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Morocco's Diplomatic Assets in Africa: An Overview

Written by: Youssef Zizi, Cultural Studies: Hassan II University, Morocco
& Ilham EL MAJDOUBI, Professor, English: Hassan II University, Morocco.

Unlike the oil-rich countries of the Gulf, Morocco's historical influence stems from its rich culture rather than its natural resources. Its Cherifian Kingdom has navigated modern international, regional, and domestic challenges, including the Arab Spring uprisings and the Covid-19 pandemic, thanks to its political stability, soft power, and effective cultural diplomacy.

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace recently published a policy paper highlighting Morocco's use of hard and soft power to effectively advance its regional objectives. According to the *North Africa Post*, the Kingdom has expanded its influence in Africa through mutually beneficial projects and strategic communications. Morocco employs a range of soft power tools, including humanitarian aid, information dissemination, spiritual outreach, and economic initiatives. Morocco's preventive diplomacy has effectively resolved numerous disputes and found long-term solutions to political crises in Africa.

Specifically, Morocco is experiencing a resurgence in Africa due to King Mohammed VI's well-planned strategy. Since the King's rise in the early 2000s, the Kingdom has returned to the African Union, and the King has also expanded its presence and made several official visits to African countries, empowered by clerics, businessmen, and diplomats. Since ascending to the throne on July 23, 1999, King Mohammed VI has played a significant role in supporting the African continent. At the 28th African Union (AU) Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January 2017, King Mohammed VI reported that Morocco had signed 515 agreements between 1956 and 1999. Since 2000, Morocco has signed nearly 1,000 agreements with African countries in various fields of cooperation, almost double the number of previous agreements.

To complement the King's royal visits and return to the African Union, Morocco has launched several programs to confirm its regional position as a geopolitical and geostrategic power. These initiatives aim to consolidate its positions on the African scene and strengthen its partnerships with several African nations.

Before delving further, let us first define the two main types of power: "soft power" and "hard power." According to Joseph Nye, "soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments (2004, p. 10). It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and foreign policies." Later, Nye provides a detailed explanation of soft power, describing it as:

The ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want. One can affect others' behavior in three main ways: threats of coercion ("sticks"), inducements

and payments (“carrots”), and attraction that makes others want what you want. A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its examples, and/or aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness (Nye 2008, p. 94).

According to Nye, hard power is “the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies” (2011, p. 11). In contrast to soft power, hard power relies on military intervention, coercive diplomacy, and economic sanctions (Wilson 2008, p. 114). It is based on tangible power resources such as armed forces or economic means (Gallarotti 2011, p. 29). Cooper emphasizes the importance of legitimacy in soft power, a trait which is lacking in hard power (2004, p. 173). Therefore, to enhance soft power, state activities must be perceived as legitimate.

Morocco considers Africa a crucial part of its foreign policy and aims to showcase its potential on the global stage. The decision to rejoin the African Union was a diplomatic strategy, rather than a reactionary move. The 2011 Constitution, promulgated on July 29, 2011, emphasizes the Kingdom’s cultural diversity and its commitment to its African heritage:

A sovereign Muslim State, attached to its national unity and to its territorial integrity, the Kingdom of Morocco intends to preserve, in its plentitude and its diversity, its one and indivisible national identity. Its unity, is forged by the convergence of its Arab-Islamist, Berber [amazighe] and Saharan-Hassanic [saharo-hassanie] components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic and Mediterranean influences [affluents]. The preeminence accorded to the Muslim religion in the national reference is consistent with [va de pair] the attachment of the Moroccan people to the values of openness, of moderation, of tolerance and of dialogue for mutual understanding between all the cultures and the civilizations of the world. (Translation from Jefri J. Ruchti; linked below).

Rabat frequently engages in United Nations peacekeeping operations in the African region. Currently, it has deployed 1,724 peacekeepers in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan, as confirmed by Under-Secretary-General for UN Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix during his recent first official visit to Morocco (maroc.ma).

Additionally, the Kingdom hosts the Atlantic Federation of African Press Agencies (FAAPA), which was established in 2014. In March 2015, FAAPA inaugurated the Training Center for African Journalists (CAFJ) in Rabat.

