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Beyond IGAD: The Political Economy of Regional Development in the Horn of Africa

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Acronyms

AfCFTA – African Continental Free Trade Area

AMISOM – African Union Mission in Somalia

ATMIS – African Union Transition Mission in Somalia

AU – African Union

AUSSOM – African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia

BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

BRI – Belt and Road Initiative (China)

CEWARN – Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism

CRRF – Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

EAC – East African Community

EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zone

EPRDF – Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

EU – European Union

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization

FGS – Federal Government of Somalia

FMS – Federal Member States (Somalia)

FSRP – Food Systems Resilience Program

GERD – Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

ICPAC – IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre

ICPALD – IGAD Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development

IDDRSI – IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative

IGAD – Intergovernmental Authority on Development

IGADD – Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development

IPF – IGAD Partners Forum

LAPSSET – Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor

MIP – Minimum Integration Plan

MSU – Mediation Support Unit

NTBs – Non-Tariff Barriers

R-ARCSS – Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan

RECs – Regional Economic Communities

RSCT – Regional Security Complex Theory

RSF – Rapid Support Forces (Sudan)

SAF – Sudanese Armed Forces

SGR – Standard Gauge Railway

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

Abstract

This thesis examines the political economy of regional integration in the Horn of Africa, through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Despite IGAD's mandate to bring security and economic cooperation, its effectiveness is complicated by structural flaws, sovereignty disputes, and overdependence on external actors. Through qualitative analysis of institutional frameworks, member-state foreign policies, the study reveals three core contradictions. IGAD's consensus-based model, designed to respect sovereignty, often results in deadlock during crises. Over 80% of IGAD's budget comes from external actors like the EU and Gulf states, skewing priorities toward counterterrorism and migration control over locally driven development. Technical projects achieve localized gains but fail to build political trust or institutional cohesion due to uneven implementation and member-state rivalries.

The study argues that IGAD's challenges are existential, requiring more than incremental reforms. The 2023 Agreement, while progressive, lacks enforcement mechanisms to address the Horn's interconnected crises. Alternative models, such as variable geometry (flexible integration) or decentralized regionalism, are proposed to reconcile sovereignty with collective action. Ultimately, the thesis calls for a reconceptualized framework that prioritizes regional autonomy, balances technical and political integration, and mitigates the distorting influence of external actors. Without structural transformation, IGAD risks irrelevance in a region where instability demands bold, coordinated responses.

Key findings includes IGAD's institutional design perpetuates fragmentation rather than unity. Moreover, member states (e.g., Ethiopia, Kenya) leverage IGAD for national interests, undermining collective security.External funding sustains IGAD but erodes its legitimacy and long-term vision. This research bridges a critical gap in scholarship by interrogating IGAD's foundational misalignment with the Horn's political economy, moving beyond prescriptive reforms to explore radical alternatives for regionalism.

Keywords: Horn of Africa, IGAD, regional integration, sovereignty, donor dependency

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background

For decades, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has positioned itself as the primary vehicle for regional security and economic cooperation. Yet its achievements have been uneven and constrained by various limitations. This study examines why IGAD struggles to foster meaningful regional integration in one of the world's most volatile geopolitical landscapes.

The Horn of Africa is a region where state fragility and external interference have persistently undermined collective security and development. Despite decades of operation, IGAD remains an institution caught between its aspirations for regional integration and the realities of a deeply divided political landscape.

Originally formed in 1986 as the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), the organization was restructured in 1996 to address the region's escalating conflicts. However, its transformation failed to resolve fundamental contradictions in its design (de Waal, 2015). This structural flaw has been exacerbated by the Horn's entrenched obstacles (Woodward, 2016).

A further complication is IGAD's reliance on external funding, which has distorted its agenda. Over 80% of its budget comes from international donors (Apuuli, 2023). While this financing has enabled critical programs, it has also tied IGAD's priorities to external geopolitical interests, rather than locally driven solutions (Menkhaus, 2009).

Theoretical frameworks such as Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and Functionalism help explain these dynamics. RSCT highlights the Horn's interconnected security threats, where conflicts in one state inevitably spill over into neighboring countries (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Yet IGAD's inability to mediate effectively, evident in its inconsistent responses to crises in Tigray, demonstrates the limits of a regional body that lacks enforcement mechanisms. Meanwhile, Functionalism's promise that technical cooperation (e.g., drought resilience, infrastructure) could foster political integration has only partially materialized. Projects like the IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI) have achieved

localized successes but have failed to translate into deeper institutional trust or policy harmonization (Mesfin, 2008).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Scholars such as Alex de Waal (2015) and Peter Woodward (2016) discussed IGAD's limitations. De Waal argues that IGAD's consensus-driven model often prioritizes sovereignty over collective action, while Woodward emphasizes how external interventions in the Horn of Africa distort regional agendas.

1.3. Research Gap

While IGAD has been analyzed in terms of its mediation efforts and functional programs, there remains a gap in assessing whether its foundational and institutional structure, inherited from its predecessor, IGADD is fundamentally ill-suited for contemporary security and economic demands and has been poorly integrated with the reality on the ground.

1.4. Research Questions

1.4.1. General Questions

The general question this paper is attempting to answer is what are the structural and political obstacles to effective regional security and integration in the Horn of Africa?

1.4.2 Sub-questions

Similarly the questions that feed into the grander goal of this paper are:

- How has IGAD's role evolved since its founding, and what factors limit its current effectiveness?
- How does IGAD's structure and decision-making processes influence its capacity?
- What alternative integration models can be developed to enhance collective security and cooperation among states in the Horn of Africa?

1.5. Objective of the Study

1.5.1 General Objective

This research's general objective is to examine the major obstacles to regional security and integration in the Horn of Africa.

1.5.2. Specific Objectives

In terms of Specific Objectives, they are

- To examine the change and continuity of IGAD's mandate across the ages
- To assess how IGAD's institutional structure impacts its operational capacity in conflict mediation and regional cooperation.
- To explore the possibility of alternative models of regional integration that could enhance collective security and economic cooperation in the Horn of Africa

1.6. **Scope of the Study**

Spatially, the study concentrates on IGAD's eight member states: Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. While maintaining this primary focus, the research acknowledges the relevance of non-state actors and neighboring territories such as Somaliland when their interactions significantly influence regional dynamics or IGAD's operations. The study also considers the broader strategic significance of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden regions, particularly in relation to external power competition.

Temporally, the research establishes its analytical boundaries with major events or documents between 2000 and 2023. While historical context from the 1980s and 1990s, particularly IGAD's formative years and early peacebuilding efforts, is referenced where necessary. This time frame was chosen because it is wide enough to take into account the various instances where IGAD's success and failure was shown from conflict resolution initiatives to climate resilience projects. While this is a wide range, specific milestones in this range would attempt to give the institution a fair chance in terms of assessment.

Thematically, the investigation centers on three interconnected areas of inquiry. First, it examines IGAD's institutional architecture and decision-making processes, analyzing how these structural factors enable or constrain effective regional cooperation. Second, the study explores

the influence of external actors on IGAD's agenda and operations, investigating how this dynamic shapes the organization's autonomy and effectiveness.

1.5.Significance of the Study

This study is significant by making two contributions to the field of study. First, it advances academic discourse by examining the theoretical underpinnings of regional cooperation between weak states. Second, the research generates knowledge through its assessment of IGAD's performance. The focused country case studies yield data that enhances our understanding of the organization's operational realities, creating an evidence-based foundation for future studies on African regional institutions.

1.6. Challenges of the study

The primary limitation stems from restricted access to sensitive security-related data and internal decision-making processes within IGAD. To mitigate this constraint, the research employed a triangulation methodology that cross-verified information from authoritative sources such as official IGAD and state documents. For the structural analysis of IGAD's limitations, the study employed process-tracing methods to establish causal pathways between institutional design and operational outcomes. This helped compensate for the lack of direct access to internal deliberations.

1.7. Operational definitions

For the purposes of this paper, regional integration refers to the process by which neighboring states collaborate to achieve collective goals. In the context of IGAD, this concept encompasses efforts to harmonize policies, foster trade, and mediate conflicts among member states. Political economy is a framework that examines the interplay between politics and economics in shaping regional and national outcomes. Here, it is used to analyze how power dynamics, resource distribution, and external funding influence IGAD's operations. Sovereignty is a cornerstone principle for IGAD member states, emphasizing non-interference in domestic affairs and the primacy of national decision-making. While this principle is meant to protect state autonomy, it frequently leads to gridlock in regional initiatives. Donor dependency describes IGAD's heavy

reliance on external funding from entities like the European Union, the United States, and Gulf states.

These operational definitions are not just academic labels; they are tools for unpacking why IGAD struggles to fulfill its mandate and reveal a disconnect between the organization's aspirations and the realities of a region where sovereignty trumps solidarity, external agendas distort priorities, and functional projects fail to bridge deeper political divides.

1.8.Organization of the thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters. The Introduction establishes the research problem, objectives, and theoretical framework. Chapter Two reviews existing literature, identifying gaps in current understandings of IGAD's structural constraints and operational challenges. It situates the study within broader academic debates. The Methodology chapter details the qualitative research design. Chapter Four presents the data through three key dimensions: IGAD's institutional evolution, its mediation efforts in selected conflicts, and the impact of external actors on its operations. Chapter five presents the data analysis and discussions. While the conclusions synthesizes findings to suggest directions for future research while reinforcing the study's central arguments about institutional reform.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Concepts

Drawing on Functionalism, the study examines how technical cooperation (such as infrastructure development or drought management initiatives) can serve as a basis for building trust and paving the way for broader political integration. IGAD's early work focused on drought resilience, leveraging partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to distribute aid and improve water management. For example, its Drought Recovery and Rehabilitation Project (1987–1992) rehabilitated pastoralist communities in Somalia and Ethiopia. RSCT provides a framework for understanding how security issues in the Horn of Africa are intrinsically interdependent because of geographic proximity, historical rivalries, and shared vulnerabilities. This theory directs attention to the patterns of alliances and enmities that complicate IGAD's efforts to mediate conflicts and promote cohesive regional security. For instance, Ethiopia's involvement in Somalia's peacekeeping efforts and its past conflicts with Eritrea illustrate the regional security entanglements where internal and external security dimensions are deeply connected.

2.1.1. The Political Economy of the Horn of Africa

The 20th century witnessed an expansion of political economy into international and regional spheres, as theorists examined how intergovernmental organizations and regional cooperation influence economic stability and political power across borders (Yang, 2023) Political economy, in the regional context, thus considers the economic and political hierarchical interdependence among neighboring states, particularly in regions like the Horn of Africa, where economic disparities and political fragmentation necessitate a cooperative approach to stability and development.

The region faces significant challenges, including high levels of poverty, fragile political institutions, and external geopolitical interests that exacerbate internal regional divisions (Woodward, 2016). A political economy perspective could, perhaps, explain how economic

inequality among IGAD member states and active actors within the region creates barriers to equal participation in regional initiatives and security rentierism, thus complicating efforts for regional integration (Mahdavy 1970). Political economy in the Horn of Africa context reveals the limitations of economic interdependence when external actors, driven by their interests, introduce funds or security assistance that may not align with regional objectives (Mesfin, 2008; de Waal, 2015).

A critical aspect of political economy in the Horn is how state sovereignty and regional economic disparities intersect to limit the effectiveness of regional institutions like IGAD. Member states often prioritize other interests, not necessarily national, over regional goals (Bereketeab, 2013). This is exacerbated by external powers such as China, the Gulf States, and Western countries whose financial and military involvement in the region, positively and negatively, affects IGAD's capacity to operate independently, as these external influences affect the region's internal stability through direct and indirect interventions that, often introducing political dependencies and exacerbating local conflicts rather than resolving them, for ultimately their own interest (Alden, 2007).

In regions, such as the Horn of Africa, where economic resources are unevenly distributed, political economy helps explain why relatively stable states may wield greater influence within regional organizations, while economically fragile states struggle to have an equal stake in decision-making (Mesfin, 2008). This inequality often translates into unequal security benefits, as economically powerful states, or states with powerful external backers can leverage resources for increased political influence and security investments.

The literature often treats the Horn as a monolithic region, failing to account for the significant variations For example, certain countries' relative stability allow these states to shape regional policies in ways that may marginalize smaller or more fragile states. While the works of Burgess (2009) and Alene (2024) discuss the need for regional integration and economic cooperation, they do not sufficiently explore alternative frameworks that address IGAD's foundational limitations. The reliance on state-driven solutions, as highlighted by Apuuli (2020), often ignores the potential of non-state actors, grassroots initiatives, and hybrid governance models to contribute to regional stability and development.

2.1.2. Regional Security Complex Theory

Political economy intersects with several theoretical frameworks. RSCT, for example, does so by examining how security dynamics are inherently interlinked within regions. According to RSCT, security issues in a region are interconnected and are best understood in regional interactions rather than in isolation (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Regions can form security complexes when states within these regions view their security as interdependent, meaning the security concerns of one state are closely tied to the security conditions of its neighbors. The theory posits that these regional security complexes operate as subsystems within the broader international system, each with its dynamics and patterns of security interdependence (Ibid).

In RSCT, two primary forces: patterns of amity and enmity among states, and power distributions that influence whether states engage cooperatively or antagonistically with each other, shape regional security dynamics. Buzan and Wæver identify three main components within regional security complexes:

- Boundaries that separate the regional complex from other complexes.
- Anarchic Structure, meaning each state operates independently, yet security is intertwined within the region.
- Patterns of Rivalries and Friendships that dictate the level of conflict or cooperation within the region (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998).

The Horn of Africa's security complex aligns with RSCT's premise that geographic proximity and interdependence drive regional security concerns (Mesfin, 2011). Given that states in the Horn share both geographic boundaries and historical animosities, the conflicts are not isolated but regionalized. For instance, Ethiopia's conflicts with Eritrea and involvement in Somalia's peacekeeping efforts reflect regional security entanglements where each state's internal security concerns are influenced by regional dynamics (Bereketeab, 2013).

2.1.3. Functionalism

Developed by David Mitrany (1966), Functionalism posits that by focusing on areas of mutual interest, such as infrastructure development, and trade initiatives, states can establish trust and

economic interdependence that eventually reduce conflicts and foster cooperation in more politically sensitive areas.

Functionalism is relevant in regions where political fragmentation or historical rivalries make direct political integration challenging. The theory is rooted because cooperation in technical and economic domains can incrementally lead to regional integration and peace. By building cooperation through functional projects, states can create shared interests that lay the groundwork for political cooperation (Walsh B. et al., 2023). Functionalism emphasizes incrementalism, where trust is built over time as states work together on low-stakes issues, eventually nurturing enough confidence to cooperate on security and political matters. IGAD has arguably pursued functional cooperation through projects such as drought resilience initiatives and infrastructure Master Plan aimed. These projects align with Functionalist principles by focusing on non-political areas that can serve as a foundation for broader collaboration (Weldesellassie, 2011) (Mesfin, 2008).

However, perhaps it did not use the tools available through it properly. IGAD's failure to fully leverage functionalism's potential reveals the organization's institutional weaknesses, including insufficient funding, lack of capacity, and political interference by member states. For instance, while IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainable Initiative (IDDRSI) has seen some success, competing national priorities and the reluctance of states to cede even minimal sovereignty to a regional body has hampered its implementation. Perhaps its reliance on stable economic conditions and relatively equal participation among states hinders functional cooperation. Wealthier states like Kenya can benefit more from functional initiatives, while conflict-ridden and economically fragile states struggle to take part equally, which deepens regional inequalities rather than promoting integration. Subsequently Functionalism's incremental approach may also be too gradual for the urgent security needs of the region, where immediate and coordinated security interventions are often required.

The literature on functionalism in the Horn remains relatively limited compared to other regions like Europe. Haas's (1964) foundational work on functionalism provides the theoretical basis for exploring regional integration through incremental, task-specific cooperation. Although much of Haas's focus was on European integration, his ideas have informed analyses of how the Horn's

Regional Economic Communities (RECs), particularly IGAD, attempt to address cross-border issues. Functionalist approaches to the Horn often highlight IGAD's initiatives, such as the Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI), as examples of how functional cooperation can build momentum for broader regional integration.

Weldesellassie (2011) discusses how IGAD's early focus on environmental issues, including drought and desertification, aligns with functionalist principles by addressing shared vulnerabilities to manifest into collective action. Musau (2021) extends this functionalist analysis by examining IGAD's Protocol on Transhumance, which seeks to facilitate cross-border movement of pastoralist communities while managing resource-based conflicts. This initiative reflects functionalism's emphasis on solving practical problems to build institutional capacity and trust among member states. Musau argues that by addressing specific, localized issues, IGAD has the potential to strengthen regional integration incrementally. Söderbaum (2016) and Kaburu (2018) explore how regional projects, such as the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor, embody functionalist principles by addressing shared economic needs.

However, both authors critique the uneven implementation of these projects, undermining functionalism's core principle of fair cooperation. The region's deep-seated political rivalries, as discussed by Le Gouriellec (2018) and de Waal (2015), often undermine the trust necessary for functional cooperation to succeed. Weldesellassie (2011) and Musau (2021) note that this limitation is evident in IGAD's inconsistent implementation of initiatives like IDDRSI and the Protocol on Transhumance.

