



PEACE, PROSPERITY AND
REGIONAL INTEGRATION

OFFICIAL REMARKS

WORKNEH GEBEYEHU, IGAD EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

2nd IGAD Water Dialogue Forum

26th January 2022

Entebbe, Republic of Uganda



- Our gracious Host, **Hon. John Mulinbwa**, Minister of State for Regional Affairs, Republic of Uganda;
- Hon. **Sam Cheptoris**, Minister of Water and Environment, Republic of Uganda;
- Excellency **Dr. Ing. Habtamu Itefa**, Minister for Water and Energy, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia;
- Excellency **Sicily Kariuki**, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Water Sanitation and Irrigation, Republic of Kenya;
- Excellency **Hassan Abdinur Abdi**, Minister of Energy and Water Resources, Federal Republic of Somalia;
- Excellency **Manawa Peter Gatkuoth**, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Republic of South Sudan;
- Mr. **Ibrahim Elmi**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Water, Fisheries, Animal and Marine Resources, Republic of Djibouti;
- Representative of the **AUC**;
- Representatives of our **Development Partners**;
- Representatives of **UN Organizations** here present;
- My Dear **IGAD Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen**, All Protocols Observed.



It is a pleasure for me to welcome you all to this second edition of our ongoing conversation on how to best manage our shared water resources as a region.

I will begin by first of all **congratulating our hosts and dear brothers and sisters in the Republic of Uganda as we observe the 36th Celebration of Liberation Day.**

It is auspicious that both IGAD and Uganda are both marking a 36th anniversary so closely together, where IGAD was born on 16th January 1986 and Uganda was re-born 10 days later on 26th January 1986.



On both occasions, **both IGAD and Uganda have been privileged to benefit from the influence of H.E. Yoweri Museveni in the role of a founding father.**

In the 36 years that IGAD and the Republic of Uganda have walked the journey together towards peace, prosperity and regional integration, **President Museveni has played a central role in re-establishing peace and stability, first of all in Uganda and radiating it out to the other conflict-affected parts of our region.**



Indeed, **the work of IGAD** to improve the future prospects of the citizens of our region **would be much more difficult without the unwavering support of H.E. the President, the most senior statesman of our region to whom we owe a debt of gratitude.**

On a more sober note, **please accept my sincerest condolences and the entire IGAD family on the recent passing away of the late Prof. Mutebile, the longest serving Governor of the Bank of Uganda.**

In his passing, **both Uganda and the IGAD region have lost a foremost economist who made a tremendous and everlasting contribution to the economic destiny of our people.** We are deeply sorry for your loss.



Excellencies,

Turning to the substance of this meeting, I want to begin by observing that ***"just like water, individually we are just one drop, but when we come together, we can form an entire ocean."***

Our **core mandate as IGAD is to bring our countries together** to discuss matters of mutual interest, come up with common solutions and chart the path to our shared destiny.

And over these past 36 years of mutual consultations, **we have come to recognize that the quality that defines us most as people of the IGAD region is our resilience.**



We have also always acknowledged that in addition to Peace and Security, **our Resilience is our single biggest intangible asset, so unique to us here in IGAD that it is neither substitutable nor transferable.**

It is in the current context of conflict and climate change characterized by severe drought and flooding cycles that **our Resilience as a region and as a people is being rigorously tested.**

As we may all be aware, about **75% of the IGAD region is constituted of arid and semi-arid lands**, which in turn are home to 1 out of every 3 of our citizens or close to 100 million of our brothers and sisters.



These lands **are also the most reliant on groundwater as the largest source of water for the communities living on the edge of survival.**

At the same time, **the IGAD region is on the frontlines of climate change.** Data forecasts from our Climate Centre ICPAC project that **the IGAD region is set to heat up twice as fast as the rest of the world over the next 30 years.**

The resulting **high evaporation rates of surface water means groundwater will play an increasingly crucial role** in supporting our future water needs, ensuring food security, and achieving greater equity amongst our communities.



Excellencies,

It is with some unease I have observed that **in these fragile lands, it is easier to find a smartphone, than it is to find a water source.**

In other words, the **"water gap" is bigger than the "digital divide"** where a lot of effort has been made to bring important telecommunications infrastructure to the remote parts of our region, but at the same time not enough effort has been made to bring similar life-saving water infrastructure to vulnerable communities.



