

Soft Power of the UAE: Dubai Cares Project in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Uganda was one of the countries, which have received South Sudanese refugees since 2013. Since that period of time, South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda have faced challenges such as school dropouts, health issues, hunger, and family loss. Amid this crisis, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) intervened through Dubai Cares to support the rights of South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda through education program. The research employs a qualitative method by analyzing primary data from official government reports and websites, as well as secondary data from academic literature, reports, and online newspaper publications to examine the implementation of the Dubai Cares project for South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda. The concept of soft power is used to understand how the UAE leverages the Dubai Cares as a soft power instrument. Soft power concept serves to confirm that the UAE uses Dubai Cares to spread the country's influence without resorting to coercive measures. The study finds that Dubai Cares enhances the UAE's attractiveness, reputation, and influence on the international stage through its educational programs for South Sudanese children in Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

According to the South Sudan Situation Regional Framework for the Protection of Refugee Children reports that in 2017, over 4 million people were affected by the crisis in South Sudan, with the majority fleeing to neighboring countries. The report added approximately 2.4 million South Sudanese refugees sought safety in these countries, including Uganda, which alone has received one million refugees, over 600,000 of whom are children under 18. Therefore, this situation underscores the profound impact on the education of future generations of South Sudanese children (UNHCR, 2018a). The civil war in South Sudan, which erupted on July 23, 2013, forced many children to flee to neighboring countries like Uganda. The conflict stemmed from a power struggle between President Salva Kiir Mayardit, backed by the Sudan People Liberation Army (SPLA), and Deputy President Riek Machar Teny, supported by the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM) (Aljazeera, 2020). The situation escalated when Kiir accused Machar of plotting a coup, a charge Machar denied.

Intense fighting erupted between rebel forces aligned with Machar and government army units, leading to ethnic killings that targeted civilians in Juba. This conflict between Kiir and Machar for political power severely impacted various ethnic groups. The death toll reached approximately 10,000 people, causing immense suffering among South Sudan's population. Many endured cruelty, displacement, and food shortages, forcing them to seek refuge in neighboring countries (GIGA, 2014, pp. 1–7). South Sudanese child refugees in Uganda face numerous challenges following their relocation, including security concerns and limited access to educational facilities (Save the Children, 2017). The rapid influx of refugees has overwhelmed and burdened the Ugandan government as a host country for South Sudanese refugees. Uganda struggles to provide essential necessities such as

food, shelter, healthcare, education, and clean water, resulting in unmet basic needs for the refugees (Médecins sans Frontières, 2017).

The UAE supports South Sudanese children in Uganda through a UNHCR agreement that provides education, housing, and humanitarian assistance. Additionally, the UAE's provision of humanitarian aid enhances and expands its soft power (UNHCR, 2017). Dubai Cares, established by the UAE, specifically assists refugee children, particularly those from South Sudan living in Uganda (Dubai Cares, 2017). According to Law No. 22 of 2021, Dubai Cares has been officially recognized as a platform for the UAE's foreign policy, aiming to establish the Emirates as a prominent global center providing essential aid to those in need (Dubai Government, 2021). Motivated by the belief that education is fundamental to development and with the goal of enhancing the UAE's reputation, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, founded the Dubai Cares Project on September 19, 2007. Dubai Cares plays a crucial role in supporting UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which seeks to achieve universal access to quality education by 2030 (Dubai Cares, n.d.).

To comprehend the UAE's soft power in relation to South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda through Dubai Cares, it is essential to review the nature of Dubai Cares' projects. Founded in September 2007, Dubai Cares is an organization focused on supporting education in developing nations and enhancing the UAE's role in foreign aid, contributing to the framework of humanitarian diplomacy (Krzymowski, 2022).

Multiple studies by Ben Moussa and Benmessaoud (2020), Alalami (2019), and d'Orville (2020) demonstrate that Dubai Cares has implemented diverse education programs across continents, targeting disadvantaged children and facilitating their access to quality education. Ben Moussa and Benmessaoud (2020) found that Dubai Cares has successfully launched education programs in various countries, focusing on providing children and youth in developing nations with access to quality education through sustainable, measurable, and integrated program funding. From another perspective, Alalami (2019) emphasizes Dubai Cares' strong dedication to funding educational assistance and acknowledges the insufficient funding for education provided by both governments and humanitarian actors globally. From another perspective, Zell (2020) and Al Qaisimi (2021) emphasize that Dubai Cares is a philanthropic organization committed to educational programs. Zell (2020) found that Dubai Cares focuses on the Sub-Saharan African region, aiming to improve children's access to quality basic education. This is achieved through funding provided to the International Publishers Association (IPA) and by promoting the development of the book and publication industry for students. Al Qasimi (2021) highlights Dubai Cares' contribution to addressing the learning crisis in Africa through the Africa Publishing Innovation Fund (APIF), by providing assistance in creating digital education publications, facilitating remote learning, supporting the publishers, preparing librarians transition into online; and establishing libraries. These supports aimed to tackle the educational access challenges faced by millions of African children, ensuring their right to education.

