

GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE LAPSET CORRIDOR AS A TRANSNATIONAL PROJECT

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Abstract: *Transnational development initiatives have emerged as important instruments through which states advance national interests by promoting regional integration, economic competitiveness, and geopolitical influence. The LAPSET Corridor is a strategic Kenyan development initiative and flagship project of the country's grand strategy. This article assessed the geopolitical implications of the LAPSET Corridor as a transnational project. The study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining cross-sectional survey and explanatory research approaches. The target population comprised LAPSET Corridor Development Authority officials, Ministry of Transport officials, investors, foreign partner governments, international organisations, private-sector stakeholders, civil society organisations, and communities along the corridor. Purposive and snowball sampling yielded 384 respondents. Primary data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides, while secondary data were obtained from project reports, policy documents, agreements, master plans, budgetary documents, media reports, and academic literature. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings indicate that the LAPSET Corridor is perceived as a significant geopolitical instrument capable of strengthening Kenya's regional influence, enhancing relations with Ethiopia and South Sudan, and promoting economic integration in the Horn of Africa. However, concerns regarding unequal distribution of benefits, land disputes, environmental challenges, limited local socioeconomic development, foreign influence, regional instability, and sociopolitical exclusion were identified. The study concludes that LAPSET is broadly aligned with Kenya's Vision 2030 and aspirations for regional integration, economic transformation, and infrastructural modernisation. The study recommends establishing an institutional task force to harmonise strategic infrastructure policies with regional and international commitments and safeguard Kenya's strategic interests in foreign investments.*

Keywords: *East African Community, Regional Integration, Geopolitical, Kenya's Grand Strategy, Transport Corridor, Domestic Investors, LAPSET*

INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure has become a key instrument of economic transformation, geopolitical influence and regional integration in the 21st century. Countries now use infrastructure not only for domestic development but also as part of a broader strategy to shape cross-border economic flows, strengthen security and expand diplomatic influence (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). Kenya's LAPSSET Corridor is the country's largest and most geopolitically significant infrastructure project to date.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a strategic infrastructure initiative launched in 2013 by China to enhance economic development and regional cooperation, and to connect Asia, Europe and Africa, is the most high-profile example. The BRI plays a pivotal role in China's foreign policy, enabling it to facilitate trade routes, secure access to essential resources, and expand geopolitical reach and influence through ports, railways and energy pipelines (Hillman, 2020). According to Wolf (2019), CPEC shows how infrastructure development can slash transit times and deepen bilateral ties while delivering strategic depth through the circumvention of maritime choke points. LAPSSET is similar to CPEC in that, while its objective is economic development, it also enhances the host country's power, as CPEC does.

In Europe, the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) demonstrates how harmonised cross-border infrastructure enhances regional integration and economic competitiveness. TEN-T corridors that cross several EU member states allow for the transport and the harmonisation of a range of rules, lowering transaction costs and enhancing the internal market of the EU. Like LAPSSET, TEN-T was established to mitigate imbalances in regional connectivity. It also reflects the EU's soft power strategy, which seeks to use infrastructure to promote unity and cohesion rather than hard geopolitics.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), now the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), has made extensive investments to facilitate trade in North America. These investments include the development of cross-border rail networks and motorways linking Mexico, the United States and Canada. According to Hufbauer and Schott (2005), these projects helped reduce logistics costs and reorganise supply chains in the region. The case of NAFTA-related infrastructure exemplifies how strategic corridors can encourage economic integration and interdependence, but this process can be jeopardised by politics, as with the turn towards U.S. protectionism.

The Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) is another example of a transnational initiative aimed at reducing regional disparities and strengthening the country's foothold in the Asia-Pacific region. NAIF finances initiatives that enhance trade and investment in remote locations, often in collaboration with Asia-Pacific neighbours (Australian Government, 2019). These initiatives are designed to balance economic aspirations with security threats in contested maritime areas.

