

# Moroccan Soft Power in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Economic Diplomacy in Strengthening Morocco's Attractiveness

**Bahha Meryeme**

*Abdelmalek Essaadi University, Morocco  
meryeme.bahha2@gmail.com*

**Lebbar Abdelghani**

*Abdelmalek Essaadi University, Morocco  
lebbar640@gmail.com*

**Abdelhamid Nechad**

*Abdelmalek Essaadi University, Morocco  
anechad@uae.ac.ma*

## ABSTRACT

*Moroccan soft power in sub-Saharan Africa stands out after an absence that lasted three decades. Today, this soft power is only the extension of South-South solidarity and win-win cooperation with the aim of strengthening economic, diplomatic and social relations giving Moroccan companies access to a market of 1.2 billion people. Individually the countries of sub-Saharan Africa are small, these countries must work together to be more visible on the international scene. In this article, we are going to try to highlight the different aspects of Moroccan economic diplomacy in sub-Saharan Africa, going through the study of the Moroccan Sahara file and finally by studying a concrete example of the OCP as a leader on the African continent.*

**Keywords:** Soft power, Economic diplomacy, South south cooperation, Economic intelligence, Negotiation, Foreign direct investment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Based on modern, relatively tense international relations, economic considerations are of fundamental importance in understanding inter-state relations. Take the example of the Moroccan-Algerian dispute over the Sahara issue, which was largely resolved after the proclamation of US President Trump recognising Morocco's full sovereignty over the whole of the Moroccan Sahara after negotiations that lasted 45 years. This conflict cannot be understood without mentioning the economic interests of a region occupying an advantageous geopolitical position facilitating traffic to Africa, of which Morocco sees itself as the main partner. We will try to provide an overview of this issue in detail later.

In many other international conflicts, the economic factor plays a major role, including the question of alliances. No country allies itself with another without some economic gain behind it. The most striking example is that of Russia and Ukraine, which has had unexpected consequences on an international scale, such as the unprecedented price hike that the world has experienced: the prices of energy, fertilisers, raw materials and cereals have risen by 20% to 30%. Even the Russian economy has been negatively affected due to the economic pressure and sanctions imposed on the Kremlin.

This being said, the political-economic duo thus regains all its consistency through a real overlap of interests. In this configuration, it is almost impossible to make a definitive judgement as to the primacy of one over the other.

Morocco for its part is increasingly active in its economic diplomacy towards its historical allies such as Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa and more recently towards certain Asian countries. In our work, we will focus on the Morocco-Africa relationship with the aim of analysing the ins and outs of the Moroccan soft power strategy in its continent.

Needless to say, soft power covers all the actions undertaken by a country to increase its attractiveness and influence. One of the essential components of soft power is economic diplomacy, which in turn reinforces this influence (economic, linguistic, ideological or cultural).

A brief historical review is necessary to analyse the evolution of these long-standing relations between Morocco and its Africa: Since independence, Morocco has established political, economic and institutional relations with many African countries, particularly sub-Saharan countries.

As a preamble, we recall that in the 19th century the capital of French West Africa was the city of Saint Louis in Senegal, while the capital of Morocco was Fez instead of Rabat. The African capital experienced a flow of immigration from Morocco, this immigration was not only the result of commercial relations but also of friendly and even family relations (mixed marriages).

From 1956 onwards, we witnessed the conclusion of bilateral cooperation agreements in the political, cultural, economic and technological fields with several countries, particularly those of West and Central Africa. The period from 1956 to 1961 represents an active and accelerated period of Moroccan-African relations, as Morocco reaffirmed its African vocation loud and clear. This Moroccan will was marked in the Moroccan constitution of 1962, which states in its preamble that Morocco, as an African state, has set itself the objective of achieving African unity.

Since the early years of its independence, Morocco has been able to establish a network of bilateral relations with many countries on the continent, particularly with the countries of West Africa (Marfaing & Wippel, 2004).

In the absence of the sustainability of the Casablanca group, the Organisation of African Unity was created to defend the interests of the African continent in 1963 in Addis Ababa. Morocco, as one of the founding members, was obliged to withdraw from the organisation in protest against the admission of the so-called "*Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)*". This in no way represents Morocco's lack of interest in Africa, which is why the late Hassan II committed himself to strengthening bilateral cooperation in several areas. He even showed his interest in Africa through his participation in the various Franco-African summits but also a commitment to Africa's problems such as the reduction of customs duties for African products, debt cancellation, etc. (Barre, 2010).

The creation of the Arab-African Union in 1984 by Morocco is an action aimed at Arab-African relations and the maintenance of international peace and security.