These studies demonstrate Dubai Cares' efforts to improve access to education in Uganda. Additionally, Sekaggya-Baganrukayo and Oddy (2022) acknowledge Dubai Cares' contribution to Uganda's Accelerated Education Program (AEP), which has mitigated educational challenges in the country. Dubai Cares supports initiatives that provide access to education for students through informal education programs, particularly for children who dropped out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated poverty, conflict, marginalization, and crisis in Uganda.

Moreover, literatures supporting this research discuss the UAE's adoption of soft power as a strategy to enhance its reputation by focusing on human and cultural aspects. In this context, soft power to a certain degree can be identified as the capacity to attract or influence others without using coercive measures. The Dubai government has implemented various initiatives to improve its global image (Stephens et al., 2019). However, this article primarily describes the UAE government's soft power strategies without focusing on specific programs and does not mention Dubai Cares in the context of developing UAE soft power. Antwi-Boateng and Alhashmi (2021) highlight the UAE's increased soft power through investment, global issues, and significant projects that attract attention and build the country's image. Additionally, Almezaini (2012) notes that innovative soft power tools have allowed countries like the UAE to proactively gain regional influence.

In general, previous research highlights Dubai Cares' interventions in improving education, particularly in Sub-Saharan regions and countries such as Uganda. While these studies have examined Dubai Cares' role as a philanthropic organization and the UAE's efforts in promoting soft power, none specifically address Dubai Cares' contribution to refugee children. This study suggests there is room for further research on Dubai Cares' interventions in supporting the education sector for South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda as a tool of UAE soft power. To address this gap, the research explores the implementation of the Dubai Cares project for South Sudanese child refugees in Uganda during 2017–2018 and analyzes its role as an instrument of UAE soft power.

Bjola and Kornprobst (2018) assert that diplomacy, involving the exercise of power, plays an instrumental role in achieving goals, influencing policies, pursuing national interests, and strengthening security. Power and diplomacy are crucial and encompass distinct components such as coercive diplomacy (hard power), soft power, and smart power. Coercive diplomacy is characterized by a state's use of hard power to achieve specific goals through coercion, which may include economic sanctions, political pressure, and military actions. Soft power, on the other hand, refers to a country's ability to influence others through attraction, promoting its values, culture, and foreign policies without resorting to coercion or violence. The aim is to shape the actions of others through appealing means, and it is widely recognized as an effective approach for gaining interest and influence from the international community. Sources of soft power include government, culture, global engagement, education, companies, and technology (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2018, pp. 180–183).

RESEARCH METHOD

The research employs a qualitative method by analyzing primary data from official government reports and websites, as well as secondary data from academic literature, reports, and online newspaper publications to examine the implementation of the Dubai Cares project for South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda. The concept of soft power is used to understand how the UAE leverages the Dubai Cares program as a soft power tool. In addition to coercive diplomacy and soft power, Bjola and Kornprobst (2018) highlight another form of power: smart power. Smart power combines hard power (military and security forces) with soft power (values, culture, assistance, education, etc.) to shape international opinion and achieve diplomatic goals by strategically leveraging both forms of power. It is not a comparison between hard and soft power but rather a strategic integration of the two to achieve diplomatic objectives through a balance of coercion and co-option.

The concept of soft power was first introduced by Joseph S. Nye in 1990. Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence others through culture, values, and institutions, rather than relying solely on military or economic might. It emphasizes attraction over coercion or pressure to achieve

desired outcomes. Nye (1990) highlights the importance of non-military and non-economic influences, such as culture and state ideology, in shaping a country's ability to attract others.

