Establishing an Early Warning System in the African Peace and Security Architecture: Challenges and Prospects

By

Birikit Terefe Tiruneh

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Abstract

Conflict Prevention includes a wide range of actions, interventions, programmes, activities, mechanisms and procedures that address structural risks to prevent the escalation of tension into violent conflict, the continuation of conflict or the reoccurrence of armed conflicts in post-conflict situations.[1] This in turn broadens and diversifies the purpose of early warning, which is a tool responsible for data collection, analysis and communication of the information for conflict prevention. In 2004, the African Union (AU) launched the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) as part of the African Peace and Security Architecture. This was done in acknowledgement of the effectiveness of conflict prevention, which is proactive than the traditional reactive system in AU. Now the CEWS has been in place for almost half a decade. This paper examines the progress and challenges of this system by looking at the African Union and other African regional organisations. Key issues to be discussed include a historical background to the CEWS and commonly contested issues in the system. Using different facts and the experiences of the regional organisations, this paper tries to show the challenges and merits of early warning systems in Africa. It also argues that the early warning systems should be included in every stage of conflict and explains that the core value of early warning should be the protection of individuals by the state or by the regional organizations if the state fails to do so.

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[1] Report of the Secretary General. *Preventionof Armed Conflict*. June 2001.

1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War resulted in an immense change in the nature of war in Africa. Wars became more intrastate than interstate, leading to the deaths of more civilians.[2] The late realisation of this change in dynamics led to the worst cases like the genocide in Rwanda that recorded the deaths of millions of civilians.[3] These grave circumstances and the increasing concern of the international community forced African leaders to reconsider some of their guiding principles, structures and policies. Consequently, the idea of non interference and respect for the territorial integrity of states was challenged. This also resulted in the transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU).

The African Union emerged with the core objective of promoting peace, security and stability on the continent with the notion of non-indifference rather than/as opposed to non-interference.[4] In order to achieve this objective and to strengthen the capacity of the AU in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, the Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) was adopted in Durban in July 2002 and entered into force in December 2003. Accordingly, the Peace and Security Council was formed as *a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient responses to conflict and crisis situations in Africa*.[5]

In order to achieve its objectives, the following structures were established: the African Standby Force (ASF), the Military Staff Committee (MSC), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the Panel of the Wise (POW) and the Peace Fund. Collectively, these bodies fall under the umbrella of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

There is also a growing realization of the importance of proactive measures to conflicts rather than reactive measures. The prevention of conflict is found to be more effective in terms of cost and saving lives. Due to this, article 12 of the Peace and Security protocol provides for the establishment of a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). This system, which is responsible for facilitating the 'anticipation and prevention of conflicts in Africa', works very closely with the regional organisations in information gathering with all the information being submitted to the situation room at the headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Eight Regional Mechanisms are considered to be part of this structure including the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the East African Community (EAC), the

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[2] Kaldor, M., *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Cambridge: Polity, 1999.

[3] See: Shelton, G., ''Preventive Diplomacy and Peacekeeping'' in *Journal of African Security Review* Vol 6 no. 5, 1997.

[4] See Article 3(f) of the AU constitution, 2001.

[5] See Article 2(1) of the Peace and Security Protocol of AU, 2001.

Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Community of Sahel and Saharan States (CEN-SAD).

These different organisations are performing at different levels. ECOWAS and IGAD have been the most progressive in the continent. Both organisations have progressed beyond mere paperwork and have started collecting and analysing data from the field. The other regional mechanisms are still struggling to create their mechanisms on paper.[6] There is also a big gap in the implementation guidelines. IGAD's early warning unit has the most sophisticated electronic mechanism and tools in place and works as an open information centre whereas the SADC places the early warning unit as part of its closed intelligence system.[7]

Recognising that early warning requires the involvement of state and non-state actors, article 12(3) calls on the regional organisations for their active role in early warning activities. Accordingly, ECOWAS collaborates with a regional civil society organisation- the West African Network for Peace building (WANEP). The IGAD also bases its information on field officers and employees of local NGOs in pastoralist areas.

The focus of the CEWS in the RECs is also found to be diverse. For example, In East Africa, the IGAD focuses on pastoralists and related issues, whereas the EAC is putting emphasis on 'security among the member states, inter-state defence and intra state conflicts that emanate from cattle rustling, smuggling and illegal trade; poverty and economic inequalities; human rights violations in partner states and sharing of cross border and intra state natural resources and land'.[8] The SADC plans to focus on threats and conflicts of a social economic nature whereas the ECOWAS widely focuses on 11 thematic areas with prior focus on human security.

Nonetheless, the protocol and implementation procedures (including the indicators) for the early warning system overlook a lot of issues such as the specific definition and understanding of when to apply early warning, which issues to include in early warning and how to include them.

This paper seeks to explore the challenges at the levels of both the AU and the regional organisations and will recommend common points for a more proactive CEWS. This paper also examines the gaps between the RECs and the African Union related to the early warning system in the APSA.

2. The Genesis/ Evolution of Early Warning

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[6] Cilliers.J.,*Towards a Continental Early Warning System.*, 2005.

[7] For IGAD see: Cilliers Op. cit For SADC See: Report- Meeting of governmental experts on early warning and conflict Prevention, 2006.

[8] See Draft protocol of the East African Community, 2004.

There are two schools of thought about the origins of the Early Warning System: some believe that early warning emerged from a military origin while others attribute its emergence to a humanitarian perspective.

According to the first perspective, early warning developed during the Cold War in the field of national military intelligence to enhance capacities to predict potential (ballistic) attacks.[9] In contrast, the latter believe that early warning has evolved as a system of predicting environmental hazard, mainly to detect natural disasters like floods, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes.[10] In the early 80s, it was also used for predicting the economic condition of the stock market.[11] Nevertheless, the effect of these occurrences in terms of human casualties makes it obvious that these events have a direct effect on individuals and communities as a whole. For this reason, early warning started focusing on humanitarian issues and also included famine and refugee migration in the late 1980s. This activity was led by relief organisations that are mostly non-governmental, making them the first actors to use early warning as a system of humanitarian assistance.