Moroccan media groups, such as the Maghreb Arab Press (MAP), have recently established bureaus abroad, strengthening their position as an important tool and a contemporary form of soft power. Morocco has the potential to increase its influence on the African continent and enhancing Rabat’s soft power could be a key factor in achieving this goal. According to the African Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Morocco remains a leader in South-South cooperation, an expanding domain of global solidarity. Since countries

are updating their diplomatic models with various strategies, Morocco can be understood within this framework. For example, since 2007, China has been actively promoting Chinese culture through international cultural exchanges, the establishment of new think tanks, university programs, and organizations. In contrast, Morocco, which has a rich ancestral history and has witnessed the rise and fall of great ancient civilizations, Qatar has developed soft power based on material and financial resource inducements. As a small Gulf state with significant economic resources, Qatar has emerged as an international power. Qatar employs a range of soft power tools to project an appealing image abroad, including in African nations such as Sudan, Somalia, Mali, and Tunisia. According to Ben O'Bright, Qatar's approach to international relations differs from that of Western countries (2017). O'Bright identifies five obstacles that affect Qatar's soft power mechanisms primarily derived from the country's financial investments rather than an image linked to desirable universal values. Qatar has employed "carrot diplomacy," also known as foreign aid, in Africa by offering material and financial incentives (Antwi-Boateng 2013, p. 358; 361). This approach aims to position the country as a global power and increase its soft power influence by leveraging its significant economic resources to gain valuable influence over resource-rich African nations. Economic diplomacy can be a prudent strategy for a prosperous nation. In line with this, Doha is expanding its investments to decrease dependence on petroleum-based products. Furthermore, as a component of its foreign policy, Qatar mediates conflicts and projects its image abroad through various means, including its state-owned media outlet, Al-Jazeera (Hall et al. 2013). Established in 1996, Al-Jazeera has played a significant role in enhancing Qatar's global presence by covering sports, documentaries, local news, children's programming, and English-language networks, similar to CNN and BBC (CNBC, 2022). Al-Jazeera has projected Qatar's set of ideals and values abroad through its 65 international bureaus, broadcasting to nearly 220 million households in more than 100 countries (Al-Jazeera.com 2012).

Qatar exercises soft power in the Middle East by leveraging its military alliance with the United States. It has enhanced its standing in the region through effective income redistribution policies and a progressive higher education system that has accommodated many US institutions in setting up satellite campuses. Since the 1940s, Qatar has undergone a remarkable transformation from poverty to prosperity. The country currently possesses a higher education system that follows a Westernized model, which is administered by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF). Additionally, there have been considerable efforts to expand foreign aid and enhance the global reach of its nonprofit sector. It has various means of influence, such as political stability, media power, sports investment, and foreign aid policy.

Qatar used global events, such as its successful bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, to distinguish itself from neighboring countries. According to Foley et al., these strategic and sporting occasions brought Qatar closer to Western nations and portrayed it as a stable neighbor and model for growth (2012). This observation aligns with Mehran Kamrava's definition of a unique tri-directional soft power strategy. Kamrava

describes Qatar's strategy as a balancing act of cultural, financial, and military persuasion, utilizing subtle power.

This small but relatively strong nation-state has implemented a global footprint and devised an African soft power strategy; in this manner, it consciously maintains cordial relations with both the West and the Arab world and positions itself as a bridge between the two. Its success can be attributed, in part, to its flexible identity, which balances a moderate Islamic outlook with a domestic approach to legal and social affairs.

Like Qatar, Morocco has demonstrated its effectiveness in utilizing soft power while also enhancing its foreign policy capabilities. According to Christian Wagner, "capacities point to economic, political and cultural resources that states have at their disposal. Capabilities denote the transformation of such capacities or resources into instruments or initiatives of foreign policy" (2011, p. 3). Morocco has established a comprehensive framework for its capacities based on a coherent set of values that includes counterterrorism and equal treatment for all minorities. For instance, during Mohammed V's leadership after Morocco gained independence, Moroccan Jews were involved in decision-making and even appointed to ministerial posts and senior civil service positions. To support its soft power imitative, Morocco has also linked sports and culture, with a focus on modernizing sports culture. After its success in the Soccer World Cup in Qatar, the Royal Moroccan Federation faces a significant challenge in maintaining its momentum across all age groups (*Hespress English*).

