

Kenya's Foreign Policy: Implementation Strategies in Economic Diplomacy Towards the East African Community

Eric J. Irungu, Bramwel N. Matui and Paul K. Kurgat

Department of History, Political Science and Public Administration, Moi University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Economic diplomacy has in recent times become a vital component of many states' foreign policies. This paper examines the economic diplomacy implementation strategies Kenya has used towards the EAC. The study employed sequential mixed method design for the research with interviews and questionnaires for data collection complemented by secondary sources. This study found that the pursuit of economic interests is fundamental to the economic progress of states in a globalized international economic system. Kenya has made economic diplomacy a core pillar since 2014. Kenya's foreign policy has a pragmatic approach towards pursuit of national economic interests since 1963. This pursues a framework of pursuing robust relations with East African Community (EAC) neighbours. The region has a long history of fostering economic cooperation right from the time of the then East African Cooperation up to date. This is foundational to enhancing economic advancement in the region to overcome global economic developments occasioned by globalization and the related complex interdependencies among states. This has seen EAC states move towards deepened regional integration efforts. It also finds state visits followed by Kenyan diplomatic missions to be the most preferred strategies towards economic diplomacy. The paper makes two recommendations: the need for mechanism on collection and dissemination of information on economic diplomacy strategies by Kenya's missions in the region; and, the need to adopt modalities on engagement of non-state actors in implementing economic diplomacy strategies.

Keywords – Economic diplomacy, economic cooperation, foreign policy, globalization, regional integration, state visits.

INTRODUCTION

Economic diplomacy is gradually emerging as an important component in inter-state relations and in particular in the foreign policies guiding such relations. States are developing progressive strategies towards pursuing their foreign policy and national interest goals. This can be seen in light of changes taking place within the global political economic framework attributed to the emergent forces of globalization, regional integration, economic interdependence as well as complex multilateralism around global and regional issues. These changes call for greater resilient measures on the part of states towards responding to these complexities. These complexities are exacerbated by severe global crises in the recent years like the global economic crisis; COVID-19 pandemic; and recently the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. The 2021 report of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) prepared for the UK presidency of the G7 group of countries roots strongly for the enhancing economic resilience by examining three core issues affecting the global economy: the risks, acute shocks and the chronic vulnerabilities the world faces (OECD, 2021).

Economic diplomacy has been adopted as a viable strategy by other states across the world from its acceptance and wide application across the world by both industrialized and non-industrialized states. This

provides opportunities worthy of consideration by foreign policy decision makers (Bergeijk et al, 2011). Foreign policy makers have to contend with linking the economic diplomacy and their development needs as provided for in their foreign policies (Hurd, 2011). The reality from the experiences of world states is that the developed and industrialized nations have taken economic diplomacy more seriously than their developing counterparts and for a much longer time (Okpokpo, 2000). This therefore places it at the epicenter of Kenya's pursuit of her economic interests globally, regionally and also sub-regionally within the EAC region.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Economic diplomacy has gained significance in recent years as an instrument employed by states towards the pursuit of their economic interests. This is linked to the increasingly complex international political economy owing to factors like globalization, regional integration and complex multilateralism in pursuit of economic interests. Its ultimate focus is attainment of growth and development as key economic interests for a state. Kenya is not an exception in this regard. Kurtulus (2008) defines it as the process of international economic decision making that focuses on how states conduct their external economic relations, how they make decisions domestically, how they negotiate internationally and how these processes interact. The focus therefore is on trade; external investments; financial flows; aid; technological exchanges; bilateral; and multilateral economic negotiations.

Economic diplomacy implementation towards pursuit of foreign policy objectives must be viewed from a dimension of implementation of a state's foreign policy. Implicit in scholarly circles is consensus on foreign policy implementation phases entailing a diametrical interaction between actors and the environment (whether domestic or foreign) in foreign policy making. In this respect, the actors confront the environmental realities and environment also confronts the actors (Elisabetta Brighi & Christopher Hill, 2016). It is both a strategic and decisive process; strategic in its translating foreign policy goals to practical strategies and decisive in turning those strategies into the desired foreign policy outcomes. This significant classification pinpoints a need for the desired outcomes via strategies and instruments through which implementation of foreign policies takes place (Ibid).