In 1992, early warning as a system of conflict prevention was established in the UN Secretariat after the Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali's report, 'An Agenda for Peace[12]', highlighted the link between humanitarian action and the peace process. In the above report he mentioned the 'valuable work' of the early warning system on environmental threats, the risk of nuclear accidents, natural disasters, mass movements of populations, the threat of famine and the spread of disease. He stressed that 'there is a need to strengthen arrangements in such a manner that information from these sources can be synthesised with political indicators to assess whether a threat to peace exists and to analyse what action might be taken by the UN to alleviate it.'[13]

Subsequently, the nature of conflict in Africa, the high death toll of civilians and the gravity of human rights abuses (including sexual exploitation), added to the high cost of peacekeeping and other post-conflict interventions, led the international community and African leaders to focus on conflict prevention. This shifted the focus onto the development of knowledge-based models that enhance the decision maker's ability to identify critical policy developments in a timely manner. In July 1990, the OAU decided 'to work towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all types of conflicts on the Continent'. This was followed by the establishment of the *Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution* in 1992.[14] This decision was put into effect in June 1993 with the adoption of the *Cairo Declaration* which established

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[9] Simon & Niels (2006) cited in Schmeidl. S.,et al. *'Conflict Early Warning and Prevention: Toward a Coherent Terminology', 2002..* Lawrenceville and Asmara: The Red Sea Press, Inc.

[10] Schmeidl Op. Cit.
[11] ibid

[12] See Boutros Boutros-Ghali's report on *An Agenda for Peace*, 1992. para. 23

[13] ibid

[14] OAU, declaration of the assembly of heads of state and government on the establishment of a mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, 29th ordinary session, Cairo,28-30, June 1993.

the Central Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. The Mechanism provided for the anticipation and prevention of situations of armed conflict as well as peacemaking and peace-building efforts during conflict and post-conflict situations. Nevertheless, while the Cairo Declaration created most of the AU institutions (such as the Peace Fund) and practices (such as the use of eminent persons) that were subsequently included in the PSC Protocol, it did not explicitly provide for the establishment of a unit for early warning.

The first specific reference to the establishment of an early warning system at the level of the OAU Heads of State appears in the Yaoundé Declaration of 1996 which followed a June 1995 OAU Council of Ministers meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that endorsed a proposal submitted by then Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim for the establishment of a continent-wide early warning system[15]:

> *We welcome the creation in June 1993 of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution which is already contributing significantly towards improving the Organization's capacity to prevent conflicts and maintain peace in Africa; We hail in advance the imminent institution within the said Mechanism of our early warning system (EWS) on conflict situations in Africa, convinced that its establishment should be able to further improve the action of the Organization in the area of preventive diplomacy by making it possible, notably through pre-emptive action in gathering and analyzing pertinent data, not only to establish the existence of a threat to the peace, but also to look for a quick way to remove the threat. We exhort all potential data collectors to communicate same information in time and provide the OAU Mechanism regularly with any at their disposal on warning signs of imminent conflict.*

After this, early warning as a body of the Peace and Security Council was solemnly launched in 2004 under the Peace and Security Secretariat of the African Union. This Peace and Security Council includes the Continental Early Warning System in addition to the other bodies under the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

Since its formation the CEWS has undergone several changes, notably the inclusion of the eight Regional Organisations as major stakeholders, the identification of indicators for data collection and the establishment of the situation room in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Implementing the CEWS has been difficult and has generated various debates and controversies, especially about the purpose of EW and how and when to use it.

3- The Purpose of Early Warning

Social conflict, which is a universal and inevitable phenomenon, is not always negative. It is a catalyst for change and a key to producing necessary and constructive

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[15] Yaonde Declaration, Africa: Preparing for the 21st century. 32nd OAU summit, July 1996, Yaonde.

transformation.[16] It is a tool for mobilising the masses and enables the voices of the needy to be heard. But to what extent is conflict constructive and how far can we tolerate it? Some social researchers argue that conflict is positive only if stopped before it escalates into violence. However, others believe that violent conflict is a desirable step for addressing deep rooted grievances and major inequities such as apartheid in South Africa.[17] Such assumptions raise more questions than answers. Though conflicts can lead to change in some situations, they have also contributed to the deaths of individuals, the destruction of infrastructures, widespread sexual abuse and the looting of natural resources. So it is essential to distinguish between conflicts that are beneficial and conflicts that are disadvantageous. A clear understanding of the kinds of conflicts that early warning should report is a critical question that must be addressed.

Unlike the previous particular focus on state security, early warning in the African Union is rooted in the new concept of 'human security' and the principle of the responsibility to protect.[18]

Human security is about human beings and their broader security needs. Despite widespread support for the core principles of early warning, consensus seems to be lacking over precisely what threats individuals should be protected from. Advocates of the 'narrow' concept of human security focus on violent threats to individuals or the protection of communities and individuals from internal violence; freedom from fear.[19] On the other hand, advocates for the broader meaning of human security agree that individuals should not be protected only from violence or fear but also from other challenges such as hunger, disease and natural disasters because these kill far more people than war, genocide and terrorism combined.[20] Accordingly, they argue that human security should include the protection of people from threat as well as from violence. While those that support the narrow perspective indicate that focusing on more specific issues would lead to greater success, the broader school of thought states that addressing issues narrowly cannot bring sustainable peace and security since other root causes will not be addressed and may escalate with time. They even define human security as 'the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment[21] and the freedom to take action on one's own behalf.[22]

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[16] Alfred, G. Nhema, Tiyambe & Zeleza. *The Resolution of African Conflicts: The Management of Conflict Resolution & Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, 2008. Ohio University press.