Africa offers examples of strategic infrastructure corridors. The completion of the Tanzania–Zambia railway (TAZARA) in the 1970s, with Chinese support, gave Zambia an alternative export route that bypassed apartheid, South Africa. This case study illustrates how infrastructure can reshape dependencies (Monson, 2009). The Maputo Development Corridor between South Africa and Mozambique highlights the capacity of public–private partnerships to re-energise regional trade and investment (Curtis, 2017). LAPSET seeks something similar: to promote development and alter spatial power relations.

Transnational development initiatives have become essential instruments for pursuing national objectives. This is especially true for states in the Global South. These states seek to strengthen regional integration, enhance economic competitiveness and increase geopolitical influence. One such strategic project is Kenya's LAPSET Corridor. LAPSET is the most ambitious infrastructure project in Eastern Africa. It is more than a development project; it is an integral element of Kenya's grand strategy. Grand strategy refers to a coherent set of national objectives pursued through diplomatic, economic and security instruments to shape the regional order in Kenya's favour (Kaplan, 2017; Mwangi, 2019).

Kenya's geographical position across the Indian Ocean, the Horn of Africa, and East Africa corridors places it in a natural position for transnational infrastructure. Kenya initiated the LAPSET Corridor in March 2012 to create an integrated transportation corridor linking Kenya with Ethiopia and South Sudan through roads, rail, pipelines, ports and tourist resort cities. The LAPSET Corridor project supports the overall national development strategy and divided into two phases, both phases of Vision 2030 are intended to develop Kenya as a regional logistics hub and provide us greater negotiating power as a member of the EAC, IGAD and AfCFTA.

Due to the project's broad scope and cross-border nature it is not only seen as an important development initiative but also part of Kenya's Grand Strategy. As major states expand their spheres of influence through infrastructure diplomacy, exemplified by the BRI, Kenya's strategic use of LAPSET may redefine its regional role (Mugambi, 2021). The LAPSET Corridor is not only an economic project but also a tool of statecraft. Kenya seeks to reduce its dependence on the busy Mombasa–Northern Corridor by linking Ethiopia and South Sudan to the Indian Ocean via Lamu Port. Furthermore, by positioning itself as a gateway to maritime trade for the Horn of Africa, the country will promote greater regional integration within the framework of the AU Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA (African Union Commission, 2015).

Kenya's Grand Strategy

According to Brands (2014), a grand strategy is the coordination of all the elements of national power – military, economic, diplomatic and informational – towards the attainment of long-term objectives. Grand strategy literally means a plan that is holistic, complete and vast in all ways. Grand strategy is an elevated national strategy, formulated and implemented at the highest level of a state, mainly to advance, protect and further state interests. When national interests are well secured, they may provide the basis for external projection in international relations and foreign

policy. The core of grand strategy is a broad vision to achieve and maintain long-term goals by overcoming obstacles and threats to national interest (Munene, 2018).

According to sources from 2020 and 2021, Kenya has no official Grand Strategy. Nonetheless, its articulation of a grand strategy is reflected in Kenya Vision 2030. While other national development blueprints exist, such as the Kenya Foreign Policy of 2025 (Sessional Paper No. 01 of 2025 on The Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kenya), the National Spatial Plan 2015-2025, and the Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA), Kenya Vision 2030 remains the long-term development blueprint for the country. It stems from the realisation of a society that every Kenyan would wish to see in the year 2030 (GoK, 2022). Kenya Vision 2030 was established to create a globally competitive and prosperous country with a high quality of life by the year 2030. Implemented by a Delivery Board and Secretariat, the Vision aims to transform the nation into a clean, secure, newly industrialising, middle-income country that offers all citizens a high quality of life.

The three most important pillars driving the envisaged transformation by 2030 are the economic, social, and political pillars (GoK, 2022). These pillars are anchored in macroeconomic stability, continuity of governance reforms, and enhanced equity and wealth-creation opportunities for the poor. The LAPSSET project was first conceived in 1975 but did not progress. The idea was again developed by the Kenyan government in the late 1970s but was dropped amid financial constraints. It was later in 2009 revived, fully developed, and included in Kenya Vision 2030. Full implementation of the LAPSSET project began in March 2012, following the launch by the governments of Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan. The Kenyan portion of the LAPSSET project is being implemented within the Second Medium-Term Plan of Vision 2030. Other transnational projects in the region involving Kenya, such as SGR, the Northern Corridor and East African Pipeline Project (EAPP), are either planned or already being implemented. However, this study focuses on LAPSSET as the only transnational project embedded from the outset in Kenya Vision 2030, which is Kenya's embodiment of a grand strategy.