2.1.4. Understanding the Horn of Africa

In African states, foreign policy is usually an outward projection of domestic realities (Clapham, 2018). One of the reasons is the legacy of weak state institutions and political instability (Ibid). Many states in the Horn are defined by fragile governance structures and unresolved internal conflicts (De waal, 2015). This limits their ability to project an independent foreign policy, as it often aligns with donor priorities or the interests of powerful neighbors (Menkhaus, 2009).

Governments in the Horn often use foreign policy to bolster their domestic standing, either by appealing to nationalist sentiments or by deflecting from internal failures. Eritrea, under President Isaias Afwerki, has long pursued an isolationist and confrontational foreign policy with its neighbours while maintaining somewhat friendly relationships with donors, shaped by its internal authoritarian structure and the regime's need to maintain tight control over the population (De waal, 2015). The longstanding conflict with Ethiopia, only formally resolved in 2018 for a brief time, was as much about external dynamics as it was a tool for internal consolidation (Clapham, 2018).

This fragmented approach often undermines regional organizations like the IGAD, which depends, as all RECs do, on the collective commitment of member states to address shared challenges (Kaburu, 2018). When member states are preoccupied with domestic crises, their engagement with regional initiatives becomes inconsistent, weakening the organization's overall effectiveness.

Scholars such as Kidane Mengisteab (2014) argue that, given the transboundary nature of issues like terrorism, migration, and resource scarcity, regional integration is not merely desirable but essential for the stability of the Horn. Mengisteab emphasizes that many of the region's conflicts, including those in Somalia and Sudan, have spillover effects that directly impact neighboring states, highlighting the need for a coordinated response to security threats. From this perspective, IGAD's integration efforts are seen as vital for containing conflicts and promoting collective security.

But any integration effort would have its work cut out for it. Historical rivalries, shaped the political landscape such as those between Ethiopia and Eritrea or Somalia and Kenya (and Ethiopia), which create a backdrop of mistrust and territorial disputes (De waal, 2015).

In Somalia, the fragmented clan-based social structure shapes its engagement with IGAD (Menkhaus, 2009). Internal clan dynamics, which can conflict with national interests and make cohesive foreign policy challenging, heavily influenced Somali politics. Somalia's commitment to regional integration is therefore limited, as national cohesion itself is difficult to achieve, let alone regional cohesion. Historical disputes between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Somali

region have deepened a legacy of mistrust, affecting IGAD's capacity to mediate effectively and establish consistent cooperation between these countries (Mengisteab, 2013).

Mamo (2016) states that different scholars provide different reasons regarding the security issues that plague the Horn of Africa. Besides factors such as its proximity to the Middle East and the wider global international security interest, interrelated factors include weak states and environmental issues. He argues positive influences of shared interest does not hold these issues, but shared rivalries. Even though there are instances of cooperation to counter issues such as terrorism, scholars note "those successful joint operations are mostly rendered impossible" because of tense relations within and between the IGAD member states (Mamo, 2016).

2.1.5. **Regional Economic Communities and their Significance in the Global System**

ADD AN INTRO ABOUT AU

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have become essential components of global governance and regional integration. These organizations facilitate cooperation among member states to address shared economic, political, and security challenges. Their origins are deeply rooted in the post-World War II order, which witnessed the proliferation of regional integration as a mechanism for achieving peace, stability, and development (Balassa, 1961).

The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 and the subsequent formation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 laid the foundation for modern regional integration and served as a model for other regions seeking to replicate its achievements. (Söderbaum & Shaw, 2003)

In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the wave of decolonization during the 1950s and 1960s brought newly independent states into the global system. These states faced significant economic and political challenges, including weak institutions and limited bargaining power on the international stage (Söderbaum, 2016).

For this research, RECs can be broadly defined as organizations formed by a group of states within a specific geographic region to pursue common geopolitical objectives.

RECs typically operate under a legal framework. These frameworks provide the basis for cooperation among member states. As one of the core reasons for its existence, RECs aim to promote economic integration among member states. RECs exist at different levels of integration, ranging from loose cooperation to more advanced forms of union. (Söderbaum, 2016; Apuuli, 2020).

Politically, RECs provide a platform for dialogue and cooperation (Kaburu, 2018). However, the effectiveness of RECs often depends on the political will and commitment of their member states.

Academic Arguments on New Models of Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

As geopolitics reshapes the world, traditional models face new challenges that require new approaches. Scholars have debated the effectiveness RECs and proposed new models. These arguments focus on the evolution of REC and their relevance in addressing contemporary challenges. Traditional RECs have been primarily state-centric, focusing on intergovernmental cooperation. However, critics argue this limits the inclusivity and effectiveness by excluding non-state actors (Söderbaum, 2016).

They argue new models should prioritize bottom-up approaches, where grassroots initiatives and informal networks complement formal institutional frameworks (ibid). Another critique of traditional RECs is their "one-size-fits-all" approach, which assumes uniform readiness among member states to engage in integration.

Variable geometry suggests that member states can progress at different speeds or depths of integration, depending on their economic and political conditions (Stubb, 1996). For instance, countries with advanced economies might deepen their integration within a REC, while others remain at a more basic level of cooperation. This model is relevant for regions like Africa, where significant disparities exist in economic development and governance capacities among REC member states.

For regions plagued by conflict, traditional REC models focused on economic integration may not suffice. Scholars argue for conflict-responsive models that prioritize peacebuilding and

security alongside economic goals. Conflict-Responsive Regionalism incorporates peacekeeping mechanisms, early warning systems, and post-conflict reconstruction into REC mandates.

Decentralized regionalism proposes delegating more power to sub-regional or national entities. This approach aligns with the principle of subsidiarity, ensuring that decisions are made at the most effective level of governance. Decentralized models can address local issues more efficiently, fostering stronger connections between regional initiatives and local realities. But perhaps such a decentralized approach would be difficult to implement in ethnic conflict prone regions do to the complications the approach would entail.

2.2. Literature Review

IGAD fits within the broader tradition of organizations that expand their mandates in response to shifting geopolitical and socio-economic demands. Originally established in 1986 as IGADD, its primary focus was environmental cooperation (Burgess, 2009; Weldesellassie, 2011). However, the post-Cold War era's security vacuum and the Horn of Africa's escalating conflicts necessitated change. In 1996, IGADD was reconstituted as IGAD, incorporating peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and political stabilization into its core agenda (Maru, 2017).

This transformation reflects a recurring pattern among RECs: initial specialization in non-political issues (e.g., trade, environment) often gives way to broader security and governance roles as regional instability demands intervention. IGAD's experience parallels the AU's own trajectory, where social mandates gradually expanded to include peacekeeping and mediation. Yet, unlike more robust RECs such as the EU, IGAD's effectiveness remains constrained by the Horn's unique challenges. (de Waal, 2015; Mesfin, 2008).

2.3. 2.2.1. IGAD's Structure and Evolution

The story of IGAD is, at its core, a story about the limits of theory when confronted with the messy realities of the Horn of Africa. The organization's evolution mirrors broader academic debates about how and why states cooperate. When IGAD's predecessor, IGADD, was established in 1986, its architects were guided by functionalist logic. David Mitrany's (1966) vision of international cooperation was built on a simple premise, if states could first collaborate on non-political, technical issues, like managing shared water resources or combating desertification, they would gradually develop the trust and institutional habits needed for deeper

integration. The idea, intentional or not, was that success in one area would "spill over" into others, creating an almost inevitable momentum toward political unity.

For IGADD, this meant starting with the most immediate and least controversial challenge facing the Horn: environmental degradation. Droughts were killing livestock, destroying crops, and displacing communities across borders. In theory, these small victories would build confidence, foster technocratic networks, and lay the groundwork for more ambitious collaboration.

By the 1990s, however, the Horn's escalating conflicts forced a dramatic shift. The collapse of Somalia into civil war, the intensification of Sudan's north-south conflict, and the destabilizing aftermath of the Cold War made it clear that environmental cooperation alone was insufficient.

This pivot aligned with neo-functionalist theory, which argued that crises could accelerate integration by compelling states to cooperate in new ways (ibid). Unlike classical functionalism, which envisioned gradual, technical spillover, neo-functionalism recognized that political elites might consciously expand cooperation in response to emergencies. IGAD's mediation efforts in Sudan (culminating in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement) and its involvement in Somalia's peace processes seemed to validate this logic.

Yet, for all its theoretical resonance, IGAD's trajectory has also exposed the limitations of these models. The functionalist assumption that technical cooperation would naturally lead to political unity has proven wildly optimistic in a region where distrust runs deep and sovereignty remains sacrosanct. Meanwhile, neo-functionalism's emphasis on crisis-driven integration has often resulted in reactive, ad hoc interventions rather than sustained institutional growth.

In the Horn, external actors, from Western donors to Gulf States and China, have consistently shaped IGAD's agenda. Donor funding has skewed priorities toward security issues often at the expense of long-term development (Mengisteab, 2014). Meanwhile, Gulf States like the UAE and Qatar have exploited regional fractures, backing rival factions in Somalia and Sudan to advance their own geopolitical interests (Meester et al., 2018).

The organization relies heavily on external donors for basic operations, leaving it vulnerable to shifting priorities and conditionalities (Bereketeab, 2013). At the same time, its technical capacity remains weak, particularly in conflict monitoring and mediation support. The Conflict

Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), for example, has been praised for its data collection but criticized for its inability to compel member states to act on its warnings (Apuuli, 2023).

This is not to say that regionalism is impossible in the Horn. But it does suggest that future efforts must start from a more grounded understanding of the region's political economy, one that acknowledges the limits of theory and the need for flexible, context-specific solutions. The question is not whether IGAD can be reformed, but whether the Horn's leaders and their international partners are willing to confront the hard truths that have constrained integration from the beginning.

2.2.3. Internal Challenges: The Fractured Foundations of Cooperation

Through the years, the organization has characterized by an imbalance of power (Le Gouriellec, 2018). This hegemonic dynamic has created resentment among smaller member states, who frequently perceive IGAD as a vehicle for advancing the interests of its most powerful members rather than as a genuinely neutral platform for regional cooperation. The Ethiopia-Eritrea rivalry has been particularly destabilizing, with both countries using IGAD as an arena to pursue their competing agendas (Henneberg & Stapel, 2020). Compounding these political divisions are IGAD's profound institutional weaknesses. Unlike more robust regional organizations, IGAD lacks meaningful enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with its decisions (Mesfin, 2008). Furthermore, IGAD's chronic financial instability renders it dependent on the voluntary contributions of member states, which are often irregular and insufficient (de Waal, 2015). This financial precariousness limits IGAD's operational autonomy and forces it to prioritize short-term crisis management over long-term strategic planning.

2.3.4. External Challenges: The Geopolitics of Dependence

IGAD's operational environment is further complicated by the influence of external actors, whose strategic interests frequently diverge from those of the region. Donor countries, particularly the United States and European Union, have played an outsized role in shaping IGAD's agenda (Mengisteab, 2014). This financial leverage has skewed IGAD's priorities toward issues that align with Western security concerns, such as counterterrorism and migration control, often at the expense of locally-driven development initiatives.

Perhaps more destabilizing has been the growing interference of Gulf States and China in the Horn's political economy. The strategic rivalry between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates has replicated itself within IGAD's membership (Meester et al., 2018). Similarly, China's Belt and Road Initiative has created new dependencies that complicate IGAD's efforts to promote regional integration(Alden, 2007). These external engagements have made it increasingly difficult for IGAD to maintain a coherent, independent position on critical issues.

2.4. Proposed Reforms and Alternative Frameworks for Regional Cooperation

The challenges that IGAD faces have prompted scholarly debate about potential reforms and alternative models for regional cooperation in the Horn of Africa. These proposals range from institutional restructuring to the creation of parallel financial mechanisms and engagement with alternative regional blocs.

2.3.1. The "IGAD 3.0" Agenda

Some scholars advocate for fundamental restructuring of IGAD to enhance its effectiveness in conflict mediation and regional integration. Kaburu (2018) propose an "IGAD 3.0" model that would introduce binding agreements with enforcement mechanisms, moving beyond the organization's current reliance on voluntary compliance. This shift would require member states to cede a degree of sovereignty. (Mesfin, 2008).

Key components of these reform agendas include:

- A dedicated Mediation Support Unit to professionalize conflict resolution efforts, addressing the current ad hoc nature of IGAD's interventions (Apuuli, 2023).
- Grassroots inclusion mechanisms to incorporate civil society and local stakeholders in peace processes, countering the top-down approach that has often marginalized affected communities (Kaburu, 2018).
- Enhanced early warning systems with mandatory response protocols, building on the existing but underutilized Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN)

While theoretically promising, these reforms face significant political hurdles. The historical reluctance of member states, particularly Ethiopia and Kenya, to surrender decision-making

authority suggests that binding agreements may prove difficult to implement in practice (Hersi & Akinola, 2024).

2.3.2. The IGAD Development Bank Proposal

Recognizing IGAD's chronic funding instability, Michael (2016) proposes the creation of an IGAD Communities Development Bank as a mechanism to reduce external dependency. This institution would adopt a private equity approach, focusing on asset-backed investments rather than traditional loans, given the high debt burdens of member states.

The bank's theoretical advantages include:

- Reduced donor influence by generating independent revenue streams through strategic investments in infrastructure and regional trade corridors.
- Promotion of economic integration by financing cross-border projects that align with IGAD's broader development goals.
- Risk diversification through a portfolio approach that anticipates project failures in high-risk environments.

However, the feasibility of this model remains uncertain. The same sovereignty concerns that hinder IGAD's political integration could limit member state contributions to the bank's capital base. Moreover, the region's volatile security environment poses significant risks to long-term investments (de Waal, 2015).

2.3.3. Complementary Regionalism: Engagement with Alternative Blocs

Given IGAD's structural constraints, scholars have increasingly examined how alternative regional frameworks might supplement or enhance its work. Two models have attracted particular attention.

Henneberg and Stapel (2020) document how South Sudan's 2016 accession to the EAC reflects a pragmatic search for more effective economic integration. The EAC's relatively stronger institutions and progress toward a common market present an attractive alternative for IGAD members seeking tangible benefits from regional cooperation. However, the EAC's limited security mandate means it cannot replace IGAD's conflict resolution role, suggesting the need for complementary rather than competitive engagement (Molla, 2023) On another note, Abubakar

(2022) argues that IGAD could leverage AfCFTA to advance its economic integration agenda while avoiding the political bottlenecks of deeper institutional reform. Through its trade facilitation programs with continental standards, IGAD might achieve incremental progress where broader political integration has stalled. This approach, however, risks further marginalizing IGAD's role if implementation occurs primarily through AU channels (Apuuli, 2020).

2.3.4. Hybrid Models

A fourth strand of literature, exemplified by Musau (2021), suggests bypassing state-centric models altogether in favor of issue-specific coalitions. Transhumance agreements between pastoralist communities, joint climate adaptation programs, and cross-border local governance initiatives could build trust at sub-state levels while circumventing political blockages at the intergovernmental level. Drawing on Haas's (1964) functionalist theory, these micro-level collaborations might eventually "spill up" to reshape broader regional dynamics.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that is used to investigate the political economy with the Horn of Africa and the role of the IGAD in shaping regional security and integration in it. Given the research's emphasis on understanding not only the structural and functional aspects of IGAD but also the meaning-making and socially constructed processes among its members, this study adopts a qualitative design.

The chapter also states the ontological and epistemological stance of the study, recognizing that reality in regional security is socially constructed, contingent upon historical interactions and political discourses.

3.2. Research Design

This reviewed 45+ IGAD agreements, donor reports and member state policies. Moreover, thematic coding patterns suc as sovergnity and external influence where identified.

3.2.1. Qualitative Approach

Given the context-specific nature of IGAD's role in the Horn of Africa as well as resource constraints, a qualitative research design was chosen. This approach allows for an in-depth investigation of political, economic, and social processes that influence regional security and integration. In line with the interpretivist epistemology, the study sought to understand how IGAD member states construct and negotiate their security and integration strategies through historical narratives, discursive practices, and practical cooperation initiatives.

3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1. Document Analysis

To understand the formal structures and policy intentions behind IGAD, the study undertook an analysis of policy documents, legal frameworks, and secondary sources. This includes, key texts such as the IGAD Charter, foundational agreements and institutional mandates. Reports and communiques from IGAD and related regional bodies was be examined to understand

operational challenges and decision-making processes. Evaluative reports by international organizations, media articles, and press releases offer external perspectives on IGAD's successes, failures, and the broader geopolitical context influencing its operations.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The analyses of qualitative data were conducted using thematic coding procedures. Detailed notes and initial observations were recorded. Segments of data were labeled with descriptive codes that capture key concepts. Initial codes include "member state dynamics," "external influence," "technical cooperation," "trust-building," and "sovereignty concerns." Codes were organized into broader categories, such as grouping all codes related to internal dynamics under "Member State Dynamics" and those related to external actor involvement under "External Influences." Core themes were refined and aligned with the theoretical frameworks. For instance, themes emerging from RSCT (e.g., interdependence and regional rivalries) were compared against functionalist themes (e.g., incremental cooperation) and constructivist narratives (e.g., identity formation and discourse). The recurrent themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions. Special attention was given to how IGAD's formal mandates, as outlined in policy and legal documents, both reflect and diverge from the practical realities.