Several countries have recognized the potential of cultural diplomacy in promoting trade, investment, and cooperation and have incorporated cultural diplomacy strategies into their foreign policy. The distinction between hard and soft power is not binary but exists on a continuum that includes a range of instruments from coercion to persuasion. These instruments include punishment, inducement, agenda setting, persuasion, and attraction (Smith-Windsor 2000, p. 52).

Use of Soft Power: World Cup and Winter Olympics

Soft power is the ability to influence others through cultural, artistic, or athletic endeavors, rather than financial gain. Therefore, it is important to consider the impact of soft power at major sporting events such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Olympic Games, or the World Cup, all of which have a global reach unmatched by any other occasion.

Major sporting events provide an excellent opportunity to build soft power due to their positive reputation. However, it is crucial to note that hosting such celebrations requires significant financial and organizational resources. For example, Brazil invested billions of dollars to organize the 2014 World Cup, constructing stadiums and facilities that showcased its economic power and capacity to host a global sporting event. Although the economic cost is high, competitions like these can provide incomparable soft power. We will discuss some global cases in order to situate the Moroccan condition in this context of soft diplomacy and sport.

The 2018 World Cup and the 2014 Winter Olympics, both hosted by Russia, demonstrate the potential for sports to improve global perceptions and mitigate the

effects of violence. These events showcase how a country can use soft power to enhance its global reputation. In 2014, Russia prepared for the annexation of Crimea. Putin sought to restore Russia's former prestige by improving its image before taking military action, in an attempt to minimize negative consequences. In 2018, Russia eased visa requirements for the World Cup event. The program was extended after the World Cup to attract more tourists to the country. The event was a success for Russian soft power, presenting Russia and its president positively to visitors from around the world.

Morocco's participation in the 2022 World Cup is a noteworthy accomplishment for the country, enhancing its soft power. This achievement will undoubtedly be remembered in Moroccan football history. The global competition, held in an Arab country for the first time, has served as an excellent marketing campaign for Morocco, showcasing its strong social values.

During the World Cup, Morocco gained popularity, as shown by Google Trends data. Morocco's participation in the event showcased its culture globally and positioned its supporters as ambassadors of national identity. The Moroccan team was one of the most searched-for teams during the game, with online interest peaking during the quarterfinals. This interest surpassed that of Portugal, Brazil, and France (*The Star* 2022).

According to *The Washington Post*, the country is ranked as one of the top destinations for 2023. The extensive media coverage has led to a surge in online searches for Morocco-related topics following the 2022 World Cup. Moreover, there has been a noticeable increase in tourist activity, with reservation agencies reporting a rise in hotel bookings.

The coverage of Morocco highlighted several key themes, including family values, respect for mothers and wives, and women in general. Additionally, there were a significant number of female Moroccan spectators who displayed a keen interest in football. The coverage also touched on investment in human capital and social welfare. Moroccan players exhibited their philanthropy by donating their winnings to associations.

Morocco's success in the World Cup presents an opportunity to promote the country's economic development and establish it as a top tourist destination through the "Made in Morocco" campaign. The Moroccan football authorities' practice of "nation branding" has helped create an image of a trustworthy partner and an attractive country for investment.

Morocco's national football team, the Atlas Lions, has enhanced the country's international reputation as a promoter of modernity and peaceful coexistence among nations. Football has been strategically used as a tool of soft power to exert public influence (*TelQuel*).

Morocco's soft power diplomacy refers to a series of actions aimed at promoting the Moroccan model beyond its borders. Moroccan cultural diplomacy is also used to achieve this goal. The Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation (AMCI) awards thousands of scholarships to foreign students. Since 2000, Morocco has intensified its policy of welcoming African students.

