



PEACE, PROSPERITY AND
REGIONAL INTEGRATION

IGAD QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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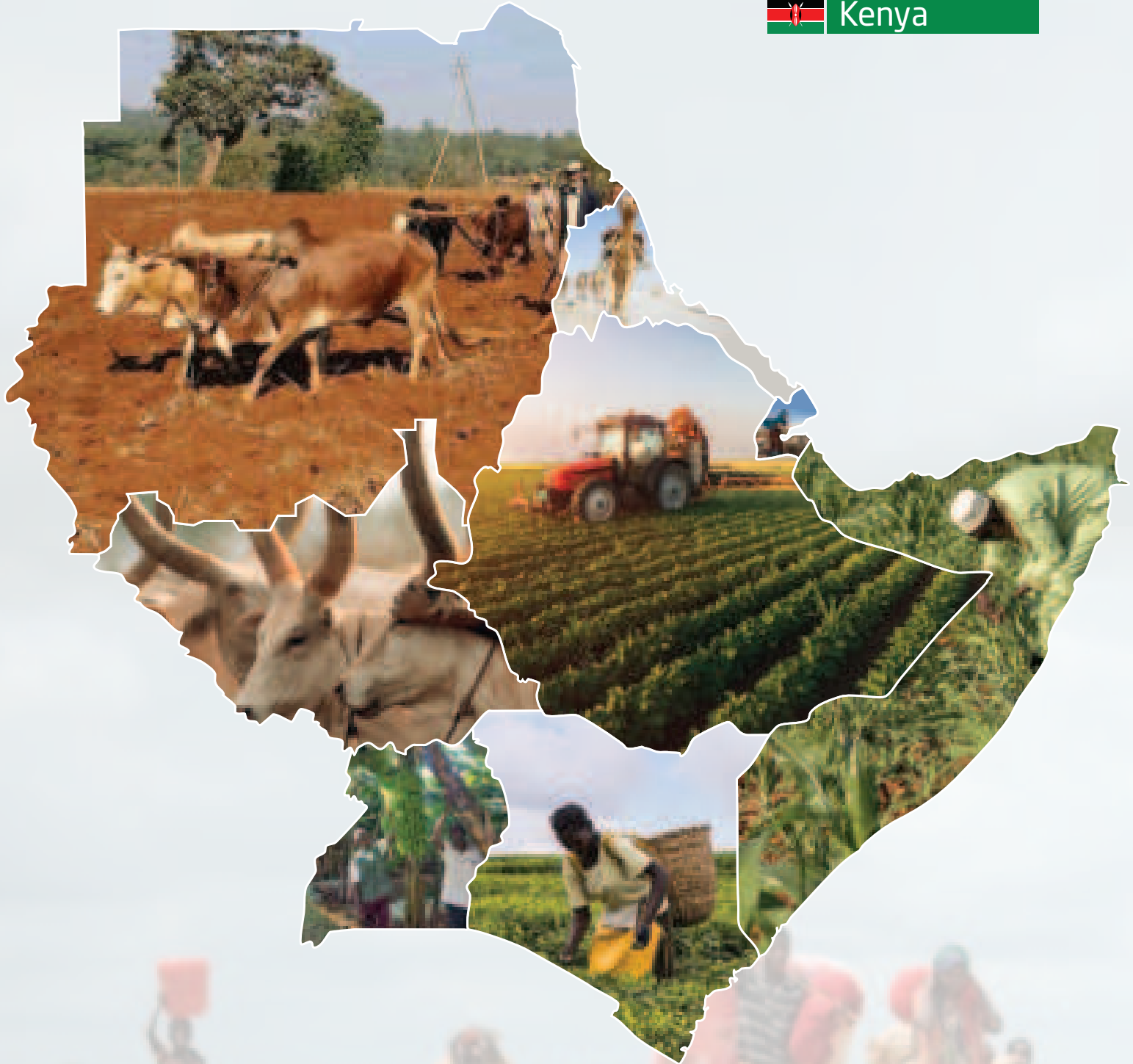
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OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

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FOREWORD

EMPOWERING WOMEN AND YOUTH

In a region as dynamic and diverse as the IGAD family, the strength of our shared future lies in how we nurture, recognise, and empower our most transformative agents of change—our women and youth. They are not merely participants in development; they are leading forces shaping a more peaceful, inclusive and sustainable Horn of Africa.

Throughout the first quarter of 2025, IGAD has launched and championed the regional campaign “Their Impact, Our Future: Women and Youth at the Forefront of Solutions.” This initiative reflects our continued dedication to amplifying the voices and visibility of women and young people who are

driving progress in their communities, economies and public life.

From grassroots innovations in climate resilience to bold ventures in entrepreneurship and digital storytelling, the stories we have encountered over the past months are a powerful testament to the courage, ingenuity and resilience of our people. But more than stories, they are calls to action to dismantle the systemic barriers that persist, and to invest meaningfully in the agency and potential of women and youth as catalysts for change.

This newsletter captures the momentum of the campaign’s first phase. It highlights uplifting narratives, transformative dialogue and critical policy engagement, all contributing to a vision of a region where every woman and every young person is empowered to lead and thrive.

The foundation for this work was strengthened in 2023, a landmark year for IGAD. That year, we launched the IGAD Youth Policy, a regionwide framework to guide the inclusion of young people in development, governance and peacebuilding processes. With youth making up the majority of our population, this policy serves as a roadmap for Member States and the Secretariat alike to create pathways for meaningful youth engagement and leadership.

Alongside this, we introduced the IGAD Regional Gender Equality Strategy 2023-2030 under the theme “Equality, Inclusion and Empowerment.” This strategy offers a unified approach to embedding gender perspectives in all our programmes and supporting Member States in advancing women’s

rights and opportunities. It is a bold step towards institutionalising gender equality across the region and ensuring that our efforts are sustained and measurable through the decade.

In early 2025, our efforts gained further momentum with the signing of a strategic grant agreement with the Government of Japan, aimed at supporting women and youth across IGAD Member States. Launched on International Women's Day, this partnership is funding a transformative initiative focused on enhancing inclusive leadership and removing the structural obstacles that prevent full participation in peace and development processes. It also speaks to the growing confidence of the international community in IGAD's leadership and vision.

As we move forward, we remain resolute in our commitment to building a future where no one is left behind. These frameworks, strategies and partnerships are not symbolic; they are dynamic tools that continue to shape the day-to-day realities of our people. I am encouraged by the progress we are witnessing and inspired by the collective resolve of our Member States, partners and the women and youth who are leading the way.

Together, let us continue creating a region where hope is tangible, equality is lived, and every voice has the power to shape tomorrow.

*H.E. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu
Executive Secretary, IGAD*





IGAD AND JAPAN PARTNER TO EMPOWER WOMEN AND YOUTH IN LEADERSHIP AND PEACEBUILDING

March 8, 2025 - Djibouti, Djibouti: On International Women's Day, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Government of Japan launched a transformative initiative: "Empowering Women and Youth in the IGAD Region: Overcoming Barriers to Meaningful Participation, Leadership, and Peace & Security."

The USD 1.5 million, 12-month programme (March 2025 - February 2026) will be implemented across IGAD Member States by the IGAD Secretariat, co-implemented by the IGAD Leadership Academy, and coordinated by the IGAD Gender Department. This initiative aims to address systemic barriers, enhance leadership opportunities, and strengthen the role of women and youth in governance, peace, and security processes.

H.E. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, IGAD Executive Secretary, highlighted the importance of this partnership, stating:

"Empowering women and youth is key to building resilient communities and sustainable peace. This collaboration with Japan reflects our shared commitment to ensuring that women and young people are not just participants but decision-makers in shaping the future of our region."

The Government of Japan reaffirmed its commitment to gender equality and youth empowerment, emphasising the programme's alignment with its foreign policy efforts to promote inclusive governance and regional stability.

"I would like to express my appreciation to the members of the IGAD Secretariat who have worked tirelessly to make this training possible. I also want to express my strong support for the successful implementation of this project, which has been made possible the high-level commitment from both sides. I would like to request the continued support of His Excellency Mr. Workneh, the Executive Secretary of IGAD, and the ministers of the Djibouti government." - H.E. M. Keiichi HARA, Ambassador of Japan to Djibouti.

IGAD extends its appreciation to Japan for its steadfast support in advancing gender equality and peacebuilding across the region. This initiative marks a significant step towards creating inclusive leadership spaces and breaking barriers that hinder the participation of women and youth.



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In today's rapidly evolving world, digitalisation has emerged as a vital pillar for good governance and sustainable development

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DRIVING EFFICIENCY THROUGH DIGITALISATION: IGAD's Bold Strides in Service Transformation

In today's rapidly evolving world, digitalisation has emerged as a vital pillar for good governance and sustainable development. At IGAD, the Division for Administration and Finance is leading the charge—modernising internal systems and streamlining service delivery to better serve Member States and citizens across the region. By embracing digital tools, we are improving efficiency, transparency, and accessibility in line with IGAD's institutional vision.

Enhancing Services Through Smart Systems

Digitalisation at IGAD is more than a technological upgrade—it is a commitment to better, faster, and more inclusive service delivery. Several digital platforms have been introduced to ensure that planning, implementation, and reporting processes are not only seamless, but also more accountable.

Key systems rolled out to date include:

- **Planning, Budgeting and Monitoring System (PBMS):** A central platform that allows departments to align their annual plans with IGAD's strategic objectives, while enabling real-time tracking of budgets and programme delivery.
- **Travel Authorisation and Claims System (TRACS):** This automated tool has simplified and accelerated the travel approval and reimbursement process for staff and delegates, significantly reducing paperwork and increasing oversight.



