

*Original Research Articles*

# The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR): Achievements, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

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The paper critically examined the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) an organization that was formed to solve conflict issues between member states within the Great Lakes Region, after recognizing the fact that political instability has a considerable regional dimension that required a concerted effort. The Secondary method of data collection was used to gather data from articles, and books, journals, among others on the subject matter. As a framework of analysis, the paper adopted the theory of liberal Intergovernmentalism. Findings from the work showed that the ICGLR has established itself as a regional mediator between the various national interests of the signatory states and offered an urgently-needed platform for regional networking through its bodies and regular meetings. Also with its regional initiative against the illegal exploitation of natural resources, ICGLR has created an important policy and action framework to prevent trade in conflict resources and promoted good governance in the region as well as democratic ideals. However, the ICGLR has had its challenges which are lack of commitment from member states and unwillingness to put the Dar-es-Salaam, Nairobi, and Addis Ababa agreements into action, financial constraints, and overlapping membership of international organizations. The paper recommends among others the need for member nations to show more commitment towards the organization to bring the Dar-es-Salaam, Nairobi, and Addis Ababa agreements into action, and the need for the member states to do better in their financial contributions.

**Keywords:** Achievements, Challenges, Conference, Greatlakes, Prospects

## INTRODUCTION

In Africa generally and in the Great Lakes region, in particular, poverty, weak institutions, and lack of security reforms have affected peace in the region, therefore, militarising the region (Levine and Nagar, 2015). As a result of the militarised space in the region, economic, political and social activities have been affected and have made people leave in perpetual fear and danger as their lives are threatened both by armed groups, and sometimes security forces of their governments, and by breakdowns in the ability of states to provide public

services and protection from common crime. Iddris and Jobins (2015) argument accentuates this when they argue that twenty-five(25) years ago, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were engulfed by a series of wars that drew in armies from across the continent, froze economic growth, and triggered some of the worst atrocities seen after the end of the Second World War. According to them, the genocide in Rwanda, the civil war in Burundi, and the wars and state collapse in the DRC have claimed millions

of lives and cost billions of dollars in assistance and lost opportunities. For example, in the Rwanda crisis - the most notable among the conflicts that have had cross-border impacts or origins, more than 800,000 lives were lost (Kanyangara,2016). Other Challenges in the region include arms trafficking, terrorism and organised crime which have caused cross-border causes and consequences and made the region unstable. These conflicts constitute a major threat to international peace and security. So in many parts of the Great lakes, fundamental conflict dynamics remain.

Several attempts have been made to address the highlighted challenges in terms of exploring and implementing creative and collective approaches for the prevention, management and resolution of disputes in the region. Among these attempts is the establishment of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) in 2004, by 12 nations in this region in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU). Although the processes began in 2000 when the United Nations Security Council, as stated in its resolutions 1291 and 1304, called for an International Conference on peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes region. What followed was the establishment of the Secretariat of the International Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, under the umbrella of the United Nations and the African Union (Devex., 2020). The mandate of ICGLR is to foster peace and security in the region, promote good governance, promote democracy and humanitarian and social issues through its protocol on internally displaced persons within the region and also has the mandate of promoting gender equality and campaigning against gender-based violence.

The problem of this paper, therefore, is to examine this organisation-the ICGLR with a view of finding out what it has been able to achieve within its operational mandates since its inception in 2004 and as well establish the attendant challenges or problems of the organisation. Also, the work attempts to make suggestions on what the organisation can do to make her better prepared in achieving her objectives.

## Theoretical Framework

This work adopts the liberal Inter-governmental theory. Liberal Inter-governmental theory is one of the key theories in the study of regional integration. Inter-governmentalism theory as a regional integration theory was espoused by Stanley Hoffmann in 1966 and further developed by Andrew Moravcsik in the year 1993. This theory according to Olarimiki (2018) sees states and their national governments as the primary actors in the integration process. Therefore, it is the government that controls the level and speed of integration. Nugent cited in Cini (2007) opined that the theory is centered on the view that nation-states are the key actors in international

affairs and the key political relations between states are channeled primarily via national governments.

The following are the basic assumptions of Inter-governmental theory:

i. That (at any given moment and in any given issue) varied views about state interests internally and varied actors that represent the state externally aggregate to relatively coherent preference functions and strategic calculations.

ii. States are purposive and at least rational. Rationalism is an individualist or agency assumption: actors calculate the utility of alternative courses of action and choose the one that satisfies (or maximizes) their utility under the circumstances. Agreement to cooperate, or to establish international institutions, is explained as a collective outcome of interdependent (strategically) rational state choices realized through intergovernmental negotiation (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig, 2019).

