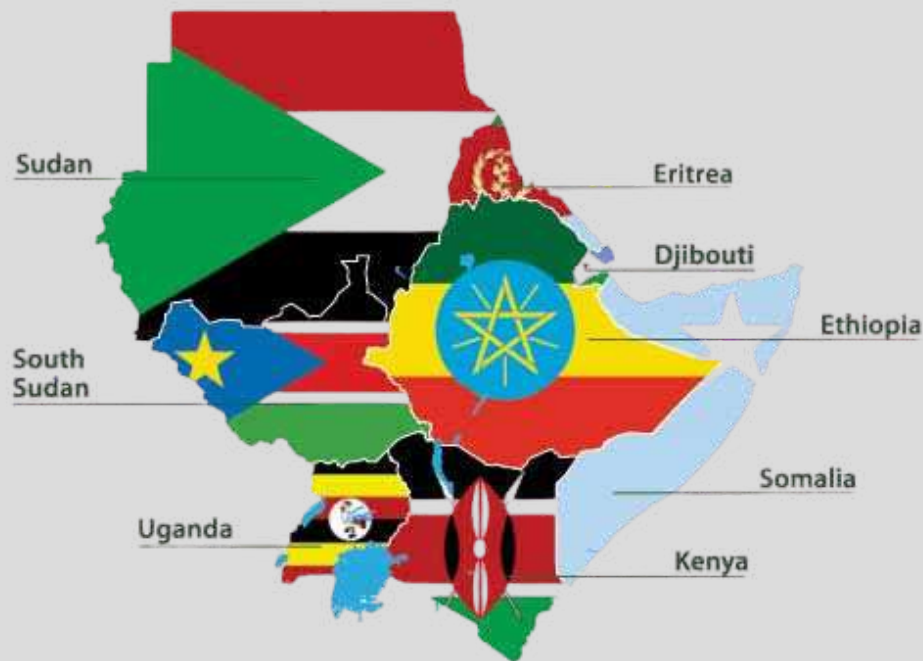


The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD): Towards Re-reforming the Regional Organization in the Age of Uncertainty



The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has undergone a significant transformation from its origins as a drought-focused entity (IGADD) in 1986 to a comprehensive regional organization mandated with development and security. Following a 1996 revitalization that expanded its scope to include peace and socio-economic matters, member states adopted a New Treaty in June 2023 to address modern geopolitical threats and deepen regional integration. This new legal framework broadens cooperation into diverse sectors, including tourism, digital governance, gender equality, and private sector participation.



Executive Summary

The Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) was established in 1986 to overcome the recurring drought afflicting the Horn of Africa. The changing regional and international contexts incentivized the regional organization to transform itself into the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), with the mandate for development and regional security. Following over a decade of demands to broaden cooperation, member states, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda, convened on June 12, 2023, at the Fourteenth Ordinary Session of the Heads of State and Government. This summit culminated in the adoption of the New Treaty, which provides a legal framework for addressing emerging threats and cementing ties with external actors. Indeed, the New Treaty could be considered an innovative approach to address the erosion of trust in regional cooperation and to recognize the need to diversify cooperation. Despite heightened geopolitical uncertainty, IGAD remains a critical platform, compelling member states to consolidate their collective efforts.

Introduction

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the Horn of Africa and the wider region were characterized by a host of socio-economic crises, including drought and desertification, environmental degradation, and political instability. Realizing

the grave situation, the United Nations (UN) recommended member states of the region to establish an intergovernmental entity through its Resolution 35/90 (1980).¹ This initiative aimed to overcome the years of natural and man-made disasters that frequently visited the region and to build capabilities to “mitigate the effects of future droughts and promote sustained economic and social development.”² To this end, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) was instrumental in playing “the role of guiding this process.”³ However, the formation of the organization was driven not only by environmental concerns but also by the prevailing Cold War environment, which necessitated a coordinated regional response to external pressures.⁴

Against the backdrop of the daunting challenges facing the region, member states, particularly Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda, showed interest in forging a regional organization. In January 1986, the

¹ Woodward, Peter. (2013). The IGAD and Regional Relations in the Horn of Africa. In: The Horn of Africa. Intra-State and Inter-State Conflicts and Security. R. Bereketeab (Ed.). London: Pluto Press: 141-155.

