

## **Role of Early Warning Systems in Conflict Prevention in Africa: A Framework**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the last four decades, the international peace agenda has been dominated by debates on conflict prevention. In Africa, the post-cold war era has witnessed a shift in emphasis from conflict management to conflict prevention. Essentially, the shift is necessitated by the shortcomings of the reactive nature of conflict management approaches. Irrespective of the paradigm shift towards conflict prevention, most African countries continue to witness persistent overt conflicts despite the existence of early warning systems. This article investigates why existing conflict early warning and early response systems have not managed to fully prevent conflict in the region in a timely manner. This article makes the case that the shortcomings of the existing early warning systems are due to a combination of factors including divergent scholarly perspectives and practical policy dilemmas. Many conflict early warning systems are reactive, not context specific, and in many cases early warning signs and indicators are ignored. This article suggests an early warning and response framework that would link warning and preventive responses. Guided by the view that each conflict has its own dynamics, nature and context, response plans must be developed as part of the early warning system. The framework proposed in this article, lays emphasis on context-specificity and critical leadership and responsibility in early warning and early response.

Violent conflicts all over the world but particularly Africa, have multiplied in complexity and intensity. The conventional paradigm of states going to war with each other has become less common. Today, intra-state conflicts are more

prevalent. Since the establishment of the African Union (AU) in 2002, African countries such as Burundi, South Sudan, Somalia, DRC, Nigeria, Egypt, Uganda, South Africa, Tunisia, Ethiopia and Kenya, have in various degrees, witnessed persistent overt conflicts. These conflicts are associated with civil wars, wars of independence, secessionist conflicts, national violence resulting from border disputes, poor governance, ethnic rivalry, competition over natural resources, declining economic conditions, and widespread poverty (Wallensteen and Möller 2003). During the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed an increase in the number of military interventions as a result of the rising violence across the Continent. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) database (2015) records a dramatic rise from over 3,000 violent events in 2009 to over 12,000 in 2014.

Much of the impetus for conflict early warning stemmed from the events of the 1990s. For instance, the failure to prevent the Rwandan genocide of 1994 followed by the end of the cold war, led to increased scholarly interest in the study of early warning mechanisms as instruments of conflict prevention. Many divergent conceptual debates on early warnings have since emerged and have been assimilated into many conflict prevention agendas as well as disaster reduction across the world. The increasing threats of terrorism, especially since the US 9/11/2001 attack; have inspired the rapid interest in the development and advancement of conflict early warning and early response systems. However, while a significant literature on how early warning and early response systems should be carried out exists, there is still limited convergent understanding of how early warning actually happens and how early should preventive interventions be taken. The contending approaches revolve around the fundamental issue that the added value of early warning systems is still unproven.

There are two main schools of thought that inform the origins of the early warning system. Historically speaking, some authors hold that early warning is of a military origin whilst some ascribe its development to an altruistic frame of reference. Pursuant to the first perspective, early warning emerged during the Cold War in the broad area of national military intelligence to reinforce and strengthen the anticipation of impending aggression. On the contrary, the second school of thought postulates that early warning has emerged as a system of forecasting threats, largely to anticipate natural disasters calamities such as floods, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. In the wake of the 1980s, early warning was also used for forecasting fiscal situations of the stock exchange. Important to note however, is that the emergence of early warning is a direct response to disasters that affected individuals and communities as a whole. For

this reason, the focal point of early warning embarked on humanitarian issues and also incorporated famine and refugee migration in the late 1980s.

The conflict prevention theory holds that conflict does not just happen, that it goes through a cycle of phases, and that preventing the outbreak of overt conflict is possible depending on three assumptions: timely response to manifestations of danger; an all-inclusive, coordinated approach to mitigate the threats to violence; and a comprehensive attempt to transform the root causes of violence. According to this theory it is possible to collect data in order to determine whether a situation is risky and likely to escalate into violence. A second tenet of this theory states that, in situations where clear information of an impending crisis exists, there remains the task of persuading stakeholders to act upon the warning signs in a timely manner. This theory further propagates the prospects of facilitating advanced planning and the early deployment of supplies and personnel, as well as prompting intervention efforts to rescue the situation.

Conflict prevention requires the identification of both structural and proximate causes of conflict, as well as efforts to avert causes before the outbreak of violence. The championing for conflict prevention does not imply that conflict is undesirable. It just simply means that trying to resolve a conflict after it has happened complicates its resolution and it is costly. The practice of conflict prevention is divided into three stages: structural or long-term; early warning and analysis; and operational. The two major principles of conflict prevention hold that peacebuilding is only sustainable if it embraces core principles of conflict prevention; that preventive action is more feasible (although more complex) in post-conflict environment; and that lessons learnt from post-conflict preventive action must inform and encourage pre-conflict prevention.

Decades after it was embraced as an international commitment, conflict early warning remains a fragile undertaking with mixed results. While there is little doubt that early warning will continue to require international attention, the lessons of the last two decades do not add up to a successful record. Early warning failures revolve around the inability to predict crises beyond the obvious trends. Lack of accuracy, ad hoc responses, actionable recommendations, lack of political will and divergence in warning often make the whole exercise redundant even when warning signs are obvious. This article is convinced that with the changing nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century conflict trends, calculated responses can be achieved by the rigorous methods entailed in early warning systems. There is need therefore to interrogate the impact and assess the performance of early warning mechanisms in Africa with an aim of formulating early warning frameworks that are context-based.

## **Role of early warning in conflict prevention**

Effective prediction and analysis of impending conflicts should be underlined with some type of early warning-system. Proper investigation is in the long run a waste of time and resources if it fails to be acted upon by the decision makers. The thought of a universal early-warning system for conflict prevention is not new. The concept of conflict early warning and early response entails monitoring when violence is about to befall and enhancing well-timed intervention to avert or avoid conflict.

