BRIDGING HORIZONS - ANALYZING EAST AFRICA'S ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY WITH THE MIDDLE EAST

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Introduction

A key field of study for comprehending the broader ramifications of international relations and economic development is the relationship between East Africa and the Middle East in the context of economic diplomacy. The goal of this literature review is to examine the strategic dynamics of economic diplomacy between these two regions, elucidate the unique advantages and difficulties that define their interactions, and shed light on the relationships' long-term effects on East Africa and the Middle East. The findings will add to a more comprehensive discourse on international relations by emphasizing the role that economic diplomacy plays in advancing geopolitical stability and sustainable development in a world that is becoming more interconnected by the day.

1.0 SIGNIFICANCE AND OBJECTIVE OF THIS LITERATURE

Despite growing interactions, the depth, equity, and sustainability of East Africa–Middle East economic ties remain underexplored. Key questions that need to be further explored include: Are these relations fostering balanced, long-term benefits for both regions, or do they risk becoming one-sided, risky, transactional, or extractive? A clearer understanding of this relationship will help shape more informed foreign policy, guide future economic strategies and economic diplomacy negotiations, and ensure that the partnerships are not only strategic but sustainable and inclusive. The paper aims to provide some clarity and guidance.

This research is even more significant due to the existing Literature Gaps:

1. **Lack of Empirical Case Studies:** Few in-depth country-specific analyses (e.g., Kenya vs. Ethiopia vs. Tanzania).
2. **Underexplored South-South Relations:** Most scholarship frames the relationship within North-South paradigms rather than South-South cooperation.
3. **Missing Perspectives from East Africa:** Much of the literature is authored from Middle East or Western viewpoints; local agency and priorities are underrepresented.
4. **Limited Analysis of Long-term Sustainability:** Insufficient exploration of whether these alliances will evolve into strategic partnerships or remain transactional.

Key Objectives:

1. To examine and analyze the current state, trends and key economic drivers motivating the economic relations between East Africa and the Middle East and identify key sectors driving current economic diplomacy (e.g., agriculture, energy, infrastructure, finance, tourism/culture).
2. To assess the strategic interests and policy approaches of East African governments toward the Middle East.
3. To analyze the Middle East's internal interests and investments in East Africa.
4. To assess whether current diplomatic engagements result in mutual benefits or asymmetrical dependencies? And propose policy recommendations for strengthening mutually beneficial economic diplomacy and equitable economic cooperation.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework overview underpinning this literature:

1. Neorealism (Structural Realism)

This research falls under the Neorealism framework as it emphasizes the role of power and national interest in foreign policy (Stanford, 2023). There is the assumption that States are rational actors operating in an anarchic international system; applied here to explain how East African states and Middle East countries prioritize survival, autonomy, and regional leverage. Economic diplomacy may be seen as instrumental to balance regional powers or counter external threats.

2. Liberal Institutionalism

It also falls under the cushions of Liberal Institutionalism that highlights the importance of cooperation, institutions, and economic interdependence. It suggests that East Africa–Middle East ties may emerge from mutual gains, trade agreements, and shared development goals. Contrasts neorealism by emphasizing long-term collaboration over short-term power calculations.

3. South–South Cooperation Theory

Frames the relationship as a form of solidarity and mutual development among Global South nations. Here it moves beyond dependency theory to emphasize horizontal partnerships, not vertical hierarchies.

This paper positions side by side the realist and liberal logics to explore whether alliances are strategic (power-centric) or cooperative (development-centric). By introducing South–South Cooperation, it fills a gap in International Relations theory application that often ignores East–East or South–South alliances. This multi-theoretical lens helps examine both motivations and outcomes of economic diplomacy in a more nuanced way.

3.0 BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the past, the Red Sea made it easier for people to travel between the Gulf states and the coast of East Africa and to trade products. With its advantageous location, Eastern Oman in particular was crucial in bridging the gap between the two areas. The maritime route over the sea made it easier for people, ideas, and things to move around, which helped to shape trade, culture, and beliefs (Ayú, M. M., & Ylönen, A. 2022). The information, language, identity, and artistic styles that are currently present along the Swahili Coast were further created and transmitted as a result of this trade. As the Middle East states work to improve ties with Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, and Djibouti by leveraging a shared cultural heritage, this enduring historical connection continues to shape their foreign policy.

