The Rationale for the Merger of IGAD and EAC: Its Potential Benefits and Challenges for the Greater Horn

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Abstract

One of the ubiquitous problems of the African economic integration process is multiple and overlapping memberships in different regional economic communities (RECs). One solution for this is the merger of these RECs into a single, larger entity. This study examined the rationale for the merger of IGAD and EAC as one larger new regional economic community in the greater Horn of Africa and assessed its potential benefits and challenges for the region. Qualitative design was employed, and primary data from policy and research experts and secondary resources were consulted. The study argues that the harmonization may address the two blocs' weaknesses over the decades of their existence, and combining the focus on peace and security of IGAD with the economic integration achievements of the EAC would allow the new larger single entity to leverage their respective strengths to drive sustainable peace and development, advance regional economic integration, and promote the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It would also create a larger market with a combined GDP and population, attracting increased investments and fostering economic growth. By aligning policies and removing trade barriers, the merged entity could enhance regional trade and create opportunities for businesses to thrive. Besides, the larger entity would help increase the bargaining power of the region and could also lead to more effective responses and resilience-building strategies to migration, climate change, and humanitarian crises the region faces. However, overcoming political rivalries and reconciling different perspectives will be essential to overcoming the challenges ahead. It is suggested that weak institutional organization, political unwillingness, and instability need to be addressed for a successful merger

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Introduction

The Merger of regional economic communities (RECs) involves combining at least two RECs into a single, larger entity to reduce membership overlap and foster broader economic and political cooperation. Adopted in 2000, the Constitutive Act of the African Union envisages regional economic blocs as its building pillars for the envisioned United

States of Africa[1]. Accordingly, the African Union recognized eight RECs as building blocks: the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Among these, three of them, namely IGAD, EAC, and COMESA, are found in the Greater Horn region. Both IGAD and EAC have eight members each. IGAD's members are Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda, four of them are also EAC's members, namely, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda. Other members include Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Tanzania. However, Eritrea formally announced its withdrawal from IGAD on 12 December 2025. The COMESA regional economic bloc is comprising 21 African member states: Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe

These RECs have been engaging in coordinating Member States' interests in wider areas such as infrastructure development, investment and trade, peace and security, and governance. However, RECs in Africa are not as successful as expected. One of the major problems identified is overlapping mandates. Countries of the Greater Horn belong to two or three of the RECs recognized by the AU. For example, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda are also members of the Eastern African Community (EAC), and all IGAD members, except South Sudan, are also members of COMESA. More or less, these groupings normally pursue essentially the same mandates and objectives, leading to wasteful duplication of efforts[2]. More importantly, such manifold memberships in RECs have created a complicated web of competing commitments, divided loyalty among governments[3], imposed heavy financial and administrative burdens on individual governments[4], and resulted in high costs of trade between member countries, in effect

[1] Constitutive Act of African Union, Adopted by the Thirty-Sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, 11 July, 2000 - Lome, Togo; see also AU (2017). Building a More Relevant African Union

[2] United Nations, (2009). Economic Development in Africa Report 2009: Strengthening Regional Economic Integration for Africa's Development, New York, United Nations Publication p.45

[3] IGAD (2020). IGAD Regional Strategy Framework 2021 2025. Despite IGAD's cross sectoral targeted policy and regulatory frameworks IGAD Member States belong to multiple RECs, subscribing to different policy and regulatory frameworks which has resulted in conflicting national choices on which the policy framework should be adopted in the interest of the wider community.

[4] IFA (2023).The Unremitting Blockades to Regional Integration in IGAD and Their Outcomes on the Viability of the Re-Revitalized Treaty: The Way Forward for Making IGAD a Vigorous Bloc

undermining integration[5]. It has also contributed to decelerating prospects for robust multilateralism and dispersing the allegiance of countries of the region into several multilateral domains[6]. For example, Kenya and Uganda, in particular, have divergent interests and need IGAD for political rather than economic reasons,[7] which weakens RECs in the East and Horn of Africa region. One mechanism to address such problems is creating coordination and harmonization of existing regional blocs that involve merging these regional communities into a larger single entity. Merging two or more regional communities into a single REC through **c**oordination and harmonization, which ultimately eliminates overlapping membership, will make the existing blocs strong and lead to effective resources. Yet, in the merging process challenges are inevitable due to the various priority interest among the merging RECs and differences in economic development that may lead to unequal advantages[8], which could instigate tension among members. This requires an assessment of the benefits and the challenges of utilization[9]. It may also result in the creation of employment opportunities, hence improving the living standards of the people in the merging community, and assessing the challenges and how to address them. Besides, merging the existing blocs may bring about increased trade creation, raising economies of scale and improving productivity, assuming a stronger negotiating environment, assurance of welfare gains, and improving productivity[10].