In more basic terms, early warning is perceived as data collection and dissemination. For conflict to be forecasted, information about its characteristics is crucial on one hand and the situation at risk on the other hand. Early warning is also perceived as the dissemination of information, highlighting the magnitude of data collected. Just merely having a regularly-updated database on states at risk of conflict, whose data has been shared among interested parties, is not exhaustive of an early warning system. A successful intervention to conflict is one that is able to contain conflict in its premature phases. It is for that reason that scholars root for a characterization of early warning that denotes specific types of violence rather than just large-scale warfare, which often manifest in the later stages of a conflict. Therefore early warning, characterized as a tool for conflict prevention should help to a certain extent, to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict by way of a so-called early response. Such an intervention could include a variety of both (military and non-military) intervention by stakeholders, such as states, international organizations or individual intermediaries. The purpose of early warning is to initiate or draw early responses that happen at the latent stages of an anticipated violent conflict, with an aim of averting, lessening, resolving, or changing circumstances that may increase the likelihood of violent conflict breaking out.

Although the roles of stakeholders were first propagated through the corporate social responsibility drive, the idea has been functional mainly by international organizations operational in development and conflict management. Harvard's Global Negotiation Project supports a way of approaching conflicts which is opposed to looking at conflict from a single side but also from the bigger standpoint of the immediate community which is otherwise referred to as the stakeholders' perspective (David, David, & Martin 2006). The entire linkage of early warning stakeholders and target groups is made up of networks of local

monitors, trained analysts, journalists and media, intelligence services, diplomatic missions, development agencies, local committees, early warning country coordinators, research institutes, donors, economic actors, and their local affiliates, as well as even the rule of law bodies (Suzsanna).

The Harvard Project on Negotiation maintains that, early warning signals appear most clearly to those immediately around the disputants (David, David, & Martin 2006). These early warning indicators are open source intelligence signals that local stakeholders are more likely aware of than outsiders. Nevertheless, it should be explicitly acknowledged that all informants—remunerated or voluntary, third-party or stakeholder—carry their own insecurities to a monitoring attempt, and these insecurities may or may not be compatible with those of the local communities.

Warning happens when predictive conclusions and a verification to support them are produced and disseminated to various stakeholders. Thus warning entails championing for well-timed and proper restorative actions as response options for prevention and transformation before conflict intensifies. This perspective presupposes a consistent, well-timed, and regular practice, in which inputs and decision-making processes about the information that is disseminated are comprehensible and sufficiently flexible to produce well-timed interventions. Reality, on the other hand, reveals the contrary, whereby decisions to intervene in situations of impending violence are time and again subjected to concerns over interests or sovereignty of states or are postponed as a result of reservations over who should in fact take action and under whose authorization.

In Nigeria for instance, early warning program was established in 2003 by the WANEP regional office which at the time was partnering with an unstable network of Nigerian CSOs. Because of the urgency to institute an official platform for Nigeria, a WANEP country office was founded in 2002. Specific successes of this structure include reinforced response system and production of Nigeria incidence and situation accounts for ECOWARN as an appendage of the ECOWAS/WANEP early warning system for West Africa. A different achievement has been the evolution of Election Barometer monitoring and analysis system for Nigerian elections of April/May 2007, culminating into a letter of cooperation with WANEP regional office by the Action Congress before the elections.

In Kenya the National Council of Churches commenced intervention programs/activities in Kenya to tackle political conflicts as a result of the multi-party elections. In spite of prosecution and threats from the government, the

council created peace committees to tackle internal displacement resulting from political violence. The district peace committees acknowledged the influence of the church as they sent early warning reports to the government and the church. The Church leaders were able to tackle political conflicts and promote popular participation in the democratic processes because they were held in high regard. Their achievements and impact led to the formation of a civil society-based peacebuilding and management commission, which works directly with the IGAD monitors and district peace committees.

The response strategies in Africa have involved strengthening the continent's conflict management organizations. They have been based on the idea that keeping peace requires permanent organizations, not just *ad hoc* responses. The process of building such an organizational architecture across the continent entailed four elements: defining priorities, allocating resources (human and financial), and constructing both bureaucratic structures and mechanisms and a capacity to create and disseminate knowledge (and hopefully act upon it). In the early 1990s, one of the central challenges was that Africa's regional bodies were generally not geared up to manage armed conflicts; they were underfunded, they lacked personnel, and most had been established to stimulate economic growth and sub-regional integration. Moreover, the attempt to refashion these organizations came at a time when armed conflicts engulfed much of the continent: African governments and their external funders were thus forced to try and build effective organizations while simultaneously attempting to stem a significant number of ongoing crises (Paul 2013).

### **Early warning as a system**

Marwala and Lagazio (2011) argue that the preliminary step of conflict early warning is completely intertwined with conflict prevention. In fact, early warning has been held as a tool of conflict deterrence that aids in establishing the likely occurrence of violent conflicts and how to arbitrate and avert these conflicts. Early warning denotes a series of activities whose intentions are to accumulate, join together and evaluate records with the sole purpose of discovering and categorizing the preliminary indications of an upcoming predicament prior to explosion. In practice, early warning entails three steps: information gathering (data collection), processing and analysis (detection), translation and signalling (prognosis).