3.1 The Natural Evolution of Economic Diplomacy in the Two Regions

Due in large part to its proximity to the Middle East, East Africa—which includes countries like Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Uganda, and Tanzania—has found itself at a crossroads of economic potential more and more. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have made significant investments in East African countries due to the availability of financial opportunities, market expansion, and the need for reliable food supply. According to academics like M. A. Mohammed (2022), this investment is not just one-sided; it frequently involves capacity building and technology transfers, which boost local economies.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of economic diplomacy between East Africa and the Middle East in the current global setting. These exchanges take place against the backdrop of shifting political environments, shifting commercial models, and changing climates. Understanding the ramifications of these interactions is crucial, as seen by the decline in traditional western influence and the shift towards diversified alliances. According to the literature, East African nations are increasingly embracing local agency and seeking strategic partnerships that complement their development goals (Hassan, H. A., & Thabet, H., 2018).

The long-term effects of East Africa's economic ties to the Middle East are complex and involve diversification tactics, economic stability, and regional geopolitical dynamics. Growing economic diplomacy between these two regions offers the Middle East a chance to stabilise its economy and strengthen its diversification efforts, as stated by Sun and Zoubir (2015). Due to their historical reliance on oil exports, many Middle East economies are vulnerable to changes in global oil and demand prices. In this regard, economic cooperation with East Africa facilitates diversification by enabling the Middle East states to investigate new markets and investment prospects, particularly in industries like telecommunications, tourism, and agriculture (Van Bergeijk, P. A., 2014).

Furthermore, the development of economic diplomacy in this setting reveals a nuanced story in which historical and cultural ties play an important role. The historical connections, which are frequently based on common religious and cultural beliefs, enable more substantial financial commitments and foster a sophisticated comprehension of shared interests (Murray-Evans, P., 2015). These reports, as examined by Javed, A. (2017), are distinguished by a combination of collaborative development projects, business partnerships, and soft power measures that seek to capitalise on the advantages of both regions.

3.2 Historical Bond

Centuries of trade, migration, and cultural interactions have changed the socioeconomic landscapes of both the East and the Middle East, establishing strong historical linkages between the two regions. These ties have their roots in antiquity, when the Indian Ocean's commerce routes made it easier for people, ideas, and things to travel, resulting in encounters that improved ties between the East African coastal states and a number of Middle East powers. According to the studies, the ancient Swahili city-states, like Kilwa and Mombasa, were important shopping hubs that connected with the interior African communities and built wide-ranging networks with Arab traders, resulting in a blending of cultures, languages, and customs (Ajú, M.A.M, Ylönen, 2022).

During the mediaeval era, the impact of Islam significantly contributed to the strengthening of these connections. The impact of these initial connections is seen in the ongoing religious, cultural, and economic exchanges between East Africa and the Middle East, forming a foundation for present diplomatic relations (Ajú and Ylönen, 2022).

Going to the colonial and postcolonial times, the strategic dynamics changed as Egypt, the Gulf States and other nations of the Middle East expanded their influence in East Africa through soft and hard mechanisms. The political landscape of the Middle East, particularly during the Cold War, significantly influenced the nations of East Africa while sailing for external economic alignments and dependencies. The rise of the Arab oil of the 1970s provided a new impulse for economic diplomacy, with nations from the Middle East that seeking access to markets and African resources, while the East Africa states sought for investments and assistance for development (Ajú, M.A.M, Ylönen, 2022).

In the contemporary context, the interaction between East Africa and Middle East has been influenced by geopolitical dynamics, especially in the light of greater competition for resources and strategic associations. The advent of the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, particularly the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, has led to a new wave of investment and economic collaboration in sectors such as agriculture, tourism, real estate and energy in the nations of East Africa. The interdependence observed in the recent associations reflects a strategic alignment of interests, in which East Africa offers agricultural potential and access to the shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean, while the Middle East provides financial resources and technology transfer as illustrated by Ajú and Ylönen (2022).