The implementation is also classifiable along the levels that the outcomes are targeted. These are the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels (Arystankulova, 2018). The bilateral level entails inter-state interactions oftentimes through bilateral agreements. The regional level entails focusing the policy objectives to a specific region. In this study, the regional focus is the EAC. In such regional focus, a state prefers foreign policy objectives that it would seek to translate into foreign policy outcomes. The multilateral level is where the state desires to pursue these goals multilaterally in for a like the United Nations and other multilateral bodies. This thus calls for states to be deliberate as to which focal level they are focusing. A state may additionally desire to translate its implementation to all the three levels albeit with some slight adjustments.

Elisabetta Brighi & Christopher Hill (2016) also present two other viable sets of classification. These are the agency-structure approach and the strategic-relational approach. The agency-structure approach predominantly dwells on foreign policy actors by contending on whether foreign policy actions can be viewed from the inside or outside contexts of the actors in their preferences and interests. In such cases, do actors always push for their interests or will these be constrained by the outside environment factors they lack control over?

The strategic- relational approach views foreign policy implementation as an interplay between the actor's strategies and the context that those strategies are to be implemented. Viewed from bilateral, regional and

multilateral levels, foreign policy actors would require to remain cognizant of the strategies other actors employ at all the three levels (Hudson, 2020).

Such classifications are theoretically oriented. The constructivist perspective sees actors as being guided in their strategies by certain norms that are informed by values shaping the desired construct of what is acceptable behaviour of the actors (Boekle et al, 1999). This informs the perception of the actors as to what constitutes desirable foreign policy outcomes. This construct is informed by what will be construed as success or a failure of a state's foreign policy. To this end multiple states have taken economic diplomacy and its implementation seriously. India has adopted robust strategies to drive its economic diplomacy agenda. These include: training all its Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) in commercial and economic diplomacy where special emphasis is laid on enhancing their skills on trade negotiation and international economic relations; engaging in aid diplomacy where she uses aid as instrument of its economic relations particularly with the developing nations. To this end an Indian aid agency the International Agency for Partnership Development (IAPD) has been created; and finally, trade liberalization and promotion of Indian goods. All Indian consulates and embassies are directed to give special focus to export promotion and India product promotion using their economic diplomacy tools (Amariei, 2014).

France regards the primacy of carrying out its economic diplomacy through support for French companies to defend and create new jobs to serve France with them and through them. Brazil on its part positions its diplomacy to continuously look for potential markets to increase its exports (Ibid). This has seen the state actively engage in promoting south-south cooperation bilaterally and multilaterally, focusing on robust energy initiatives, charting its way as the ideal economic partner for other countries in Latin America and consolidating efforts around south-south cooperation. Japan has also geared her economic diplomacy towards seeking opportunities for Japanese businesses to expand to other regions by promoting cooperation (Asano, 2015). Japan being a global economic player has expanded its horizon to countries that it can partner with but with a deliberate focus on its South Asian neighbours and partners.

The global efforts being undertaken by states globally towards the pursuit of economic diplomacy constitute the new undertaking towards realizing economic goals. Economic diplomacy has attracted immense attention globally and foreign policy makers are working to promote and protect strategic economic interests of their states using the tool of economic diplomacy. This leads Nasser Al Motairi & Abdul Zaki (2013) to assert that the advancement of the pivotal role of economic diplomacy is recognized as an important component and tool of foreign relations between the committee of nations.

The developing world is not an exception and for states grappling with economic and development challenges, the continent has had to seek and adopt creative ways to confront them. Developing countries are specifically constrained in their operations in economic relations by the complex political and economic environment that leads to their marginalization in economic diplomacy (Khatibzadeh, 2006). Economic diplomacy is gradually taking over the traditional politics-oriented diplomacy. Several states in Africa have thus positioned themselves strategically in order to navigate around the complex economic environment occasioned by the increasing globalization of the world (Pogoson, 2011).

