecurity

**Table 1:** All of the Research and Innovation Weeks hosted to date

Year	Host institution	Location
2018	University of Pretoria	Pretoria, South Africa
2019	Stellenbosch University	Stellenbosch, South Africa
2020	Uppsala University	Uppsala, Sweden (unforeseen circumstances related to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the exchange taking place remotely under the theme of 'SASUF Goes Digital.')
2022	Uppsala University <sup>1</sup>	The exchange was again facilitated remotely under the theme of 'SASUF Goes Digital.'
2023	University of the Western Cape	Cape Town, South Africa

*(Source: The authors with the data provided by the co-author)*

At the time of writing, SASUF consists of 40 partner universities and one associate partner. Table 2 organises SASUF's partners by category and country.

**Table 2:** Partner universities and associated partners of SASUF as of January 2023

Partner universities	
South African universities	Swedish universities
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Uppsala University (coordinator)
Central University of Technology	Jönköping University
Durban University of Technology	Linköping University
Mangosuthu University of Technology	Luleå University of Technology
Nelson Mandela University	Lund University
North-West University	Karlstad University
Rhodes University	Karolinska Institutet
Sefako Makghato Health Sciences University	Malmö University
Sol Plaatje University	Stockholm University

Stellenbosch University	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Tshwane University of Technology	Umeå University
University of Cape Town	University of Gothenburg
University of Fort Hare	University West
University of the Free State	Örebro University
University of Johannesburg	
University of KwaZulu-Natal	
University of Limpopo	
University of Mpumalanga	
University of Pretoria	
University of South Africa	
University of the Western Cape	
University of Venda	
University of Witwatersrand	
University of Zululand	
Vaal University of Technology	
Walter Sisulu University	
<b>Associated partners<sup>2</sup></b>	
Entrust Foundation	

(Source: The authors with data from SASUF, 2023b)

### Conceptual considerations

Since the end of the Cold War, the practice of diplomacy has expanded beyond the state-to-state nexus. Against this backdrop, both the number of actors as well as the number of categories encompassing diplomacy have become plentiful (Abdurahmanli, 2021). Academia, research, and institutions of tertiary education have become pivotal instruments of diplomatic practice; the use of this tool is twofold, as diplomats can deliver lectures or participate in panel discussions while higher education institutions can also be used to establish collaboration in research (Rozenal and Buenrostro, 2013: 235 and 236; Ogunnubi and Shawa, 2017: 87 and 88; Knight, 2022: 103). The realms of knowledge generation, knowledge sharing, and cooperation to deliver education have spurred various diplomatic typologies, namely: education diplomacy, science diplomacy, academic diplomacy,

“ Since the end of the Cold War, the practice of diplomacy has expanded beyond the state-to-state nexus. Against this backdrop, both the number of actors as well as the number of categories encompassing diplomacy have become plentiful (Abdurahmanli, 2021). Academia, research, and institutions of tertiary education have become pivotal instruments of diplomatic practice ”

and knowledge diplomacy. While it is clear that this paper opts to employ its analytical framework within the confines of knowledge diplomacy, the authors deem it necessary to clarify these concepts as a firm understanding of them will help readers to understand the interconnectivity between these various typologies and the reason why knowledge diplomacy was chosen over other typologies. Education diplomacy is defined as a means of using the diplomatic skillset to advance effective cooperation among various actors and sectors to achieve transformational agendas in education (Childhood Education International, n.d.). Over time, education diplomacy has been studied by scholars as a means of advancing international peace, security, development, and human rights (Scorza, 2019: 65). Within this setting, education diplomacy has predominantly been used in the Global South to propel the attainment of the fourth sustainable development goal (quality education for all) (Murphy, 2018). Occurrences of this within the literature include Cardarelli's application of education diplomacy to the refugee education for children displaced by the Syrian conflict (Cardarelli, 2018) and Nasser's proposal for a new framework to use education diplomacy as means to improve childhood education in Pakistan (Nasser, 2018).

Academic diplomacy is perhaps the most loosely defined diplomatic typology discussed in this paper. Academic diplomacy is the exchange of knowledge and ideas in higher education across borders (Chandramohan and Rycroft, 2018). One such example is the academic network established by the MIKTA<sup>3</sup> bloc to aid exchanges between academics and students in Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Turkey, and Australia (Farrelly, 2015). Abdurahmanli (2021: 587) argues that the exchanges between academics across borders are a form of civil diplomacy, a means of diplomacy whereby civilians informally represent their states. The Academic Diplomacy Project (n.d.) instead argues that academic diplomacy should instead be a means of ensuring that academic knowledge benefits those outside of the academic space, particularly in the case of communities and societies in need.