The ongoing conflicts, such as the Gaza war, Syrian Civil War and humanitarian crises in Yemen, have provided additional layers of complexity to the diplomatic commitment of East Africa with the Middle East. The East Africa states have had to navigate how to address these diplomatic conflicts while guaranteeing that their own national security and economic interests remain intact. The historical framework outlines a complex network of relationships that facilitates economic diplomacy between East Africa and Middle East. These enduring partnerships are established through a complex interplay of historical legacies, economic incentives, political alliances, and cultural ties. Comprehending this context is crucial for assessing the present strategic dynamics and their ramifications for both areas, as they navigate possibilities and difficulties in an increasingly globalised environment (Ajú and Ylönen, 2022).

4.0 THE PATH TOWARDS ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

Economic diplomacy is a multifaceted concept that includes the use of economic tools to achieve diplomatic purposes, mainly through the promotion of trade, investment and financial cooperation between states (Van Bergeijk, 2014). It is particularly relevant for the nations of East Africa who are browsing their commitment with the Middle East countries, as it allows these states to exploit their unique geographical and economic positions to encourage beneficial bilateral relationships. In the context of the flourishing economic ties of East Africa with the Middle East, economic diplomacy acts as a strategic road to improve commercial flows, attract direct foreign investments and guarantee development assistance.

The countries of East Africa, such as Kenya and Ethiopia, have increasingly recalibrated their foreign policy to incorporate economic diplomacy as a fundamental element of their strategies of international involvement. The rich natural resources of the region, the strategic maritime positions and the flourishing consumer markets align well to the interests of the Middle East economies, which try to diversify their markets and reduce their dependence on traditional partners. For instance, Kenya has undertaken efforts to enhance agricultural exports, whereas Ethiopia has sought to establish itself as a manufacturing centre within the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA), thereby appealing directly to Middle East investments aiming to access local markets (Van Bergeijk, 2014).

The relevance of economic diplomacy is further underlined by the unique demographic and cultural bonds that exist between East Africa and the Middle East, including historical commercial routes and shared religious affiliations. These connections create a favorable environment to promote mutual interests for the benefit of both regions (Van Bergeijk, 2014). However, the effectiveness of economic diplomacy in the context of East Africa is bound by different challenges, including political instability, bureaucratic inefficiencies and infrastructure deficits, which can hinder the correct implementation of commercial agreements and investments.

Countries like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have shown a strong interest in deepening their economic investments in the region, often accompanied by safety partnerships that can sometimes obscure purely economic considerations (Murray-Evans, P., 2015). Ultimately, the strategic dynamics of the economic diplomacy of East Africa with the Middle East are manifested in a delicate balancing act between exploiting development opportunities while navigating during multile challenges. The long-term implications of these interactions could remodel not only the economic landscape of East Africa, but also geopolitical alignments within the Great Middle East, pushing a re-evaluation of long-standing partnerships and global economic flows. These developments underline the importance of continuous research and diplomatic commitment to overcome the barriers and maximize the potential of this evolving economic panorama (Van Bergeijk, 2014).

The commitment to economic diplomacy with the Middle East presents the nations of East Africa with a series of advantages that contribute positively to their socio-economic landscapes. One of the most significant benefits is the influx of foreign direct investments, which was fundamental for economic development in the region. Saleh (2015) suggests that the Middle East countries, in particular the Gulf States, seek investment opportunities in Eastern Africa due to the abundant natural resources of the region, the strategic geographical positioning and potential markets. For example, countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya have obtained substantial investments in sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure and energy, which have catalyzed not only economic growth but also the creation of jobs and the transfer of technology.

As highlighted by Saleh (2015), the increase in the demand for assets of oriental Africa, from coffee and spices to raw materials, has an increase in export revenues, thus contributing to an improvement in trade balance. This exchange not only improves foreign earnings, but also diversifies the commercial partners of East Africa, reducing dependence on traditional western markets.

In addition, the strategic employment relationships developed through economic diplomacy allow the nations of East Africa to exploit Middle East resources, skills and financial capital. For example, initiatives such as Agenda 2063 of the African Union align well with the interests of the Middle East in the investment in areas such as infrastructure and human capital. With the adoption of technology and innovations from the Middle East countries, East Africa is to improve its efficiency in various sectors, thus accelerating development. This technological collaboration, as noted in the literature, is crucial in the sectors ready for exponential growth, such as renewable energy, which aligns with the sustainability objectives of both regions.

