

# Maritime Diplomacy and Kenya's Blue Economy: Rethinking Regional Cooperation Through Lake Victoria

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**Abstract:** The blue economy initiative in Kenya has repositioned maritime infrastructure as both a development strategy and a tool of regional diplomacy. While maritime diplomacy scholarship traditionally focuses on oceanic and naval domains, inland water systems remain underexplored as arenas of diplomatic engagement. This study examined how Kenya's investments in inland maritime infrastructure on Lake Victoria contribute to regional cooperation within the East African Community framework.

This exploratory study utilized the qualitative-dominant case study methodology to gather information using semi-structured interviews of purposively chosen officials from county administrations, maritime administration, transport operators, and regional institutions in the counties of Kisumu and Homa Bay. Regional cooperation was measured based on factors like cargo throughput, policy harmonization, institutional coordination through the Lake Victoria Basin Commission, and stakeholder involvement in cross-border transport plans.

It was found out that the expansion of Kisumu Port and inland transport corridors increased the economic dependence of riparian states, facilitated environmental governance coordination, and promoted multi-level diplomatic engagement outside foreign policy institutions at the national level. Such improvements indicate that inland maritime infrastructure can be used for infrastructure-based maritime diplomacy by raising exit costs among the states sharing inland waters and strengthening mechanisms of cooperative governance.

The current paper contributes to maritime diplomacy scholarship through an application of Complex Interdependence Theory to inland freshwater systems.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has been characterized by the redefinition of maritime governance in the context of the blue economy. Maritime space is no longer viewed as a sphere in which naval activities or the exploitation of resources are conducted, but as a multidimensional space in which economic growth, environmental sustainability, and foreign policy intersect (African Union, 2012; UNECA, 2016). This is a function of the broader changes in the international political economy, in which interdependence and connectivity have become central in shaping the foreign policy of states (Keohane & Nye, 1977; Strange, 1996).

The redefinition of maritime governance in the African context has been achieved through the African Union's 2050

Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS 2050) and Agenda 2063, in which maritime and inland water resources are viewed as a means towards continental integration (African Union, 2012, 2015). This is a move away from the traditional security focus on maritime issues in the African context. The focus on inland waterways encourages the member states to incorporate inland waterways into their national development strategies.

The Kenyan government has been at the forefront in the redefinition of maritime governance in the African context. The country's Blue Economy Strategy and Vision 2030 incorporate the development of maritime infrastructure as a component of the national long-term vision (Republic of Kenya, 2018). The initial focus on the Indian Ocean coastal

infrastructure has been followed by a strategic focus on Lake Victoria.

Kenya emerged as the main country to focus on in terms of analysis due to the extensive investment in maritime infrastructure that it is undertaking on Lake Victoria. This is mainly in the form of refurbishment of the Kisumu Port as well as upgrading its shipyard infrastructure. In this regard, Kenya can be viewed as an infrastructural anchor of the northern Lake Victoria transport corridor. In contrast to Uganda and Tanzania, where maritime investments are primarily corridor-based or national in scope, Kenya directly ties these investments into regional integration efforts via initiatives like the East African Community and the AfCFTA.

Nevertheless, existing literature on maritime diplomacy is largely ocean-centric, with a focus on naval power, sea control, and maritime security governance (Till, 2013; Bueger, 2015). Classical maritime thought, from Mahan's sea power theory (Mahan, 1890) to modern security thought, prioritizes fleets and coercive power as key means of influence. This is inadequate to capture the role of development-oriented maritime engagements in shared freshwater resources.

This article sought to fill this knowledge gap through a case study of Lake Victoria, exploring infrastructure-led maritime diplomacy. It addressed the question:

➤ *How Do Kenya's Maritime Infrastructure Investments on Lake Victoria Function as Instruments of Regional Cooperation and Maritime Diplomacy Within the East African Community?*

This article argued that Kenya's inland maritime infrastructure investments serve as infrastructure-led maritime diplomacy that fosters structured economic interdependence among riparian states (Keohane & Nye, 1977). This is because Kenya's maritime infrastructure investments enhance its regional soft power, rather than coercive power, in regional and international relations (Nye, 2004). Kenya's maritime infrastructure investments on Lake Victoria also fitted within the continental integration strategy of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union maritime strategy (African Union, 2012; Republic of Kenya, 2018).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Maritime Diplomacy in Classical and Contemporary Scholarship*