Recognizing the potential benefits of closer regional integration, the Heads of State and Governments of IGAD and the EAC, in 2013, initiated discussions on a possible merger and mandated the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of IGAD and EAC to explore the possibility of merging these two Regional Economic Communities with a view to establish a bigger economic bloc to expedite the integration process and ensure greater economic development and prosperity to the peoples of the Eastern Africa[11]. So far, no development has been made. Recently, on 16 June 2023, however, following the IGAD-EAC High Level Ministerial Conference, Member States have signed the Munyonyo

[5] Ndomo, A. (2009). Regional Economic Communities in Africa A Progress Overview , Study Commissioned by GTZ; IFA (2023)

[6] ISS, 2023; IFA (2023)

[7] IFA (2023)

[8] Yonas Yezezew (March 2025), Integrating East Africa: The Need for A Strategic Merger of EAC and IGAD, *Horn Review*,

[9] Makoko, C. E. (2018). Economic Integration and Overlapping Membership in Africa Challenges in Achieving the African Economic Community, Uongozi Journal of Management and Development Dynamics Vol. 28(2) (2018) 148 -160

[10] United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, (2006). Assessing Regional Integration in Africa Rationalizing Regional Economic Communities, (Vol. 2) Addis Ababa, United Nations Publications p.46.; Communiqué of The Joint Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and The East African Community, 12 October 2013,

[11] Communiqué of The Joint Meeting Of Foreign Ministers of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and The East African Community, 12 October 201, Addis Ababa

Declaration on Durable Solutions for Refugees in the East and Horn of Africa and agreed to work together on addressing the root causes and drivers of forced displacement in IGAD and EAC regions[12]. This research, therefore, investigated the rationale for the merger of IGAD and EAC as one larger new Greater HORN of Africa REC, and its potential benefits and challenges. To achieve this, policy and academic experts were consulted, and policy documents and academic research were reviewed, and their names are anonymous for the purpose of protecting their privacy.

Conceptualizing Regional Economic Integration and Merging RECs

The desire for development is a common interest of every state. As one of the mechanisms to achieve development, states create harmonious development strategies between them, which is known as regional economic integration. Economic integration is assumed to be multidimensional rather than a single, simple process that involves social, economic, and political aspects[13]; regional economic integration encompasses countries within a specific region coming together to form an alliance or a union, which can include forming trade blocs, customs unions, or political alliances to attain shared economic, political, and social goals[14]. Some, like the EAC, may be more successful in economic aspects, while others, like IGAD, may be more successful in political, peace, and security.

Regional economic integration is the intersection between neo-mercantilism and neo-functionalism, representing a shift from economic nationalism to economic regionalism or from nation-state to region-state[15]. Mercantilism is a preindustrial economic doctrine that restricts the importation of foreign goods and focuses on the accumulation of wealth and resources while maintaining a positive trade balance with other countries[16]. Neo-mercantilism, which is grounded in mercantilism, is a policy regime that encourages exports, discourages imports, controls capital movement, and centralizes currency decisions in the hands of a central government, otherwise known as protectionism. It challenges the laissez-faire principles of traditional trade liberalism[17].

[12] IGAD (2023) 2023 IGAD – EAC Ministerial Declaration on Durable Solutions for Refugees (English)

[13] Tesfaye Molla (2002), Roadblocks to Economic Integration in the IGAD Sub-Regional, MA Thesis, AAU Publication;

[14] PolSci Institute (September 5, 2025) Regional Integration: Strengthening States through Mutual Cooperation

[15] Aniche, E.T., Okeke, V.O.S. and Ukaegbu, V.E. (2009). "Regional Economic Integration in Africa: A Comparative Study of ECOWAS and SADC". International Journal of Africa Culture, Politics and Development, 4 (2), 82-101.

[16] Kenton, Will (2026). Understanding Mercantilism: Key Concepts and Historical Impact. Investopedia;

[17] Helleiner, Eric (April 27, 2023). The Revival of Neomercantilism, Drawn from The Neomercantilists: A Global Intellectual History (Cornell University Press 2021) and The Contested World Economy: The Deep and Global Roots of International Political Economy (Cambridge University Press, 2023); Adams, Alison and Benham, Frank (June 2025). Modern Mercantilism: Trade, Technology, and Strategic Power in the 21st Century, Global Macroeconomic Research Series,

On the other hand, functionalism and neo-functionalism are all variants of theories of integration which presume that in the absence of overarching/supranational institutions, there is cooperation in international system[18]which leads to shifting upward of sovereignty from state to regional or global level facilitated by merger of several states into ultimately a single world government or a supranational institution. Functionalism envisages a broad vision of global cooperation or integration, while neo-functionalism focuses specifically on regional integration, emphasizing the importance of spillover effects, where economic integration may lead to the creation of political institutions that govern the broader political and social aspects of cooperation[19].

Regional integration is achieved through intergovernmental treaties, and it can be understood as a process in which measures are taken to abolish discrimination between economic units among partner states and a state of affairs which is revealed through the non-presence of various forms of discrimination between the national economies in which the institutional combination of separate national economies into large economic blocs or communities is involved[20].

Merging regional communities involves coordination and harmonization of fiscal, monetary, and other policies. Coordination and harmonization provide an occasion to "re-design" economic integrations in order to attain continental-wide integration[21]**.** A good example of a successful merger of RECs is the European Union (EU), which resulted from the coordination and harmonization of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) to form the European Economic Area (EEA)[22]. For this study, merging RECs involves the coordination and harmonization between IGAD and EAC to attain a larger integration that avoids overlapping membership and aims to achieve a larger Greater Horn of Africa (East and Horn) regional community, but by bringing together the strengths of EAC's economic integration practice and IGAD's conflict resolution experiences could create a more comprehensive approach to regional challenge which is critical in addressing the

[18] Okeke, V.O.S and Aniche, E. T (2012). Economic Regionalism and Dependency in Africa: A Study of African Economic Community (AEC) in Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (OMAN Chapter) Vol. 1, No.11.