According to Nye (2004), soft power is a concept that centers on a nation's power and capability based on its attractiveness in social, educational, political, and economic interactions. Soft power employs non-coercive methods to generate interest and cooperation, focusing on shared values and policies to achieve desired outcomes. Soft power includes elements such as attractiveness, values, culture, and foreign policy. Culture encompasses aspects like music, film, art, and lifestyle, while values include democracy, freedom, and human rights, along with the principles that uphold them. Foreign policy refers to a country's actions, attitudes, and diplomatic cooperation in its international relations. By leveraging soft power, countries can effectively build strong international relations and gain influence on the global stage (Nye, 2004). Additionally, Nye (2011, pp. 83-84) explains that not only states that are involved, but also non-state actors such as corporations, Non-governmental Organization (NGO), and institution are often having soft power. Thus, states may raise concerns regarding the promotion of democracy, freedom, and human rights. In that case, soft power appears to be more superior compared to hard power.

There are three primary sources of soft power: foreign policies, culture, and political values. Legitimate and morally authoritative foreign policies can serve as a strong foundation for a country's soft power. Active participation in international assistance and conflict resolution, along with a reputation for promoting stability and world peace, can enhance a country's positive image and serve as a significant source of soft power. Additionally, when foreign policy aligns with values such as human rights and democracy, it further contributes to a country's soft power (Nye, 2004, pp. 11- 68).

Culture, as an element that can be attractive to other parties, includes innovation, freedom of expression, art, creativity, literature, and education, all of which possess the potential to attract global attention and captivate elites, thereby contributing to a country's soft power. Culture serves as a medium to counter negative judgments and impressions of a country, and the attraction generated by cultural soft power can significantly contribute to achieving policy goals. Political values, such as the promotion of human rights, freedom of speech, and democracy, can also serve as sources of soft power when a country upholds them both domestically and internationally. By adhering to these principles, a country can enhance its influence and foster global trust (Nye, 2004, pp. 11- 60). This paper explores how the UAE demonstrates its commitment to supporting humanity by providing education for South Sudanese child refugees in Uganda through the concept of soft power. The discussion focuses on one of the three sources of soft power, namely culture, to show how the UAE uses the Dubai Cares project in Uganda as a means of enhancing the country's attractiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Determinants of the UAE's Foreign Policy

Almezaini (2012, pp. 22 - 49) elaborates on six determinants of UAE foreign policy: geographical factors, national identity, security factors, economic interests, international relations, and the political system. The UAE's foreign policy is shaped by its geography, including its strategic location in the Middle East, along the Arabian Gulf, and its proximity to the crucial Strait of Hormuz, which fosters good relations with neighboring countries. National identity also influences the UAE's foreign policy, with a strong emphasis on religious tolerance and its status as a moderate Islamic country, aiming to enhance its international influence and strengthen its global standing.

In addition, economic factors play a significant role in shaping the UAE's foreign policy. With a strong focus on international trade and foreign aid, the UAE prioritizes strengthening economic relations on a global scale, particularly in the vital oil sector. The UAE's oil exports and efforts toward economic diversification profoundly impact its foreign policy, as economic interests drive its actions and contribute to its global presence.

Furthermore, international relations factors also influence the UAE's foreign policy. A key aspect of the UAE's diplomatic strategy is to establish bilateral relations and strategic partnerships with other countries to advance its interests. The UAE aims to strengthen relations with both Arab and non-Arab countries, seeking support in addressing global issues. The UAE's foreign policy is also shaped by its absolute monarchy political system, which concentrates decision-making power in the hands of the ruling family. The political leadership of the UAE actively promotes national identity and positions the country as a regional and global leader in fostering stability, security, and peace. National security is crucial in shaping its foreign policy, with strong ties in the Middle East underscoring the importance of upholding both national and regional security. The pursuit of stability and security serves as a catalyst for the UAE's economic growth, enhancing its international influence and consolidating its position on the global stage.

Soft Power as Strategy of the UAE's Foreign Policy

In the UAE, soft power is a key strategy in its foreign policy. According to the UAE Government (2022) by promoting its culture, identity, heritage, and contributions, the country seeks to enhance its international standing, cultivate a positive perception, and increase its attractiveness on the global stage. These efforts contribute to improving the UAE's position in international relations. The UAE's soft power strategy, highlighted by the establishment of the Soft Power Council in 2017, aims to enhance its global influence and reputation. The UAE's soft power strategy encompasses four key objectives, including:

1. Developing a unified direction for various sectors, including humanities, science, tourism, economy, and media;
2. Establishing the UAE as a regional capital in arts, tourism, and culture;
3. Promoting its position as a gateway to the East; and
4. Building the UAE's reputation as a country known for high tolerance and modernity (UAE Government, 2022).