Transnational development projects like LAPSSET are now helping to operationalise this strategy. As with CPEC in Asia or TEN-T in Europe, multi-level governance, regional cooperation, and security management will be key to LAPSSET. Like NAFTA and TAZARA, its long-term viability will depend on political will, economic viability, and the capacity to manage cross-border interests without compromising sovereignty.

By enhancing regional economic interdependence, alleviating logistical bottlenecks, and opening strategic access to the Indian Ocean, the LAPSSET Corridor seeks to reposition Kenya as a regional gateway and logistics hub. Additionally, the scheme is a response to the national challenges of underdevelopment in the marginalised north and external pressures from competing regional powers such as Ethiopia and Tanzania (Ochieng, 2021). With the involvement of major global powerhouses, this raises questions around whether or not Kenya has the capacity and strategic autonomy to manage a project as complex and transnational in scope as LAPSSET.

Despite its potential, the LAPSSET has faced numerous delays, primarily due to four main challenges: financial constraints, political issues (both at the national and regional levels), security challenges, and disputes regarding social and environmental issues (Mugambi 2021). Consequently, there is limited understanding of whether and how LAPSSET can be an effective tool in Kenya's grand strategy for national development, regional integration and securing geopolitical influence amid competing transnational interests. The study therefore sought to address these gaps by providing a strategic assessment of LAPSSET, its geopolitical implications, coordination mechanisms and alignment with Kenya's broader grand strategy.

METHODOLOGY

This research paper adopted a descriptive-explanatory design, which combines the strengths of both descriptive and explanatory approaches to document existing conditions and enhance understanding of the underlying dynamics that shape them. Within this design, the assessment and characterisation of stakeholder perceptions, institutional practices, governance structures and coordination mechanisms surrounding the LAPSSET Corridor were undertaken. The descriptive component enabled the systematic collection of qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of respondents, including government officials, investors, civil society actors and community members, thereby capturing how these actors perceive the socio-economic, geopolitical and policy dimensions of the corridor. The explanatory component helped interpret patterns, relationships and the underlying factors affecting LAPSSET's implementation, particularly governance effectiveness, institutional coordination and alignment with Kenya's grand strategy. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, enabling the study not only to describe but also to offer analytical explanations of observed trends without interfering with the phenomena. Given that this study sought not only to describe the implementation of LAPSSET at present but also to explain the emergence of certain outcomes, problems and trends, it needed to refer to the transnational and multi-stakeholder contexts of LAPSSET.

Descriptive explanatory designs are commonly adopted in policy and development research with the goal of producing evidence and analysis. Given the multi-sectoral scope and geopolitical significance of LAPSSET, this approach assisted the researcher to identify linkages between institutional capacity, policy coherence, stakeholder engagement and project outcome. It also provided a solid framework for examining how the governance and coordination mechanisms impact the corridor's functioning as a tool of Kenya's grand strategy. Moreover, the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches coincides with John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark (2018) argument that the qualitative depth adds to the quantitative breadth of the research. Multiple data sources were triangulated to resolve ambiguities, in ensuring that the study produced nuanced, reliable and policy-relevant insights into the strategic implementation of the LAPSSET Corridor.

The study focused on the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET), particularly Kenya's section. The LAPSSET Corridor runs through various counties, including Lamu and Garissa, and connects Kenya to Ethiopia and South Sudan. In Kenya, the railway project will pass through Manda Bay/Bargoni in Lamu, Garissa, Isiolo, Meru County, Marsabit, and Turkana (Lokichar/Nadapal). An auxiliary railway line is planned to connect Isiolo to Nairobi. In Ethiopia, the corridor passes through Moyale, Hawassa and Addis Ababa/Mojjo. In South Sudan, it passes through Nadapal, Nakodok, Torit and Juba. Fieldwork for this study took place in Nairobi, given its geographical significance for the project's strategic infrastructure and institutional coordination. The perspectives of national government ministries, the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority (LCDA), diplomatic missions and regional bodies were particularly critical in Nairobi.