Aukes (2020: 1) defines science diplomacy as 'collaborations between stakeholders from science, policy and diplomacy, which involve various governmental or diplomatic organisations as well

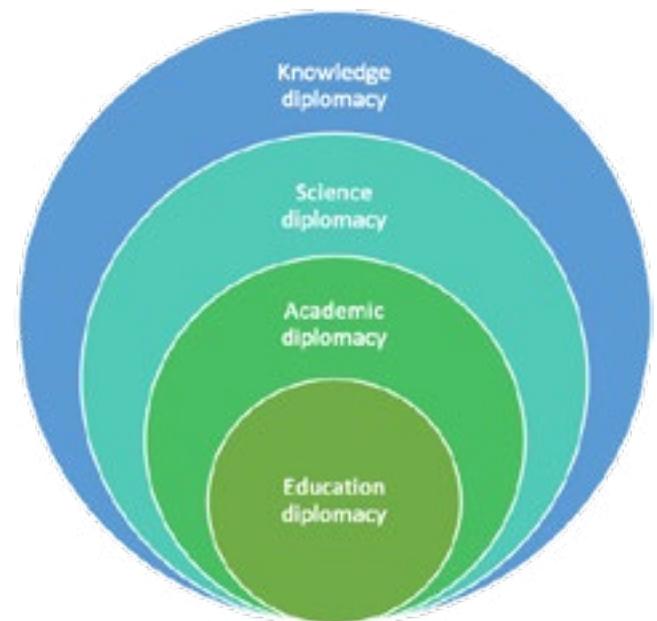
as non-governmental scientific organisations.' Within this backdrop, science diplomacy has three characteristics (The Royal Society, 2012: 15), namely:

Centring foreign policy objectives around science and scientific work.

Coordinating international cooperation in the area of science

Employing cooperation in the area of science to enhance bilateral relations between two states.

**Figure 1:** *The interconnection between various diplomatic typologies*



(Source: The authors)

South Africa has been an ardent practitioner of science diplomacy. The Republic's appetite for scientific advancement is rooted in its isolation brought on by sanctions from the international community in response to apartheid. International isolation solidified the need to safeguard South Africa's security by means of employing technologies pertaining to steel production and iron processing, nuclear technology, bio-warfare, and energy security (Masters, 2015: 174). The Republic's scientific path resulted in advances in nuclear technology, cola-to-liquid processing in aid of oil production, and surgical

intervention in the form of the world's first human-to-human transplant (Masters, 2015: 174). In the post-apartheid era, the Republic adopted its White Paper Science and Technology (the White Paper). The White Paper emphasises that South Africa needs to foster a culture and setting of innovation in order to make meaningful progress. The White Paper notes that (South African Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996: 8 and 9):

*The stimulation of a national system of innovation will be central to the empowerment of all South Africans as they seek to achieve social, political, economic, and environmental goals. The development of innovative ideas, products, institutional arrangements and processes will enable the country to address more effectively the needs and aspirations of its citizens. This is particularly important within the context of the demands of global economic competitiveness, sustainable development and equity considerations related to the legacies of our past. A well-managed and properly functioning national system of innovation will make it possible for all South Africans to enjoy the economic, socio-political, and intellectual benefits of science and technology.*

South Africa's quest for scientific innovation persists into its White Paper on Foreign Policy which identifies Europe, Asia, and South America as regions that could help the Republic advance its admission in science, technology, and innovation (South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2011: 29, 31, and 34). By 2012, South Africa's Department of Science and Technology<sup>4</sup> had three overseas offices attached to the Republic's diplomatic missions to Russia, Tokyo, and the European Union to promote cooperation in the areas of science and technology; officials have also been seconded to the secretariat of the Southern African Development Community as well as the African Union Commission (Pandor, 2012: 3). Additionally, South Africa has played a leading role in the establishment of the Group of Earth Observations (GEO).<sup>5</sup> The GEO was founded in 2005 following a call to action for the establishment of an internationally integrated earth observation system following the Republic's hosting of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (South African Department of Science and Innovation, 2018).

The Republic would go on to become the Lead Co-Chair of the GEO in 2018 and is to host the 2023 GEO Ministerial Summit in its capacity as present-day Co-Chair (South African Department of Science and Innovation, 2018; South African Department of Science and Innovation, 2022). South Africa has also used its membership of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) club to practice science diplomacy. One such example of this occurred in 2019 when the BRICS Youth Energy Agency and the National Youth Development Agency of South Africa signed an agreement to facilitate formal collaboration between young scientists from the BRICS states (Botha, 2022: 117 and 118).