[19] Goldstein, J. S. & Pevehouse, J. C. (2008) International Relations, New York: Pearson Longman; Okeke, V.O.S and Aniche, E. T (2012); Farrar, Karima J. (n.d). Functionalism vs Neofunctionalism, https://difbetween.com/functionalism-vs-neofunctionalism.p35371/

[20] Makoko (2018). Uongozi Journal of Management and Development Dynamics Vol. 28(2) (2018) 148 -160; See Balassa, B. (2013), , p.1 See also Robson, P. (2002). The Economic of International Integration, London, Routledge, p.1.

[21] United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, (2006). Assessing Regional Integration in Africa Rationalizing Regional Economic Communities, (Vol. 2) Addis Ababa, United Nations Publications p.46.

[22] Oppong, R.F. (2011). Legal Aspects of Economic, Integration in Africa, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.73. See also Makoko (2018)

goal of a peaceful and economically strong greater Horn of African region.

Background and Objectives of IGAD and EAC

The IGAD and EAC are two separate regional organizations in the Greater Horn of Africa, each with their own mandate and membership. However, there are also overlaps and similarities between the two RECs. They are among the building blocks of the African Economic Community recognized by the AU. Both were established to attain economic, political and social development. They are inspired by the objectives of the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community that was signed in 1991 and entered into force in 1994 and the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which was established in 2018.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is an intergovernmental organization in the Horn of Africa. It was founded in 1986 as the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) to address the region's common challenges of drought and food insecurity, but its mandate has since expanded to include a wide range of issues, including regional security, peace building, economic development, and environmental protection. Recently, on June 2023, it was re-revitalized with a view to widening and deepening cooperation and achieve sustainable development[23]. IGAD has played a significant role in promoting regional cooperation and integration in East Africa. It has mediated and helped to resolve a number of conflicts in the region, including the civil wars in Somalia and South Sudan. It also maintains close relations with international partners, such as the United Nations and the European Union.

On the other hand, the East African Community (EAC) with eight member states: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda has a longer history with its establishment dating back to 1917. It has undergone dissolution and re-launch multiple times, with the current iteration established in 1991. The EAC Treaty aims at widening and deepening cooperation in the above-mentioned fields[24]. It has made significant progress towards regional economic integration, including the establishment of a customs union and a common market, as well as the harmonization of fiscal and monetary policies. However, its intra-regional trade remains limited compared to trade with developed countries.

[23] IGAD (2023, Article 2) Treaty Establishing the Inter-Governmental Authority On Development

[24] See Article 51(1) of Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community y as amended on 14th December 2006 and August 2007).

The Rational for Merging IGAD and EAC into one Economic Community

One of the distinctive, appealing, and endangering aspects of African regional economic integrations is overlapping membership. The East and Horn African countries belong to nine groupings (IGAD, EAC, COMESA, EASF, EAFLU, ICGLR, NBI, Arab League, and Red-Sea Forum)[25], out of which three of them are building blocks of the African economic community recognized by the AU. The problem of multi-membership is partly emanated from AU's decision to recognize the overlapping regional blocs such as IGAD, COMESA & EAC as three distinct building blocks of AU. No country in the East and Horn of Africa (Greater Horn) is found to belong to only one REC; they are rather members of different groupings. Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia are members of IGAD and COMESA. On November 24, 2023, EAC admitted Somalia as its full member[26]. So Kenya, Uganda, and Somalia belong to EAC, IGAD, and COMESA. South Sudan is a member of IGAD and EAC. The setback in achieving objectives laid down in economic communities is mainly attributed to multiple memberships,[27]albeit other serious challenges may undermine the move towards a wider integration such as lack of political willingness and commitment, conflict, poor infrastructure, historical, political, economic, and vertical linkages of African economies to Western economies which are stated under section six. Coordination and harmonization of the existing regional blocs is viewed as the solution to address overlapping membership in Africa through merging. Both treaties establishing IGAD[28] and EAC[29] give room for coordination and harmonization of the existing blocs. Besides the 1991 Abuja Treaty[30], the Protocol on Relations between the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Community,[31] and other legal frameworks, provide a closer cooperation and harmonization between RECs to form a united African Economic

[25] These groupings are: IGAD, EAC, COMESA, EASF, EAFLU, ICGLR, NBI, Arab League, and Red-Sea Forum

[26] Communiqué of the 23rd Ordinary Summit of the EAC Heads of State, 24th November 2023, Arusha. United Republic of Tanzania

[27] Makoko (2018)

[28] Article 42 (1) & (2) of Treaty establishing IGAD states "1. The Member States reiterate their desire for and commitment to a wider unity of Africa and regard IGAD's economic integration as a step towards the achievement of the objectives of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. 2. IGAD shall foster co-operative arrangements with other regional, continental, and international organisations whose activities have a bearing on the objectives of IGAD".

[29] Article 130(3) of the EAC Treaty states that, "…the Community shall foster co-operative arrangements with other regional and international organizations whose activities have a bearing on the objectives of the Community".

