



# Examining Kiswahili and Its Potential for African Development

**Editha Adolph**

*The Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy, Tanzania*

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## Abstract

Kiswahili, a Bantu language that emerged along the East African coast centuries ago, has expanded significantly in both geographic reach and sociopolitical importance. Despite its growing number of speakers and its status as one of Africa's most widely used indigenous languages, there remains limited empirical research on how Kiswahili can be systematically leveraged to support African development. This gap is particularly evident in the absence of coordinated policy frameworks, uneven adoption across regions, and persistent global structural inequalities that shape language hierarchies on the continent. Addressing this tension, the paper investigates the developmental potential of Kiswahili across sectors such as education, trade, politics, diplomacy, and culture. Guided by Wallerstein's Modern World-System framework (2004a; 2004b), the study examines how global power dynamics influence the positioning of African languages within contemporary social and economic relations. Data were generated through structured interviews with 30 Kiswahili professionals from East Africa and through document analysis of relevant academic and policy literature. The findings indicate that Kiswahili already contributes to development, as reflected in its designation as an official working language of the African Union in 2022, its integration into education systems in more than 14 African countries, and its role in facilitating cross-border trade among approximately 200 million speakers in East and Central Africa. The paper concludes with targeted recommendations for strengthening Kiswahili's institutional support and enhancing its contribution to Africa's social, economic, and political transformation.

## Introduction

Kiswahili is a Bantu language that emerged along the East African coast centuries ago. Over time, it has expanded in scope and function, becoming not only a major *lingua franca* in the East African region but also one of the African languages taught at universities worldwide (Moshi, 2006; Mohr & Barasa, 2024). Its growth has been shaped by a wide range of actors, including heads of state, politicians, educational institutions, the media, writers, publishers, and policymakers. For instance, since the 1960s, East African state leaders have developed Kiswahili in a variety of areas. Julius Nyerere, the former President of Tanzania, accepted Kiswahili as a national language in 1962 and later established its official status in 1967, alongside English as a secondary official language. (Rubagumya, 1990). Conversely, leaders, such as Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Milton Obote of Uganda, favoured English as the official language (Muaka, 2020:129). However, in recent developments, Kiswahili has attained national and official status in Kenya alongside English (Republic of Kenya, 2010), while in Uganda, Kiswahili has been designated as a second official language (EAKC, 2019:99).



Generally, Kiswahili has been widely embraced as a national and/or official language across most East African nations. For instance, in countries such as Burundi, Kiswahili is recognised as one of the official languages by the Burundian Constitution of 2005, alongside Kirundi, English, and French (EAKC, 2019:46-47). Similarly, in Rwanda, Kiswahili holds the official status alongside French, English, and Kinyarwanda (Mlaga, 2018:14). Additionally, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kiswahili is an official language alongside Kikongo, Lingala, and Tshiluba. Furthermore, Kiswahili has been incorporated into the curricula of various African universities since the 1960s in Western and Eastern regions. For example, Kiswahili courses were introduced at the University of Ghana in 1964 and at Sebha University in Libya in 1984. Other Libyan academic institutions offering Kiswahili include Al-Feteh University and Nasser University (Chebet-Chonge, 2012; Amidu, 1996 in Dzahene-Quarshie, 2013:34). More recently, several non-Eastern African universities and schools have begun offering Kiswahili courses. Notable instances include the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which commenced Kiswahili instruction in 2012 (Dahir, 2018), the University of Zimbabwe in 2013 (Dzomba, 2019), and the University of Namibia in 2021. Furthermore, South Africa introduced Kiswahili as an optional subject in schools in 2020. Plans were also underway to introduce Kiswahili in local schools in Namibia by 2021 (Tjitemisa, 2020).