- **E-Registration for IGAD Events:** Designed to enhance participation tracking and ensure compliance with data protection standards, this platform enables secure and accurate registration for all IGAD events—supporting more effective reporting and analysis, particularly of youth and women participation.
- **Upcoming E-Procurement System:** Scheduled for launch later this year, the e-procurement platform will promote transparency and competition in the procurement process, while reducing processing time and ensuring better vendor engagement.
- **IGAD E-Library (Coming Soon):** As part of our knowledge-sharing agenda, the upcoming IGAD E-Library will provide open access to policy documents, research publications, and institutional reports. This digital resource will serve governments, academia, young professionals, and the general public across the region.

Creating Opportunities for Women and Youth

Digitalisation is not just about efficiency—it is about inclusion. IGAD is committed to ensuring that young people and women are not excluded from the digital space. The new systems make it easier for women entrepreneurs to access procurement opportunities, for youth to find relevant IGAD publications, and for all citizens to engage meaningfully in regional processes.

Whether through registering for events, accessing institutional knowledge, or engaging with digital platforms, women and youth across the IGAD region are being empowered to participate in shaping our shared future.

A Vision for a Digitally Enabled IGAD

The path to full digital transformation is ongoing, but the foundations are firmly in place. As we continue to expand our digital infrastructure, we reaffirm our commitment to building a region where technology empowers institutions and people alike.

By investing in smart systems today, IGAD is paving the way for a more connected, efficient, and inclusive tomorrow.





BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING FUTURES:

How IGAD's ISAP IV Is Advancing Inclusion and Creating Opportunities for Women and Youth

The Dawn of Change: Rewriting the Narrative of Gender and Youth Empowerment

The IGAD region is rich in potential, yet structural barriers continue to limit women's economic autonomy and youth participation. History has long dictated who holds power and who remains excluded. But history is not static. It bends where institutions commit to transformation. Through the Institutional Strengthening Action Programme (ISAP IV), IGAD is actively reshaping the landscape—not merely by inviting women and youth into existing structures, but by redesigning those structures altogether.

For too long, gender equality and youth empowerment have been treated as optional, secondary concerns. ISAP IV disrupts this notion by embedding gender audits, financial inclusion programmes, and leadership training into its framework. This is not about representation for its own sake—it is about ensuring that power is equitably distributed.

Unshackling Potential: ISAP IV's Commitment to Women's Leadership and Economic Justice.

Judith Butler reminds us that power is performed—it is constructed, reinforced, and, crucially, disrupted. The IGAD Regional Women's Forum, supported by ISAP IV, provided Sudanese women with the platform, skills, and influence needed to shape peace processes. They are no longer merely at the table; they are shaping its agenda.

Beyond politics, economic justice is critical. ISAP IV's gender-responsive budgeting frameworks ensure that funding allocations address disparities rather than perpetuate them.

Programmes advocating for women's land rights now include measurable action plans. At the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), held in New York, IGAD championed policies that guarantee women's economic security through digitalised land systems. This is not just talk—it is systemic change.

Empowering the Next Generation: Youth as Catalysts for Regional Transformation

Andrea Long Chu argues that identity is not merely something we have—it is something we do. Being young in the IGAD region has too often meant waiting—for opportunity, inclusion, recognition. ISAP IV actively empowers youth to become engaged participants rather than passive spectators.

Through leadership and governance training programmes, IGAD has equipped young people with the skills necessary to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. These efforts are reinforced by youth engagement forums, where young leaders from across the region convene to strategise on pressing socio-economic challenges and advocate for inclusive policies.

Additionally, ISAP IV has supported capacity-building workshops for young entrepreneurs, ensuring that youth are not only job seekers but also innovators and economic drivers. These training programmes provide technical knowledge on business development, financial literacy, and digital transformation, positioning young people as leaders in the region's economic future.

Asha's Story: From Silence to Strength

In a packed conference room in Nairobi, a woman named Asha stands. She is not a politician or a diplomat—she is a farmer, a mother, a community leader. And yet, today, her voice carries the weight of a movement. She speaks of land—not as a commodity, but as a legacy. She speaks of policy—not as abstraction, but as the difference between survival and destitution.

Asha is one of many women empowered through ISAP IV. This programme is more than policy—it is a direct intervention against economic and political limitations. Through gender audits, capacity-building, and policy reforms, IGAD ensures that women like Asha have the power to shape governance, not just benefit from it. Likewise, ISAP IV's gender-responsive budgeting ensures that financial planning reflects the needs of women and youth. These mechanisms are not merely about numbers; they are about priorities. They are about ensuring that empowerment is not an afterthought, but a foundation.

As Asha leaves the conference, she carries more than hope—she carries a strategy, a plan, a demand. And IGAD, through ISAP IV, supports her dream.

The Unfinished Work: A Call to Action

The call to action is clear: empowerment is not a favour; it is an obligation. ISAP IV is proving that institutional change is not only possible, but inevitable when policies are designed with the people they serve in mind. Whether it is women stepping into peace negotiations or young entrepreneurs reshaping economies, the revolution is already underway.

This is not just a programme. This is not merely a policy shift.

This is IGAD's promise. This is our revolution. And it is only beginning.





IGAD'S PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UN PRESENTS LETTERS OF CREDENCE TO THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is pleased to announce that its Permanent Observer to the United Nations, Mr. Cherinet Hariffo, has formally presented his letters of credence to H.E. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

This milestone solidifies IGAD's official observer status at the UN, reinforcing the organisation's commitment to multilateralism and deepening collaboration on peace, security, resilience, and regional integration.

With this accreditation, IGAD looks forward to strengthening engagement with the UN system, advocating for the priorities of the IGAD region, and enhancing coordinated efforts on global and regional challenges.

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AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

- Women and the Blue Economy in the IGAD Region
- Empowering Women to Cultivate Change : Strengthening Food Security Through Gender-Responsive Policies.





AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

WOMEN AND THE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE IGAD REGION

The Blue Economy (BE) agenda is dominating political discourse at national, regional, and continental levels, with the African Union referring to BE as the “New Frontier of African Renaissance.” However, gender mainstreaming and inclusivity remain limited across the world, particularly in the IGAD region. Where women are represented, their roles are often undervalued and underrepresented, despite their significant contributions across the entire spectrum of the offshore and onshore Blue Economy. Through the BE programme, IGAD seeks to ensure gender mainstreaming is achieved across the different Blue Economy objectives and interventions.

In 2023, the IGAD Blue Economy programme undertook a gender analysis of the BE sectors to explore the roles of women, men, and youth in BE-related areas, including their access to resources, economic opportunities, and decision-making processes. The analysis highlighted the challenges that different social groups face in various Blue Economy sectors and provided recommendations for promoting an inclusive and gender-responsive BE across IGAD Member States.



The gender analysis revealed several challenges that hinder women’s participation in different BE sectors. The key challenges identified include the following:

1. Women’s participation in the Blue Economy is largely limited to traditional, low-value addition activities that require minimal skills, offer low wages, and involve poor working conditions. In the fisheries sector, women are mainly responsible for onshore sales, processing, marketing, and making and mending nets. Many women also engage in small-scale businesses to support their families and sustain their communities.
2. Women are significantly underrepresented in industrial fishing and in leadership positions within both the private and public sectors. They are also generally excluded from coastal community-based organisations



(CBOs) and Beach Management Units (BMUs) involved in BE activities. This reflects discriminatory gender norms and laws governing women's work in various Blue Economy sectors.

3. Women and men have unequal access to and control over resources, opportunities, and services in different BE sectors. Access to and control of resources, opportunities, and services within the Blue Economy is largely skewed in favour of men. Notably, a lack of resources and skills among women restricts their access to collateral and credit facilities.
4. Women face poor working conditions and unequal treatment compared to men. For example, in marine tourism, a major facet of the Blue Economy, women form the largest share of the workforce but are deployed in the least protected areas and are the lowest paid. This exposes them to various vulnerabilities.
5. Most BE policies and legal frameworks in IGAD Member States have been developed from a gender-neutral perspective and, therefore, do not consider gender as a core aspect of the Blue Economy sectors.
6. Personal safety and security risks are a significant concern for women in the BE sector, as many feel that security risks pose a major challenge for those seeking to participate in Blue Economy activities.
7. In some countries, religious beliefs have been cited as barriers to women's engagement in the BE sector. For instance, the Muslim dress code restricts some women from participating in fishing. Additionally, certain religious teachings do not permit a woman to be in a vessel with a man other than her husband.
8. Although women are involved in port operations and ferry services, the majority work in administrative roles, with only a few serving at the operational level. The heavy and highly manual nature of port work has been identified as a major factor preventing many women from entering the sector.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, several recommendations have been put forward:

- Investing in capacity-building programmes and skills development initiatives is essential for gender mainstreaming in the Blue Economy. IGAD and its Member States should provide tailored training programmes targeting both women and men, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in different BE sectors.
- IGAD should encourage collaboration among government agencies, civil society organisations (particularly women-focused organisations), academia, and the private sector. Establishing a network or working group on gender and BE within IGAD Member States will help advance gender equality and inclusivity in the Blue Economy.
- Attention should be paid to addressing gender dynamics across all levels of the Blue Economy value chain. This can be achieved through initiatives that increase women's participation in the management and utilisation of Blue Economy resources and services.
- Developing gender-friendly, responsive, and sensitive policies and frameworks will help create a more inclusive Blue Economy. This requires context-specific gender mainstreaming strategies, supported by valid gender-disaggregated data across various BE-related interventions and investments.
- There is a need for community-based Blue Economy management to ensure inclusivity in decision-making processes. Creating platforms where individuals—especially women—can share their experiences will help communicate the impact of gender inclusivity in the BE sector and provide a space for those affected by BE-related activities to voice their concerns.



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Participation of more women in policy-making processes can contribute towards achieving equitable food systems. In fact, gender-responsive policies and strategies can enable women's success in the agricultural sector

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Women play a crucial role in agriculture, food production, and household food security, but they are disproportionately vulnerable across all dimensions of food security.