It should be noted, however, that after the creation of the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation in 1986, Morocco's relations with Africa took a new turn, with a focus on cooperation, particularly in the field of administrative training. Certainly, 150 economic agreements were signed during this period, compared to 120 between independence and 1987. However, most of these agreements concern countries in West and Central Africa.

Today, these relations have been increasingly strengthened thanks to Moroccan economic diplomacy towards the countries of sub-Saharan Africa in general. Several actions can testify to this: the opening of embassies of a good number of African countries in the South of Morocco, the cooperation agreements signed, the cancellation of debts of certain countries and others that we will try to detail throughout our article.

Africa is back on the international scene, the region is increasingly coveted, moving from a largely justified Afro-pessimism to an ecstatic Afro-optimism. Let us try to draw up an inventory of the situation in Africa and then analyse in detail the actions undertaken by Morocco in the framework of Moroccan soft power, while taking a look at the evolution of the Moroccan Sahara file, which constitutes a gateway to Africa.

### **1.1 Sub-Saharan Africa: Between the curse of raw materials and galloping demography**

The African continent is made up of 54 countries with totally different demographic, economic and geographical characteristics. How can we compare South Africa, a mature country, with Ethiopia, a country in the midst of an economic boom, at the dawn of its great catching-up process?

The top seven economies of the future continent with a GDP of more than USD 80 billion in 2018 (Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Angola, Sudan and Morocco) account for more than half of total GDP

(65.7%). The top three account for almost 42.6% of the total. A large part of the growth of these seven countries, with the exception of Morocco, is linked to commodity prices and oil.

That said, another hidden face is the demographic boom that the continent is experiencing, which is moving from Afro-pessimism to Afro-optimism. Ethiopia, for example, is on its way to becoming the most populous country in Africa (105 million inhabitants) behind Nigeria (191 million inhabitants). While a third of the population lives on less than a dollar a day. These demographic gaps are even more contrasted if we take the case of Egypt, with more than 102 million inhabitants in 2022, compared to 4.6 million in the Central African Republic and 2.1 million in the Gambia.

Some researchers believe that in order for Africa to catch up to China's huge economic gap, Africa would have to grow by 5% more than China for 30 years. When China is growing at 1%, Africa would have to grow at 3% to even out its gap with its Asian competitor. At present, sub-Saharan Africa's contribution to global growth is only one-thirtieth of the total. In reality, Africa will have a hard time catching up with the backlog it has accumulated since decolonisation.

Let us take a closer look at the legacy of the colonisation of the dark continent while at the same time trying to analyse the current economic situation.

If we look back briefly, we can see that the black continent nevertheless experienced an acceleration of its growth at the time of the wave of independence in the 1960s, followed rapidly by a profound reversal that plunged the continent into a quasi-stagnation until the beginning of the 1990s (0.1% growth per year). This figure is even more catastrophic if one considers the demographic boom.

The real change came very late, when Africa returned to global growth in the mid-2000s, thanks to the massive efforts of Asian economies. Between 2000 and 2007, the continent's overall GDP grew by 5.4% per year, double the rate of the previous 20 years. African economies showed remarkable resilience during the sub-prime crisis that hit the United States and some European countries in 2008. Between 2008 and 2016, Africa grew by 3.4%, 1% faster than the world as a whole. In 2014, out of the 54 African countries, the 5% growth threshold was exceeded by 22 of them, and even better, six of the ten fastest growing countries in the world were African. However, the fall in commodity and oil prices in 2016 partly reversed the improvement, showing the continent's strong dependence on commodity and oil prices (growth of only 1.4% in 2016).

Africa's disconnection from the rest of the world at the end of its independence led to a decline in its global economic weight, despite a slight recovery at the end of the period (2.8% of world GDP today compared to 1.9% in 1980). Undermined by numerous civil wars and inter-religious conflicts, Africa was hostage to the confrontation between the (communist) East and the capitalist West until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Through African countries, the two blocs waged war on the continent, as in Indochina and Korea. Che Guevara's Cuban epic in the Congo in 1965, which ended in a fiasco, is a perfect illustration of this confrontation between the two blocs.