While Sweden, like South Africa, is a member of the GEO, and both states had initially opted to enter a bilateral agreement aimed at nurturing cooperation in the areas of science, technology, and innovation in 2013, Sweden appears less ardent in pursuing science diplomacy. The bilateral agreement remains unenforced (South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 2022). Sweden's lack of enthusiasm is also highlighted by Aukes and Kuhlmann in their report detailing the extent to which the Kingdom has used and could use science diplomacy going forward. In particular, Aukes and Kuhlmann (2022: 26) note:

*Science diplomacy is a trending term in foreign policy as well as international science policy. This trend has not yet caught hold in the Swedish STI ecosystem. Partly, this is because of the careful consideration of new, fashionable notions that is common among Swedish policy stakeholders. At the same time, the Swedish diplomatic tradition, among others in international environmental policy, represents a logical starting point for a stronger role of science diplomacy in the country.*

Stalled cooperation in the areas of science, technology, and innovation coupled with a stagnant attitude towards science diplomacy within Swedish policymaking and diplomatic circles necessitates a shift towards a more inclusive diplomatic typology.

Finally, Knight (2020: 38) defines knowledge diplomacy as 'a two-way process. It refers to the role that international higher education, research, and innovation (IHERI) play in building and strengthening

international relations and, vice versa, the role that international relations play in facilitating and improving IHERI.' These processes are underpinned by five characteristics, all of which are listed and unpacked in the next section of this paper.

Overall, the above discussion illustrates how the blossoming of diplomatic typologies has complicated the diplomatic discourse. Regardless, it is important to note that there is overlap between the various typologies discussed above. This overlap is necessitated by two realities. Firstly, there is a form of 'actor-overlap' between education, science, academia, and knowledge diplomacy. Within the realms of science, academic, and knowledge diplomacy, higher education actors play a role in these kinds of exchanges. Furthermore, education and science diplomacy are very specific in their applications. The former predominantly refers to undertakings to improve access to education in the basic education sector, while the latter mostly speaks to cooperation in finding solutions to global challenges via means offered by the natural sciences. This also raises questions about the difference between science diplomacy and knowledge diplomacy and if they should be considered to be symmetrical. Knight (2022: 122) weighs in on this ponderance by noting:

*This is a question worthy of serious consideration. It depends on how broadly the concept of science is being defined and used. If science is broadly interpreted to mean knowledge, as in the Latin word "sciencia", then there is a close relationship. But traditionally, science diplomacy has been seen and used in the Western sense of natural sciences as illustrated in all the examples provided in the conceptual framework developed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.*

Knight (2022: 122) also highlights the one-sided nature of science diplomacy:

*However, the focus on science and technology excludes, to a large extent, other sectors, issues and disciplines related to the social sciences and humanities. For instance, it is unlikely that science diplomacy initiatives or negotiations would include humanitarian or societal issues such as migration, ageing, refugees, gender,*

“ with knowledge having the broadest scope, thus providing an opportunity for education, academic, and science diplomacy to be embarrassed in the practice of knowledge diplomacy (as shown by Figure 1) depending on the context in which each typology is applied. This is present within the realm of South Africa-Sweden Relations. ”

*poverty, or human rights. Thus, while full acknowledgement is given to the importance and role of science diplomacy, it does not exclude the necessity of knowledge diplomacy, which is a more inclusive concept in terms of the range of issue sectors and disciplines involved, the diversity in the production of research and application of knowledge.*

The discussion above shows that each typology discussed in this paper, while akin in some way, is different in their scope and objective. Each typology discussed herein has its own scope, with knowledge having the broadest scope, thus providing an opportunity for education, academic, and science diplomacy to be embarrassed in the practice of knowledge diplomacy (as shown by Figure 1) depending on the context in which each typology is applied. This is present within the realm of South Africa-Sweden Relations. While South Africa's priorities are channelled towards the pursuit of science diplomacy, Sweden's motivations are anchored in the Swedish government's desire to expand the internationalisation of Swedish higher education. A government report published in 2018 summarising the outcomes of a state-sponsored inquiry tasked with proposing a new strategy for the internationalisation of Swedish higher education found that internationalisation, by means of cross-border collaborations in research,

enhances the quality of research and education (Government of Sweden, 2018: 8). The report further notes that internationalisation in higher education yields significant political, economic, and social benefits for the participating states. Politically, the internationalisation in higher education allows for the strengthening of bilateral relations as many states desire to create 'knowledge-intensive societies' (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9). Economically, the internationalisation of higher education can stimulate economic growth. As the report notes (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9):

*By attracting researchers, experts and foreign students who stay on after completing their studies, a country can gain access to international expertise, compensate for inadequate domestic education capacity, support innovation and the economy by renewing the knowledge and innovation system through an inflow of new methods, perspectives and technologies and mitigate the effects of an ageing population.*

From a social perspective, the report concludes that the internationalisation of higher education can result in the personal growth of the individual participant as exposure to external cultures has the potential to increase their self-understanding as well as the understanding of others (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9).