Kiswahili's stature has flourished across Africa. In July 2004, the African Union (AU) officially recognised Kiswahili as one of its official languages, alongside English, Portuguese, Arabic, and French. Subsequently, in 2016, the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) passed a resolution affirming Kiswahili as one of the official languages of the Community (EAKC, 2019:1). Furthermore, in August 2019, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) adopted Kiswahili as one of its official languages. For many years, Kiswahili has served as a prominent medium of communication in various forms. It is extensively utilised in print media, international radio broadcasts by institutions such as the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), DW (Deutsche Welle), RFI (Radio France Internationale), and VOA (Voice of America), among others, in television, on social media platforms, and on websites.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the potential of Kiswahili to support African development across many fields, including education, trade and the economy, politics and diplomacy, and culture. The motivation for this study stems from the notable achievements of the Kiswahili language documented to date. Additionally, this paper contributes to the existing body of literature investigating the role of Kiswahili in Africa, spanning regions such as East and Central Africa, the Great Lakes region, and at the continental level (see Massamba, 1989; Mulokozi, 2003; Kische, 2003; Dzahene-Quarshie, 2013; Kanana, 2013; Mutembei, 2014; EAKC, 2019; Muaka, 2020, among others).

### **Theoretical Background**

This study draws on Wallerstein's (2004a; 2004b) World-System Framework, which provides insights into the global economic system and the ways in which countries and regions are interconnected and influenced by economic processes. Wallerstein characterises the contemporary world as an interconnected modern world-system. This system is centred on the constant pursuit of capital accumulation, with states organised into an 'interstate system' with varied degrees of authority and competitiveness. States in this system exercise authority domestically to establish the legitimacy of their governments, which are organised in a hierarchical framework extending from the core to the semi-periphery to the periphery. However, the relative strength of states is not solely determined by their ability to assert authority internally; it also depends on their capacity to compete with other states within the global environment to attain a more central position in the hierarchy. Consequently, the power dynamics of all states are influenced by actors both above the state level, such as transnational agencies and other states, and below the state level, including civil organisations (Wallerstein,



1983;2004b). Applying this theory to the role of Kiswahili in African development would involve analysing how Kiswahili functions within the broader African economic system, how it facilitates trade and economic integration, and its potential impact on regional development.

### **Previous Studies on the Potentiality of Kiswahili**

Regarding Kiswahili roles in African development, Massamba (1989) delves into the historical and contemporary significance of Kiswahili in East Africa's development. He highlights Kiswahili's evolution as a language of wider communication, tracing its roots from the coast to the interior regions. Massamba's analysis sheds light on how Kiswahili has facilitated trade, cultural exchange, and national identity, laying the groundwork for its potential role in broader African development initiatives. In a similar vein, Mutembei (2014) focuses on the educational aspects of Kiswahili and its implications for African development. He argues that adopting Kiswahili as a medium of instruction can enhance creativity, innovation, and cultural expression among African learners. Mutembei's case study provides empirical evidence for integrating Kiswahili into education systems to promote socio-economic development. The East African Kiswahili Commission (EAKC) report of 2019 offers a comprehensive overview of Kiswahili's role in promoting integration and development in the East African region. It discusses Kiswahili's status as a lingua franca, its significance in business communication, and its potential for fostering regional cooperation and economic growth. The report provides valuable data and policy recommendations to leverage Kiswahili's development potential.

In the context of politics, Kishe (2003) explores the political dimension of Kiswahili within African liberation movements. He examines how Kiswahili served as a language of mobilisation, communication, and solidarity among freedom fighters across the continent. Kishe's analysis underscores the role of Kiswahili in fostering unity, resisting colonialism, and promoting Pan-African ideals, thereby contributing to the broader narrative of African development.