Today, African growth is unevenly distributed across the continent. Generally, four economic profiles can be distinguished within the same Africa. The first profile, which we can describe as “*exporting*”, is attributed to a certain number of countries such as Nigeria, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon and Chad, which account for 68.1% of African GDP. The second African profile is attributed to countries with diversified economies whose economic weight is low (apart from South Africa), such as Cape Verde, Mauritius, Tunisia and Morocco in North Africa. The third profile is that of countries in transition such as Kenya, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon, which form the smallest group (10 countries out of 54 with a GDP weight of 11.9%). And finally, the countries in pre-transition (the most numerous, 24 countries out of 54 with a GDP weight of 14.6%) such as Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Rwanda, Mali, etc. This last category is the one with the highest potential for catching up, with a current GDP per capita of between 99 and 825 dollars. Some countries in this last category are also producers of raw materials or are about to become so, such as Mozambique, and these countries are also on the eve of their Thirty Glorious Years, such as China after the death of Mao in 1976. All it takes is a little development or a release of micro-capital to increase the wealth produced considerably and generate strong growth, as the base effect is enormous.

We have also developed a Table 1 that groups the different regions of sub-Saharan Africa that will allow us to visualise in detail the different countries of the continent:

**Table 1. The regions of Sub-Saharan Africa according to the UN mapping**

West Africa	Central Africa	Central Africa and East	Southern Africa
Benin	Angola	Burundi	South Africa
Burkina Faso	Cameroon	Comoros	Botswana
Cape Verde	Congo	Djibouti	Lesotho
Ivory Coast	Gabon	Eritrea	Namibia
Gambia	Equatorial Guinea	Ethiopia	Swaziland
Ghana	Central African Republic	Kenya	South Africa
Guinea	RDC	Madagascar	Botswana
Guinea Bissau	Sao-tome	Malawi	Lesotho
Liberia	Principle	Maurice	Namibia
Mali	Chad	Mayotte	Swaziland
Mauritania		Mozambique	
Niger		Uganda	
Nigeria		Tanzania	
Sait Helene		Meeting	
Senegal		Rwanda	
Sierra Leone		Seychelles	
Togo		Somalia	
		Sudan	
		Zambia	
		Zimbabwe	

*Source: Compiled by us on the basis of UN mapping*

The East African countries stood out from the rest by far. The East African region covers an area of 1.8 million square kilometres and is rich in resources. These countries have become the most competitive in the region, with Kenya shining in terms of infrastructure to facilitate trade in the region.

In the next point, we will deal with Moroccan economic diplomacy in sub-Saharan Africa. We recall in this sense, before starting this point in detail, that South-South cooperation is the basis of this economic diplomacy and that the Moroccan vision in terms of economic diplomacy is based on a “Win-Win” partnership.

## **1.2 Moroccan economic diplomacy in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Moroccan economic diplomacy in sub-Saharan Africa has a strategic character in the service of the national economy, under the personal involvement of the sovereign, since his enthronement in 1999, many visits have been made and several agreements have been signed with more than 35 countries of the African continent.

Aware of its African identity, Morocco is called upon to put forward its various assets, namely: its strategic position, the relations maintained with Europe, the reintegration of the African Union in 2017, and its political stability. This is to adopt a strategy that aims, in fine, to project an image of a Morocco open to negotiations with the aim of defending its economic and political interests in Africa. The aim is not only to draw the image of an open and attractive Morocco but also to make partner countries benefit from Moroccan expertise in several fields in a “Win-Win” logic. Africa being the reservoir of labour and raw materials for

all other parts of the world, notably America, Asia and Europe, this universal common good has become Morocco's privileged terrain.

Africa has 14 RECs, but only eight have been officially recognised by the African Union: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); South East African Development Community (SADC); Economic Community of Central Africa (ECCAS); Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); the East African Community (EAC); the Common Market for South East Africa (COMESA); the Economic Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) (Dieye, 2016).

Moroccan policy in Africa is based on a general geopolitical approach that relies on bilateral policies and regional strategies that take into account continental realities. Within this framework, embassies and promotion agencies play a central role, enhanced by royal visits which reinforce the political will of the Kingdom.

These visits have led to Moroccan investments in Africa to the tune of US\$3 billion during the period 2008-2017, i.e. 80% of Moroccan investments abroad (Table 2). Morocco has thus become the 2nd African investor on the continent, 1st African investor in West Africa.

**Table 2. Visits made by HM King Mohamed VI to Sub-Saharan Africa from 2001 to 2017**

Year	Country
2001	Senegal
2002	South Africa
2004	Benin, Gabon, Cameroon, Niger, Senegal
2005	Burkina Faso, Gabon, Senegal
2006	Senegal, Gambia, Congo, DRC, Gabon
2009	Equatorial Guinea
2013	Mali, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon
2014	Mali, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Conkary, Gabon
2015	Gabon, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Guinea Bissau
2016	Rwanda, Tanzania, Senegal, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Nigeria
2017	Ethiopia, South Sudan Ghana, Zambia, Guinea, Ivory Coast

*Source: Jeune Afrique n° 2915/*

To accompany its strategy, Morocco has developed a large-scale diplomatic coverage in Africa to better serve the interests of their country. Indeed, Morocco has 91 diplomatic representations in the world including 29 Moroccan embassies in Africa.