“ From a social perspective, the report concludes that the internationalisation of higher education can result in the personal growth of the individual participant as exposure to external cultures has the potential to increase their self-understanding as well as the understanding of others (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9). ”

When considered side-by-side, it is clear that South Africa favoured science diplomacy while Sweden was more inclined towards academic diplomacy<sup>6</sup> with the increasing frequency of science diplomacy being mentioned in the report (Government of Sweden, 2018: 9). SASUF therefore paves the way for knowledge diplomacy to occur as the potential occurs whereby both states are able to have their objective fulfilled.

Secondly, the context of the mechanism or platform, in this case SASUF, cannot be overlooked as it provides a circumstantial setting which brings higher education and education-focused non-governmental organisations from both South Africa and Sweden together as collaboration to advance a joint agenda for the delivery of higher education in a wide array of fields spanning the natural and social sciences, which align with Knight's observations above.

Combined, these realities require a more generic typology that accommodates both a diversity of actors and different interests among participating actors.

### **Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy**

Jane Knight remains one of the few scholars, if not the only scholar, who has been able to enrich and solidify the collective conceptual discourse pertaining to knowledge diplomacy. In this regard, five characteristics have been developed (Knight, 2020: 38–39):

- I. Focus on higher education, research, and innovation:** The practice of knowledge diplomacy involves various forms of internationalisation efforts in higher education. These include student exchanges, scholar exchanges, joint conferences, and research projects. It is imperative to note that all of these activities must be linked or interconnected to one another, as well as a myriad of actors which help to drive strategies for international engagement in order to be considered knowledge diplomacy.
- II. Diversity of actors and partners:** Within the context of higher education, higher education institutions play a potent role in international exchanges; they are, however, not the only actors involved in this process. As Knight (2020: 38)

notes ‘national, regional, or international centres of excellence, research institutions, foundations, think tanks, professional associations, nongovernmental education organizations and governmental departments/agencies [all have a role to play in adding the facilitation of international exchanges in the higher education sector].’ Of equal importance are the engagements with actors from different sectors who will be involved in the facilitation of the exchanges.

### III. Recognition of different needs and collective use of resources:

It is understood that while different actors come together to address common issues, their ability to engage and seek international partners may differ on each partner’s needs and the resources they have access to. Regardless, it is important to acknowledge that each state will bring their own resources to the table by engaging the partnership. Within this context, the cooperating states recognise the collective needs their partners have and work together to ensure that these needs are realised through the constructive employment of each partner’s resources.

### IV. Reciprocity (mutual, but with different benefits):

When states engage in knowledge diplomacy, they often exist in different social, economic, and/or political contexts resulting in each partner having access to different and sometimes unequal resources, thereby yielding asymmetrical benefits for all parties involved. Regardless, both states are likely to remain engaged in the practice since their participation is mutually beneficial and will likely meet contextual needs or outcomes.

### V. Build and strengthen relations between countries:

Overall, knowledge diplomacy, if employed correctly, can help to strengthen the bilateral relations between the two participating states. Interactions undertaken in the name of knowledge diplomacy are seen to go beyond any pre-existing bilateral or multilateral agreements that the participating states may be party to.

### SASUF as a means of knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden relations

### *Focus on higher education, research, and innovation*

A focus on higher education is central to SASUF. The project’s website notes that SASUF was founded with ‘the overall aim of strengthening ties between Sweden and South Africa in research, education and innovation’ (SASUF, 2023a). As noted earlier on in this article, SASUF has to-date connected an estimated 3,000 students and researchers. This number will most likely increase, given that SASUF’s second cycle of operation is still ongoing.

