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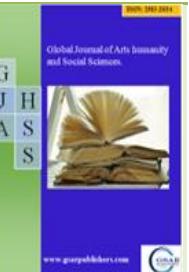
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Challenges of Realizing Development in the IGAD Region

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Abstract

The IGAD region is one of the most important and strategic areas of Africa and the global economy, and possesses potential in natural resources. However, the region remains one of the poorest regions of the World and suffers from a lack of food, not to mention poverty, disease, and continuous internal strife. This paper aims to identify and analyze the common challenges of realizing development in IGAD countries. It employed a qualitative method, using secondary sources. It is found that several factors determine the realization of development in the countries of the region. Though the IGAD region experienced an average annual economic growth, the countries of IGAD are still facing daunting challenges. The region's development dilemmas include the prevailing unfavorable external environment, crisis of governance, absence of democracy, environmental degradation, disintegration of state services, poor infrastructure, debt, intra- and inter-conflicts, and so forth. It is revealed that the challenges emanate from within and outside the countries and the region that are categorized into social, economic, environmental, and political, or natural and human-made, which are closely intertwined, and they must be reckoned with in tandem. Such challenges can be addressed if the countries of the IGAD are determined to improve their democratic governance.

Keywords: IGAD, Development, Challenges

1. Introduction

The IGAD region is one of the most important and strategic areas of Africa and the global economy. The IGAD region comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda that stretches over an area of 5.2 million square kilometers. It has 6,960 kilometers of coastline with the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Tadjoura and the Red Sea (IGAD^a, 2023; IGAD 2020). It is a bridge between Africa and the Middle East, as well as a gateway to the oil fields of the Persian Gulf. It is a culturally and historically rich region of the world with great natural resource potential. Specifically, the region is endowed with rivers, lakes, marine, forests, livestock, diverse ecosystems and high agricultural potential including untapped potential of petroleum, gold, salt, energy resources (hydroelectric, solar and geothermal), and substantial oil and gas reserves (Maru, 2017), which if properly managed, can significantly contribute to the social and economic development of the region. A population of about 283 million and an expansive territorial coverage provide a sizeable market, which can attract domestic and foreign investors.

In spite of its potential in natural resources and its geo-politically strategic position, the sub-region remains one of the poorest regions of the World and suffers from a lack of food, not to mention poverty, disease, and continuous internal strife. Here the key question is then: What blocks the countries of the IGAD sub-region from realizing their potential to bring about development? The hard answers to this question are the purpose of this paper.

The paper reviews of the existing literature and identifies the common challenges of IGAD countries. In addition to drawing on the socio-economic and political data by the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), UNDP, World Bank, African Development, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Freedom House, and other research institutes, secondary sources were obtained from research works of different scholars.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section two highlights the concepts of development. Section three examines the socio-economic conditions of the countries of IGAD. Section four analyzes the major common constraints that the countries of IGAD face in realizing development. Section five presents conclusion.



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2. Development: Conceptual Framework

2.1 Definition

The need for development has a crucial place in the lives of individuals, groups, nations, and states (Adetula and Onojieruo, 2024). However, development has been one of the most ambiguous terms in social sciences discourse and it continues to generate debate among various scholars. It is an abstract concept, the meaning of which is far more difficult to grasp than something tangible (Frankema, 2021). There is, however, consensuses that it is not a one-sided process but rather a multi-sided issue. For example, Dudley Seer (cited in Rasheed, 2008) sees development to mean not only capital accumulation and economic growth but also the condition in which people in a country have adequate food and job and the income inequality among them is greatly reduced. It is the process of bringing about fundamental and sustainable changes in the society. For him, it encompasses growth, embraces such aspects of the quality of life as social justice, equality of opportunity for all citizens, equitable distribution of income and the democratization of the development process.

For some, development is all about the capacity of members of the society to actualize themselves by participating actively in the social engineering of their life and destiny. It entails the ability of the individuals to influence and manipulate the forces of nature for their betterment and that of humanity. Rodney (cited in Rasheed, 2008) sees beyond the individual or people's perception of development and conceived development whether economic, political or social to imply both increase in output and changes in the technical and institutional arrangement by which it is produced. In other words and more importantly, development is a multi-dimensional concept and in spite of the various conceptions, development is basically about the process of changes which lies around the spheres of societal life.

According to Lawal, (2007) development is seen as the process by which a type of (social) change is introduced into a system in order to produce a better production method and improved social arrangement. It involves a structural transformation of the economy, society, polity and culture of a country. It can be argued that development is multidimensional. It is not restricted to be narrowly economic or financial, but it also needs to be cultural and social, and more importantly to take into account the political factors such as governance and democracy which are closely connected with development. It also is related to 'human development', where the idea of expanding the freedoms that people enjoy which is also often a means towards achieving more of it (Frankema, 2021). In the countries of IGAD, governance and democracy have been at the center of development. Problems associated with governance and democracy has ravaged the entire sub-region IGAD system.

2.2 Factors Determining Development

The measurement of development efforts in developing countries has generally focused on the growth of GNP per head and related

concepts, but growth of output or income by themselves are not adequate indicators of development. According to Alkan (2016), several institutions such as democratic institutions, history, culture, ideology, geography, and economic resources are critical that shape the nations' prosperity and development.

In the same vain, several factors determine the realization of development in the countries of the IGAD sub-region. It would be analyzed within the following framework. These include, among others: (a) the existence or absence of interstate and internal conflicts; (b) the existence or absence of democracy, popular consent, transparency; (c) rule of law, whether there is an enabling legal and regulatory framework and adhere to it; (d) civic inclusiveness, i.e. the degree of participation of non-state actors or the engagement of people; (e) the existence and influence of external actors, and their role in relation to domestic and regional politics; (f) the regional economy, i.e. the comparative economic strength of member states and the extent of trade, investment, infrastructure; and g) the leadership over human and other public resources for a sound functioning of institutions either public or private.