The study's target population was heterogeneous, multidisciplinary, complex and transnational, mirroring the LAPSSET Corridor project under review. The study participants were those engaged in planning, coordinating, financing, implementing and overseeing the corridor, or those affected by the corridor project along its geographical route. The total size of the target population in the counties meeting the study's inclusion criteria was 82 000 in Lamu, 410 000 in Garissa, 140 000 in Isiolo, 240 000 in Marsabit and 450 000 in Turkana Counties (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The counties are the main socio-economic and geopolitical zones in which the corridor operates and therefore constitute key data collection zones. Populations residing in these counties were included because the corridor's perceptions, implementation dynamics, and broader strategic outcomes are shaped by local communities, county governments, civil society organisations, and private-sector actors.

The study targeted policymakers and institutional actors at the national and regional levels, involved in infrastructure development, regional integration, security coordination, and foreign policy formulation. The team included officers from the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority, the Ministry of Roads and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, county governments, development partners, and other investors. The research also included representatives from various organisations including the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and the East African Community, the private sector involved in logistics, transport, construction, oil and energy infrastructure, and SEZs associated with the implementation of LAPSSET. In addition, it also included civil society organisations and representatives of communities in the corridor counties because of their engagement in advocacy, environmental governance, land rights, social accountability, and community mobilisation on the project.

This study sample size was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determining sample sizes of finite populations. This formula is widely used in the social sciences as it generates an acceptably scientific sample size that reduces errors of representation.

The formula is expressed as:
$$\frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + X^2 P(1-P)}$$

Where:

S= Required sample size

X^2 = Table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at 95% confidence level (3.841)

N= Target population size

P= Population proportion assumed to be 0.50

d= Degree of accuracy expressed as 0.05

This formula yielded a sample size of 384 respondents.

This study adopted purposive and simple random sampling methods to select respondents from the different categories of the target population. The rationale for employing multiple sampling techniques in this study is the heterogeneity of the study population. Further, it was important to include both specialised expert and representative community views on the LAPSSET Corridor. To obtain relevant, reliable, and balanced data that would serve the purpose of the study, the sampling procedures were therefore devised based on the characteristics of each respondent.

Purposive sampling was used to select key informants and other categories. Key informants were individuals with specialised knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the planning, coordination, financing, governance, and implementation of the LAPSSET Corridor. The delegation included representatives from several entities, such as the government, development agencies, the private sector and civil society organisations. Specifically, the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority (LCDA) and the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure were represented. Palinkas et al. (2015) state that purposive sampling is suitable for studies seeking information-rich participants who can provide in-depth information on complex institutional and policy processes. Using this technique, the researcher first identified relevant institutions and stakeholder categories associated with the LAPSSET Corridor. Subsequently, they purposefully selected respondents who occupy strategic positions within those institutions. As a result, the study obtained authoritative information on coordination mechanisms, geopolitical implications, and the corridor's fit with Kenya's grand strategy.

A simple random sampling method was used to select local community members living along the LAPSSET Corridor route in the counties of Lamu, Garissa, Isiolo, Marsabit, and Turkana. This approach was deemed suitable because it ensured that all people in the community had a fair chance of selection, reducing selection bias and increasing the representation of community views. To start with, the researcher identified specific communities within the interview corridor's influence zones and developed sampling lists with the help of local administrators and community leaders. Respondents were then selected from these lists using random selection procedures. Simple random sampling was used in the study to capture the socio-economic and local-level experiences of the implementation and impact of the LAPSSET Corridor.