### *Diversity of actors and partners*

As illustrated by Table 2, SASUF currently has 40 university partners and one associate partner. Additionally, there are many partners that may emerge when SASUF collaborations take place via the Seed Grants for Collaborative Research Programme. The Wilder Rangelands Workshop Series project, co-hosted by the University of Fort Hare, Nelson Mandela University, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, the University of Cape Town, Umeå University, and Rhodes University is one such example. The Final Report submitted for this project noted that Conservation South Africa played a key role in cross-learning and knowledge exchange between academic and non-academic experts in the rangeland conservation (SASUF, 2023d: 7). Outside of the Seed Grants for Collaborative Research Programme, other ad-hoc pilot collaborations have also highlighted how different SASUF actors can converge to achieve a common goal. An example of this is the Student Essay Contest on South Africa-Sweden Relations (the Essay Contest). The Essay Contest was open to all final-year undergraduate students at SASUF partner universities, with the hosting and coordination being jointly attended to by the University of Johannesburg (UJ), SASUF, and the Swedish Embassy in Pretoria. The Essay Contest welcomed submissions from five categories, namely: gender issues, environmental issues, academic exchanges, science and technology issues, and cultural issues. Participating students were asked to write an essay in which they explained how both states can strengthen their bilateral relationship within the student’s chosen category. The essay submissions were assessed by a panel of 14 judges (seven from South Africa and Sweden respectively) emanating from various SASUF partner universities.

### **Recognition of different needs and collective use of resources**

While both South Africa and Sweden acknowledge that their collaboration is rooted in addressing border-blind issues of mutual concern, each state has their own set of needs that they wish to meet via their collaboration within SASUF. The needs of both states, within the context of SASUF-orientated collaboration, are not publicly stated. Clarity can, however be sought when assessing the foreign policy documents of both states. As has been demonstrated above, South Africa maintains an ardent admission to participate in and lead processes pertaining to research, technology, and innovation. For its part, Sweden has singled out the need to deepen its development cooperation with the African continent, as noted by the Swedish Foreign Ministry (2022):

*Africa's countries and regions face widely differing conditions and opportunities when it comes to sustainable development. At the same time, several of the continent's challenges are cross-border in nature. One important starting point for the strategy is, therefore, to strengthen regional cooperation and integration. Development cooperation includes support in areas such as environment and climate, democracy and human rights, migration and development, economic integration, and peaceful and inclusive societies.*

While the above does not specifically mention cooperation in education, science diplomacy, nor knowledge diplomacy, it is plausible to argue that cooperation in education and knowledge exchange is part of this process given that the Kingdom is known for fostering a cooperation culture which allows locally based partners to take an active part in owning the projects they collaborate on (Söderbaum, 2017). Moreover, the Swedish government's desire to further the internationalisation of Swedish higher education also suggests that the Kingdom places an emphasis on the important role that collaboration in higher education can occupy in the pursuit of its own interests.

Collaboration within SASUF places an emphasis on each party employing their own resources. This emphasis is reflected in the Seed Grants for

Collaborative Research Programme, where Sweden provides funding via STINT, and South Africa provides funding via its National Research Foundation (NRF). STINT contributes 100,000 SEK while the NRF contributes R130,000 (73,891 SEK)<sup>7</sup> (SASUF, 2023e). Additionally, during the Essay Contest, each of the three partners put their respective resources into action to make the contest a success. UJ used its academic knowledge to map out the initial framework for the contest while also providing the artwork advertising the Essay Contest to prospective students. SASUF was able to help market the Essay Contest to partner universities and help identify suitable candidates for the panel of judges. SASUF also awarded the Essay Contest a mobility grant which allowed the winners of each category to attend a winners' luncheon at the Swedish Ambassador's Residence in Pretoria. The Embassy's willingness to host the luncheon provided prospective submitters with an incentive to participate in the Essay Contest.

### **Reciprocity (mutual, but with different benefits)**

Despite having different needs, the various partners are incentivised to cooperate because their collective efforts will make progress towards fulfilling their needs. In the context of SASUF, there are benefits for both states, as well as for individual researchers participating in SASUF's activities. For South Africa, SASUF offers the Republic the opportunity to meet its domestic and foreign policy objectives by affording South African researchers and students the opportunity to be part of the creation of innovative solutions to common problems, such as by scientific and exploratory means. The articles co-authored by Richards and Lipnizki, as well as Dermineur and Kolanisi, respectively, for this special issue are evidence of this. As for Sweden, the Kingdom can fulfil its desire for increased internationalisation of higher education via SASUF. South African-based researchers are able to gain access to a wider pool of research funding while also enhancing their international professional networks. Sweden-based researchers are able to gain access to the African loci for research purposes with greater ease. Combined or mutual benefits have also emerged as researchers from Sweden are able to obtain fellowships in Swedish academic institutions and vice versa. Moreover, postgraduate students from South Africa and Sweden benefited from co-supervision expertise from both states.

### **Build and strengthen relations between countries**

The activities conducted by SASUF have strengthened bilateral relations between South Africa and Sweden. SASUF was due to be showcased as a successful bilateral undertaking in 2020 at a high-level meeting between President Cyril Ramaphosa and then-Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven. The South Africa-Sweden Bi-National Commission's Working Group on Science and Technology had agreed that SASUF would be the subject of the plenary session.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, this meeting was postponed due to Covid-19.