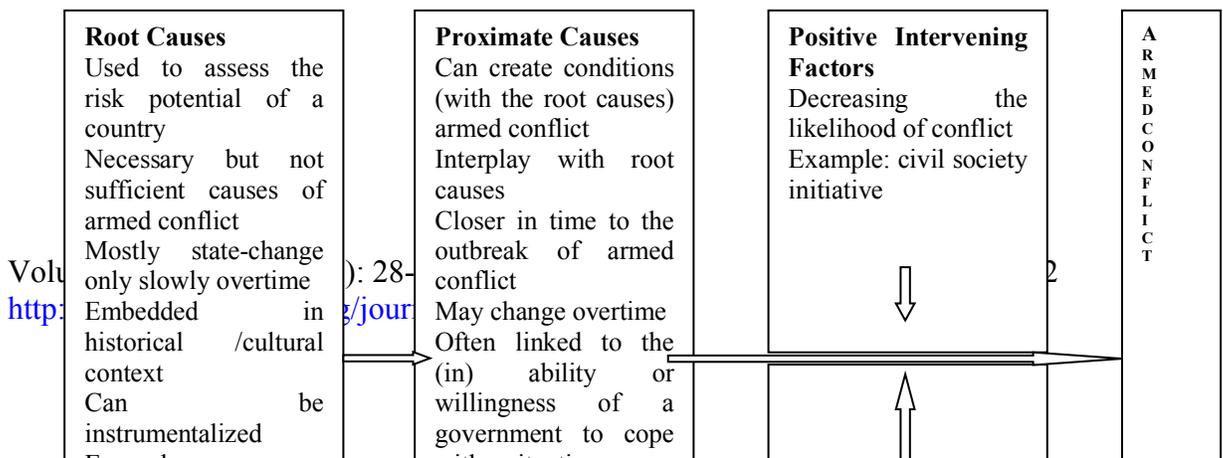
Scholars who have intensively studied early warning make a distinction between two stages in the operationalization of this tool. The first one is that of gathering and evaluating information that may be regarded as characteristic of an impending violent conflict. If the analysis reveals a looming conflict, and that timely response can make a change, the early warning process then assumes a subsequent phase: a warning is relayed to the political decision-makers who should take the necessary action to ensure the violence is prevented. Stages of early warning are discussed below:

### Collection of conflict early warning data

Collection of early warning data is an imperative stage of the entire process. More importantly, data collection enables tracking of an event or events and their effects as well as how these events affect stakeholders. In a similar conception, Janie, William & Patrick (1999) emphasize that data collection makes up a key element of an early warning system. However, they hold that the “reliability” and “validity” of the data gathered must be observed for any achievements to be met in the execution of early warning systems. The authors recommend that it is a necessity for early warning systems to have the power of being systematic, investigative and must possess the institutional competence to process, calculate and make use of any incoming information. An appropriate early warning system ends up with an assessment that informs a political decision of taking or not taking an action.

On a positive note, the wide-ranging toil in and outside academic circles, tied with the information insurgency, has enhanced access to information. Mwaûra & Schmeidl (2002) are however keen to warn that, easy access to information does not automatically impact on indicators. Indicators are determined through comprehensive analysis that categorizes the multifaceted causes that may lead to escalation of armed conflict. Today, monitoring of major early warning indicators has not been given due attention. Nevertheless, most analysts contend that tailoring early warning around groups of “family” indicators is useful. The figure below shows a graphic display of such an analytical and monitoring framework.

**Figure1: Graphic display of such an analytical and monitoring framework**



### **Adopted from Mwaûra & Schmeidl 2002**

Chen et al. (2008) have grouped indicators into:

“Systemic-general underlying, structural, deep-rooted (e.g. economic disparity, historic oppression, high military expenditure); proximate- specific situational circumstances (e.g. increasing insecurity on streets, frequency of political arrests); triggers- electoral fraud, political assassination, new and enforced discriminatory policies.”

In early warning, two major elements—root cause and proximate causes are given consideration. Root causes include pervasive factors that form the foundation of a people and may form the pre-conditions for violence. According to Clark, root causes are a deep-rooted state of affairs that have been passed on for generations, and their change is gradual. Root causes are entrenched in a people’s way of life. Root causes are hence crucial for the overall evaluation of a country’s risk potential (Mwaûra & Schmeidl 2002).

Proximate causes on the other hand are close in proximity to the real conflict and can be the breeding site for armed conflict. Proximate causes contribute to a climate favourable for violent conflict or advance its intensity, at times actually indicative of a deeper problem. These are definite situations such as an enlarged income difference, antagonism between ethnic groups, uprisings. As such, proximate causes may transform with time and often follow a government’s capability/failure or readiness/reluctance to correct situations, for instance a government’s failure to put up laws that enhance fairness in the political and economic spheres of an especially ethnically diverse society (Mwaûra & Schmeidl 2002).

Intervening factors also known as accelerators have a two-fold effect. They can either augment or reduce the chances of armed conflict and augment or reduce the prospects of peace (hence contributing to the intractability of conflict or contributing to conflict resolution). Specialists have reached a consensus that aiding and restraining factors to conflict escalation are key to note for anticipation of events that could act as accelerators as well as devising strategies and organizing effective responses.

Lund on the other hand holds that collection of data and analysis are significant, not only for predicting conflict, but also for devising suitable response strategies for particular conflict contexts. Just like Mwaûra and Schmeidl (2002) Lund also advances that early warning calls for accuracy, complete and logical data on conflict which he maintains most early warning responses lack. Rupesinghe further recommends that the collection of precise and consistent information in a logical manner is better executed by a well-established network, composed of both the external and internal organizations, where early warning work is decentralized and roles given on the basis of a proper division of labour. Regional attempts such as the continental early warning system that was initiated in 1995 by the then African Union in Addis Ababa, were some efforts in that direction (Marwala & Monica 2011). Whereas information gathering is connected to a broad-spectrum of vital categories, early warning analysts are encouraged to begin on a case-by-case foundation, the specific factors, the influence each factor has as well as a classification of the most crucial ones, and the origin. For this reason it is significant to devise a country-specific analytical framework with targeted indicators.

### **Analysis of data coming from crisis areas**

Multifaceted structures of investigation are compulsory for scrutinizing conflicts consisting of various actors and problems. With divergent levels of difficulties, every conflict is prone to possess different chronological progressions and results. An understanding of the state of a conflict arises from exploring the background and changes of relationships between opponents. Classifying the actors in a conflict is a fundamental move preceding the comprehension of their opinions, interests, and abilities as well as the extent of outside support. The progression of interactions among actors and their social environment can be scrutinized in terms of temporary and enduring changes. A chronological order of events is to be made basing on how the major actors perceive the implication of every happening, particularly in a protracted social conflict (Ho-Won Jeong 2008).