It can be argued that governance and democracy, especially the existence or absence of democracy, popular consent, transparency, and accountability are critical factors in the realizing development in the countries of IGAD.

3. IGAD: Background and Socio-economic Status

3.1 Brief Background

IGAD is one of the youngest regional organizations even in the African context. Recurring severe droughts and other natural disasters caused widespread famine, ecological degradation and economic hardship in Horn Africa between 1974 and 1984. Although individual countries made substantial efforts to cope with the situation and received generous support from the international community, the magnitude and extent of the problem argued strongly for a regional approach to supplement national efforts (IGAD, 2023; IGAD, 2010:3; ECA, 2010:18; Sisay, 2006:3; WHYCOS: 2004:2-3). In 1983 and 1984, six countries—Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda—took action through the United Nations to establish an intergovernmental body for development and drought control in the region. Heads of States and Governments of these countries held a summit in Djibouti on 6 January 1986 to sign the agreement that officially established Intergovernmental Authority for Drought and Development (IGADD) with headquarters in Djibouti to coordinate their efforts to fight against drought and desertification, and ensure development. Eritrea became the seventh member after independence in 1993. Recently, in December 2011, South Sudan became the eighth member.

Ten years later, in 1996 as a response to globalization and developments in the sub-region, IGADD was revitalized and renamed the Intergovernmental Authority on Development



(IGAD). The revitalized IGAD, with expanded areas of regional cooperation and a new organizational structure, was launched by the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Djibouti on 25 November 1996. The ultimate goal of IGAD is to achieve economic integration and sustainable development for the region.

Other objectives include: to promote joint development strategies and gradually harmonize macro-economic policies and programs in the social, technological and scientific fields; to harmonize policies about trade, customs, transport, communications, agriculture, and natural resources, and promote free movement of goods, services, and people within the region; and to create an enabling environment for foreign, cross-border and domestic trade and investment. (IGAD, 2010; ECA, 2010; WHYCOS: 2004).

However, in 2023, it was re-vitalized. The Heads of State and Government of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda met in Djibouti on 12 June 2023, and

finalized the structure of the organization and adopted a new Treaty that replaces the Agreement Establishing the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development with a view to widen and deepen cooperation and achieve sustainable development that desires to accelerate trade, investment, social and economic development cooperation among the Member State (IGAD^c, 2023).

In brief, IGAD provides a political platform through which the governments of the member states pool resources and coordinate efforts to initiate and implement regional programs and projects to tackle the development challenges facing the region.

3.2 Socio-economic Status of IGAD

he eight IGAD member states—Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda—cover an area of 5.2 million square kilometers and have a population of more than 283 million (See Table 1). The average population growth rate of 2.4 per cent is one of the highest in the world.

Table 1: Basic Indicator of IGAD Countries

Country	Country Surface1 (Km2),000	Population (million), 2022	Population growth (% per annum) 2024	Life expectancy (Years), 2023	Gross national income per capita, 2022	GDP per capita1 (US\$), 2022	Real GDP Growth Rates, 2020-22		
							2020	2021	2022
Djibouti	23,000	1.01	1.4	66	5,780	3,572	1.0	4.8	3.6
Eritrea	118,000	3.68	1.9	69		667	-0.6	2.9	2.6
Ethiopia	1,136,000	105.17	2.6	67	2,800	964	6.1	6.3	3.8
Kenya	580,000	50.62	2.0	64	5,680	2,099	-0.3	7.5	5.4
Somalia	638,060	17.60	3.5	59	1,360	592	-2.6	3.3	2.4
South Sudan	634,000	14.23	3.9	58	1,040	423	20.3	5.3	6.5
Sudan	1,854,000	46.84	0.8	66	4,150	1,199	-1.6	-1.9	-0.8
Uganda	242,000	44.21	2.8	68	2,650	1,021	3.0	6.7	4.4
IGAD	5,225,000	283.37	2.4	64		1,369	6.1	5.7	4.5

Source: adopted from IGADb (2023). IGAD Statistics, Facts and Figures 2023 and Word Bank (2024). World Bank DataBank, UN

The economies of the IGAD region possess significant structural obstacles. The informal sector dominates the economy of the IGAD region (IGAD, 2016). The key economic and social indicators of the region's states clearly point to these realities (See Table 1 and Table 2). The economies of the IGAD regional countries are predominantly agricultural, although Sudan has oil reserves, and some mining activity is present in Kenya and Uganda. Tourism is a significant contributor to the economy of Kenya and, to a lesser extent, Uganda and Ethiopia. IGAD member states depend for their exports on a relatively small number of primary commodities in which they often find themselves in competition with one another. Overlap exists in a large number of products: Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda are significant producers of

coffee, although different types and provenances are recognized in the international market; Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan are major exporters of livestock and livestock products.

Both livestock and crop production provide the basis for food supplies and export earnings as well as employment for over 80% of the population (IGAD, 2020; Salami, Kamara and Brixiova, 2010). Livestock contribute nearly 60% of the combined agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the IGAD Member. The livestock sector is an important component of the livelihoods of an estimated 40 million people in the region. However, “The drought devastated pastoral livelihoods, the key livelihood activity across many of the worst-affected areas. Extensive livestock



deaths, estimated at 13.2 – 6.8 million in Ethiopia, 2.6 million in Kenya, and 3.8 million in Somalia, were recorded due to a lack of water and pasture." (IGAD^a, 2023).