The establishment of the Institute of African Studies, dedicated to researching Africa, enhances Morocco's soft power. The Institute of African Studies (IEA) is situated at Mohammed V Souissi University in Rabat and operates under its auspices. Founded in 1987, it initiated its scientific activities in 1990. The institute's mission is to explore African civilizations and the shared Moroccan-African cultural heritage. It promotes research, academic programs, and cultural exchanges with a focus on the African continent. Moreover, Morocco has become a member of various African scientific and technological organizations, including the African Regional Center for Technology (ARCT), the African Regional Center for Space Science and Technology (CRASTE), and the African Academy of Sciences (AAS).

Private higher education institutions in Morocco have also developed their internationalization strategy in Africa. The International University of Rabat has signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Higher Education to promote university exchanges, including the possibility of granting scholarships to African students. Additionally, the African Energy Academy (ACAFE) was established to train African operators in the field of refining.

Furthermore, Morocco has implemented various cultural initiatives within the African context. The Moroccan Cinematographic Center (CCM) has financed numerous African projects, and Morocco has supported the co-production and post-production of African films. Magazines like *Les Afriques* have been published, and Morocco is experiencing an increase in festivals that aim to exhibit African culture and heritage. For instance, Morocco hosts several African cultural festivals like the African Theater Festival, the African Short Documentary Film Festival, the International African Cinema Festival of Khouribga, and the African Book Festival of Marrakech. The Atlantic Federation of African News Agencies (FAAPA) was created in 2014 during the First Atlantic and West African News Agencies Forum in Casablanca. It is coordinated by the Moroccan News Agency (MAP) and funded by the Moroccan state. The African Center for Journalist Training, established at the same time, shares offices with MAP. Recently, media groups such as Hit Radio or the Eco-Medias Group have set up subsidiaries abroad. Morocco has complex relationships with Africa. However, the development of soft power is challenged by persistent obstacles, such as the current situation in Libya and the closed borders with Algeria and the two countries' conflict over the Southern boarder.

In June 2016, King Mohammed VI presided over the inauguration of the High Council of the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema (Islamic scholars) in Fez. The foundation aims to promote African Ulema. During his speech, the King referred to the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema as an institution for cooperation and sharing experiences and urged the Ulema to shed light on the true image of Islamic values of openness, moderation, tolerance, and coexistence. Morocco aims to promote peace, security, stability, and development in Africa. The Foundation disseminates religious teachings and combats extremism, segregation, and terrorism through its branches in African countries and in collaboration with other religious institutions. However, some clerics advocate for actions that are not in line with the authentic source of Islam due to logical fallacies and theological distortions.

Morocco's successful spiritual diplomacy is attributed to the use of Sufi channels and other techniques by the country's ancient Maliki School to communicate with Sufi Muslims in West Africa. The King, as Commander of the Faithful, has effectively countered the radical voices that are gaining ground in many West African countries. Additionally, he has promoted a tolerant Islam that teaches respect and love for all religions through legitimate spiritual diplomacy.

The Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Murchidines, and Murchidaates was launched in Rabat in March 2015 to strengthen Morocco's religious influence and anchor its adherence to the precepts of Islam. Morocco has a clear advantage in religious diplomacy in sub-Saharan Africa due to its longstanding historical, spiritual and cultural ties with its African neighbors. Morocco's Maliki Islam is a distinctive style that blends modernism and Sufism. The Kingdom's unique brand enables it to export its model to both the continent and the West. The country has established imam training programs in Europe, which serve as evidence of its success.

Morocco celebrates World Africa Day on May 25th, demonstrating solidarity with the African continent. This commitment aligns with the statement made by Adrien de Bassompierre, the European Investment Bank representative in Morocco (EIB), as reported by Maroc.ma, that Morocco serves as an exceptional gateway to Africa.

Partnerships Morocco's diplomacy has not yet achieved all of its objectives, and the potential for economic growth through regional integration has not been fully realized. Possible obstacles to Moroccan soft power could arise from the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, the emerging conflict in Sudan, and the increasing presence of foreign powers on the continent. However, Morocco's diplomatic efforts are not only about economic, but also human connections. There is an annual royal tour of Africa. Each year, the King of Morocco visits four or five African countries, such as Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Zambia, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Madagascar, Zambia, and South Sudan. These visits always include a delegation of businessmen and heads of public enterprises.

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