3.5. Ontological and Epistemological Standpoint

The research is within an interpretivist epistemology, which holds that knowledge is co-created between the researcher and the subject. The findings are understood as contingent, partial, and evolving representations of how IGAD's role is perceived and enacted by various stakeholders.

The study's ontological stance is a critical realist, neorealism. Critical realism acknowledges that an objective reality exists, independent of our perception of it. This means that there are real structures and processes at play in the Horn of Africa that influence regional security and integration. In other words, iy asserts that social phenomena are caused by underlying structures that may not be directly observable but can be inferred through their effects. It combines a belief in an objective reality with recognition that our knowledge of it is fallible.

However, critical realism also recognizes the agency of actors, both state and non-state, in shaping that reality. Actors are not simply puppets of structural forces but can interpret, challenge, and redefine regional norms and institutions. Perhaps it avoids the determinism of some realist perspectives, which overemphasize the role of structures, and the voluntarism of some constructivist approaches, which may overstate the power of agency. So while critical realim grounds research in a reality that exists beyond individual views, interpretivism emphasizes understanding the meanings people attach to that reality.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to ethical protocols and recognizing the sensitivity of the topic and the political context within which IGAD operates. For any primary data collection, participants were be briefed on the research aims, and informed consent will be obtained. Anonymity was offered and ensured for respondent.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation

4.1. Introduction

This section examines the historical transformation of IGADD into the present-day IGAD, tracing the organization's shifting mandate from a narrow focus on environmental challenges to a broader role in regional security and economic integration. The analysis seeks to achieve three key objectives: first, to elucidate the geopolitical and climatic factors that necessitated IGADD's establishment in 1986; second, to analyze the institutional and strategic changes that accompanied its restructuring into IGAD in 1996; and third, to assess how this evolution reflects the Horn of Africa's enduring tensions between sovereignty and collective action.

4.2.1. The Foundation of IGAD: Historical and Legal

Early 1980s saw the Horn of Africa ravaged by droughts such as the 1984–1985 famine. OAU and FAO pointed towards the necessity of a coordinated approach, warning "drought respects no borders" (FAO, 1985). The first critical meeting occurred in Djibouti in November 1984. The summit produced the Djibouti Declaration, committing members to establish a drought-focused body. Cold War rivalries and internal conflicts, hamstrung IGADD's early years such as Ethiopia's civil war and Somalia's collapse in 1991. By the mid-1990s, regional leaders recognized that drought could not be decoupled from conflict.

The Nairobi Declaration marked a turning point. Member states agreed to expand IGADD's mandate, recognizing that "development cannot thrive in the absence of peace" (IGAD, 1996, p. 4). The revised charter, signed on March 25, rechristened the organization IGAD, incorporating security and economic integration.

4.1.1.1. A look into the legal and policy documents establishing IGAD

The preamble of the Agreement Establishing the IGAD serves as the legal foundation of the organization. It preamble articulates a commitment to principles such as regional solidarity, mutual respect for sovereignty, and non-interference in internal affairs (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Preamble). It also emphasizes the importance of sustainable development, peace, and security as pillars for regional integration. A core principle highlighted in the preamble is the need for collective action to address shared challenges. The member states acknowledge the

region's vulnerability to environmental degradation, particularly drought and desertification, which have historically devastated livelihoods and economies. (IGAD Handbook).

Articles 1 and 1A focus on defining the organization and its scope, providing insight on IGAD's purpose, legal status, and membership criteria. Article 1 of the agreement sets the foundation by defining IGAD as an intergovernmental organization tasked with promoting cooperation and integration among its member states. The article establishes IGAD's legal status as an intergovernmental organization with full legal personality.(Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 1A).

Article 6A of the Agreement Establishing IGAD outlines the core principles that govern the organization's operations. These principles include respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and the promotion of regional stability.

Core Principles

IGAD emphasizes the sovereign equality of its member states and ensures that all states, regardless of size or influence, have an equal voice in the organization's decision-making processes (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 6A). As mentioned before, the principle of non-interference mandates that IGAD refrains from intervening in the internal affairs of its member states.

4.1.1.1.2. Objectives and Mandates

Article 7 of the agreement enumerates IGAD's objectives, emphasizing the promotion of sustainable development, regional integration, and the maintenance of peace and security. Article 7 focuses on the importance of conflict prevention, management, and resolution as prerequisites for regional stability and development. Another one of IGAD's primary objectives is to promote economic cooperation and regional integration among its member states. IGAD seeks to harmonize policies and create conditions for sustainable economic growth.

Building on its origins as IGADD, IGAD also prioritizes combating desertification, managing natural resources, and strengthening resilience against climate change (Article 7C). One such example is IDDRSI which aims to enhance regional cooperation in managing shared resources, such as water basins, and building adaptive capacities for communities affected by climate-

induced challenges (IGAD Handbook, p. 30).Article 7 emphasizes the need to combat desertification, manage natural resources, and strengthen resilience to climate change and disasters.

Recognizing the Horn of Africa's heavy reliance on agriculture, IGAD prioritizes enhancing agricultural productivity The organization supports initiatives aimed at modernizing farming practices and combating livestock diseases (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 13A; IGAD Handbook, p. 27).

4.1.1.1.2 Financial Provisions

Articles 3, 14, and 15 of the Agreement Establishing IGAD provide the financial framework within which the organization operates. These provisions define IGAD's legal personality, outline member states' financial obligations, and establish mechanisms for external funding. Together, they form the backbone of IGAD's ability to function as a regional organization addressing the Horn of Africa's complex challenges.

Article 3 confers full legal personality upon IGAD, granting it the authority to enter agreements, own property, and engage in legal proceedings. It also facilitates partnerships with donors and global institutions, such as the African Union, United Nations, and World Bank (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 3).

Article 3 outlines IGAD's privileges and immunities, ensuring that it can carry out its duties without interference. These include exemption from taxes, inviolability of archives, and legal protection for its officials. These provisions enhance IGAD's autonomy, allowing it to function effectively across diverse political and legal systems within the Horn of Africa (IGAD Handbook, p. 25).

In terms of its financial contributions, Article 14 requires member states to contribute financially to IGAD's budget. Contributions are calculated based on agreed formulas that consider each state's economic capacity (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 14).

Article 15 allows IGAD to receive funding from external sources, including bilateral donors, international organizations, and development partners. External funding makes up a significant

portion of IGAD's budget, enabling it to undertake large-scale projects and initiatives, such as the Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI) (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 15). While external funding provides essential resources, it also raises concerns about IGAD's autonomy.

4.1.2 Provisions for Cooperation with External Entities

IGAD's legal personality, as defined in Article 3 of the agreement, enables it to engage in formal agreements with international entities, including the United Nations (UN), World Bank, and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These partnerships are crucial for mobilizing technical and financial resources to support IGAD's programs, such as the Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI) and conflict resolution efforts (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 3; IGAD Handbook, p. 34). Article 15 allows IGAD to receive external funding, which makes up a significant portion of its budget. Donor countries, including the United States, European Union member states, and Gulf countries, provide critical financial support for initiatives in peacebuilding, environmental sustainability, and economic integration (IGAD Handbook, 2020 p. 32). IGAD actively participates in joint initiatives with regional and global actors, such as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). These collaborations enhance its capacity to address transboundary issues and align its activities with broader international goals (IGAD Handbook, 2020 p. 35).

4.1.2.1. Decision-Making Processes

Decisions within the Assembly and the Council in IGAD are made by consensus rather than majority voting, ensuring that all member states have equal input and that no single state dominates proceedings (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 13).However, the agreement does not specify detailed voting thresholds, leaving room for interpretation (IGAD Handbook, p. 23).

Representation within IGAD's organs balances equality and practicality. Each member state has equal representation in the Summit and Council of Ministers, ensuring that smaller states like Djibouti and Eritrea have a voice alongside larger powers such as Ethiopia and Kenya.

4.1.2.2. Institutional Framework and Structure

The institutional framework of IGAD is defined in Articles 8 through 13 of the Agreement.

Assembly of Heads of State and Government:

The Assembly's position at the apex of IGAD's structure reflects the intergovernmental nature of the organization, ensuring that all critical decisions have the endorsement of member states' leadership (IGAD Handbook, p. 18).It serves as the supreme decision-making body of IGAD. Composed of the heads of state or government of the member states, it has the authority to set strategic direction, approve budgets, and resolve major regional issues (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 8). Consensus makes decisions, reflecting the intergovernmental nature of IGAD but sometimes limiting its ability to act decisively during crises (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 8).The Assembly convenes biannually, with the chairmanship rotating annually among member states (IGAD, 2020).

Its functions include:

1. Formulation of policies and overall strategic oversight.
2. Endorsement of treaties, agreements, and key initiatives.
3. Resolution of high-level disputes between member states.

Council of Ministers:

Composed of foreign affairs ministers and other relevant ministers from member states, the Council acts as a policy advisory and implementation body. It reviews and adopts recommendations from the Secretariat and coordinates regional initiatives (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 9). The Council is composed of foreign ministers and other relevant ministers from each member state. It functions as the policy advisory body to the Assembly, responsible for refining recommendations and overseeing their implementation (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 9). The Council bridges the gap between the Assembly and the Secretariat, translating strategic policies into actionable programs while maintaining oversight (IGAD Handbook, p. 19). To execute its function, it has subsidiaries committees such as a committee on agriculture and environment and committee on economic cooperation.

Its key functions include:

- Reviewing and adopting policy recommendations from the Secretariat.
- Approving budgets and ensuring the financial sustainability of IGAD.
- Coordinating regional programs and monitoring their progress.

Committee of Ambassadors:

This committee provides a link between the Secretariat, and member states, ensuring continuous dialogue and coordination. It plays a monitoring and advisory role, particularly in implementing decisions made by the Summit and Council of Ministers (IGAD Handbook, p. 19). The Committee of Ambassadors acts as a liaison between the Secretariat and the member states, ensuring regular dialogue and coordination (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 10).

- Providing advisory input on policy implementation.
- Monitoring compliance with decisions made by the Assembly and the Council.
- Facilitating communication among member states to address emerging challenges.

Secretariat

The Secretariat serves as the administrative and operational arm of IGAD, headquartered in Djibouti. Led by the Executive Secretary, it implements programs, coordinates activities, and facilitates communication among member states and external partners (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 10). The Secretariat is the administrative and operational arm of IGAD, headquartered in Djibouti and led by an Executive Secretary appointed by the Assembly (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 11).

Its functions primarily include:

- Implementing decisions made by the Assembly and the Council.
- Coordinating IGAD's programs and activities across member states.
- Facilitating partnerships with international organizations and donors.
- Preparing reports, budgets, and recommendations for IGAD's governing bodies.

Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI)

Launched as a flagship program under the IGAD Regional Strategy 2011–2015, IDDRSI focuses on mitigating the impacts of recurrent droughts through early warning systems and livelihood diversification. The initiative has strengthened national expert panels and promoted cross-border cooperation in drought-prone areas such as the Karamoja cluster (spanning Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan) . Member states develop national 5-year plans under IDDRSI to prioritize resilience-building projects. IDDRSI also strengthens institutional capacity by establishing National Expert Panels in each member state. These panels coordinate disaster risk management, climate adaptation, and policy harmonization. Regional reports indicate a decline in food-insecure populations from 55.5 million (2022) to 47.3 million (2023), attributed to IDDRSI's interventions in crop diversification and emergency response. (WHO, 2023)

Food Systems Resilience Program (FSRP)

Developed in partnership with the World Bank, the FSRP (2023–2030) aims to enhance agricultural productivity and climate adaptation across the IGAD region. It launched in 2023 as part of the IGAD Regional Strategy 2021–2025, is a 10-year initiative. A cornerstone of this program is the Regional Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (2025–2034). The strategy emphasizes crop diversification, post-harvest loss reduction, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture. To reduce annual post-harvest losses (estimated at 30–40% in the region), the program supports solar-powered cold storage units and hermetic grain silos. In Kenya, pilot projects in Nakuru County reduced maize spoilage by 60%, benefiting over 5,000 smallholder farmers (ibid). FSRP integrates bio-fortification programs, such as vitamin A-enriched sweet potatoes in Uganda and iron-rich beans in South Sudan. These efforts aim to address chronic malnutrition, which affects 32% of children under five in IGAD states. The program facilitates cross-border trade by harmonizing food safety standards and reducing non-tariff barriers.

Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development (ICPALD)

ICPALD's mission is to complement the efforts of IGAD member states in sustainably generating wealth and employment through livestock and complementary rangeland resources in arid and semi-arid areas of the region. Its overall objective is to facilitate and advocate for people-centered and gender-responsive sustainable development in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands

(ASALs) and livestock in the IGAD region. ICPALD operates through a collaborative framework involving IGAD member states, local communities, and international partners. The center serves as a regional policy reference institution for livestock and drylands, developing frameworks that guide sustainable development in pastoral areas. The center focuses on enhancing the skills and knowledge of stakeholders involved in livestock and pastoral development through training and workshops.

IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Center (ICPAC)

The IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) serves as a cornerstone of climate adaptation and disaster preparedness. Established to address the region's vulnerability to climate extremes, ICPAC combines advanced meteorological forecasting with actionable policy frameworks to mitigate risks to agriculture, food security, and human livelihoods. Its work spans climate modeling, early warning systems, and capacity-building initiatives, all aimed at fostering resilience in a region where climate variability disproportionately impacts marginalized communities. ICPAC's mandate centers on providing timely and accurate climate predictions to inform decision-making across sectors. In March 2025, the center released its March-May (MAM) 2025 seasonal forecast during the 69th Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF 69), projecting warmer-than-normal temperatures and below-average rainfall for much of the IGAD region. These forecasts are critical for agricultural planning, as the March-May season is a primary cropping period for equatorial areas. ICPAC's sub-seasonal updates, disseminated through weekly bulletins, enable governments and NGOs to preempt climate hazards such as droughts and floods. ICPAC's Agriculture and Food Security program integrates climate data with agricultural monitoring to address food insecurity, which affected about 85 million people in the region as of March 2025. The center coordinates the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG), a network of over 80 organizations that produce monthly food security updates and advocate for targeted interventions. ICPAC's disaster risk management efforts emphasize proactive measures to mitigate loss of life and livelihoods.

Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN)

CEWARN monitors potential conflicts across the region through data collection, analysis, and dissemination. It focuses on transboundary issues such as resource-based conflicts and

communal violence (Agreement Establishing IGAD, Article 18A; IGAD Handbook, p. 33). CEWARN's success lies in its ability to provide actionable intelligence, facilitating timely interventions and fostering dialogue among conflicting parties.. The mechanism relies on real-time data sharing and joint security operations.

CEWARN's primary mandate is to provide data-based early warning and support early response initiatives to tackle human security challenges across governance, environment, economy, social affairs, and security

CEWARN operates through a collaborative framework involving IGAD member states, local communities, and international partners. Its structure includes:

- **National Conflict Early Warning and Response Units (CEWERUs):** These units, established within each member state, collect and analyze data on potential conflicts and coordinate response strategies.
- **Field Monitors:** Field monitors gather real-time information on conflict indicators to ensure timely and accurate reporting
- **Data Analysis and Reporting:** Using advanced tools, CEWARN assesses conflict trends and disseminates regular reports to stakeholders, facilitating informed decision-making

Mediation Support Unit (MSU)

IGAD has played a pivotal role in mediating conflicts, such as its involvement in the South Sudan peace process and efforts to stabilize Somalia. These initiatives leverage IGAD's regional legitimacy and expertise in facilitating dialogue and negotiation (IGAD Handbook, p. 34). The Mediation Support Unit (MSU) encompasses IGAD's capacity to engage in complex conflicts by providing technical and logistical support.

Minimum Integration Plan (MIP) and Economic Cooperation

The Minimum Integration Programme (MIP), conceptualized under the African Union (AU), serves as a continental framework to harmonize regional economic communities (RECs) and accelerate the vision of the African Economic Community (AEC). Unlike the East African Community (EAC), which achieved a customs union by 2005, IGAD remains at the stage of "coordination and harmonization" of member-state activities, reflecting slower progress in

eliminating non-tariff barriers and harmonizing trade policies . The MIP's first phase (2009–2012) prioritized sectors such as agriculture, energy, and infrastructure, aligning with IGAD's focus on drought resilience and cross-border trade.