Mukuthuria (2018) posits that Kiswahili played a pivotal role in organising and mobilising liberation forces in the 1980s, which contributed to its newfound favour among the leadership of the National Resistance Movement in Uganda. Consequently, Kiswahili is experiencing a resurgence and renewed focus for development in Uganda, a country where it was previously overlooked and viewed with suspicion for a considerable period. In the same vein, Abdulaziz (2017) highlights the promotion of Kiswahili and its implications for socio-economic development in Tanzania, and posits that Swahili political culture has fostered an environment in which sentiments regarding mother tongues coexist harmoniously with aspirations to cultivate a new Tanzanian nation characterised by a distinct culture and ethos. This proclamation sheds light on Kiswahili's roles in fostering economic growth and political stability across Africa, which constitute the primary focus of the current study.

Subsequently, Habwe (2006) explores the role of Kiswahili in fostering the integration of diverse communities within East Africa. He contends that there exists an evolving socio-cultural framework specific to the East African region, with Kiswahili serving as a prominent lingua franca. According to him, Kiswahili is regarded as a symbol of regional identity and the integration of East African peoples and cultures. Though Kiswahili's position as a key agent in East Africa faces significant challenges due to the pervasive influence of globalisation, which promotes the spread of major world languages such as English, French, German, Spanish, and others, Habwe (2006) sternly holds that Kiswahili's capacity to reinforce East African integration remains highly significant.

Furthermore, Kawoya and Makokha (2009) present a viewpoint on harnessing Kiswahili as a tool to gain popular support for the East African regional integration process, encompassing the then-five member states of the current East African Community: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi. They propose elevating Kiswahili to the status of a regional broadcasting language for a



network operating under the auspices of the East African Community in Arusha, Tanzania. This argument is underpinned by three key points: firstly, media studies indicate the widespread popularity of ICT and FM radio stations across Africa in recent decades; secondly, radios serve as ubiquitous mediums of communication, entertainment, and education, particularly in rural areas where a significant portion of the population resides; and thirdly, the establishment of a regional broadcasting service, utilising the popular FM mode, can be initiated by the EAC Secretariat in Arusha to promote EAC programmes and garner popular support for its objectives. Generally, they advocate prioritising Kiswahili as the primary broadcasting language, given its significance as a rich symbol of shared regional heritage.

Despite the existing literature on Kiswahili's significance and potential to foster African development, a notable gap warrants further exploration, particularly regarding its impact on the economic and political spheres. While previous studies have delved into Kiswahili's role as a lingua franca, its cultural importance, and its implications for social cohesion, there has been limited focus on its specific contributions to economic growth and political stability across the African continent. Furthermore, existing literature often overlooks the dynamic interplay between Kiswahili and key sectors such as trade, investment, governance, and diplomacy. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive examination that elucidates how Kiswahili can serve as a catalyst for economic advancement and political resilience in Africa, offering insights to inform policymaking and development strategies at both national and regional levels.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study included the structured interview method with Kiswahili professionals across East Africa, with an emphasis on Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, and Uganda. Structured interviews provide researchers with a framework for asking consistent, focused questions, ensuring that data collection remains systematic and rigorous (Rubin and Rubin, 2012; Patton, 2015; Bryman, 2016). The interview modes were both face-to-face and online video conferencing (Microsoft Teams). Using a set of predetermined questions, participants were asked to share their perspectives, experiences, and insights. The interviews involved 30 Kiswahili professionals, divided into six groups of five participants each. This structure ensured diverse insights from professionals across sectors related to Kiswahili and its potential for African development. The participants were selected for their expertise and involvement in fields related to Kiswahili, education, culture, or development. These professionals included: Linguists, who are scholars and researchers specializing in Kiswahili linguistics, language acquisition, and language policy; Educators, comprising teachers and professors who teach Kiswahili at various educational levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions; Policy Makers, including government officials and representatives from language planning bodies responsible for shaping language policies and initiatives related to Kiswahili; Cultural Experts, who are involved in cultural preservation, promotion, and heritage activities related to Kiswahili-speaking communities; Media Professionals, such as journalists, broadcasters, and media personalities who work in Kiswahili language media outlets and contribute to its dissemination and influence; and Diplomats, including officials from embassies who engage in diplomatic activities involving Kiswahili.