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EMPOWERING WOMEN TO CULTIVATE CHANGE:

STRENGTHENING FOOD SECURITY THROUGH GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICIES

Gender-responsive policies pay particular attention to barriers to gender equality, which are caused by harmful gender norms. Agricultural policies that are well-designed and implemented can, conversely, help close the gender gap, thus empowering women sustainably. The participation of more women in policy-making processes can contribute towards achieving equitable food systems. In fact, gender-responsive policies and strategies can enable women's success in the agricultural sector. For instance, policies on agricultural technologies that respond to women's needs must be developed and adopted to help transform the IGAD region's food systems. Gender inequalities in the IGAD region, particularly in food security and nutrition, persist despite commitments to gender equality.

IGAD Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (2025-2034)

In December 2024, IGAD adopted the Regional Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (2025-2034), which aims to strengthen emergency response and recovery mechanisms, enhance capacity for disaster preparedness and agricultural trade, as well as promote gender-inclusive approaches while empowering vulnerable populations, particularly women and youth. The strategy is aligned with the CAADP Strategy and Action Plan: 2026-2035 (Building Resilient and Sustainable Agri-Food Systems in Africa).

This strategy is a critical step towards strengthening food system resilience across the region by addressing food insecurity and nutrition challenges, enhancing analytical capacities, and supporting decision-making processes. In fact, it aligns with global and regional frameworks, reflecting IGAD's commitment to addressing the compounded challenges of climate change, economic shocks, and natural disasters that threaten food security in the region. The IGAD Food Systems Resilience Programme (FSRP), supported by the World Bank, plays a key role in operationalising this vision through coordinated interventions and knowledge-sharing among Member States.

The IGAD FNS Strategy is Gender-Responsive

The IGAD Food and Nutrition Security Strategy (2025-2034) strongly addresses the existing gender gaps in food systems and provides key interventions to enable decision-makers to invest in women's empowerment in food systems resilience. Specifically, Objective 8 of this policy document focuses on the inclusion and empowerment of women and youth in the main pillars of food security: availability, access, utilisation, and stability. Women play a crucial role in agriculture, food production, and household food security, but they are disproportionately vulnerable across all dimensions of food security. Indeed, where women do not have sufficient resources or power to act on behalf of themselves and their households, food outcomes suffer.



To strengthen food security, it is essential to promote gender equality and women's inclusion in all aspects of agricultural productivity. With this objective in mind, the strategy identifies key interventions including access to resources, services, technologies, and participation in decision-making through participatory approaches such as training and capacity building, as well as fostering collaboration and partnerships for collective action. These interventions will consistently support policies aimed at empowering women to benefit equally from food security initiatives and advocate for their needs.

Addressing Gender Inequalities in Food Systems Through Responsive Policies

Gender-responsive policies are crucial to achieving sustainable agriculture and rural development, as they enable women and girls to participate fully in, and benefit equally from, socio-economic opportunities. In addition, inclusive policies foster economic growth, food security, and sustainable rural development more broadly. However, even when there is political commitment towards gender equality, insufficient investment in gender-responsive policy interventions can limit positive impacts on the livelihoods and empowerment of women and girls.

Key Messages and Actions for Gender-Responsive Food Systems:

- **Access:** Designing gender-responsive interventions aimed at providing women and men with equal access to food, productive resources, education, decision-making power, and economic opportunities along food value chains.
- **Information and Communication:** Advocating for gender equality issues in international and national policy dialogues to empower women and girls.
- **Institutional Capacity:** Strengthening the capacities of regional and national institutions to collect and use sex-disaggregated data to build a strong evidence base that can guide the design of adequate gender-responsive policies, strategies, laws, and programmes, and monitor their gender impacts on food security.
- **Responsive Policy:** National and sector-specific policies, legislation, and investment plans for food security need to consider women's roles and contributions to better respond to their specific needs and challenges.

Further Areas of Focus:

- » Developing specific policies on health and nutrition under food security, which could be analysed and adapted to protect children and women.
- » Utilising focused data to highlight key issues affecting women, including documentation and case studies.
- » Supporting research and policies that examine aspects of the division of labour, gender roles, and needs in food systems, especially how to navigate cultural norms.
- » Promoting participation in decision-making in natural resource management and food regulation policies.
- » Analysing the specific impact of various threats, such as climate change, on women and youth in relation to food security.

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03

ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

- Bridging the Women and Youth Digital Divide: IGAD's EARDIP Initiative
- The Desert to Power (DtP) Initiative - Economic Empowerment for Women and Youth.
- Facilitating Digital Transformation in Ethiopia.
- Enhancing Somalia's Financial Landscape, Through Credit Support Systems.

systemic barriers to women's digital participation

34% Women
less likely to own smartphone,

56% Women
less likely to use mobile internet,

68% Women
Required male approval to access digital devices,

12% Women
In Ethiopia confident in using smartphone,

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Women's exclusion in the digital space weakens the economy, reduces educational opportunities, and contributes negatively to gender equality

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ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION:

BRIDGING THE WOMEN AND YOUTH DIGITAL DIVIDE: IGAD'S EARDIP INITIATIVE

In the Horn of Africa, there are systemic barriers to women's digital participation. In 2023, GSMA reported that 34% of women in the region were less likely to own a smartphone and 56% were less likely to use mobile internet. For instance, in Somalia, 68% of women required male approval to access digital devices, reflecting entrenched cultural norms (Abdi, 2021). In Ethiopia, only 12% of women were reported to be confident in using smartphone functions, showing an educational gap (Tesfaye, 2022). This gap is not merely a matter of connectivity; it reflects deeper socio-economic inequalities that hinder women's participation in the digital economy.

Recognising that women's exclusion in the digital space weakens the economy, reduces educational opportunities, and contributes negatively to gender equality, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) aims to address the issue of digital inclusion in the Horn of Africa. The Economic Cooperation and Digital Integration Division, through the World Bank-funded Eastern African Digital Regional Integration Project (EARDIP), seeks to create a roadmap for equitable digital transformation.

EARDIP will assess multiple obstacles that contribute to the digital divide. These barriers may be in the form of socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and limited digital literacy. By identifying these hurdles, EARDIP aims to develop actionable guidelines that member states can implement in order to create an inclusive digital landscape for women.

EARDIP will use its guidelines to support policies that subsidise device costs, promote digital literacy, and foster supportive ecosystems for women in tech. Through partnerships with governments, private sector actors, and civil society organisations, EARDIP will facilitate the adoption of scalable solutions tailored to the unique challenges facing women's inclusion.

In addition to this, the project focuses on the need to create safe spaces for women in the digital domain. As digital platforms become an ever-more powerful feature of daily life, it is imperative that women can participate without fear of harassment or discrimination. This includes legal systems, but also community-run groups that help ensure that women and others can engage in offline life without pervasive and horrific abuse online.



The East African region is estimated to have 384 million people, of whom 33% are under age 24 (World Bank, 2019). Besides including women in the digital transformation, EARDIP also creates opportunities for youth. The project provides youth with a beneficial starting point by allowing university graduates to receive training in technology or programming. For example, the Digital Djibouti project, which primarily concentrates on ICT education, highlights the importance of youth training. The project also promotes collaboration between National Research and Education Networks in the region through regional capacity-building initiatives (such as study tours and workshops) and regional access to open educational resources.

In summary, closing the digital gap for women and creating job opportunities for youth in the Horn of Africa necessitates a multidimensional solution that targets the affordability of devices, promotes literacy, and ensures safety. With its thorough assessment and context-specific guidelines, EARDIP takes a significant step towards achieving digital inclusion. By learning from existing initiatives and tailoring solutions to the unique contexts of IGAD member states, the project aspires to empower women, enhance their socio-economic opportunities, and contribute to the region's overall digital transformation.

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THE DESERT TO POWER (DtP) INITIATIVE

- Economic Empowerment for Women and Youth

1. Introduction

The Desert to Power (DtP) Initiative, led by the African Development Bank (AfDB), seeks to harness the vast solar energy potential of the Sahel region, aiming to provide sustainable electricity to approximately 250 million people across 11 countries, including those in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region. This initiative offers significant benefits for women and youth.

By integrating renewable energy solutions with community empowerment strategies, the Desert to Power Initiative not only addresses energy deficits but also fosters socio-economic development, particularly for women and youth in the IGAD region.

2. Benefits for Women and Youth

2.1 Economic Empowerment:

- **Entrepreneurship and Job Creation:** Access to affordable and reliable solar energy enables women and youth to establish and expand businesses, particularly in rural areas. For instance, the initiative is expected to increase professional integration and job creation for women through productive use activities associated with future mini-grid projects.
- **Agricultural Productivity:** Reliable electricity supports agricultural activities by powering irrigation systems and processing equipment, leading to increased productivity and income for women and youth engaged in farming.

2.2 Health and Education Improvements:

- **Health Benefits:** Transitioning from hazardous energy sources like kerosene to clean solar energy reduces health risks associated with indoor pollution, benefiting women and children, who are often most affected.
- **Educational Advancement:** Reliable lighting extends study hours for students and supports educational activities, particularly in off-grid rural areas.

2.3 Leadership and Capacity Building:

- **Empowerment Programmes:** Initiatives like the IGAD Leadership Academy focus on equipping women and youth with leadership skills, enabling them to participate actively in decision-making processes related to renewable energy projects and community development.

FACILITATING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN ETHIOPIA

Contextual Background

In recent years, the Ethiopian Government has made significant strides towards digital transformation, aiming to modernise various sectors of its economy and infrastructure. This shift is crucial for the country's growth and development, as it opens new opportunities for innovation, efficiency, and competitiveness on the global stage.

Like many developing countries, Ethiopia faces numerous challenges in its pursuit of economic development. Limited access to technology, inadequate infrastructure, and a predominantly agrarian economy are some of the obstacles the country must overcome. However, digitalisation presents a unique opportunity to leapfrog traditional barriers and accelerate progress in key sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, finance, and industrialisation.

