

Morocco's Soft Power

The term 'Soft Power' was first introduced by Joseph Nye of Harvard University in the late 1980s where he coined "the best propaganda is not propaganda". This reflects getting goals and resources in other countries through non-coercive means. Soft power was conceptualized as the new means to success in world politics. Nye defined soft power as "the ability to get what one wants by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment" (Nye, 2004, p. 16). Nye identified three main resources of a country's soft power in "its **culture** in places where it is attractive to others, its **political values** when it lives up to them at home and abroad, and its **foreign policies** when others see them as legitimate and having moral authority" (Nye, 2011; p.84). There are several dimensions that involve soft power practices, mainly ranging from international relations, business and trade, people and values, culture and heritage, education and science, and governance. As experts asserted, soft power can deliver limitless benefits for countries, nations, people, and organizations. Having a strong and positive soft power image allows a country to appear attractive at regional and international levels. In this commentary, I shed light on the Moroccan approaches to soft power with concrete examples.

Culture and Education Matter

In 1986, the Moroccan government launched the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation ([AMCI](#)) to promote Moroccan culture globally as well as offering higher education and vocational training to international students. The AMCI operates in 119 countries (47 from Africa) and the number of students recruited in Moroccan institutions increases annually. As of 2021, more than 35 thousand students from 98 countries (47 from Africa) graduated from these institutions. Now, the number of active African students reaches +12,500 in addition to more than 14,500 other international students. About 85% of African students are granted full scholarships and accommodations. The agency also operates in other sectors to promote and transcend Moroccan expertise in industries mainly trade, fishing, transport and logistics, agriculture, and health systems. Since its creation, the AMCI represents the new dynamics that Morocco adopts to augment its presence at international levels, particularly in Africa.

Economic Incentives

In the Soft Power Index 2022 report, Morocco was ranked 43 in terms of its soft power implementation, particularly in the region and the African continent, leading Morocco to become the third African country to lead soft power. One reason for this is that the North African kingdom attracts businesses of different sectors; it also shares its expertise in several sectors with other African countries and other allies. Morocco is the fifth fast-growing economy on the continent. With its large hub of airports, highways, railways, and world-class seaports, Morocco ranked 53 in Doing Business 2022 compared to 95th place in 2012. Concurrently, the Moroccan government issues several incentives for foreign investors such tax exemptions in the first five years, employee training, and affordable access to capitals of production. These incentives have attracted, as a result, an interesting flow of foreign direct investments (FDI) with a net inflow of \$ 1.7 billion by 2020 (1.5% of GDP). In 2020, The Moroccan Investment and Export Agency (AMDIE) launched a platform labeled '[Morocco Now](#)' to encourage both exports for national and locally-manufactured products and services, and investments in foreign capitals. Branding Moroccan products and services at a global level cover several principal industries in which Morocco accumulated noticeable expertise including automotive, aeronautics, textile, agriculture, pharmaceutical, and outsourcing.

Religious Diplomacy

One of the cards that Morocco has been using to manifest its soft power in the last two decades is religious diplomacy. Morocco has always been applauded for its approaches to maintaining Islam as the religion of peace and coexistence within the national territory and regional and continental levels. The king of Morocco bears the title of 'Emirul-Muminin', which means literally The Commander of Faithful, as the person who secures and assures the implementation of religious affairs mainly Islam. With this perspective, Morocco placed itself as the major player in religious diplomacy in the African continent by countering extremism that emerges continuously in some sub-Saharan countries. What is more, in 2004 Morocco established the '[Mohammed VI Foundation of African Oulema](#)' to provide both basic and advanced training in Islamic studies for African religious preachers and scholars. Today, the foundation

has branches in 34 countries with an African outreach ranging from mosques construction, Imam training, and spiritual education. Although this foundation appears to serve religious affairs in terms of modeling the 'spiritual security' paradigm in other Sahelo-Saharan regions, the foundation deeply envisions expanding Morocco's political and economic influence in Africa. King Mohamed VI pays annually dozens of visits to different African countries (approximately 55 visits to 16 countries in 2017 alone). During his visits, he makes sure to lead the 'Jumu'aa Prayer' with his counterparts at central mosques. Moreover, he along with the Minister of Islamic Affairs launches several projects such as building mosques, Qur'an distributions, Islamic training and the like. For many African leaders, the example that Morocco exacerbates in religious diplomacy is a matter of being rooted to African identity underlying the primordial role of soft power in religious means. Another example of religious diplomacy is promoting [Tijaniyyah](#) which is a Sufi school of thought originated from Fez city. [Tijaniyyah](#) is currently widespread in North Africa, Senegal, Mali, Gambia, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sudan. To strengthen spiritual ties with the originating root of [Tijaniyyah](#), Morocco had launched direct flights from several African capital cities to Fez in 2016. This, certainly, has some economic and political motives underneath to enhance Islamic tourism.

Win-Win Strategies

After 33 years of absence, in 2017 Morocco rejoined the African Union which was warmly welcomed by the majority of member states. The Moroccan king delivered a speech to African leaders and emphasized that African problems and conflicts should be resolved within the African house. Morocco has long been adopting a win-win strategy within the south-south cooperation framework. This approach has allowed Morocco to boost capitals in different means in several African countries. For example, Maroc Telecom owns 11 telecom companies in 11 different African countries (Mostly in ECOWAS region). Beside the telecommunication sector, Maroc Telecom engages in several corporate social responsibilities in countries where it operates such as schooling, humanitarian and social works, health care systems and so forth. Likewise, the globally leading producer of phosphate and fertilizer OCP launched after rejoining the AU operates in several African regions. Such projects assure jobs for thousands of local personnel.

Meanwhile, Moroccan banks have been investing, for years, millions to expand their operations, especially in West Africa. With a combination of wise diplomacy, business investments, and far-reaching infrastructure investment in the African continent, Morocco has entrenched its position as a key player in, and a gateway to, the African market. In the recent pandemic, the Moroccan model in combating COVID-19 crisis has been approved by the WHO and other international organizations. The same model has been adopted by some African countries, which resulted in boosting Moroccan ties with many African countries at the time of crisis. For example, the Moroccan largest investing company 'Univers Des EPI' in Ivory Coast donated a large amount of medical kits and other medical apparel to the health ministry of Abidjan. In fact, Morocco has already garnered the fruits of its soft power by drilling historical diplomacy which was crowned by the recognition of several Arab and African countries of full sovereignty of Morocco over Western Sahara.

Summing up, although Morocco does not possess natural resources (i.e., oil and gas) like many African countries (i.e., Nigeria and Algeria), the variety and diversity of human resources with intangible capabilities have alleviated Morocco, under the wise leadership of King Mohamed VI, to become the leading country in the Maghreb region and one of the best countries globally in using soft power as its diplomatic, cultural, economic, and religious means. There are also some rooms to be maintained in this sense. Particularly, offering quality higher education to prospective students in Africa in, a major quota, would help entrench multilateral cooperation between the kingdom and sub-Saharan countries. Once they graduate from Moroccan institutions, these foreign students would spread the Moroccan perspectives and become ambassadors of Moroccan culture in their home countries.

Further Readings

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