In common with most developing economies, the manufacturing sector remains small. The contribution of industries to the national economies is about 15-20% on average (IGAD, 2020; IGAD, 2009). Since they produce similar commodities, the level of intra-state trade remains low and markets are neither inter-dependent nor inter-linked. Besides, as shown in Table 2, the countries of IGAD are towards the bottom of the UN Human Development Index (HDI) which measures average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living (0.388-0.628) in 2023, where out of 193 countries, South Sudan ranks 193rd, and Somalia ranks 192nd.

Large proportion of the population lives below the poverty line and average life expectancy is under 70 years. However, there is real GDP growth in the countries of IGAD (see Appendix Table 3). IGAD's nominal GDP growth was reported at 10.4% in 2022, an

increase from the previous number of 6.3% for 2021. Growth in nominal GDP means growth in economic activities in IGAD, and it is attributed to an increase in quantity or price. Ethiopia stands out with significant GDP expansion, growing from 42.2 billion USD in 2012 to 119 billion USD in 2022, showcasing a robust and expanding economy. Djibouti and Uganda also demonstrate consistent GDP growth over the years, reflecting stable economic environments and steady progress. However, some countries like South Sudan and Sudan experienced fluctuations, possibly due to factors such as political instability, economic challenges, or shifts in resource availability (IGAD^a, 2023).

Most of IGAD region may be classified as arid and semi-arid with high climate variability, with more than 40 percent of the IGAD population lives in semi-arid to hyper-arid zones (IGAD, 2020; IGAD, 2010:3). The region is prone to recurrent severe droughts which hamper crop and livestock production. Coupled with rampant insecurity and other natural and man-made disasters, this has resulted in perennial food deficit which makes the IGAD region one of the most food insecure regions in the world.

Table 2. Human Development Index trends, 1990-2023

HDI rank	Country	HDI: Human Development Index (HDI)									Change in HDI rank	Average annual HDI growth			
		1990	2000	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023	2015-2023		1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2023	1990-2023
Medium human development															
143	Kenya	0.485	0.500	0.552	0.583	0.600	0.608	0.626	0.628	5	0.31	0.99	1.00	0.79	
157	Uganda	0.342	0.407	0.514	0.547	0.571	0.573	0.578	0.582	3	1.76	2.36	0.96	1.62	
Low human development															
175	Djibouti	..	0.337	0.421	0.469	0.499	0.501	0.510	0.513	6	..	2.25	1.53	..	
176	Sudan	..	..	0.479	0.498	0.513	0.512	0.516	0.511	-3	..	..	0.50	..	
178	Eritrea	..	..	0.465	0.480	0.495	0.496	0.499	0.503	-1	..	..	0.61	..	
180	Ethiopia	..	0.293	0.415	0.456	0.486	0.487	0.494	0.497	4	..	3.54	1.40	..	
192	Somalia	..	..	..	..	..	..	0.385	0.404	..	..	..	..	..
193	South Sudan	..	..	0.420	0.317	0.398	0.393	0.388	0.388	0	..	..	-0.61	..	
Source: UNDP ^a (2025): Human Development Reports 2025															



4. Challenges of Realizing Development in IGAD

There are numerous signs of development opportunities in Africa, in general, and in the IGAD sub-region, in particular. Reports by ADB, IGAD, UNECA, UNCTAD, IMF, and others are generally optimistic about the sub-regional countries. There have been marked improvements in recent economic performance. The region experienced an average annual economic growth rate of 5.7 percent over the last decade. It is predicted that many of the IGAD countries continue to enjoy good economic growth, and Africa's average growth is expected to accelerate to 5.8% in 2012. IGAD's nominal GDP growth was reported at 10.4% in 2022, an increase from the previous number 6.3% for 2021. Growth in nominal GDP means growth in economic activities in IGAD and it is attributed to increase in quantity or price. Ethiopia stands out with significant GDP expansion, growing from 42.2 billion USD in 2012 to 119 billion USD in 2022, showcasing a robust and expanding economy. Djibouti and Uganda also demonstrate consistent GDP growth over the years, reflecting stable economic environments and steady progress. However, some countries like Eritrea have maintained relatively stable GDP figures, indicating a need for targeted strategies to stimulate growth. South Sudan and Sudan experienced fluctuations, possibly due to factors such as political instability, economic challenges, or shifts in resource availability. GDP, current prices in billion (USD) (IGAD^b, 2023)

Life expectancy in the IGAD region has shown a general increase over time, suggesting overall improvements in healthcare. While some countries have had steady rates, others have seen positive trends, reflecting ongoing healthcare enhancements. Despite challenges and variations, the region has made progress in promoting well-being and healthcare access (IGAD^b, 2023). In 2022, life expectancy at birth ranged from 56 to 67 years, with Eritrea having the highest and Somalia and South Sudan the lowest among IGAD member states (see Table 1).

However, the countries of IGAD are still facing daunting challenges. The sub-region's development dilemmas, which include the prevailing unfavorable external environment, crisis of governance, absence of democracy, environmental degradation, poor soils and climates, abysmal health and education indicators, massive population movements (both voluntary and involuntary), disintegration of state services, poor infrastructure, debt, intra- and inter-conflicts, and so forth. The challenges emanate from within and outside the countries and the region. They may be categorized into social, economic, environmental and political, or natural and human-made. The social, economic, political, and environmental challenges of the sub-region are closely intertwined, and they must be reckoned with in tandem. Hence, the challenges are formidable ones. This paper, however, tries to identify those challenges in terms of global, regional, and national levels with due emphasis on political factors.