The UAE seeks to enhance its soft power in response to negative judgments, criticisms, and perceptions from the global community, including human rights organizations. Concerns have been raised about the UAE's record on freedom of opinion and human rights, such as the 2014 arrests of activists and critics, including human rights advocates. In 2016, Amnesty International reported that the UAE was perceived as restricting freedom of assembly, opinion, and peaceful association (Amnesty International, 2016).

Additionally, the UAE has faced accusations of discriminating against migrant workers, with reports of inadequate protection, long working hours, and low wages. In 2016, Human Rights Watch highlighted ongoing discrimination issues, noting limited progress despite attempts to address these concerns (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Furthermore, the UAE's controversial foreign policy,

particularly its support for the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen conflict, has drawn criticism for alleged involvement in human rights violations, including airstrikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

As part of its foreign policy strategy, the UAE employs soft power through various channels, including infrastructure development, education, cultural promotion, and strategic partnerships in security, economy, and politics. The establishment of the Soft Power Council underscores the importance of soft power in enhancing the UAE's international and regional reputation, as well as positioning it as a cultural, humanitarian, and economic leader globally. The UAE leverages soft power by engaging in humanitarian aid, multilateral support, international philanthropy, and conflict resolution. This approach is aimed at promoting cooperation, fostering partnerships, encouraging global involvement, and contributing to peacebuilding efforts worldwide, thereby elevating the UAE's global profile (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2021, pp. 1-15).

According to Coutts, as cited by Ridge and Kippels (2014), donations from philanthropic organizations in the UAE were ranked as the second highest among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. These philanthropic organizations serve as instruments of soft power, integral to the UAE's foreign policy. Dubai Cares focuses on education and youth, health, and infrastructure, implementing programs that garner global attention. Renowned for its contributions, Dubai Cares has supported over 35 countries, particularly through educational aid. Its initiatives include funding educational projects such as establishing libraries and translating books. Additionally, Dubai Cares contributes to infrastructure development by constructing schools in developing nations (Ridge & Kippels, 2016, pp. 2-6).

Dubai Cares as an Instrument of the Soft Power of the UAE

Founded on September 19, 2007, Dubai Cares was established by the vision of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Prime Minister of the UAE. This vision is grounded in the belief that education is a fundamental human right, essential for preventing and overcoming poverty. The Prime Minister's goal is to provide equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of race, gender, nationality, or religion, ensuring their right to quality education (Dubai Cares, n.d., pp 6-10). Dubai Cares is part of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives. Beyond focusing on access to education, its programs include early childhood development, technical and vocational training for youth, education in emergency situations, access to basic education, and gender equality.

Figure 1. Social Media of Dubai Cares

Sources: (Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook of Dubai Cares)



Figure 2. Dubai Cares post on the UAE National Day

Source: (Dubai Cares Instagram, 2022)



Dubai Cares utilizes social media platforms to provide the public with easy access to information and evidence of its contributions. Figure 1 illustrates how the inclusion of a bio mentioning the UAE can reinforce a positive image of the country and highlight that Dubai Cares is an initiative rooted in UAE values. The content and campaigns conducted by Dubai Cares are aligned with promoting UAE values, such as human rights, tolerance, collaboration with international partners, and a commitment to quality education. Additionally, Figure 2 emphasizes the significance of education for the UAE and showcases Dubai Cares' efforts in promoting the UAE as a nation dedicated to educational development (Dubai Cares Instagram, 2022).

Through its social media platforms, Dubai Cares highlights the importance of humanitarian assistance, particularly for refugee children. A post from Dubai Cares states, "Dubai Cares acknowledges that education is a catalyst for transformation! Refugees must be equipped with skills,

knowledge, and resilience to rebuild their lives, contribute to their communities, and foster inclusivity" (Dubai Cares Instagram, 2023).

According to Law No. 22 of 2021 concerning the Dubai Cares Foundation, several goals have been outlined for its establishment. Dubai Cares is recognized as a tool to enhance the UAE's soft power, promoting the Emirates as a global hub for charitable contributions and assistance, particularly for children in need. The foundation aims to support volunteer work both domestically and internationally, contribute to global initiatives aimed at poverty reduction, raise public awareness, and foster collaboration with relevant entities within the Emirates.