Conflict early warning data takes into consideration two broad types of information—quantitative data (structural, event data, statistics) and qualitative data (narrative/descriptive data/ information). Generally, analysts should be able to differentiate raw data (unprocessed indicators) from analytical data (information that has already been set into context). Preferably, the center of attention should be on raw data for analysis. However, analytical data can also be used to inform the analytical process or to compare results and theories. Early warning specialists strongly advise on a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to achieve an all-encompassing approach.

Mwaûra & Schmeidl (2002) argue that information must live up to some principles; these principles they argue, include: the information must be well-timed, precise, convincing, consistent and provable. The two authors however warn that standardization is extremely enviable, but very difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, employing a set of “family indicators” serves to simplify the task. Like-minded organizations are very important in supporting the collection and authentication of early warning information. This allows consumers of the information to judge source reliability and the authority of the analysis. Most important to remember is that information (though refined) is not early warning. Mwaûra & Schmeidl (2002) maintain that information devoid of analysis is as the popular adage goes, “like an orange without sunshine.” Analysis helps to fit information into context that further enables the prediction of violent conflict. Finally, it promotes devising of case scenarios and response choices that make early warning whole.

Early warning analysis entails evaluating a number of questions that lead the analyst towards a comprehension of both underlying and apparent concerns rooted in a particular conflict. The major inclination in particular areas of crisis aids in the assessment of the possibility for escape from unfriendly environments. Despite the fact that every conflict context is distinctive, indicators can be tailored to enlighten on their linkages in diverse backgrounds. Signs are important for the reduction of a complex situation to manageable concrete features and to assign useful issues against which to observe any transformations. Not only are the variations of party, aspirations, problem, and approach that illustrate the nature of conflict, but also the styles and effects of opposition. The features determine the conflict approaches but also shape dynamics associated with mutual relations. The planning ought to authorize conflict analysts to discover particular conducts which provoke conflict and maintain the intensification of the conflict. Parties in a conflict are often grouped according to different levels of obligation to the fight and capacities to marshal resources as well as their perceptions of each other.

## **Early response plan**

There seems to be unanimity that for analysts to establish the sources of conflict, and effectively forecast the eruption of bloodshed and alleviate the conflict, an early warning system ought to include six central systems: Data collection; data analysis; assessment for earning or identification of different scenarios; formulation of action proposals; transmission of recommendations; assessment of early response. However, there are reservations as to whether such an ideal model is attainable. Despite decades of research and practice, the record of success has been uncertain and the added value of early warning has not been obvious. Nevertheless, an early warning system is comprised of three elements: receiving, believing, and taking preventive measures (Anna 2006).

Every approach for the creation of an anticipatory strategy has to be particular on a case-to-case starting point, denoting that it is impossible to devise a ‘one fits all’ methodology. To make such an anticipatory action plan functional would need the harmonization of actions by preventive parties, and the examination and assessment of the effect of the anticipatory action assumed. Lund advocates for the designing of a successful prevention strategy which can generally be categorized into three areas: conflict examination (the analysis of the deep-rooted and proximate causes of conflict deterrence and detection of prospective preventive parties), prevention examination (a harmonization of preventive approaches to the established sources of conflict and an initial evaluation as to the potential success of such strategies once put into operation) and preventive action (how to systematize and execute anticipatory action, examination and assessment of the outcomes of such action) (Ackermann 2003).

It is necessary that communities recognize the impending dangers; value the warning structures available and have a slight idea of how to act in response. Instruction and awareness programmes are very vital. It is also crucial that the available risk management preparations are habitually exercised and assessed. The community should be aware of alternatives for safe behaviour, existing escape routes, and how best to prevent destruction and loss of property.

Coordination of conflict early warning and response is one very problematic yet delicate process. The complexities of the process emanate from the commonly documented reasons of protocol (i.e., who has the command to “lead” a synchronized intervention), impartiality (as many groups do not wish to participate in coordinated action), and reputation (the role assigned to an organization may not produce the visibility that an organization yearns for). In order to avoid the aforementioned challenges, some early warning attempts have

concentrated on a devolved methodology, where stakeholders convene on a quarterly or monthly basis to share information on activities and on the present conflict situation. This methodology however, necessitates consensus in selecting a convener (who should be nonthreatening) and a group that compares information on activities and conflict dynamics in the region covered (Carment & Schnabel 2004).

### **Assessing the capacity of african early warning and early response architecture**

In the year 1994, Rwanda a small country in the Great Lakes region of Africa, hit the headlines and catapulted onto the international centre stage. Retrospectively, the international community has been harshly criticized for its failure to take preventive measures in a timely and effective way to contain the genocide in Rwanda, despite the knowledge that genocide was going to transpire. At the core of the debate that has followed this tragedy are the questions: how did Rwanda abruptly collapse into a civil strife? What reasons did the international community have for its failure to intervene and prevent genocide in the Rwandan situation even after it was evident that genocide was underway?

Despite the international developments in conflict early warning practice, Africa's early warning systems have been harshly criticized for their failure to look at the future in a predictive fashion. As a matter of fact, the post-cold war Africa has earned a negative niche as a region that bears witness to some of the grave humanitarian intervention failures the world has experienced. National and regional security issues are inexorably intertwined in Africa. State weakness and the issue of ethnic groupings across porous, colonially imposed borders determine the extent to which instability in one country affects neighboring countries and speak to the need for regional solutions to domestic challenges.

During the institution of the OAU at the Cairo Summit, when the Heads of States established the machinery for conflict prevention, management and resolution, they intended to endow the continental body with an up-to-date institutional framework for the advancement of peace, security and stability through the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. The leaders were conscious of the fact that there cannot be substantial and sustainable development in Africa in the absence of peace, security and stability. As an amendment to the machinery, the AU Secretary General, Salim Ahmed Salim says that the EWS is seen as being:

Originally intended at allowing specialists in the field of conflict prevention, the opportunity of predicting and countering crisis situations

before they get out of hand, or in the very least, allow them the bargaining chip to take corrective action in order to alleviate their negative effects once they are underway (Oyom & Oshita 2010).