Even though illiteracy rates have declined significantly over the past decades, many policymakers have been concerned about the illiterate population because it is one of the major barriers to technological progress, economic growth and development. However, the significant decline in illiteracy rate among the IGAD member states was influenced by several factors, such as investment in education, literacy programs, government initiatives and socio-economic progress. (IGAD^b, 2023)

4.1 Global/External Challenges

At the global level, there are macro-economic shortcomings, the problems of aid and debt as well as the negative consequences of the legacy of colonialism. To begin with, there are serious macro-economic shortcomings, which have led to the sharp economic decline in the poor countries of IGAD. The shortcomings include the unfair trade practices of the developed world which have led to a gradual erosion of the poor countries' terms of trade as prices of primary agricultural commodity exports fall to unsustainable levels while prices of industrial goods and services of the developed world have kept on rising (IGAD, 2009:6). One result of this unfavorable situation has been the reduction in farm and rural employment with the concomitant loss of purchasing power among the rural people (Mochoge and Zziwa, 2004:1). Loss of economic empowerment leads to loss of entitlement to food among the poor people. Faced with poor balance of payments and serious shortages of foreign exchange, the poor countries have had to depend on loans from international lending institutions as well as bilateral sources.

External debt and external debt volatility have a negative and significant impact on economic growth in Sub-Saharan (Manasseh *et al*, 2022). The resulting debt burden was too high to bear and any meaningful development efforts were thwarted by the unsustainable debt servicing commitments (See Table 3 & 4). To access these loans, the countries were required to undertake major structural adjustments of their economies, which included among other things the retrenchment of many government employees in order to reduce government expenditure. This automatically created poverty not only in the urban areas but also throughout all the countries. The impact of structural adjustment, and the harsh conditionalities it has, Rasheed (2008:11) argues, in the name of development, contributed to political instability and violence." In many cases, in response to the increasing exposure to food insecurity and in some cases famines (usually triggered by droughts) donor countries brought in massive food aid. The food aid was useful in addressing the immediate emergencies, but there was no clear exit strategy after the emergencies. As such continued food aid imports have had the negative effect of dampening local markets and acting as a disincentive to local production and thus creating paradoxical a food aid trap.



Table 3 - Total External Debt as % of GDP

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Djibouti	25.1	24.6	26.9	39.9	45.7	47.9	46.5	39.1	41.0	43.2	38.2
Eritrea	154.6	187.0	136.6	180.7	167.5	202.5	185.6	187.1	182.2	170.8	164.2
Ethiopia*	39.4	44.1	44.2	50.7	51.8	55.3	58.5	54.7	53.7	53.0	56.3
Kenya	37.6	39.8	41.3	45.8	50.4	53.9	56.5	58.6	67.6	68.1	72.9
Somalia	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	45.9	44.1	42.6
South Sudan	8.9	17.6	37.6	59.3	104.0	60.7	46.3	28.1	37.2	58.2	41.2
Sudan	117.7	105.8	84.4	93.2	109.9	149.5	186.7	200.4	270.4	184.3	185.9
Uganda	19.5	22.1	24.8	28.5	31.0	33.6	34.9	37.6	46.4	51.6	50.3
IGAD											

Sources: IGAD Statistics, Facts and Figures 2023

Table 4 - Debt Service as a Proportion of Exports of Goods and Services

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Djibouti	8.10	1.24	1.04	1.24	2.12	1.56	1.42	1.32	1.58	--	--
Eritrea				9.90	14.70	11.80	11.40	11.30	12.40	--	--
Ethiopia*	7.14	10.65	11.82	18.16	20.62	22.01	21.16	28.09	25.76	21.00	--
Kenya	4.37	4.40	10.98	6.98	8.38	12.21	20.87	35.41	26.64	18.66	--
Somalia	--	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.05	--	--	1.1
South Sudan	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Sudan	7.05	4.85	4.28	10.62	6.31	3.96	4.08	3.69	2.87	49.71	--
Uganda	1.36	1.63	1.98	1.85	2.10	3.46	5.25	4.45	5.47	9.57	--

Sources: IGAD Statistics, Facts and Figures 2023

It can be argued that aid may not be an essential ingredient of development. This is not to deny, for example, one could find that aid given in telecommunication sector may have helped to remove bottleneck in communication. However, aid has not enabled the countries of IGAD escape from the historic dependency on the developed countries nor facilitates development. It can further be argued that aid and grants are being used, not for development, but to repay creditors. More importantly, as some writers (Hancock, 2001: 189; Onyemelukwe 1974:120) contend, aid has sapped people's energy, initiative, creativity, and enterprise and substituted the superficial and 'irrelevant glitz' of imported advice. Apart from the economic and political arguments, aid has an impact on IGAD's development in that it can alter the entire psychology of a people in the direction of mental impotence. The problem linked with the psychology of aid tends to undermine the

very essence of economic development by building up the attitude that someone else is better qualified and can do it for me, amongst the recipients (Abeselom, 2018)

Moreover, the current global economic and financial crisis will undoubtedly have an impact on IGAD countries' economies, for investment flows may be significantly altered and commodity prices adversely affected by reduced demand (UNECA, 2025). According to UNDP *et al* (2010), the global economic and financial which has an impact on African economies and their ability to attain the MDGs, will continue to be felt for many years to come. Further, global food prices remain well above their average before the 2008 price spike, leaving the poor highly vulnerable to hunger. Oil prices have also been rising, albeit at a slow rate. Budget cuts arising from concern over mounting deficits



in advanced industrial economies and the Eurozone debt crisis of 2010 and 2011 threaten economic recovery and could cause a significant reduction in aid flows to Africa in 2011 and beyond. As of early 2025, public debt in Sub-Saharan Africa averages over 60% of GDP, and debt servicing costs have risen sharply. In many countries, debt service now absorbs more than 40% of government revenues, placing immense pressure on public budgets and crowding out vital investments in social services and infrastructure (UNDP^b, 2025). The return to debt distress for many countries and the continued underperformance in revenue generation require bold, coordinated reforms. The same holds for the countries of IGAD.