For Charles Saint-Prot: *“Morocco has increased aid to several African countries (...) and cancelled the debts of the least developed countries”* (Prot, 2014) Such offensive diplomacy also allows the kingdom to access African resources at competitive prices, to reduce the cost of production and to conquer new markets by diversifying external outlets.

Conscious of its African identity, Morocco has always maintained economic and political relations with the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. These relations are generally materialised in the form of agreements and partnerships aimed at strengthening and consolidating the market shares acquired and diversifying the range of external outlets.

These trade agreements take three forms: Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trade agreements with 14 African countries, four preferential trade agreements and the Global System of Trade Preferences agreement.

In this sense, the MFN clause is based on the principle of equality in terms of trade benefits. The aim is to encourage free trade and to limit protectionist policies by states adopting the core provisions of the WTO, as it is a reciprocity-based clause allowing a state to enjoy the same trade benefits as any other state. Similarly, an institutional framework is at work by adopting the principle of non-double taxation to strengthen the legal framework and facilitate investment in Africa. Indeed, Morocco is signatory to 78 tax

treaties of non-double taxation, 21 of which are with African states, although not all of them have entered into force.

The continent of tomorrow is progressing rapidly, and many countries are interested in its development and participating in it while serving their economic interests. Morocco is part of this line and wants to be a leader in the black continent because of its African membership and identity, which play an important role in its integration.

To accompany Morocco in its march towards establishment in Sub-Saharan Africa, Moroccan national companies have also committed themselves in a way to anchor their presence in the continent of tomorrow. Alongside French and American multinationals, Moroccan companies are also present and have imposed themselves in certain fields in order to reinforce the Moroccan commitment to its continent.

Most of the investments from Morocco are concentrated in the West and Central African regions. However, the sectors of activity in which Moroccan operators intervene are the following (Table 3).

**Table 3. Moroccan operators present in Sub-Saharan Africa**

<b>Sector of activity</b>	<b>Main Moroccan operators</b>
Telecommunications	Maroc Télécom
Financial services	Bank of Africa, Attijari Wafa Bank and Banque Populaire
Insurance	Saham Assurance, Wafa Assurance, RMA and Atlanta Assurance
Air and sea transport	Royal Air Maroc
Infrastructure	Addoha, Alliances, Somagec, Ynna Holding
Pharmaceutical industry	Sothema Morocco
Mines	Managem

*Source: Compiled by us*

It should be noted, however, that the main sectors in which Moroccan operators are active are: banks (up to 50%) and telecommunications (up to 25%). Moreover, even operators in other sectors occupy an important place, such as the RAM which participates in 50% of the capital of Air Sénégal International and 51% of the capital of Air Gabon, the SOMAGEC group present in Equatorial Guinea since 2005 with more than 2500 employees, the ADDOHA group present in 7 African countries within 10 years.

Through the strong presence of Moroccan operators in Africa, Morocco is pursuing its economic diplomacy in West Africa which absorbs 80% and in Central Africa which absorbs 25% of Moroccan investments. However, East Africa and Southern Africa are still regions not exploited by Moroccan operators.

As regards investments in the primary and secondary sectors, they are very insufficient and mainly concern mining and energy exploitation, while the agricultural sector remains very limited, even though the opportunities in terms of investment in agriculture are enormous in Africa. Moreover, several African countries have embarked on programmes and strategies to diversify agricultural opportunities by exploiting new agricultural potential. The contribution in the secondary sector remains very meagre and is mainly in the pharmaceutical industry.

Moroccan economic diplomacy in sub-Saharan Africa also places the human being at the heart of its strategy, as demonstrated by Morocco's humanitarian aid to many countries that are victims of natural disasters, health crises or military conflicts in various African countries such as Mozambique, Mali or Burkina Faso. In this sense, we can cite several examples, such as

- The organisation of the African Conference on Human Development in 2007 with the aim of improving the living conditions of Africans,
- The creation of the Alaouite Foundation for Human Development in Africa (AFDHA) in 2008,
- The maintenance of air links with the countries affected by Ebola in 2014, namely: Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.
- And more recently, following the COVID-19 health crisis from which Morocco was not spared, the dispatch of humanitarian aid consisting of masks, visors, hydro-alcohol gel, chloroquine and others to 15 African countries,

namely Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, Eswatini, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Tanzania, Chad and Zambia.