The interviews involved asking participants a series of structured questions designed to elicit their opinions, insights, and experiences related to the Kiswahili language and its potential impact on African development and unity. These questions covered topics such as the role of Kiswahili in education, trade, politics, cultural exchange, and regional integration. In addition to interviews, the study incorporated document analysis (Bowen, 2009) to complement and contextualise the primary data. This involved a systematic review of academic publications, policy documents, institutional



reports, and other relevant materials on Kiswahili's use, status, and socio-cultural significance in Africa. Treating these sources as data strengthened triangulation and enhanced the depth of the analysis.

### **Kiswahili Potentiality for African Development**

On the African continent, there are over 2000 languages, with Kiswahili ranking among the top ten globally spoken languages (Hammarström, 2018). The number of Kiswahili speakers is steadily increasing, positioning it as one of the most widely spoken indigenous languages in Africa. Approximately 150 million people across Africa are thought to speak Kiswahili, as noted by Dzahene-Quarshie (2013). These speakers reside in countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Comoros, Rwanda, and beyond, with varying levels of Kiswahili proficiency. The subsequent section will explore the potential roles of Kiswahili as a catalyst for African development. This paper acknowledges the multifaceted roles Kiswahili can play across sectors such as education, politics, economics, and culture (Massamba, 1989; Kishe, 2003; Mutembei, 2014; EAKC, 2019). While Kiswahili has demonstrated its significance in these diverse areas, this paper specifically concentrates on two pivotal domains: trade and economy, as well as politics. By focusing on these specific aspects, the paper delves deeper into how Kiswahili can impact economic development, regional trade integration, political discourse, and diplomatic relations within the African context.

### **Kiswahili for African Development in Trade and Economy**

This section synthesises the key points extracted from existing literature and interviews conducted as part of this study on the potential role of Kiswahili in African economic growth. Drawing on a review of empirical studies and insights from interviews, the section presents a comprehensive overview of perspectives and findings on Kiswahili's contributions to Africa's economic development.

#### ***Enhancing Cross-Border Trades***

The interviews conducted with Kiswahili professionals yielded compelling evidence showcasing the significant role Kiswahili plays in the regional economy. The findings reveal the cruciality of Kiswahili as a medium of communication in various economic sectors, such as trade, tourism, and business transactions across the East African region. The interviewed experts emphasised that Kiswahili facilitates interactions and negotiations in markets across the region between individuals from different linguistic backgrounds, thereby fostering trade relationships and economic collaborations. Moreover, the widespread use of Kiswahili in local markets, among street vendors, and within informal trading networks underscores its practical importance in stimulating economic activity at the grassroots level.

In the same vein, historical accounts suggest that, following the establishment of trade and relations along the coast, Kiswahili gradually became more important as a language of wider communication (Massamba, 1989). He argues that Arab slave traders recognised the importance of Kiswahili and contributed to its spread along the East African coast and into the interior (Massamba, 1989:60). Kiswahili has played a significant role in fostering economic growth through trade since early contact between Arabs and East Africans. In underscoring Massamba's assertion, Muaka (2020:133) emphasises a direct correlation between African languages and the economy in East Africa and other regions of the continent. The same is attested in the EAKC report (2019:87-88), which states that 'Kiswahili is an important communication tool necessary for business communication' in the East African community (whose member states are Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda) and the Great Lakes region. It plays a facilitative role in business and trade, which are key drivers of the four pillars of regional integration and sustainable development in the EAC: Customs



Union, Common Market, Political Confederation, and Monetary Union. Kiswahili is and will continue to play an important role in economic development and cross-border trade in East Africa, the Great Lakes Regions, and elsewhere.