IGAD's dependence on international trade has increased significantly since 2012. Most IGAD member states recorded significant deficits in balance of payment between 2012 and 2022. Through 2012-2022, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda sent more money abroad than they receive from abroad indicating current account deficit (IGAD^b, 2023). Between 2012 and 2022, IGAD region has recorded a consistent deficit in trade balance as a share of GDP indicating more imports of commodities, capital and services than exports (Ibid.)

Another challenge is related to the legacy of colonialism. One of the prerequisites for development is the prevalence of peace and stability within and between the countries. However, the IGAD sub-region is characterized by instability. It is one of the most fragile sub-regions in the world. And some of the instability in the sub-region has been linked to the legacy of colonialism (Brouk, 2011:10-11; Healy, 2011:2-3; Sarbo, 2010:15-16). The modern state was created in Horn of Africa by European colonialists, when they carved up the sub-region among themselves without regard to geographical, historical, cultural, or other factors defining any of the territories. One outcome of this was the total disregard for the peoples who fell within these territories, and those of varying historical, cultural and linguistic groupings were lumped together in the same territory (the Somalis and Afras, Tire-Tigriyans, and Angewak).

The ethnic overlap across borders in the Horn of Africa is not just a localized phenomenon. In the east of the region, it occurs on a grand scale, dividing linguistic communities made up of millions of people. The Somali-speaking people live under five different political administrations, including Somalia and Somaliland and substantial parts of Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti. The Afar people are spread across three countries, Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Their Issa Somali neighbors are in Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somaliland. The majority of these border communities are pastoralists, meaning that they cross international borders both literally and metaphorically.

The border between Ethiopia and Eritrea divides Tigrinya-speaking people in the Tigray regional state in Ethiopia and neighboring Eritrea, where they form half the population. Both are settled agricultural communities rather than pastoralists. Beja-speaking people straddle the boundary between Eritrea and Sudan, and Boran pastoralists share their connections across the Kenya-

Ethiopia border. The new border between Sudan and South Sudan has been depicted as a zone of ethnic confrontation between the Arab north and African south for a long time. History and politics have conspired against the development of communities in the borderlands and a leading analyst has observed that the referendum of 2011 intensified the racialization of the border (Healy, 2011:3). On Ethiopia's western borders a small degree of overlap exists, with groups such as Anuak and Nuer living on both sides of the border in South Sudan and others such as Berta and Burun in both Sudan and Ethiopia.

As a result, there is more space for cross border interaction by different population groups, and for disaffected groups in one state to seek support among their close kinsmen across the borders. Consequently, most of the parties to the conflicts in several states have support or sympathy from groups, and often governments in the neighboring states (Molla, 2025). Very often, instead of looking for amicable solutions, states retaliate against each other by supporting the insurgents. The result is that these states destabilize and weaken one another and spend scarce resources on unnecessary armaments. This will remain the challenge to the attempt to development.

4.2 Challenges at Regional Level

At the regional level, IGAD faces serious predicaments in attaining its objectives. The countries of IGAD are characterized by poorly developed domestic market structures, low savings and investment, heavy debt burden, dependency, lack of political commitment, institutional and structural inefficiency, underdeveloped infrastructure, and political instability (inter-state conflicts) that limit the implementation of the sub-regional organization's objective. (Maru, 2017; Medhane, 2004; IGAD, 2009; UNCTAD, 2009; UNDP^c, 2025; UNECA, 2009; UNECA, 2010).

The development of trade has been a major objective pursued through programs aimed at achieving a free trade area, a customs union, and a common market (IGAD, 2023; IGAD, 2020; IGAD, 2009; ECA, 2008). But outcomes of decades of experimentation with cooperation in the IGAD sub-region have, on balance, remained diffident. The countries generally lack a strong industrial capacity to produce diversified manufactured goods for trade within regional markets. Indeed, there is no material basis for exchange as almost all member states are producers of similar primary products. Most IGAD countries continue to trade in a narrow band of natural resource-based products. These limited trade links among member states of IGAD restrict the foundation on which the regional economic cooperation and integration scheme between them have been based and impedes the region to achieve its objective, i.e. realizing development.

IGAD's dependence on outside resources for the maintenance of the organization and functioning of its activities has been one of the fundamental predicaments. IGAD has not been in a position to financially maintain the organization's personnel, let alone the priority areas. From its inception, IGAD relied heavily on the financial and technical assistance of Western countries and their institutions (Molla^a, 2023). The basic document of the organization



was first developed by experts from outside the sub-region. More importantly, the Authority has totally relied on the IGAD Partners Forum (IPF) for the implementation of the projects. The potential significance of self-help and cooperation at the sub-regional level could not materialize with the unsustainable hopes and funding promises from outside sources. External sources of financing would only exacerbate the region's vulnerability to external pressure and cooperation. This greatly affects negatively the attempt to achieve effective economic integration and attainment of development in the IGAD sub-region.