SASUF's work has also helped to foster strong social bonds between researchers from both states. Some of the Final Reports submitted by beneficiaries of the Seed Grants for Collaborative Research Programme brought these conclusions to the surface. Facilitators of the Remote Sensing and Multispectral Imaging for Plants and Food Stuff to Meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) project made a similar observation and noted the following when asked to highlight the most significant outcomes of their collaboration: '[t]he different ties we have been able to make and that there are several projects both within academia and between academia and the private sector that will survive after the project is over' (SASUF, 2023e: 1). Likewise, the Final Report submitted for the 'Violence on the Global Map: 'Street Science'

for Challenging Norms and Practices' project made the following observation: 'We have been able to develop the partnership into a strong and meaningful collaboration that is looking forward to continued shared activities and engagement' (SASUF, 2023f: 2). They elaborate further to say: 'Through this project we have learnt from one another in ways that have enriched us all and our future plans will enable the learning to strengthen teaching and learning activities at [our respective] institutions' (SASUF, 2023f: 2). Finally, collaborators working on the Open Education and Social Justice (OESJ) Project concluded (SASUF, 2020: 5):

*The SASUF OESJ has been highly successful as a mechanism to facilitate ongoing collaboration between participating researchers. The team has benefitted from the numerous contact meeting opportunities and has established the trust and rapport necessary to facilitate longer-term collaboration. The project team members have all benefited personally from the interaction in terms of being exposed to different perspectives in two countries and remain committed to ongoing interaction.*

The positive outcomes outlined above confirm strong social ties between South African and Swedish academics, which could help to maintain traditional bilateral relations going forward should the strong bilateral cooperation in research and innovation continue.

### **Conclusion**

This paper sought to highlight the presence and nature of knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden Relations by attempting to illustrate that Knight's five characteristics of knowledge diplomacy were present within SASUF. These characteristics were found to align with SASUF's work which indicates that SASUF is an example of knowledge diplomacy within the context of South Africa-Sweden Relations. Given the alignment of SASUF with the typology of knowledge diplomacy, the authors posit and propose a new research agenda vis-à-vis SASUF and knowledge diplomacy. The proposed research agenda is threefold. First, continued usage of SASUF as a case study in scholarly work could help further understanding of contemporary South

“ The positive outcomes outlined above confirm strong social ties between South African and Swedish academics, which could help to maintain traditional bilateral relations going forward should the strong bilateral cooperation in research and innovation continue. ”

Africa-Sweden Relations. Some of the Final Reports submitted have indicated that the seed funding has helped to foster strong working relationships between South African and Swedish researchers. With this submitted observation as a backdrop, future research should focus on how SASUF-orientated collaborations impact how researchers view South Africa-Sweden Relations and whether their work contributes to the fostering of this relationship. The motivation for electing to participate in SASUF activities could also be incorporated into this research.

Second, researchers may wish to focus on the soft power potential of SASUF. Jane Knight has already illustrated the difference between knowledge diplomacy and soft power, so future research should apply this differentiation to SASUF. Third, the long-term impact of the SASUF-funded projects is yet to be determined. This is largely due to the fact that SASUF is still in its second cycle of operation. SASUF coordinators, researchers, and students should continue to submit Final Reports while also keeping additional statistical and numerical information on hand so that a thorough evaluation can be undertaken upon the second funding cycle's conclusion. The success of knowledge diplomacy between South Africa and Sweden by means of SASUF is laudable. However, South Africa's positions in relation to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict as well as the possible expansion of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) bloc could possibly undermine this positive collaboration.<sup>9</sup> Only time will tell how these phenomena will unfold and potentially impact the bilateral relations between South Africa and Sweden.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the South Africa-Sweden University Forum for allowing them access to the Final Reports of the Seed Grants for Collaborative Research Programme, which provided some primary insights for this article. Both SASUF and the authors of these reports are assured that their information was used solely for research purposes and was not disclosed to a third party.

### Notes

1. SASUF encourages the joint coordination of projects across its partner institutions. To this

end, plans are currently being formulated for the Research and Innovation Week for 2024 to be co-hosted by three Swedish universities.

2. Plans with SASUF's Associate Partners are still under development. Further information regarding SASUF's Associate Partners was not available at the time of writing. Their work, contributions, and impact will need to be noted and discussed in future research.
3. MIKTA is a bloc of states consisting of Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Turkey, and Australia.
4. At the time of writing, this department is known as the Department of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation.
5. The GEO was founded in 2005 with the intention of establishing a Global Earth Observations System that will enable political leaders and policymakers to make better decisions that will impact humankind. At the time of writing, the GEO has 113 member states, which include both South Africa and Sweden.
6. This conclusion is confirmed when one considers the definition of internationalisation of higher education used in the report.
7. This is an estimated value based on present-day exchange rates.
8. This information was provided to the authors by SASUF.
9. For more information on these global developments, please refer to Beakkvold and Hattar's paper in this special issue.