The Agreement Establishing IGAD legalizes the very sovereignty-maximizing tendencies that undermine integration. While Articles 6A and 7 enshrine cooperation and security, they stop short of mandating enforceable action, reflecting a consensus-based political economy that protects elite autonomy over collective accountability. Similarly, Article 15's facilitation of external funding embeds global capital into regional governance, often in ways that subordinate long-term development to short-term donor priorities

4.2. The 2023 IGAD Revisions: Key Changes and Notable Gaps

One of the most substantial additions was the introduction of IGAD's first regional Climate Adaptation Strategy, covering the period from 2023 to 2030 (IGAD, 2023) This framework focuses on mitigating climate-related risks such as droughts, floods, and displacement through improved early warning systems, transboundary water management, and disaster preparedness measures. The strategy also incorporates gender-responsive and youth-inclusive approaches, recognizing the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable groups.

In the realm of food security, IGAD expanded its initiatives by leveraging data from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system to prioritize six member states, including Somalia, as regions facing severe food crises due to conflict, climate shocks, and economic instability. The revised policies emphasized veterinary services, fisheries development, and regional trade facilitation to enhance food supply stability.

Governance and conflict prevention also saw notable updates, with IGAD strengthening its early warning systems and mediation frameworks. The revisions explicitly linked climate-induced migration to security risks, proposing guidelines for emergency evacuations and resource-based dispute resolution.

Regarding financial provisions, the 2023 revisions introduced new funding restrictions that have drawn significant attention. The updated framework imposed stricter conditions on member states' access to climate adaptation funds, requiring demonstrable progress on governance reforms and transparency measures. While these provisions aim to ensure accountable use of

resources, they have raised concerns among some member states about potential delays in accessing critical funding during emergencies. The revisions also introduced new reporting requirements for project implementation but stopped short of mandating independent audits for all programs.

However, despite these advancements, the 2023 revisions contained several omissions. The Climate Adaptation Strategy, while comprehensive in its regional scope, lacked detailed plans for localized implementation, particularly in Somalia where clan-based governance structures require tailored interventions. Additionally, Eritrea was excluded from IGAD's food security assessments due to insufficient data, creating gaps in the regional analysis. Financial transparency also remained an issue, as the revisions did not provide clear details on fund allocation to member states or civil society organizations.

In conclusion, the legal foundation and institutional structures of IGAD are not neutral. They reflect and reproduce the political and economic power relations in the region. These principles are rooted in a political economy that prioritizes sovereignty over regional enforcement mechanisms. Because the economically and militarily stronger states benefit from maintaining regional dominance without being bound by enforceable obligations. In other words, IGAD's legal design accommodates the interests of the region's hegemonic actors. Moreover, the heavy dependence on donor funding, enabled legally by Article 15, reveals how IGAD's institutional legality is enmeshed with global economic power. The legal ability to accept external funds has allowed Western and Gulf donors to shape IGAD's priorities, which are often misaligned with regional development goals. This has created what is described as "donor dependency" and "agenda distortion."

4.3. Foreign Policy Formulation in IGAD Member States

4.3.1. Somalia

Somalia's approach to international relations is a story largely dictated by a history, marked by the collapse of its state structures between 1991 and 2012, the persistent efforts towards rebuilding, and the undeniable geopolitical pressures of the Horn of Africa. Under the Siad Barre regime (1969–1991), a defining characteristic was the pursuit of pan-Somali irredentism.

The subsequent collapse of the state in 1991 led to a fragmentation of foreign policy. In the absence of a central authority, various warlords and emerging regional administrations, notably Somaliland and Puntland, cultivated their own independent relationships with external entities (Menkhaus, 2006). It was only with the establishment of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) post-2012, which received international recognition that attempts were made to re-establish a centralized foreign policy. However, this has been a delicate balancing act, contending with the realities of clan-based federalism and the influence of foreign patronage (Bradbury, 2008).

The birth of the Somali Republic in 1960, through the unification of British Somaliland and Italian Somalia, came with a constitution that explicitly committed to "promote Somali unity" (Art. 6). This irredentist stance became a central pillar of early foreign policy. The Cold War introduced further complexities into Somalia's foreign policy trajectory. Initially aligning with the Soviet Union, which provided armaments for the Ogaden conflict, Somalia later shifted its allegiance to the West following the war. This pivot saw Somalia received military and economic assistance in return (Lyons, 2019).

The fall of Siad Barre's regime in 1991 represented a significant break in Somalia's foreign policy continuum. Without a central governing body, power dispersed among clan-based factions, warlords, and newly formed regional administrations like Somaliland and Puntland. For instance, Somaliland actively sought ties with Ethiopia and the UAE to gain recognition, while Puntland engaged with Arab states to secure investments for its ports (Hoehne, 2015). This power vacuum allowed various external actors, neighboring states, Gulf powers, and Western nations, to exert influence, often by funding proxy groups to advance their respective agendas. This period also witnessed the emergence of transnational threats such as piracy and the rise of Al-Shabaab, which garnered global attention. International responses, including the U.S.-supported African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), were often criticized for prioritizing counterterrorism objectives over sustainable governance solutions, arguably deepening Somalia's reliance on external security support (Bryden, 2013).

The formation of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in 2012 signaled a step towards reasserting centralized authority. Its foreign policy capacity remains significantly constrained.

The federal structure itself, intended to manage clan diversity, has, in some ways, empowered federal member states (FMS) like Jubaland and Galmudug to pursue their own external relations. (International Crisis Group, 2018).

A critical factor shaping Somalia's foreign policy is its profound dependency on external aid, particularly in the security sector. International actors fund over 90% of Somalia's security apparatus, including the European Union, the United States, and Turkey (ibid).Turkey's investments in Mogadishu's infrastructure and military training, juxtaposed with UAE and Saudi support for federal member states, show Mogadishu's attempts at a "balanced hedging" strategy (Verhoeven, 2019).

Ultimately, Somalia's foreign policy decisions appear to be pragmatic reactions to pressing existential threats. Relations with neighboring countries remain fraught with complications. Despite shared counterterrorism objectives against Al-Shabaab, Ethiopia's backing of regional states like Jubaland is perceived by Mogadishu as undermining its authority (International Crisis Group, 2023). The 2018 détente between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which notably excluded Somalia, further eroded bilateral trust (Abbink, 2020). Kenya's military interventions, such as Operation Linda Nchi in 2011, and its claims to Somali maritime territory have been persistent sources of friction. The 2021 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling, which favored Somalia's claims regarding its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), intensified these tensions, with Kenya ultimately rejecting the verdict (Ng'etich, 2021). Somalia's membership in the Arab League provides a degree of diplomatic support but can, at times, complicate solidarity within African blocs (Hersi, 2017).

Building on the purchase of 19% of DP world, Ethiopia, a landlocked nation seeking dependable access to the Red Sea for its trade and potential naval ambitions, agreed for a 50-year lease over approximately 20 kilometers of Somaliland's coastline near the port of Berbera (ibid). In exchange, Ethiopia offered the possibility of future recognition of Somaliland's independence. The FGS condemned the MoU as an apparent violation of Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, reiterating its position that Somaliland is an integral part of the Somali Republic (Al Jazeera, 2024; Security Council Report, 2024). In a notable diplomatic escalation, Somalia expelled Ethiopia's ambassador and mandated the closure of Ethiopian consulates in Hargeisa

(Somaliland's capital) and Garowe (the capital of Puntland) (Al Jazeera, 2024). President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud stated firmly that Somalia would use all available legal avenues to defend its territorial integrity (Al Jazeera, 2024; Security Council Report, 2024). Amidst these heightened tensions, Turkey emerged as a mediator, capitalizing on its relationships with both Somalia and Ethiopia (TRT World Research Centre, 2021; Understanding War, 2024). These mediation efforts led to the signing of the Ankara Declaration in December 2024, wherein the leaders of Ethiopia and Somalia reaffirmed their mutual respect for each other's sovereignty, unity, independence, and territorial integrity (Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024; Understanding War, 2024). Following this declaration, plans were initiated for technical negotiations to delineate the specifics of this commercial arrangement (Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024).The fact that Ethiopia has not formally rescinded its agreement with Somaliland despite the Ankara Declaration (Understanding War, 2024), despite the new Somaliland leadership's reluctance to follow through, as Dr. Tesfaye notes, suggests that the underlying issue remains unresolved and carries the potential to reignite instability.

Its persistent security challenges, particularly the ongoing fight against the Al-Shabaab insurgency heavily influenced Somalia's foreign policy. A significant development in this domain is the transition of the African Union peacekeeping mission from the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) to the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) (ISS Africa, 2025). ATMIS concluded its mandate in December 2024, with AUSSOM officially beginning operations in January 2025 (Al Jazeera, 2024; Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024). AUSSOM's primary objective is to support the Somali Federal Government in consolidating security gains and further developing its own national security forces (Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024). The UN Security Council formally endorsed this transition through Resolution 2767 (2024) (Security Council Report, 2024, 2025).

Despite this transition, AUSSOM continues to face substantial funding challenges, inheriting a significant financial deficit from its predecessor, ATMIS (Crisis Group, 2025; ISS Africa, 2025; Amani Africa, 2025). The United States has voiced reservations about utilizing UN-assessed contributions for AUSSOM, adding to the uncertainty (Amani Africa, 2025). There are indications of donor fatigue from the European Union, which has historically been a major

financial supporter of AU missions in Somalia (Crisis Group, 2025; ISS Africa, 2025). Securing adequate troop contributions for AUSSOM has also proven challenging. Disagreements among potential troop-contributing countries initially led to delays in the mission's force generation (Crisis Group, 2025; ISS Africa, 2025). Somalia initially objected to Ethiopian troop participation in AUSSOM following the MoU with Somaliland, but this position was later reversed after Turkish mediation (Al Jazeera, 2024; Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024; Understanding War, 2024). Burundi, a long-standing contributor to AU missions in Somalia, withdrew its troop contribution pledge because of disagreements with the Somali government over troop numbers (Crisis Group, 2025; Amani Africa, 2025). As of February 2025, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda are expected to deploy troops to AUSSOM, alongside police personnel from Egypt, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone (Crisis Group, 2025; ISS Africa, 2025). Including Egypt as a troop contributor represents a notable shift in the AU mission's composition (Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024).

In August 2024, Somalia and Egypt signed a bilateral defense cooperation agreement, with Egypt pledging military support and the deployment of troops to the new AU mission (Al Jazeera, 2024; Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024; Understanding War, 2024). Egypt has also supplied Somalia with military hardware, including heavy weaponry (Al Jazeera, 2024; Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024; Understanding War, 2024). The leaders of Somalia, Eritrea, and Egypt convened a tripartite summit in Asmara in October 2024. During this summit, they committed to strengthening their security ties (Al Jazeera, 2024; Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024; Understanding War, 2024).

According to Ambassador Ibrahim Idris, an expert in international law, this developing alliance is widely interpreted as a strategic countermeasure to Ethiopia's perceived growing regional ambitions, particularly its agreement with Somaliland. Egypt, which has a long-standing dispute with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and its potential impact on Egypt's water security, shares Somalia's concerns regarding Ethiopia's increasing influence in the Horn (Al Jazeera, 2024; Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024; Understanding War, 2024).

Another notable aspect of Somalia's foreign policy is the expanding influence of Turkey. Since 2011, Turkey has steadily increased its engagement with Somalia, emerging as a critical partner across various sectors (TRT World Research Centre, 2021).Turkey established its largest overseas military base in Mogadishu in 2017. At this facility, it has trained thousands of Somali soldiers (Crisis Group, 2025; TRT World Research Centre, 2021). In 2024, Turkey and Somalia further solidified their security partnership by signing a comprehensive defense and economic cooperation agreement (ibid).

Turkey's growing interest in Somalia is also driven by economic considerations and a strategic gateway to the broader African continent (Crisis Group, 2025; TRT World Research Centre, 2021). In line with this ambition, Turkey and Somalia have signed an agreement for joint oil and gas exploration in Somali territories (Security Council Report, 2024; TRT World Research Centre, 2021). Turkey is slated to receive a significant share of the revenue generated from Somalia's offshore economic zone as part of their bilateral agreements (Security Council Report, 2024; TRT World Research Centre, 2021).

Somalia's foreign policy also involves navigating its relationships with major global powers such as the United States, the European Union, and China. The United States maintains a bilateral security partnership with Somalia, primarily focused on counterterrorism efforts, including conducting airstrikes against Al-Shabaab and providing support and training to the Somali Danab special forces (Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024; US Department of State, 2024).. The US has also shown increasing interest in engaging with Somaliland (Atlantic Council, 2024; US Department of State, 2024). It is anticipated that US policy towards Somalia might undergo shifts under the Trump 2.0 administration (Atlantic Council, 2024; Crisis Group, 2025; US Department of State, 2024).

As mentioned, EU has historically been a significant financial contributor to AU missions in Somalia, but there are indications of a growing weariness regarding long-term financial commitments (Crisis Group, 2025; ISS Africa, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024). The EU's current approach emphasizes building Somalia's domestic security capacities and favors a more streamlined and smaller AU mission (Crisis Group, 2025; ISS Africa, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024). The EU continues to advocate for multilateral solutions to the challenges in

Somalia and encourages a wider range of international partners to contribute to AUSSOM's funding needs (Crisis Group, 2025; ISS Africa, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024). The EUCAP Somalia mission plays a role in training the Darwish gendarmerie force, contributing to the development of Somalia's internal security apparatus (ISS Africa, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024).

China's influence in Somalia is also on the rise. In April 2025, Somalia implemented a ban on the entry of Taiwanese citizens, a move that was swiftly welcomed by China as aligning with its "one China" principle (Al Jazeera, 2025; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025). China has been growing its economic and security engagements across Africa, including the Horn of Africa region (Crisis Group, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024; TRT World Research Centre, 2021). China has also provided financial contributions to support the AUSSOM mission (Amani Africa, 2025). Beijing firmly opposes any form of official exchange or recognition between Taiwan and Somaliland, reflecting its core policy stance on Taiwan's status (Al Jazeera, 2025; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025).

Mogadishu has voiced critiques of international "trusteeship" models, viewing them as neo-colonial (Harper, 2012).. Ankara's positioning as a non-Western partner appears to resonate with Somali leaders who are exploring "alternative partnerships" (Özkan, 2014). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments in Somalia remain comparatively limited but are strategically focused, particularly on port access.

The Federal Government of Somalia actively seeks foreign direct investment (FDI) (US Department of State, 2024; World Bank, 2025). The Somalia Investment Promotion Office (SOMINVEST) plays a key role in attracting and facilitating FDI into the country (US Department of State, 2024). A significant step in Somalia's economic foreign policy was its formal accession to the East African Community (EAC) in 2024 (US Department of State, 2024; World Bank, 2025). Membership in the EAC is expected to formalize trade relationships with its neighboring countries and eventually facilitate the movement of Somali citizens to other EAC member states through the common EAC passport (US Department of State, 2024; World Bank, 2025).

Somalia's efforts to attract foreign direct investment are vital for its long-term economic recovery and development, but these endeavors are significantly constrained by persistent security challenges and institutional weaknesses (US Department of State, 2024). The ongoing threat from Al-Shabaab and the absence of a fully functional legal and regulatory framework pose significant deterrents for potential investors (US Department of State, 2024).

The risks of elite rent-seeking behaviors and continued external interference could perpetuate cycles of instability. As Menkhaus (2020) cautions, "Somalia's sovereignty remains a fiction until its leaders prioritize nation-building over clan politics."

As noted by IGAD's former Executive Secretary, Mahboub Maalim, the organization's efforts have transformed Somalia from a localized issue into a regional and global priority (Rift Valley Forum, 2018) IGAD's support for Somalia's Provisional Federal Constitution (2012) and its advocacy for debt relief (achieved in 2023) are examples of tangible contributions (IGAD, 2024) Despite these efforts, IGAD is often viewed with suspicion. Many Somalis believe the organization prioritizes the interests of Ethiopia and Kenya, particularly in security and political interventions (Rift Valley Forum, 2018) scholars like Dr. Ibrahim Farah advocate for a "Somali Marshall Plan" over externally driven frameworks like the EU's New Deal, suggesting partnerships with non-regional actors like Turkey for more culturally aligned support (Ibid)

Somalia's view of IGAD is a blend of gratitude for its regional advocacy and frustration with its perceived inefficacy and partiality. While IGAD has helped sustain international engagement, Somalis increasingly seek autonomy in peacebuilding and development.

4.3.2. Sudan

Sudan, a strategically positioned at the crossroads of the Arab world and Sub-Saharan Africa, has long navigated a foreign policy landscape shaped by internal history and regional dynamics. The outbreak of intense and widespread conflict in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has not only impacted all facets of Sudanese life, its foreign policy has been particularly affected, becoming almost entirely subservient to the exigencies of the war.