According to Hassan and Thabet (2018), the Gulf States are increasingly trying to diversify their energy sources and guarantee long-term supply chains, given the volatile nature of the global oil markets. The collaboration with the nations of East Africa, which show a substantial unspoken mineral wealth, facilitates this strategic diversification.

Moreover, the growing request for food safety in the Middle East has transformed investments to agricultural initiatives in East Africa. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have recognized Eastern Africa as a potential bread basket thanks to its fertile land and favorable climatic conditions. The current drought conditions in different countries of the Middle East have exacerbated the food deficiency, pushing a move to agricultural investments abroad (Hassan and Thabet, 2018). By promoting agricultural partnerships, the Gulf States can mitigate their risks for food safety, contributing to the economic development of the nations of East Africa.

In addition to accessing resources, the Middle Eastern countries benefit from the growing market opportunities for East Africa. The rapid growth and urbanization of the population in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania are creating new consumption markets, which attract Gulf investments in sectors such as telecommunications, retail and finance (Maher, R., 2016).

These investments not only promise substantial returns, but also help to encourage commercial relations that improve economic interdependence between the regions. The influx of investment capitals from the Gulf resonates with the aspirations of the development of East Africa, allowing the GCC countries simultaneously to guarantee its economic imprint in an increasingly competitive global panorama.

4.1 Geopolitical Dynamics

The geopolitical dynamics underlying the relationships of East Africa with the Middle East states also offer strategic benefits. With the rise of political instability and security concerns within some nations of East Africa and Middle-East, improved bilateral ties with the Middle East countries can facilitate cooperation for safety, in particular in anti-terrorism and maritime safety (Farouk, Y., 2019). This partnership acts as a medium for East Africa to strengthen its security apparatus while ensuring a more stable climate for foreign investments.

The strategic mechanics of economic diplomacy are further complicated by the intricate political landscape of the Middle East, where varying levels of geopolitical tension and war can hinder bilateral cooperation. The rivalry among regional powers, especially in the Horn of Africa, can impact the efficacy of Eastern Africa's economic diplomacy engagements.

Geopolitically, partnerships with the nations of East Africa allow the Gulf States to expand their influence in a region historically dominated by western powers. In light of this moving global alliances, countries like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are leveraging their economic influence to establish strategic alliances that can extend their geopolitical reach. Economic diplomacy in East Africa is strategically connected with both commercial interests and the broader objectives of the Gulf States, particularly the containment of Iranian influence and collaboration in counter-terrorism (Mathebula, N., & Zreik, M., 2024).

Moreover, Javed (2017) underscores that the presence of entrenched alliances and shifting loyalties among Middle East nations engenders unpredictable circumstances that influence diplomatic relations. The impact of external actors, especially from Asia and the West, intensifies these tensions, resulting in a complicated web of affiliations that frequently places East African governments in a vulnerable position. The alignment of the Gulf States with certain East African nations seeking investments and resources might be viewed as a strategy of soft power development aimed at countering the perceived dangers posed by other regional states. Nevertheless, this may also result in reciprocal suspicions and a perception of policy alignment. The influx of refugees resulting from such conflicts has exercised tensions about the economies of East Africa, which requires additional resources to manage the social and economic implications of the housing of displaced populations (Mathebula, N., & Zreik, M., 2024).

The rise of non-state actors, such as militant organisations, has significantly transformed the security landscape of the Middle East, resulting in consequences for East Africa.

The indirect consequences of terrorism might undermine trade channels and deter investment, essential elements of East Africa's economic diplomacy (Mathebula, N., & Zreik, M., 2024). This has led to a proactive stance by the governments of East Africa, aiming to alleviate concerns through enhanced security collaboration with Middle East nations while addressing the sensitivities arising from the diverse interests of regional powers.

Analysing the strategic dynamics of East Africa's economic diplomacy reveals that addressing the problems posed by Middle East crises necessitates a nuanced equilibrium. The competitive interests of regional powers necessitate a sophisticated diplomatic strategy, wherein East African nations must define their strategic priorities and remain attuned to the intricacies of regional policy. These dynamics highlight the significance of both cooperative initiatives and conflict techniques in enduring connections between Middle East and East Africa. Consequently, the handling of these regional conflicts is essential for shaping the future of economic diplomacy between the two areas, influencing not just immediate economic outcomes but also overarching geopolitical alliances and regional stability.