Ethiopia has been implementing the **Digital Ethiopia 2025 Strategy** since 2020, aiming to capitalise on opportunities and address the challenges presented by technological growth. A major part of this effort involves ambitious goals to expand access to digital technologies, build a skilled workforce, and promote innovation and entrepreneurship. Key projects are currently in progress—for example, the implementation of a digital national ID, expansion of broadband infrastructure, rollout of e-government services, establishment of digital payment systems, and deployment of public key ICT backbone infrastructure. These initiatives are laying a firm foundation for a more connected and technology-driven society.

The **Horn of Africa Digital Market Integration (HDMI) Project - Phase I** is supporting Ethiopia in achieving these ambitious goals at the regional level. The HDMI Project is funded by the African Development Fund (ADF) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), with in-kind counterpart contributions from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The project is responsible for conducting robust feasibility studies on:

- i) Ethiopia's government digital payments and collections platform and national data centre,
- ii) the establishment of a regional centre for cybersecurity and e-certification, and
- iii) the establishment of a regional e-waste management centre.

These studies are essential to ensure appropriate design, successful implementation, and sustainability of these systems, making a vital contribution to Ethiopia's digital transformation journey.

The Importance of a Digital Government Payments and Collections Platform

The Ethiopian Government has enacted a national digital payment strategy to promote digital transactions, enhance the speed, efficiency and accuracy of payments, reduce the need for in-person cash transactions, and significantly lower transaction costs.

A comprehensive digital payments and collections platform plays a crucial role in reducing reliance on cash, while introducing greater efficiency, transparency, and security within the financial system. In a country where many citizens still depend on manual payment methods, the implementation of digital platforms will greatly improve the ease of conducting financial transactions for businesses, individuals, and government institutions, both nationally and across borders. This platform will also significantly contribute to the Government's vision of expanding access to financial services, especially in rural and underserved areas. By creating a more inclusive environment for economic transactions, the platform can support a fairer distribution of resources and foster a more dynamic, integrated economy.



National Data Centre: A Pillar of Digital Infrastructure

Alongside the digital payments initiative, Ethiopia is working to establish a state-of-the-art National Data Centre, through a joint effort between the Government and private companies, to host the country's critical data infrastructure. The centre will act as the backbone for various e-government services, providing a centralised and secure environment to store and process data, thereby improving the speed, security, and accessibility of services for citizens, businesses, and other economic actors.

These data centres will not only enhance government operations but also support the private

sector's digital transformation. By offering scalable and reliable cloud-based infrastructure, the centre will enable local businesses and start-ups to innovate, develop, and scale digital services more efficiently. The creation of a national digital payments and collections platform, along with the establishment of a robust national data centre, is integral to the country's technological advancement. These initiatives have attracted considerable attention for their potential to improve financial inclusion, streamline government services, and stimulate economic growth.

The Role of Cybersecurity and e-Certification

As reliance on digital platforms for commerce, governance, and communication increases, cybersecurity becomes a critical priority. Cyber threats, including data breaches, ransomware, and cyber espionage, pose serious risks to national security, business continuity, and individual privacy. With more services moving online—from banking to public services—a secure and resilient digital ecosystem is essential for protecting users and maintaining trust in digital platforms.

E-certification, the process of issuing and verifying digital certificates, is pivotal in securing online transactions. It enables individuals and organisa-

tions to authenticate their identities and engage in secure exchanges. This system is particularly important for areas such as online banking, e-commerce, and digital government services, ensuring data integrity and privacy in an increasingly interconnected world. As Ethiopia continues to expand its digital landscape, the need for robust cybersecurity measures and an efficient e-certification framework has never been more pressing. In a recent development, the Ethiopian Government launched a **Public Key Infrastructure (PKI)** facility aimed at streamlining the data exchange component of the country's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

The Growing Challenge of E-Waste in Ethiopia

E-waste refers to discarded electronic devices that contain hazardous materials such as lead, mercury, and cadmium. Improper disposal and recycling of e-waste can lead to serious environmental and health risks, contaminating water sources, soil, and air.

As technology evolves rapidly, Ethiopia is witnessing an increase in obsolete electronic devices, with consumers frequently upgrading to newer models. This has resulted in the growing accumulation of e-waste. Although the Government enacted electrical and electronic waste management regulations in 2018, effective systems for the collection, recycling, and disposal of e-waste are still lacking. Insufficient infrastructure, limited resources, and low public awareness exacerbate the issue. To address this challenge and support sustainable digital growth, IGAD—with financial support from the AfDB—is conducting a feasibility study for establishing a **Regional E-Waste Management Centre** as part of the HDMI Phase I Project.

Importance of Feasibility Studies

Feasibility studies led by the IGAD HDMI Project are critical to the success of these ambitious initiatives. These studies will assess the technical, financial, and operational viability of each intervention. A thorough analysis will evaluate the current infrastructure, identify gaps, and offer recommendations to ensure implementation is both sustainable and scalable.

For the digital payments platform and national data centre, one of the key factors to assess is Ethiopia's unique socio-economic context. This includes evaluating digital literacy levels, internet penetration, mobile usage patterns, and the existing financial systems. By analysing these aspects, the studies will help design solutions tailored to Ethiopia's specific needs, ensuring accessibility, affordability, and effectiveness for all segments of the population. The proposed **Regional Centre for Cybersecurity and E-Certification** is a strategic move forward in strengthening Ethiopia's digital security framework. The feasibility study will examine the centre's infrastructure requirements, operational capacity, and potential funding sources, as well as its long-term sustainability and impact on the broader region.

Given Ethiopia's pivotal role in the Horn of Africa, establishing a regional centre would benefit not only the country but also its neighbours. The centre would serve as a hub for cybersecurity training, research, and policy development, bolstering the region's resilience against cyber threats and encouraging cooperation among IGAD Member States. Similarly, the feasibility study for the **Regional E-Waste Management Centre** will explore the practicality of establishing a comprehensive system to manage electronic waste across the Horn of Africa.

This includes evaluating infrastructure needs, cost implications, and funding opportunities, as well as exploring the development of a regional framework for e-waste management.

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Improper disposal and recycling of e-waste can lead to serious environmental and health risks, contaminating water sources, soil, and air.

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E-waste centre would provide a safe and environmentally sound solution for electronic waste disposal, create decent jobs—particularly for young people—stimulate local economies, and reduce the environmental impact of improper disposal.

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A well-designed e-waste centre would provide a safe and environmentally sound solution for electronic waste disposal, create decent jobs—particularly for young people—stimulate local economies, and reduce the environmental impact of improper disposal. The study will also explore how innovative technologies and public-private partnerships (PPPs) can support the creation of a sustainable e-waste management system. Given the cross-border nature of e-waste, a regional approach is essential.

The proposed centre would serve Ethiopia and other Horn of Africa countries by fostering knowledge-sharing, technology transfer, and collaborative policy-making. It would also become a hub for training, research, and best practices in e-waste management, helping countries across the region tackle the environmental challenges posed by digital waste.

Conclusion

The IGAD HDMI Project's feasibility studies will provide critical insights needed to ensure the success of these initiatives, laying a strong foundation for future growth and prosperity. By addressing technical, financial, and operational dimensions, the studies will help Ethiopia embrace the digital age and reap the benefits of a modern, inclusive economy.

As Ethiopia continues to drive digital transformation, such initiatives will not only strengthen national infrastructure but also pave the way for a more connected, resilient, and prosperous future for its citizens.

The HDMI Project is also supporting similar digitalisation initiatives in **Djibouti, Somalia, and South Sudan.**



ENHANCING SOMALIA'S FINANCIAL LANDSCAPE, THROUGH CREDIT SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The Central Bank of Somalia (CBS) is embarking on a transformative journey to enhance its financial infrastructure, supported by the Horn of Africa Digital Market Integration (HDMI) project. This initiative is funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and is executed by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The HDMI project, aims to create a unified digital market across Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, fostering deeper economic integration within the IGAD region.

A key component of this initiative is development of a regulatory framework, to support implementation of a Credit Information System (CIS) and a Collateral Registry (CR), for the Central Bank of Somalia (CBS). The CIS and CR systems are designed to address the low credit rates in Somalia, by improving access to financial services. The CBS is prioritizing establishment of a robust CIS and CR, to support responsible lending and borrowing practices in the country.

Despite signs of growth, Somalia's financial sector faces significant challenges, due to absence of credit history, credit ratings and effective default risk management.

The banking sector consists of 14 licensed commercial banks, with cumulatively about 1.2 million account holders. However, access to credit for individuals and businesses is limited by high lending costs, including lower loan maturities and elevated markup rates.

The high costs are largely driven by lack of established credit and collateral reporting systems, which increase lending risks and hinder accurate borrower creditworthiness assessments. This non-transparency practice impedes private sector lending, which currently accounts for just 4% of GDP and 23% of total credit to assets.

The absence of a functional credit bureau and collateral registry creates significant information asymmetry, limiting financial inclusion and access

to credit, especially for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Despite growth in total financial sector assets, credit to the private sector remains constrained. Women and youth-led businesses face particular challenges, with limited financial access being a key obstacle.

The establishment of a fully operational CIS and CR, along with development of supportive regulatory frameworks, is critical to transforming Somalia's financial infrastructure. These systems will enable sharing of credit information, improve risk management and promote more responsible lending and borrowing practices.

By reducing information asymmetry and providing detailed credit and collateral data, the CBS aims to create a more competitive and inclusive financial environment. Over 50% of the current 1.2 million account holders (more than 0.6 million persons) will be enabled to access credit services by the commercial banks and will commence a trend of creating reliable credit history, to facilitate recurrent borrowing in future. The number of vetted credit-worthy borrowers is projected to increase increasingly, in the coming years.

This initiative will not only strengthen stability of Somalia's financial system but will also contribute to broader regional trade and economic integration. Through digital integration, Somalia is poised to unlock its economic potential and contribute to sustainable growth and development within the Horn of Africa and Africa at large.





بنك السلام الصومالي
SALAAM SOMALI BANK

04

HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- Access to Education for Women and Youth: Challenges and Best Practices.
- Migration trends and their impact on women and youth.