Millions of Sudanese citizens were forcibly uprooted from their homes, creating what international organizations have described as the world's largest internal displacement crisis (UNHCR, 2024). Engagement with donor countries also became a matter of national survival, necessary to secure any available aid (OCHA, 2024). Alongside this, Sudan, or rather its warring factions, sought diplomatic support aimed at bringing an end to the hostilities, or at least achieving conditions favorable to their respective causes (IGAD, 2023). These actors, at different times and with varying degrees of commitment, expressed willingness to facilitate a ceasefire (African Union, 2023). Numerous mediation attempts were undertaken. These involved a wide spectrum of entities, including IGAD, and the continental body, the African Union (AU). The United Nations, through various envoys and missions, also played a role. Key international powers like Saudi Arabia and the United States initiated their own mediation tracks, notably the Jeddah process (U.S. Department of State, 2023; Al Arabiya, 2023). Various external actors were reported, and sometimes openly acknowledged, to be providing support to the opposing sides (Reuters, 2024; The Guardian, 2023). This external interference fueled the conflict, and raised grave concerns within Sudan and among international observers about the potential for the country's fragmentation or descent into a protracted proxy war (Security Council Report, 2024). This often occurred at the considerable expense of pursuing any coherent, long-term strategic foreign policy goals that might have been prioritized in a more stable, pre-conflict environment.

The relationship with South Sudan, which itself gained independence from Sudan in 2011 after decades of conflict, remained vital. The disruption of the major oil export pipeline running from South Sudan through Sudanese territory to Port Sudan was a significant point of concern and economic pain for both nations (Bloomberg, 2024). Relationship between Sudan and its western neighbor, Chad, proved to be volatile, as SAF leadership, repeatedly and publicly accused Chad of providing support, including sanctuary and supply routes, to the RSF (Sudan Tribune, 2024). These accusations, which some reports suggested were fueled or encouraged by external actors like the United Arab Emirates (Wall Street Journal, 2023), a key backer of the RSF, led to significantly heightened tensions. Diplomatic ties were strained, and threats of military retaliation were exchanged between the two countries. The long and porous shared border, overlapping ethnic groups with cross-border loyalties (such as the Zaghawa), and a history of mutual interference further complicated this relationship.

Egypt, Sudan's northern neighbor with historical, political, and strategic ties, emerged as a pivotal regional actor in Sudan's foreign policy, particularly in the ongoing conflict. Cairo provided strong and relatively consistent support for the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) (Reuters, 2023). This support reportedly manifested in various forms, including the provision of military aid and intelligence sharing. (Middle East Eye, 2024).

Saudi Arabia also played a notable, albeit somewhat perceived as dual role in Sudan's foreign policy landscape since the conflict began. On one hand, the kingdom positioned itself as a key mediator. It co-hosted, with the United States, several rounds of peace talks between the warring SAF and RSF factions in Jeddah (Saudi Press Agency, 2023). These talks, however, yielded limited and unsustainable results.

The African Union (AU), the continent's principal political body, played a significant role. However, its direct involvement and leverage were notably constrained by Sudan's suspension from the organization following the military coup in October 2021 (AU Peace and Security Council, 2021). This suspension limited the formal mechanisms through which the AU could engage with the Sudanese authorities.

Sudan's official stance towards IGAD's involvement under the SAF-led authorities was notably inconsistent and often contradictory. There were periods of engagement and participation in IGAD-led initiatives. Yet, outright rejection of IGAD's involvement, accusations of bias against certain IGAD member states (particularly Kenya, which chaired some IGAD initiatives on Sudan), and even temporary withdrawals from IGAD processes (Sudan News Agency, 2024) punctuated these. Despite these considerable challenges and setbacks, IGAD as an institution, and through various ad hoc committees and special envoys, stressed the critical need for reinforcing unified and coherent mediation efforts to end the war (IGAD 2024). The organization convened multiple forums of regional and international special envoys to coordinate peace efforts and build consensus on a way forward.

Sudan also sought the diplomatic and political support of the Arab League, particularly in its efforts to counter what it perceived as unwelcome foreign interference in its internal affairs and to garner support for the legitimacy of the SAF-led government (Arab League Statement, 2023). The Arab League, in its official pronouncements, consistently expressed its support for Sudan's

unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. It also called for an end to the fighting and a return to a peaceful political process.

The United States was actively involved in the Sudanese crisis from its early stages. This involvement was primarily manifested through co-sponsorship of mediation efforts (notably the Jeddah Process) and imposing targeted sanctions (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2023). These sanctions aimed at individuals and entities on both sides deemed responsible for fueling the violence, obstructing humanitarian access, or undermining democratic processes. However, US engagement was criticized by some regional analysts and humanitarian organizations as being insufficient, inconsistent, or too slow to adapt to the rapidly deteriorating situation. (The New Humanitarian, 2024).

China holds significant economic interests in the country. These are particularly concentrated in the oil and gold sectors, representing years of investment (China Global South Project, 2023). Throughout the conflict, China maintained its diplomatic engagement with Sudan, emphasizing principles of non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and calls for a peaceful resolution through dialogue. Sudan's foreign policy continued to reflect its alignment with China's core foreign policy positions, such as the "one China" policy. China's approach was cautious, seeking to protect its investments and maintain stability without becoming overtly entangled in the internal power struggle.

Russia has been increasingly assertive and visible in its engagement with Sudan, particularly in the gold, security and geopolitical spheres. It has sought to expand its influence in the strategically important Red Sea region. Reports indicated ongoing discussions or potential plans for Russia to establish a naval logistics facility or base in Port Sudan, a move that would grant Moscow a significant foothold in the region (Associated Press, 2023). There were also reports alleging that Russia, or Russian-linked entities like the Wagner Group (prior to its formal dissolution/rebranding), was involved in supplying weapons or providing other forms of support to one or both of the warring factions (The Times, 2024).

The trajectory of Sudan's foreign policy soon will undoubtedly remain heavily, if not entirely, influenced by the dynamics of the ongoing conflict, the continuously evolving and unstable

regional landscape, and the strategic engagement (or disengagement) of major global powers seeking to exert their influence in this strategically vital, yet tragically fractured, region.

External Actor	**Reported Stance/Actions**
Egypt	Strong support for SAF; provided military aid; opposes division of Sudan; key player in regional security concerning Sudan.
Ethiopia	Complex role; initially strained relations with some regional actors impacting Sudan; later involved in broader regional diplomacy; historical border issues.
Chad	Accused by Sudan (SAF) of supporting RSF; significant refugee influx; border security concerns; ethnic cross-border ties.
South Sudan	Economically impacted by oil pipeline disruption through Sudan; major refugee host; concerns about conflict spillover and own stability.
Saudi Arabia	Co-led Jeddah mediation talks; reportedly provided some support to SAF; opposes parallel government; seeks regional stability.
UAE	Widely reported as a key supporter of RSF (arms, finance, logistics); denies direct military involvement; significant economic interests.

US	Co-led Jeddah mediation; imposed targeted sanctions on both SAF and RSF individuals/entities; aid concerns; voiced concern about UAE's role.
China	Significant economic interests (oil, gold); maintains strategic partnership; calls for non-interference and peaceful resolution.
Russia	Expanding influence in Red Sea region; potential naval base in Port Sudan; reports of arms supplies/Wagner Group involvement.
EU	Significant humanitarian aid provider; diplomatic efforts for ceasefire and civilian protection; supports mediation.

Table 2: Key External Actors and Stance on Sudan Conflict (Illustrative)

4.3.3. South Sudan

South Sudan, Africa's youngest nation, embarked on its sovereign journey in 2011.However, the subsequent years have been profoundly marked by a series of significant challenges. These have included a brutal and recurring civil conflict, deep-seated economic instability heavily reliant on a single commodity (oil), and an often unpredictable regional environment.

Implementing the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) remains a central, if deeply problematic, focus of both domestic policy and foreign engagement. This peace agreement, despite its numerous challenges, delays, and violations, continues to be the primary framework through which international partners engage with South Sudan on political and security matters (UNMISS 2025) The primary, overwhelming focus on attempting to a modicum of internal stability often overshadows resources and attention that might otherwise be directed towards other potential foreign policy objectives. The pressing, existential need for domestic political consolidation and intensive efforts dictates the nature of South Sudan's external engagements. According to Dr. Tesfaye Mola, a researcher at the

Ethiopian Institute of Foreign Affairs, this is starkly evident in the continued heavy reliance on regional mediation efforts and substantial international support.

In contrast, increased engagement with the East African Community (EAC) has also emerged as a more pronounced key foreign policy priority in recent years. The government of South Sudan increasingly views its membership in this regional bloc as vital for its economic integration and diversification away from oil (Government statements on EAC).

The establishment of a dedicated Ministry of East African Community Affairs (Government of South Sudan, 2025) and the subsequent formulation of a national policy and strategy document for EAC implementation (Ibid) indicates importance the government assigns to this regional bloc. South Sudan expects, perhaps optimistically given its current state, that closer ties with its East African neighbors will yield substantial economic benefits.

In terms of tangible integration progress, South Sudan has taken some, albeit often slow and halting, steps to participate in the EAC's structures and initiatives. It has elected and sent delegates to the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), the regional parliament, thereby participating in regional legislative processes (EALA, 2024). South Sudanese officials and technical experts have also been involved in various EAC sectorial committee meetings, ministerial councils, and Heads of State summits, contributing to regional policy discussions and decision-making processes.

However, Ambassador Ibrahim notes that implementing the EAC Customs Union, particularly the CET, may lead to a short-to-medium term loss of crucial customs revenue from tariffs on imports from non-EAC countries. South Sudanese industries, which are nascent and uncompetitive, may also struggle immensely to compete with more established and efficient businesses in other EAC countries like Kenya or Tanzania (EU 2024).

The slow pace of implementing the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS) (UNIMISS 2025) further undermines confidence among regional partners and the wider international community regarding South Sudan's long-term stability and its reliability as a member of the EAC. Donors may become increasingly hesitant to continue providing significant levels of aid, including development assistance that could support EAC integration projects. The ongoing

conflict in neighboring Sudan has had negative regional implications for South Sudan. The fighting in Sudan, especially in areas bordering South Sudan, has led to a direct spillover of conflict into South Sudanese territory (Crisis Group 2024). This has been acute in regions like Upper Nile State, where pre-existing ethnic tensions and competition for resources have been exacerbated by the influx of armed elements and the general climate of instability, leading to direct clashes and further displacement (UN 2025). The massive and continuous influx of refugees fleeing the violence in Sudan, alongside South Sudanese citizens returning from Sudan (many of whom had lived there for decades), has placed an unsustainable strain on South Sudan's already limited resources (UNHCR 2025).

There is a growing risk that South Sudan, given its own internal fragilities and complex ethnic makeup, could be inadvertently or deliberately drawn into a wider regional proxy war (IGAD 2025). The conflict in Sudan has also demonstrably increased the availability and circulation of small arms and light weapons in an already heavily armed region.

The conflict in Sudan has also created extremely complex and delicate foreign policy challenges for the government of South Sudan. Officials in Juba have had to navigate precarious and often contradictory relationships with both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This delicate balancing act has been primarily driven by the existential need to ensure the continued flow of its oil exports, which, as noted, rely on infrastructure passing through Sudanese territory often controlled by different, warring factions (ibid). The conflict has also critically undermined Sudan's previous role as a key guarantor of the R-ARCSS in South Sudan. With Sudan itself engulfed in war, its capacity and willingness to play a constructive role in South Sudan's peace process have been severely diminished.

South Sudan's foreign policy, its domestic political trajectory, and its agenda for regional integration are all significantly shaped, and often heavily influenced, by the sustained engagement of a diverse array of external actors. The African Union (AU) plays a crucial role in supporting South Sudan's pursuit of its officially stated goals (AU 2025). This engagement is vital for attempting to resolve ongoing political tensions and for facilitating the implementation of the peace agreement's numerous outstanding provisions. Ultimately, such efforts aim to create a more stable and conducive environment for both national recovery and effective regional

cooperation (UNIMISS 2025). The AU also provides, or attempts to coordinate, technical assistance in critical areas such as Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs for ex-combatants (EALA 2025).. The AU, often in collaboration with IGAD, monitors the implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement (UNIMISS 2024), helping to maintain international pressure and ensure some level of adherence to its terms.

The United Nations (UN)also plays an extensive and critical role in South Sudan, primarily through its large and complex peacekeeping mission, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). This security presence, however imperfect, is a prerequisite for South Sudan to focus on its broader foreign policy objectives, including its regional integration agenda. The UN, through its various agencies like WFP, UNICEF, WHO, and UNHCR, is also a major provider of life-saving humanitarian assistance.

Donor countries and international financial institutions, including key bilateral partners like Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway (the Troika countries) and the European Union, provide substantial financial and technical assistance. This assistance is directed towards humanitarian aid, various development projects (where feasible given the security situation), and peacebuilding efforts in South Sudan. This includes funding for projects that can directly or indirectly enhance its capacity for regional integration within the EAC, such as support for customs reform, trade facilitation measures, or institutional capacity building. These international actors also support broader regional initiatives through dedicated funding mechanisms and the provision of technical expertise, such as the NEPAD Infrastructure Project Preparation Facility (IPPF), which can benefit projects involving South Sudan. The international community, through embassies, special envoys, and public statements, closely monitors political developments in South Sudan. They frequently complain about the slow pace of peace agreement implementation, the repeated postponement of elections, issues of corruption, and human rights abuses (ibid). From peacebuilding and security support (AU 2023) to humanitarian aid and development projects means that its foreign policy must prioritize the cultivation and maintenance of these critical relationships. The influence of these external actors can also guide, and sometimes dictate, the direction, pace, and even the substance of South Sudan's regional integration efforts.

There have been instances where the South Sudanese government has expressed reluctance or outright opposition to certain international proposals, such as the initial deployment of a UN-mandated Regional Protection Force (RPF), viewing them as infringements on its sovereignty (Horn Diplomat 202).

A risk of state collapse characterizes South Sudan's foreign policy in the 2024-2025 period. External actors, including the AU, IGAD, the UN, and various bilateral and multilateral donor partners, continue to play a vital, often indispensable, role in shaping South Sudan's trajectory, offering essential support while also exerting significant influence on its domestic and foreign policy priorities. The overarching narrative is one of a nation struggling to reconcile its aspirations for regional belonging and prosperity with the stark realities of its internal fragilities.

4.3.4. Ethiopia

Ethiopia, the most populous landlocked country globally and a historical heavyweight in the Horn of Africa, has long projected an image of a regional anchor. Its foreign policy, particularly between 2020 and 2025 under the administration of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, has been a combination of historical ambition (access to the sea) and acute internal pressures.

In the early 2000s, following a costly border war with Eritrea (1998–2000), the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government articulated a comprehensive "Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy." This explicitly stressed that rapid economic development was not merely an aspiration but "a guarantee of national survival". The document posited that Ethiopia’s principal national interest was to lift its vast population "free from poverty" and to prevent state "disintegration" (Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy, 2002). Foreign policy was to be strategically employed as a primary tool for achieving economic modernization and safeguarding the country from internal and external threats. This translated into a foreign policy focused on forging diverse international partnerships to sustain state-led development initiatives, while simultaneously managing border conflicts and containing perceived threats from rebel movements on its periphery through a combination of diplomacy, security cooperation, and, direct intervention (Ibid). It’s also interesting to note that the way it framed Ethiopia’s neighbours was in terms of access to the sea. (Ibid)Simultaneously, Ethiopia consistently assumed a prominent leadership role in Horn of Africa regional affairs. Dr. Tesfaye

Mola observes that, historically, "IGAD was considered being little more than an extension of Ethiopia's foreign policy".

Since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed assumed office in 2018, and particularly from 2020 onwards, Analysts have frequently stressed that Abiy Ahmed's approach to foreign policy has been highly personalized, often appearing to serve immediate internal political needs and power consolidation objectives as much as, or even more than, clearly defined long-term external strategic goals (Anonymous source within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Ethiopia's diplomatic posture has often oscillated between two distinct, and sometimes contradictory modes, active multilateral engagement and assertive, often unilateral, bilateral action.

it has been noted that has the Prime Minister has actively revived and deepened ties with influential Gulf states, particularly the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. These relationships have been prioritized for their potential to yield significant economic support, investment, and security leverage, rather than following a single, coherent ideological or strategic foreign policy doctrine (Rift Valley Institute, 2024). This pattern of using diplomacy as a "space" for domestic maneuvering and resource mobilization echoes, in some ways, earlier EPRDF practices (Anonymous Source, Ministry of Foreign Affairs). One manifestation of this is Ethiopia joining BRICS in 2024.

A defining event of this period was the outbreak of a brutal internal conflict in Ethiopia's northern region of Tigray region in November 2020. This internal war had immediate and severe regional consequences. Abiy Ahmed's government adopted an extremely assertive stance regarding international involvement, aggressively warning both IGAD and the African Union not to intervene in what it framed as an internal law enforcement operation. Reports suggested that Ethiopia even threatened to leave IGAD if the bloc formally discussed the Tigray crisis on its agenda (Ibid). Meanwhile, the conflict inevitably drew in neighboring actors. This Eritrean involvement, initially denied by both Addis Ababa and Asmara strained Ethiopia's ties with some Western partners who condemned the human rights abuses attributed to all sides, including Eritrean forces.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had played a constructive role in facilitating Sudan's political transition in 2019 following the ousting of Omar al-Bashir. However, the outbreak of the Tigray

war in Ethiopia dramatically altered the strategic calculus for both nations. In late 2020, as Ethiopian federal forces were heavily engaged in Tigray, the Sudanese army moved into and took control of the fertile Al-Fashaga border region. This area, long cultivated by Ethiopian farmers, has been the subject of a historical border dispute, though an uneasy status quo had previously prevailed. By early 2021, Sudan controlled almost all of Al-Fashaga, displacing thousands of Ethiopian farmers and leading to sporadic armed clashes between the two countries' forces (Chatham House, 2020). Relations nosedived further. Sudan now insists on its full sovereignty over Al-Fashaga and has, accused Ethiopia of supporting Sudanese rebel elements or armed groups operating in its territory. The Sudanese government (SAF-led) eventually suspended its IGAD membership in early 2024, accusing the bloc of violating its sovereignty by inviting the RSF leader to a summit (Foreign policy, 2024).