² United Nations (UN). (1980). Assistance to the drought-stricken areas of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda: Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/35/90). Retrieved <https://www.worldlii.org/int/other/UNGA/1980/>

³ Byiers, Bruce. (n.d). Economic Integration and Peace and Security in IGAD: High-level Summitry and Pragmatism in a region of “persistent turbulence”.

⁴ Byiers, Bruce. (n.d). Economic Integration and Peace and Security in IGAD: High-level Summitry and Pragmatism in a region of “persistent turbulence”.



Heads of State and Government of these six states gathered in Djibouti and demonstrated their commitment to establishing a regional organization, the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), by signing the Agreement. Its primary mandate was to address environmental challenges. The establishment of IGADD was a testimony of the recognition of “a regional approach to supplement national efforts”⁵ that focused on addressing environmental challenges. Since then, it has become one of the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa.

The 1996 Revitalization

With the dissolution of the bipolar international system in the early 1990s, the region's security and geopolitical landscape also shifted accordingly. The issue of security and governance has gained primacy on the region's agenda. The security conundrum and the mounting security challenges facing the region, in general, and member states in particular, had compelled the regional organization to revisit its mandate. Furthermore, the need to revitalize the regional organization was necessitated by the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (the Abuja Treaty) that envisaged the regional economic communities (RECs) as building blocks of the formation of a common economic community,

and the Rio UN Summit was an incentive to the reinvigoration of the regional organization.⁶

On 21 March 1996, at its second extraordinary summit, the Heads of State and Government of the member states signed “Letter of Instrument to Amend the IGAD Charter” in Nairobi, Kenya.⁷ During its extraordinary summit that was held on 18 April 1995, Heads of State and Government of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda came to a consensus that the regional organization's mandate, which was mainly concerned about fighting drought and desertification, needs to be expanded to include peace and security as well as socio-economic matters.⁸ Consequently, IGADD was revitalized, and its name changed to Intergovernmental Authority on Development. It was officially launched during the Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting held on 25 November 1996 in Djibouti. Since 1996, the revitalized IGAD has sought to diversify its areas of cooperation and adopt a new organizational structure. Over the course of its existence, IGAD is continued to address the problem of environmental protection, food

⁵ African Union. (n.d). Intergovernmental Authority for Development. Accessed on December 30 2025. Retried from <https://au.int/en/recs/igad>

⁶ Welde Sellassie, Isaac. (2011). IGAD as an International Organization, Its Institutional Development and Shortcomings *Journal of African Law*, 55(1):1-29.

⁷ Intergovernmental Authority on Development. (1996). Agreement Establishing the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD/SUM-96/AGRE-Doc). Assembly of Heads of State and Government Nairobi, 21 March 1996.

⁸ Intergovernmental Authority on Development. (1996). Agreement Establishing the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD/SUM-96/AGRE-Doc). Assembly of Heads of State and Government Nairobi, 21 March 1996.



security, social development and economic cooperation, peace and security. After nearly three decades, reforming the regional organization for the second time was a widely shared understanding among member states when they met during the fourteenth ordinary session of the Heads of State and Government in Djibouti on 12 June 2023 to adopt the New Treaty.

The Adoption of the New IGAD Treaty

During the fourteenth Ordinary Summit of the Heads of State of the regional organization that was held in Djibouti on 12 June 2023, member states demonstrated a commitment to revise the existing founding Treaty. Accordingly, member states of the organization adopted the new Treaty that believed to “expand and diversifies areas of cooperation among member states and with the international community.”⁹ This marked the renewal of the IGAD Treaty after more than three decades.