[17] Stewart, F., Brown, G. & Langer, A. **Inequalities, Conflict and Economic. Accessed on http://www.undp.org/cpr/content/economic_recovery/Background_6.pdf (Accessed July/6/08).**

[18] *Cilliers Op.Cit*

[19] See the report on http://www.humansecurityreport.info/HSR2005_HTML/What_is_HS/index.htm
[20] ibid

[21] Kofi Annan. "Secretary-General Salutes International Workshop on Human Security in Mongolia." Two-Day
Session in Ulaanbaatar, May 8-10, 2000. Press Release SG/SM/7382.
http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000508.sgsm7382.doc.html> (Accessed July/8/08)
[22] http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/Outlines/outline.pdf

Africa has traditionally followed a broad and expansive approach to the concept of human security. The draft African Non-Aggression and Common Defence Pact states that:

> *Human security means the security of the individual with respect to the satisfaction of the basic needs of life; it also encompasses the creation of the social, political, economic, military, environmental and cultural conditions necessary for the survival, livelihood, and dignity of the individual, including the protection of fundamental freedoms, the respect for human rights, good governance, access to education, healthcare, and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfil his/her own potential.[23]*

The security of the individual is also considered to be broader in terms of his/her personal surroundings and the community the individual lives in.[24] From the above definition, it is clear that the AU has adopted an expansive view of what constitutes human security. But there are those who caution against the broadening of the concept. According to them, broadening the definition of human security would make it less practical. However, with more than 800,000 people a year losing their lives to violence and about 2.8 billion suffering from poverty, ill health, illiteracy and other maladies, the inclusion of freedom from want cannot justifiably be ignored.[25]

Importantly, without the provision of effective national security, neither citizens nor communities can be personally secure. Without secure and stable countries and a body of practice or law whereby countries regulate their interaction,individual, community, regional and international security remain elusive.[26] On the other hand, even if the state is not at war and human rights abuses are present, the security of the state comes under threat. Relatedly, conflict may originate from the individual, the state or the state system or a combination of both.[27] At the same time, the intensity of war also affects neighbouring states increasing migration which in turn affects the economy and social condition of the country. This shows the interrelated nature of insecurity. Therefore human security and national security can never be mutually exclusive. It is impossible to ignore the fact that both are interlinked since one cannot be achieved without the other. In this sense, in order for early warning to be effective, its purpose and scope should be broadened. Thus the broader perspective of human security is useful as it provides broader indicators for early warning.

- ***The Scope of Early warning***

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[23] See Article 1(K) of the African Union Non Aggression and Common Defence pact. (2005).

[24] Kwesi, A., Addo, P & Birikorang E & Sowatey E ''African Commitments to Conflict Prevention and Peacemaking: A review of eight NEPAD countries',. *A Monograph for the African Human Security Initiative.*2004.

[25]http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/Outlines/outline.pdf

[26] Nitschke S, Christian.*Anticipating African Conflict.* University of Oslo, 2005.

[27] Porto, Joäo G. *'Contemporary Conflict Analysis in Perspective'* in Lind, Jeremy and Kathryn Sturman (editors): *Scarcity and Surfeit. The Ecology of Africa's Conflicts.* Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies. (2002)

The initial workshop of experts on early warning reached a consensus that threats of violence and loss of life are potential entry points for the AU's early warning system.[28] This was followed by the draft Roadmap which emphasises that 'the objective of the CEWS should be the provision of timely advice on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security to enable the development of appropriate response strategies to prevent or limit the destructive effects of violent conflicts.'[29] For this, the meeting of governmental experts on early warning and conflict prevention recommended that the indicators of early warning should consist of larger activities that directly challenge 'state activities' to maximize the effectiveness of the quality of data.[30] It was also mentioned that issues of local disturbances can be managed by local agencies. As such, it was indicated that larger systems like intergovernmental early warning systems should be alerted only when the casualties are outrageous. This narrows the concept and the use of early warning under human security to 'freedom from fear'.[31] This contradicts the broad spectrum under which the AU defines human security. It is also a general fact that if we keep on addressing the former and ignore the latter, the main pillar of early warning which is human security would be undermined.

If early warning is to anticipate violent conflict, this cannot be understood without reference to root causes such as poverty, inequality, political representation and the uneven distribution of resources. The link between violence with deep rooted poverty, inequality, development, governance and other related issues is discussed by many scholars.[32] For example, the 2001 UN Report clearly mentions that every step taken towards reducing poverty and achieving broad based economic growth is a step towards conflict prevention.[33] Therefore, preventive strategies must work to promote human rights, to protect minority rights and to institute political arrangements in which all groups are represented. Hence, ignoring these underlying factors amounts to addressing the symptoms rather than the causes of deadly conflicts.

4. Early Warning and Conflict Prevention

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[28] See: African Union Report on Meeting the challenges of Conflict Prevention in Africa- Towards the Operationalisation of the Continental Early Warning System. Kempton Park, South Africa. 2006.

[29] African Union Draft Roadmap for the Operationalisation of the Continental Early warning System. Issue Paper No. 1. 2006

[30] African Union, Meeting the challenge of Conflict prevention in Africa- Towards the Operationalisation of the Continental Early Warning System. Issue paper No. 2. Proposal for indicators Module. 2006

[32] Wood, B., ''Development dimensions of Conflict Prevention and Peace Building.'' *An independent study prepared for the Emergency Response Division, UNDP.*2003.

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[32] Wood, B., ''Development dimensions of Conflict Prevention and Peace Building.'' *An independent study prepared for the Emergency Response Division, UNDP.*2003.