Abiy Ahmed's 2018 peace agreement with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki was a landmark diplomatic moment, formally ending two decades of a "no war, no peace" stalemate and earning Abiy the Nobel Peace Prize. Notably, after a 16-year hiatus, Eritrea formally rejoined IGAD in May 2023, a move that Ethiopia and Djibouti reportedly facilitated as the new IGAD Treaty was being brought into force (IGAD, 2023). Addis Ababa publicly hailed Eritrea's return as a sign of transformative regional change and a step towards greater Horn stability (ENA, 2023). Yet, many regional observers point out that the highly personalized, and often secretive, nature of these events relationship risks undermining broader, institution-based regional integration efforts (Anonymous Source, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By late 2024 and early 2025, reports emerged of renewed tensions and military mobilizations along the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, particularly concerning disputed territories and Eritrean accusations of Ethiopian collusion with anti-Asmara groups, the "bromance" had significantly cooled

As mentioned in the Somalia section, Ethiopia's ties with Somalia and the self-declared Republic of Somaliland have also been volatile during this period. Yet, Ethiopia shifted its course. Following mediation efforts, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud met and agreed to the "Ankara Declaration." IGAD's Executive Secretary subsequently hailed this accord as a "landmark" achievement that strengthened Ethiopia-Somalia ties and reinforced regional stability (IGAD, 2024).

Relations with Kenya have remained cordial and pragmatic, centered on regional security issues (particularly concerning Somalia and Al-Shabaab), and discussions about joint infrastructure projects, such as the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor.

Djibouti's ports handle the vast majority of Ethiopia's international trade, making this relationship indispensable for Addis Ababa. Both countries have cooperated on infrastructure development (such as the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway) and security matters. With Uganda, Ethiopia has maintained cooperative relations, engaging on issues of regional security and economic development, Ethiopia has historically played a significant mediation role in South Sudan, both bilaterally and through IGAD-led peace processes. Addis Ababa has contributed to various peace initiatives there, though its primary focus, especially since late 2020, has been more on its own pressing internal crises. Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan have thus been the main neighboring actors most directly and significantly affected by the more dramatic shifts and turns in Ethiopia's recent diplomacy.

In a significant development, IGAD Heads of State adopted a new, revised IGAD Treaty in June 2023, aimed at strengthening the organization's mandate and expanding areas of regional cooperation. Ethiopia's parliament subsequently ratified this new treaty in April 2024 (IGAD, 2024). The IGAD Secretariat publicly praised Prime Minister Abiy's "exceptional leadership" in this process, stating that Ethiopia's ratification "underscores its steadfast dedication to regional cooperation and the shared vision of a prosperous and stable Horn of Africa" (IGAD, 2024).

It is notably not a member of the East African Community (EAC). While the country is undergoing economic liberalization, Ethiopia's own domestic market remains relatively closed in many respects, which has so far hindered the development of deep and diversified regional trade links. Its heavy dependence on neighboring ports (primarily Djibouti, but also potentially Berbera or Port Sudan in the future) underscores Ethiopia's fundamental stake in cooperative regional development and infrastructure connectivity.

Ethiopia often champions IGAD's overall goals and vision at a rhetorical level. At the June 2023 IGAD summit in Djibouti, Ethiopia's Foreign Ministry publicly reaffirmed the country's "continued commitment… to expedite regional integration, share economic development and durable peace and stability" among member states (ENA, 2023). Ethiopia has historically

provided significant personnel to IGAD bodies, including the Secretariat, and has frequently hosted IGAD meetings, conferences, and summits in Addis Ababa. In February 2025, following Prime Minister Abiy's visit to Mogadishu and the apparent de-escalation of the Somaliland MoU crisis, IGAD even took to social media to praise the "deepening diplomatic ties" between Ethiopia and Somalia, framing this as a positive step towards enhancing regional connectivity, economic collaboration, and overall stability (Fana, 2025). Experts note these statements indicate that IGAD, as an institution, often views Ethiopia as a potential integration "champion" or "warrior," capable of leveraging its influence to bring neighbors together and drive the regional agenda forward. (Anonymous Source, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

In one critical evaluation, IGAD is perceived by some as "dying a slow death" as a relevant and effective forum for regional security coordination and conflict resolution (Rift valley, 2024). Indeed, in early 2024, Ethiopia reportedly declined an IGAD invitation to a ministerial meeting (citing scheduling conflicts) intended to discuss the Sudan crisis and the Ethiopia-Somaliland issue (Foreign policy, 2024).

Beyond the immediate Horn, Ethiopia has actively pursued a multi-vector foreign policy, engaging with a diverse range of global and regional powers. The deepening of ties with Gulf Arab states like the UAE and Saudi Arabia has been a prominent feature. These relationships have yielded significant financial support, investment pledges (particularly from the UAE in sectors like agriculture and logistics), and security cooperation. Ethiopia's formal accession to BRICS in 2024 was a major foreign policy statement, signaling its ambition to play a role in shaping a more multipolar world order and to access alternative frameworks for development finance and political coordination, potentially reducing reliance on traditional Western partners and institutions. While relations with the west have seen some cautious recalibration since the Pretoria Peace Agreement (which ended the Tigray war in late 2022), underlying tensions and concerns often remain.

Turkey has emerged as an increasingly significant actor in the Horn, including in Ethiopia. Turkish companies are involved in infrastructure and manufacturing sectors in Ethiopia. Ankara has also played a notable diplomatic role, as seen in its reported mediation efforts between

Ethiopia and Somalia concerning the Somaliland MoU. Turkey has also supplied Ethiopia with military hardware, including drones, which reportedly played a role in the Tigray conflict (ibid).

China remains a crucial economic partner for Ethiopia. Beijing has financed and built extensive infrastructure projects in Ethiopia over the past two decades, including railways, roads, dams (like the GERD), and telecommunications networks.

On one hand, Ethiopia's leaders frequently articulate their support for IGAD cooperation and have taken formal steps, such as the ratification of the new IGAD Treaty and consistent participation in summits, that align with IGAD's stated agenda (IGAD, 2024; ENA, 2023). As the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa notes, Ethiopia is a party to almost every major African regional trade bloc (COMESA, IGAD, AfCFTA) short of the East African Community, showing at least a nominal commitment to fostering broader regional economic integration (Trade.gov).

However, Ethiopia's actions on the ground often contradict this cooperative rhetoric. Its concurrent tendencies toward unilateralism have frequently diluted IGAD's institutional effectiveness and strained regional solidarity. Political analysis strongly suggests that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's regional strategy, primarily focused on securing Ethiopia's internal stability and pursuing a strategic realignment with powerful international patrons, has often been prioritized over IGAD's collective agendas and the slower, more consensus-based processes of regional integration. The result is a persistent paradox: Ethiopia remains, by its size, history, and location, the Horn of Africa's anchor. However, its assertive tactics, internal conflicts, and sometimes unpredictable foreign policy shifts pose a significant challenge to the very regional integration and stability it vocally espouses.

4.3.5. Djibouti

Djibouti's emergence as an independent state reflected both its strategic location and the shifting balance of Cold War interests in the Horn of Africa. Under French rule from 1884, the territory. Leased to the French by Ethiopia, (then known as French Somaliland) served as a maritime outpost linking Europe and Asia (Pankhurst, 1968) On 8 May 1977, over 97 percent of the population voted for independence, and France formally recognized the Republic of Djibouti on 27 June 1977 (ibid). From its inception, Djibouti's leaders prioritized securing international

support and diversifying diplomatic ties to bolster the young nation's sovereignty and economic viability.

The post-independence relationship with Ethiopia quickly assumed central importance for Djibouti's survival. Djibouti's port facilities became vital leading up to the Ethio-Eritrean conflict in 1998, and continued after Eritrea's 1993 secession rendered Ethiopia landlocked. By 2022, over 90% of Ethiopia's trade volume transited through Djibouti, generating substantial revenue from port fees and logistics services (African Development Bank, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Djibouti's relationship with Eritrea has oscillated between confrontation and cautious rapprochement. Disputes over the Ras Doumeira border erupted into armed conflicts in June 2008, prompting Djibouti to seek support from France and to appeal to the African Union for mediation (International Crisis Group, 2008). Subsequent negotiations under African Union auspices gradually reduced tensions, and in September 2018, both governments signed an agreement in Asmara to restore full diplomatic relations (Reuters, 2018).

In Somalia, Djibouti has leveraged both cultural affinities and institutional engagement to project influence and promote security. Since 2011, Djibouti has contributed troops to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), hosting the mission's Sector 4 headquarters in Beletweyne and providing logistical support and training to Somali security forces (African Union Peace and Security Council, 2021).

President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh (in power since 1999) wields substantial influence over foreign affairs, working through a small circle of advisers and a long-serving Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (alongside the presidency and security apparatus) constitutes the core institutional actors. Djibouti has no formal "foreign policy white paper," but its international outlook is evident in national strategic visions like *Vision 2035*, which explicitly positions the country as a regional economic hub.

Djibouti has pursued an "extraverted" foreign policy, actively courting both regional and extra-regional partners. In the 2000s and 2010s, Djibouti steadily built strategic ties through hosting foreign military bases: France (since *independence* in 1977), the United States (Camp Lemonnier opened in 2002), Japan (Self-Defense Forces base in 2011), Italy (naval base operational in

2014), and China (first overseas military base inaugurated in 2017). This constellation of bases has made Djibouti a focal point of great-power competition in the Red Sea region.

In 2020, President Guelleh facilitated talks between Somalia and Somaliland, reflecting Djibouti's interest in Horn of Africa stability. Djibouti's diplomatic profile rose further when Guelleh assumed the rotating presidency of IGAD in 2023. Meanwhile, Djibouti's foreign policy also focuses on its traditional bilateral ties, maintaining close relations with France (its former colonial power) and the United States, it also tries carefully balancing growing Chinese influence. For example, in October 2022 Djibouti revised its defense agreement with France, underscoring its effort to renegotiate terms with long-time partners as China's economic role expands.

However, Djibouti also pursues interests that occasionally diverge from IGAD's integration ethos. Its "extraverted" approach, hosting Western and Chinese bases, prioritizes national strategic interests and global ties. Overall, Djibouti's foreign policy is one of cautious balancing: it advances IGAD's peace and development priorities when possible, but simultaneously cultivates relationships with major powers to secure its own interests.

4.3.6. Kenya

Kenya occupies a strategically significant position within the East African region. It functions as a pivotal economic and political hub, a role underscored by its relatively developed infrastructure. This infrastructure includes a robust telecommunications sector, a comparatively mature financial system, and a prominent logistics network, with the Port of Mombasa serving as a critical gateway for Kenya and its landlocked neighbors.

A consistent thread in Kenya's foreign policy has been its demonstrated commitment to the broader framework of African regional integration. It is formally articulated in its updated Foreign Policy Framework of 2024. This document explicitly reaffirms the prioritization of regional integration and the deepening of intra-African relationships as fundamental principles guiding Kenya's international engagements (Kenya State Department, 2024). The pursuit of a more integrated continent is therefore presented as a core tenet of its external strategy.

Economic diplomacy has been elevated to a cardinal position within Kenya's foreign policy strategy. President Ruto and other high-ranking officials have consistently emphasized the critical role of foreign policy in attracting foreign investments and unlocking new avenues for trade (KTN News Digital, 2025). Within this context, regional integration is frequently cited as a pivotal pathway to achieving these economic objectives.

Kenya holds a central and influential position within the EAC. It currently serves as the chair of this regional bloc (Parliament of Kenya 2025) the state is also invested in the development of regional infrastructure projects. These projects are crucial for improving connectivity and facilitating trade within the EAC. A notable example is the Kisumu-Busia/Kakira-Malaba Expressway Project.

Despite the significant progress and Kenya's active role, the EAC continues to face several challenges on its path towards deeper integration. Persistent Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) remain a significant impediment to the free flow of goods within the community (EAC c 2025). These barriers often manifest as cumbersome regulations or protectionist measures. Trade imbalances also exist. Kenya and Tanzania are often identified as the dominant exporters within the bloc. Other member states, such as Burundi and South Sudan, struggle with limited industrialization and export capacity.

The current administration under President Ruto has made attracting FDI a key priority. It has implemented policies designed to be conducive to foreign investment (ibid). Kenya's strategic membership in regional trade blocs such as the EAC, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides it with preferential trade access. This access is to a vast and growing regional market (Kenyan – State Department 2024). Besides its engagement within regional blocs, Kenya is also actively pursuing bilateral trade agreements. This strategy aims to further enhance its economic relationships beyond the continent. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with the United Arab Emirates in February 2024 is one example. The entry into force of the EU-Kenya Economic Partnership Agreement on July 1, 2024, is another (ibid).

Similarly, Kenya is a strong proponent of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It leverages its membership in the AfCFTA, as well as in other regional economic communities, to drive its economic diplomacy efforts (ibid).

Within the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD**)**, Kenya is a key member state. Given its own experiences with terrorism and cross-border insecurity, Kenya has a vested interest in IGAD's peace and security architecture. It has participated in IGAD-led mediation efforts in regional conflicts, such as those in Somalia and South Sudan.

Economically, Kenya stands to benefit from IGAD's initiatives aimed at regional economic integration and infrastructure development. Kenya's more developed economy might position it as a leader in some IGAD economic forums.

Despite Kenya's firm commitment to regional integration, the 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) reveals a concerning trend for Kenya. It shows a double-digit deterioration in its regional integration score (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024). Specifically, Kenya's score in this indicator declined by -17.8 points between 2014 and 2023. This decline contributed to an overall slight decrease in regional integration within the EAC (Ibid).

4.3.7. Uganda

Uganda’s landlocked geography inherently necessitates a strong emphasis on regional cooperation to secure vital trade routes and facilitate its access to the Indian Ocean through neighboring countries, primarily Kenya (ibid). Regional integration is not merely a matter of diplomatic preference but a fundamental imperative for Uganda's economic development, stability, and overall progress (Foreign Relations – East Africa, n.g.). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs manages Uganda’s foreign policy under the direction of President Yoweri Museveni, who has governed since 1986. Uganda’s 2018 *Foreign Policy Framework* outlines five core objectives: regional peace and security, economic cooperation, international trade, image building, and diaspora engagement (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Uganda, 2018).

Museveni's pragmatic approach to economic development and his willingness to forge international partnerships have allowed Uganda to navigate regional and global dynamics while pursuing its national interests (ibid) His extended tenure as president has also provided a significant continuity in Uganda's foreign policy objectives (Congress 2020).

Recent shifts in Uganda's foreign policy engagements include its decision to join the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) bloc as a partner nation in early 2025 (ibid). Simultaneously, Uganda has experienced disagreements with some Western nations regarding social issues. (BBC, 2014) Despite these shifts, strengthening ties with neighboring countries and regional blocs, particularly the EAC, remains a consistent priority in Uganda's foreign policy (ibid).The state also supports the African Union's agenda on peace, security, and economic development, aligning its efforts with continental frameworks (Crisis group, 2025).

Uganda has consistently championed the ideals of the EAC, viewing a unified East African bloc as crucial for its strategic and economic advancement (EAC, 2025). Historically, Uganda has also served as a significant hub for the EAC, hosting the headquarters of key institutions (ibid)

President Museveni has historically been a strong advocate for the EAC Political Federation, articulating it as a vital step towards ensuring long-term regional stability and fostering greater economic strength (EAC Press Release, 2025) Uganda has already commenced national consultations on the drafting of the constitution for the envisioned EAC Political Confederation (ibid).

However, like Kenya, the tension between IGAD's security-driven agenda and the EAC's market-oriented goals often requires Uganda to balance its strategic priorities carefully. For instance, while Uganda supports IGAD's mediation in South Sudan because of its border proximity and refugee flows, it also prefers EAC mechanisms for infrastructure development and customs regulation, where progress is often more predictable and institutionally coherent.

