

Kenya's Quest for Economic Interests in the East African Community: The Formulation Process of Foreign Policy

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Abstract— Economic diplomacy is emerging as a critical pillar in the foreign policy of states around the world. The Kenya Foreign Policy Framework (2014) recognizes economic diplomacy as a key pillar of the state's foreign policy alongside peace diplomacy, environmental diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and diaspora diplomacy. The East African Community (EAC) as a region has a long history of fostering economic cooperation right from the time of the East African Cooperation up to date. This is the foundation of enhancing economic development for the region as a way of overcoming global economic challenges occasioned by globalization and the related complex interdependencies among states. This has seen EAC states move towards regional integration efforts. This paper investigates the formulation process of Kenya's foreign policy on economic interests towards the EAC. The study employed a sequential mixed method design employing the use of interviews and questionnaires complemented by secondary data sources for data collection. The paper is informed by Karl Popper's philosophy of piecemeal social engineering that advocates for a gradualist approach towards solving societal problems and the resultant policies that are adopted.

Keywords—*Economic Diplomacy, Economic Cooperation, Foreign Policy, Regional Cooperation And Regional Integration.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Formulation of Foreign Policy for Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy is a crucial strategy towards the pursuit of a state's economic interests has gained significance in recent years as employed by states towards the pursuit of their economic interests. This can be linked to the increasing complexity in the international political economy owing to factors like globalization, regional integration and complex multilateralism in the pursuit of economic interests. The ultimate focus of economic diplomacy is the attainment of both economic growth and development as key economic interests for a state. Kenya is not an exception in this regard. Economic diplomacy can be generally defined as a 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 interaction processes. The focus therefore is on trade, external investments, financial flows, aid, technological exchanges as well as bilateral and multilateral economic negotiations (Kurtuluş, 2008).

Economic diplomacy's significance as a key pillar of Kenya's foreign policy took center stage during the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government (2003-2007) headed by H.E. Mwai Kibaki. This saw the adoption of Kenya's Foreign Policy Framework which defined the vision of Kenya's Foreign Policy as "to advance the interests of Kenya through innovative diplomacy." (Republic of Kenya, 2009a).

This premised Kenya's quest for economic progress and prosperity on 'innovative diplomacy' as a critical component of her foreign policy. Economic interests had however been a key focus of Kenya's foreign policy since independence in 1963.

Karl Popper's philosophy of piecemeal social engineering is a useful tool towards understanding Kenya's quest to achieve economic interests in the region. Popper's piecemeal social engineering provides a prism to view societal problems and needs. It advocates a gradual approach to social transformations as opposed to rapid changes (Ezebuilo, 2019). From this Popperian viewpoint, economic interests are thus seen as critical components of Kenya's foreign policy that are geared to addressing the core state economic needs. Piecemeal social engineering promotes learning from policy initiatives undertaken to address societal problems through the elimination of errors that are rapidly done away with as policy interventions are monitored and what does not work eliminated.

The formulation process of Kenya's foreign policy on economic interests is thus an aspect traceable to its foundation as a sovereign state and even beyond as a British colony. Successive Kenyan governments thus prioritized economic interests even before economic diplomacy was officially recognized as a pillar of her 2014 foreign policy. From a Popperian perspective, a lot of learning has been generated over time than can inform better policy responses towards the pursuit of these economic interests. The economic diplomacy pillar is premised on among other objectives; to increase capital flows to Kenya and the East African region; to support export promotion and investment by Kenyan enterprises within the region and beyond; to strengthen regional economic communities and organizations to serve as competitive springboards to emerging and global markets; and promotion of fair trade and equitable bilateral, regional and multilateral trade agreements (Republic of Kenya, 2014).