Inter-Governmental theory also argues that states decisions to cooperate internationally can be explained in a three-stage framework: states first define preferences, then bargain to substantive agreements, and finally create (or adjust) institutions to commit to and secure those outcomes in the face of future political uncertainty (Moravcsik,1989) Furthermore, each stage is distinct and each can be explained by a separate theory. Thus cooperation, or its failure, emerges only at the end of the multiclausal sequence (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig, 2019). The three-stage framework according to Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig (2019) are;

### Forming National Preferences

From the intergovernmental theory perspective, the fundamental goals of states – or ‘state preferences’ – and the strategies they use to achieve them are neither fixed nor uniform: they vary across issues, states and time according to issue-specific societal interdependence and domestic institutions.

### Reaching a Substantive Bargain

The national preferences of different states rarely converge precisely. To explain the nature of the substantive policies that emerge from negotiations among states with different preferences, inter-governmental theory deploys (following rationalist institutionalism) a bargaining theory of international cooperation. States must overcome collectively suboptimal outcomes and achieve coordination or cooperation for mutual benefit, yet at the same time, they must decide how the mutual gains of cooperation are

distributed among the states. In this context, bargaining theory argues that the outcome of international negotiations, that is, whether and on which terms cooperation comes about, depends on the relative bargaining power of the actors.

### **Creating Regional Institutions**

Given states are prepared to strike a substantive agreement to coordinate policy and seek to explain the establishment and design of international institutions. To do so, the inter-governmental theory relies mainly on a 'regime-theoretical' ('rational' or 'neo-liberal institutionalist') account, which conceives of international institutions as instruments to cope with unintended, unforeseen and often unwanted consequences that arise when states commit to coordinate their policies.

In intergovernmental theory, actors like interest groups and others can influence their government's policies domestically and they do not have the power to cause their governments to integrate as states are independent decision-makers because they are legitimate entities (Olarimiki, 2018). Synoptically, Inter-governmentalism is about states forming cooperation through preferences, bargaining, and regional institutions and cooperation by states and can be Bilateral, multilateral or tripartite in nature. The issues raised in this theory find relevance in the ICGLR in terms of the reason for its formation.

### **Background to the Formation of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)**

The ICGLR is an organisation for the countries that exist within the African Great Lakes Region. Interestingly, the name 'Great Lakes Region' was derived from the freshwater lakes and river basins within the central and eastern parts of Africa. Great Lakes Region constitutes a complex network of political and economic interactions with significant implications for peace, security and governance (Kyangara, 2016). Therefore, the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) is a Conference for the countries located in east and central Africa – namely Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Republic of South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia. In order words, the ICGLR is a regional organisation stretching over Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa with twelve diverse member states, several of which are characterised by war, conflict, mistrust and mutual tensions about resources and border lines. The region is interlinked with conflicts and common fundamental problems which emanated from post-colonial challenges to state-building and nation-building. But ICGLR in terms of membership also counts states which are rather stable

and secure and on a path towards further development and prosperity (Hauck, 2017).

Several factors rooted deep in historical issues of protracted cross-border and internal conflicts traceable back to the pre-colonial history of the region, strongly reinforced through the decisions made during the Africa Conference in Berlin, 18851, all together with the crisis in the eastern part of DRC, the Rwanda genocide and its effect among others informed the establishment of the ICGLR. In the words of Hauck (2017:6), while commenting on what informed the establishment of the ICGLR posits that:

At the root of the foundation of the ICGLR lie the conflicts in eastern DRC and its neighboring countries in the post-cold war of 1990s with hundreds of thousands of deaths. First, there were the consequences of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda of almost one million persons dead while another two million were pushed to leave the country by the Government and its army and militia who executed the genocide. The presence of thousands of Rwandese refugees as well as armed soldiers and militias mainly in the DRC was a threat to regional security, requiring a regional solution. Second, there was a need for an agreement to end the political crisis and the war in the DRC where many countries were involved in what some observers called "the first African World War" in 1998. Indeed, at the end of the 1990s, DRC was divided into three zones, one (West) under Kinshasa government control supported by Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia; the second (East) by a rebel movement (Congolese Rally for Democracy - RCD), supported by Rwanda (and somehow by Burundi); and third (North) by another rebel movement, the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC) supported by Uganda.

It is also argued that apart from the crisis in Rwanda which flowed into the eastern part of DRC armed conflicts also took place in eight of the twelve ICGLR countries in the years prior to the conference. These conflicts nevertheless had spill-over effects such as flows of refugees and arms trade, which in turn contributed to destabilisation in neighboring countries (Heyle,2010).