The conversation also shed light on how Kiswahili is used in specific situations by other African regional economic bodies. These regional organisations are the Southern African Customs Union (SACU<sup>1</sup>), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA<sup>2</sup>), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS<sup>3</sup>), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC<sup>4</sup>). One interviewee from Zimbabwe referred to the SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap 2015 – 2063, which highlights the importance of technological and economic transformation of the SADC region through industrialisation, market integration, modernisation, skills development, science and technology, financial strengthening and deeper regional integration as one of the main strategies aimed to promote economic cooperation, development and integration among members of SADC states. This participant argued that this strategy can be partially achieved through the use of Kiswahili. He insisted that, apart from oral communication in doing business (for individuals who possess the ability to speak) among citizens from these regional blocks, in addition to other international languages spoken in the relevant regions, such as English, French, and Portuguese, or other languages depending on where a product originated, Kiswahili can be used in product manuals. Exports from African countries to other parts of the world, such as the United States of America, Europe, and Asia, can also incorporate Kiswahili into their manuals for automobiles, electronics, and pharmaceutical products, etc. This aligns with the suggestion provided by the EAKC report (2019:33, 57) that Kiswahili can be used as the language of business and trade to promote not only the EAC economy but also other African regional organisations. According to the EAKC (2019), Kiswahili is the basis for communication, which in turn is necessary for economic growth.

Within Wallerstein's paradigm, Africa's economic relations can be viewed as part of a larger global system divided into core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral regions. Kiswahili, a widely spoken and understood language throughout Eastern Africa, serves as a conduit for communication and commerce in this system. It allows traders, entrepreneurs, and businesses from various African countries, located at different levels of the global hierarchy, to engage in economic operations and transactions. Furthermore, Kiswahili's importance in trade and business promotes intra-regional trade and helps Africa integrate into the global economy. Within Wallerstein's concept of the World, Kiswahili plays an important role in supporting economic integration and growth across the continent by bridging linguistic barriers and encouraging collaboration among varied actors.

### *Creating Markets for African Products*

The information gathered indicates that introducing Kiswahili into these regional economic organisations will be beneficial for the language's expansion and growth, as well as for the member states' economies, by opening markets for their goods within Africa. Considering that Kiswahili is recognised as an official working language by the African Union, the East African Community, and

<sup>1</sup> SACU members include Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland.

<sup>2</sup> COMESA is the largest regional economic organization in Africa, with 19 member states namely Burundi, Comoros, D.R. Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Eswatini, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

<sup>3</sup> ECOWAS is formed by 15 members namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

<sup>4</sup> SADC member states are Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



the Southern African Development Community, and that a number of member states of these organisations have either adopted Kiswahili as their official national language or have included it in their curricula, this matter should not present a problem. The seaports of Kenya and Tanzania act as major entry points for numerous landlocked countries in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa, including Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and the Eastern portion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As such, the language is expected to promote more seamless business dealings and trade exchanges, which in turn will boost economic development among the populace.

### ***Creation of Employment***

Moreover, the findings suggest that Kiswahili in Africa serves as an opportunity for economic growth through employment. Most Kiswahili professionals argue that Kiswahili teachers from East African countries will be hired in countries that have recently introduced Kiswahili courses. They praise the commendable initiatives undertaken by countries such as South Africa, South Sudan, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe to introduce Kiswahili as an optional subject in schools. In a similar vein, Muaka (2020) highlights that while not all African languages are taught as foreign languages, there is demand for widely spoken languages such as Kiswahili, Yoruba, Hausa, Zulu, Wolof, Amharic, Somali, and, to some extent, Kinyarwanda and Lingala. These languages are sought after both in diaspora communities and in regions where they are spoken. They serve as significant revenue sources for both governments and the communities they target. This study further posits that highlighting the importance of teaching Kiswahili will generate employment opportunities for both native and non-native Kiswahili teachers and professionals. The study argues that expanding Kiswahili teaching and learning in more African countries will equip their citizens with the skills to work across the continent. Not only that, but the increased demand for teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, literary works, audio, and video will also be advantageous for writers and publishers across the continent. Within Wallerstein's framework (2004), Kiswahili's status as a widely spoken language across Eastern Africa positions professionals proficient in the language as valuable assets across various industries, enabling them to navigate international job markets. By leveraging their language skills and cultural knowledge, Kiswahili professionals can establish connections, bridge cultural gaps, and contribute to economic development both within Africa and beyond.