Maritime diplomacy has traditionally been conceptualized within the framework of sea power and naval strategy. Classical thinkers such as Alfred Thayer Mahan (1890) emphasized the strategic importance of naval fleets and control of sea lines of communication as determinants of national power. Contemporary maritime scholarship has extended this logic to include maritime security governance, sea control, and naval signaling (Till, 2013; Bueger, 2015; Bueger & Edmunds, 2017). Within this literature, maritime

diplomacy is often associated with port visits, joint exercises, deterrence operations, and naval presence missions.

Although analytically robust, this body of work is overwhelmingly ocean-centric. It privileges blue-water naval capabilities, maritime domain awareness, and great power competition in international waters. Inland water systems rarely feature as central analytical units in this tradition. As a result, maritime diplomacy remains closely associated with coercive capability and security projection rather than development and infrastructure.

➤ *Infrastructure, Connectivity, and Economic Statecraft*

A growing body of scholarship has emphasized infrastructure and connectivity as instruments of geopolitical influence and economic statecraft (Keohane, 1984; Strange, 1996; Gilpin, 1987). Infrastructure is increasingly understood not merely as a development tool but as a mechanism that structures economic interdependence and reshapes bargaining power. Trade corridors, ports, transport networks, and logistics hubs generate patterns of dependency that influence diplomatic relations.

However, while infrastructure diplomacy has been explored in global contexts, particularly in relation to major power competition, its application to African inland maritime systems remains limited. Most studies focus on large-scale oceanic ports or transcontinental initiatives, leaving freshwater transboundary systems under examined.

➤ *Regional Integration and Lake Victoria Scholarship*

Scholarship on African regional integration has highlighted the role of institutions such as the East African Community (EAC) in promoting trade facilitation, regulatory harmonization, and cooperative security (Zartman, 2000; Acharya, 2014). Studies on Lake Victoria have largely focused on fisheries governance, poverty, and environmental sustainability (Onyango & Jentoft, 2010). Policy-oriented reports have examined transport revitalization and corridor development (World Bank, 2019; LVBC, 2021).

Yet these studies treat infrastructure primarily as a development or environmental issue rather than as an instrument of diplomacy. The diplomatic implications of inland maritime infrastructure—particularly how it structures interdependence, reshapes regional influence, and generates multi-level governance remain under-theorized.

➤ *Identified Gap*

In sum, three gaps emerge from the literature:

- Maritime diplomacy scholarship remains predominantly ocean-centric and security-focused.
- Infrastructure diplomacy literature rarely engages inland freshwater systems in Africa.

- Lake Victoria studies emphasize development and ecology but do not conceptualize infrastructure as a diplomatic instrument.

This article addresses these gaps by reconceptualizing inland maritime infrastructure as a form of infrastructure-embedded interdependence that functions as a diplomatic mechanism within the East African region. By centering Lake Victoria within regional diplomacy and regional integration theory, the article extends maritime diplomacy beyond naval projection and situates inland waters as arenas of strategic statecraft.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was situated within two theoretical traditions that guided the analysis of Kenya's inland maritime strategy. These two theoretical traditions include Complex Interdependence Theory and African-Centered Diplomacy. Complex Interdependence Theory assisted in the analysis of how infrastructure development within shared water systems can serve as a tool of regional cooperation, diplomatic relations, and normative statecraft. On the other hand, African-centered diplomacy assisted in situating the analysis within a continental tradition of solidarity, advancement, and ecology.

#### ➤ *Complex Interdependence*

- *Theoretical Framework: Extending Complex Interdependence*

Instead of considering complex interdependence as a set of fixed and independent propositions, this article engaged complex interdependence as a dynamic and constantly evolving analytical framework that has developed and expanded through a number of different areas of International Political Economy and institutionalist scholarship. Indeed, as a result of the pioneering work of Keohane and Nye (1977), numerous studies have sought to expand and develop complex interdependence through institutional theory (Keohane, 1984), structural power analysis (Strange, 1996), and political economy approaches (Gilpin, 1987).