With this, the United Nations (UN) and the OAU (Organisation of the African Unity-the predecessor of the African Union) using the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the Secretary General of the UN(UNSG) adopted resolutions- 1291 and 1304 respectively in February and June 2000 calling for a holding, if conditions were appropriate, of an international conference on peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes Region under the auspices of the UN and the OAU(Hauck,2017). In November 2004, the twelve Heads of State and Governments of the member countries unanimously adopted the Declaration on Peace, Security, and Development in the Great Lakes region in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This Dar-es-Salaam Declaration presented a political statement to address the root

causes of intractable conflicts and constraints to development in a regional and innovative approach.

The Dar-es-Salaam declaration was also done to show the desire of the organization in bringing development to the region. The key extracts from the Dar-es-Salaam declaration are to achieve:

a) democracy and good governance; to promote democracy in the region by monitoring elections so as to ensure that elections conducted by member states are free and fair

b) economic development and regional integration; creating policies that will bring economic development in the region and also integrate member states through unity and

c) humanitarian and social matters. The declaration also provided for the creation of a special fund for reconstruction and development in the Great Lakes region. The Declaration of Dar-es-Salaam showed a strong commitment to peace in the region((Kayangara,2016)

To strengthen the ideals of peace, stability and development in the region, the Heads of State and Government of the region convened once again in Nairobi in 2006 to sign the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region. The pact was signed precisely signed on 15 December 2006 and was later known as the Nairobi Pact; it came into effect on 21 June 2008 after its ratification by eight of the 12 member states parliaments. The pact embodies the desire of the heads of state to solve the region's problems, and its objectives include:

a) carrying out the proposals in the Declaration of Dar-es-Salaam, the agreements, the action programmes, the regional follow-up mechanism, and the special fund for reconstruction and development; and

b) the creation of conditions of security, stability, and sustainable development between the member states. The Summit of Heads of State and Government meets every second year and oversees the implementation of the pact([www.icglr.org](http://www.icglr.org))

Since the signing of the Nairobi Pact, the heads of state and government have taken turns chairing the body; the Nairobi Pact contains 10 protocols, action programmes, and projects.

### **The Objective of the International Conference on The Great Lakes Region**

ICGLR is to initiate a process within which the leaders of

the countries of the Great Lakes region will try to come to a common agreement on several principles such as;

a) Good neighbourly relations: one of the key objectives of the body is to promote good neighbourly relations and this will ensure that there is no interstate conflict over a boundary or other issues between the member states of the regional organization.

b) Stability, peace, and development: this is to enable the organization to specify and implement several programmes to end the cycle of conflict and lead the region toward lasting peace, stability, security, democracy, and development'

c) To promote Democracy in the region: this is to promote democracy in the region so as to ensure that there is respect for human rights, accountability and rule of law, and good governance in the region.

### **Decision-Making Bodies of the ICGLR**

i. The Heads of State and Government Summit – it is the Supreme decision-making organ of the conference. The organ is responsible for all the decision-making that guides the operations of the regional organization. The organ provides political direction that guides the body. It is chaired by a head of state of member states and the leadership of this organ is on rotational basis.

ii. The Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee (RIMC) - the committee is made up of foreign ministers of member states. The committee is responsible for the development of protocols and legal decision framework and also the agenda for the summit. It guides the head of state and governments on strategic decisions.

iii. National Coordination and Collaboration Mechanism - the mechanism provide the link between regional and respective national operations of the ICGLR. It is to ensure that its members are fully involved in the matters of the organization by identifying new issues and further developing the existing ones.

iv. The Executive Secretariat – this organ of the body is responsible for coordinating the activities of the organization. The Secretariat provides technical functions of the body and is headed by the executive secretary. The Secretariat is responsible for the calendar events of the organization and is located in Bujumbura.

### **Divisions of ICGLR**

**The main divisions of ICGLR are**

i. Peace and Security - this division of the body is

responsible for promoting peace and security in the region

ii. Democracy and Good Governance- this division of the regional body deals with the promotion of good governance and entrenchment of democratic ideals in the region

iii. Economic Development and Regional Integration- the division is about policies that bring economic development and integration in the region.

iv. Humanitarian and Social Issues- it handles issues like gender equality and internally displaced person crisis.

As obtained on the ICGLR website ([www.icglr.org](http://www.icglr.org)), the ICGLR also addresses other critical and serious issues in the region. Such issues include Gender, Environment, Human Rights, HIV/AIDS, and Human Settlements.