Moroccan players are making remarkable efforts in terms of internationalisation and also involve the State in their approach. To be able to invest in the march towards internationalisation, Moroccan companies must meet a certain number of criteria, notably: size, turnover, number of years of experience and others. For this reason, the Moroccan companies most active in sub-Saharan Africa are the banks, as their governance meets international standards and has already been the subject of several audits by the IMF. The other actors must also structure themselves in order to increase their chances and support Morocco in its internationalisation strategy.

### **1.3 The Moroccan Sahara issue: profound changes in the era of Moroccan soft power**

In 2022, it is clear that the Moroccan SAHARA issue has undergone considerable changes, which we will try to describe in this section. That said, a historical review is necessary in order to analyse the situation in depth.

We recall in this sense that the links between northern Morocco and its Saharan provinces date back to the Almoravid dynasty, the Saharan Berbers who in the 11th century unified Greater Morocco, from Tangiers to the Senegal River. Then, the borders of pre-colonial Morocco, which largely exceeded those of today. Towards Algeria, which did not exist at the time, but especially towards the South. In the 16th-17th centuries, Moroccan authority extended to the loop of the Niger. At that time, in Gao and Timbuktu, Friday prayers were said in the name of the Sultan of Morocco. It was only later, between 1900 and 1912, that the Spanish settled in the “*Western Sahara*”.

Without talking about a state, there has never been a Saharawi nation, in the sense of a people forming a single body. On the other hand, what must be considered is the plural identity of the Saharawi tribes, each of which has its own policy towards the sovereign to whom they have always pledged allegiance, all the more so because most of these tribes had North Moroccan founders. On the one hand, because five of the seven dynasties came out of the Saharan or pre-Saharan melting pot, and on the other hand, because many of the ancestors of the Saharan tribes themselves have origins in the centre and north of Morocco, one can say that in the south, as is the history of the Saharan tribes that are an integral part of this Moroccan nation.

These historical realities legitimise Morocco's sovereignty over the “*Western Sahara*” and are further consolidated by legal decisions. The International Court of Justice, for example, recognised on 16 October 1975 that in 1884, i.e. at the time when Spain began to take an interest in this region, the said region was not terra nullius and that the nomadic tribes that inhabited it had ties of allegiance with the Moroccan sovereign.

The legitimacy of the Moroccan position is thus derived from history: with the advent of the colonial era, Morocco was fully sovereign of its Sahara, which was independent and united. Today, there are many documents showing that the Saharawi tribes had pledged allegiance to the Moroccan sultans. In this respect, the Kingdom has its dahirs which demonstrate the administrative and political affiliation of Western Sahara to the central authority of the country. These dahirs have already been submitted to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in 1975. Despite this, the latter reaffirmed the political, legal and spiritual attachment of the Saharawis to the Moroccan dynasties, notably through allegiance.

It has been almost 35 years since Morocco took over the Sahara region, following the departure of the Spanish army in 1976. Every year now, on 6 November, the Kingdom commemorates the Green March, the peaceful march of Moroccans to the Moroccan Sahara, demanding the departure of Spanish troops from this region historically linked to Morocco.

Since then, the regions of southern Morocco have undergone considerable development in a quarter of a century, the territory has gone from being an outpost in the desert of a European colonial power to a territory gripped by the fervour of development. A new life has been given to this part of the great Sahara desert.

In 2016, Morocco decided to devote a budget of 29 billion dirhams (US\$3 billion) to the last colony in the South for a development programme for the southern regions. This envelope is intended to finance

fishing and aquaculture projects, as well as the construction of a seawater desalination plant that will be used for agricultural activities and to combat erosion. The objective is to make the southern regions an economic crossroads and to ensure maximum comfort for the populations of these provinces.

Then comes the implementation of the Moroccan initiative for the negotiation of an autonomy status for the Sahara region. This initiative has been in place since 2007 and is aimed at respecting the local populations and finding a good and mutually acceptable political solution.

As part of its advanced economic diplomacy and its march towards internationalisation, Morocco was able to have the recognition of its Sahara regions in December 2020 following the declaration of former President Trump. Subsequently, several declarations followed that gave a legal outcome and strengthened Morocco's position towards its Sahara.

Today, Moroccan interest in the Sahara is only increasing and this is materialised by its unwavering commitment to the southern regions. In addition to investments in projects related to infrastructure, agriculture, human capital and energy transformation. The objective of accompanying the development of the Sahara, since the launch in 2015 of the new development model, is based on the strengthening of regional institutions. An envelope of 6.24 billion dirhams has been released in favour of the southern regions and is also intended to make the Dakhla region a regional hub linking Morocco to Africa.

