ABSTRACT

The countries of the EAC have a long history of working together. The media is an increasingly strong channel which interconnects the world. The media serves to develop opinions both at home and abroad. The power of the media is the main propeller of propaganda that has seen certain powers attain and maintain their position in world politics. Thus media is an opinion shaper and an agenda setter. In this era of globalization, with increased international dependency as well as competitiveness, media diplomacy serves as a significant tool in winning local and international masses. One of the effects of media diplomacy and public diplomacy is image building through national branding. An effect which can be utilized by the EAC Partner States, given their deep common history, language, culture and personal ties. The objective of this research was to examine the diplomatic value of the media in fostering regional integration within the EAC. Arguments as well as generalizations advanced in this study are based on data generated using qualitative and quantitative techniques. Specifically, this research used content analysis and survey methods. The content analysis focused on media reports in four of the five East African countries. The analysis was limited specifically to issues on the EAC presented in media reports in English language. The issues examined include Common Market Protocol, Trade, Customs Union and EAC Secretariat affairs. Other issues were legislation, economy, energy, employment, education, language, foreign aid, migration and entertainment. Evidence from the analysis of the study suggests that media interest in covering the EAC is sometimes determined by the level of engagement that the EAC Secretariat has with the region’s media houses. As evidence presented herein indicates, most media organizations cited regular press releases from the EAC Secretariat as their main motivation for reporting on EAC issues. Beyond press releases, the Secretariat seems not to have a viable communication strategy aimed at building confidence in the process and outcomes of regional integration. Thus the study recommends a review of EACs existing Communication and Marketing Strategy that would improve the synergy of all stakeholders in the integration process with the media being key as a communication and information disseminator. This will result to increased participation of the EAC citizenry in EAC matters and consequently to the socio-economic and political development of the region. It is on this basis that the EAC is set to develop, its Communications and Marketing Strategy that aims at strengthening popular participation, a common East African identity and strong political will behind the regional integration process; critical subset of this concern will be strengthening Kiswahili as the unifying lingua franca of the region. Above all, through the Communication Strategy we need to construct a strong coalition between all the stakeholders of the EAC viz; the East African people in general, the Political Class, the East African Media, Civil Society, the Intelligentsia, the Business Community and our Development Partners for a collective quest to bridge the gap between the vision of a prosperous, competitive, secure and politically united East Africa and its concrete realization. 1