In this environment of water scarcity, **both national and transboundary groundwater resources are uniquely placed to play a fundamental role in addressing major development challenges** in the region in 2 main ways;

First and foremost, **from a political standpoint, groundwater resources can be an instrument to enhance regional Peace and Security.**

It is said that "**water is the new oil**" and is set to increasingly become the source of new and future conflicts. **The IGAD region has been affected by disagreements over water** not only at inter-communal level in the borderlands, but more significantly, at regional level over riparian water rights along the Nile, whose sources are located in 2 of our Member States.



Furthermore, a conflict analysis conducted in 2021 by the IGAD Conflict Early Warning Mechanism (CEWARN) established that **within the IGAD region, there is a strong relationship between poor vegetative cover due to lack of water and the incidence of conflict.**

The study concluded that, **a 10% improvement in vegetation reduces the chances of Armed Conflict by 21% and human death by 17.3%**. These findings are inviting us to explore the possibility that, if we are able to maximize on the irrigation and livestock access potential of groundwater sources through shallow and deep wells, we can improve food and fodder security.



And this is in turn likely to lead to a reduction in both the **incidence** and **intensity** of resource conflict in the arid and semi-arid lands that account for three-quarters of the IGAD surface area.

IGAD therefore **welcomes the potential of groundwater to ameliorate conflict** in the region and **contribute to driving a positive hydro-politics agenda in the region.**

Secondly **from a socio-economic perspective, groundwater is a catalyst for sustainable development.** I invite us all as the IGAD region to **begin looking at groundwater resources using a strategic lens.**



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It is worrying that the quantity and quality of surface water resources is diminishing some parts of our region. In these kinds of situations, **groundwater sources offer a longer-term sustainable solution to food insecurity and water scarcity** in the region.

Furthermore, **groundwater has great potential as an alternative source of drinking water and enabler of industrialization**, especially in rapidly urbanizing environments within the IGAD region.

It therefore of vital importance that in order to meet the SDG Goal No. 3 on Good Health and Wellbeing, as well as SDG Goal No. 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation, sufficient consideration is given to groundwater resources if the IGAD region is to meet its target of improving access to clean water in rural areas growing urban areas.

Excellencies,

While it is a fact that groundwater occupies a pivotal position in the development of the Greater Horn of Africa region, **we still face significant challenges in having adequate data and a comprehensive knowledge base of the available groundwater resources** in the region.



And although the IGAD region has a number of major Aquifers, **the knowledge of the deep groundwater resources is incomplete; We need therefore to put in place knowledge investments towards better quantifying and mapping out the available groundwater resources.**

The challenge of insufficient data is **further compounded by limited human, technical and institutional capacities** that are essential to devise and execute sustainable adaptive water management strategies.

In this regard, **I call upon this forum to first sharpen the focus on improving governance, legislative and regulatory arrangements** of existing and yet-to-be-discovered groundwater resources.



Secondly, I also call upon our Member States and Partners to **exert the same level of effort and influence to build the technical capacity needed reduce the “water gap” as has been applied to closing the “digital divide”.**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As I come to the conclusion of my remarks, I have highlighted a number issues and **I am confident that some of the answers are already here with us in this room.** I also know that **some of the other questions regarding groundwater policy and management that I have raised will be tackled during the deliberations** of this regional forum.



At the very least if no answers are found here, **our discussions will point us in the direction of the next set of questions we need to ask** in order to have a better grasp of how to sustainably utilize and maximize our groundwater resources.

Some of the solutions we are seeking will **require us to “get out of our pool and swim in the ocean”** by expanding this discussion and engaging with other non-water disciplines, such as social scientists or economists.

Medical studies have concluded that whereas **we can survive 1 or 2 weeks without food, we cannot survive for more than 4 days without water.** **Water is literally life** and **we are all wholly invested in it** regardless of our race, colour, creed or status.



Our approach to groundwater management therefore **calls for a similarly holistic approach and all-embracing strategic engagement** in which Government, the Private Sector, Academia and Civil Society work together.

If Water, not oil is to be the cause of future conflict, I am convinced that by increasing the water options available to our people and using modern science to increase efficiency of utilization of both surface and groundwater sources, we can reduce the levels of scarcity and **transform water into a lubricant for regional integration, peaceful progress and shared prosperity.**

I wish you a successful discussion forum and look forward to your inputs.

I thank you.