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a bright blue face mask and a blue dress with white polka dots and large red floral patterns, is smiling slightly. She is holding a light blue rectangular sign in front of her chest. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with other people and greenery.

Did your students respond to your new presentation methods?



HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH: CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES

I. Introduction

Education is an engine for sustainable development. Without education, it is unlikely, if not impossible, to achieve any national, regional, and international development commitments. Women constitute more than 50% of the world's population, and the IGAD region is no

exception. Education is a fundamental human right, and women have the same rights as their male counterparts in education and skills development. Facilitating access to education for women and girls is an obligation for governments and regional bodies to ensure that women can fully enjoy their rights.

The African Union International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa (AU/CIEFFA) has stated that "Education is a powerful tool for development. Ensuring girls' and women's access to education increases their ability to meaningfully contribute to the socio-cultural, political, and economic development of their respective communities." This recognition of the importance of education has been articulated in regional and international commitments such as the SDGs, Agenda 2063, and the IGAD five-year strategies. SDG4 commits member states to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." More specifically, SDG4 urges member states and all stakeholders that "By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university."



II. State of Women and Girls' Education in Selected IGAD Member States

Despite strong commitments at national, regional, and global levels, access to education remains limited for both boys and girls. Nevertheless, women and girls lag behind their male counterparts.

- **Djibouti:** According to World Bank data, in 2017, the percentage of school-age female children enrolled in primary education stood at 55.73%. Female dropout rates at the lower secondary level in 2015 were 55.83%. Among the 35,000 estimated refugees in Djibouti, about 40% are girls and women, particularly among undocumented urban refugees and migrants, the majority of whom are Ethiopian. A ChatGPT search on 6 February 2025, quoting iicb.unesco.org, reveals that "Gross enrolment rates for secondary education are relatively low, with 42% of females enrolling compared to 48% of males."
- **Ethiopia:** The Gross Enrolment Rate for junior secondary level (grades 7-8) shows a female/male ratio of 67/70, while the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) is 46.8/47.2 for the same grades in 2022. This percentage declines significantly for senior secondary school (grades 9-12) to 44.6/47.6 and 33.4/32.9, respectively. Dropout rates are higher for girls than for boys in grades 1-8, with national statistics showing female and male dropout rates of 12.2% and 14.1%, respectively.
- **Kenya:** A 2024 article by Mwangi noted that Kenya ranks higher in literacy levels for both males (85.6%) and females (80.3%) compared to Sub-Saharan Africa averages (74.2% and 61.4%, respectively). However, female literacy remains lower than male literacy, and school enrolment rates decline at higher levels of education, with fewer girls reaching secondary and tertiary education.
- **Uganda:** The Ugandan Statistical Abstract 2023 reports that pre-primary enrolment decreased from 18% in 2016 to 8% in 2017, a trend that predates the COVID-19 pandemic and has long-term negative impacts on primary and secondary education. However, "Over the years 2013 to 2017, the number of females enrolled in pre-primary has been more than that of males." Gender disparity in education remains high. A 2024 Afrobarometer report stated that "Ugandan women are less likely than men to have higher education and paying jobs. Few respondents say that families still prioritise boys' education over girls'."

School-age female children enrolled in primary in Djibouti 2017

55.73%
Females

enrolment rates for secondary education in Djibouti 2025

48% **42%**
Males Females

Male-Female dropout rate in Ethiopia

14.1% **12.2%**
Males Females

Literacy levels in Kenya 2024

85.6% **80.3%**
Males Females

Literacy levels in S-Saharan Africa

74.2% **61.4%**
Males Females

Pre-primary enrolment decrease 2016-2017 in Uganda

18% **8%**
2016 2017

III. Challenges or Barriers to Accessing Education for Women and Girls

Several barriers constrain access to education, including:

- Cultural and social barriers
- Economic difficulties
- Conflict and instability
- Migration and displacement
- Climate change and vulnerability

Other macro and micro factors also impact access, such as inadequate school infrastructure, poor sanitation, lack of school feeding programmes, long distances to schools, and a shortage of female teachers as role models.

IV. Regional Initiatives to Facilitate Access to Education: Best Practices

1. The Djibouti Declaration (2017)

The IGAD Djibouti Declaration (DD) on Education for refugees, returnees, and host communities, adopted in 2017, urges member states to mainstream education for boys and girls in the context of leaving no one behind. Paragraph 27 specifically calls upon stakeholders to “Respond to the distinct learning needs of refugee boys and girls and ensure they have equitable and inclusive access to education.”

2. The IGAD Regional Education Policy Framework (2018)

The framework focuses on Accessibility, Quality, Affordability, Relevance, and Inclusivity, with eight priority intervention areas, including Gender and Education (PIA 8), recognising the persistent gender disparities in education.

3. The IGAD Regional Scholarship Scheme (2021/22)

The scheme prioritises girls, especially those from refugee backgrounds and marginalised host communities, to promote academic excellence among disadvantaged students.

4. The IGAD Regional Youth Policy Framework (2023)

This policy, adopted in September 2023, prioritises youth education, skills development, and gender equity as essential for regional transformation.

5. The IGAD Qualifications Framework (2024)

Adopted in May 2024, this framework enhances the recognition of skills acquired within IGAD member states. A high-level validation workshop in 2022 identified the need to strengthen its gender component, which was subsequently improved with GIZ support.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Education is a fundamental human right and an essential driver of women’s empowerment and inclusive development. To enhance educational access for women and girls, the following recommendations are proposed:



- 1. Understand and address barriers:** Generate disaggregated data on harmful cultural practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and gender-based educational biases.
- 2. Develop policies and advocacy:** IGAD should continue to formulate policies and advocate for inclusive education, focusing on refugees, returnees, marginalised communities, and persons with disabilities.
- 3. Encourage member state investments:** Governments must prioritise girls' education and track implementation progress.
- 4. Expand the IGAD scholarship scheme:**
Mobilise resources to increase scholarships, fostering regional scholars for integration and cooperation.
- 5. Engage development partners:** Support from international organisations should enhance scholarships, youth development, and entrepreneurship initiatives for women and girls.

By implementing these measures, IGAD can significantly contribute to gender equality in education and broader socio-economic development.



MIGRATION TRENDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON WOMEN AND YOUTH, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE IGAD REGION

While mobility is a driver of development and prosperity, migration out of necessity creates challenges and vulnerabilities. Migration into and from the region is driven by multiple and interrelated economic, political, and environmental factors, with the majority of migrants from the IGAD region leaving their countries in search of decent work and better employment opportunities. The main reasons are structural like poverty and lack of economic opportunity and poor governance and acute factors (such as violent conflicts and natural disasters). Owing to the absence and/or limited availability of regular migration and mobility options, citizens in the region migrate through irregular channels through three major notable routes to the east to Gulf countries via Djibouti, to Europe via Sudan & Libya and to Southern Africa as destinations. However, if migration is driven by the necessity to escape hardship and insecurity, it is often unsafe and irregular. This causes problems for the countries of origin of the migrants (loss of young, ambitious people) as well as the for migrants themselves (migration can be risky and can make them vulnerable).

Given the fact that 70% of the population of the IGAD region are youth, there is high proportion of unemployed, underemployment and youth engaged in an unproductive sector which triggers labour migration out of the region.

As the nature of migration is very dynamic and multifaceted, effective governance requires the coordinated efforts of a number of national and regional stakeholders. To address the challenges posed by irregular migration at the national and regional level, IGAD has developed Regional Migration Policy Framework back in 2012 and which was endorsed by its highest policy organ, council of Heads of States and since then guides the migration works. Following the endorsement of the Policy Framework, IGAD has also developed Migration Action Plan and have been implemented a number of migration governance projects that have contributed for the establishment of National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) on Migration and Regional Consultative Process to tackle issue at regional level.

On the other hand, an increasing trend of feminization of migration and recognizing the importance of improving the protection of women migrant workers and advancing gender equality for greater regional integration. However, IGAD MS Labour, migration and employment policies apply to national workers and regular migrant workers, except for sectors that are

reserved for nationals, such as the public service. There were clear needs to advocate for regular overseas employment through bilateral labour agreements for youth labour migrants in general and women migrant workers in particular to ensure protection and respect for human rights. It is evident that women in irregular migration status are often employed in the informal economy in care and domestic work sectors characterized by decent work deficits that includes harsh living and working conditions, violence and harassment, low quality jobs and lack of access to health, justice and basic services.

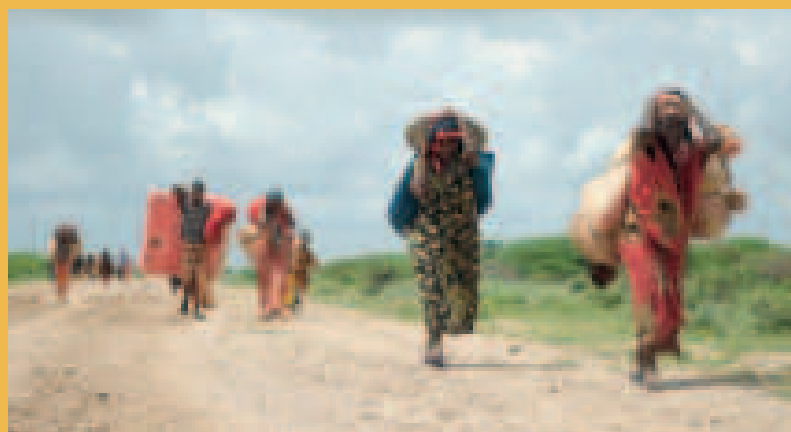
According to IGAD Statistics, Facts and Figure produced in 2023, there were 4.8 million international migrants in 2022 which was a significant increase in international migrants from 2.5 million migrants in 2012. Although there is no consolidated data at a regional level, there has been a sharp increase in the number of semi-skilled, skilled and low skilled migration of youth out of the region in the recent past primarily to the Middle eastern countries.