---

### References

- Abdurahmanli, E. (2021). 'Definition of Diplomacy and Types of Diplomacy Used Between States.' *Anadolu Akademi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 3(3): 580–603. Academic Diplomacy Project. (n.d.). 'Vision.' *Academic Diplomacy Project* [online]. Available at: [www.academicdiplomacyproject.org/](http://www.academicdiplomacyproject.org/)
- Aukes, E. (2020). 'Towards Effective Science Diplomacy Practice, Using Science Diplomacy for Addressing Global Challenges.' Policy Brief, No. 2. *S4D4C* [online]. Available at: [www.s4d4c.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/S4D4C-Towards-effective-science-diplomacy-practice.pdf](http://www.s4d4c.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/S4D4C-Towards-effective-science-diplomacy-practice.pdf)

- Aukes, E. and Kuhlmann, S. (2022). 'Science Diplomacy in and for Sweden.' *STINT* [online]. Available at: [www.stint.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/STINT\\_Science\\_Diplomacy.pdf](http://www.stint.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/STINT_Science_Diplomacy.pdf)
- Botha, S. (2022). 'The Youth and South African Foreign Policy: Influences or Passive Observers.' In: Masters, L., van Wyk, J. and Mthembu, P. (eds.). *South African Foreign Policy Review Volume 4*. Johannesburg: HSRC Press.
- Cardarelli, R. (2018). 'Solving the Education Crisis of Displaced Children: A Most Important Goal for Education Diplomacy.' *Childhood Education*, 94(3): 61–66.
- Chandramohan, B. and Rycroft, D. (2018). 'Academic Diplomacy, an Evolving Discipline.' *Diplomacy Beyond* [online]. Available at: [diplomacybeyond.com/academic-diplomacy-an-evolving-discipline/](http://diplomacybeyond.com/academic-diplomacy-an-evolving-discipline/)
- Childhood Education International. (n.d.). 'What is Education Diplomacy?' *Childhood Education International* [online]. Available at: [ceinternational1892.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/What-is-Education-Diplomacy.pdf](http://ceinternational1892.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/What-is-Education-Diplomacy.pdf)
- Farrelly, N. (2015). 'Academic Diplomacy in the 21st Century.' *New Mandala* [online]. Available at: [www.newmandala.org/academic-diplomacy-in-the-21st-century/](http://www.newmandala.org/academic-diplomacy-in-the-21st-century/)
- Government of Sweden. (2018). 'Internationalisation of Swedish Higher Education and Research – A Strategic Agenda.' *Government Offices of Sweden* [online]. Available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/2522e5c3f8424df4aec78d2e48507e4f/internationalisation-of-swedish-higher-education-and-research.pdf](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/2522e5c3f8424df4aec78d2e48507e4f/internationalisation-of-swedish-higher-education-and-research.pdf)
- Knight, J. (2020). 'Knowledge Diplomacy: What Are the Key Characteristics?' *International Higher Education*, 100: 38–39.
- Knight, J. (2022). *Knowledge Diplomacy in International Relations and Higher Education*. Cham: Springer.
- Masters, L. (2015). 'South Africa's Two Track Approach to Science Diplomacy.' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41(1): 169–186.
- Murphy, Y. (2018). 'Education Diplomacy: The Two sides of Innovation.' *Childhood Education*, 94(3): 3.
- Ogunnubi, O. and Shawa, L.B. (2017). 'Analysing South Africa's Soft Power in Africa Through the Knowledge Diplomacy of Higher Education.' *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 15(2): 81–107.
- Pandor, N. (2012). 'South African Science Diplomacy: Fostering Global Partnerships and Advancing the African Agenda.' *Science and Diplomacy*, 1(1): 1–6.
- Rozental, A. and Buenrostro, B. (2013). 'Bilateral Diplomacy.' In: Cooper, A.F., Heine, J. and Thakur, R. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scorza, S.A. (2019). 'The United Nations as a Platform for Education Diplomacy.' *Childhood Education*, 95(1): 64–72.
- Söderbaum, F. (2017). 'Swedish Development Cooperation and Ownership of African Regional Organizations.' *Forum for Development Studies*, 44(3): 357–375.
- South Africa-Sweden University Forum. (2020). 'SASUF Short-term Collaborative Projects, Final Report, Open Education and Social Justice Project.' [Report disclosed to authors by SASUF.]
- South Africa-Sweden University Forum. (2023a). 'General Information About SASUF.' *SASUF* [online]. Available at: [www.sasuf.org/general-info-about-sasuf](http://www.sasuf.org/general-info-about-sasuf)
- South Africa-Sweden University Forum. (2023b). 'The 40 Partner Universities in SASUF.' *SASUF* [online]. Available at: [www.sasuf.org/partner-universities](http://www.sasuf.org/partner-universities)