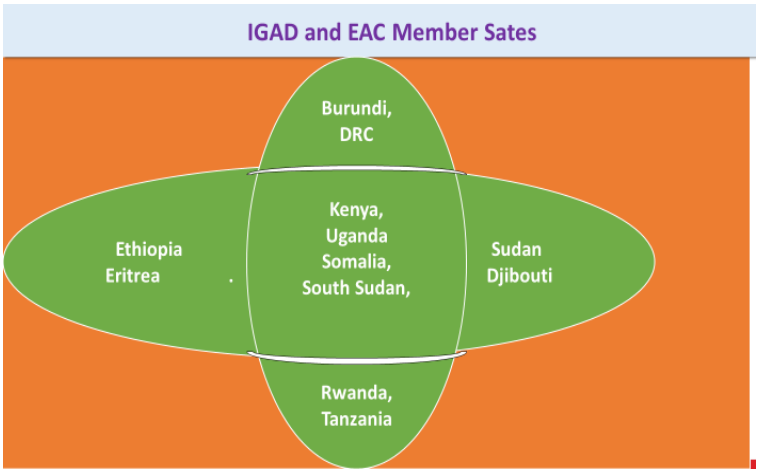
[30] The Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community states that "Regional Economic Communities inters, may enter into cooperation arrangements under which they undertake joint programmes or activities or more closely co-ordinate their policies, measures and programmes."

[31] Article 5(1) (d) of Protocol on Relations between the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Community (RECs), 2008 envisages that RECs are expected to merge and become absorbed to form the united AEC.

Community.

Recently, there have been some discussions[32] about whether it would make point to amalgamate the two regional economic blocks into a single economic community. The merging of these two blocs has been suggested as a way to reinforce a wider and single regional integration in East Africa and the Horn of Africa (the Greater Horn) so as to increase welfare in order to satisfy the desire for development of the region. As Gathii[33] notes, coordination and harmonization will streamline the existing African Economic Communities, hence avoiding overlapping membership in Africa. With four IGAD members also belonging to the EAC, EAC seeks Ethiopia and Sudan to join the bloc[34]. Hence, it seems the continued existence of two separate regional organizations is increasingly shaky[35].

It appears that it is a good way to bring countries closer together, but when we investigate how they work and what they focus on, it is not such a clear-cut choice. It's worth asking the question of whether merging them would actually help or just make things more complicated.



One of the main arguments in favor of merging IGAD and the EAC is that some countries belong to both groups[36]. For example, four of the IGAD member states (Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, and Somalia) are also members of the EAC, making a merger or closer collaboration more feasible[37].

[32] Sheekh, Nuur Mohamud (November 25, 2024), Prime Let's merge EAC and Igad, https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/opinion/columnists/let-s-merge-eac-and-igad-4835452; Andualem, 2019; Horn Review, March 2025

[33] Gathii, J. T. (2011) African Regional Trade Agreements as Legal Regimes (vol. 6), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

[34] Ogboye, Mariam and Ochieng, Beverly (May 7, 2024). Expansion versus Cohesion: The East African Community's Turbulent Journey to Greater Unity, sis.org/analysis/expansion-versus-cohesion-east-african-communitys-turbulent-journey-greater-unity#:~:text=Similarly%2C%20in%20the%20wake%20of,and%20hostility%20among%20member%20states.

[35] Yonas Yezezew, Horn Review, March 2025

[36] Interview with Z,emedkun Lemesa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Yenealem Ayele, Hawassa University , 2025; W, 2023

[37] Interview with Selamu Belete, IGAD, Yenealem Ayele, Hawassa University and Tamrat Temesgen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,, 2025

Merging is a common theme among many of the RECs in Africa, with many countries appreciating overlapping membership, which is also the case for the East and Horn African communities. A single economic community might have more weight in trade negotiations and international diplomacy. Moreover, the EAC has done a lot of work focusing on economic integration, such as establishing a customs union and a common market, as well as the harmonization of fiscal and monetary policies, and building institutions such as a court and a legislature, while IGAD has built experience in development, peacebuilding, and security issues[38]. Both of these issues are crucial to achieving the continental goal of a connected, more prosperous, peaceful, and economically united Africa[39]. Bringing together these strengths and complementary experiences in resolving the region's issues could create a more comprehensive approach to regional challenges[40], and it will be a key step towards achieving the aspirations of the continental customs union and African Economic Community (AEC).

Given the current global dynamics and crises that remain to evolve, and the decrease in donor contributions, African RECs should prioritize broader regional integration more than ever.[41] In a net shell, while the EAC has made strides in creating a Customs Union, Common Market, and is working towards a Monetary Union, IGAD has a strong mandate in conflict prevention, resolution, and mitigation[42]. Yet, harmonizing the strengths of the two can drive regional economic integration and stability in the greater Horn (the East and Horn Africa)[43]. Overall, the merger of IGAD and the EAC may be considered as a step towards greater regional integration, by combining the experience of IGAD on peace and security with the success story of economic integration of the EAC though addressing the divergent interests might be challenging.