Using purposive and simple random sampling provided sufficient methodological rigour to the study by including institutional experts and a grassroots community. This ensured balanced representation of stakeholder groups, thereby contributing to the credibility, validity, and comprehensiveness of the findings on the governance, strategic, and geopolitical issues of the LAPSSET Corridor as a transnational development project.

Sample Size Distribution

Category of Respondents	Estimated Target Population	Sampling Technique	Sample Size
LCDA Officials and Technical Staff	80	Purposive Sampling	7
Ministry of Transport & Infrastructure and Relevant Government Ministries	150	Purposive Sampling	7
County Government Officials	120	Purposive Sampling	7
Foreign Partner Governments and Diplomats	40	Purposive Sampling	7
International Organisations and Development Partners	60	Purposive Sampling	7
Foreign and Domestic Investors	100	Purposive Sampling	7
Private Sector Stakeholders	250	Purposive Sampling	7
Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)	180	Purposive Sampling	7
Local Community Members in Corridor Counties	1,322,000	Simple Random Sampling	328
Total	1,322,980		384

Due to the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the LAPSET Corridor - a transnational infrastructure project with security, economic and diplomatic implications - the study used semi-structured interviews and unstructured questionnaires to collect primary data. Prior to undertaking the study, it was ensured that authority to conduct research was obtained from all relevant parties, including the National Defence University-Kenya (NDU-K) and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). The introductory letters provided all participants with adequate information on the study's purpose. All participants were asked for consent beforehand. The confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents were strictly observed. As interviews may intrude on participants and cause undue stress, the researcher demonstrated credibility and trustworthiness through a competent grasp of the topic. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher provided participants with relevant information to help them prepare.

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were coded, entered, cleaned, and analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies, percentages were used to summarise the responses and present the findings in a clear and systematic manner. The results were presented using figures to facilitate interpretation. Qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed, organised, and analysed thematically. The analysis involved familiarisation with the interview transcripts, identification and coding of recurring ideas, categorisation of related codes, and development of themes corresponding to the study objectives. Relevant quotations from participants were used to support and illustrate the emerging themes while maintaining respondents' anonymity. The quantitative and qualitative findings were subsequently integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive

understanding of the geopolitical implications of the LAPSSET Corridor as a transnational project.

RESULTS

Demographic Information

Questionnaires were sent to 328 respondents, of whom 297 were duly completed and returned. This represents a return rate of 91%. In a separate part of the study, 56 interviews with key informants were conducted. Of these, 52 were successfully completed, and the data collected were complete and valid for the study. This corresponds to a return rate of 93%. The realised return rate of 92% was used to inform the study. Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) opined that a response rate above 75% is adequate to inform a study and that the findings can be used to generalise about a population's characteristics.

Regarding the gender distribution, 65% of the respondents were male and 35% were female. The gender distribution reveals a significant disparity in attendance. This difference may reflect broader structural dynamics in the research region, with men more likely to hold leadership positions, contribute to community forums, or be directly involved in development projects such as LAPSSET. It may also indicate that men are more visible than women in sectors such as infrastructure, transport, security and local administration that are linked to the corridor's implementation.

When asked about their age bracket, the findings showed that, more than a third of the respondents (39%) were aged 35-45 years. This suggests that the study primarily captured opinions from people in their most productive and decision-making years, likely those with experience in development matters such as the LAPSSET Corridor.

LAPSSET and Kenya's relations with Ethiopia and South Sudan

The study sought to determine from the participants if the LAPSSET project has enhanced Kenya's relations with Ethiopia/South Sudan. As illustrated below, these were the results:

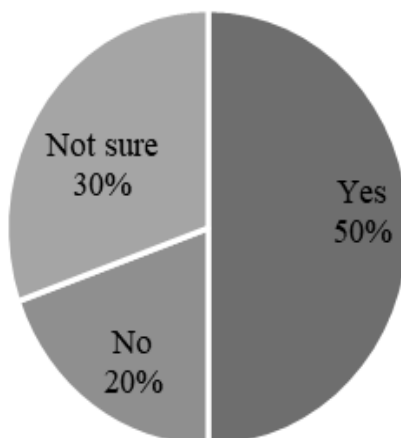


Figure 1: LAPSSET has improved Kenya's relations with Ethiopia and South Sudan

According to the research, half of respondents (50%) reported that the LAPSSET project enhanced Kenya's relations with Ethiopia and South Sudan. One-fifth (20%) reported that relations had not improved, while one-third (30%) were unsure. The study sought participants' opinions on the role of foreigners and international partners in LAPSSET.

