



## POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN AFRICA

**PEDRO**

### *IGAD and the governance agenda: The region may not always be a catalyst<sup>1</sup>*

This paper sets out to better inform stakeholders about why the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and national level stakeholders operate as they do in promoting governance reforms. It concludes with implications for support.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Political traction, member states interests and potential**

The Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) has evolved from a group of states primarily determined to fight drought and desertification, into a Regional Economic Community (REC) recognised by the African Union (AU) with an important role in conflict resolution and management. However, despite the political dimension of these conflicts, IGAD's role in the governance agenda remains limited, with a small and under-resourced department responsible for promoting this agenda.

The IGAD Political Affairs Programme (PAP) was established in 2008 under the IGAD Peace and Security Division (PSD). PAP is tasked with contributing to peace and security in the IGAD region through preventive diplomacy, focusing on democracy, governance, elections, and human rights, with the goal of paving the way for gradual political integration of the region. As PAP is an integral part of the PSD, there is an opportunity to avoid rivalry or competition between political affairs and peace and security.

Yet, despite being one of IGAD's oldest programmes, various obstacles have turned PAP into the least active programme. A lack of emphasis on governance by the institutional leadership has made PAP a one-person show, even a decade after its establishment. IGAD documents that define its mandate on governance have not been formally adopted by the decision-making structures. Adoption of a draft Protocol aiming to strengthen IGAD's mandate in the area of governance remains elusive, despite several adjustments during three rounds of negotiations. As a result, IGAD does not formally have a properly formulated governance strategy of its own.

The work of IGAD on governance has largely emerged through a peace and security instrument, the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN). In the new IGAD strategy for 2016-2020, governance has been identified as one of five sectors that will be monitored. Here too, assessments by CEWARN have reportedly often not

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on a March 2017 background paper by ECDPM, available at [www.ecdpm.org/pedro/backgroundpapers](http://www.ecdpm.org/pedro/backgroundpapers). The Policy Brief and background paper were prepared under the BMZ-financed project on the *Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations (PEDRO)*. Authors: Faten Aggad ([fa@ecdpm.org](mailto:fa@ecdpm.org)). Project team leader: Bruce Byiers ([bby@ecdpm.org](mailto:bby@ecdpm.org)).

<sup>2</sup> Other IGAD-related papers cover peace and security, trade and transport integration, and food security.

led to effective action. Likewise, while CEWARN theoretically allows for civil society participation, the limited and often closing space for civil society in member states raises questions about those organisations that are allowed to participate.

But the governance agenda is much broader, and also covers electoral processes, the transfer of power, sectoral governance performance, and key public functions of transparency and accountability. Many of these governance challenges touch on sensitive areas for national governments. IGAD member states guard their sovereignty from outside interferences, including from regional or continental organisations to which they belong. Given the long history of intra and inter-state conflicts in the region, member states choose to focus on 'hard' security risks in order to contain the costs of spillovers of violent conflicts. Long-term 'soft' security issues associated with poor governance receive less attention. In this regard, consensus among member states is more easily found for peace and security action than for the aspirational regional governance agenda.

Election observations are routinely conducted by IGAD and potentially represent an area with traction. In this regard, IGAD has played a significant role. It monitored the implementation of the Sudanese Comprehensive Peace Agreement, including on electoral processes and a referendum on independence. Member states have requested IGAD in such conflictual transformation process to engage in governance and election-related activities. Nonetheless, the region has so far failed to agree on common standards that guide its engagement in electoral processes. The ad hoc arrangements have cast doubts over the independence of the IGAD election observation missions.

From its inception, IGAD has been heavily funded, and influenced by donor finance. With the exception of Kenya and Ethiopia, member states regularly don't pay their membership contributions to IGAD. At the same time, international partners have been reluctant to support governance activities because of a perceived lack at national level of commitment, political will and results in the area of governance. Overall, the IGAD Secretariat continues to be largely a compliant servant of the member states and does not challenge the status quo in member states' governance, except in cases of threats of regional violent spillovers and political instability.

## Implications for support

### **1. The limited degree of external funding for the IGAD governance agenda reflects the limited political traction in the region:**

- IGAD has signalled its adherence to continental and international norms with respect to good governance.
- Yet governments have not embraced this agenda nor implemented it at national level, except in those areas where the immediate and visible costs of regional conflicts and political instability pose a threat, especially in the 'swing states' Ethiopia and Kenya.
- Any traction for the IGAD governance agenda will depend on unlikely short-term political opening in IGAD member states, with little role for the IGAD organs given the poor levels of trust and current interstate relations.

### **2. This implies the need to develop longer term engagement strategies:**

- Strengthening core governance functions of accountability and transparency in IGAD can help lay a foundation for improved trust and governance between key institutional actors.
- Support strategies should explore - and build on - opportunities offered by coalitions that seek to solve cross-country governance challenges in specific (sub)sectors or problem areas and facilitate linkages with the regional organisation.

Behind the formal structures of regional organisations is a messy world of regional power and politics. This messiness is often difficult to capture in the language of development cooperation and institutional development. Working with regional organisations and their programmes therefore implies engaging with complex, multi-level power and interest dynamics.

PEDRO, the Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations, is an ECDPM project that looks at the politics behind regional organisations, and the structural factors, institutions and incentives that ultimately define the way in which countries and different stakeholders engage at a regional level. PEDRO covers 17 African regional organisations and 11 policy areas. For each of these, ECDPM has applied a political economy approach to help understand the dynamics and their effects in different regions and policy areas.

The studies are framed around three key questions: the first relates to the political traction of the regional organisation as this helps assess whether the regional organisation has enabled regional decision making and if it has contributed to implementation. The second focuses on the member state interests in engaging with the regional organisation, especially the more resourceful and powerful ones (the so-called 'swing states'). The third looks at the areas with most traction where regional and national level interests seem to be most aligned for regional outcomes.

The reports aim to present information and insights that can help regional stakeholders navigate the obstacles and better respond to reform opportunities. Rather than providing specific operational recommendations, the political economy approach encourages more reality-based discussions among practitioners and reformers about feasible ways to address regional challenges. It is hoped that this may help tailor the ambitions and approaches of donors and reformers and help identify ways to support national or regional champions or coalitions to take regional cooperation and integration forward.