The AU previously known as the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed in 1963 to articulate the interests of African states as members of the international community. The founding of OAU was a great triumph for the cause of decolonization. The OAU's charter gave it a wide mandate, and it was intended that the organization would spearhead and coordinate African platforms on issues such as development and cooperation. However, with the settlement of conflict in South Africa, the organization suddenly found itself without a common cause. It therefore needed to search for, and articulate a new agenda, if it was not to become irrelevant in the twenty first century.

During the Cold War, OAU conflict management revolved around two approaches. The first was that the OAU created a dichotomy between internal and inter-state conflicts. Having created this dichotomy, the OAU argued that its conflict management mandate applies to inter-state conflicts rather than to internal conflicts. The argument was that the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states precluded the organization from involving itself in internal conflicts in member states. The second policy of OAU conflict management was that mediation under the OAU was undertaken by committees of heads of state. These committees were appointed *ad hoc* and reported back to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government (Mwagiru 2006). According to the report, the mechanism would be equipped with the “objectives and principles of the OAU Charter. The principles entail, the sovereign equality of member states, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States, their inalienable right to independent existence, the peaceful settlement of disputes as well as the inviolability of borders inherited from colonialism. It would also function on the basis of the consent and the cooperation of the parties to the conflict” (Bliswaro 2013). The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) is a structure that is core to the fulfillment of Africa Union's conflict prevention, management and resolution mandates. The PSC Protocol gives the CEWS a fundamental responsibility for which a carefully developed methodology and process are required: that of anticipating and preventing the occurrence of overt conflict through the provision of information and analysis of the Chairperson of the Commission. In the fulfillment of his responsibility to advise the PSC on potential threats to peace and security in Africa, as well as recommend best courses of action, the Chairperson relies therefore on a well-functioning, comprehensive and AU specific early warning system. Consequently, the CEWS assumes a critical role as regards the ability of key institutions of the Union and other pillars of the peace and security

architecture to perform their responsibilities, particularly the PSC, other Departments within the Commission, the Panel of the Wise, and the Pan-African Parliament among others (Gomes João Porto & Ulf 2013).

Nevertheless, Africa clearly has weak conflict prevention capacity, a situation compounded by the international community's reservations about substantively contributing to Africa's conflict prevention. Considering Africa's capacity constraints, the major question still remains, is African conflict prevention a reality or merely rhetoric? Judging from the findings from the different countries, particularly when assessing relations between pairs of neighbouring countries depicts a wide variety of differing experiences in terms of ability to restrain disputes and disruptions and in setting up institutional machinery for managing them. Four distinctive categories exist in which conflicts across state boundaries can surface: borderline disputes, battles between communities across borders, joint interventions by outside governments in internal conflicts, and inter-state warfare.

### **Borderline disputes**

The war between Eritrea and Ethiopia underlines a case in point with terrible human costs when such disputes escalate into major violent confrontations. It serves as a reminder that the best action in other such cases would be conflict prevention. In such a context a conflict prevention formula is likely to be one in which each pair of neighbours agrees to set up a joint commission (with or without a third party mediator such as the UN or IGAD itself) to settle any outstanding counter claims about border delineation or demarcation. One such instance that resulted in some degree of acceptance transferred a territory claimed as Ugandan to Kenya-but this was accomplished while there was still a single colonial authority ruling both countries. Other instances of unilateral "settling" of frontiers by the later colonial powers, such as the Haud, are still remembered as a source of grievance. It should be recognized that the existence of disputed enclaves in some cases only threatens to generate open conflict when relations between two governments deteriorate because of other factors (Mwaûra & Schmeidl 2002).

Eritrea's disputed border in the Red Sea with Yemen is one of the only cases where a definitive ruling was made by an international legal body and accepted. But there again the lesson is that such steps could have been taken preemptively before a violent clash had caused loss of life and soured relations. There have been instances of conflict management in such border disputes, meaning in this context that action is taken to prevent a descent into open conflict.

In one or two instances, it would be more appropriate to talk about inaction: Kenya and Sudan seemed to have reached an agreement at the top political level not to do anything to disturb (or clarify) the ambiguous status of the Ilemi Triangle. Similar disputes between Somalia and Kenya were defused many years ago. Yet these and many others are instances tacit agreement often exists-one centered at summit or other high diplomatic level as part of a political arrangement. The agreements are not codified nor made public and transparent. Nor are monitoring and regulatory mechanisms set up and institutionalized.

The Eritrea-Ethiopia case is a cautionary tale in many ways, but specifically in this context, because a joint commission was in place to seek clarification of the border and to ease tensions that were recognized as building up (thus hardly a case of lack of early warning). The Eritrean case study thus makes a point of providing detailed review of the experience of that commission and the failure of it and other mechanisms to achieve what they had been set up to do. This analysis supports a general conclusion that border issues of prevention and management have usually been handled on an *ad hoc* basis, being taken seriously only after tensions have been built up, and by political dialogue at leadership levels. Even though the latter process has chalked up some successes as well as spectacular failures, the lesson would seem to be that processes that are more transparent and institutionalized might be more sustainable, especially if undertaken before tensions mount and while relations are not mutually suspicious (Mwaûra & Schmeidl 2002).

### **Battles between communities across borders**

Conflicts and disturbances between communities living on opposite sides of the border are common in Africa. These may involve rustling of livestock or other forms of theft, terrorizing of communities, destruction of crops, smuggling and imposition of illegal levies on trade, and trade in arms. Such violent events may be essentially local ones between communities. But because they involve international frontiers, they have the potential to escalate, as a result of some combination of the conflict becoming “ethnicized” or through involvement of government personnel. The implication is that conflicts that might otherwise be managed or resolved by customary, inter-community mechanisms tend to involve local administrators and even foreign ministries and state security services. These conflicts also tend to be dealt with in an *ad hoc* way, rather than on a pre-emptive and institutionalized basis. Sudan and Chad have had a joint border commission operating and meeting regularly for many years. This body deals with a wide variety of problems, including encroachment by rebels from across the border and even border demarcation issues. At one time a committee was set up to deal with conflicts across the Somali-Kenya border, originally reaching out from the Kenya

County of Wajir but now extended to other districts of the Northeast Kenya. This innovative committee involves administrations from the two areas as well as army and police on either side of the border, but also traditional authorities and civilian representatives (Mwaûra & Schmeidl 2002).