Moreover, the legal and practical grounds for the merger are buttressed by international treaties[44] and communiqués[45]. As indicated under Article 3(m) of the African Union Constitutive Act, the need to rationalize the activities of RECs for the AU to achieve its

[38] Otieno, W. (2020). Development and Security in the IGAD Region. Journal of African Studies, 12(3), 45-60.
[39] Interview with , Zemedkun Lemesa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kassech Deribew, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Yenealem Ayele, Hawassa University, 2025
[40] Interview with Zemedkun Lemesa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Yenealem Ayele, Hawassa University , 2025; and W, 2023; Yonas Yezezew, Horn Review, March 2025
[41] Yonas Yezezew, Horn Review, March 2025; interview with Negus Delele, Mnistry of Foreign Affairs and Selamu Belete, IGAD, 2025
[42] Intergovernmental Authority on Development, (2022). Intergovernmental Authority on Development: Regional Trade Policy 2022-2026,
[43] Yonas Yezezew, Horn Review, March 2025
[44] Such as the Abuja Treaty of 1991, the Constitutive Act of the African Union,
[45] Communique Of The Joint Meeting Of Foreign Ministers Of The Inter-Governmental Authority On Development (Igad) And The East African Community 12 October 2013 Addis Ababa

objectives of accelerating the continental integration process is well recognized.

The Benefits of Merging the Two Blocks for the Region

~~Regional~~ Economic regionalism has been primarily explained by domestic factors, such as economic benefits resulting from static and dynamic effects of economic integration in a regional context[46], but there are also political, social, and legal benefits embodied in economic integration. So, the creation of a larger East and Horn African Community is a vehicle to realize a prosperous and peaceful region[47].

The integration of the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) presents a significant opportunity for enhanced regional cooperation and development in the Greater Horn. A potential merger or closer collaboration minimizes costs arising from overlap and could create a more powerful and comprehensive regional bloc. By merging into a single REC, they would combine their strengths, optimize resources, and position themselves as a driving force for regional and continental integration[48]. The following are some of the opportunities of merging the two organizations into a single bloc.

Reducing Overlapping Mandates:

IGAD and EAC have overlapping mandates in areas like trade, customs, transport, communications, agriculture, and natural resources. Harmonizing these policies would reduce duplication and create a more cohesive regional framework[49].

[46] Kang, Y. (2016). Development of Regionalism: New Criteria and Typology, Journal of Economic Integration jei, Vol.31 No.2, 234-274 http://dx.doi.org/10.11130/jei.2016.31.2.234

[47] Achie. Aniche, E. (2015). The 'Calculus' of Integration or Differentiation in Africa: Post neo-functionalism and the Future of African Regional Economic Communities (RECs), International Affairs and Global Strategy, www.iiste.org ISSN 2224-574X (Paper) ISSN 2224-8951 (Online) Vol.36; see also Andualem Zewdie (2019)

[48] Sheekh, Nuur Mohamud (November 25, 2024), Prime Let's merge EAC and Igad, https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/opinion/columnists/let-s-merge-eac-and-igad-4835452

[49] Interview with Mr. Zemedkun Lemesa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Walelign Wario, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, . 2025

Furthermore, both organizations' integration efforts and objectives in line with the African Union's Constitutive Act, which underlines intensifying political and socio-economic integration,[50] requires the merging of the new organizations to complement legal and policy frameworks and establish a coherent regional governance system.



Several studies[51] have recognized the problem of duplication and overlapping memberships in RECs, which results in undermining integration and creating a complicated web of competing commitments and resulting in high costs of trade between members' countries, in effect undermining integration[52]. A merger would therefore not only be a calculated action but also an economic requisite[53]. Merging IGAD and EAC would reduce these financial strains by consolidating memberships and streamlining funding requirements. Coordinating budgetary processes would provide the opportunity to ensure financial accountability while avoiding duplication. Merging would create a more balanced, efficient regional system, reducing administrative redundancies and ensuring resources are used effectively[54].

Enhancing Peace and Security:

Politically speaking, merging the two would be a vehicle to realize a broader, prosperous, and peaceful Greater Horn African Community[55], as the establishment of the East African Standby Force served as a regional mechanism to counter violent conflicts in Africa. IGAD has a strong focus on peace and security, while the EAC has made strides in

[50] Interview with Yenealem Ayele, Hawassa University ,Zemedkun Lemesa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025; Horn Review, March 2025

[51] Tesfaye Molla (2002), Roadblocks to Economic Integration in the IGAD Sub-Regional, MA Thesis, AAU Publication; Ndomo, Atieno (2009). Regional Economic Communities in Africa A Progress Overview, Study Commissioned by GTZ; PSC Report (August 05, 2022). Untangling Africa's mixed bag of regional organisations. https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/untangling-africas-mixed-bag-of-regional-organisations; Söderbaum, Fredrik and Stapel, Sören (2022). Agenda 2063 and the role of Africa's overlapping regional organisations, DISCUSSION PAPER No. 317, ECDPM Making Policy Work; Muhabie Mekonnen Mengistu (2015) Multiplicity of African Regional Economic Communities and Overlapping Memberships: A Challenge for African Integration. Institute of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences, Pan African University, Yaoundé, Cameroon

[52] Ndomo (2009); Interview with Dr. Mohammed Seid, Bahr Dar University, 2023

[53] Yonas Yezezew, Horn Review, March 2025

[54] Yonas Yezezew, Horn Review, March 2025

[55] Andualem Zewdie (2019) "Intergovernmental Authority on Development and East African Community: Viability of Merger," International Journal of African Development: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 7. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/ijad/vol5/iss2/7

regional stability. The merger would create a more comprehensive approach to addressing security challenges in East Africa**,** leading to enhanced peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and counterterrorism efforts. So, such a merger would be a vehicle to realize a broader, prosperous, and peaceful Greater Horn of Africa Community[56]. In that regard, in the domain of peace and security, it is worth mentioning the establishment of the East African Standby Force (EASF, then called the EASFCOM) by members of the two blocs in 2007 as a regional mechanism to counter violent conflicts in Africa[57].