### **Kiswahili and African Development in Politics**

Interviews conducted with various Kiswahili professionals and the literature consulted consistently highlight the significant role Kiswahili plays in fostering African development, particularly in politics. They emphasised several key points:

#### ***Promotion of Unity among Citizens***

Kiswahili has played a pivotal role in promoting unity among the people of East Africa since the colonial era. Despite the region's diverse linguistic backgrounds, Kiswahili emerged as a unifying language due to its accessibility and widespread use (cf. Barasa, 2023). During the struggle for independence, Kiswahili served as a common medium of communication, enabling individuals from different ethnic groups to come together, coordinate efforts, and advocate for their shared goal of liberation. Its role in fostering solidarity and collaboration among diverse communities contributed significantly to the success of independence movements in East Africa. This aligns with Massamba's (1989:61) assertion that throughout the fight for independence, Kiswahili emerged as a crucial tool in fostering unity among the populace.

Furthermore, Kiswahili's influence extended beyond East Africa to other parts of the continent during the liberation movements in Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia. In these



countries, Kiswahili served as a tool for mobilisation, education, and communication among freedom fighters and the general populace. Its widespread usage facilitated the dissemination of revolutionary ideas, organisational efforts, and resistance strategies against colonial and apartheid regimes.

Moreover, Kiswahili played a crucial role in fostering regional solidarity and cooperation among liberation movements across borders. Fighters from different countries often communicated in Kiswahili, allowing for the exchange of experiences, strategies, and support networks. This cross-border collaboration strengthened the resolve of liberation movements and contributed to the eventual downfall of colonial and oppressive regimes in Southern Africa

Further examination of the literature indicates that even after independence, Kiswahili maintained its role as a unifying force among East African citizens. For instance, according to Massamba (1989:63) and Mutembei (2014:342), in 1962, the government of Tanganyika officially designated Kiswahili as the nation's language. President Julius Nyerere made history as the first African head of state to address the parliament through an indigenous African language, Kiswahili, with English initially serving as the primary parliamentary language. Following this precedent, the Republic of Kenya (2010), through the Constitution of Kenya, declared Kiswahili as both its national and official language in 2010. Currently, Kiswahili is one of the official languages in the Kenyan parliament, alongside English (EAKC, 2019:97). Thus, this study argues that the declaration of Kiswahili as an official or national language has significantly promoted unity among East African peoples, transcending their diverse linguistic backgrounds. By establishing Kiswahili as a common language understood by the majority, regardless of ethnic origin, governments in the region have facilitated communication and fostered a sense of belongingness and inclusion among their citizens. This linguistic unity has helped bridge cultural divisions and promoted cross-cultural understanding, enabling individuals from different linguistic groups to interact, collaborate, and cooperate more effectively. Furthermore, Kiswahili's status as a shared language has facilitated the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences, contributing to a stronger sense of regional identity and solidarity among East African communities.