### **Joint interventions by outside governments in internal conflicts**

There is a persisting systematic pattern whereby internal rebel groups operate from neighbouring countries, often with the support of governments. Intervention escalates on a tit-for-tat basis. These tendencies aggravate and amplify the internal conflicts and make them harder to resolve. They also exacerbate tensions between countries and make contested issues between them harder to settle peaceably. Indeed, this pattern is often at the root of the chronically unstable and volatile regional security regime that characterizes African Countries. Although some individual internal conflicts have been resolved, and occasional (but usually short-term) improvements do occur in bilateral relations, little has been done systematically to tackle this combined problem of internal conflicts feeding off external support from countries whose relations are antagonistic. Given this complexity for example, IGAD could not be expected to come up with an immediate formula for such a fundamental transformation. But it constitutes the only forum where such discussion and imaginative rethinking can take place. The temporary restraint on interference, suggests that the present pattern is not immutable. There are also instances like the agreement between the Ethiopian and Somalia governments in 1988 that emphasized the mutual advantage in non-intervention. This should be stressed as opposed to the seeming short-run political gains from intervention.

### **Peacemaking in inter-state wars**

In the Horn of Africa, there had only been one case of inter-state war, the Somalia-Ethiopia war of the 1970s, until the 1998-2000 war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. However, one can also say that, despite Africa's conflict ridden image, the Horn appears to be the only region in Africa where inter-state wars have occurred. So, even if very rare, the wars' enormous human and political cost and the fact that they have occurred at all mean that it is vital to explore what mechanisms are in place to resolve and prevent them. The Eritrea-Ethiopia war is of great significance for future conflict resolution in the region, and specifically for IGAD. A look back to events following the outbreak of war in 1998 shows that there was a delay before initiatives got underway. The world was shocked and did not anticipate the escalation and scale of fighting or its long duration. But neither were there any clearly available mechanisms for stepping in. However, the OAU played a critical role, especially through its central organ of the Mechanism

for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution (COMCPMR). IGAD itself was unable to register any considerable successes in any of these initiatives. This inertia was perhaps predictable as the war involved two member governments with whom other members had intimate relations. These circumstances raised the issue of whether IGAD could ever have been an appropriate and sufficiently disinterested third party. Even if it had been seen as appropriate, the antagonism between the two countries also imposed strains on the organization itself and generated a paralysis (Mwaûra & Schmeidl 2002).

### **The constraints facing early warning in africa**

With almost five decades of practice, early warning systems are facing a myriad of challenges that have grown out of events during those decades. There are several obstacles identified by the literature reviewed in this article. To begin with, the role of methodological frameworks for informing response mechanisms still remains inadequate. Experience shows that most stakeholders do not outline or encourage clear approaches for promoting peace in violent conflict situations. The lack of these kinds of calculated structures provides room for incoherence and inept responses. Early warning is dependent on appropriate prediction of the possibility and magnitude of an underlying conflict rising into violence.

Delays are a characteristic that jeopardize the performance of multifaceted systems. It takes time to measure and report information. It takes time to make decisions. And it takes time for decisions to affect the state of a system. Delays may lead to “counterintuitive behaviors or to striking differences between short-term and long-term behaviors. Two main types of delays are usually considered in the literature on dynamic systems, material delays and information delays.” The first one concerns the delay in the flow of material objects. Take for example the time required to set out a UN peacekeeping force on the ground once the resolution has been made. The contingents from countries that play part in the peacekeeping force must be gathered, and afterward transferred to the site. All these take some time and often impact negatively on the mission’s success. More difficult is the type of delay that has to do with communication, views and attitudes. The process of getting information from the crisis area for instance takes time to reach the media. Also it takes much time for the government to reach an agreement on a viable humanitarian response. Information delays may play a key role in circumstances where several stakeholders are present, and operating in correspondence with one another. The absence of appropriate information of the other stakeholders’ interventions and an imprecise assessment of their aims, may result in disastrous outcomes (Gallo 2012).

For a long time, conflict early warning machineries have not necessarily meant success in conflict early response. The relation between warning and response still remains inadequate. According to Evans, as cited in Kuwali & Viljoen (2014) “if early warning alarm bells do not generate enough response they might as well not be rung at all.” There continues to be a crack between early warning and early response which some have ascribed to various aspects, among them malfunction of early warning designs, a detachment between the early warner and policymaker, lack of political will and bureaucratic blockages and interests. This is as a result of reduced excellence of early warning and undeveloped mechanisms and response strategies, alongside a variety of individual, institutional and political weaknesses that impinge on decision making. If initially the challenge was early warning is not wired to the bulb, presently it could be the existence of countless bulbs opposing each other or not operational when need be.

A primary assessment of conflict early warning and early response mechanisms is that in as much as delivering caution is somewhat unproblematic, pulling together an early response is not. This censure has been pointed primarily at large-scale systems. George and Hall as cited in Bock (2012) refer to this as the “warning-response problem.” Indications in point of fact show that the “warning-response problem” is being resolved, at least in part, with large-scale systems. International institutions and governments are by means of satellite images trailing huge massacres and causing international anxiety to end them. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), with support from Google Earth and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, trails the detrimental behaviour of the Janjaweed militia in Darfur, Sudan. In the same way in Southern Sudan, the Satellite Sentinel Project merges field accounts and satellite descriptions with Google’s Map Makers for an early warning system of massacres.