#### **1.4 Economic diplomacy as a strategy for Moroccan soft power**

As mentioned earlier, Morocco's geostrategic assets give it a central role in the economic life of sub-Saharan Africa. At this level, Morocco has made significant efforts to have a strong position on the international map by joining the African Union in 2017 (AU), having the proposal of a strategic partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Group in 2011 and having the advanced status of the European Union in 2008.

This position has allowed it to expand commercially to the countries of the sub-Saharan African continent, and to limit its presence as a mere conduit for investments between the north and the south. Furthermore, an analysis of the evolution of historical relations between Morocco and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa reveals that the central core of rapprochement is trade. At this level, Morocco has made efforts to develop economic diplomacy channels with sub-Saharan Africa. In other words, Morocco's investment logic in sub-Saharan Africa is now based on a multidimensional approach.

Thus, the literature review makes it possible to detect the evolution of economic diplomacy at the level of principles and actors. At this level, the actors of economic diplomacy have evolved from the State to companies that are becoming internationalised. According to Guy Carron de la carrière, the means and tools of economic diplomacy are constantly evolving according to the orientations and policies, as well as the elements of the historical context (de La Carrière, 1998).

Moroccan companies that are going global have become obliged to be agile both internally and externally. Thus, the internal communication channels of Moroccan companies have become outdated by the new information and technology revolution. However, companies have been able to achieve an important status in "*host countries*", thanks to their ability to influence norms, economic and social life.

The economic diplomacy used by Moroccan companies tries to give a global, real, long-term reading of a set of complex relations, which bring together actors of different weight and influence. Moreover, the diplomacy of Moroccan companies has a certain number of characteristics of traditional diplomacy, namely the weight of international perception, and the focus on international relations, and at the same time the strategic nature of the decisions taken.

It is essential to note that Moroccan companies rely more and more on the tools of economic diplomacy in order to enhance their value and achieve their objectives. At this level, the value of the company has undergone a radical change from a conception based essentially on stock market and patrimonial values to a conception that integrates the influence of the brand and the reputation of the company on an international scale. The latest study conducted by PWC in partnership with the London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG) entitled "*Companies to inspire Africa 2019*" listed 360 companies that inspire Africa. On this occasion, Morocco had 12 influential companies out of a total number of 26 companies present in North Africa.



Similarly, the complexity that characterises the relationship between the company and the state becomes a basis for the new approach to economic diplomacy. Indeed, multinationals have become a major flow of transnational information.

According to Joseph Nye, soft power resides in the capacity of an actor (State, NGO, multinational, a network of citizens...), to influence, using various non-coercive methods, the behaviour of another actor or to use influence to redefine the interests and priorities of other actors. Thus, as an indispensable actor in the international value chain, multinational companies use several means to implement their influence (Nye, 1990).

It is important to remember that the company has economic, social, normative and also political power. Traditionally, the company used the media and advertising to prepare markets and improve the extent of its international influence. Nowadays, multinationals are expected to interact in coordination with other actors in order to influence the host country through well-designed soft actions. Multinational companies all over the world try to convey the values of the parent company by making the staff adhere to their ethics and values and also try through social and/or societal actions to integrate in the host countries by propagating their cultures in the softest possible way.

Thus, strengthening the governance and culture of international companies has become of great importance in order to strengthen their identity and increase their attractiveness.

At this level, Moroccan companies in sub-Saharan Africa were aware of their political and diplomatic as well as economic weight. For this, it was necessary to implement influence strategies in order to improve their soft power. For example, Attijari Wafabank, as the leader of the banking sector in Africa, has succeeded in embodying its image as a partner in the development of African countries through several actions, notably digitalisation, increasing banking inclusion and training of managers. On the other hand, other public sector companies such as OCP, known for its highly developed economic intelligence strategies, have been able to distinguish themselves as committed and responsible African actors.

The role of multinational companies in sub-Saharan Africa generally makes the circuit more fluid and mobilises African states so that they can adapt to the flow of direct investments in their countries. Moreover, in the case of Morocco, due to its geographical and cultural proximity to certain countries, Moroccan companies participate directly in the growth of the host countries. These new players in Moroccan economic diplomacy are like ambassadors who strengthen South-South cooperation in terms of sharing expertise and investment.

## **1.5 The duo of economic intelligence and economic diplomacy at work in a new soft power in sub-Saharan Africa**

The internationalisation of Moroccan companies in Sub-Saharan Africa has been evolving since the beginning of the 20th century. These foreign direct investment flows were relatively small and did not reach the level of \$100 million. However, after 2006, Morocco was able to improve its position as an investor in Sub-Saharan Africa thanks to the capitalisation of experience and the improvement of the size of Moroccan companies.