In a nutshell, a larger, more merged and combined bloc could augment greater economic and political integration. Merging IGAD's strong point in peace and security with the EAC's progressive economic integration framework could generate a more comprehensive alliance, and effective regional body. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that IGAD focuses on political stability, security, and humanitarian challenges, and has a strong mandate in conflict prevention, resolution, and mitigation. The EAC can benefit from IGAD's expertise in these areas, especially considering the constant security challenges in some parts of the region. As Yonas (2025, p1), rightly stated out[58] "IGAD has worked on critical regional issues like drought control and conflict resolution, but its limited resources often hinder its impact." EAC, with its stronger institutional framework and focus on economic integration, could provide the necessary leverage to improve regional peace and security." The merger of IGAD and EAC could lead to improved coordination and cooperation in achieving regional integration goals. By strengthening their efforts, the RECs can synchronize policies, reduce duplication, and make more efficient decision-making processes, thereby smoothing the free movement of goods, services, and people across the region.

Addressing Emerging Problems and Augmenting Bargaining Power:

We are in a dynamic, competitive, and uncertain world. In a period of political and economic uncertainty, global crises, and declining donor assistance and grants, Africa's regional economic communities (RECs) must revisit their outlook on regional integration[59]. Similarly, the involvement of the middle powers and great powers in the region, which has often led to competition between foreign powers for domination, has

[56] Andualem Zewdie (2019) "Intergovernmental Authority on Development and East African Community: Viability of Merger," International Journal of African Development: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 7. Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/ijad/vol5/iss2/7

[57] Robinson, Colin (2014). International Peacekeeping (2014): The Eastern Africa Standby Force: History and Prospects, International Peacekeeping, DOI: 10. 1080/ 13533312. 2013. 866451

[58] Yonas Yezezew, Horn Review, March 2025

[59] Sheekh, Nuur Mohamud (November 25, 2024), Prime Let's merge EAC and Igad, https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/opinion/columnists/let-s-merge-eac-and-igad-4835452

had devastating consequences for the Greater Horn region[60].

In addressing these rivalries, the evolving new form of globalization and the geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa make the merger of the two blocs in the Horn and East Africa even more demanding[61]. A combined EAC-IGAD could have a stronger voice in African Union affairs.

As stated above, following the IGAD-EAC High Level Ministerial Conference, Members States have signed the Munyonyo Declaration on Durable Solutions for Refugees in the East and Horn of Africa and agreed to work together on addressing the root causes and drivers of forced displacement in IGAD and EAC regions which is one of the current critical problem of the Greater Horn region.

Besides, the increase in the member countries would help increase the bargaining power of the Greater Horn region and make dynamic gains from regional blocs. Both RECs face challenges related to migration, climate change, and humanitarian crises. Integrating their efforts could lead to more effective responses and resilience-building strategies[62].

A joint digital integration project aims to boost connectivity, access, and economic growth by harmonizing digital policies and regulations[63]. This could facilitate smoother cross-border trade and communication. The merging will also help achieve the objective of each vision. For example, IGAD's Vision 2050 seeks to transform the IGAD region into upper upper-middle-income economy and an industrialized region to serve as a continental beacon of regional peace, stability, and security by 2050. Harmonization and coordination will augment their efforts to achieve this vision better.

Enhancing Economic Integration:

The merger would create a larger market with a combined GDP and population, attracting increased investments and fostering economic growth. Together, IGAD and EAC constitute a market of more than 500 million inhabitants. By aligning trade policies, removing trade barriers, and facilitating cross-border infrastructure development, the merged entity could enhance regional trade and create opportunities for businesses to

[60] Ylonen, A. (2022). A Scramble of external powers and local agency in the Horn of Africa. CIBOB, Newsletter, Notes International 280

[61] Ibid

[62] Interview with Kassech Deribew, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2025;

[63] The Cooperator (September 12, 2024). EAC and IGAD to roll out digital integration project to boost connectivity, access and economic growth. Retrieved from https://thecooperator.news/eac-and-igad-to-roll-out-digital-integration-project-to-boost-connectivity-access-and-economic-growth/

thrive[64].

EAC principally distillates on economic integration and trade. The EAC has made strides in creating a Customs Union, Common Market, and is working towards a Monetary Union. IGAD, on the other hand, focuses on trade, transport, and communication, and promotes free movement of goods, services, and people. Integrating these efforts could streamline trade, reduce barriers, and foster a more robust regional economy. The EAC and IGAD, two critical RECs in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, have an unprecedented opportunity to join forces, leveraging their respective strengths to drive sustainable peace and development and advance regional economic integration, and promote the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)[65].

The merger would allow for better coordination of development programs and projects. Combining the expertise and resources of both organizations would enable more effective implementation of initiatives related to infrastructure development, energy, agriculture, education, and healthcare.

The Possible Challenges of Merging IGAD and EAC

Though the wider integration brings about benefits, there are also challenges. As noted by some writers,[66] the road towards the envisioned merger of the RECs may be constrained by factors such as conflict, poor infrastructure, historical, political, economic, and vertical linkages of African economies to Western economies, and lack of political willingness and commitment, which potentially undermine the move towards a wider integration.