4.2 Importance of Mapping the Main Stakeholders and Players

By analyzing the strategic dynamics of economic diplomacy between East Africa and the Middle East, it is imperative to identify the main actors involved and their respective strategic objectives. This interaction is shaped by a constellation of national and non-state actors, including governments, regional organizations and stakeholders in the private sector.

Countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda are at the forefront of economic diplomacy in East Africa. Kenya, a leading economy within the East African Community (EAC) and a key participant in regional trade, aims to enhance its market access and draw foreign direct investments (FDI) from Middle East nations (Maher, R., 2016). Kenya's strategic objectives encompass enhancing its infrastructure, particularly within the transport and energy sectors, hence enabling economic routes and augmenting regional connectivity.

Ethiopia presents a distinctive situation owing to its landlocked location; its economic diplomacy seeks to assimilate into the financial resources of the Middle East through diverse investment collaborations and prospects, particularly in agriculture and industry. The Ethiopian government has diligently cultivated its connections with the Gulf States, underscored by the substantial influx of the Ethiopian diaspora in the Middle East, which is crucial in bolstering the nation's economic progress (Maher, R., 2016).

From the perspective of the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are significant actors in the economic diplomacy of East Africa. The United Arab Emirates has been notably proactive in positioning itself as a regional hub for commerce and investment, driven by its objectives of food security and energy diversification. Emirati investments in East African infrastructure, exemplified by the Sudan port and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, demonstrate the strategic aim of enhancing supply chains and optimising logistics networks that leverage regional trade (Mathebula, N., & Zreik, M., 2024)

Saudi Arabia, with its Vision 2030 initiative, recognizes the potential of East Africa as a complement to its efforts of economic diversification. The kingdom has positioned itself to cultivate stronger links with the nations of East Africa, seeking agricultural partnerships to meet its challenges of food security and channel investments in sectors such as health care and education (Mathebula, N., & Zreik, M., 2024). These economic commitments are not only based on trade; they also reflect a broader geopolitical strategy to counter the influence of rival powers in the region, in particular in the context of regional stability.

In addition to government actors, multinational companies and regional companies also play a central role in training economic diplomacy. East Africa and Middle East companies are increasingly involved in joint ventures and cross-border investments, increasing the economic destinies of these regions more. The presence of non-state actors, such as development agencies and international financial institutions, also adds another layer of complexity in the diplomatic environment, influencing the terms and sustainability of economic commitments (Garlick, J., & Havlová, R., 2020).

These principal actors function within a dynamic framework, where their strategic goals frequently align with common regional interests, yet also confront rival national agendas. The resulting environment illustrates a compelling narrative of collaboration, competitiveness, and interdependence, which will be pivotal in shaping the outcomes of Eastern African economic diplomacy with the Middle East.
The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), initiated by China in 2013, is fundamentally transforming the landscape of economic diplomacy between East Africa and the Middle East. This ambitious infrastructural and economic development strategy aims to enhance global trade routes and has profound ramifications for inter-regional dynamics historically characterised by Western hegemony and post-colonial relationships. Sun, D. (2021) notes that China's engagement in both regions demonstrates a strategic objective to foster bilateral economic connections that leverage shared resource requirements and geopolitical advantages.

Infrastructure projects, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, which connects Ethiopia with outlet to the sea to the port of Djibouti, paves the way in which Chinese investments are promoting connectivity and improving the economic competitiveness of East Africa (Sun, D., 2021). At the same time, these projects are fundamental for Middle Eastern economies in search of different supply chains and new markets within the African continent.

In evaluating long-term implications, it is essential to consider not only the economic benefits, but also the socio-political ramifications of the greater Chinese involvement. Hoh (2019) indicates the potential for changes in governance and local responsibility, in which infrastructure projects based on Chinese investments may not align with the needs and aspirations of local populations. This divergence can lead to public dissent and, ultimately, to destabilization in East Africa and its relations with the Middle East states. As the investment models evolve, it will be necessary for both regions to recall their development strategies to guarantee sustainable partnerships that protect themselves from the pitfalls associated with addiction and geopolitical rivalry.