To address the structural and acute factors that drive migration it is important to promote positive mobility in such a way that it creates economic opportunity and to reduce poverty at household level. In this regard, under article 16 of its Protocol on Free Movement of Person adopted in Feb 2020, IGAD is committed to advocating for safe and regular labour migration in the region and beyond. In addition, the Oct 2021 Djibouti Declaration on Labour, Employment and labour migration is another the bold step towards making labour mobility safe for the migrant workers and beneficial to both countries of origin and destination. To realize the objective of the protocol and the declaration, IGAD Secretariat in collaboration with ILO has been

implementing EU funded project under the Title of Protocol on the Free Movement of Person and Transhumance in the IGAD region where labour migration is the main component.

Apart from promoting mobility and legal migration as a choice, while reducing migration out of necessity, it is also important to address economic reasons for irregular migration at countries origin and along the major corridors in the region. To this end, IGAD has initiated Regional Migration Fund project in 2019 to improve the living conditions and economic opportunities through job creation mainly for youth migrants and host communities in main cross border locations.

In a nut shell, IGAD as a regional bloc is very much cognizant of the fact that well managed migration is beneficial to the development (through the inflow of remittances) of the countries of origin and off-course to the destination as well and hence; promoting legal pathways for effective labour mobility among the youth and women is the best way forward. IGAD will further strengthen collaboration and cooperation with national, regional and continental actors like AU to advance the agenda of safe labour migration.



05

PEACE AND SECURITY

- Securing the Future: IGAD Leadership Academy Empowers Women and Youth to Drive Change.
- From Vulnerability to Leadership: How Youth are Key to Preventing Violent Extremism in the IGAD Region.
- Examining Narratives on Women and Youth in Peace and Security.







PEACE AND SECURITY

SECURING THE FUTURE: IGAD LEADERSHIP ACADEMY EMPOWERS WOMEN AND YOUTH TO DRIVE CHANGE

Any time the story of the IGAD region is told, the narrative of challenges, conflict, instability, and human crises always takes prominence, often overshadowing the immense potential and growth prospects. With a youthful, diverse population and a growing momentum for good and inclusive leadership, the future of the region is full of possibilities. Unlocking this potential and actualising the possibilities requires more than just ambition. It demands visionary and inclusive leadership, as well as a commitment to empower those who have historically been left behind—women and youth.

The two groups are under-represented in leadership and decision-making processes despite their forming the majority of the population in the region. For instance, various studies have shown that women's political participation in Africa remains relatively minimal, reflected in the low representation in the governance spaces. The same holds true for the youth. Paradoxically, despite Africa being the youngest continent by population, its leadership remains largely old. In the IGAD region, the youth make up more than 60% of the total population, a vibrant demographic that can drive economic transformation and peacebuilding. However, the region is yet to reap a demographic dividend from the "youth bulge."

For women and youth to participate meaningfully in leadership, they must possess the requisite skills, knowledge, and access to resources that empower them to effectively contribute to decision-making processes. Acknowledging that leadership setbacks are at the heart of the various challenges facing the region, IGAD set out to address the root cause by establishing the IGAD Leadership Academy (ILA). The Academy was mandated to bridge the leadership gap by equipping our future leaders with critical skills suitable to navigate through the challenges of a developing society

while fostering inclusivity.

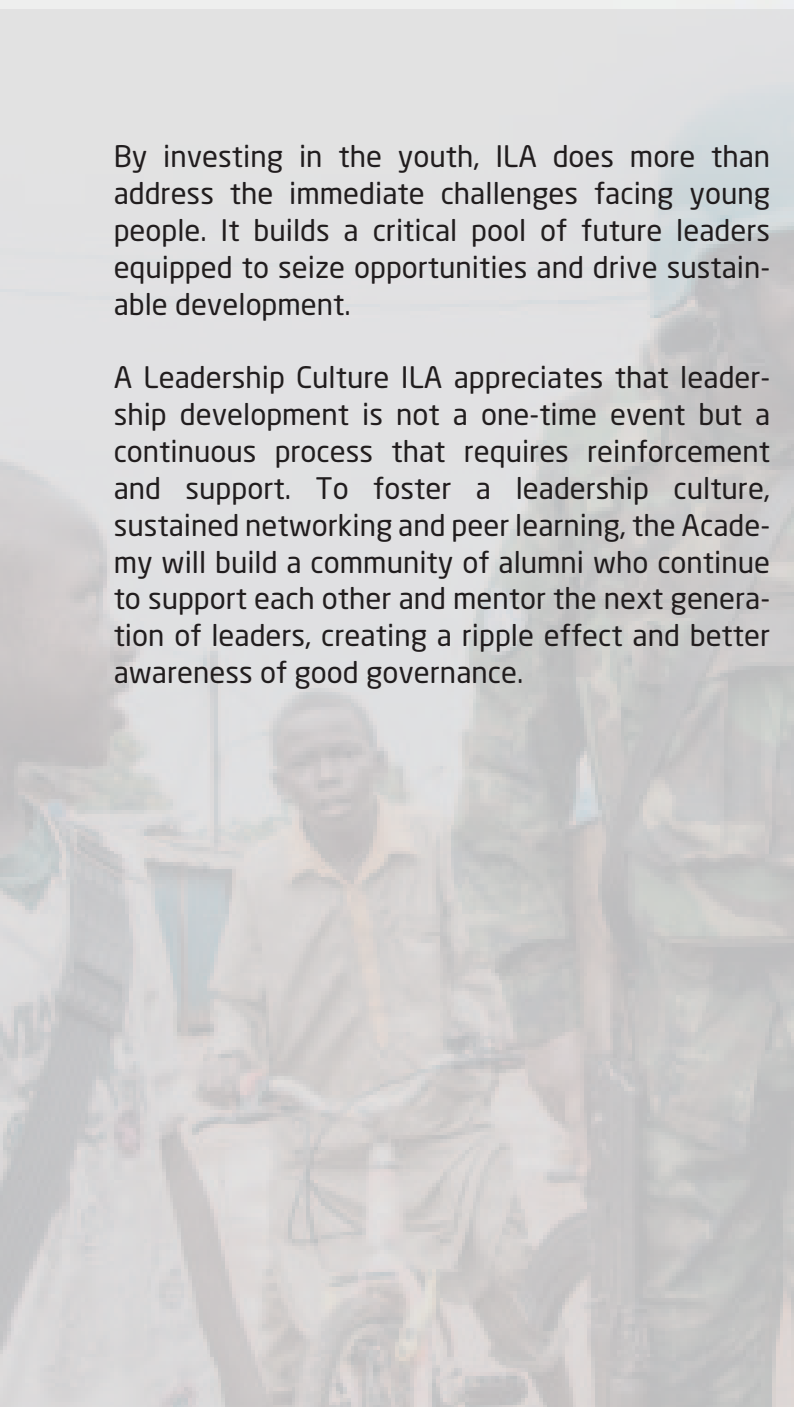
ILA's mission is rooted in IGAD's conviction that Africa needs home-grown solutions to its problems. When women and youth are equipped with practical leadership, peacebuilding, and decision-making skills backed by a gender-responsive and youth-centric curriculum, the region will have a new cadre of future leaders who are innovative, resilient, and responsive to the needs of their communities.

Breaking Barriers Through targeted programmes, the Academy endeavours to provide women with the tools and skills they need to overcome the systemic and cultural barriers that have long excluded them from leadership. Leadership training, mentorship and networking opportunities, as well as creating safe spaces for dialogue and peer learning, are just some of the approaches of the Academy in preparing women to take on leadership roles in politics, governance, and peacebuilding. This initiative is grounded in findings that when women are included in leadership and decision-making, communities experience more sustainable development, reduced conflict, and improved social cohesion.

Looking Ahead It's no secret that high unemployment rates, limited access to education, and a lack of opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making processes have left many young people in the region feeling disillusioned and excluded. This hopelessness has birthed a resistance among the youth as they push for youth-oriented policies and representation in governance. ILA will tap into the potential of this group to ensure that the region can enjoy the demographic dividend. The Academy will not only provide the youth with leadership skills and mentorship, but it will also amplify their voices in regional and national dialogues.

By investing in the youth, ILA does more than address the immediate challenges facing young people. It builds a critical pool of future leaders equipped to seize opportunities and drive sustainable development.

A Leadership Culture ILA appreciates that leadership development is not a one-time event but a continuous process that requires reinforcement and support. To foster a leadership culture, sustained networking and peer learning, the Academy will build a community of alumni who continue to support each other and mentor the next generation of leaders, creating a ripple effect and better awareness of good governance.

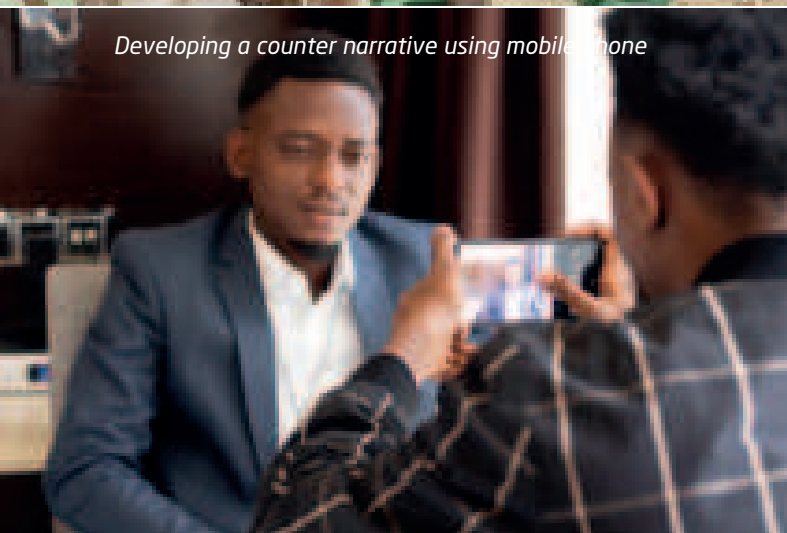




FROM VULNERABILITY TO LEADERSHIP:

Extremism in the IGAD Region

Dr. Martha Njiiri, Head of Strategic Communications, IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (ICEPCVE) The youth in the IGAD region constitute the largest percentage of the total population, with approximately 60% being under the age of 25, of whom a majority are unemployed, thus constituting a significantly vulnerable population. Research studies conducted denote increased radicalisation and recruitment of vulnerable youth into violent extremist groups in the guise of promising them employment. The empowerment offered by violent extremist groups warrants keen consideration by governments and policymakers on the role of youth in efforts towards preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). The involvement of youth in P/CVE efforts is underwhelming, and their coverage largely portrays them as supporters and perpetrators of violent extremism, yet they can be and are key actors in P/CVE.