The New Treaty is aimed to replace the 1996 Agreement Establishing the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. Its preamble of the treaty recognized and reaffirmed the Declaration of 18 April 1995, the purposes of the Agreement Establishing IGAD signed in 1996 and it also stated the incentives of maintaining the “purposes of promoting peace and security, regional cooperation, integration,

and sustainable development”¹⁰ and the Abuja Treaty as well as the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Likewise, the 1996 Agreement, the New Treaty is continued to anchor on the cardinal principles and purposes of UN Charter and the successor of the OAU, AU’s Constitutive Act and vision of peaceful, prosperous and integrated continent. Unlike the previous 1996 Agreement, the New Treaty was developed within the context the current impetus to overcome trade and investment barriers through the implementation of AfCFTA, African Union reforms and the looming geopolitical uncertainty.

Article 3 of the Treaty stated the aims and objectives of IGAD. Likewise, the previous founding document, the New IGAD Treaty aims “to accelerate regional economic, social, environmental and political integration, and cross border cooperation among the Member States.”¹¹ The New IGAD Treaty has also similarities with the previous one with regard to the fundamental principles governing the regional organization with the exception of Article 4(e) of the Treaty that makes a detail statement of good governance.¹²

⁹ IGAD Executive Secretary Commends the Parliament of the Republic of Kenya for Approving the IGAD Treaty

¹⁰ IGAD. (2023). Treaty Establishing the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Article 4(e) of the Treaty on Fundamental Principles Governing IGAD that stated good governance including adherence to the principles of constitutionalism, democracy, the rule of law, accountability, transparency, social justice, equal opportunities, gender equality as well



Unlike its predecessor, the Treaty in its Article 7(2(f)) seeks to create an enabling environment of peace and security through “constitutionalism, democracy, human and people’s rights, the rule of law, accountability, transparency, governance, peace and security.” In the same article the Treaty wants to create a conducive environment for “the participation of the private sector in economic development.”¹³ The Treaty also maintains the existing major organs and their respective mandates and functions. Unlike the Agreement, the Treaty creates the positions of two Deputy Executive Secretaries (Article 22).¹⁴ Another difference between the 1996 Agreement and the 2023 New Treaty lies in the areas of cooperation. Indeed, most of the areas of cooperation states in both the Agreement and the Treaty have similarities. Nevertheless, the Treaty has widened and broadened the areas cooperation in part due to the observation of new continental and global development. Unlike the previous one, the 2023 New Treaty encompasses new areas of cooperation: tourism; enabling environment for the private sector, the civil society and professional bodies; gender equality and empowerment of women and girls; investment; development and utilization of human resources; education,

as the Recognition, Promotion and Protection of human and people’s rights.

¹³ IGAD. (2023). Treaty Establishing the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

¹⁴ Ibid.

science and technology; social welfare; health; culture and sports. The Treaty also further elaborated cooperation with other RECs, the African Union and other international organizations and development partners under Articles 42 and 43. Article 42 indicates member states’ commitment to foster regional economic integration to attain the objectives of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community.



The Executive Secretary of IGAD, H.E. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu

The Treaty demonstrated “the evolving mandate of the organization, reinforcing its role in facilitating cooperation on critical priorities such as conflict prevention, climate adaptation, public health, economic integration, and digital governance.”¹⁵ Thus far, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and South Sudan¹⁶ and

¹⁵ IGAD Executive Secretary Commends the Parliament of the Republic of Kenya for Approving the IGAD Treaty

¹⁶ IGAD. (2024). Three IGAD Member States Ratify the New IGAD Treaty, Marking a Milestone in Regional Cooperation. Retrieved from <https://igad.int/three-igad-member-states-ratify-the-new-igad-treaty-marking-a-milestone-in-regional-cooperation/>

The Republic of South Sudan officially ratified the IGAD New Treaty by its Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA)



Kenya¹⁷ have ratified the treaty. The Treaty's entry into force requires its ratification by the two-thirds of the member states, however.