Involvement of foreign investors and international partners in LAPSSET

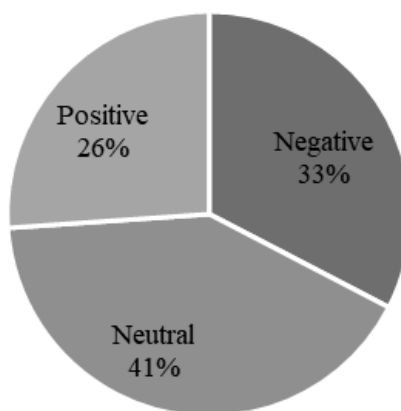


Figure 2: Involvement of foreign investors and international partners in LAPSSET

According to the survey data, 26% of respondents believe that international investors/partners will positively influence the LAPSSET Corridor; while 33% hold a negative view and 41% expressed neutrality about their involvement.

According to interviews conducted, foreign investors and international partners would bring better benefits and add creditability to the Project. According to one of the key informants interviewed;

International partnerships help provide financing, feasibility studies, and environmental protection. They assist in implementing the project within the context of broader regional integration frameworks, such as the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Protocol. Their participation will enhance the Project's credibility, although they may create delays in processing approvals for any such proposals. (Respondent P56)

DISCUSSION

The study sought to determine from the participants if the LAPSSET project has enhanced Kenya's relations with Ethiopia/South Sudan. The responses reveal a generally positive yet nuanced perception of LAPSSET's role in enhancing Kenya's diplomatic and economic relations with Ethiopia and South Sudan. Numerous participants stated that the project is improving regional cooperation, particularly with Ethiopia, through cross-border connectivity, facilitated by the Isiolo–Moyale highway and the enhanced movement of goods, people and services. These developments are seen as creating common economic interests and strengthening Kenya's position as the gateway to the Horn of Africa. Interaction in corridor planning meetings, security cooperation and infrastructure harmonisation was cited as evidence of enhanced bilateral engagement between the two countries.

Nonetheless, many are unsure about this or note that benefits remain limited or uneven, especially in South Sudan. According to experts, political instability in South Sudan, slow internal infrastructure development, and a changing government will hinder the corridor's ability to achieve its regional integration objectives. As some participants noted, countries may appear to have strong diplomatic ties, but that is not the same as having real, practical measures to bring about the enhanced coordination effects including a fully coordinated customs system, harmonised trade policy, and joint security operations. However, participants said that many such initiatives are still a work in progress and are not yet strongly felt at the community level.

A smaller proportion of respondents felt that the project does not significantly improve relations. They argued that geopolitical cooperation was already underway before LAPSSET and that current collaborations (e.g. IGAD frameworks) matter more than corridor investments. According to them, the project will affect regional relations only once its major components, namely the pipeline and the railway, become operational. The results indicate that LAPSSET has made significant contributions to strengthening Kenya-Ethiopia relations. The project does not have a similar influence on Kenya-South Sudan relations. This is constrained mainly by political and infrastructure-related factors. The project is thus seen as a potentially promising but still incomplete driver of regional integration and diplomatic alignment. The study's findings reveal that the success of the LAPSSET Corridor as a transnational development project depends on the prevailing geopolitical realities.

According to the study, geopolitics is at the core of the implementation and strategic significance of the LAPSSET Corridor. Respondents highlighted that the success of the corridor will be greatly dependent on Kenya's diplomatic ties with Ethiopia and South Sudan, regional security collaboration, and continued backing from international investors and development organizations. According to findings by Brautigam (2020) and Carmody (2016), recent infrastructure initiatives in Africa are facing escalating competition from leading global investors who have entered these strategic partnerships. These findings suggest that there is a growing number of stakeholders that view infrastructure corridors as not only an economic asset, but additionally a geopolitical tool that can transform trade flows throughout a region, diplomatic relations, and strategic power.