The law also states that Dubai Cares plays a crucial role as a soft power instrument in the field of education. As previously mentioned, education is recognized as a significant component of soft power, capable of capturing global attention. Dubai Cares supports programs that develop and enhance the skills of youth and early childhood, with a focus on providing education to children in need, including tertiary education, during both underlying crises and emergency situations. Additionally, Dubai Cares is responsible for evaluating and monitoring education programs, facilitating learning opportunities, and collecting and providing donations in accordance with the prevailing laws in the Emirates. Dubai Cares is essential for the UAE as it contributes to improving the country's image, countering negative perceptions, and increasing its global attractiveness (Dubai Government, 2021).

Through its programs, Dubai Cares has successfully implemented educational initiatives that have reached over 60 developing countries and benefited more than 20 million individuals. Dubai Cares deals with the lesser-known obstacles in education such as lack of gender-sensitive sanitation facilities, student health and nutrition. As a result, Dubai Cares are able to create additional school facilities, increasing student enrollment in schools, and ensuring healthy school environments. Among these countries, several are in Africa. Dubai Cares aims to improve the lives of children through various contributions, including:

1. Providing sources of drinking water and water wells for more than 1,124 schools;
2. Constructing over 6,342 latrines in schools;
3. Providing nutritious food to over 509,294 children in schools;
4. Training more than 137,320 teachers;
5. Ensuring and protecting the health of more than 55 million children through deworming activities;
6. Donating over 6,886,022 books written in local languages; Establishing and hosting more than 13,154 Parent-Teacher Associations (Dubai Cares, n.d., pp 6-10).

The abovementioned interventions in Africa have different impacts for beneficiaries in the region. At a certain level, the implementation of Dubai Cares programs has contributed to the improvement of African students' wellbeing. A study from Chard et al (2018) suggests that Dubai Cares program on school water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) has supported the prevention from enteric disease. The research found the lower enteric disease among the students in beneficiary schools rather than students in comparison schools.

Another example, Dubai Cares intervention on training for pre-primary education in Tanzania that is called *Fursa kwa Watoto* (Opportunities for Children) has shown impact to the improvement of teachers' skills. After the intervention, the teachers have been able to develop diverse teaching approaches, learning activities, advanced teaching materials, effective management, as well as formative assessment with student (*Fursa kwa Watoto*, n.d.).

South Sudanese Refugees in Uganda (2017-2018)

Experiences of Dubai Cares suggest that the framework has significant interests on education issues, including by securing the rights of refugees to education access. In July 2017, a significant number of South Sudanese refugees sought refuge in Uganda, fleeing from the brutal conflict caused by the civil war that threatened their lives. The conflict in South Sudan led to numerous casualties and widespread suffering, forcing many South Sudanese to flee to neighboring countries. Over the past year, Uganda has seen a daily influx of 1,800 South Sudanese refugees. However, the refugees face numerous challenges related to the economy, education, and health in Uganda. South Sudanese children, many of whom are unaccompanied, face additional obstacles (Robinson, 2017).

South Sudanese refugees encounter significant challenges, particularly in the health sector, including food shortages, malnutrition, and inadequate sanitation. The Ugandan government has made considerable efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and protection for these refugees, including education and health facilities and services. Additionally, the government offers programs to facilitate the integration of South Sudanese refugees into Ugandan society (United Nations, n.d.). Despite these challenges, Uganda's refugee policy provides access to livelihoods, freedom of movement, education, agricultural land, and documentation, which are considered beneficial for the well-being of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda (Shelter Projects, 2018, pp. 44-48).

The civil war in South Sudan resulted in a significant influx of refugees. Approximately 4 million people were affected, with around 2.4 million fleeing to neighboring countries and 1.9 million becoming internally displaced. Of the 2.4 million who fled, more than 1 million chose to seek refuge in Uganda (UNHCR, 2018a, pp. 4-5). It is estimated that the distribution of South Sudanese refugees across several settlements in Uganda includes 28% in Yumbe, 25.5% in Adjumani, 19% in Arua, 15% in Moyo, 7% in Kiryadongo, and 4.3% in Lamwo. The smallest populations are in Kikuube and urban Kampala, with percentages of approximately 0.4% and 0.3%, respectively (UNHCR, 2019).