Uganda is an active participant and a key driver in the Northern Corridor Integration Projects, a multilateral initiative aimed at accelerating regional growth through enhanced infrastructure and trade facilitation among Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and South Sudan (New Vision,). Uganda has demonstrated a strong commitment to eliminating trade barriers and enhancing infrastructure within this framework. Progress on the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) project should connect the landlocked countries of the region with Kenya's port of Mombasa (Soft Power, 2024) Uganda is also collaborating on the development of ICT infrastructure, including cross-border broadband connectivity and regional satellite communication projects (independent, 2024) cooperation on peace and security matters within the Northern Corridor is a key aspect of Uganda's participation

(Ibid)These projects hold significant potential for reducing business costs and improving the livelihoods of people across the region by establishing a seamless railway network and enhancing overall connectivity (Soft power 2024)

4.3.8. Eritrea

Eritrea's foreign policy is a one of unique history, geographical location, and the ruling party's ideology. A strong emphasis on sovereignty, self-reliance, and a deep-seated skepticism towards external interference often characterizes the nation's foreign relations. This posture is not merely a contemporary choice but one shaped by decades of struggle for independence and the challenges faced in the post-liberation era. The pursuit of national security and the preservation of independence are the paramount drivers, often leading to a cautious and sometimes confrontational stance in international relations.

The format of Eritrean foreign policy is less about publicly articulated doctrines and more about pragmatic responses to perceived threats and opportunities (Horn Review, 2024). It is highly centralized and closely controlled, reflecting the broader governance structure within the country(Ibid). Decisions are often made within a tight circle, with President Isaias Afwerki and a small group of advisors holding significant sway. This concentration of power means that foreign policy can be agile and decisive but also prone to sudden shifts, driven by evolving regional dynamics or perceived challenges to Eritrea's sovereignty. The emphasis on self-reliance translates into a preference for bilateral engagements, allowing Eritrea to maintain greater control over its relationships, although it participates in various international and regional bodies when deemed advantageous (Ibid). Transparency in foreign policy formulation is limited, with key decisions often announced after they have been made.

The primary institution formally responsible for shaping and executing foreign policy is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the real locus of power lies with the President and key figures within the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) (BTI Transformation Index, 2024).

Eritrea's foreign partners have shifted over time, often influenced by its relationships with its immediate neighbors and the broader geopolitical landscape. Historically, during its protracted struggle for independence, the Eritrean liberation fronts sought support from diverse

international actors, including some Arab states and other entities. In the post-independence era, Eritrea has cultivated relationships based on perceived mutual interests and strategic alignment. Economic ties are significant, with countries like China and the United Arab Emirates emerging as important trade partners (OEC, 2023). Relations with Western nations, such as the United States, have frequently been strained due to persistent concerns over human rights, governance, and regional stability, although diplomatic relations are maintained (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Eritrea has also actively sought closer ties with countries in the Global South, viewing these relationships to counterbalance perceived pressures (Horn Institute, 2025).

The relationship with Ethiopia is arguably the most defining feature of Eritrea's foreign policy. Following the devastating border war, a state of "no-war-no-peace" characterized relations for nearly two decades, marked by mutual suspicion and support for opposition groups (Accord, 2025). A brief rapprochement in 2018, started by Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, formally ended the state of war and opened borders (Rift Valley Institute, 2024). However, this normalization is no more. While the Tigray conflict has subsided, relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia remain sensitive, influenced by unresolved border issues and Ethiopia's continued ambition for guaranteed sea access, which Eritrea views with suspicion given its own control over key Red Sea ports (Horn Institute, 2025).

Relations with Sudan have fluctuated, impacted by internal Sudanese political dynamics, border security concerns, and historical grievances. While periods of cooperation have existed, the ongoing conflict in Sudan has presented factors for Eritrea's engagement with its western neighbor (BTI Transformation Index, 2024). Relations with Djibouti have also experienced periods of tension, particularly over border disputes, which led to brief armed clashes. While efforts have been made to normalize ties, underlying issues can resurface.

Eritrea's interaction within IGAD has been intermittent. However, its relationship with the bloc became increasingly strained, particularly due to disagreements with Ethiopia and perceptions of bias within the organization, which it felt did not adequately address its concerns regarding the border dispute (Global Politics, 2023). Eritrea suspended its membership in 2007, citing objections to IGAD's stance on regional issues, notably the deployment of Ethiopian troops in

Somalia, which it opposed (Global Politics, 2023). After a prolonged period of disengagement, Eritrea officially rejoined IGAD in June 2023. Yet, it is currently barely active.

In conclusion, a centralized decision-making structure and a pragmatic, sometimes cautious, approach to external relations characterizes it. While it seeks pragmatic partnerships globally, its interactions with regional actors, particularly Ethiopia, remain the most defining and dynamic feature of its external orientation.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Introduction

At the core, this study set out to understand whether IGAD, as it exists today, can meaningfully foster regional integration and collective security in the Horn of Africa. The data drawn from legal documents, policy reports, strategic frameworks, and the foreign policies of IGAD's member states has been rich but uneven. Some pieces speak clearly, others more obliquely. But together, they offer a textured account of an organization shaped as much by what it cannot do as by what it aspires to be.

In carrying out the in-depth analysis, the researcher approached the data intending to address the questions and objectives laid out in Chapter One. Underpinning the analysis is a thematic method that used both the Regional Security Complex lens and the principles of Functionalism. Themes surfaced from reading IGAD's founding treaties, policy reports, and following the twists in member states' foreign policy. The researcher used qualitative methods to organize coded excerpts. This tool helped to reveal patterns, how references to "consensus" often coincided with notes on "delayed decisions," for example. It also made it possible to see where themes overlapped. Passages about "external funding" frequently intersected with mentions of "donor priorities," a tension central to the study's second objective on external actors. Not every initiative labeled "functional" delivered on its promise. Several infrastructure projects, for example, had strong technical plans but weak follow through on governance. And where RSCT highlights interdependence, the data often showed member states retreating behind sovereignty. This method allows the analysis to speak directly to the questions driving the thesis, while staying rooted in the nuanced realities of IGAD's political economy.

5.1. Analytical Themes

5.1.1. Structural Design and Geopolitical constraints of IGAD

The structure of IGAD is often treated as a given, an institutional frame that member states inherited, adapted slightly, and now operate within. But the data shows that this design is anything but neutral. It has grown from a narrow, development-oriented mandate into a more

security-heavy organization. And yet, the core mechanics have barely changed. That contradiction lies at the heart of IGAD's difficulties.

The founding structure emphasized voluntary cooperation. Decision-making by consensus, equal voting power, and non-interference were framed as strengths, meant to encourage fragile states to sit at the same table. But over time, these features became liabilities. In security crises, whether in Somalia, South Sudan, or Ethiopia's internal conflict, consensus slowed the process. Sometimes, it paralyzes it altogether. The researcher noted how references to "consensus" in IGAD protocols often appeared alongside reports of stalled negotiations, delayed implementation, or conflicting positions from key member states.

Take, for example, the institutional response to the "Tigrai conflict" in Ethiopia. Despite the regional implications, IGAD refrained from formal engagement, partly because Ethiopia, a dominant member, would never consent to scrutiny. The consensus rule, while protecting state sovereignty, effectively granted veto power to the most powerful actors. This is not unique to IGAD, but in a region where power is highly uneven, it cements a hierarchy that weakens the very idea of regional unity.

Financial issues are also structural constraints. IGAD's dependence on external funding, while pragmatic, has shaped both what it can do and what it dares to say. Strategic frameworks often mirrored the language of Western partners, particularly the EU and the US, which prioritize border security, counterterrorism, and migration control. These are legitimate concerns, but they rarely align with the deeper, structural needs of the region, such as governance reform, economic equity, or environmental resilience. The IGAD Partners' Forum (IPF), a coalition of key donors including the EU, US, and Gulf states, exemplifies this tension between external funding and regional ownership. While the IPF provides critical financial and technical support, its influence often skews IGAD's strategic priorities toward short-term, donor-aligned objectives, such as counterterrorism, rather than long-term structural transformation. For instance, IPF-funded initiatives frequently emphasize measurable outputs (e.g., border security training) over systemic challenges like governance deficits or equitable resource distribution.

While its mandate expanded significantly in the 1990s to include peace and security, the supporting legal instruments were not updated with the same urgency. As a result, IGAD

operates in a grey zone, tasked with conflict mediation but lacking the authority or enforcement mechanisms to constructively follow through. The researcher found several references in peace agreements, such as the CPA and ARCSS, that mention IGAD as a mediator but give enforcement responsibility to external bodies, such as the African Union or UN. This outsourcing reflects a lack of institutional trust and internal capability. Moreover, it also shows the severely limited capability of member states.

Even IGAD's secretariat, meant to be the engine of its operations, struggles with capacity. Interviews with regional analysts and secondary reports from internal assessments pointed to chronic understaffing and bureaucratic inertia. The Mediation Support Unit, a potentially transformative initiative, can be described as conceptually sound but structurally starved. (ACCORD, 2024) Failing to institutionalize peacebuilding functions has meant that each crisis starts from scratch, with ad hoc coalitions and improvised timelines. In short, the structure of IGAD is not just about form, it deeply shapes function. Its legal weaknesses, consensus-driven politics, and external dependencies combine to create a system that can sometimes coordinate and convene, but rarely lead. And in a region as fragile and fast moving as the Horn, this is not a trivial failing. It is structural, and one that any alternative integration model must contend with head on.

The next sections looks beyond this structural foundation to explore how sovereignty sensitivities and entrenched rivalries further complicate IGAD's capacity to act. But the foundation is already clear; the organization's structure was not built to carry the weight of its current responsibilities. And without a serious redesign, even the most well-meaning regional strategies risk collapsing under their own ambition.

5.1.2. Sovereignty, Rivalries, and the Fragmented Regional Landscape

If structure is the skeleton of IGAD, sovereignty is the muscle pulling it in different directions. The documents and case studies revealed that sovereignty is not just a principle; it is a defense mechanism, a bargaining chip, and often, a silent veto. It is also the single greatest tension within IGAD's framework. The organization was never designed to override the will of its member states, and in the Horn of Africa, that design choice has profound consequences.

This was evident in how Ethiopia handled the "Tigray conflict". Despite the internal war threatening cross, border stability, IGAD's engagement was minimal. The consensus structure, combined with Ethiopia's geopolitical weight, made it politically unthinkable for IGAD to intervene meaningfully. Here, sovereignty didn't just slow action, it prevented it altogether.

Rivalries among member states further complicate this landscape. The researcher found repeated references to bilateral tensions. These rivalries are active and shape diplomatic behavior and regional strategy. For instance, the researcher traced how South Sudan's position in IGAD peace talks often shifted depending on its alignment with either Sudan or Ethiopia. These alignments were not based on regional goals but on narrow national calculations.

These shared interests do not erase rivalry. They simply run parallel to it. The IDDRSI platform, for example, generated cooperation on paper, but national programs were often misaligned, with little effort to harmonize approaches across borders. Sovereignty remained the filter through which every commitment was weighed.

There is also a deeper issue: the unequal power relationships within IGAD. Sovereignty is formally equal, but functionally it is not. Ethiopia and Kenya, as the region's economic and military heavyweights, shape outcomes more than their smaller neighbors. The researcher observed how smaller states like Djibouti or Somalia often follow the lead of these larger powers, not because they agree, but because they have limited leverage to push alternatives. This reality undermines the idea of collective regionalism and reinforces a hierarchy that weakens trust among member states. Rarely is it treated as a international actor capable of enforcing binding decisions. This mismatch in expectations has quietly but steadily hollowed out the organization's capacity.

What this reveals is that the very idea of a "regional response" in the Horn of Africa is shaped, if not distorted, by the primacy of state sovereignty and longstanding rivalries. Subsequently, they are embedded in the political culture of the region. Any move toward deeper integration or meaningful security cooperation must first reckon with the weight of this fragmentation. IGAD, as currently structured, does not have the mandate, or perhaps the political trust, to do so.

5.1.3. External Actors and the Illusion of Regional Autonomy

If sovereignty pulls IGAD inward, external actors pull it outward, often in conflicting directions. The region's strategic importance has long attracted global and regional powers. But the data clarifies that their influence, while financially indispensable, comes at a steep cost. Its dependency consistently compromised IGAD's autonomy, both political and institutional, on external funding, technical support, and diplomatic endorsement.

One of the most consistent findings across policy documents and strategic frameworks was the quiet dominance of donor priorities. References to counterterrorism, border control, and migration management appear not just in externally funded programs but in IGAD's own planning documents. The language mirrors that of Western partners, particularly the European Union and the United States. These partners have clear stakes in Horn affairs: curbing extremist threats, stemming migration routes, and ensuring maritime security. These are not irrelevant to the region, but they are not the same as regional integration, governance reform, or economic equity.

The researcher found that key IGAD initiatives, like the Mediation Support Unit and the IDDRSI, have struggled to evolve independently because they rely so heavily on donor contributions. In multiple documents, funding gaps were cited as reasons for limited staffing, suspended programs, or halted field operations. These gaps were not accidental. They occurred when donor attention shifted or when political developments made funding politically risky. The result is a pattern of short-term progress followed by long-term stagnation.

Gulf states have played an increasingly assertive role, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Unlike Western actors, whose involvement is often filtered through humanitarian or development frameworks, Gulf investments are transactional and fast moving (Meester,2018). They focus on ports, agricultural corridors, and military infrastructure, assets that give them both economic leverage and security presence in the Red Sea corridor. The researcher noted that this engagement often bypasses IGAD altogether. Bilateral deals with Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti unfold independently, weakening IGAD's position as a coordinating body. This side, stepping undermines even the appearance of regional coherence.

China's involvement is similarly complicated. It's Belt and Road Initiative has brought large-scale infrastructure development, railways, industrial parks, and energy projects, particularly in

Ethiopia and Djibouti (Eickhoff, 2022). These investments have filled longstanding gaps. But they have also deepened economic dependencies. In IGAD documents reviewed by the researcher, there was little critical engagement with the implications of Chinese debt exposure. Infrastructure was celebrated, but without a plan for regional ownership or shared oversight. The projects often reflect national strategies, not collective ones.

The researcher also noted subtle shifts in IGAD's institutional culture. External actors have introduced their own frameworks, on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and regional resilience, which IGAD adopts to maintain funding. While these frameworks can be useful, they are not always homegrown. The pressure to align with donor metrics often forces IGAD to focus on what is measurable rather than what is transformative. Peace is easier to report on than governance reform; infrastructure outputs easier than political trust-building.

What this creates is a form of "instrumental regionalism", where IGAD becomes a delivery vehicle for external agendas. This is not about bad intentions. Many of these programs have delivered real benefits. But they do not build regional autonomy. They substitute it. And in a region already fractured by internal rivalries, this substitution makes IGAD less a regional actor and a more regional intermediary.

This illustrates a fundamental irony. IGAD exists to promote regional integration, yet it functions in a context where integration is repeatedly deferred, both by internal fears of sovereignty loss and external agendas that prioritize narrow stability over structural transformation. The organization is caught in between, tasked with representing regional interests that are constantly being reshaped from the outside.

5.1.4. Functional Cooperation and Its Uneven Promise

Functionalism offered IGAD a path around politics. By focusing on technical collaboration, drought resilience, infrastructure development, cross-border trade, member states could build trust where politics had failed. And at first glance, the data suggests this approach created some shared initiatives. But looking closer, the picture becomes less optimistic. Cooperation has often been surface-level. The deeper integration it was supposed to lead to rarely materializes.

Launched in response to the 2011 famine, IDDRSI was ambitious: it framed climate resilience as a regional concern requiring collective action. Countries signed up, strategies were drafted, and donor support poured in (IGAD, 2013). But when the researcher traced the actual implementation, using project reports, monitoring documents, and follow-up assessments, national programs proceeded at extraordinary speeds. Some states prioritized it; others sidelined it. Regional coordination structures existed on paper but lacked the authority to enforce timelines or reporting obligations.

Similarly, the Infrastructure Master Plan, touted as a transformative project for regional connectivity (IGAD, 2022), suffers from uneven execution. While Kenya and Ethiopia advanced sections of the LAPSSET Corridor, other member states like South Sudan or Somalia remained peripheral, geographically and politically. In documents outlining progress, the researcher noticed a recurring trend: the projects moved fastest where national interests aligned with the funding partner's agenda. Regional alignment was an afterthought, not a driver.

This is the paradox of functional cooperation in the Horn: while the issues are clearly regional, the implementation is profoundly national. Each state engages only if it directly benefits. And when the benefits are uneven, as they often are in asymmetrical regions, trust erodes rather than builds.

Even IGAD's Protocol on Transhumance, a recent initiative to manage pastoralist mobility and resource-sharing, reflects this uneven dynamic. The protocol is celebrated as a success of functional cooperation (IGAD, 2021), yet several countries have not fully ratified or operationalized it (IGAD, 2024; ICPALD, 2022). Field reports highlight persistent clashes over water and grazing land along the Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia borders, despite the protocol's existence (IGAD, 2020a). What this shows is that paper cooperation does not always translate into changed behavior, especially where national and local interests are not aligned.

Disparities in outcomes, real or perceived, feed resentment. Smaller or less stable states feel sidelined. More powerful states feel burdened. And IGAD, without the capacity to equalize participation, becomes more of a coordinator than a convener.