The success of Kenya's foreign policy therefore can be evaluated on a broader perspective by the success of its economic diplomacy pillar. It thus presents a significant challenge for Kenya with regard to the effectiveness and efficiency of this critical pillar in shaping the pursuit of its foreign policy goal(s). Kenya's foreign policy has attracted scholarly scrutiny. Kurgat (2017) underscores that foreign policy is traceable to the political manifestos of Kenya's first ruling party the Kenya African National Union (KANU) as captured in their 1961 and 1963 election manifestos. Of these, the most prominent were the regional orientation of Kenyan foreign policy through fostering the East African Common Services Organization and also East African Common Market. This view is reiterated by Matui (2023).

Wanyama (2013) sees Kenya's foreign policy as being closely tied to Kenya's medium term goal of achieving the country's economic blueprint the Vision 2030. Ododa (1986) observed the aspects of continuity and change in Kenya's foreign policy particularly during the Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Moi administrations. This continuity was an offshoot of the colonial era policy where the post-independent era Kenya chose to continue with a number of aspects inherited from the colonial administration like on security, military alliances as well as on economic partnerships. This is akin to Karl Popper's view of enhanced learning that offers social engineering towards what is best positioned to respond to the problems at hand. Over the years, Kenya's foreign policy has focused on developing an African and also an East African orientation.

Wright (1980) viewed Kenya's foreign policy from two main paradigms: its predominant position in the East African region in terms of trade and the development of Nairobi as a regional hub. He asserted the notion that the key foreign policy decisions at that time were not specifically tuned to the national interests but rather they were focused on the general African (and by extension third world) as well as East African interests. This portrays a state that even at those early years had immense regard for the collective development aspirations of East Africa.

A state's foreign policy and its formulation can be analyzed from the global, regional and sub-regional levels. This viewpoint is emphasized by Okoth (1998) who observes the latter as reflecting the East African region to which he asserts that Kenya has been active in her African foreign policy with deeper focus on the Eastern African sub-region. Sadia Mushtaq & Ishtiaq Choudhry (2013) observe that foreign policy is a behavioural pattern which states adopt to conduct foreign and diplomatic relations formulated according to well defined national interests. This points to how Kenya has positioned herself in formulating her national interest(s) as well as how it undertakes to systematically orient this in practical plans that inform day to day inter-state relations with her EAC neighbours. Kenya's foreign policy cannot be analyzed only from the context of the post-independence state, but rather from her pre-colonial and colonial foundations.

Kenya's foreign policy formulation around her economic interests as expressed through her economic diplomacy towards the EAC region must be contextualized from the perspective of the key debates around foreign policy formulation. In foreign policy formulation, the key aspects of formulation must be understood from the broader perspectives and goals of foreign policy. Foreign policy is classified into the three broad levels of conception, content and implementation (Bindra, 2019). The level of conception embodies the formulation process of a state's foreign policy which is an elaborate process that is guided by the requisite foreign policy objectives that a state desires to accomplish.

In this respect, the foreign policy formulation therefore entails several principles, policies and decisions that collectively guide how a state conducts its inter-state relations (Zainab Gimba & Sherif Ibrahim, 2018; Kurgat, 2017). Foreign policy formulation is thus undertaken premised on the classification of the objectives that it seeks to achieve. These are classified into three: core objectives, middle range objectives and long range objectives.

The other debate has to do with the determinants of foreign policy. Bojang (2018) observes a consensus in foreign policy studies that the internal/domestic determinants and the external/foreign determinants are the key aspects informing

foreign policy formulation as responses to those dynamic aspects. These two determinants would highly influence the foreign policy makers' formulation of a foreign policy that best responds to the two environments. Hermann (1972) observed that foreign policy formulation, as a foreign policy component may be classified along ten aspects. These are: geographical regions/political entities where the policy is being formulated; strategic or grand designs adopted; skills and resources at the disposal of those formulating; the desired action properties; the relational attributes with respect to other foreign policies; basic values espoused by the formulating state; national goals; communication characteristics; pattern variables; and the issue areas of focus.