States are taking up strategies towards implementing their economic diplomacy. Moons Selwyn & Bergeijk Peter (2013) in a study focusing on 29 empirical studies on trade and investment impacts conclude that economic diplomacy aims to influence decisions on cross-border activities pursued by governments and non-state actors. In this pursuit, it may cover a range of international representations like embassies, consulates, public sector business support facilities, domestic institutions in investment, export promotion offices and diplomatic bilateral activities like trade and state visits.

The broader debate on economic diplomacy strategies is multifaceted in nature. First, there is a dilemma on how to arrive at the best placed strategies that a state can utilize (Ibid). This is critical and the study

sought to make a contribution to. Secondly, there is the question of which actors are to be involved in implementation thereof. Traditionally, this is left to diplomatic missions in their overseas missions. There is however growing debate on the need to incorporate non-state actors in the implementation strategies (UNCTAD (2011)). The study sought to examine the economic diplomacy implementation strategies Kenya has used towards the EAC. Limited attention is given to the key implementation strategies applied to Kenya's economic diplomacy. This is pivotal towards analyzing how the economic diplomacy is executed.

The literature pinpoints the role that non-state actors play towards actualization of state-strategies towards their economic interests. The private sector is singled for its role. As with other areas of international focus, this sector is central to the pursuit of business and commercial interests. Keppner et al (2019) underscore the need for private sector integration in state efforts towards addressing issues touching on world economic needs. They call for deliberate approaches by governments towards engagement with private sector and other non-state players. There must be clear roles to be assigned in order to facilitate the implementation of foreign policies. This can be seen within the broader context of the quest by states to enhance the survival of nation-states as primary actors within the international system. The reality is the visible diminishing role of the nation-states with time.

A number of approaches have worked globally. One perspective is adoption and implementation of multi-stakeholder collaboration (Valencia, 2006). This entails state and non-state actors engaging around implementation of mutual pertinent interests. This entails frameworks of engaging business players, non-governmental organizations as well as civil society players. Saner (2006) emphasizes the roles non-state actors play in foreign policy implementation through diplomacy particularly in campaigning, advocacy and lobbying. They make use of their networks across regions and globally to shape discourse on matters of interest. Viewed from an economic interests and economic diplomacy perspective, this is an area of cooperation for state actors to explore. In bringing various players to work towards such implementation, it enhances a robust learning environment for all players. They learn from the experiences of each other and this enhances a contribution towards what effective implementation of foreign policies on economic concerns portend for actors.

Kenya's economic diplomacy and its associated strategies is viewable from a context of the complicated diplomacy associated with realization of development that guides all African states (Mudida, 2012). The ultimate goal is realization of the development needs that would see states uplift the development conditions of their people. This is nonetheless not an isolated African concern. Globally, states have been adopting strategies geared towards achieving developmental goals and objectives. The European Union (EU) is a crucial example. The EU economic diplomacy strategy recognizes economic issues as key to the conduct of her diplomacy. This emanates from the realization that the economy is the main component of political power and influence (Imbert, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This was a study based on sequential mixed method design with EAC as the reference point. A mixed method approach was preferred due to the growing use of mixed method approaches to explain social science related phenomena that cannot be out rightly quantified and that is dependent on people's perceptions and opinions (Chava Nachmias & David Nachmias, 1996). Data was collected using 20 semi-structured interviews and 21 questionnaires from key informants and respondents situated in Nairobi City, Kenya. This was derived from a target population of 110 through stratified sampling as convenience sampling techniques. The study was based on the premise of the use of primary data (interviews and questionnaires) and secondary data through content analysis of relevant secondary data sources to complement the primary data collected.

The actual field work was organized into two components; first, interviews were conducted alongside questionnaire administration on the sampled respondents. Data analysis was consequently carried out. The initial interview schedule had to be reformulated after some inefficiencies touching on the depth of the questions posed were observed from a pilot on three respondents. Secondly, the researcher collected secondary data touching on the various targeted institutions and in line with their relevance to addressing the research objectives and analyzed this as well. The study respondents were derived from organizations and entities most relevant to the focus of the study. These included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Service Academy, the Ministry of East African Cooperation and Regional Development, Ministry of Trade, Industrialization and Enterprise Development and other key agencies supporting Kenya's economic interests namely the Kenya Investment Authority, Kenya Tourism Board and the Kenya Export Promotion and Branding Agency.