Contrastingly, Carment and Schnabel (2004) argue that the challenges of linking early warning to response are abundant and come about as a result of what is time and again dubbed “lack of political will.” Unloading the key components of political reluctance to act is the first move towards building approaches to tackle the problem. Countering these challenges is a difficult task and conceivably an unrealistic mission. It calls for realistic and rational responses to deal with the lack of political will to take action. The lack of political will has meant that conflict anticipation has been ad hoc and inept. Obtainable literature mainly documents the incidents of ‘missed opportunities’ and centers minimally on linking the warning-response gap. There is a figurative association between early warning and early response that calls for the improvement of approaches that match up with institutional mandates, competencies and machineries. The lack of political will has often been acknowledged as the principal factor

hampering both inter-governmental and regional organizations from acting resolutely in the early days of conflict spiral.

Unlike NGOs, governmental organizations have a higher threshold to wait before acting upon signals. There are political sacrifices implicated with identifying and evaluating early warning signals. Political misunderstandings within organizations; incompetent and ineffectual interventions and principles such as nonintervention and sovereignty are some of the obstacles that reign. Even an influential international security apparatus such as the UN Security Council is still not proficient enough to discover impending disasters and act in response to early warning.

### **Towards an action oriented early warning framework**

It is a sign of the times that there is renewed interest in studying the lessons learned from intervention in early warning. Lacking an agreed-upon strategic paradigm, decision makers find themselves needing both a conceptual compass and a means for relating different types of conflicts to the kinds of early warning interventions that may be relevant. All too often, the early warning debate has been the disconnection between early warning and response. However, the threats and opportunities of the 21st century demand that increased attention be paid to practical questions about how to design and implement effective prevention strategies—beyond identification of warning signs, a system should be put in place to address the question of when, how and who should take preventive actions. In an effort to clarify what is required for successful early warning systems, we discuss the following key elements of a successful early warning framework:

#### **Context-specific early warning frameworks**

Preventing overt conflict continues to be severely constrained by systemic disconnect between early warning and early response. One way this could be addressed is through having a contextualized conflict early warning framework that would help to predict the outbreak of overt conflicts. An early warning framework is a crucial part of the efforts to engage in conflict prevention measures. We believe that early warning frameworks should aspire, explicitly or implicitly: to clearly identify the structural, proximate and triggers of conflict; identify the conflict related signs and indicators and the most preferred operations that best deter the signs and indicators from escalating into violent conflict (Dessler 1991). One of the challenges with a framework of this nature is that signs and indicators can only be identified within a single context since conflict analysis

is also only possible within contextual boundaries and with respect to a specific conflict's nature and dynamics (Ho-Won Jeong 2008).

There is no one-size-fits-all approach for conflict early warning, and as much as the tasks of an intervention may vary, the contexts are specific. Consequently, the process of developing certainty with regard to what signs and indicators are, who should act and when requires some comparison with what happens in different situations. Even though each case must be interpreted independently, comparisons ought to be made with other regions in the world so as to develop full certainty that the identified indicator is really a pointer to a possible occurrence of conflict (Sriram & Wermester 2003). A framework that takes into consideration this strategic adaptability to particular contexts, greatly facilitates strategic planning and operational coordination among different organizations: international and local, civilian and military, official and private.

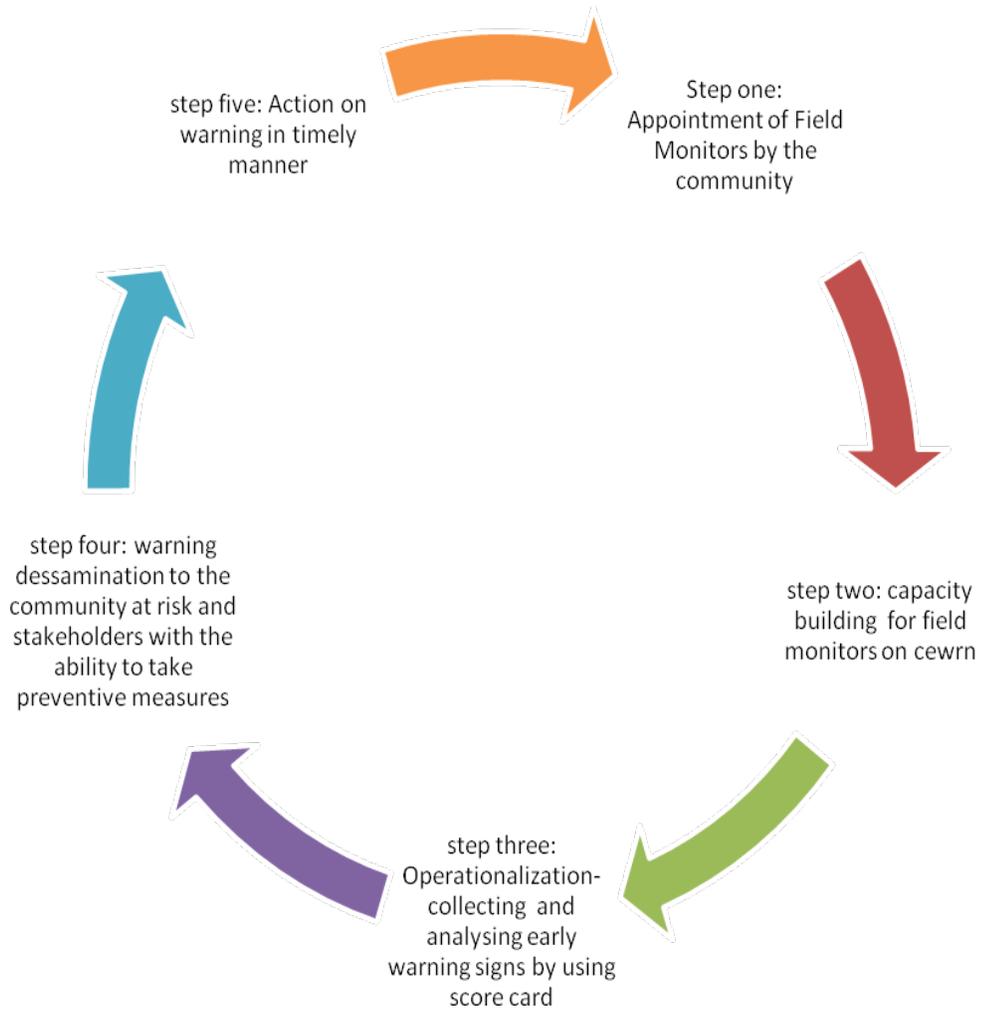
### **Critical leadership responsibilities**