The other aspect of debate is on actors involved in the formulation process. There is increasing contribution of non-state actors to the foreign policy making and foreign policy formulation processes. Carter(2020) for instances singles out the key foreign policy actors in the USA context into executive branch actors, congressional actors, judicial actors, societal actors and the international actors. These have a uniquely shaped foreign policy formulation. Linda Jakobson & Dean Knox (2010) view the actors as broadly classified into two: official actors and actors on the margin.

The former entails state officials while the latter incorporates the business sector, local governments, research institutions, academia, the media and the citizenry. Husain (2014) also views the actors as state actors, informal actors, regional and international actors. The former includes the Presidents, Prime Ministers, Cabinet, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Parliament and security agencies. The informal actors include the media, academia, think tanks, the business community and pressure groups. In this interplay of the multiple actors, the MFA reserves a special role in coordinating and directing the various players on the different roles and contributions that they can play towards enriching the foreign policy formulation process.

This paper sought to investigate how Kenya's economic diplomacy is formulated as a key component of her foreign policy towards the pursuit of economic interests. An examination of economic diplomacy as a deliberate foreign policy instrument has not attracted much study going by the studies done in this area. Some studies have been undertaken about this phenomenon. Coolsaet (2002) studies changes in the foreign policy of the USA with trade as the central bridge between domestic and foreign policy. Afesorgbor (2016) underscores that states around the world and Africa in particular have resorted to the pursuit of their economic interests through political and diplomatic relations. Amariei (2014) observes the move by world governments to give special attention to the economic dimension of their foreign policies towards advancement of economic progress.

Other studies address how states need to re-position themselves and their foreign policies towards a changing economic landscape (Nicholas Bayne & Stephen Woolcock, 2011; Asano, 2015; Wanyama, 2013; and Kisiangani, 2014). This presents a clear gap of focus on economic interests largely without specificity as to pursuit of economic diplomacy as the preferred instrument that this study seeks to address. There is need for states to ensure a clear linkage of economic diplomacy and their economic development needs as contended by Hurd (2011). The Kenyan context may be partly due to economic diplomacy pillar being a recent component in Kenya's foreign policy circles. In this regard, it remains part of the uncharted terrain. To understand strides that Kenya has made in its

economic diplomacy, it underscores the need for studies on Kenya's economic diplomacy as a deliberate foreign policy designed and implemented to achieve specified economic outcomes.

This also aims at contributing to ongoing debates as articulated earlier. Specifically, from the global, regional and sub-regional levels of analyzing a state's foreign policy and its formulation, this paper attempts to tilt the focus to a sub-regional level. This is attributable to the close proximity that a sub-region like the EAC has to Kenya and how her immediate economic interests can be met. The other has to do with the determinants or the guiding principles that the foreign policy and its formulation is anchored on. Finally, the debate on the actors in the foreign policy formulation and how these can play a defining and contributive role to foreign policy formulation.

II. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This was a study based on a sequential mixed method design with a specific focus on the EAC as the reference point. A mixed method approach was preferred since the study focused on people's perceptions. Mixed method approaches are gaining importance in understanding many social science phenomena that cannot be out rightly quantified and are dependent on people's perceptions and opinions (Chava Nachmias & David Nachmias, 1996). This approach was informed by the goal of contextualizing the findings to a particular focus: the EAC. Data was collected using 20 semi-structured interviews and 21 questionnaires from key informants and respondents situated in Nairobi City, Kenya. Secondary sources were referred to augment primary data sources.

The study was guided by the constructivism theory of international relations as propounded by Alexander Wendt in 1995. The three key issues advanced in this theory are: first, the idea that the social order around us is a social construct of our own making; second, the theory posits that the nature of international relations is a byproduct of a multiplicity of actors (state and non-state) who influence developments through their actions and interactions with each other; third, identities and interests, the key assertion being that states tend to have identities that are social constructs emanating from the interactions of state and non-state actors (Wendt, 1995).