Developing a counter narrative using mobile phone



Editing the counter narrative developed using mobile phone

The IGAD Regional Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism recognises the pivotal role that youth can play as champions in discrediting violent extremists' ideologies, as they have a vantage point in understanding their peers' grievances and positively influencing them. Therefore, youth engagement is outlined as a key measure to strengthen their capacity to reject the ideologies and aims of violent extremists. Additionally, a Youth Engagement Strategy in P/CVE has been developed to guide the youth in the IGAD region on how to effectively undertake activities to counter violent extremism in their communities. Since its inception, the IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (ICEPCVE) has remained steadfast in engaging and empowering youth to not only enhance their capacity but also their resilience to resist radical ideologies perpetrated by violent extremists in both online and offline spaces.

Meaningful youth engagement through workshops that enhance strategic thinking skills is critical to empowering them to reject violent extremism. As such, through regional strategic communication

workshops organised by ICEPCVE, the youth drawn from mapped youth organisations involved in peace-building efforts in the IGAD region and hosted in the Digital Hub get a chance to deepen their understanding and awareness of ideologies being perpetuated by violent extremist groups and are trained on how to design and disseminate effective alternative and counter messages using their handheld gadgets to undermine

ideologies and narratives peddled by violent extremists to radicalise and recruit in both online and offline spaces.

ICEPCVE has also strived to bring the youth together with other credible actors in their communities, including religious leaders, civil society, media, and influencers, to advance a whole-of-society approach and explore how they can strategically collaborate in advancing P/CVE efforts in the IGAD region. The engagements have also seen the development and dissemination of joint counter and alternative narratives to discredit violent extremists' ideologies.

ICEPCVE records a strong and growing network of youth actively pushing for counter narratives to undermine and reject violent extremists' aims in both offline and online spaces. The youth mapped and trained also continue sharing experiences and information through the ICEPCVE Digital Hub, a mobile-enabled application that provides a safe space to learn and share on P/CVE.

Developing a counter-narrative using a mobile phone.



EXAMINING NARRATIVES ON WOMEN AND YOUTH IN PEACE AND SECURITY



Kidsena Tafesse : Author

Master's degree Holder in International Affairs from George Washington University, USA.

Women in Peace Processes Monitor, in 2023

9.6% of Women
negotiators,

13.7% of Women
mediators,

26.6% Women
signatories to peace agreements,

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agendas represent significant advancements in recognising the roles of women and youth for peace. These frameworks, backed by international and regional commitments such as the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 Aspiration 4, the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2250 (2015), and the AU's Continental Framework on Youth, Peace, and Security (2020-2029), underscore the importance of inclusive peacebuilding. However, despite these commitments, both demographics remain largely excluded from formal peace negotiations.

According to the UN Women in Peace Processes Monitor, in 2023, women accounted for only 9.6% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators, and 26.6% of signatories to peace agreements. Meanwhile, youth are often sidelined or misrepresented in discussions of conflict and security. Addressing these gaps requires a fundamental shift in narratives from portraying women and youth as passive victims to recognising them as active agents of peace. One core issue that highlights the above gap in peace and security discourse is a recurring dichotomy that arises when examining the opportunities and challenges faced by women and youth. The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agendas acknowledge the prevalence of gender-based violence and the recruitment of young people into armed groups, both critical issues that disproportionately impact these populations. However, this categorisation must be met with an equally robust effort to recognise the indispensable role women and youth play in securing lasting peace across the African continent.

The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda:

Women make up an average of 50% of most African countries' population, yet their representation in formal peace processes remains minimal. This underrepresentation is compounded by the persistent framing of women primarily as victims in need of protection rather than as political actors with agency. Too often, women are grouped under the broader category of "vulnerable populations" or alongside children, reinforcing an assumption that they constitute a sociological minority rather than half of society. Such framing not only undermines their political legitimacy but also creates a paradox within peacebuilding efforts: while women are often expected to take on responsibilities as mothers, teachers, and community leaders who shape social attitudes, they are simultaneously portrayed as inherently vulnerable and passive.

Despite these barriers, women have been at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts. For instance, in 2023, Sudanese women demonstrated this leadership by forming the Peace for Sudan Platform, comprising over 49 women-led organisations advocating for an inclusive peace process. Additionally, studies indicate that peace agreements with women signatories are more likely to be implemented and have a longer-lasting impact. Thus, for

peace processes to be truly inclusive, the WPS agenda must move beyond protective rhetoric and actively dismantle institutional barriers that limit women's full participation.

The Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda

Similarly, the dominant narrative surrounding youth in peace and security oscillates between portraying them as either vulnerable individuals needing protection or as a threat to stability. This binary fails to capture the diverse and essential roles young people can play in peacebuilding. With approximately 55% of the IGAD region's population falling within the youth bracket (ages 15-35), and Africa's youth population projected to increase by 42% by 2030, it is imperative to shift the discourse. Young people have repeatedly demonstrated their capacity to drive positive change; however, the focus often remains on their potential for radicalisation rather than on their contributions to building peace. Recognising youth as partners in peace processes requires moving beyond the "victim or perpetrator" dichotomy and actively involving them in decision-making.

Intersectionality of WPS and YPS

Applying a gender-sensitive lens to YPS interventions can also help dismantle societal inequalities

that limit women's roles in peace and security while promoting inclusive engagement for young men. Notably, "youth" is often synonymous with "young men" in policy discussions, sidelining young women who exist at the intersection of WPS and YPS agendas. A more holistic approach to peace and security would ensure that gender considerations are integrated into all interventions. The intersectionality of these groups means that a failure to address gender disparities in YPS efforts risks perpetuating the same exclusionary power dynamics that have historically limited women's participation.

To conclude, the discussion on women and youth in peace and security is not only about representation but also about reshaping the very foundation of peacebuilding efforts.

Addressing the gaps in narratives and policies related to WPS and YPS has broader implications beyond conflict resolution as it directly impacts governance, judicial systems, education, and gender equality across African societies. If international and regional commitments are to be truly transformative, they must go beyond symbolic recognition and translate into concrete actions that empower women and youth as equal stakeholders in peace and security.



06

UPDATES CORNER

- IGAD Water Dialogue Forum.
- IGAD Scientific Conference.
- This quarter policy briefs.
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With growing demands for water due to population growth, urbanization, and climate variability, the need for effective governance and cooperation in managing shared groundwater resources has never been greater

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**CALL FOR
ABSTRACTS**

3rd IGAD Water Dialogue Forum

*Building a Platform for Sustainable Regional
Groundwater Cooperation*

Supported by:



THE WORLD BANK
World Bank Group

Conference date:
19-21 May 2025

IGAD WATER DIALOGUE FORUM

Building a platform for sustainable regional groundwater cooperation

Background:

Groundwater resources play a vital role in the socio-economic development and environmental stability of the IGAD region. With growing demands for water due to population growth, urbanization, and climate variability, the need for effective governance and cooperation in managing shared groundwater resources has never been greater. Transboundary aquifers such as the Dawa, Northern Basement, and Shabelle aquifers exemplify the necessity for collective management approaches to address water scarcity and regional challenges.

The 3rd IGAD Water Forum builds on the progress of previous fora, emphasizing the importance of shared governance, data harmonization, and capacity building to foster sustainable groundwater management. It aims to engage key stakeholders from IGAD member states and beyond in a collaborative platform to exchange knowledge, discuss policy frameworks, and draft a roadmap for future cooperation.

Objectives:

- 1. Policy and Governance Development:** Strengthen institutional frameworks and harmonize regional policies for transboundary groundwater management.
- 2. Knowledge Exchange:** Present and discuss findings from key initiatives such as the Joint Regional Study (JRS) and the Dawa Feasibility Study.
- 3. Regional Collaboration:** Enhance partnerships among member states and international organizations for effective groundwater management.
- 4. Innovation and Capacity Building:** Promote innovative tools and methods for groundwater assessment and development in borderlands and data-sparse regions.
- 5. Strategic Roadmap Development:** Draft a proposal to guide future groundwater resilience initiatives in the IGAD region.

Expected Outcomes:

- 1. Strengthened Regional Collaboration:** Enhanced partnerships between IGAD member states, regional organizations, and international stakeholders to improve the collective management of groundwater resources.
- 2. Knowledge Dissemination:** Findings from the Joint Regional Study (JRS) and the Dawa Feasibility Study shared, providing a scientific basis for informed decision-making on groundwater management.
- 3. Capacity Building:** Increased expertise among participants through the introduction of innovative tools and methodologies for groundwater assessment and development in borderlands and data-scarce regions.
- 4. Actionable Roadmap:** A clear and actionable roadmap co-developed by stakeholders, outlining key priorities and steps to advance groundwater resilience and regional cooperation.

Target Participants:

- *National Focal Groups (NFG) and task force members from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia.*
- *Policymakers, government officials, and water sector professionals.*
- *Researchers, development partners, and representatives from international organizations (e.g., UNESCO, UNICEF, UNEP).*
- *Private sector representatives and NGOs active in water management.*

The 3rd IGAD Water Forum offers a unique platform to advance sustainable groundwater cooperation, address shared challenges, and lay the foundation for future resilience. By engaging diverse stakeholders, this forum will contribute to shaping a collaborative and sustainable approach to groundwater management in the Horn of Africa.