Political Will

Merging regional organizations requires political will and commitment in terms of ceding power to the merging regional body, meeting the human and financial resource commitments made and incorporating regionally adopted policies into national programs, and adopting a coherent policy framework and a consistent strategy that attempts gradually to eliminate the mismatch between national and regional policy objectives which is not only required at the initial stages but it must be sustained over a

[64] UNECA (2020) AFRICAN INTEGRATION REPORT 2020: The Status of Regional Integration in Africa Advancing Intra-African Trade for Post-Covid Recovery, Retrieved from https://portal.africa-union.org/DVD/Documents/DOC-AU-WD/EA27095%20_E.pdf

[65] Interview with Tamrat Temesgen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Kassech Deribew, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025

[66] Aniche (2015); Andualem (2019)

long period. The success of any integration effort depends on the political will of member states and their commitment to working together. A unified economic community calls for fundamental political and economic decisions at all levels, at the sub-regional and national levels.[67] The process can begin at the national level. Thus, political will and commitment are the greatest challenges.

The unrelenting lack of political will and commitment in terms of unresponsive to action for more integration, and the mistrust and suspicion among the member states may be one of the critical challenges. Let alone the merger of the two blocs, members may withdraw from the exiting bloc. For example, Eritrea previously left the IGAD in 2007, during its border dispute with Ethiopia. It only rejoined in 2023. However, it again withdrew its membership from IGAD on 12 December 2025. The withdrawal came as tensions have been increasing between Eritrea and Ethiopia, two countries that have a long history of deadly conflict[68]. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda are members of EAC and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Due to a disagreement between Rwanda and DRC, the former withdrew its membership from ECCAS in June 2025. Rwanda's withdrawal from ECCAS marks a defining moment in its foreign policy that places sovereignty above membership to regional bloc. Rwanda condemned Congo's "instrumentalization" of the bloc and saw "no justification for remaining in an organization whose current functioning runs counter to its founding principles." [69] Though this occurred in another bloc, the recent decision by Rwanda as well as the Eritrean government indicated that because of dispute between member states, members can withdraw any time from bloc, and hence the ongoing tensions and a lack of trust between the members of regional blocs remain a challenge, which spill over into the regional blocs and affect their attendance, commitment and fulfilment of membership obligation[70].

Divergent institutional mandates and priorities:

While both organizations share goals, their specific mandates and priorities may differ. This may be an obstacle for the merger. On the other hand, IGAD and the EAC were set up with different goals in mind. The EAC's main focus is economic and political

[67] Jiboku, P. A. (2015). The Challenge of Regional Economic Integration in Africa: Theory and Reality December 2015 Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review 3(4):5

[68] BBC (December 12, 2025). Eritrea quits regional bloc as tensions rise with Ethiopia, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly555k8de3o

[69] Reuters, June 8, 2025

[70] Ilunga, Patrick & Gahigi, Moses K. (June 11, 2025) Unwilling partners: Congo in EAC, Rwanda in ECCAS, *The East African.*

integration[71]. It has concrete plans to create a customs union, a common market, and even a monetary union in the future[72]. It has also gone to quite some lengths to achieve these goals over the past few decades since its foundation. On the other hand, IGAD's mandate is broader and includes peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and managing environmental crises. This is especially important in countries like Somalia and South Sudan, where conflicts and instability remain serious challenges[73]. In more recent years, there has been greater instability from its more stable members, making peace and security its top priority. This is also highly influenced by the nature of the members of each bloc. Because the two organizations have such different priorities, they operate in various ways and on different timelines[74]. Aligning the legal frameworks, policies, and administrative structures of two distinct organizations would be complex, and balancing the diverse interests and objectives of member states in a merged entity could be challenging.

Different Levels of Integration

The disparities among RECs and differences in the pace of progress bring us to another challenge among the two blocs' member states. The level of integration varies among the RECs[75]. ECA is one of the most integrated RECs in Africa, with a score of 0.73, performing particularly well in trade integration due to the implementation of free trade zones or common external tariffs[76]. On the other hand, IGAD is slightly above the average score of 0.5, partly due to a lack of plans or programs in certain integration dimensions, such as free movement and financial and monetary integration.

[71] Interview with Kassech Deribew, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025, and Walelign Wario, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023

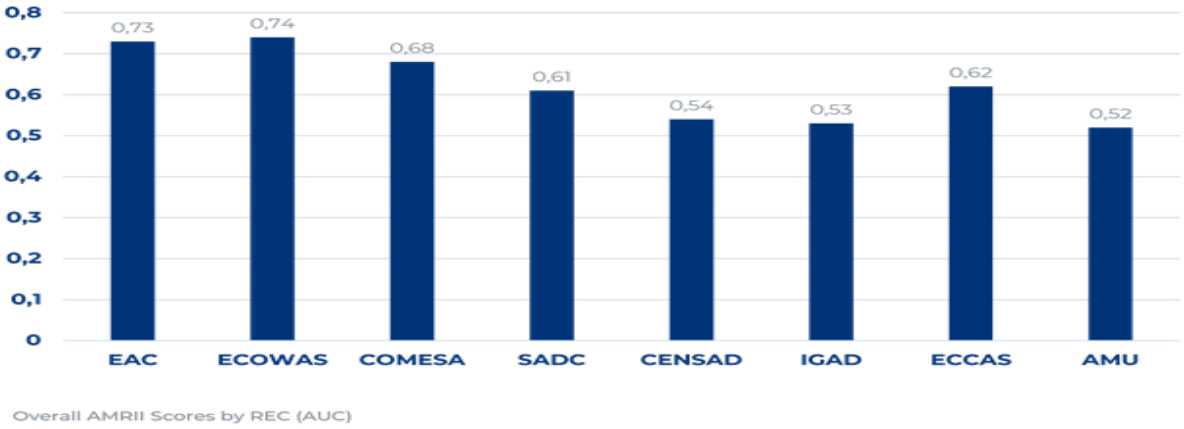
[72] EAC Secretariat (2023). East African Community Integration Report. Arusha: EAC.