This theory was preferred as it focused on Kenya's economic interests as a component of her foreign policy towards the EAC and as such it gives a good basis for the relative identities created around the state's economic interests. In addition, this theory presented a useful tool to study the prevailing notion of constructs created around Kenya's economic interests and how a foreign policy towards their realization is formulated in the EAC context. Finally, it also presents a useful framework to analyze the multiplicity of actors that are involved in foreign policy formulation process.

III. FOREIGN POLICY FORMULATION PROCESS FOR ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY IN KENYA

Foreign policy formulation is linked to the broader goals and objectives that are captured in a state's foreign policy. The three levels of foreign policy: conception, content and implementation underscore both nature and form of arriving at foreign policy (Bindra, 2019). Foreign policy formulation is always guided by the objectives that a state's foreign policy would seek to achieve. Zainab Gimba & Sheriff Ibrahim (2018) observe these as the core objectives; the middle range objectives and the long range objectives.

This classification bears great significance theoretically from a constructivist perspective because they form the basis of identities and interests that are shaped by actors in the foreign policy formulation process (Wendt, 1995). It is to be emphasized on the multiplicity of actors involved as the findings show. This study classifies Kenya's foreign policy formulation as being geared towards the accomplishment of both the middle range and long range objectives. It views the middle range objectives as premised on achievement of economic progress for the country's economic growth and development realized from her economic diplomacy interactions with her neighbouring states in the EAC region. This further translates into long range objectives that envision in the long run an economically prosperous Kenya that benefits itself and other partner states in the EAC region.

Kenya's foreign policy formulation bears close similarity with a number of countries around the world. A key example is Pakistan where great significance is attached to the roles of multiple actors in foreign policy formulation in terms of what can be termed as state actors, informal actors, regional and international actors (Husain, 2014). This further enhances collective learning from these multiple actors in line with Popper's observation in piecemeal social engineering. The Kenyan case is however unique in that regional and other international actors are exclusively viewed contextually from their interactions with the official state actors in formal engagements.

It also resonates with the USA case that views foreign policy making as incorporating multiplicities of actors that operate in different environmental contexts, particularly the internal and external contexts. The uniqueness of Kenya's case however is in more of an internal focus in terms of national economic interests and how these shape how economic diplomacy will be formulated. Kenya is not as large a player as is the USA which due to its hegemonic position globally has to factor the external context significantly. One glaring similarity with the USA however is in terms of how Kenya has given serious attention to the economic dimension of its foreign policy (Amariei, 2014; Nick Vahid & Ronny Gitonga-Mutetha, 2021). As it stands, economic diplomacy is a significant pillar in Kenya's foreign policy.

The Kenyan case also closely relates to the United Kingdom (UK) where the latter has been taking considerable efforts to enhance economic diplomacy alongside the other aspects of diplomacy particularly those that are politically linked (Ibid). With regard to perception of role's played particularly by non-state players in foreign policy formulation, Kenya's case relates closely with the Republic of Turkiye which prioritizes the role of non-state players like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs) and business groups (Vallée, 2012) The uniqueness of Kenya's case is that besides private sector actors, not much of a structured process of engaging NGOs and CSOs has been put in place. While making the strides towards economic diplomacy, Kenya can benefit a lot from the lessons and experiences of countries that matured their economic diplomacy like Singapore, China, India, South Africa, Brazil and Nigeria (Margaret Egbula & Qi Zheng, 2011; Grimm et al, 2014; Kioko, 2012; Okpokpo,2000).

Kenya's foreign policy is anchored multiple principles since independence. This is since independence where the key national interests always guided the formulation of the state's foreign policy (Okumu, 1973). The findings in this study point to a growing focus on economic aspects as key principles. For

instance between 1963 to 1978, economic development alongside regional cooperation were key concerns of the state. Between 1978 to 2002, economic development, regional cooperation through trade became the focal point. Finally, between 2002 to 2022, economic development; economic recovery; the global economy; trade; investment; regional integration; and economic diplomacy have gained a lot of attention.