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[33] For a more sophisticated view of the connection between aid and conflict, see Kofi Annan, "Peace and Development — One Struggle, Two Fronts," Address to World Bank Staff, October 19, 1999. P.45

The African Union approach to peace and security focuses more on conflict management, especially in peacekeeping operations. This reactive approach has proven to be costly both financially and in terms of the loss of human life.

The cost of demobilisation, disintegration and reintegration and other post-conflict activities like Security Sector Reform are far more expensive than prevention. Members of the African Union have suffered from genocide and civil wars which the AU was unable to address because of a lack of capacity; the Rwandan genocide and the ongoing civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia are cases in point. According to the UN, the costs of peacekeeping missions and long-term capacity building of post conflict areas have increased from $1.5 billion in 1999-2000 to $7.1 billion for 2008-2009.[34] This shows the high cost incurred for post-conflict interventions. The costs in terms of the loss of human life and livelihoods are even higher. For example, Liberia lost 250,00 out of a total population of 3.5 million; the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has claimed more than 4 million lives while Angola's civil war killed more than 500,000 people. During the war in Sierra Leone tens of thousands of people died and more than 2 million people (one third of the total population) were displaced. It is therefore better to be proactive through conflict prevention than to be reactive. The latter approach is less expensive in terms of saving financial resources, cutting down on the loss of human lives and protecting the sources of livelihood of those involved in conflict.[35]

To achieve the above, conflict prevention requires vigilance, constant monitoring and, above all, in-depth understanding of the dynamics of all levels of conflict, including identifying potential conflict spots and mitigating the possibility of relapse into conflict after an initial settlement. This is where early warning can play a major role. Likewise, early warning is included as a conflict prevention strategy in the PSC protocol as a responsible body for pre-empting conflicts before eruption.[36] Early warning serves as capacity building for conflict prevention and can be used to strengthen the capacity of potential parties to violent conflict for resolving and progressively reducing the *underlying problems* that produce disputes.[37] Early warning raises several questions when it comes to the use of the system in conflict prevention.

There are those who think that early warning should not be used as part of the 'conflict prevention' strategy. They recommend that it should be an independent and separate data gathering system.[38] While others highly emphasise that early warning should anticipate conflict before it erupts. They state that the purpose of early warning should not be for reporting the escalation of conflict but rather to predict the root

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[34] Report of the 63rd GASC Session,2008.

[35] Report of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Armed Conflict. Fifty Fifth Session. 2001

[36] PSC protocol 12

[37] African Union, Report on Meeting the challenges of Conflict Prevention in Africa- Towards the Operationalisation of the Continental Early Warning System. Kempton Park, South Africa.2006

[38] Nitschke Op. Cit

causes of conflict.[39] This is related to the initial use of early warning to detect potential environmental hazards.

Yet others see early warning as a prior step to different conflict stages and a tool for conflict prevention. Especially in the context of Africa where there are a lot of countries at or emerging from war, the utility of framing the purpose of early warning to only one stage is highly contested.[40] Similarly, the definition of the former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his 1992 report, *An Agenda for Peace,* stated that Conflict Prevention should prevent disputes from arising and escalating, but also limit the spread of conflicts when they occur. Moreover, conflict prevention can be used to prevent conflicts before they emerge, to monitor post-conflict situations as well as to prevent the possibility of relapse into conflict. It further allows independent analytical briefings to its relevant organs on the situations in conflict zones.[41] This clearly shows that there is always a role for conflict prevention from pre- to post-conflict stages. Protecting people from harm and violence should not be an issue only before the emergence of conflict. It should be an ongoing process through different stages of conflict because early warning can play a major role in bringing the information necessary for action and helping to understand the issues. Early warning can facilitate intervention, policy formulation and other responses by conducting effective data collection and, analysis and by recommending a proper implementation framework. Therefore early warning can occur at every step of conflict management, escalation and prevention. It is a system that brings the early warning signs of emerging, potential or ongoing conflict. Therefore, it is relevant and more practical to think of early warning as an important part in three different stages; pre-conflict, in-conflict and post-conflict.

Though the main goal of early warning according to the Peace and Security Protocol of the AU is only about the prevention of violent conflict, it also mentions that CEWS tasks include monitoring situations of potential and actual conflicts as well as post-conflict situations on the continent.[42] Furthermore, the meeting on the operationalisation of CEWS clearly indicated that *the approach within the African Union and Regional organisations is to consider early warning and conflict prevention, peace support operations and reconstruction and development as an interdependent issue.*[43]

Saying this, it is very important to note the relevance of integrating an early warning system with the different conflict prevention, management and resolution activities.[44]

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[39] Ackermann, A., ''The Idea and Practice of Conflict Prevention'' in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2003, pp 339–347.

[40] Schmeidl Op. Cit

[41] ibid, Nitschke Op. Cit

[42] African Union Meeting The challenge of Conflict Prevention in Africa- Towards the Operationalisation of the Continental Early Warning System. Framework for the Operationalisation of the Continental early Warning System. 2006

[43] African Union Report on Meeting the challenges of Conflict Prevention in Africa- Towards the Operationalisation of the Continental Early Warning System. Kempton Park, South Africa.2006

Yet, the integration of this system should be done with caution not to *mix but integrate.* Because integrating the early warning system with the different stages of conflict should be done with the aim of keeping its independence during the process of data collection and analysis. Above all, to avoid loss of life and obtain a proper response, every stage of conflict requires early warning. As the objective of early warning is based on human security, saving human lives and protecting people, it is very difficult to draw a boundary where people's lives are in danger in the conflict process.