- South Africa-Sweden University Forum. (2023c). 'Funding Opportunities.' *SASUF* [online]. Available at: [www.sasuf.org/funding-opportunities](http://www.sasuf.org/funding-opportunities)
- South Africa-Sweden University Forum. (2023d). 'SASUF Short-term Collaborative Projects, Final Report, Wilder Rangelands Workshops Project.' [Report disclosed to authors by SASUF.]
- South Africa-Sweden University Forum. (2023e). 'SASUF Short-term Collaborative Projects, Final Report, Remote Sensing and Multispectral Imaging for Plants and Food Stuff to Meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Project.' [Report disclosed to authors by SASUF.]
- South Africa-Sweden University Forum. (2023f). 'SASUF Short-term Collaborative Projects, Final Report, Violence on the Global Map: "Street Science" for Challenging Norms and Practices Project.' [Report disclosed to authors by SASUF.]
- South African Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. (1996). 'White Paper on Science and Technology: Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.' *South African Government* [online]. Available at: [www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/sciencetechnologywhitepaper.pdf](http://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/sciencetechnologywhitepaper.pdf)
- South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation. (2011). 'White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy: Building a Better World—The Diplomacy of Ubuntu.' *South African Government* [online]. Available at: [www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/final-draft-white-paper-sa-foreign-policy.pdf](http://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/final-draft-white-paper-sa-foreign-policy.pdf)
- South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation. (2022). 'South African Treaty Register.' *DIRCO* [online]. Available at: [treaties.dirco.gov.za/dbtw-wpd/textbase/treatywebsearch.htm](http://treaties.dirco.gov.za/dbtw-wpd/textbase/treatywebsearch.htm)
- South African Department of Science and Innovation. (2018). 'South Africa to Chair Group on Earth Observations.' *South African Department of Science and Innovation* [online]. Available at: [www.dst.gov.za/index.php/media-room/latest-news/2664-south-africa-to-chair-group-on-earth-observations-geo](http://www.dst.gov.za/index.php/media-room/latest-news/2664-south-africa-to-chair-group-on-earth-observations-geo)
- South African Department of Science and Innovation. (2022). 'South Africa to Host Group on Earth Observation Ministerial Summit.' *South African Department of Science and Innovation* [online]. Available at: [www.dst.gov.za/index.php/media-room/latest-news/3822-south-africa-to-host-group-on-earth-observations-ministerial-summit](http://www.dst.gov.za/index.php/media-room/latest-news/3822-south-africa-to-host-group-on-earth-observations-ministerial-summit)
- Swedish Foreign Ministry. (2022). 'Government Adopts Regional Strategy for Swedish Development Cooperation with Africa.' *Swedish Foreign Ministry* [online]. Available at: [www.government.se/press-releases/2022/02/government-adopts-regional-strategy-for-swedish-development-cooperation-with-africa/#:~:text=The%20Government%20has%20adopted%20a,by%20climate%20change%20and%20conflicts](http://www.government.se/press-releases/2022/02/government-adopts-regional-strategy-for-swedish-development-cooperation-with-africa/#:~:text=The%20Government%20has%20adopted%20a,by%20climate%20change%20and%20conflicts)
- The Royal Society. (2010). 'New Frontiers in Science Diplomacy Navigating the Changing Balance of Power.' *The Royal Society* [online]. Available at: [royalsociety.org/topics-policy/publications/2010/new-frontiers-science-diplomacy/](http://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/publications/2010/new-frontiers-science-diplomacy/)
- Uppsala University. (2019). 'Joint Declaration by the Participating Universities in the South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF).' *Uppsala University* [online]. Available at: [mp.uu.se/documents/432512/399567108/Joint+declaration+SASUF+%28signed%29.pdf/64489aaf-12b4-a60e-da73-5f1719d8c334](http://mp.uu.se/documents/432512/399567108/Joint+declaration+SASUF+%28signed%29.pdf/64489aaf-12b4-a60e-da73-5f1719d8c334) international relations and, vice versa, the role that international relations play in facilitating and improving IHERI.' These processes are underpinned by five characteristics, all of which are listed and unpacked in the next section of this paper.