The study also targeted the following: private sector organizations with interests in the EAC (Kenya Private Sector Alliance and the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry), individual business players, members of Kenya's diplomatic community in the EAC region, academicians, scholars and analysts. In this latter category the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis were considered due to their relevant work on Kenya's economic interests. All these categories of persons even when domiciled outside the city frequently travel to the capital for personal or official business. These respondents were targeted due to their involvement in core aspects relevant to the study, their access to information relevant to the study as well as their expert knowledge on the subject matter of study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided in its theoretical framework by the constructivism theory of international relations as propounded by Alexander Wendt in 1995. It was guided by three salient issues in constructivism: first, the idea of the social order around being a social construct of our own making; second, the perception of the nature of international relations as a byproduct of the interactions of state and non-state actors and these can influence foreign policy related outcomes and developments; third is the assertion that states adopt an identity anchored on interests that reflect the aforementioned interactions between state and non-state actors (Wendt, 1995). This theory was preferred since the desired foreign policy outcome that Kenya seeks to attain through her economic diplomacy can only be regarded as a construct that can or cannot be achieved depending on the appropriateness of the strategies employed. Secondly, the theory presents an analytical tool that can study in an isolated manner the different roles played by both state and non-state actors towards the different strategies employed in economic diplomacy

ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY STRATEGIES IN KENYA'S RELATIONS WITH THE EAC

Economic matters remain to be central concerns that states articulate through their foreign policies. This is a key focus by Kenya in her relations with her EAC counterparts. Kurgat (2017) points out the centrality of economic interests in the foreign policies of East African states as provided for in the EAC treaty where there is an emphasis on creation, strengthening and regulation of the industrial, commercial and other relations among the partner states. To this end, Kenya has employed economic diplomacy towards these pursuits.

Economic diplomacy strategies are critical to the implementation level in foreign policy (Bindra, 2019). The respective strategies to be implemented must reflect the broader foreign policy environment in which actors operate in. The environment reflects the realities observed from internal as well external environments (Elisabetta Brighi & Christopher Hill, 2016). It is worthwhile to contextualize it from the

bilateral, regional and multilateral levels of engagement with a regional level taking a prominent position (Kisiangani, 2014)-although recently during Covid-19 pandemic EAC multilateralism encountered a challenge (Matui, 2023). The Kenyan experience with implementing economic diplomacy strategies has similarities and differences with the experiences of other states.

There is great focus that is expended towards making diplomacy tuned towards economic interests. This is visible in the efforts made by states like Russia, Israel, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Argentina. These states initiate domestic economic reforms to mitigate against the difficult global economic environment facing the world. Economic diplomacy thus becomes a key instrument towards engaging with other states and trying to build confidence that these economic reforms presents new opportunities for economic engagement (Khatibzadeh, 2006). States like Russia and Iran for instance have suffered economically under the weight of western imposed sanctions. Kenya’s experience is unique in that whereas like any other state it contends with the globalized economic environment, it is situated in the EAC region which does not experience such kind of economic uncertainties. However, it operates in a region that characterized by political uncertainty in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region. This region is equally characterized by other economic significant impacts like climate change, drought and food insecurity.

The experiences of Germany, France, USA, Brazil, UK and India are also significant to take note of. They have made strides in promoting economic diplomacy as a key instrument in their foreign policy by putting the right infrastructure in place to facilitate economic diplomacy as a priority area over other forms of diplomacy (Amariei, 2014). India has focused on the training of all its Foreign Service Officers and diplomats in economic diplomacy. This is an area where Kenya has a unique experience in that whereas trainings are conducted, they are mainly at the point of induction of new staff into Foreign Service and other diplomatic positions. There is need towards greatly enhancing the training and capacity building capacity to reach such heights. These trainings can be extended to cover both state and non-state actors involved in any aspects of economic diplomacy. This can yield long term benefits.