Respondents also indicated that they believe the LAPSSET Corridor could elevate Kenya's regional leadership within the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Horn of Africa (HoA). Consequently, all this underscores the corridor's geopolitical significance. The findings support the assertions of Otieno (2021) that view LAPSSET as Kenya's "strategic pivot" to Kenya's influence and for the diversification trade routes in the region away from routes mainly through Djibouti and Tanzania. Other transnational infrastructure corridor projects, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline, provide evidence that these types of corridors can alter the geopolitical alignments of states and strengthen their power within the greater political economies of the region (Hillman, 2020; Starr & Cornell, 2005). However, respondents registered some concerns regarding insecurity in the region, terrorism, environmental degradation, and excessive foreign debt burdens. Similarly, studies by Lesutis (2021) and Ondigi (2018) suggest that strategic infrastructure projects can create both opportunities and vulnerabilities for states, which subject them to geopolitical competition, risks to their sovereignty, and the potential for social conflict. A number of geopolitical dynamics illustrate how cross border corridors function within larger political economies as well as demonstrate how the sustainability and strategic effectiveness of these corridors depend upon diplomatic relations, security cooperation, and international partnerships.

On involvement of foreign investors and international partners in LAPSSET and that their involvement will positively influence the LAPSSET Corridor; there is no clear consensus. Therefore, this ambiguity indicates a lack of clarity among stakeholder groups regarding how external actors may impact the Corridor. Conversely, there are potential drawbacks to foreign involvement, including a focus on non-local priorities, limits on regional autonomy, or unequal distributions of funding benefits. Engaging in meaningful stakeholder dialogue is necessary to mitigate concerns about foreign intervention. Open communication can assist with ensuring that the presence of external stakeholders supports both the community needs and government needs.

The findings indicate mixed views on the involvement of foreign investors and international partners in the LAPSSET project. Some stakeholders suggested that the benefits could include capital formation, job creation, trade and market opportunities, improved connectivity, and support for regional integration and transport sector development. Nonetheless, many cited

threats such as the displacement of locals, land grabbing, the extraction or theft of resources, the marginalisation of communities, the prioritisation of foreign business interests, and threats to livelihoods. A significant share of respondents, despite being able to answer, were unsure or clearly didn't know how investors work or what the impact is. In general, foreign involvement must be heavily regulated and include community safeguards (to ensure the benefits are equitably distributed).

CONCLUSION

This paper finds that the LAPSSET Corridor represents a development initiative which is intended not merely to increase the region's economy and connectivity/integration but rather serves a geostrategic objective of providing Kenya with increased leverage in the Horn of Africa. Findings confirm LAPSSET strengthens ties with Ethiopia and South Sudan while locking in Kenya's position as the regional commercial powerhouse. Meanwhile, fears of cross-border impact on development, geopolitical risk, and unequal benefit sharing shows the complex geopolitical context in which transnational infrastructure initiatives are developed. One key finding from this analysis is that geopolitical factors, such as cross-border cooperation and regional diplomacy, contribute substantially to perceptions about the strategic effectiveness of the project. In summary, the geopolitical success of LAPSSET rests on Kenya's capacity to coordinate its goals of national interest with its ability to cooperate with other countries in the region and partner with other countries, to ensure both regional stability and economic inclusion.

The Government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Roads and Transport, should establish a Strategic Infrastructure Policy Harmonisation Taskforce to synchronise national development policies (Vision 2030, sectoral transport strategies, county development plans) with wider regional and global commitments and to formulate safeguards to ensure that foreign investment is consistent with Kenya's long-term strategic priorities. Its membership should include ministries of the national government, counties, LCDA, regulatory agencies, and appropriate private-sector partners. The taskforce will create a comprehensive set of approval criteria for each project, enhance land and environmental compliance processes, negotiate balanced investment arrangements, and conduct regular audits to ensure that national policies are coherent.

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