### ***Facilitating Communication and Political Dialogue***

Kiswahili serves as a bridge, facilitating communication among diverse African populations with different native languages, thereby fostering political dialogue and cooperation. Interviews conducted with various Kiswahili professionals highlight the alignment between the EAC Vision of 2050, the SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap 2015 - 2063 and the objectives of the African Union Agenda of 2063. The argument posits that Kiswahili, functioning as a widely used language of communication across Africa, has the potential to catalyse substantial change and transformation throughout the continent. As a language accessible to a broad spectrum of the African population, Kiswahili serves as a unifying force, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in dialogues, collaboration, and collective action. Its widespread usage facilitates the dissemination of ideas, the exchange of knowledge, and the forging of connections across borders, fostering greater cooperation and solidarity among African nations. Consequently, Kiswahili's role as a common medium of communication is seen as instrumental in driving forward socio-economic development, promoting cultural exchange, and advancing the collective aspirations of the African continent. The interviewees also mentioned how accessibility to Kiswahili encourages residents to participate more actively in political processes. Kiswahili promotes a more inclusive and democratic political climate by providing a common language understood by the majority, enabling greater participation in political discourse, elections, and advocacy.



### ***International Relations***

Interviewees emphasised Kiswahili's growing recognition as a language of international relations, enabling African nations to assert themselves politically on the global stage. Its inclusion in diplomatic dialogues and multilateral forums enhances Africa's representation and influence in international decision-making processes, ultimately contributing to the continent's development agenda.

Besides, Kiswahili's utility in enhancing international relations is well documented in the academic literature. Firstly, its status as a language of wider communication in Africa enables easier diplomatic interactions and negotiations among African countries. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), established in 1995 by the United Nations Security Council, is a significant case scenario of international negotiations conducted in Kiswahili. Located in Arusha, Tanzania, the ICTR was tasked with prosecuting individuals responsible for the Rwandan genocide. Kiswahili, being one of Tanzania's official languages and widely spoken in the region, played a crucial role in facilitating communication and proceedings during the tribunal. Witnesses, defendants, legal representatives, and tribunal staff from various linguistic backgrounds communicated effectively in Kiswahili, ensuring fair and transparent legal processes. This demonstrates Kiswahili's practical utility in international legal settings, where clear communication and understanding are paramount. This facilitates smoother collaboration on regional issues such as trade agreements, security cooperation, and cultural exchange. Secondly, according to Mazrui & Mazrui (1995), the growing use of Kiswahili as a teaching language at African colleges helps prepare students for careers in international relations and diplomacy. Proficiency in Kiswahili allows them to engage more effectively with African counterparts and navigate diplomatic environments within the continent. Furthermore, the African Union's recognition of Kiswahili as one of its official languages increases its influence in diplomatic discussions and continental policymaking. (Mazrui, 2004). This ensures that African viewpoints and interests will be fairly represented in international conversation. All things considered, these academic resources highlight Kiswahili's significant contribution to strengthening diplomatic ties and elevating Africa's standing in the world.

### ***Promoting Peace and Security in Africa***

Academic literature supports Kiswahili's function in promoting security and peace in Africa. First of all, its use as a lingua franca makes it easier for people from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to communicate, which is crucial for efforts to resolve conflicts and promote peace (Mudzingwa, 2011). Additionally, Kiswahili's cultural significance and widespread usage contribute to community cohesion and social integration, mitigating tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence (Chacha, 2006). Furthermore, the adoption of Kiswahili as a working language in regional security organisations, such as the East African Community (EAC) and the African Union (AU), enhances cross-border collaboration on security issues (Chebet-Choge, 2012). This facilitates joint efforts in addressing transnational threats such as terrorism, organised crime, and border disputes.

The respondent also asserts that in light of the region's intricate sociopolitical environment, Kiswahili is essential to preserving security and peace. The majority of them outlined various approaches to addressing security issues and promoting peace in this environment using Kiswahili. Firstly, Kiswahili serves as a lingua franca among the diverse ethnic groups in the region, facilitating communication and dialogue among communities affected by conflict in the eastern DRC. This linguistic commonality bridges linguistic divides and fosters understanding among different groups, contributing to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. The same has been pinpointed by Wolters (2004), who argues that Kiswahili is employed in various peacebuilding programmes and initiatives in the eastern DRC to promote reconciliation and conflict transformation. Non-



governmental organisations (NGOs) and international agencies often utilise Kiswahili in community engagement activities, mediation processes, and peace education programmes.