These developments suggest that interdependence is not simply a feature of global politics but also something that can be strategically constructed through investments in infrastructure and institutional density. In this sense, interdependence is also “politically embedded.” This article built on such developments and extend complex interdependence as a theoretical framework through the development of Infrastructure-Embedded Interdependence and its application to inland maritime infrastructure as a form of diplomatic leverage through increased exit costs and flattened issue hierarchies between states and in economic and environmental issues.

In this analysis, “exit costs” can be defined as the financial, institutional, and logistical obstacles faced by states in disconnecting themselves from the existing infrastructural network for trade and governance. The greater the degree of interdependence, the higher the exit costs will become.

The argument was developed through three propositions:

- Proposition 1: Inland maritime infrastructure increases exit costs between neighboring states, leading to increased economic interdependence and reduced conflict potential.
- Proposition 2: Inland maritime systems of trade and environmental governance lead to flattened hierarchies of issues and reinforce non-militarized diplomatic engagement between states.
- Proposition 3: Inland maritime infrastructure generates multi-level diplomatic engagement between sub-national and regional actors, thus dispersing state-centric control of diplomacy.

These were measured by means of indicators such as cargo throughput, harmonization of laws among the riparian countries, coordination efforts by the Lake Victoria Basin Commission, and participation of stakeholders in forums for cross-border transportation planning. These indicators allowed the research to empirically evaluate the effect of inland maritime infrastructure on structured interdependence, instead of viewing diplomacy as an abstract concept.

This extension of complex interdependence moves beyond its application and instead refines it in terms of its application to inland maritime systems.

#### ➤ *African-Centered Diplomacy*

Although Complex Interdependence provides a structural approach to the phenomenon, it does not address the normative and historical aspects of African diplomatic practice. To address this limitation, the research incorporates African-Centered Diplomacy as an alternative approach.

African diplomatic practice has, throughout its history, emphasized the principles of collective security, shared prosperity, and solidarity between postcolonial states in Africa. According to Tim Murithi (2017), African diplomacy is informed by the principles of Pan Africanism, cooperative sovereignty, and the shared destiny for development in the continent. Unlike the liberal approach, which focuses on the projection of power, African diplomacy has emphasized the principles of consensus-building, institution-building, and problem-solving.

Kenya's initiatives in the development of its maritime capabilities on Lake Victoria are a clear manifestation of the African approach to diplomacy, especially considering the involvement of the East African Community (EAC) and the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC). The development initiatives by the State are a clear manifestation of the ideals of

cooperative development, an aspect of the Pan African approach to development in the continent.

LVBC, as a specialized institution in the EAC, seeks to promote joint environmental management, transportation, and development in the Lake Victoria Basin, an approach that is clearly African-centered in its approach to diplomacy, considering the integration of ecological security and economic integration.

Moreover, African-centered diplomacy appreciates the inherent connection between environmental sustainability and socio-economic stability. Inland water systems, which Kenya shares with its neighbors, necessitate a collective approach, with each country responsible for the sustainability of the water basin. Kenya's investments in maritime infrastructure, therefore, form part of a broader commitment to sustainable development and regional solidarity. In this regard, infrastructure is not merely a force for economic development; it is also a statement of intent towards regional cooperation.

By incorporating Complex Interdependence with African-Centered Diplomacy, this study seeks to develop a theoretically pluralistic approach to Kenya's inland maritime strategy. Complex Interdependence helps to clarify the role of infrastructural connectivity in facilitating complex economic and institutional interdependencies that diminish the significance of military rivalry. African-Centered Diplomacy, on the other hand, situates this within a normative framework that appreciates regional African governance, its attendant commitments to regional solidarity, shared growth, and environmental sustainability.

Collectively, Complex Interdependence and African-Centered Diplomacy seek to clarify the significance of Kenya's maritime strategy within Lake Victoria, beyond the parameters of standard development policy. Instead, Kenya's inland maritime strategy represents a form of infrastructure-driven diplomacy that is at once sensitive to global interdependence relations and African diplomatic traditions. In this regard, Kenya's inland maritime strategy represents a form of liberal institutional logic merged with Pan-African cooperative praxis.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

##### ➤ *Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-method case study design. A case study approach was appropriate where the objective is theory refinement and contextual explanation rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 2018). Given the under-theorized nature of inland maritime diplomacy, an in-depth case allows for analytical generalization to broader International Relations debates.