4th IGAD Scientific Conference

on Migration and Displacement

"Migration, Displacement, and Urbanization: Implications for Sustainable Development"

Conference date:
19-21 May 2025

IGAD SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

On Migration and Displacement :

Displacement and migration are becoming a primarily urban phenomenon in the IGAD region. These include rural-to-urban migration, cross-border labor migration, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, and refugees who tend to move and stay in urban areas (cities and towns). The unprecedented migration and refugee situation presents unique sources of opportunities and challenges that affect urbanization.

Cities authorities are often unprepared to respond to the influx of displaced households and increased rural-to-urban migration amidst the many competing challenges and priorities they face. Many cities in the Horn of Africa are facing demographic growth and extreme inequalities. In spite of this, they have a severe shortage of financial and technical capacity to provide adequate basic socio-economic services and affordable housing to their growing citizenry. On top of this, the national government's budget allocation does not take into consideration population figures affected by displacement and migration.

Policymakers and humanitarian and development actors' responses to displacement and migration

are largely through a rural lens. Many contexts also suffer from a lack of data to track displaced populations in urban areas and the impacts that displacement and migration have on urban systems. Migrant and displaced populations are not integrating socially and economically well. Their potential contribution is tremendous if they are well-tapped. Thus, there is a need to understand and explore cities and towns' contexts, including the political dynamics, and roles of city actors, and identify the specific needs of cities and provide tailored solutions so that they can effectively support migrant and displaced populations and reap the potentials that migrants and refugees can present for development of cities and towns in the IGAD region.

It is against this background that IGAD is organizing the 4th scientific conference with the aim of creating a platform for academics, practitioners, and policymakers to present their scientific works. It is assumed that the studies will provide recommendations for evidence-based policy and practice to IGAD and its Member States in terms of improving the preparedness of cities in the region so as to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance opportunities for migration and forced displacement.

KEY EVENTS

Main Policy Briefs

- Policy Brief, Tourism Trends in the IGAD Region
- Trade Policy Trends in IGAD Region
- Policy Brief, Anchoring Blue Economy in IGAD Region and Member States
- Policy Brief, IGAD Trade Integration Arrangements Status of Membership of IGAD Members to WTO and RECs

References Links:

Download the articles by following the links below ;

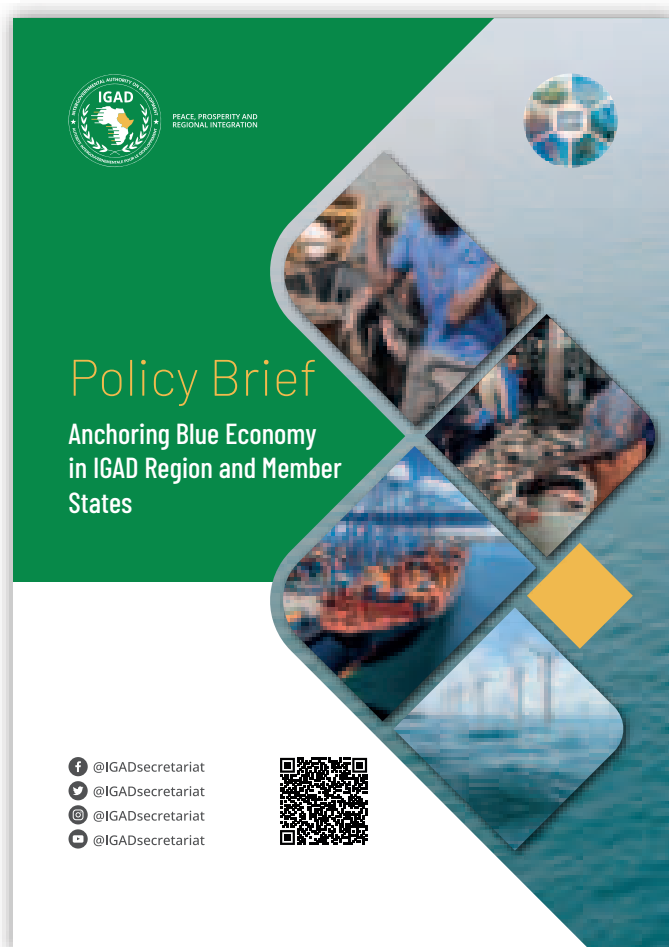
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<https://igad.int/download/policy-brief-anchoring-blue-economy-in-igad-region-and-member-states/>



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IGAD at AU Summit 2025





Quarterly Events Pictorials.



IGAD at AU Summit: Executive Secretary meets with H.E Antonio Guterres



Executive Secretary congratulating the new Chairman of the African Union Commission



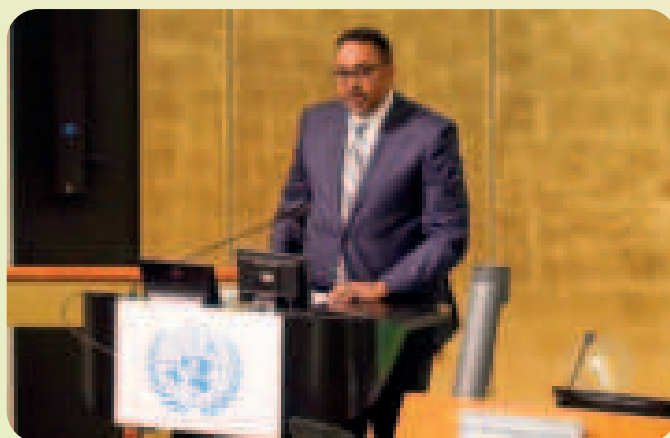
Executive Secretary with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway



Group Photo: Executive Secretary with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway



High-level Humanitarian Conference for the People of Sudan



High-level Humanitarian Conference for the People of Sudan



Executive Secretary taking over as the chair for the Africa Union Inter-Rec Platform



Group Photo: Africa Union Inter-Rec Platform



The President of the Federal Republic of Somalia and the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia strengthen their bilateral relations



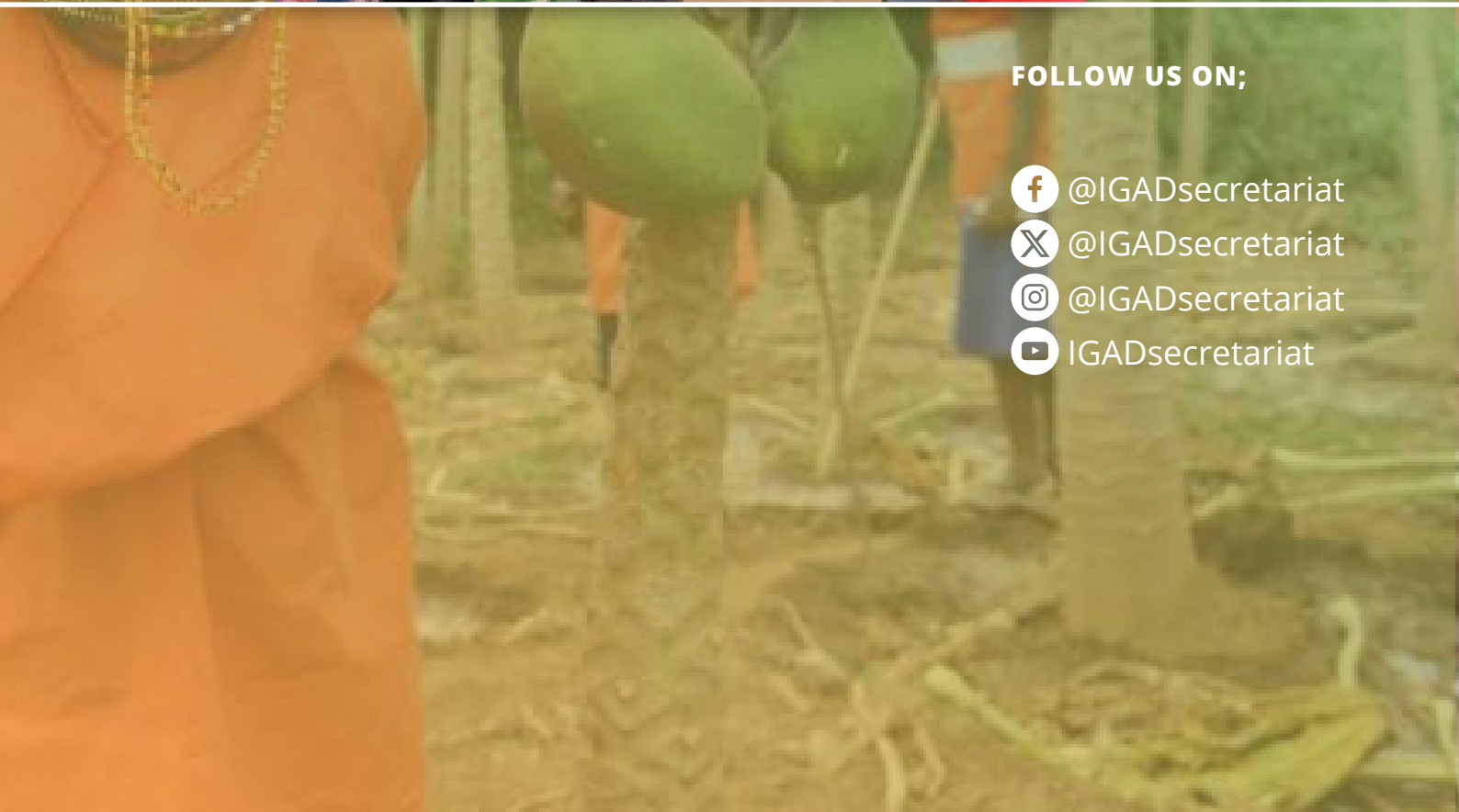
Group Photo: Heads of states at the African Union Summit 2025



Group photo: AU CAADP Summit



Executive Secretary leading the IGAD delegation to the AU CAADP Summit



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