4.3 Social and Governance Dynamics

In terms of social dynamics, the Gulf countries contribute to the development of the ability and development of human capital in EastAfrica through investments in education and health sectors. The educational partnerships that lead to the creation of universities and professional training institutes in countries such as Somalia and Sudan facilitate the transfer of knowledge by improving the series of skills of local populations (UNESCO, 2020). This investment in human capital not only benefits local economies, but also creates a favorable environment for supported diplomatic relationships, since the start-up generated by the capacity construction initiatives promotes mutual understanding and cultural exchanges.

The governance and regulatory structures underpinning economic diplomacy are essential in shaping the interactions and connections between East Africa and the Middle East. According to Mathebula and Zreik (2024), solid government structures facilitate transparent, responsible and efficient diplomatic commitments, while inconsistencies and deficiencies in regulatory frameworks can lead to complications and deteriorated relationships. In this context, it is essential to understand the complexities of the governance of East Africa, especially since many countries in the region deal with systemic problems such as corruption, political instability and inappropriate institutional capacity.

The regulatory framework of East Africa is defined by a blend of formal and informal procedures that impact its economic diplomacy. Despite advancements in governance norms among some East African nations, as seen by the formation of regional entities like the East African Community (EAC), fundamental difficulties remain. The inadequate enforcement of some laws, ineffective bureaucracies, and lack of transparency can obstruct business discussions and restrict foreign investment opportunities in Middle East states (Hassan, H. A., & Thabet, H., 2018). Moreover, uneven regulations between nations may engender anxiety among investors in the Middle East, so impacting the overall economic engagement across these regions.

Conversely, governance issues in East Africa can strategically impact their economic diplomacy with Middle East nations. Certain scholars contend that nations experiencing governance challenges frequently rely on foreign affiliations to bolster their economies, rendering them especially vulnerable to economic diplomacy efforts (Hassan, H. A., & Thabet, H., 2018). The Middle East states, acknowledging the enormous prospects in East Africa, may provide financial aid, investments, or commercial deals that incentivise political stability and effective governance. This tendency can result in dependence on external actors, complicating governance's autonomy and integrity.

In addition, the role of civil society and local governance structures in East Africa is essential to shape the perceptions of economic diplomacy with the countries of the Middle East. As highlighted by Kiyaga (2021), a committed civil society can advocate best governance practices and more equitable economic agreements. However, in the regions (applies to both East Africa and Middle-East) where civil organizations are marginalized or suppressed, there may be a mismatch in the expectations between leaders and local populations with respect to the benefits of such international associations. This misalignment can feed the dissent and resistance to the economic initiatives promoted by the investments of the Middle East, which complicates the diplomatic panorama.

Legal uncertainties around property rights, taxation, and profit repatriation may dissuade investors in the Middle East, resulting in missed economic prospects (Hassan, H. A., & Thabet, H., 2018). Consequently, establishing a unified legal framework in East African nations would be advantageous for attracting investments from the Middle East and for presenting the region as a united economic bloc.

4.4 Social and Environmental Implications

Despite the apparent benefits, the relationship is full of challenges. Garlick and Havlová (2020) identify disparities in power dynamics among regions, noting that Middle East countries frequently possess greater bargaining advantages due to their significant economic power. The existing power imbalance may result in exploitative practices, wherein the advantages of investments and partnerships disproportionately favour Middle East entities, rather than fostering equitable economic growth in East Africa. Geopolitical factors, such as safety issues and the influence of external powers, complicate these interactions.

Garlick and Havlová (2020) assert that economic projects, especially those centered on large-scale resource extraction and agricultural investments, can substantially transform the environmental landscape. The extensive utilization of water resources in initiatives like large-scale irrigation for export crops illustrates a scenario where local communities experience diminished access to vital water supplies, underscoring the delicate equilibrium between development and environmental stewardship. Simultaneously, local populations in both regions may undergo social upheavals as a consequence of these economic initiatives. And the influx of foreign investments may result in the displacement of communities, particularly in regions allocated for industrial agriculture or urban development.