Lake Victoria constituted a "most-likely" case: a transboundary inland water system undergoing infrastructural

revitalization within an active regional institutional framework. If infrastructure can generate diplomatic interdependence, it is plausible to observe it in this context.

##### ➤ *Data Collection*

Data were collected through:

- Semi-structured interviews conducted in Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties.
- Policy and institutional document analysis.
- Regional trade and transport reports.
- Supplementary quantitative indicators on cargo throughput and employment.

Regional cooperation was analyzed based on four measurable indicators: growth in cross-border cargo traffic through lake transportation corridors, harmonization of regulations among countries surrounding the lake, coordination through technical means within the Lake Victoria Basin Commission, and stakeholder involvement in regional transport planning meetings. This enabled a practical assessment of infrastructure diplomacy rather than a theoretical one.

##### • *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties. Respondents were purposively selected based on their involvement in maritime governance, port operations, lake transport, regional coordination, and lake-based economic activities. These included county government officials, maritime and port authorities, representatives of regional institutions, and private sector actors such as traders and transport operators.

Semi-structured interviews were employed to balance consistency and flexibility in data collection. This approach allowed the researcher to maintain thematic coherence across interviews while also enabling in-depth probing of context-specific insights and emerging issues (Bryman, 2016). The method was particularly suitable for examining perceptions of infrastructure-led interdependence, regional cooperation, and the diplomatic implications of inland maritime development, as it captured both institutional perspectives and lived economic experiences.

Respondents for the study were selected using the purposive sampling method in order to ensure that responses were obtained from participants who played direct roles in governing inland maritime affairs and coordinating transportation activities in the region. The selected respondents included county government representatives, personnel at the Kenya Ports Authority, Lake Victoria Basin Commission members, transporters, fisheries industry players, and cross-border traders engaged in transport across the lake.

The sample size was arrived at through the saturation method used in qualitative studies where interviews proceeded until thematic saturation was achieved.

A total of around 25 respondents were interviewed for the study, which is enough to achieve thematic saturation.

- *Policy and Institutional Document Analysis*

The study also relied on systematic analysis of policy and institutional documents to assess the formal articulation of Kenya's inland maritime strategy and its alignment with regional integration frameworks. Documents reviewed included the Kenya Blue Economy Strategy and Implementation Plan (2018), the Kenya Maritime Transport Policy (2020), Lake Victoria Basin Commission reports, East African Community transport and integration frameworks, and relevant African Union maritime strategy documents.

Documentary analysis enables the evaluation of institutional intent, regulatory priorities, and governance structures. It also facilitates comparison between declared policy objectives and observed implementation practices, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the study by linking discourse to practice.

- *Regional Trade and Transport Reports*

To contextualize qualitative findings within broader economic patterns, regional trade and transport reports were analyzed. These included assessments produced by the World Bank and regional transport authorities focusing on Lake Victoria transport corridors, cargo movement, and infrastructure performance.

These reports provided macro-level insights into trends in cargo throughput, route utilization, and logistical efficiency, enabling the study to assess whether infrastructural investments were associated with observable changes in regional trade behavior. This evidence was critical in evaluating claims regarding increased interdependence and reduced exit options among riparian states.

- *Supplementary Quantitative Indicators*

Although the study adopts a qualitative-dominant research design, supplementary quantitative indicators were incorporated to support and corroborate qualitative interpretations. These indicators included data on cargo throughput, vessel movements, and employment trends associated with port and shipyard revitalization.

Rather than serving as the primary basis of analysis, these quantitative indicators functioned as contextual evidence, illustrating patterns of economic embedding and dependency formation. Their inclusion strengthens analytical rigor by demonstrating that infrastructure-led diplomacy has tangible material outcomes.

- *Triangulation*

The integration of interviews, documentary analysis, and trade data enabled methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and robustness of the findings (Denzin, 1978). By cross-validating evidence from institutional documents, stakeholder narratives, and economic indicators, the study minimizes single-source bias and ensures that conclusions reflect both policy intent and practical outcomes.