Secondly, Kiswahili's widespread use in the eastern DRC contributes to community cohesion and social integration, which are crucial to peacebuilding initiatives. Through shared language and cultural practices, Kiswahili helps create a sense of belonging and solidarity among residents, strengthening social ties and promoting peaceful coexistence. Third, Kiswahili is employed in various peacebuilding programmes and initiatives in the eastern DRC to promote reconciliation and conflict transformation. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international agencies often utilise Kiswahili in community engagement activities, mediation processes, and peace education programmes. By using Kiswahili as a communication tool, these initiatives aim to build trust, facilitate dialogues, and empower local communities to resolve conflicts peacefully and constructively.

In the fight against terrorism in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, Kiswahili serves as a valuable tool in various ways. Regarding this account, Mwakikagile (2020) and Féron (2021) postulate that Kiswahili's status as a widely spoken language in the region enables security forces and counter-terrorism units to communicate effectively with local communities, gather intelligence, and coordinate operations. Through Kiswahili, security personnel build trust and rapport with residents, encouraging them to report terrorist activities and suspicious individuals, thereby enhancing efforts to counter-terrorism. The same has been attested by a Kiswahili professional who participated in this study, when some diplomats stated that Kiswahili facilitates collaboration and coordination among regional and international security forces involved in combating terrorism in Cabo Delgado. Given that Kiswahili is spoken in neighbouring countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Kenya (where some security personnel originate), its use as a common language rationalises communication and cooperation among diverse units operating in the region. This interoperability enhances the effectiveness of joint military operations, intelligence sharing, and border security measures aimed at disrupting terrorist networks and preventing the infiltration of militants across borders.

Diplomats, furthermore, informed that Kiswahili plays a role in countering terrorist propaganda and extremist ideologies in Cabo Delgado. As terrorists often exploit local grievances and vulnerabilities to recruit followers, efforts to counter extremist narratives and promote alternative messages of peace and tolerance require effective communication with affected communities. Kiswahili provides a means for conveying such messages in a language that resonates with the local population, thereby undermining the appeal of terrorist propaganda and fostering resilience against radicalisation. In addition, Kiswahili is used in educational and awareness-raising initiatives aimed at building community resilience to terrorism in Cabo Delgado. NGOs, international organisations, and local authorities use Kiswahili in outreach programmes, workshops, and public awareness campaigns to educate residents about the risks of terrorism, the importance of reporting suspicious activity, and the need for community-led efforts to prevent radicalisation and extremism (UNDP, 2020). These programmes guarantee that vital information reaches the target audience efficiently and enable them to take proactive steps to protect their communities from terrorist threats by interacting with local populations in Kiswahili.

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to examine the potential impact of Kiswahili on African development across the economic and political sectors, drawing on insights from 30 participants distributed unevenly across Tanzania (14), Kenya (8), Uganda (5), and Rwanda (3), a pattern that reflects Tanzania's historical centrality in Kiswahili development and helps contextualise the study's regional emphasis. The analysis highlights Kiswahili's role as a language of broad communication within the East African



Community (EAC), a working language of SADC, and an official working language of the African Union, underscoring its growing contribution to African development. Economically, the findings show that Kiswahili facilitates trade, cross-border mobility, and employment creation among its speakers. Politically, the language demonstrates strong potential to enhance regional and continental integration, strengthen social cohesion, and promote a shared sense of African unity, peace, and security. The study therefore calls for broader recognition and promotion of Kiswahili across the continent, urging leaders and citizens to challenge lingering negative perceptions and actively support the language's advancement. Practical steps proposed include integrating Kiswahili into educational curricula, expanding teacher training, organising professional conferences, and encouraging international companies to incorporate Kiswahili in product labelling to reach wider African markets. Collectively, these measures aim to elevate Kiswahili's status and reinforce its role in Africa's social, economic, and political transformation.

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