The region is also characterized by overlapping memberships and duplicated efforts. No country maintains a singular membership in the sub-region. Each is a member of at least two regional communities. For example, Djibouti and Sudan are members of IGAD, COMESA and the Community of Sahel-Saharan Countries (CENSAD) (Molla^a, 203; IGAD, 2009; ECA, 2006). Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia are members of IGAD and COMESA. Djibouti, Somalia and Sudan are also members of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), which have incompatible interests with the aspirations of some other member states of IGAD, particularly Ethiopia (Madhane, 2004). Kenya joins IGAD, East African Economic Community (AEC), CENSAD, and COMESA. Uganda is a member of IGAD, AEC and COMESA. Duplication of membership as well as multiple arrangements and institutions present its own set of challenges to the attempt to sub-regional development. Overlapping memberships, mandates, objectives, protocols and functions create unhealthy multiplication and duplication of efforts and misuse sub-region's scarce resources (Molla^b, 2023; ECA, 2008). In addition to imposing a heavily financial burden on the individual countries, duplication of membership and functions create constraints in that they lead to conflicts over mandates and divided loyalty among governments, and tend to confuse integration goals and lead to counterproductive competition between countries and institutions.

Another impediment to the realization of development at the regional level is lack of commitment. Commitment by governments to incorporate regionally adopted policies into national programs is crucial for effective integration and development of the region. However, this is not the case in Africa in general and the IGAD sub-region in particular. As some writers (Molla^b, 2023; ECA, 2006; Asante, 1997) argue, member countries of regional groupings in Africa are individually developing their own strategies, plans, and priorities while declaring their commitment to regional economic cooperation and development. This has led to the mismatch between national and regional economic policies. This has led to the lack of harmonization and coordination of national policies at the regional or sub-regional level. Even though African countries continue to speak of collective action for economic integration and collective development, no single country has as yet designed its national plans to be consistent with the promotion of effective integration for development. Governments have failed to translate commitments under regional treaties into national plans and budgets and to cede authority to regional economic community

secretariats. Consequently, the lack of commitment to harmonize national and regional policies remains a challenge to effective development (Molla^b, 2023; ECA, 2006)

The lack of political will on the part of the participating governments is also reflected in their reluctance to give executive independence to the Secretariat in the running and management of the institution (Molla^b, 2023). As Nomvete (1997) points out, the problems of management of secretariats of the economic cooperation institutions in Africa are administrative in nature, but arise from policies passed by governments. Moreover, the secretariats of the regional groupings, composed of international civil servants who have sworn to be faithful to the treaty but who are answerable to the Council of Ministers, made up of incumbent ministers, and member states are too weak to enforce the organization's view point (Adedeji, cited in Asante, 1997). This argument seems relevant to the case of IGAD even today (Molla^b, 2023). Most officers are loyal to their governments rather than to the institution. This has become one of the hurdles to effective cooperation in the sub-region that impede the attainment of its objective.

Severe lack of infrastructure (air, road, rail, maritime and inland transportation, ICT and energy) is also a serious challenge to the realization of development at the regional level. Infrastructure plays a critical role in economic development and poverty reduction. Well-developed and maintained infrastructure services – power, transport, ICT, water and sanitation – reduce the barriers and transaction costs to economic growth, and contribute significantly to enhancing the lives of the poor through increased access to public and social services (ECA, 2020; ECA, 2010). Fully functional infrastructures are also essential to facilitate trade, reduce poverty and to permit the free transport of goods and the free movement of persons. The IGAD region faces several challenges in achieving comprehensive vaccination coverage, resulting in limited access to vaccines for many populations. Inadequate health infrastructure, including insufficient storage facilities for vaccines, poses a significant barrier (IGAD^b, 2023). Some estimates (AU/NEPAD, 2009; Nisa and Khalid, 2024) suggest that with an improved infrastructure stock, economic growth rates could be at least 1% higher than they are today.

Unfortunately, the IGAD sub-region lags in this respect. Though IGAD is currently undertaking studies on the implementation of the Isiolo-Moyale Corridor, which is intended to connect Kenya and Ethiopia, there are still no adequate social and physical services, such as adequate roads, railways, airways, see means that connect the countries of the sub-region. Inadequate infrastructure imposes major costs on businesses in terms of lost output and additional costs incurred. Besides, poor infrastructure development among member countries has greatly impeded the sharing of resources, intra-regional trade, and effective exploitation of human and material resources endowed in the IGAD region.

4.3 Challenges at National Level

There are various daunting challenges at the national level such as population growth, lack of capacity, low level of private



investment, H.I.V./AIDS, TB and Malaria Famine and hunger. This paper focuses on the constraints associated with governance and democracy. There is a growing consensus that better governance and democracy is a key element in promoting growth and development and enabling countries to achieve their development goals (UNDP^c, 2025; UNDP *et al*, 2010: 15). Democratic governance fosters transparency, accountability, the rule of law, respect for human rights, civic participation, and civic inclusiveness – all of which are necessary for securing economic productivity, equitable distribution and state legitimacy.

Governance is interlinked with institutionalized values such as democracy, observance of human rights, accountability, transparency and greater efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector (AU/NEPAD, 2009). Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources. Improving good governance in Africa is of central importance. Governance is seen as an effective means of enabling and guaranteeing development, building and/or restoring stability as opposed to conflict in countries, regions, and sub-regions.