The South Sudan Situation Regional Framework for the Protection of Refugee Children calculated total South Sudanese refugee population to around 1,057,809 by October 2017 which 63% of the refugees are children; and additionally more than 65,000 children arrived in Uganda unaccompanied by their parents or guardians in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018a, pp. 4-6). In 2018, projections indicated that approximately 300,000 South Sudanese refugees would arrive in Uganda from January to December. By December 31, 2018, the South Sudanese refugee population had reached 1,380,000. Notably, the number of South Sudanese child refugees increased significantly in 2018, reaching 66% of the total population, amounting to more than 910,000 children by the end of the year (UNHCR, 2018b, pp. 6-45).

Condition of South Sudanese Refugee Children in Uganda

The South Sudanese refugee population in Uganda is predominantly composed of children, exceeding 60% in both 2017 and 2018. At least 65,000 children were relocated from South Sudan to Uganda (OCHA, 2018). These children face numerous challenges and crises that hinder their

development, including limited access to quality education and healthcare, which stifles their growth. Intergenerational poverty is another significant issue affecting their future. Unfortunately, many South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda have lost their families, and thousands are unable to attend school due to a lack of funding (Rodriguez, 2019). Additionally, the needs and vulnerabilities of these child refugees in Uganda include:

1. Child Protection: The protection of South Sudanese refugee children should be a high priority, given that children under 18 years old constitute the largest segment of the refugee population. These children face risks such as abuse, family separation, exploitation, and psychosocial stress.
2. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV): South Sudanese refugee children are vulnerable to early marriage, SGBV, forced marriages, limited access to education, teenage pregnancy, intimate partner violence, and transactional sex. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive prevention and response measures, including heightened awareness, effective reporting mechanisms, education, support for survivors, and holistic services that provide psychosocial and legal assistance.
3. Education: Education is crucial for fulfilling the right to quality education for refugee children, but it faces significant challenges in Uganda due to the large refugee population. While South Sudanese refugee children have some access to education, they encounter gender disparities, particularly in school enrollment between boys and girls. Secondary education for these children is hindered by a lack of essential facilities, scholarships, institutional latrines, and qualified teachers, which impedes their learning and presents challenges due to inadequate resources (UNHCR, 2018b, pp. 22-26).

Therefore, it is evident that the condition of South Sudanese child refugees still requires significant assistance, both from NGOs and countries providing humanitarian aid. Specifically, the UAE is recognized for its strong commitment to humanitarian assistance, particularly in the field of education for South Sudanese children in Uganda. The UAE is recognized for its ability to provide humanitarian assistance, including education, to the people of South Sudan in Uganda. As a global leader in philanthropy, the UAE has been one of the world's largest aid donors since 2016 (WAM, 2018).

UAE Intervention through Dubai Cares in the Education Field

The UAE's policy of providing humanitarian assistance, particularly in education, aims to elevate the Arab world on the international stage and is supported by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiative. The UAE views humanitarian assistance, especially through education-focused philanthropic organizations, as a strategy to enhance its attractiveness and increase its soft power. The decision to intervene in Uganda was driven by the dire situation of South Sudanese children, who had lost many of their rights, particularly in education. The UAE's foreign policy prioritizes the provision of quality and inclusive education, aligning with its goal of increasing its soft power (Antwi Boateng & Alhashmi, 2021, 6 -13).

The UAE expanded its influence by partnering with UNHCR and Dubai Cares, a philanthropic organization dedicated to educating South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. In 2017, Dubai Cares launched three educational programs with donations approximately USD 3.1 million to support South Sudanese children in Uganda. These programs are estimated to have benefited more than 21,500 South Sudanese children. The three programs include:

1. A Dubai Cares initiative dedicated to educating South Sudanese refugee children who fled the conflict in South Sudan and settled in northern Uganda;
2. A program promoting technology and science education for secondary and elementary school students;
3. A Dubai Cares program providing support and assistance for the enrollment and integration of children with disabilities into public primary schools (Dubai Cares, 2017).