The Challenges Ahead: Geopolitical Volatility

Although the Treaty demonstrates member states' commitment to further bolster their cooperation among themselves and with other partners, formidable challenges confront the regional organization, and its aspirations and goals remain apparent. The first challenge comes from internal Conflicts and Ratification Delays; the ongoing civil war in Sudan and internal security crises in other member states divert attention away from regional integration; domestic survival often takes precedence over lifting tariff and non-tariff barriers.

Belonging to more than one economic community¹⁸; as is the case with most IGAD members also belong to the East African Community (EAC) or COMESA, is another challenge IGAD will continue to face in its drive to meet its objectives and aspirations. This "spaghetti bowl" of memberships creates conflicting commitments and resource strain.²⁰

¹⁷ The Parliament of Kenya approved the New IGAD Treaty on 27 May 2025.

¹⁸ Nagar, D. and Ngan, J. (2016). The AU and Africa's Regional Economic Communities. Center for Conflict Resolution.

²⁰ The political economy of Africa's regional 'spaghetti bowl'.
<https://ecdpm.org/application/files/2716/5546/8685/EC-DPM-synthesis-report-political-economy-Africas-regional-spaghetti-bowl.pdf>

Another difficulty facing the regional arrangement is Eritrea's un(?)expected exit. A significant setback occurred on December 12, 2025, when Eritrea once again formally withdrew from IGAD. This exit complicates the "regional identity" and makes the two-thirds ratification threshold harder to reach.

The changing global context also creates a discouraging environment for the functioning of the multilateral arrangement, likewise IGAD. Amid the increasing complexity of global and Gulf rivalries in the Horn of Africa and the growing trend of unilateralism, IGAD will face challenges in securing partnerships and support from international organizations to address regional problems. Recently, resource mobilization constraints have hindered the international community, particularly the UN, from financing projects worldwide. This is indeed the result of Washington's withdrawal from international commitment.

Conclusions

The drafting of the IGAD Treaty, which confers the status of an Economic Community, testifies to the commitment of the Heads of State and Government to address the emerging threats and the current and future needs and interests of the region. The realization of the objectives of the Abuja Treaty and, in general, the AfCFTA, including accelerating regional economic, social, environmental, and political integration and cross-border cooperation among member states, requires further



commitment from member states and the design of innovative strategies for future engagement with other partners. To survive the unfolding global uncertainties of 2026 and beyond, IGAD must forge a solid regional identity that can withstand the rivalries of external powers and the internal fragilities of its member states.





BRIDGE Research & Innovation



BRIDGE Profile

Bridge Research and Innovation for Democratic Governance and Enhanced Peace (BRIDGE) is an independent, non-profit think tank based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Registered under the FDRE Civil Society Organization Proclamation No. 1113/2019, which specializes in parliamentary affairs, peace, and development in the IGAD region.



Mission

To advance democratic governance and enhance peace through evidence-based research and innovative policy analysis.



Vision

To be a leading research hub and trusted source of analysis on parliamentary affairs, peace, governance, and development in the IGAD region.



Core Values

Rigor: Delivering high-quality, evidence-driven research.

Innovation: Pioneering creative and adaptive solutions for governance and peace challenges.

Trust: Upholding credibility through transparent and reliable analysis.



Objectives

It aims to be a knowledge hub on the affairs of IGAD and strengthen peace and socio-economic development throughout the Horn of Africa by:

- Conducting rigorous, evidence-based research that informs policy and practice on the IGAD subregional organization and on the Horn of Africa.

- Delivering specialized training programs on the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and regional dynamics in the Horn of Africa.

- Monitoring IGAD's activities for knowledge dissemination and engagement with academicians, the diplomatic community, and pertinent stakeholders, to amplify IGAD's impact and reinforce its commitment in the region.

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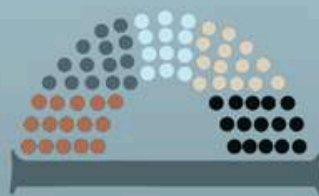
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