From Vestal (2006) perspective, a development strategy for the Horn of Africa must be founded upon two pillars. The first pillar is promoting freedom, justice, and human dignity—working to end tyranny, to promote effective democracies, and to extend prosperity through free and fair trade and wise development policies. The second pillar is based on the idea that many of the problems the Horn of Africa faces—from threat of pandemic disease, to proliferation of weapons, to terrorism, to human trafficking, to natural disasters—reach across borders. He further asserts that free governments are accountable to their people, govern their territory effectively, and pursue economic and political policies that benefit their citizens. According to Freedom House (2025), democracy governments were classified into three: electoral democracy, emerging democracy and restricted democratic practice. Democracy (Electoral Democracy) was defined as states with governments elected through generally legitimate, free, and fair elections that reflected the will of the people, a freely operating political opposition, and a climate that encouraged respect of both political rights and civil liberties. Truly democratic nations are responsive to their citizens, submitting to the will of the people, especially when people vote to change their government; exercise effective sovereignty and maintain order within their own borders, protect independent and impartial systems of justice, punish crime, embrace the rule of law, and resist corruption; and limit the reach of government, protecting the institutions of civil society, including the family, religious communities, voluntary associations, private property, independent business, and a market economy. Democratic governance is therefore essential to creating the conditions needed for entrepreneurship and investment to flourish. However, this is not the case in the countries of IGAD. The record of governance in the region is depressing. According to Freedom House (2025), no

country in the Horn of Africa was considered as ‘free’. Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, were classified as “not free,” while only Kenya and Somaliland are categorized as “partly free”.

After independence democratic governance was never given a chance to take root, as military takeovers became the order of the day in most of the countries of IGAD. Military regimes bred corruption, which further saw the bleeding of national economies as huge sums of financial resources were stashed away in personal safe accounts abroad. There was a total lack of visionary leadership and national planning and policies were largely flawed and ineffective. In this regard Mochoge and Zziwa (2004) postulates that at the national level, the main cause of economic decline, which has exacerbated food insecurity, has been bad governance as a result of lack of accountability of the leader to the people.

In the same vein, Sisay (2006) argues that in spite of the potential in natural resources and its geo-politically strategic role, the countries of the sub-region IGAD remain poor; and the “primary cause of poverty in the midst of such natural resource potential is bad governance and dictatorships that produce conflicts, wars, and bad economic policies.” Indeed, democratic culture is not installed in the countries of IGAD. In most of the countries of IGAD, there is no term limit. This is manifested in the number of years the leader stay in power. Leaders such as Afwerki of Eritrea and Museveni of Uganda have been in power for about thirty years and it seems that they will not be retire any soon.

Although multiparty politics is introduced in the sub-region, democratic culture has not yet institutionalized, as vestiges of authoritarianism threaten the democratic process and the political accommodation are not yet rooted in the polity. With the exception of Eritrea, all states of the sub-region have introduced a multi-party electoral competition. As Joseph (2008) notes a decade ago: “While the holding of regular multiparty elections and the occasional defeat of incumbents are significant trends, the struggle to cross the frontier from personal rule-based governance is still far from over in much of Africa.” The Election process and its outcomes in the IGAD countries (particularly the 2005, 2007 1nd 2008 elections in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, respectively) were controversial and compromised by acts of bribery. They are also marred by intimidation, harassment and violence. Thus, political tension, conflict and crises are emerging patterns of electoral politics in the sub-region.

Moreover, as Vestal (2006:6) contends, some governments in the sub-region have regressed, eroding what few democratic freedoms their peoples might once have enjoyed. He further contends that all of the governments in the sub-region share commonalities in abusing basic human rights, including freedom of religion, conscience, speech, assembly, association, and press. Besides, non-state actors (civil society organizations, professional groups and the private sector) are not playing important roles in checking and balancing the executive and other agencies of government. One common characteristic of the countries of IGAD in his regard is the enactments of laws by the incumbent government with a view to



limit the participation of citizen. For example, countries such as Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia have enacted new counterterrorism laws to restrict rights and repress freedom of expression with the aim of silencing those who oppose the government (Habimana, 2011). These countries detain and arrest activists, journalists and members and supporters of opposition parties on terrorism charges. All these actions are aimed at intimidating or silencing critics.

According to the study made by the UNECA (2009:3-4) national governments in Africa are generally unwilling to allow the decentralization of power and the concentration of resources at the center impinges on the capacity of local governments to operate for the benefit of the local communities. In addition, there is no an enabling legal and regulatory framework (such as lack of independent judiciary). In general, legal systems are weak and the application of law is uncertain and/or enforcement is arbitrary, they tend to distort economic transactions, foster rent-seeking activities, and discourage private capital flows, all of which undermine national development. Where adherence to rule of law is weak, security of private property is also weak, and investment prospects are low.

Corruption remains a major challenge in the sub-region. It remains the single most important challenge to the eradication of poverty, the creation of predictable and favorable investment environment and general socioeconomic development in the IGAD countries. Once corruption becomes entrenched, its negative effects multiply. It induces cynicism, because people begin to regard it as the norm. It undermines social values because people find it easier and more lucrative to engage in corruption than to seek legitimate employment. It erodes governmental legitimacy because it hampers the effective delivery of public goods and services. It limits economic growth because it reduces the amount of public resources, discourages private investment and saving and impedes the efficient use of government revenue and development assistance funds (Lawal, 2007). Moreover, corruption increases the costs of doing business, wastes resources, hence radically reduce revenues accruing to the state. It also results in poor service delivery, “moonlighting” or multiple concurrent sources of employment and refusal to perform normal functions without additional payment. Moreover, corruption deepen poverty and make it difficult for ordinary people to get ahead as the result of their own efforts. There is increasing evidence that the social and economic cost of corruption disproportionately affects the poor, who not only suffer from the lack of services and efficient government, but who are also powerless to resist the demands of corrupt officials (ibid). In this connection, the corruption Perception Index indicates that the countries of IGAD are the worst (see Table 5). Accordingly, out of 180 countries in 2024 Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, Uganda, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, and South Sudan ranks 99, 121, 127, 140, 170, 173, 179 and 180, respectively.

