

# The Paradox of Policy: Regional Cooperation and Climate Governance in the IGAD Region – A Case Study of Ethiopia and Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Climate change presents complex, cross-border challenges that transcend national boundaries, creating severe socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities in the Horn of Africa. This study investigates the influence of regional cooperation on climate governance within the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) framework, focusing on Ethiopia and Kenya. Employing a mixed-methods approach comprising quantitative surveys of 100 experts, qualitative interviews with 24 key informants, and document analysis, the research reveals a significant "paradox of policy. While IGAD has established robust regulatory frameworks viewed by 80% of stakeholders as a strong foundation, there remains a profound disconnect in national-level implementation. Survey results indicate a unanimous (100%) perception of ineffective coordination between national and regional policies. However, bilateral cooperation between Ethiopia and Kenya serves as a successful outlier, driven by tangible necessity rather than abstract policy. The study concludes that meaningful progress requires a strategic shift from policy design to operational implementation, sustainable financing, and the strengthening of enforcement mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Regional cooperation, Climate governance, IGAD, Policy coherence, Ethiopia, Kenya, Implementation gap.

## INTRODUCTION

The Horn of Africa is currently confronting significant climate-related challenges, expected to endure the most severe near-term impacts of climate change, including droughts, floods, and desertification. Approximately 70% of the IGAD region consists of arid and semi-arid lands, where rain-fed agriculture and livestock production form the economic backbone, rendering member states highly vulnerable to environmental shocks. Given the transboundary nature of these risks, unilateral national responses are increasingly insufficient. Regional cooperation is essential for pooling resources, harmonizing policies, and fostering sustainable transitions.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), originally established to combat drought, has evolved into a key regional security and development bloc. However, despite the proliferation of climate strategies, such as the IGAD Regional Climate Change Strategy (2016–2030), questions remain regarding their effectiveness. The region faces a "capabilities-expectations gap," where ambitious regional goals often fail to translate into national action.

This article assesses how regional cooperation under the IGAD framework influences climate governance in Ethiopia and Kenya. It specifically examines the divergence between regional protocols and national integration, the effectiveness of resilience networks, and the drivers of joint adaptation strategies.

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## Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The study is grounded in theories of regional integration and environmental regionalism. While early functionalist theories suggested that technical cooperation would spill over into political integration, the African experience has been shaped by the unique constraints of state sovereignty and "neopatrimonialism". Krapohl and Fink (2013) argue that regional integration in developing contexts often reinforces existing economic structures rather than transforming them.

In the context of climate governance, "environmental regionalism" suggests that ecological interdependence forces sovereign states to cooperate. However, literature indicates that African RECs often excel at institution-building while struggling with implementation—a phenomenon often described as the "implementation gap". This study bridges the gap in the literature by providing an empirical analysis of this phenomenon within the specific context of the Ethiopia-Kenya borderlands.

## METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a cross-sectional research design with a mixed-methods approach to ensure both breadth and depth of analysis.

- **Study Area:** The research focused on Ethiopia and Kenya, two major players in IGAD with significant transboundary climate interactions.
- **Quantitative Data:** A survey was administered to 100 respondents (50 from Ethiopia, 50 from Kenya), primarily government officials and experts working with IGAD and NGOs.
- **Qualitative Data:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 key informants, including technical experts from the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC), regional strategists, and NGO representatives.
- **Document Analysis:** A systematic review of the IGAD Treaty, the IGAD Regional Climate Change Strategy, and national climate policies of Ethiopia and Kenya was conducted.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### The Paradox of Policy: Strong Foundation, Weak Coordination

The study revealed a striking contradiction in stakeholder perceptions. Respondents demonstrated high confidence in the technical quality of IGAD's regulatory instruments but zero confidence in their execution.

**Regulatory Strength:** 80% of respondents strongly agreed that IGAD climate regulations provide a strong foundation for regional climate governance. Stakeholders view the scientific and legal architecture as robust.

**Coordination Failure:** Conversely, 100% of respondents disagreed (with 45% strongly disagreeing) that there is effective coordination between national and regional policies. Furthermore, 100% of respondents indicated that national governments do not actively integrate IGAD climate policies into their national strategies.

This creates a governance landscape where regional protocols function as aspirational documents rather than operational directives.

### Systemic Barriers: Finance and Sovereignty

Two primary drivers were identified for this implementation gap: financial volatility and national sovereignty.

**The Resource Trap:** There was absolute consensus (100% agreement) that there is insufficient financial and technical support for regional climate resilience programs. Qualitative interviews described resilience efforts as

"projectized"—existing only for the duration of specific donor grants, leading to a "stop-start" governance model.

Sovereignty as a Hurdle: 99% of respondents agreed that differences in national interests among IGAD member states hinder effective climate governance. The lack of supranational enforcement power allows states to "opt out" of mandates that threaten perceived national interests, particularly regarding shared water resources.

### **The Bilateral Success Story**

In stark contrast to the stagnation of broader regional coordination, the study highlighted successful bilateral cooperation.

The "Moyale Effect": 100% of respondents agreed that Ethiopia and Kenya have strong collaboration on joint climate adaptation strategies.

Effectiveness: 86% strongly agreed that these joint strategies effectively address droughts and extreme weather events. This suggests that cooperation is most effective when rooted in "hyper-local" tangible necessity rather than abstract policy, as seen in the Moyale-Marsabit Cross-Border Programme.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The "Paper Tiger" of Regional Governance**

The findings validate the theory of Intergovernmentalism in the African context. While IGAD has expanded its mandate from drought to security and development, structurally it remains a consultative body without "teeth." The "sovereignty" clause in Article 6A of the IGAD Treaty structurally protects fragmentation, preventing the enforcement of harmonization required by Article 13A. Consequently, the region possesses high-quality policies that are operationally dormant—a "paper tiger" scenario.

### **Coalitions of the Willing**

The divergence between the failure of general regionalism (Mean 4.45 disagreement on coordination) and the success of bilateralism (Mean 1.34 agreement on collaboration) is a critical finding. It suggests that "coalitions of the willing"—specific cross-border initiatives focused on immediate shared threats—are more resilient than centralized bureaucracies. The shared ethnic lineages and ecological risks along the border force a functional cooperation that bypasses high-level political friction.

### **The Need for "Soft" Infrastructure**

There was absolute consensus (100%) on the need for adequate knowledge-sharing. While physical infrastructure is often prioritized, the "soft" infrastructure of data sharing is critical for managing transboundary risks like locust swarms. The study identified that technical institutions like ICPAC have created a strong scientific foundation, but political barriers prevent this data from driving policy harmonization.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The IGAD region operates with a "capability-expectations gap." It possesses world-class scientific data and legal frameworks but lacks the political will, financial autonomy, and enforcement mechanisms to operationalize them. The future of resilience in the Horn of Africa lies not in drafting new policies, but in closing the implementation gap.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Operationalize Implementation: Move from policy design to execution by establishing dedicated "Climate Implementation Units" within national ministries tasked with domesticating regional treaties.

2. Sustainable Financing: Shift from ad-hoc donor projects to sustainable financing models, such as a centralized Regional Climate Adaptation Fund that blends member state contributions with private capital.
3. Strengthen Enforcement: Evolve IGAD from a consultative body to one with oversight capacity. Introduce binding enforcement mechanisms for key protocols, potentially linking compliance to access to regional funds.
4. Scale the Bilateral Model: Recognize that the "all-or-nothing" approach to integration may be flawed. actively promote and replicate the successful "Moyale Model" of bilateral cooperation in other border clusters.

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