[73] Williams, P. D. (2017). Conflict and Peacebuilding in East Africa. London: Zed Books

[74] Interview with Tamrat Temesgen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025

[75] Louw-Vaudran, Liesl (2022), Africa's mishmash of regional blocs doesn't add enough value. Published on 09 August 2022 in ISS Today https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africas-mishmash-of-regional-blocs-doesnt-add-enough-value

[76] Gómez, Asier Ruiz and Miyares, Juan (July 10, 2024) African Regional Economic Communities: what they are and why they matter. https://www.alg-global.com/blog/logistics/african-regional-economic-communities-what-they-are-and-why-they-matte



Source: Gómez, A. R. and Miyares, J. (July 10, 2024)[77]

Besides, the EAC countries tend to be more economically stable and politically aligned. IGAD by contrast, includes countries that face ongoing conflicts and significant development hurdles[78]. The EAC itself is still working through the complexities of deeper integration among its members. And IGAD is still working through the complexities of having a diverse population across many borders. As both regional blocs are at different stages, and union between the two would be best if they were reach the same level so that the transition is smooth[79]. Until then, it would be best for both to share experiences, learn from one another, and to pursue their respective goals to ensure the success of the African Economic Community.

Conclusion

The merger of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) to form a larger Greater Horn African Community could drive the achievement of the objectives of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community and promote the African Continental Free Trade Area. The merger presents both benefits and challenges. Combining IGAD's strengths in mediation and conflict management with EAC's expertise in trade and economic policy would create a more unified and stable region. However, overcoming political rivalries and reconciling different perspectives will be essential to overcoming the challenges ahead. Challenges such as economic disparities, trade imbalances, weak institutional organization, and

[77] Ibid
[78] Mwagiru, M. (2018). Regional Integration and Peacebuilding in East Africa. Nairobi: Institute of Security Studies
[79] Interview with Yenealem Ayele, Hawassa University 2025

political instability need to be addressed for a successful merger.

From past experience, differences in economic development may lead to unequal advantages, which could cause resistance among members. Diplomatic efforts should focus on aligning common objectives and enhancing people-to-people interactions to foster interdependence in sectors like trade, security, and development. As a final note, the ongoing efforts to reinforce cooperation between the two regional blocs, along with the support of member states and international partners, will be crucial in determining the future of a single larger regional integration in the Greater Horn of Africa.

The following strategies can be suggested to address the challenges to enhance the possibility of effective merger**.**

i) Without political commitment and willingness by the top political leaders let alone merging between two different regional blocs, simple bilateral cooperation cannot be realized. So, both RECs and their member states need to devise and reconsider their concrete commitments which is sustained over a long period of time and not easily be backtrack towards a viable merging. To establish a common ground, they need to have a continuous discussion and meeting among leaders to solve differences. Addressing disparities in these domains is vital for ensuring a fair and balanced integrated system.

ii) The Abuja Treaty (1991), which has been in operation since 1994, aims to build the African economic community gradually through harmonization, coordination and effective integration of Africa's RECs. The AU Commission is charged with monitoring the continent's integration process and has the mandate to speed up plans for economic integration including merging as it helps achieve the continental integration. Hence, the AU can play a more active role to address the challenges encountered by Africa's RECs via designing a mechanisms to help merging RECs as to how to improve their merging process and moving forward. For example, to address problems such as conflicting mandates and diverge interest, it needs considerable dialogue among REC members and the AU, the use of mechanisms of coordination and harmonization of the policies and programs of the IGAD and reach agreements with EAC and COMESA through joint programming and partnership undertakings. The AU can also have a coordinating role in setting on how the priorities of each REC can be addressed.

iii) The potential for integrating EAC and IGAD is significant. The ongoing efforts to strengthen cooperation between the two organizations, along with the support of

member states and international partners, will be crucial in determining the future of regional integration in Greater Horn of Africa. Lessons from relatively successful African integration efforts such as SADC and ECOWAS emphasize the need for clear leadership, robust institutional frameworks, and a shared vision[i]. If applied to Greater Horn Africa's context, these lessons increase the chances of a successful merger.

iv) Lastly, merging two regional organizations involves integrating administrative structures, legal frameworks, and operational procedures. This process can be complex and time-consuming, and thus requires careful planning and coordination. With careful planning, active participation, and effective coordination, the merger has the potential to create a more prosperous and integrated Greater Horn Africa. Addressing disparities in these domains is vital for ensuring a fair and balanced integrated system. Until the two blocs reach the similar level of integration, the challenges remain. Hence, as stated above, it would be best for both to share experiences, learn from one another, and pursue their respective goals to ensure the success of the African Economic Community