5. The Early Warning System 'Process'

The protocol on the PSC, which is the decision-making organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, provides for a Peace and Security architecture; a Panel of the Wise (POW), a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), an African Standby Force (ASF) and a Special Fund. [45] The Continental Early Warning System (Art 12) according to Article 2 of the PSC protocol establishes:

   a. An observation and monitoring centre, to be known as 'The Situation Room', located at the Conflict Management Directorate of the Union and responsible for data collection and analysis on the basis of an appropriate early warning indicators module, and
   b. Observation and monitoring units of the Regional Mechanisms to be linked directly through appropriate means of communications to the Situation Room, and which shall collect and process data at their level and transmit the same to the Situation Room.[46]

The situation room works for 24 hours on weekdays and until 9pm on weekends. It has 8 situation room assistants, a coordinator responsible for coordinating and a communication clerk for dispatching official communications. Information is collected from regional organisations, BBC, CNN, Pana press, UN news centre and Reuters, and daily reports are produced.[47] The Situation Room also monitors member states in a rather *ad hoc* way. On a daily basis, the employees produce three or four news bulletins after monitoring various news agencies on the Internet.[48] The bulletins are divided into six categories: Conflict Situations; Crisis Situations; Human Rights Situations; Post Conflict Situations; Humanitarian Situations Arising from Conflict; and Political Developments. While the reliance on internet and media sources is helpful, it is difficult to corroborate the information collected from this source.

Mwaûra, C & Schmeidl, S.*Early warning and conflict management in the Horn of Africa.* The Red Sea press. 2002. P. 72

[45] PSC protocol 2

[46] PSc protocol 12: 2

[47] Cilliers., ''Towards a Continental Early Warning System'' for Africa Occasional Paper No.102.2005
[48] ibid

Early warning at first glance seems to focus only on information gathering. Nevertheless, the PSC indicated that the existence of the protocol cannot be effective without the cooperation and willingness of the member states.[49] According to the protocol,

The Member States shall agree to accept and implement the decisions of the Peace and Security Council and shall extend full cooperation to, and facilitate action by the Peace and Security Council for the prevention, management and resolution of crises and conflicts, pursuant to the duties entrusted to it under the present Protocol.[50]

This clearly shows the obligation of the member states for cooperation. The challenge being the dependence of the cooperation on the political will of the member states which is so difficult to attain.

In the African Union, early warning is perceived as 'an effective tool to action' and encompasses the collection of information, analysis of information, formulation of best/worst scenarios and response options and communication to decision makers. Early warning is expected to strengthen the capacity of the Commission, the PSC and its structures such as the Panel of the Wise to identify critical developments in a timely manner, so that coherent response strategies can be formulated to either prevent violent conflict or limit its destructive effects. Early warning is considered as a tool for preparedness, prevention and mitigation with regard to disasters, emergencies, and conflict situations, whether short or long-term ones. However, the idea of information gathering by itself, however sophisticated, would mean less in the absence of proper analysis, clear decision and action.

In a similar manner, the PSC protocol put the early warning unit as a system that uses the information gathered through the CEWS for a timely and optimal course of action.[51] This is not happening due to the incapability of the regional organisations, the lack of proper structure and the lack of willingness from member states.

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[49] PSC Protocol 16: 3

[50] PSC Protocol 4

[51] PSC Protocol 12:4

This requires the cooperation of member states both during the data collection and the response phases. Above all, the key early warning indicators of intra-state conflict and regional instability in Africa and elsewhere have repeatedly proven to be the abuse of power (often culminating in a coup d'etat), ethnic politics and exclusionary practices, human rights violations, bad governance and institutional corruption, the proliferation of small arms (possibly most evident in the West African conflict system) and the like.[52] So most issues are related to the decision making ability and political willingness of member states, which are decisive factors for the success of early warning. [53]

All of this illustrates the point that the CEWS will need to be politically astute and its analysis will need to be informed by sound political judgment. Though the analysis of response is beyond the scope of the paper, the factors for the slow response from states and regional organisations is discussed under the following points.

- Lack of proper coordination and functioning between the regional organisations and the AU;
- Lack of a general guiding indicator manual,
- Inability to be proactive in addressing the issues that trigger violent conflicts and political instability.

5.1. Indicators

The main challenge of producing sound indicators is related to the uncertainties of the cause and effect relationship of events and violence. There are a lot of underlying problems and issues like poverty, degradation and abuse of natural resources, climate change, gender inequality etc. which are worse in developing countries. Though, in general, scholars seem to agree that there is no *one* variable that can explain the incidence of conflict, some try to explain this idea by dividing the causes of conflicts into root/structural cause and triggering factors.[54] The former has a wide spectrum which looks at the basis of problems that are likely to lead to violent conflict. This can be poverty, gender imbalance, bad governance etc. On the other hand, the trigger factors can be those immediate things that could lead to violent conflict in a short period of time like the shooting of the leader of another clan which *may* end up in immediate violent conflict, (which in turn bears no direct relation to violent conflict.) meaning not too clear The outbreak of violence in Guinea following the killing of President João Bernardo Vieira is a recent example.

An effective early warning system should be able to provide data that can assist in the prevention of conflict. This is important because human lives are involved during conflict situations.

The African Union is based upon the shift towards human security that enables the organisation to expand the scope of early warning to include political, economic,

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[52] See: Alfred G. Op Cit.

[53] Kwesi Op. Cit. .

[54] Ackermann, A., ''The Idea and Practice of Conflict Prevention'' in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2003, pp 339–347.

social, military and humanitarian indicators.[55] The benchmarks for normal social, political, economic and cultural activities on which to measure change were recommended as follows: democracy; civil liberties and political rights; internal politics and human and civil rights and the characteristics and behaviour of governments, classified according to levels of instability, incompetence and oppression.[56]

The AU, in its meeting on the formation of its indicators manual has come up with nine objectives that can guide the indicators for the early warning system in the region. This manual starts from indicators on inter and intra state conflict which range from small arms, human rights violations, cross border raids, the expulsion of a group to public or private hate talks in or by media. It also looks into the restriction of individual or collective economic, cultural and social rights. It includes issues like judiciary process and intrusion into parliamentary rights. The module therefore takes into consideration both human and state security issues. It covers a wide area of conflict indicators, both immediate and structural ones. However, the indicator fails to include important issues like natural resources, climate change and natural disaster which are posing direct security challenges in Africa.