Drawing from the experiences of other states in the African continent, one can see Kenya taking economic diplomacy seriously to match leading states. Rwanda has in recently ranked very well on indices that measure the ease of doing business. This is attributable to strengthening capacity of diplomatic missions in information gathering and dissemination to investors and business people in the private sector (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), 2021). The uniqueness of Kenya is that it has a larger economy with better organized private sector that if well involved can engage strategically with Kenya’s diplomatic missions. Namibia, another African state coming from a complex political and economic environment has also taken economic diplomacy very seriously as a way of countering the devastating challenges occasioned by the globalizing world economy (Republic of Namibia, 2004; Feldman, 1993). Nigeria has also done well by positioning itself well through economic diplomacy and between 2003 and 2009 managed to clinch the second highest [after South Africa] level of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Margaret Egbula & Qi Zheng, 2011). These are operating in a near similar economic environment with many similarities to assess from.

On examining Kenya-EAC relations as a precursor to understanding how her economic diplomacy is and the strategies used thereof, the study responses are classifiable into four categories: very good, good, cooperative and competitive. The percentage responses for the four categories were as presented in the table below:

Table 1.1: Responses on the State of Kenya-EAC Relations

Kenya-EAC Relations	Distribution (%)
Very good	48.78
Good	29.27
Cooperative	19.51

Competitive	2.44
Total	100

Source: Field data

This finding can be attributed to the long history of the relationship that Kenya has as founding member of the EAC and having played a role in East African cooperation matters since independence in 1963. Kenya is also arguably a dominant player in the region’s affairs and also has a large and well diversified economy. Towards this it has cultivated an image for itself as a state concerned about regional matters (Howell, 1968). Despite existence of areas where frosty relations, this can be attributed to the general environment regionally occasioned by the economic challenges that the partner states face (Kamala, 2006).

From the literature, foreign policy implementation, of which economic diplomacy is a critical component, can be explained from the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels of classification. Whereas there are instances that Kenya prefers bilateral engagements with her EAC partner states, the state normally tends to prefer a regional level of engaging with her neighbours. Kagwanja (2014) highlights regionalism to be an important cornerstone of Kenya’s current foreign policy which he argues is very assertive in its current form and anchored on sub-regionalism. This is a view that is shared by Obala (2013) equally observes Kenya’s commitment to the strengthening of regional bodies, particularly the EAC in her foreign policy implementation pursuits. This classification agrees with constructivism in that it epitomizes Kenya’s desire on the part of Kenya to forge an identity as the state that is fully committed to regional interests as key to the achievement of her own interests. This is constructivist construct of maintaining and protecting the EAC brotherhood.

On examining the key strategies that Kenya employs in her economic diplomacy in the region, the study classified these into five broad categories as presented in table 1.2 below:

Table 1.2: Kenya’s Economic Diplomacy Strategies in the EAC Region

Economic Diplomacy Strategies	Ranking
State Visits and Presidential Visits	1
Kenya’s EAC Diplomatic Missions	2
Infrastructural Development Partnerships	3
Investments, FDI & Trade Promotion	4
Kenya’s Branding Strategy (Tourism, Culture, Heritage and Sports)	5

Source: Field data

State visits and presidential visits are critical to realization of economic interests as enshrined in the foreign policy. Nzomo (2016) underscores the immense role of the President who as with other African Presidents plays a foreign policy role in pertinent matters on economic diplomacy. To this end, the study found between 2013 and 2021, the Kenyan President made 9 state visits and 24 presidential visits to the EAC region. In all these visits, non-state actors particularly those in the private sectors and potential investors were in the presidential delegations. This is significant bearing in mind the findings from other studies on Germany, France and the USA indicating that a single state visit, holding other factors constant would translate to between 8-10 % increases in exports (Nitsch, 2005). A related study on Brazilian state visits and their impact to exports found a strong positive correlation to her exports at 33% (Fabricio Linhares & Jonatas Martins, 2019).