It is noteworthy to state the guiding principles of the approach of the conference. There are two main principles that guide the operation of the ICGLR. The first approach is the sustainable solution for peace, stability, and development in the Great Lakes Region. This is based on strong ownership of the countries of this region themselves. Second, the ICGLR is based on partnership with stakeholders, in particular, the Group of Friends and Special Envoys which provides financial, diplomatic, technical, and political support (Tunamsifu, 2017)

The Group of Friends and Special Envoys is co-chaired by Canada and the Netherlands. Its member countries and organisations include Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, and Greece. Others are the Holy See, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

### **Achievements And Progress Of The International Conference On The Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)**

The achievements of the International Conference on the Great Lakes region include:

i. The Conference Secretariat has established itself as a regional mediator between the various national interests of the signatory states, offering an urgently-needed platform for regional networking through its bodies and regular meetings. The platform provided by the conference has given the member states the avenue to deliberate on key issues and this has helped to reduce tension in the region.

ii. With its Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources (IEN), ICGLR has created an important policy and action framework to prevent trade in conflict resources. In Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, legislation has been aligned and the Regional Certification Mechanism (RCM) has been successfully implemented. These developments are also progressing in other member states and are gradually being incorporated into national legislation. The work of the technical unit in implementing the initiative is perceived as supportive by the relevant ministries.

iii. Since the creation of ICGLR, peace, and security have improved relatively compared to when the body was not in existence. The Rwanda genocide of 1994 and the Congo crisis as well as others increased the call for the creation of ICGLR and since its creation, such killings have reduced.

iv. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) has promoted good governance in the region as well as democratic ideals. The body monitor elections conducted by the member states to ensure that they are free and fair to some extent. There has been progress made as some member states have seen a peaceful transition of power- an example is the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The country witnessed a peaceful transition of power when former president, Joseph Kabila, that ruled Congo for decades handed over power to Félix Tshisekedi, the man that won the election in 2018. Also in Burundi, Évariste Ndayishimiye won elections in 2020 after late president Pierre Nkurunziza ruled for almost 15 years.

v. It has promoted gender equality in the region and has championed women's rights through the creation of the Regional Women Forum (RWF), created in December 2010 by ministers in charge of gender/feminine issues from 11 member states. This forum is one of the most active and important fora of ICGLR and has promoted women's rights in the region (Karamira, 2016 and David, 2020).

### **Problems and Prospects of ICGLR**

The following are the challenges of the ICGLR:

(a) Members of the ICGLR have not shown enough commitment to the implementation of the Dar-es-Salaam, Nairobi and Addis Ababa agreements. In other words, there is no willingness and eagerness among the ICGLR members to implement the aims and objectives of these agreements and this is a major challenge to the body.

(b) Financial constraints - this is one of the major challenges facing the body as it has partly led to the non-implementation of the Dar-es-Salaam, Nairobi and Addis Ababa. The ICGLR relies on the financial contribution of member states and partners to effect its programmes and projects. When financial contributions fail to come or come in a limited manner, it affects the projects of the body. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for example has never honored its annual contribution, while Rwanda and Burundi have outstanding debts Mugabe (2010) cited in Nzaramba (2012).

(c) new and persistent conflicts – conflicts such as those in South Sudan, the Central African Republic, the DRC and Burundi continue to characterize the region. These conflicts undermine the region's capacity for conflict management and resolution and thus constitute a major challenge to the body.

(d) limited partnership with civil society organizations (CSOs) - ICGLR has not effectively partnered with CSO and this is reflected in some of its key documents and policy plans.

(e) overlapping membership of regional organizations - Member nations belong to different regional organizations and this brought about divided loyalty and commitment issues. Some countries like Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya etc are members of COMESA while some are members of IGAD like Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and others.

ICGLR as an organisation has challenges as pointed out above but if efforts are made to ameliorate these challenges, the organization stands a greater chance of actualizing its mandate of fostering peace, development and good governance among the member nations.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), created in 2004 by 11 member states has contributed to the development and fostering of peace and security in the Great Lakes Region since its creation. The organization was created to explore and implement creative and collective approaches for the prevention, management and resolution of disputes in the region and prevention of conflicts, promotion of good governance and entrenchment of democratic ideals as well as gender equality in the region. This organization has made some achievements like serving as a mediator between member states, initiatives against illegal exploration of natural resources, promotion of good governance and others but the organization is not without some

challenges. Some of the challenges the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) is facing includes financial limitations, commitment issues, overlapping membership, and inadequate coordination with CSOs. Arising from these challenges, the paper makes the following recommendation:

(a) Member nations should show more commitment - Member states need to show more commitment towards the organization by implementing the Dar-es-Salaam, Nairobi and Addis Ababa agreements.

(b) There is a need for member states to do better in their financial contributions as inadequate finance has affected the organization and some of its projects have been abandoned due to that.

(c) The issue of inadequate coordination with civil society organizations (CSOs) should be addressed. The ICGLR should actively involve CSO experts on specific issues in the run-up to major meetings and policy processes.

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