The mainstreaming of women and other target populations is not included in the manual. The issues of women and youth were simply included as one separate objective. While it is advantageous to look at women separately because it can bring more focus on their gender, it can also undermine their productive role within the society. The violation of women's rights is not the only security challenge facing them. As such, integrating women into other elements can help draw more attention to the range of issues affecting them.

Lastly, the indicator module produced in the AU looks into the end results of conflicts in most of the cases. This is mentioned by the proposal itself and is considered as a broad 'framework'. The responsibility of building specific indicators from this broad framework is given to the functioning organs including the regional organisations. This brings another challenge to the operationalisation of the CEWS as different regional organisations are performing at different levels.

5.2. Regional Organisations and Early Warning

The African Union recognises the need for the *harmonization, co-ordination and co-operation* of Regional Mechanisms and the African Union in the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability in Africa.[57] Accordingly eight regional organisations have signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the formation of the Early Warning System with the AU. However, the process of transforming the idea of an early warning system from a concept on paper into reality has been slow and challenging. Almost all regional organisations have established or are in a process of

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[55] PSC protocol:4

[56] At the AU workshop on indicator formation in 2003, by O'Brien, 2002.

[57] PSC protocol 7:J

forming the early warning mechanism with the ECOWAS, the IGAD and the SADC taking relative leads in their respective regions.

In ECOWAS, the early warning system was established through the protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in 1999. The ECOWAS early warning system (ECOWARN) focuses on human security and is different from the traditional intelligence-gathering in that all its information is from an open source and also, it makes all the information accessible for the general public.

This system consists of the Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC) at the centre of the ECOWAS Commission, Abuja and four Zonal Bureaus in Banjul (The Gambia), Cotonou (Bénin), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and Monrovia (Liberia) that send a daily report to the OMC. Each zone has zonal bureau officers (ZBO) and zonal coordinators (ZC) to ensure and maintain collaboration between WANEP and ECOWAS at the zonal level. The OMC and PMC are the peace and stability observatory centers responsible for collating and analyzing early warning reports from all the four zones for onward transmission, in digestible form, to the President of ECOWAS.

There are three levels of reporting mechanisms: countries, zones and headquarters. At the country level, incident and situation reports are submitted by WANEP. At the zonal level, the reports posted on the ECOWARN website are reviewed and analyzed at each zone by ECOWAS zonal bureau officers (ZBOs) and WANEP zonal coordinators (ZCs). At the headquarters level, analysts at the Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC) of ECOWAS and Peace Monitoring Centre (PMC) of WANEP, which is the focal office for data collection by civil society actors, examine the country reports together with the zonal analyses and develop assessments, alerts and recommendations for actions and interventions as the situation demands.

In addition to this, ECOWAS has a relatively unique and strong approach towards the involvement of civil society organisations through its partnership with the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP) engaging 12 national networks and over 450 member organizations. In addition to this, ECOWAS has gone one step further in incorporating the Network in a sustainable way through the creation of a liaison office within the ECOWAS secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria, which is responsible for providing civil society access to governments and decision makers through ECOWAS. In 2007, ECOWAS and WANEP embarked on a series of activities including assessments and the production of a region-specific training manual for the field officers that are responsible for collecting data. This system, however, is contested by other NGOs which are not members of WANEP by indicating that the indicators and thematic areas of this system are not user-friendly for civil society. In addition, the operation of the ECOWARN mechanism is seen to be restricted to ECOWAS and WANEP focal persons and is not open to the wider civil society.[58]

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[58] *Civil Society and Conflict Prevention: Breaking the Cycle of Violence and Promoting Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the Mano River Union Countries.* Narrative Report of Conference Organised at Mariador Palace Hotel, Conakry, Guinea . 25th to 28th February 2009.

In order to run the above activities including the computer-based database, 15 focal points are assigned in the 15 Member States whose task would be to input data into the EWS using the 98 indicators. In addition to the heads of the four zonal bureaux and four civil society coordinators who are responsible for quality control of data and analysis, a total of 30 staff participate in the monitoring process.

Generally, ECOWAS' recognition among states has contributed to the success of the diplomatic response for the ECOWARN; the case of Guinea and the intervention of ECOWAS is a recent example. However, the ECOWAS situation-reporting database that comprises close to 100 indicators is currently in its trial phase and the incident report format is also being designed. It has also been in its testing phase since June 2006. This does not allow us to assess the success and failure of the work so far. But ECOWAS also agrees that it has challenges with regard to human resources and calls for a more sophisticated online facility to have quality data and analysis.

Besides, gender perspective has been absent from early warning and preventive response systems in the ECOWARN system. It has been noted that the indicators of the on-line situation report are not gender-sensitive enough which in turn fails to bring a special attention to policy-makers with useful insights on how conflict issues impact on women.[59]

IGAD on the other hand has an early warning system which was established with the objective of receiving and sharing information concerning potentially violent conflicts as well as their outbreak and escalation in the IGAD region including livestock rustling, conflicts over grazing and water points, nomadic movements, smuggling and illegal trade, refugees, landmines and banditry. However, CEWARN was mandated by the Member States to commence its monitoring and reporting on cross-border pastoral conflicts in 2003.