We know too well that without several critical components—from resources and authority to international support and legitimacy an intervention may falter or fail. Earlier early warning frameworks tend to be silent on these types of responsibilities within intervention activities, thereby disguising or even entirely hiding the responsibilities. By highlighting critical leadership responsibilities, early warning interventions could be more effective. Elies, Iglesias & Yeo (2010) argue that the duty to act rests in the hands of policy makers, whereas the scrutiny of information, knowledge, and indicators as well as early warning is vested in the hands of policy analysts. The conversion of information from analysis to policy can be sustained by the activities of civil society groups, lobbyists and other players. As a matter of fact, there is an additional significance of those bodies and organizations that put on various hats — supplying both assessment and back up associated with early warning. The present third generation of early warning systems now relies on and support home-grown initiatives in early warning and early response. For example, due to local efforts in Ambon, Indonesia, the first early warnings of conflict go to the local community leaders (in the case of Ambon, the Rajahs) who use the information to forestall and prevent violence in the community through mediation.

Whereas development associates are more and more dedicated to state building, their methodologies do not satisfactorily replicate the need to assist

government institutions, while nurturing state-society affairs. They have not moved beyond technical institution building and capacity development to hold up wider political discourses and courses of action. State building attempts are inclined to center on the executive at central level, with a smaller amount of aid for the legislature, judiciary and decentralized administrations. Assistance is often concerted on formal institutions and traditional areas of intervention such as election support, public sector management and service delivery, while support to civil society organizations in order to foster free and fair political processes, domestic revenue mobilization or job creation is left behind.

This work argues that early warning is far wider, deeper, and more encompassing and involves a far greater array of actors, activities, levels of society, links between societies and time horizons than the dominant practice recognizes. It involves nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society. It involves religious actors, who are all but ignored in most current thinking on early warning. It involves combating inequalities that are embedded in the global structures of power and wealth. Not only is the broad range of these players, practices, and periods crucial for achieving sustainable peace, each is linked to others through cause and effect, for better or for worse. Effective early warning system, it follows, aims to strengthen these ligatures of interdependence, accenting, deepening, and synchronizing them, and linking them further with the efforts of governments and international institutions and with the broad project of building a just peace in and between societies. This article suggests a bottom-up operational framework that could be domesticated in different conflict contexts as indicated in the figure below:



## Conclusion

When passing judgment on the effectiveness of early warning system, we need to be conscious that the whole subject is still a major work in progress-especially since it did not begin to boom until the end of the Cold War. The experience over the past decade has provided some important lessons that assist in structuring a practicable mechanism not destined for collapse from the beginning. The key point so far is that it may not be the notions of early warning and conflict prevention that are flawed per se, but potentially our relevance or failure thereof. We can distinguish failures associated with early warning's technical features (information collection and analysis), its institutional features (communication channels and decision-making processes), as well as its response side. Failures at the response side of conflict avoidance not only tend to be associated with technical or institutional constraints but also to situational and political conditions (Mwaûra & Schmeidl 2002).

Long-term security is process-based, different from being a short-range, deliverable product. Dedicating concentration to the process is paramount because it shapes the building blocks of trust, a vital precondition for all conflict resolution dealings. In the context of interstate conflicts, process obtains even greater impact because of the psychopolitical dynamics implicated. To overcome negative feelings and perceptions so that structural issues can be addressed, protagonists have to develop trust in the process and in those who guide it. Whether security is being sought in a troublesome environment, or as a conflict deterrent action, it is a process that is based on agreements, trust and cooperation between various subdivisions of society at the local, national, and regional levels.

There are two viable ways to tackle the disparity between early warning and early response. Early warning systems must be: (a) "built back-to-front. To augment the possibility that the suggestions would be followed, the early warning systems must openly employ the assistance and, furthermore, the capacity of the decision makers. Unless, this is accomplished, then it will make a small difference how much is devoted in the correctness of the mechanism; (b) built as a satellite around particular conflict hindrance machineries in so doing directly connecting warning with concrete response initiatives. The system should not be built in seclusion." (Austin, Martina & Nobert 2004).

To overcome the disparity between conflict prevention theory and practice, prevention needs to develop into a round the clock specialized and governmental venture. A significant feature that will direct this obligation is to deal with the urgent need to actively get involved in crisis prevention. In particular, concentration should be aimed at advancing all the major actions

entailed in the prevention process, from the identification and projection of when, why and where conflict will explode to how to mediate.

There is need for conflict early warning systems to integrate, at different stages of the warning process, different groups of stakeholders involved in governance so that when particular occurrences are conveyed such actors or groups are automatically set off as part of a wider response strategy and therefore protect the warning from vanishing on transit as it moves from the warning room to the decision makers at the top. This type of organization would have been useful in a situation like Kenya where the national government was warned about the looming post election violence of 2007/8, but the information did not arrive to others who could have taken action where the government did not. The underlying principle behind the development of early warning systems for instability in general and conflict and crises in particular lies in the acknowledgment that it is simple to power international events in their initial phases, before they become more hostile and less controllable. Such systems, while in their formative years, hold promise of providing early enough warning so that policy makers can lay down, standardize, and fine-tune their strategies so as to be at the forefront of events.

This work affirms that the context should serve as the first point of reference, and that knowledge of local political economy realities is important, yet they neither carry out regular and systemic assessments, nor methodically distribute the ones they have carried out, nor do they necessarily use the analysis to inform their programming. On the contrary, international stakeholders still use pre-packaged programming rather than modifying assistance to fit local realities as suggested by the framework in this work.

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