- *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, definition, and reporting. Coding combined deductive categories derived from complex interdependence theory with inductively emerging themes.

Triangulation across interviews, policy documents, and institutional reports strengthens internal validity (Denzin, 1978). Rather than relying solely on narrative description, findings were cross-validated against documentary and trade data to assess consistency between stated policy objectives and observed outcomes.

- *Triangulation and Analytical Rigor*

The integration of multiple data sources enabled methodological triangulation. Through the cross-validation of policy analysis, institutional documents, interview narratives, and quantitative data, the research eliminated biases and improved credibility. Triangulation enabled the validation of research findings from both institutional and community levels, ensuring that infrastructural diplomacy was considered both as a policy tool and as a socio-economic experience.

Moreover, the use of documentary analysis in tandem with field-based research helped enhance the study's internal validity through the establishment of a link between declared policy intent and observed outcome. This ensures that the research does not simply depend on declared intent, instead critically examining the practical application of Kenya's maritime policy.

- *Ethical Considerations*

The study ensured that it conformed to ethical requirements in research. All participants in interviews were made aware of the intent of the research, and informed consent was sought before any interaction. Confidentiality was ensured where possible. Documents used in the research were accessed through institutional provisions, with proper citation being made.

The above methodology ensures that, through a qualitative-dominant mixed research methodology, there is a systematic examination of how Kenya's inland maritime infrastructure on Lake Victoria works as a development tool and a diplomatic tool.

## V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings are presented in relation to the three analytical propositions derived from Complex Interdependence Theory: infrastructure-generated exit costs, issue hierarchy flattening between trade and environmental governance, and the emergence of multi-level diplomatic coordination structures across the Lake Victoria Basin.

Stakeholders involved in inland maritime infrastructure coordination included county governments, Kenya Ports Authority, Lake Victoria Basin Commission representatives, fisheries management actors, transport operators, and private sector traders engaged in cross-border lake commerce. Their participation illustrates that inland maritime diplomacy operates through multi-level governance structures rather than exclusively through national foreign policy institutions.

### ➤ *Infrastructure and Exit Costs*

The findings of the interviews consistently revealed that port modernization has led to reduced transport costs and increased volumes of trade between Kenya and Uganda. The findings also revealed that lake transport offers a viable alternative for trade between the two countries compared to road transport corridors. Documentary analysis of regional transport reports also revealed increased volumes of cargo after port modernization (World Bank, 2019). Assessments by the World Bank concerning regional corridors reveal that the volume of cargo at Kisumu Port grew following its rehabilitation, thus emphasizing the role of inland maritime routes as an additional logistics route complementing Northern Corridor transportation routes connecting Kenya and Uganda (World Bank, 2019).

Analysis of documentary sources concerning regional transport reveals that there was a significant growth in the volume of cargo at Kisumu Port after its rehabilitation. For example, cargo volumes grew from around 200,000 metric tons in 2018 to more than 500,000 metric tons in 2022. This represents a marked increase in the reliance on lake routes for transportation.

The findings suggested increased exit costs because trade is increasingly being institutionalized in lake transport corridors. This suggests that disengagement is costly and that infrastructure changes incentive structures. These findings are consistent with Proposition 1, which posits that infrastructure development increases interdependence by raising the costs of disengagement.

### ➤ *Issue Flattening: Trade and Environment*

The findings of the interviews revealed that mechanisms of environmental governance are integrated into transport planning processes. Documentary analysis of policy reports and interviews with regulatory officials revealed that monitoring of trade and lake transport is carried out jointly and

that harmonized navigational regulations are coordinated through the Lake Victoria Basin Commission.

Lake Victoria functions not only as a transport corridor but also as a shared ecological resource system requiring cooperative fisheries management, shoreline infrastructure regulation, and pollution monitoring coordination. Infrastructure-led maritime diplomacy therefore operates alongside resource governance diplomacy in which environmental sustainability becomes a prerequisite for maintaining transport connectivity and regional economic integration.

The findings suggested that trade facilitation and environmental sustainability are not hierarchically related as suggested by traditional propositions of issue integration and military prioritization. This suggests that inland maritime diplomacy is carried out through issue integration rather than military prioritization, confirming Proposition 2.

