

Morocco, Driving Force of South-South Cooperation in Africa

By **Ezzoubeir Jabrane** - February 10, 2017



Casablanca – ***Morocco has managed to win the trust of many African countries in its push towards South-South cooperation, convincing them that economic, political, and social development must be undertaken collectively, from within.***

The African continent, long regarded by foreign powers as a gold deposit to be mined or an oil field to be drained, has continued to succumb to such exploitation under promises of “development.” South-African social activist and Nobel Prize winner Desmond Tutu’s statement that “Europe became rich because it exploited Africa; and the Africans know that,” is more relevant today than it ever was.

Accordingly, today’s Africans are more watchful and vigilant about whom they deal with and what kinds of agreements they sign. It is within this collective attitude of suspicion that Morocco has successfully extended its influence in Africa and regain its position in the African Union.

African countries, east and west, are quite certain that Morocco seeks to give with one hand and take with the other. However, Morocco's initiative for South-South Cooperation in the continent was preceded by a thorough need-analysis that examined the economic components that are critical to the countries involved. The gas pipeline project linking Nigeria with Morocco, the fertilizer plants in Nigeria and Ethiopia, and the agreements related to banking, agriculture, and fisheries with Madagascar, among others, are all in vital sectors in these countries.

In its campaign to regain its membership in the African Union, which it gave up in reaction to the body's 1984 recognition of the so-called SADR, Morocco put a long-term plan to action in the beginning of the third millennium, the preparation of which had already started in the early 90's when Morocco signed cooperation agreements with a number of African nations. The plan focused on economics and encouraged Moroccan firms to operate in African countries, doubling the volume of Morocco's economic transactions by reaching out to West African countries.

This approach has hastened a large number of Moroccan firms to invest in over 23 African countries, including those in the banking sector (BMCE, Attijariwafa Bank and Banque Populaire), real estate (Addoha and Alliances Développement Immobilier), the insurance sector, the telecom industry, and industrial and mining companies (OCP, Managem Group). In addition, a huge chunk of the Morocco's direct investment went to vital sectors in these countries. While it is true that Morocco's chief economic partners remain the European Union and the US, Morocco has allocated a significant part of the kingdom's investments to African.

Moreover, the Moroccan Monarch's recent tour of East Africa for the first time since his coronation in 1999 is quite significant. It conveyed the message that Morocco extends its hand not only to West Africa, or French-speaking Africa, but to the whole continent. Numerous agreements with Rwanda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia have followed from this tour in the fields of agriculture, industry and infrastructure.

Although Morocco focused on economics as an instrument for foreign diplomacy, its regional approach has made use of religious diplomacy as well as security cooperation with Africa. With the help of its moderate Maliki Islam (which has kept Wahhabi extremist ideologies at bay), its position as the birthplace of the Sufi Tijaniyyah Brotherhood, and its historical role in spreading Islam in Africa, Morocco has galvanized 190 million African Muslims.

Agreements were signed between Morocco and Mali pertaining to training imams, while other countries such as Guinea, Nigeria, and Senegal saw in Morocco an alternative to Egypt's Al-Azhar and formally requested trainings of imams. Added to this, Morocco's security model, with its apparent immunity to terrorism, has proven to be a viable commodity.

Morocco's groundbreaking agreements with a multitude of African countries were successful even before the kingdom rejoined the African Union, helping the old-but-new AU member assure its neighbors that it is different from the Western powers that have sucked Africa dry. Quite the contrary, Morocco holds the key to development of the continent: to mobilize internal cooperation between African countries, rather than remain at the mercy of foreign powers.

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