This system operated on a 'bottom up' and process-oriented approach with National Research Institutes (NRIs) contracting them as partner organizations. Each NRI has a CEWARN Country Coordinator (CC) supported by an assistant who is responsible to: a) organize and supervise the required field monitoring, b) coordinate information and data collection, and c) analyze the data and submit EW reports.[60]

In addition to this, CEWARN has the Technical Committee for Early Warning (TCEW) which includes the National Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanisms (CEWARNU) and the Committee of Permanent Secretaries (CPS) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is a policy making organ that reports to the IGAD Council of Ministers. This body in collaboration with the Executive Secretary is responsible to come with policy options and recommendations and also decide what parts of this information or analysis should be made available in the public domain. The latter reports to the Council of Ministers which in turn reports to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. CEWARNU is mandated to form a Steering

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[59] See detail on WANEP at http://www.wanep.org/programs/cbp.html

[60] Cilliers Op. Cit.

Committee including representatives of relevant ministries, security bodies such as the police, intelligence and military, legislative bodies, civil society organizations, academia and religious organizations or other influential members. The Executive Secretary, the Director of the Peace and Security Division and the Director of the CEWARN Unit are *ex-officio* members of the CPS.

All these activities are coordinated in the CEWARN Unit in Addis Ababa which is the regional hub for data collection, conflict analysis, information sharing and the communication of response options. This unit acts as a clearing house and is responsible for quality control.

CEWARN, using the above bodies and its unique database, is trying to provide timely, consistent and accurate information on cross-border pastoralist conflicts in its two pilot areas: Karamoja and the Somali cluster. It collects both qualitative (violent event data) and quantitative (constant behavioural factors) information through identified indicators that will enable it collect both conflict and peace developments. This makes CEWARN a very strong unit in data collection. Added to this, the data is analysed using a framework of root, proximate and triggering factors. These are in turn communicated in two kinds of reports:- incident reports on violent pastoral and related conflicts, which are submitted as they occur and situation reports on the general cultural, social, economic and political situations of the targeted areas that are submitted weekly.

IGAD has gone one step forward in responding to the early warning reports with the establishment of the Rapid Response Fund (RRF) to help finance short-term projects targeted at preventing, de-escalating or resolving pastoral and related conflicts in the region.[61] It has also taken a considerable step in calling for experts on engendering CEWARN.

The staffing for such a vast activity in the Horn of Africa is about 28 . The situation room has four professional staff. It has fourteen Field Monitors (FMs) in Karamoja who are trained in collecting information, categorizing and placing that information into prescribed reporting formats since mid-2003 and eight FMs in the Somali Cluster since June 2005. Unlike ECOWAS which is institutionally coordinated through a network of NGOs, the success of the information of the early warning system mainly depends on these individual actors which are '*the beginning and end of CEWARN's data collection*'.[62] These FMs are coordinated by the national research unit for Ethiopia, Inter Africa Group, to handle the early warning portion of the mechanism: 'This Group coordinates the EW process via selected country coordinators and field monitors that carry out the actual task of information collection, analysis and production of early warning reports.'[63]

The information system is well strengthened in terms of the use of software and modern technology with one of the best software (known as FAST) and IT technologies installed with the help of the German and US government. However,

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[61] For Detail see http://www.cewarn.org/gendoc/RRF.htm
[62] For more detail see http://www.interafricagroup.org/Conflict_Early_Warning.html

[63] ibid

information sharing between the CEWARN and the IGAD Member States, a key component of the protocol, is still lacking in practice. This adversely affects the public dissemination of its analyses and results.

Technically, the CEWARN system is complex and authoritative and has not yet closed the gap between analysis, options and actions. This is made more pronounced by the location of the CEWARN in Addis Ababa while the main office for IGAD is in Djibouti. This had widened the gap between the data collection and action due to distance and the system is left without mechanisms to harness and focus political will to action by IGAD Member States. The danger is that CEWARN may not be able to operationalise its conflict prevention ambitions at the regional level. This system is also relatively expensive; it requires about US600,000 per annum to run in its current configuration which makes it dependent on external support,especially with IGAD's plan to expand its focus from pastoralist to other areas in the coming years, the political will and relationship among the states and the cost of the system are points of challenge. Last but not least, the lack of a strong link with CSOs can limit the data collection process, especially accessibility of in-depth and grass root information from the system. This is important because most CSOs have a better connection with the community, especially women and other vulnerable groups.

SADC has been able to establish an early warning which is highly linked with the *intelligence* community in the region. This approach is against the foundation of the formation of early warning system in the AU.[1] The preparations to operationalise the regional early warning system are run by the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (NICOC), part of the Ministry of Intelligence.

The SADC Organ Protocol provides, in Article 11(3)(b), for the establishment of an 'early warning system in order to facilitate timely action to prevent the outbreak and escalation of conflict.' SADC has a National Early Warning Centre   (NEWC) in each member state and is still working on the situation room but has a Regional Early Warning Centre in Botswana. The member states have designated National Focal Points which are dealing with early warning issues between Member States and the SADC Early Warning Centre. The early warning system in the SADC focuses on threats and conflicts of a socio-economic nature. The early warning system in the SADC largely equates security with the state rather than with human security.

Although the SADC State Security Committee (and subsequently the Integrated Committee of Ministers) had apparently agreed that SADC would utilise the UNOCHA model (adopted for African specificities) for early warning and conflict assessment, all indications are that the methodological debate has not been settled. SADC system will apparently only disseminate its strategic reports through the office of the President that chairs the SADC Organ, to the African Union.

The procurement of equipment for the Centre has become very slow due to the high cost. Furthermore, though the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ encourages Civil Society to contribute to conflict prevention, management and resolution, there has been no involvement of organised CSOs in the system. However, it has a better

contact with research institutions like the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in the region.

Other Regional Organisations
In addition to the above systems, the other regional organisations have agreed to the AU's protocol on the formation and involvement of the early warning system. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) are in the process of conceptualising and operationalizing the system on paper while the Community of Sahelo Saharan States (CEN-SAD) is farther behind but still preparing itself for the establishment of the system through the formation of an appropriate framework.