Research has been conducted on the ability of Moroccan companies that are going global to create soft power in Sub-Saharan Africa, based on the elements of economic intelligence and the maturity of economic diplomacy. Given that we have studied economic diplomacy in the previous sections, let us analyse the concept of economic intelligence in a functional way:

Academic research has made a major effort to define the conceptual framework of economic intelligence. According to the two researchers Larivet and Brouard, the definition encompasses three major informational dimensions, namely the protection of data and information, intelligence and influence. At this level, the definition of economic intelligence is translated by the intersection of these three components.

**1.5.1 The intelligence dimension:** plays an important role in controlling the risks and threats in the business environment, through rigorous management of information that has a direct or indirect impact on the business. At this stage, the possession of information becomes a competitive advantage for companies. Intelligence involves a clear path, from the definition of the information need to its collection and processing

by specialists in order to disseminate it to the other departments concerned in the company. The intelligence dimension also serves to make changes to the information asymmetry between the company and its rivals.

**1.5.2 The protection dimension:** Mainly concerns the set of management techniques and risks related to the holding of information. That said, companies with sensitive information must have a strong system for protecting information from being appropriated by competing companies. In this sense, the protection of company data is sometimes part of a normative framework, for example the ISO 27001 standard which describes the governance and security measures to be validated for data processing.

**1.5.3 The influence dimension:** Net information is a fundamental element for developing the tools for lobbying and influencing companies in their environment. At this level, this influence becomes a key element for managing competition and developing the company's image. The use of the influence dimension directly serves the soft power of Moroccan companies that are going global. That said, the power of the company in its environment lies essentially in its possession of the right information. Unlike espionage, which is qualified as an illegal practice, economic intelligence remains a strategy for managing information at the level of companies.

#### **1.5.4 Internationalisation of Moroccan companies: The case of OCP (Office Chérifien de Phosphate)**

In the framework of a national and international competitiveness perspective, intelligence appeared in Morocco in the 1990s. At this stage, the OCP, like other large Moroccan companies, set up an entity responsible for monitoring and surveillance at all levels, with the aim of guaranteeing the protection of their expansions and at the same time ensuring a secure environment for investments. This strategy has allowed other public and private actors to contribute to the creation of a Moroccan soft power with well-crafted economic intelligence pillars.

The Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP), the leading producer of phosphate fertiliser in the world, represents an important weight in the composition of the Moroccan economy, in terms of added value. The OCP group has 4 main mining sites and 2 chemical complexes, as well as others. After its legal transformation into a public limited company in 2008, the group created in 2016 a new subsidiary called OCP AFRICA, in charge of developing its investments in its five subsidiaries in sub-Saharan Africa. OCP Group is responsible for the development of the entire value chain from production to distribution of phosphate fertilizers.

In this article, we will use an inductive logic to conduct a qualitative case study of this Moroccan giant in Sub-Saharan Africa. The choice of OCP among almost 500 Moroccan companies in Africa takes into account the following elements.

- The economic weight of the company on a national and international scale and the financial and economic impact on the company's environment.
- The existence of an economic character in its activity in order to avoid other entities with other non-market activities.
- The existence of the OCP Group in 16 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and the experience accumulated over many years.
- The maturity of the management style adopted within the company's structures.
- The special character of the company as a force for proposals and negotiations.

In the same vein, the OCP Group has a great maturity in terms of management and commitment to sustainable investment abroad. According to the statement of Mr. Mostafa Terrab, CEO of OCP Group, at the annual meeting organised by the World Bank Group in Washington in October 2022, OCP covers 80% of sub-Saharan Africa's fertiliser needs.

The hypothesis is that Moroccan companies that are internationalising in sub-Saharan Africa, as indispensable actors, can take advantage of the tools of economic intelligence and the efforts of economic diplomacy in order to develop their soft power.

The data collection was carried out by studying and analysing the studies conducted by OCP policy centre and the reports conducted by the official bodies dealing with the activity of OCP Group in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The documentary research was targeted according to the criteria of clarity, objectivity of data and sincerity of information.

## 2. RESULTS

The preliminary results of the case study show:

### 2.1 Influence: An instrument for controlling the OCP environment

The choice of Africa presents a materialization of OCP Africa's vision, which aims primarily to ensure a sustainable future in the continent. Moreover, the African continent holds a potential of 60% of the world's arable land. Hence the inescapable weight to ensure food security. At this stage, OCP Africa presents aids to farmers by developing customized fertilizer solutions adapted to the territories. In order to control its environment, OCP Africa has based itself on a logic of partnership with local institutions in Africa that have a great reputation and influence. This partnership approach has enabled it to develop a significant amount of information.