In East Africa, this has manifested itself in conflicts on the rights of the earth, since foreign entities acquire substantial sections of land often without consulting the indigenous communities or respecting traditional systems for the possession of the earth (Garlick and Havlová, 2020). These dynamics are further complicated by governance issues, in which weak regulatory framework cannot protect the rights of local populations, with consequent exacerbated inequalities and social tensions.

The cultural implications of economic diplomacy initiatives must be acknowledged. The introduction of foreign commercial practices, work regulations, and market strategies may disrupt local customs and social structures. The work practices of Middle East companies in East Africa frequently differ from local expectations concerning the treatment and rights of workers, resulting in friction between foreign employers and local workforces (Hassan, 2022). The cultural exchange resulting from enhanced economic ties may lead to hybridised social identities, which, while enriching, can also generate tensions between traditional lifestyles and emerging influences.

The potential for social disorders associated with economic disparities warrants attention. The wealth generated by these economic commitments often concentrates among a privileged few, which can exacerbate disparities within companies and potentially lead to conflict. The discourse surrounding these investments frequently characterises them as a solution to economic issues; however, the reality may result in intensified poverty for those marginalised by shifts in their socio-economic environment (Hassan, H. A., & Thabet, H., 2018).

Moreover, regional disparities in capacity and infrastructure have significant challenges to achieve equitable growth. Certain nations in East Africa possess limited negotiation power within regional diplomatic frameworks, encountering difficulties in securing favourable terms of trade or investment, as discussed by Hassan & Thabet (2018). The consequences of this unequal capacity may endure across generations, perpetuating cycles of inequality and obstructing collaborative advancement.

Economic diplomacy between East Africa and the Middle East presents opportunities; however, it necessitates a global framework prioritising ethical investment practices, environmental sustainability, and social equity. The acknowledgement of social and environmental issues in economic diplomacy efforts will enhance sustainable relationships between the two regions and protect the interests of local communities.

The flourishing economic diplomacy between East Africa and Middle East requires a nuanced examination of environmental and social considerations that directly affect local communities in both regions. The initiatives driven by this diplomatic commitment, while promising in their economic potential, often bring faceted social and environmental branches that guarantee careful examination. This indicates a pressing necessity for political managers to integrate social and environmental evaluations into the planning and execution of economic projects, ensuring that the advantages of diplomacy are equitably distributed among all stakeholders.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The regulatory framework in East Africa comprises both formal and informal mechanisms that shape its economic diplomacy. Despite advancements in governance practices among several East African nations, fundamental challenges remain. The inadequate enforcement of certain laws and the absence of consistent transparency may obstruct commercial negotiations and restrict foreign investment opportunities in Middle East states. Moreover, inconsistent policies across countries may generate uncertainty among investors in the Middle East, thereby impacting the overall economic commitment between these regions.

Legal frameworks significantly influence the structure of East Africa's economic diplomacy. Establishing a harmonized legal framework in East African nations would facilitate investment attraction from the Middle East and present the region as a unified economic bloc.

The complex interplay among governance, regulatory frameworks, and economic diplomacy in East Africa significantly affects relations with the Middle East. The region faces distinct challenges, and the strategic elections regarding governance and regulation will have substantial long-term effects on the economic relationships among these areas, influencing overall development outcomes and geopolitical alignments. The fluid dynamics of these relationships necessitate ongoing examination to guarantee equitable distribution of the benefits of economic diplomacy, while also addressing the governance challenges that these initiatives may compromise.

CONCLUSION

The long-term economic implications of the diplomatic and economic relations of East Africa with the Middle East are multifaceted, with significant ramifications for labor migration, economic dependence and sustainable growth. While interactions can generate substantial benefits, they also pose considerable challenges that the region should navigate. For the nations of East Africa, this may imply first taking advantage of associations to improve not only trade but also the transfer of knowledge and technological exchange. Putting a balance between the harvest of immediate economic benefits and promoting sustainable growth will be essential for future stability and development of East Africa nations in the context of their relations with the counterparts of the Middle East.

Moreover, the strategic commitment between the nations of East Africa and the Middle East countries is fortified through a multifaceted economic diplomacy that exploits investments and trade, mitigates security challenges, cultivates cultural bonds and promotes development growth. This synergy suggests potential paths for economic cooperation and integration supported, positioning both regions for long-term economic resilience and prosperity.

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