The study found Kenya’s foreign policy formulation process entails a six stage process. The first begins with the drafting of a sessional paper by the MFA for cabinet discussion. Once Cabinet approval is granted, the second stage entails collection of stakeholder viewers. The third stage sees the formation of a deliberations committee by MFA. From this, the fourth stage is public participation. The fifth stage after this is sending the policy proposal to parliament for discussion and approval. Finally, once approved, the sixth stage is integration of the policy within the MFA. This entails bringing line ministries relevant to specific policy components to work towards its execution.

With the increasing complexity of foreign policy formulation particularly with regard to economic diplomacy and the interests thereof, the findings led to the classification of actors in the foreign policy formulation on economic diplomacy into two categories: special role actors and informal actors. This is presented in the figure below:

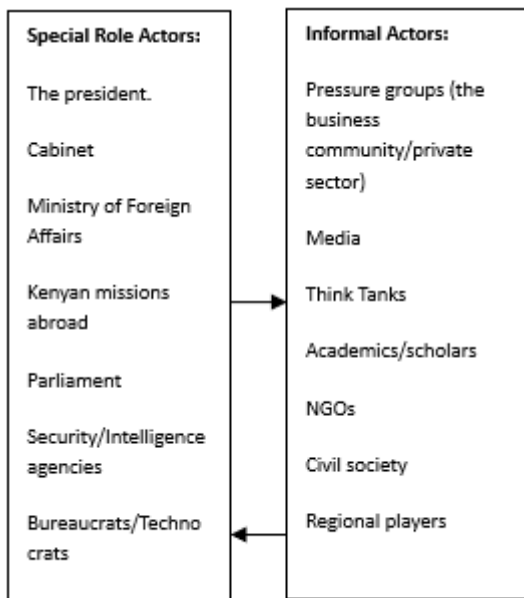


Figure 1.1: Actors in the Foreign Policy Formulation Process on Economic Diplomacy in Kenya

Source: Field data

Figure 1.1 above shows a breakdown of the foreign policy formulation actors broken down into two: special role actors and informal actors. The special role actors play a direct role in their contribution. The President for instance is regarded as the chief diplomat and as head of state and head of government he directs the state’s foreign policy. This mandate is delegated to the MFA for coordination purposes. The Ministry serves as the headquarters for the Kenyan missions abroad which are vital in the formulation as well as implementation of foreign policy. Other special role actors include Parliament which mainly plays an oversight role and also acts as a critical player through the defence and foreign relations committee. The findings also point towards government bureaucrats from the relevant line ministries playing vital roles on pertinent issues that touch on their respective ministries and state departments.

From these findings, it is notable there is immense scholarly consensus as to the trajectory of Kenya’s foreign policy formulation. Nzomo (2016) underscores the role that the Presidency for instance plays in foreign policy formulation. As the state’s chief diplomat, the Kenyan President plays a big role in foreign policy matters. Kaburu (2020) for instances asserts the Kenyan President’s dominance of all decision making pertaining to foreign policy matters. The pro-democracy political changes that culminated to a return to multi-party democracy also ushered the prominent role of parliament as an oversight institution in all public interest matters.

The departure from a single party state introduced divergent alternative voices that could articulate themselves concerning certain issues that affect the general public. This includes foreign policy matters. Kibati (2016) stresses on the prominent role that the security/ intelligence agencies have played towards foreign policy formulation. This emanates from their central role of information gathering which has remained crucial to a state. Successive intelligence agencies from the Special Branch to the current National Intelligence Service (NIS) have remained a crucial source of information to the President. The findings show, with regard to the informal actors, 82.92% of the respondents had been involved either individually or through their organizations in foreign policy formulation processes on economic diplomacy. The table below presents the roles that these respondents took part in and classified them into two categories; active and passive roles:

Table 1.1: Informal Actors Involvement in Foreign Policy Formulation on Economic Diplomacy

