

Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

Cultural diplomacy involves exchanging ideas, art and cultural practices to promote understanding and strengthen ties between countries. According to soft power expert Joseph Nye, *“Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.”* Cultural diplomacy uses cultural resources to enhance international relations, foster understanding and increase a nation's soft power. By showcasing culture, values and traditions, it promotes people to people connections and builds bridges between nations.

Through common cultural experiences, cultural diplomacy fosters global understanding and collaboration. An example is the U.S. Fulbright Program, enabling thousands of researchers and students to study abroad, promoting mutual respect. In Pakistan, organizations like the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (NCA) organize festivals, art exhibitions and cultural events to showcase the nation's rich heritage and improve its image domestically and internationally. Regionally, South Asia also values cultural diplomacy, with SAARC initiating cultural exchange programs to strengthen regional cooperation. To further enhance cultural diplomacy, countries should invest more in educational and cultural exchange programs, emphasizing meaningful citizen to citizen connections. Such efforts serve as soft power tools, promoting trust and harmonious relationships. Sharing cultural values and traditions improves a nation's global image, attracts tourism and investment and strengthens international influence.

Pakistan has made efforts to promote cultural diplomacy by showcasing its art, literature, cuisine and sports internationally. It offers scholarships to international students, particularly from South Asia, through government funded initiatives. However, compared to global players like China, US and Turkiye, Pakistan's efforts appear limited. China's Belt and Road Initiative to boost cultural exchanges, US Fulbright Program and Turkiye's heritage

promotion campaigns are major examples of cultural diplomacy. China notably, has engaged international social media influencers to promote its culture digitally, recently invited international social media influencers including from Pakistan to experience and promote its culture, using digital platforms effectively. Pakistan in contrast, lacks a cohesive strategy, faces limited funding and has not fully tapped into tools like social media or diaspora engagement to reshape its narrative.

For Pakistan to truly enhance its cultural diplomacy, political and economic stability is essential. A unified government strategy increased funding and the involvement of professionals and youth are crucial. Learning from international best practices can help. The country has vast potential in promoting tourism, with its diverse landscapes, heritage sites and culturally rich villages capable of attracting global interest if developed properly. Infrastructure improvements in both rural and urban areas are necessary to bring hidden cultural treasures to the forefront.

Importantly, maximizing technology, media especially social media and television can effectively showcase Pakistan's positive stories to the world. Citizens must be provided with better facilities and services, because when people feel safe, empowered and content, they naturally become ambassadors of their country's image abroad. Addressing challenges such as weak coordination among cultural bodies, outdated promotional strategies and the underutilization of youth and digital resources is vital. By overcoming these obstacles, Pakistan can build a stronger global presence and a resilient, lasting cultural identity.