The other key strategy employed is Kenya’s diplomatic missions in the EAC region. The study found a 63.41% commitment level by Kenya on economic diplomacy implementation. Towards this end, Kenya’s

diplomatic missions in the EAC region have laid a special emphasis on trade and investment matters as important concerns in pursuing economic diplomacy. This responds to a changing economic environment that Kenya operates in that calls for the diplomatic mission to play a facilitative role to business and economic issues (Musau, 2015). Rwanda, a state in the EAC region also takes its diplomatic missions roles seriously particularly with regard to information gathering and dissemination to Rwandese investors and business people (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), 2021). In this, Kenya can borrow from to actualize speedy and accurate dissemination of such information from missions in the EAC region to the eventual users or consumers.

Infrastructural developments and partnerships are key strategies employed by Kenya in her economic diplomacy in the region. This has seen the state prioritize crucial infrastructure developments in partnerships with her neighbours like the northern corridor connecting states within the Great Lakes Region (GLR), the Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor that seeks to connect South Sudan and Ethiopia which are landlocked to the port of Lamu and developing a Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) which has also seen Kenya-Uganda cooperation towards a remodel of the Kenya-Uganda railway towards enhancement of trade and travel between the two states. Briceno-Garmendia & Maria Shkaratan (2010) single out Kenya as having a high infrastructure need in Africa with an annual spending of USD 1.6 billion to meet her infrastructure development needs with 65% of this going to capital expenditure while the rest is recurrent expenditure. This is against a total annual need of USD 4 billion.

To bridge this gap, Kenya must enter into infrastructure development partnerships to enhance the pooling of these vital resources together with other neighbouring states with similar needs. This is to rapidly mitigate adverse effects to her economic interests like poverty alleviation, economic growth and improving the ease of doing business (Ombara, 2019). Such infrastructure investments are required in crucial economic sectors like transport, communication and energy (James Nyamongo & Lilian Nyamongo (2019). These will cumulatively impact directly on other strategies on investments; Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); trade promotion; Kenya's branding strategy as a preferred destination for investments; tourism and heritage all of which are critical foreign exchange earners for the country.

These findings remain pertinent when viewed through the theoretical lenses of constructivism in the following ways: One, constructivism's propagation of a social order that is a social construct of our own making leads to the implication that Kenya has always had a clear construct of what it seeks to achieve towards its economic development. This translates to very clear foreign policy goals and objectives that in turn have been rolled out via strategies discussed in this paper.

Secondly, constructivism emphasizes on the roles played by both state and non-state actors towards the conduct of inter-state relations. It is clear that the enormous task of actualizing such strategies cannot be conducted solely by state actors. One missing link however is a need to identify the engagement mechanisms through which the non-state actors can be brought on board to play a part in implementation of all the various strategies. This is an aspect that can even lead to a further contribution to the development of constructivism as a framework by recommending actual measures of involving and coordinating contribution of non-state players.

Finally, on constructivism's argument on the issue of identities and interests, these multiple identities that the state has with regard to economic diplomacy can be said to emanate from the interactions that state actors have with non-state players. As interests change and new non-state players are brought on board, new identities will be shaped and these will guide the strategies that the state will need to craft to respond to this evolving and changing environment.

CONCLUSION

The identification of viable economic diplomacy strategies and their effective implementation is key to the

attainment of Kenya's foreign policy as covered in its economic diplomacy pillar. This is closely linked to the EAC region's economic interests and objectives and in this regard, Kenya must respond to both its internal foreign policy environment and this external environment in the EAC region. This is difficult to strike a balance and therefore calls for both efficiency in and the consistency of strategies deployed. This paper makes two recommendations towards enhancing the implementation of these economic diplomacy strategies. First, it recommends that there be a proper mechanism for the collection and dissemination of information touching on the key economic diplomacy strategies by Kenya's diplomatic missions in the region. This can further be stored in a repository that key economic players can be able to access easily, conveniently and expeditiously. Secondly, there is need to come up with modalities of how to engage and coordinate the involvement of the non-state actors particularly the business players and other significant players so that they play a part implementing various economic diplomacy strategies.

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