What is missing is institutional muscle. The researcher observed that in regions like West Africa, ECOWAS uses its Commission to centralize project design and monitoring (Ademola, 2018). IGAD's secretariat is overextended and under-resourced. As a result, functional cooperation depends heavily on member state initiative and donor momentum. Neither of those is predictable or even always regionally motivated.

Functionalism, in the Horn of Africa, does offer opportunities. It creates space where political dialogue is impossible. It makes it easier for states to work together without confronting the deeper issues. But that ease may also be its weakness. It allows difficult conversations to be deferred, sometimes indefinitely. And in a region where security, economy, and governance are so deeply intertwined, deferral is not progress.

5.1.5. The Political Economy of development

The foreign policy behavior of IGAD member states is not simply a reflection of national interest or ideology; it is shaped by the political economy of survival and strategic dependency. States in the Horn often use IGAD as instrument to gain access to external rents, whether in the form of aid, diplomatic leverage, or security guarantees. It's often less about grand national interests or ideologies, and more about the tough reality of survival and reliance on outside help. These countries are often walking a tightrope, trying to secure what they need to simply keep functioning.

Consider Somalia. The state's foreign policy is inescapably limited by its internally divided domestic politics. While its diplomatic protests (e.g., regarding the Ethiopia-Somaliland MoU) manifest an assertion of sovereignty, they are equally closely linked to an abiding necessity to maintain legitimacy in front of domestic constituencies and federal member states aligned in the Gulf. The Somali government balances on a needle between asserting national sovereignty and placating the outside powers financing its state-building process.

In Ethiopia's case, foreign policy toward IGAD reflects its dual role as both a regional hegemon and a vulnerable post-conflict state. It uses IGAD as a platform to project leadership, especially in security domains, but resists deeper institutional integration that might constrain its unilateral actions. Its recent Red Sea strategy, including the Somaliland agreement, shows how Ethiopia

seeks economic outlets not through regional economic cooperation, but through bilateral deals that serve immediate state interests. This behavior is rooted in Ethiopia's political economy: a landlocked economy under internal strain, seeking stability through geopolitical maneuvering rather than collective regional strategies.

Kenya's involvement in IGAD reveals one other aspect. With a comparatively sound economy and central location in East Africa, Kenya uses IGAD to protect its borders and enhance its diplomatic footprint. But it still advocates for bilateralism where its fundamental interests, such as territorial claims in the oceans or counterterrorism, become involved.

More broadly, the international space surrounding IGAD is dominated by a "rentier security" logic. This means that member states often strategically align themselves with major international powers – like the EU, US, or Gulf states – and then utilize IGAD's multilateral platform to gain aid, military assistance, and infrastructure investment. This "rentier logic" actually hinders collective action within the region, as states often prefer international validation and direct assistance over genuine regional coordination. The result is a fragmented, externally driven, and structurally uneven pattern of regional diplomacy.

5.1.6. Alternative Models of Integration: Rethinking the Framework

After months of tracing IGAD's patterns, its structure, constraints, rivalries, dependencies, and half-realized functional efforts, the question inevitably becomes: is it enough? The documents, regional experiences, and comparative examples examined throughout this research all point to one conclusion. IGAD, in its current form, cannot deliver the deep integration or collective security the Horn of Africa urgently needs. It was built for something narrower. And though its mandate has expanded, its foundations have not.

Alternative models are not just theoretical exercises. They are already taking shape, sometimes from within IGAD's own policy circles, sometimes from scholars, and sometimes from actors because see the cracks in the system. One proposal that stood out in the data was the idea of an IGAD 3.0, a restructured version of the organization that integrates economic development directly into its peace and security work. This is not just about adding more departments; it is about changing the logic of how IGAD operates.

Right now, security and development exist in separate lanes. But as the research has shown, the very causes of conflict in the region, resource scarcity, economic exclusion, governance deficits, are economic at their core. Scholars, like Apuuli, proposing IGAD 3.0 call for the creation of a regional development bank, stronger monitoring and enforcement units, and decentralized funding mechanisms that would empower local actors. It's a radical shift. But it acknowledges that peace cannot be built on political dialogue alone.

One might even suggest a variable geometry model, one that allows states to integrate at different speeds, depending on their capacity and political will. This approach would avoid the all-or-nothing trap of consensus-based decision-making, which has paralyzed IGAD in moments of crisis. Under this model, Ethiopia and Kenya could deepen collaboration on energy and transport, while states like South Sudan could engage where and when possible. It is a model used in the EU, and to some extent, in ECOWAS. For a region as uneven as the Horn, it offers realism without abandoning ambition.

Then there is the argument for decentralized or localized regionalism. This does not mean dismantling IGAD, but complementing it with stronger sub-regional or cross-border structures. For example, borderland communities that share grazing routes or markets might benefit more from a shared local mechanism than from top-down IGAD policies. The researcher found scattered but promising examples of this in reports on pastoralist cooperation, informal trade routes, and early warning systems. These interactions were often more trusted than IGAD's formal structures because they were grounded in everyday needs, not abstract diplomacy.

Model Type	**Core Features**	**Strengths**	**Risks and Limitations**
IGAD (Current Form)	Consensus-based, sovereignty first	Legitimacy, inclusive in principle	Slow, reactive, limited enforcement
IGAD 3.0	Development-security linkage, institutional	Holistic, more robust	Politically ambitious, requires overhaul and

	reform	interventions	trust
Variable Geometry	Flexible integration levels	Realistic, reduces paralysis	Risks fragmentation, uneven standards
Decentralized Regionalism	Community-led, cross-border focus	Locally grounded, more adaptive	May lack coordination, needs strong facilitation

Table 3: Comparing Integration Models for the Horn of Africa

The critical insight here is that no single model offers a complete fix. But all of them confront what the current IGAD framework avoids: that integration is not just about aligning policy documents. It's about confronting the region's unequal power dynamics, divergent state interests, and structural dependencies. And it's about building institutions that are capable of not only coordinating, but leading.

5.2. Cross-Cutting Observations

The themes presented so far, structure, sovereignty, external influence, and functionalism, may appear distinct on the surface, but they intersect in messy, sometimes contradictory ways. The data revealed these dynamics are not isolated. They reinforce one another. They create cycles that explain why progress in one area is often undone by setbacks in another.

One of the clearest examples is the tension between consensus and urgency. IGAD's structural reliance on consensus reflects its respect for sovereignty, a core principle that gives member states equal standing. But in moments of crisis, South Sudan, or even the Red Sea port rivalries, this same principle stalls action. Sovereignty becomes a shield behind which inaction hides. Functional initiatives, while valuable, are not strong enough to break through this wall. In fact, they sometimes become substitutes for the harder political work of integration.

This reality complicates functionalism, which the thesis leaned on to imagine alternative entry points for cooperation. Functionalist theory assumes that progress in technical domains builds

habits of collaboration that spill into political trust. But what the data shows is that without a shared political vision, functional efforts remain transactional. They are pursued not as collective solutions but as opportunities for domestic leverage. States cooperate because it serves them, not because they believe in the region. In this way, the political economy lens becomes essential. It reveals how state behavior, even in regional projects, is often shaped by the economic calculus of who gets what, and on whose terms.

It's failing because it has outgrown the logic that shaped it. It was created in weak states, drought, and recovery. Today, it is asked to mediate wars, manage investment corridors, coordinate military operations, and represent the region diplomatically. The gap between mandate and capability is no longer technical. It is political. And in a region where national interests regularly override collective goals, this gap widens with every crisis IGAD struggles to respond to.

Area of Focus	**Underlying Tension**	**Resulting Outcome**
Decision-making	Consensus vs. urgency	Delayed response, risk aversion
Sovereignty	National pride vs. regional necessity	Weak enforcement, fragmented cooperation
External funding	Capacity support vs. agenda distortion	Dependence, policy drift
Functional projects	Shared needs vs. unequal capacities	Uneven outcomes, trust erosion
Institutional logic	Expanded mandate vs. static tools	Overstretch, symbolic integration

Table 4: Intersections of Structural and Political Constraints

What emerges from this matrix is a more sobering picture. IGAD does not lack ideas. It lacks a cohesive political will to act on them. And while technical tools can paper over this divide for a while, they cannot resolve it. The researcher noted that regional resilience, whether economic, political, or environmental, depends less on well-drafted documents and more on shared commitment. That commitment is still fractured.

5.3. Comparative Analysis: EAC versus IGAD and the Case for Revitalizing IGAD

The researcher turned to the East African Community (EAC) to see what a different regional model might offer. At first glance, the EAC seems appealing. It has a stronger institutional apparatus than IGAD. It pursues a common market, a customs union, and plans for a single currency. But the closer the researcher looked, the more the cracks showed. There is also a real danger that the EAC could become a conduit for 'product dumping.' China's Belt and Road Initiative already uses Kenyan ports as gateways for cheaper goods. Those goods flow into Uganda and Tanzania under EAC's open-market rules. Contrast this with IGAD's current scope. IGAD lacks the depth of EAC's economic integration, IGAD's strengths lie in conflict mediation, early warning, and shared security frameworks. These functions are vital for the many states in the horn still recovering from internal strife. To simply abandon IGAD for the EAC would be to leave behind an institution designed, imperfectly, but with knowledge to manage the Horn's volatile politics.

Feature	EAC	IGAD
Economic Integration	Common market, customs union, path to monetary union	Limited trade protocols, no customs union
Decision-making	Consensus, dominated by Kenya's proposals	Consensus, but less economic leverage to steer agendas

Security and Conflict Mediation	Minimal; relies on AU for peace operations	Central mandate; CEWARN and mediation support well,established
External Dependencies	Heavy BRI influence via Kenyan ports; risk of product dumping	Reliant on donor funding but with regional ownership rhetoric
Institutional Capacity	Strong secretariat, dedicated revenue stream	Understaffed secretariat, relied on project funding
Sovereignty Flexibility	High integration demands, limited opt-outs	Sovereignty-first model, allows flexible or asymmetrical commitments

This comparison does not spell doom. It does, however, underscore that the EAC is not a one-size-fits-all model. Its economic gains come with political costs. More critically, the wholesale shift risks collapsing IGAD. Member states rely on IGAD for conflict prevention. Without it, the fragile inter-state trust in the Horn could unravel.

Re-energizing IGAD will not be easy. It requires political courage to accept limitations on rapid economic integration. It demands vision to see that security and economic agendas must be woven together.

5.4. Fragmentation and the Regional Dilemma

Looking across the foreign policy orientations of IGAD's member states, one conclusion becomes unavoidable: this is not a bloc. It is a forum of states navigating different threats, different priorities, and often, different visions of what "region" even means. There is no shared political identity. There is no common foreign policy goal. And that absence, so clearly visible in the data, is what continues to make regional integration more of an aspiration than a reality.

Ethiopia, once the engine of IGAD, is now engulfed by internal fragmentation and geopolitical pressure. Its leadership, essential to the creation of IGAD's peace and security structures, is no longer fully present. The "Tigray war", and the distrust it generated, pushed Ethiopia inward. That inward turn opened the door for rivals like Egypt to assert themselves, not just against Ethiopia, but against IGAD itself. Kenya, stable and economically confident, has opted for the East African Community as its real regional platform. It shows up to IGAD out of courtesy and caution, but not commitment. Trade corridors, international partnerships, and global visibility shape its foreign policy. IGAD, to Kenya, is useful in moments of crisis, not in long-term planning.

Uganda sees the region through the lens of strategic security. It acts when its interests are threatened, and often acts alone. It participates in IGAD frameworks when necessary but does not wait for them. Museveni's state behaves like a regional power, not a regional partner. That distinction is subtle, but it matters. Sudan is now in open conflict, and the military dominates its foreign policy. It listens to Cairo, not Djibouti. And because Egypt distrusts IGAD's Ethiopian roots, Sudan does too. When Sudan disengages, peace processes collapse. IGAD is left in the awkward position of trying to mediate a conflict where one side refuses to acknowledge its legitimacy.

South Sudan, born of IGAD mediation, now barely participates. It takes what it can from the region but contributes little in return. Its leaders have mastered the art of delay and deflection. They attend meetings and stall implementation. They play neighbors against each other. And through it all, IGAD watches, unable to enforce its own agreements. Somalia engages defensively. It needs IGAD, but it doesn't trust it. Ethiopia and Kenya loom too large. Internal politics distort external alignment. And outside partners, Turkey, Qatar, the UAE, offer faster, more flexible support. IGAD, with its slow diplomacy, struggles to compete. Djibouti remains the host and the neutral party. It does not destabilize, but it does not lead either. It holds the institution physically but does little to guide it politically. And while it remains safe ground for summits and statements, it offers no vision for what IGAD could become.

Then there is Eritrea, the permanent outsider. Its re-entry in 2023 has changed little. It is a member in form, not in function. And its refusal to engage reflects the deepest wound in IGAD's

structure: the inability to respond to member states who reject the premise of collective governance.

Together, these profiles do not add up to nations with an aim of integration. A region where every state turns to IGAD only when convenient. And IGAD, as data clearly shows, has no tools to fix this. It cannot compel compliance. It cannot mediate between equals who see each other as enemies. It cannot integrate what will not be aligned.

This is the heart of the research question: What are the major obstacles to regional integration and security in the Horn? The answer is not just structural or legal. It is political. IGAD's structure reflects the same fault lines it resolved. Its decision-making processes, designed to honor sovereignty, now entrench fragmentation. And its evolution, while important, has never been strong enough to overcome the centrifugal pull of national interests.

There are models out there. But none of them will matter unless the political will to act together emerges. And right now, that will does not exist.

So what is IGAD, really? It is not a failure. But it is not yet a regional authority. It is a forum, a placeholder, a reminder of what might be possible if states looked beyond their borders. But until they do, IGAD will remain what the research has so clearly shown it to be, a necessary institution trapped inside the contradictions of the very region it was built to unite.

The perception of exceptional difficulty, then, is at least partly a product of how knowledge is produced and how narratives are framed. If integration is to be revitalized in the Horn, it will not be through copying models like the EAC or continuing donor-driven initiatives. It will require a conscious effort to reclaim regional agency, an effort that begins by seeing the Horn not as a perpetual exception, but as a region capable of writing its own rules, if allowed doing so.

5.5. Conclusion

At the start of this thesis, theory provided a compass. RSCT helped frame the Horn as an interdependent but fractured security space. Functionalism offered a hopeful pathway, technical cooperation as a bridge toward political trust. Together, these theories structured the research

questions and shaped the way data was collected and analyzed. Now, at the close of this chapter, the question is whether these frameworks still hold.

The answer is mixed. RSCT is useful in naming the Horn of Africa as a tightly linked regional security complex. The conflicts are undeniably regional, armed groups operate across borders, displacement spills into neighboring countries, and one state's instability often invites another's interference. The theory explains the logic of regional instability, but it does not account for the political denial that often greets it. Functionalism, too, begins with promise. IGAD's projects on climate resilience, infrastructure, and livestock mobility suggest that shared needs can drive collaboration. But Functionalism leans on the idea that cooperation in one area naturally leads to integration in others. The data suggests otherwise. In the Horn, states collaborate where it serves their immediate interest, then retreat. There is no automatic spillover, no deeper trust built from joint infrastructure projects or agricultural policy harmonization. These initiatives are real, but their integrationist logic is not organic. It has to be actively built, and IGAD has not yet built the institutional or political muscle to do that. Both frameworks underscore what IGAD lacks: enforceable mechanisms, trusted coordination, and an agreed-upon direction. The data confirms these deficits are not simply bureaucratic. They are rooted in the political economy of the region, where power is uneven, sovereignty is sacred, and regionalism is often more of a performance rather than a project.

In closing, what stands out most is the gap between theoretical potential and operational reality. IGAD is not yet the region-building institution it aspires to be. But the data does not suggest that this is inevitable. Rather, it suggests that IGAD's trajectory depends on choices, about reform, about trust, about who gets to set the agenda. Those choices will determine whether the region continues to coordinate reactively, or integrates proactively.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The Horn of Africa stands at a crossroads, caught between the necessity of regional integration and the inertia of fragmentation. This study has demonstrated that IGAD, despite its ambitions, remains structurally and politically ill-equipped to bridge this divide. Its consensus-based model, designed to preserve sovereignty, often entrenches paralysis; its reliance on external funding distorts priorities; and its functional initiatives, while valuable, fail to cultivate the deeper political trust required for meaningful integration.

The findings reveal a fundamental tension: IGAD operates within a system that demands regional solutions but rewards national self-interest. Member states engage selectively—cooperating on drought resilience or infrastructure when convenient, yet retreating behind sovereignty during security crises. Meanwhile, external actors, from the IGAD Partners' Forum to Gulf states, exploit this fragmentation, advancing agendas that prioritize stability over structural reform. The result is a hollow regionalism, visible in summits and strategies, but absent in enforcement and collective action. This is not merely an institutional failure, but a geopolitical one. The Horn's security and economic challenges are interdependent, yet IGAD's approaches treat them as distinct. Mediation in South Sudan proceeds separately from trade integration; climate adaptation is divorced from governance. Without a framework that links these issues, progress in one area unravels in another.

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Signed Declaration

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University, and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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Hewan Endashaw Bekele Date