Categories of Stakeholder Roles Played by Informal Actors	
Active Roles:	
i.	Participation in private sector presidential round table/consultation forums
ii.	Public participation sub-committee membership on foreign policy
iii.	Review of the draft Kenya foreign policy
Passive Roles:	
i.	Public participation engagement meetings on Kenya’s foreign policy
ii.	Participation in stakeholder sensitization forum on Kenya’s foreign policy
iii.	Preparation of expert views on Kenya’s foreign policy

Source: Field data

Notably, one of the active roles played particularly by non-state players in private sector is that of participating in the presidential round tables/consultation forums with the private sector where members have had an opportunity to give their contributions often times through memoranda presented to the MFA officials present. These point to the input that private sector actors play in foreign policy formulation. The second category of active roles touches on participation in a public participation sub-committee on foreign policy where the main involvement came from respondents from private sector and academia. To the third sub-category on active roles of the review of the draft Kenya foreign policy, the finding indicated that only one person from academia participated in review of a draft policy. It remains unclear from the findings the point of the conduct of the review and whether the review input was incorporated in the final foreign policy.

The study found among the passive roles that informal actors play the main roles centered on participating in public

participation engagement meetings and also stakeholder sensitization forums on Kenya's foreign policy. The study found that there is an organized structured process of engaging key stakeholders. This however cannot lead to a determination of the extent of the input that these stakeholders made to the eventual outcome of the foreign policy. Similarly, the study also categorizes the preparation of expert views on Kenya's foreign policy as a passive role in the absence of details as to whether these expert views had an input towards the current foreign policy or whether these were made for academic purposes since the demographic details indicate the respondents in this sub-category were from academia.

From a constructivist perspective, the concept of national interests is viewed as being constructed by the shared ideas of the various actors on what constitutes an agreeable conception of the national interests. This indicates an attempt to bring the various perspectives onboard to have them deliberated on before arrival at what a majority of the actors if not all would agree represents an aggregate of their interests. A state like Kenya is therefore guided in its foreign policy and its formulation thereof by the national interests. Kenya's economic interests within the EAC region cut across the major sectors of Kenya's economy that need articulation well enough so that Kenyan diplomats in the region specifically address those specific economic interests through their missions there.

Constructivism has proved predictive in this study by pinpointing to the significance of the multiplicity of actors that are involved in Kenya's foreign policy formulation on her economic diplomacy. This enhances the perception of national economic interests as a critical component towards the development of the identity that the state wishes to forge in the EAC region. All this aid in the understanding of Kenya's foreign policy environment as a construct that is informed by the regional environment that her economic diplomacy is focused on with regard to the EAC region. This is critical towards an extension of the applicability of constructivism in analyzing the foreign policy formulation environment that states consider while carrying out their inter-state relations particularly from an economic diplomacy perspective.

CONCLUSION

The Foreign Policy Framework 2014 asserts that Kenya's economic development is inextricably tied to that of the EAC region. Kenya has pursued economic diplomacy as the most significant component of her foreign policy pillar. This paper highlighted the key guiding principles that informed Kenya's foreign policy formulation, the foreign policy formulation stages and the key actors in the process. This paper makes three recommendations towards enhancing foreign policy formulation on economic diplomacy. First, the need enhance participation of the non-state actor players towards the policy formulation. It is notable that whereas a structured process of engaging the private sector exists under the auspices of a presidential roundtable with representatives of the private sector, similar avenues are lacking for other informal players. Similar mechanisms can be put in place for the academics, think tanks, NGOs, CSOs, the media and an array of regional players. Secondly, it is recommend that the MFA through its EAC diplomatic missions work towards enhancing collaborations with organizations and non-state players who have diverse economic interests in Kenya and the region. This can accentuate learning from different stakeholders as per Karl Popper's piecemeal social engineering towards enhancing policy responses. Finally, the paper recommends that the Kenyan government takes serious measures aimed at

enhancing as well strengthening economic diplomacy both from foreign policy formulation and a training and capacity building perspective. Greater effort is required to be expended towards the training of Kenyan diplomats and other non-diplomatic players involved in economic diplomacy.

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