Additionally, Dubai Cares has collaborated with Plan International Canada on the "Education in Emergency" program, implemented from July 2017 to September 2018. This program aimed to provide educational support to South Sudanese refugee children, with a particular focus on increasing access to quality primary education for girls, who often face exclusion within refugee communities in Adjumani, Yumbe, and the West Nile zone. The program sought to ensure that South Sudanese refugee children could exercise their rights and improve their future prospects. According to the records of the Dubai Cares program titled "Providing Emergency Education to Refugee and Host Community" in Uganda, the initiative benefited numerous South Sudanese refugees, including 15,338 direct beneficiaries and 8,000 indirect beneficiaries. The program also trained 60 teachers, constructed or renovated 6 schools, built 60 latrines, and distributed 16,000 books. The program achieved several positive outcomes, including:

1. South Sudanese refugee children in school, particularly among marginalized children and girls have equal rights and opportunities to access education;
2. Improved quality of elementary schools due to improvement on physical school buildings and teaching materials, as well as the enhancement of teachers' skills; and
3. Raised awareness of gender equality among community groups in Uganda (Dubai Cares, 2018).

Dubai Cares has launched a program to promote technology, science, and mathematics education for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, in partnership with the Lira District, Uganda, and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). This program places a significant emphasis on developing girls' skills. Additionally, in its efforts to support the integration of South Sudanese refugee children with disabilities in Uganda, Dubai Cares has partnered with Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD). This partnership has ensured that 500 children with disabilities are enrolled in primary school and receive the specialized care they need (Dubai Cares, 2017).

The decision to intervene in Uganda, driven by the realization that the country is facing challenges in adhering to its international policies and maintaining an open-door policy, the UAE aims to provide support and assistance to Uganda in addressing crises. This includes a particular focus on education for South Sudanese child refugees, in addition to enhancing its global position and soft power. By contributing to the education crisis in Uganda, Dubai Cares serves as an instrument for enhancing the appeal of the UAE through its philanthropic assistance (Pennington, 2017).

Dubai Cares Program in Uganda as the UAE's Soft Power Instrument

The UAE's interventions in providing humanitarian assistance, particularly education to refugee children in Uganda through Dubai Cares, demonstrate the use of Dubai Cares as a soft power instrument. In this context, the UAE is using its soft power to enhance its image by adopting a co-

optive rather than coercive approach. An example of this is Dubai Cares' effective collaboration with Uganda and international organizations, such as Plan International Canada, Leonard Cheshire Disability, Lira District Uganda, and FAWE, in implementing its programs (Dubai Cares, 2017).

Figure 3 Dubai Cares Delegation's Visit to Launch Education Programs in Uganda

Source: (Dubai Cares, 2017)



Figure 4 Dubai Cares Partnership with Plan International to Build New Classrooms

Source: (Pennington, 2017).

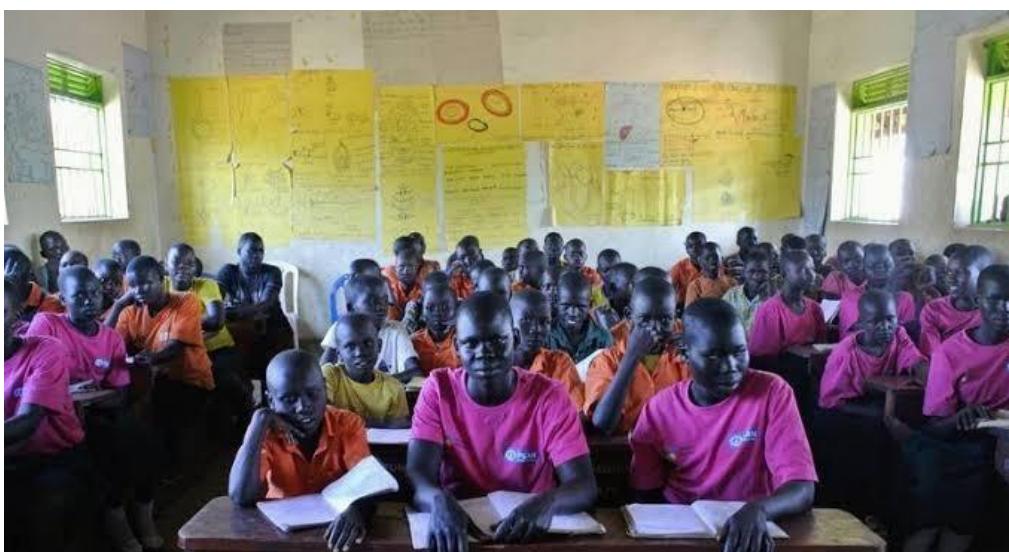


Figure 3 and Figure 4 shows the Dubai Cares team alongside the Ugandan people and South Sudanese refugees with the Plan International and Dubai Cares logos that provides a tangible evidence of collaboration in building new classrooms at a primary school for refugees (Pennington, 2017). According to Joseph Nye (2004, pp. 11-13), there are three sources of soft power: culture, foreign policy, and political values. In this context, Dubai Cares is used as a soft power instrument because it relates to culture, particularly the educational aspect. Additionally, soft power can also stem from philanthropic organizations, and Dubai Cares, as a philanthropic entity emphasizing