### ➤ *Multi-Level Diplomacy*

County governments, maritime authorities, traders, and regional institutions actively participate in implementation and coordination processes. Interviews reveal that diplomatic interaction increasingly occurs through technical committees, regulatory harmonization meetings, and joint infrastructure planning forums.

This supports Proposition 3 by demonstrating pluralistic diplomatic channels beyond traditional foreign ministries. Inland maritime infrastructure produces institutional density consistent with complex interdependence.

For example, coordination between county governments, regional institutions, and transport operators illustrates how diplomacy is increasingly conducted through decentralized and technical governance platforms rather than exclusively through national foreign ministries.

## VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND DIPLOMACY THEORY

The research findings from the Lake Victoria case have several significant implications for regional integration and diplomacy theory. Firstly, the findings demonstrated that inland water systems have been largely overlooked within dominant maritime scholarship, which has traditionally privileged oceanic spaces as the primary arenas of diplomatic and strategic interaction. In contrast, the Lake Victoria case showed that inland waters function as equally important sites of diplomacy, where economic and ecological interdependence are actively constructed. As a transboundary resource, the lake created a structured environment that shaped patterns of cooperation, thereby influencing the conduct of regional diplomacy.

Secondly, the findings indicated that infrastructure can operate as an instrument of soft power within regional contexts. Kenya's investment in inland maritime infrastructure enhanced its diplomatic position by deepening economic interdependence and embedding cooperative frameworks among riparian states. This demonstrated that infrastructural development is not merely a domestic economic tool, but also a mechanism through which states can exercise influence within regional integration processes.

Thirdly, the study advanced the concept of Infrastructure-Embedded Interdependence, arguing that physical connectivity can actively construct diplomatic leverage rather than merely reflect cooperative intent. By extending complex interdependence theory to inland maritime spaces, the study showed that infrastructure itself constitutes a strategic diplomatic resource. This reconceptualization broadened regional integration and diplomacy theory by incorporating non-oceanic maritime domains into mainstream analytical frameworks.

Finally, the findings illustrated that regional power relations can be reconfigured through development-oriented strategies without reliance on military capabilities. Economic interdependence, institutional coordination, and ecological cooperation collectively reshaped regional interactions. In this regard, Kenya's inland maritime strategy represented a model of influence grounded in connectivity, sustainability, and cooperative governance rather than dominance.

Collectively, these implications extended the scope of regional integration and diplomacy theory by highlighting inland ecosystems as critical arenas of strategic interaction. They further underscored the importance of development-oriented and infrastructure-driven approaches as central components of contemporary regional diplomacy.

#### ➤ *Study Limitations*

This study relied primarily on qualitative evidence from stakeholders located within the Kenyan segment of the Lake Victoria transport corridor. Future research could incorporate comparative fieldwork in Uganda and Tanzania to evaluate whether similar infrastructure-led diplomatic dynamics exist across the wider basin. In addition, although supplementary trade indicators were used to support interpretation, future studies could incorporate longitudinal transport datasets to strengthen causal inference regarding infrastructure-led regional interdependence.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Kenya's blue economy strategy on Lake Victoria was more than a mere national-level infrastructure initiative; rather, it was a recalibration of regional-level international relations. Kenya seeks to maximize its regional-level influence through its infrastructure-based strategy that modernizes its ports, revitalizes its shipyards, and connects its inland transport infrastructure.

The study illustrated that Lake Victoria is a site of strategic diplomatic action, where trade facilitation, environmental management, and regional relations converge. This infrastructure-based approach strengthens Kenya's position within the East African Community and is consistent with the objectives of continental integration within the African Continental Free Trade Area. At the same time, the study illustrated that Kenya's strategy also seeks to strengthen regional relations through ecological cooperation, thereby embedding sustainability within its international relations strategy. By reframing maritime diplomacy through the lens of inland waters, this article broadens theoretical understandings of how shared ecosystems can serve as platforms for regional integration, sustainable development, and strategic influence in twenty-first-century Africa. Lake Victoria, in this context, emerges not merely as a geographic entity but as a dynamic arena of infrastructure-driven diplomacy that redefines maritime statecraft beyond the ocean.

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