Corruption Perceptions Index 2024: Global scores

Country /	ISO3	Region	CPI 2024	Rank	standard error
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Territory			score		2024
Ethiopia	ETH	SSA	37	99	1.38
Kenya	KEN	SSA	32	121	2.08
Djibouti	DJI	SSA	31	127	1.98
Uganda	UGA	SSA	26	140	1.19
Sudan	SDN	SSA	15	170	1.90
Eritrea	ERI	SSA	13	173	5.51
Somalia	SOM	SSA	9	179	2.30
South Sudan	SSD	SSA	8	180	2.09

Source: Transparency International (2024)

Apart from the perception corruption index, some writers (Alemayehu, 2025; Sisay, 2006:25; Vestal, 2006:11) also shares the view that corruption is one of the challenges to development in countries of IGAD. For example, Sisay, 2006:25 posits that governments can impede the development of market institutions through arbitrary exercise of state power, in the form of corruption, and “indeed, it is in these regard that the states of the Horn of Africa have failed to a various degree.” The overall governance picture for the countries of IGAD is therefore one of limited progress. And it remains one of the daunting challenges to realizing development in these countries. Acknowledging the shortfalls in democratic governance, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights, the 2021-2025 Peace and Security Division’s Strategic Plan recognize the pressing prerequisite to tackle corruption and its harmful effects on society (IGAD^d, 2023).

To make matter worse, the countries of the IGAD are beset by conflicts. Conflicts continue to constitute one of the greatest challenges facing the region. The IGAD sub-region remains a hotbed of conflicts, some of them extremely violent. No country in the sub-region is without internal strife or conflict. Decades of war, destructive state intervention by dictatorial regimes that ruled the Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Somalia have caused massive de-capitalization, brain drain, environmental degradation, poverty and famines. The conflict and instability of the region has both intra-state, inter-state, and global dimensions. The primary cause of these intra-state and inter-state conflicts in the Region is the problem of concentration and arbitrary use of power which still continues to be practiced by the states of the IGAD with the various degrees (Sisay, 2006). The major effects of these conflicts in the sub-region is the great loss of lives, destruction of the sociopolitical order in the region, wide spread looting of economic resources, the erosion of states’ legitimacy, the weakening of international borders, growth of militia and private armies and the massive displacement of persons (IGA, 2020; Medhane, 2004; Bah and Tapsoba, 2010; Vestal, 2006; Sisay, 2006). Further, the ability of states to concentrate on its initial mandate of enhancing the economic prosperity of their society is constrained by the absence



of peace. From the political point of view, it can thus be argued that an attempt to achieve development in the states of IGAD is far from success.

Almost in all other IGAD member states, there are also opposition forces that are fighting against the regime in power. For example, since independence in 1956 Sudan has been in civil war in most years of self-rule which led to the disintegration of the Southern Sudan. The Darfur crisis and the power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the official military, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a powerful paramilitary group, over control of the country has not yet settled. The ongoing conflict in Sudan has also hampered education, affecting nearly 19 million out-of school children (IGAD^b, 2023). In spite of the fact that the thirty years of long civil war in Northern Ethiopia ended in 1991 with the independence of Eritrea, a bloody war in 1998 and there is still tension between the two. Ethiopia is barely recovered from civil war. For example, the government is fighting against the OLF and the *Fano*, a loose alliance of ethnic-based militia in the Amhara region. Though the Somaliland declared independence two decade before, it has not yet got formal international recognition, except Israel, and the crisis in Mogadishu has not been resolved. In Uganda, Kenya, Eritrea and Djibouti also opposition forces operate against the governments. The post-election violence and negative effects went beyond the Kenyan borders thereby threatening regional peace, security and the livelihoods of the people of the region (IGAD, 2011; Ochieng, Matanga, and Iteyo 2023). It is to be noted that these domestic conflicts have negative impact on development of the individual state as well as inter-state relations among the countries of the IGAD sub-region. Consequently, hunger and malnutrition have become perennial features of life in the sub-region. Hunger and despair stalk the regions' fast growing urban slums and refugee camps where millions quietly suffer in squalor. In the countryside, peasants and nomad pastoralists struggle against the ravages of war, the elements of natural calamities and the inefficient and inequitable economies of their shattered countries.

More importantly, conflicts have destroyed the country's economy and infrastructure and reversed most of the development achieved over the past half century. This in turn has constrained human development and made the sub-region one among the least developed areas of the world. Massive militarization and continued war has squandered valuable and scarce resources, diverted them away from priority human and development needs and made most of the region's population chronically vulnerable and dependent on charity. The opportunity cost of conflict is tremendous. Not only countries in conflict forgo development, but also they invariably retrogress. The more violent and protracted the conflict, the more pervasive and difficult it becomes to reverse the negative development.

5. Conclusion

The IGAD sub-region is one of the most volatile regions in the world. The sub-region suffers from numerous political, socio-

economic and cultural challenges. These challenges are intertwined. However, the fundamental challenge is at national level, the problem associated with democratic governance. Democratic governance is a key element in promoting growth and development and enabling the IGAD countries to realize development. Addressing the problem of democratic governance may help reduce other challenges. Issues such as drought, a poor natural resource base, and dependence on primary exports interacted with an increasingly hostile international environment with disastrous consequences, political instability, economic degradation and cultural tensions can be addressed if countries of the IGAD are determined to improve their democratic governance.

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