education, plays a key role in the UAE's soft power strategy (Antwi-Boateng & Alhashmi, 2021, pp. 1-15). Based on the concept and sources of soft power, Dubai Cares, as the UAE's soft power instrument, is considered capable of:

1. Increasing the attractiveness of the UAE at the international level

Education is a soft power instrument that can capture global attention. Dubai Cares enhances the UAE's attractiveness by demonstrating the UAE's values of tolerance and commitment to education through its efforts to improve the quality of education for South Sudanese children. Dubai Cares' credibility is further reinforced by its collaborations with UN aid agencies and various local and international NGOs, such as UNICEF, The Partnership for Child Development, Plan International, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, GAIN, the Global Network, Oxfam GB, Save the Children, UNRWA, Care International, and WFP (Dubai Cares, n.d.).

2. Improving the reputation/image of the UAE

Dubai Cares, as a philanthropic organization, enhances the reputation of the UAE by showcasing the nation's generosity through its educational programs and assistance for the refugee crisis in Uganda. The UAE's commitment to quality education through Dubai Cares helps mitigate negative perceptions of the country and its policies. This improvement in the UAE's image is evidenced by a statement from Jessica Ilomu, a manager at Plan International Uganda, who noted that Dubai Cares' presence has been highly beneficial to Uganda, arriving at a critical time to meet the educational needs of South Sudanese refugee children (Pennington, 2017).

3. Improving the position and influence of the UAE on the international scene

The UAE ambassador to Uganda, Abdullah Mohammed Al Takawi, stated that Dubai Cares' active role in Uganda, particularly in providing access to education for South Sudanese child refugees, not only benefits those in need but also serves as an inspiration and influence for other countries to contribute to the development of developing nations. Dubai Cares' involvement in assisting refugee children in Uganda positions the UAE as a prominent player in the charity and humanitarian sector. Additionally, the programs launched by Dubai Cares are considered a model for the Ugandan government in addressing the challenge of school dropout rates among South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda (Dubai Cares, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Uganda has become a refuge for the people of South Sudan due to the ongoing civil war, which has severely impacted South Sudanese citizens, particularly children who have lost their right to quality education. The strain on Uganda in providing assistance led the UAE to intervene and support South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. The UAE's initiative to bring Dubai Cares into the refugee crisis in Uganda underscores its commitment to humanitarian assistance. Dubai Cares plays a significant role in providing quality education to South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda, effectively promoting the UAE's values. Dubai Cares intervention on providing education programs for South Sudanese child refugees in Uganda has reflected the employment of soft power by the country. In this case, the UAE have been criticized for cases related to violation of human rights, restriction on freedom of expression and speech, as well as to involvement in geopolitical conflict in the Middle East.

However, Dubai Cares programs in Uganda to a certain extent have assisted the UAE's efforts to improve international perspective toward the country. This idea is confirmed by the facts that Dubai Cares have delivered access to quality education and healthcare, as well as promoted gender equality. During 2017-2018, the Dubai Cares successfully delivered benefits to South Sudanese children in Uganda, enhancing their aspirations for a better future; therefore, this fact supports image of the UAE as the country that promotes the fulfillment of human wellbeing and gender equality. Dubai Cares project for South Sudanese child refugees in Uganda has boosted the UAE influence as one of important global actors in humanitarian interventions. The engagement of international non-governmental (NGOs) organizations and the Ugandan government to implement Dubai Cares programs has suggested the attractiveness of the UAE for international cooperation, particularly in humanitarian issues.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates how the UAE utilizes its soft power to provide humanitarian assistance, including support for refugee children in Uganda through the Dubai Cares project. It highlights the UAE's generosity and commitment to education, ensuring the implementation of quality and inclusive education. Furthermore, the UAE effectively employs the Dubai Cares project as a tool of soft power to provide education for South Sudanese refugee children in Uganda. This paper acknowledges that Dubai Cares uses this project to strengthen the UAE's image on the international stage without resorting coercive measures.

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