The following Table 4 presents the partnership network established by OCP Africa:

**Table 4. The partnership network established by OCP Africa**

SENEGAL	Association Sénégalaise pour la Promotion du Développement à la Base
	Copeol Senegal
	Société Nationale d'aménagement et d'exploitation des Terres
COTE D'IVOIRE	World Cocoa Foundation
	African Fertilizer and Agribusiness Partnership
	Africa Rice
	SIFCA
	Coffee and Cocoa Council
GHANA	Ghanaian Ministry of Agriculture
	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)
CAMEROON	Government of Cameroon
	La Voix Du Paysan
TANZANIA	Ministry of Agriculture
	Agricultural Research Institute Mlingao

*Source: Official website of OCP Africa.*

OCP Africa does not limit itself to the technical level of intervention, but also presents financial solutions to farmers through programmes oriented with partnerships with African countries. This capacity to integrate the different agricultural socio-professional categories allows it to further validate its influence in the African host countries.

### 2.2 Impact of OCP on territorial stability

OCP's policy in Africa is not only to promote agriculture but also to foster food security which has a great impact on African security.

**2.2.1 Securing OCP group's information assets: ISO 27001 certification:** OCP Group operates an Information Security Management System (ISMS), which has resulted in ISO 27001 certification. These achievements have been accompanied by measures allowing the securing of information and the strict

implementation of traceability rules. These measures are part of the group's monitoring strategy to protect the various information collected on the environment.

It is clear that the OCP Africa Group attaches great importance to economic intelligence to ensure the sustainability of its investments in the African continent and to create a strong Moroccan soft power.

### 3. CONCLUSION

To conclude this article, we recall that the balance sheet of Morocco-African relations is rather positive. These long-standing relations are beginning to take shape and are taking concrete form through various actions, namely: agreements, partnerships, exchanges and projects under study. The novelty is that we are witnessing a rather particular commitment of Moroccan companies which have dared to take the step of internationalisation by basing themselves in sub-Saharan Africa in order to mark their presence in the continent and to support state actions in terms of economic diplomacy and soft power.

Under the second point, we have listed Morocco's achievements in terms of establishment and presence in sub-Saharan Africa. That said, we have a few remarks to make in order to improve the Moroccan performance:

The Moroccan offer must be adapted to the African demand, in this sense Moroccan products bearing the label "*Made in Morocco*" must meet the needs of the African population with competitive prices compared to the Chinese, Turkish or Russian competition present on the black continent.

Although the French-speaking region of the continent is solicited by Moroccan investors, we can notice that the other zones (English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking Africa) are not yet exploited. Hence the need for a roadmap including a mapping and the strategic areas of activity on which investors should focus for a better distribution in the continent in question.

It is also a question of setting up a committee whose main mission is to monitor the implementation of any partnership or agreement between the various partners in order to avoid overlaps and to ensure the smooth running of promotional or investment actions.

A synergy between the public and private sectors is strongly requested in order to position Moroccan products and expertise in this region and defend the economic interests of Moroccan industries. For this purpose, the various stakeholders must draw up action plans based on economic objectives, risk management, the managerial aspect, the promotional aspect etc. (Dafir, 2012).

Finally, Moroccan operators are confronted with a certain number of constraints, whether administrative, logistical or commercial. At this stage, we are basing ourselves on a study by the DEPF based on the testimonies of certain Moroccan operators participating in forums or conferences relating to Morocco-African cooperation.

From an administrative point of view: Administrative obstacles persist despite the multiplication of investments in Africa, as cumbersome administration and the corruption of public officials are major constraints for the creation of companies or the acquisition of premises intended for investment. From a structural point of view: Moroccan companies encounter obstacles to the creation of companies or the non-facilitation of setting up in particular through the following aspects (Abou El Farah, 2010):

- Logistical difficulties, notably the lack of reception facilities,
- The land status of the land which remains complex,
- Problem of competition, especially from European and Asian business communities.

We can consider the case of OCP to be a real success story insofar as its establishment in sub-Saharan Africa responds to various economic and social issues. The Moroccan giant does not limit itself to making financial gains from its expansion in sub-Saharan Africa, but also seeks to accompany the host countries in their quest for food security. Accompaniment also means influence and we can say that Moroccan soft power is well and truly present in sub-Saharan Africa.

Moroccan banks have also made a good impression on this aspect, the latter having made digitalisation a battle horse to encourage banking inclusion and to accompany local companies in the accomplishment of their projects. It is clear that the size of the company, the internal organisation and governance are key elements in each internationalisation process. It remains to know how to develop within

the host countries by means of precise market studies in order to move up a gear and thus achieve the desired objectives.

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