Generally, these regional organisations seem to have different challenges in the process:

The regional organisations each have have different focus. For example, looking at the Regional Organisations in the Eastern part of Africa, the EAC is planning to work on issues related to interstate security, interstate defence and intra state conflicts that emanate from cattle rustling, smuggling and illegal trade, poverty and economic inequalities, human rights violations in partner states; sharing of cross border and intra state natural resources and land, while COMESA proposes to focus mainly on economic related issues to ensure that the region benefits from the trade of its natural resources. IGAD on the other hand focuses on pastoral issues. This diversity can be advantageous for addressing specific issues in the same region. For instance, Kenya who is a member of all the three regional organisations can have three early warning systems that can allow the country have classified information and broader area coverage. However, this may also cause duplication of information and resources in a region with three situation rooms and other related structures. This will also hugely affect the decision making process, especially if two different reports come with different information and recommendations at the same time. On the other hand, the corroboration of reports emerging from the fields depending on one source can be damaging because if the source of information collected proves to be fake, it can lead to faulty analysis.

Importantly, the AU has clearly indicated the relationship between AU and the regional organisations. However there are no mechanisms for sharing information *among* the regional organisations. Currently there is no regular reporting arrangement from the regional organisations to the AU, which may cause duplication of effort and resource by the AU and also affect the decision making process of the early warning system. In all the EWS in the regional offices there is no person assigned for communicating the information to the AU. The regional organisation and the African Union seem to focus more on communicating the information within the organisation than exchanging information across the regional organisations. There is only one Communication Officer in the AU who has the duty of communicating the information from the analysis stage to the commission within the AU.[64]

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[64] Cilliers Op. Cit

In addition to this, it is clearly stated that the AU does not need to duplicate efforts already accomplished by the regional organisations in the conflict early warning system.[65] This is an idea that can maintain the autonomy of the regional organisations but at the same time has created a big gap in terms of coordinating the diverse and uncoordinated activities in every part of the continent. For instance early warning in SADC, leans more towards intelligence when ECOWAS and IGAD make it an open and public recourse. Except for the idea of establishing a situation room, almost all the RECs focus on different areas and have different systems for collecting and reporting information.

The diverse nature of problems that the member states face is also the other factor that is challenging the early warning system from having a uniform framework. The IGAD which has volatile states has less power to push issues on the states so it focuses on addressing issues of pastoralists. On the other hand the SADC which spent most of its years fighting for independence tends to incline more on intelligence and state sovereignty. This causes a major challenge in establishing a continental framework of information gathering and analysis which directly affects the processes of analysis and decision making. The unavailability of the continental framework also affects the division of labour in the system. For example, in East Africa both the EAC and the IGAD work on cattle rustling and the common member countries will be facing a duplication of information and resources.because as cattle rustling happens in one area both field officers from the two organisations will invest their time and input to report on the same issue.

In most systems in the AU including the African Standby Force, regional organisations are restricted to the five geographic coverage (East West, South, North and Central Africa). The Economic Commission for Africa is also trying to minimize and merge the number of the existing regional organisations.[66] But in the case of the EWS, all the eight regional organisations have signed a memorandum of understanding. This in my belief is done without the consideration of duplication that may arise due to redundancy of information and waste of resources in regions that have more than one regional organisation. After the realisation of this duplication, the AU tried to focus on organising an exchange program with the regional organisations which could not succeed for a long time due to the lack of resources and coordination.

The regional organisations try to work with civil society organisations in the data collection process. The constitution of the African Union clearly prioritises the involvement of regional organisations and other non-state actors.[67] However, in practical terms, there is no systematic mechanism in place except the slow process of the formation of the ECOSOCC which is taking more than three years to form a committee.[68] This will have a massive effect in terms of information gathering from

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[65] African Union Report on Meeting the challenges of Conflict Prevention in Africa- Towards the Operationalisation of the Continental Early Warning System. Kempton Park, South Africa. 2006

[66] AU Conference of Ministers of Trade., Resolution on the Rationalisation and the Harmonisation of the Regional Economic Communities, 4th ordinary session, Nairobi, Kenya. April 2006.

[67] PSC protocol and constitutive act of AU

[68] Template for Election into the ECOSOCC General Assembly Accra, Ghana. (17-20 June 2007).

the grassroots level and addressing human security challenges. ECOWAS has a better approach by including the CSOs through a networking organisation like WANEP but still fails to create the proper reporting system into the zonal offices and the AU.

Last but not the least, the analytic capacity of the small number of staff is also an issue. Early warning information needs a more regional or continental analytic capacity with professionals specialised in fields like the rule of law, gender, and governance who can help to give detailed and well analysed reports which most of the early warning systems - including the CEWS – lack at present.

here, a very clear continental framework is needed as to how the regional organisations should function, which areas they should cover, and how to exchange professionals in order to share experience. Of course all these have to be supported with precursory regional and continental assessments.

6. Conclusion

Early warning, since its inception in the late 1990s as a conflict prevention tool in Africa, has been widely adopted by different regional organisations in the continent. Africa has faced grave wars and severe droughts. It also has experienced the worst desertification in the world. The lack of good leadership, corruption, illiteracy, poverty etc. adds much more to the instability of the continent.

The nature of conflicts has shown that they have a trans-border character and therefore the repercussions can be felt in neighbouring states. This verifies the assumption that security is indivisible.
To make this worse, most conflicts as much as they have become drivers of change, have also resulted in the death of civilians, sexual abuse, and loss of developmental activities and destruction of public services. This reality calls for early warning: a well structured and effective anticipation of conflicts that constitute threats to the individuals which in turn affects the state and the world in general. This anticipation process needs to address both the structural and trigger factors on conflict requiring the cooperation of member states in data collection, analysis and response both during data collection and action. This also needs a more structured framework at the continental level with a clear division of labour among the RECs.

Accordingly, the structural and trigger factors cannot however be identified without the proper use of indicators. The proper use of indicators can be a basis for clear data collection which is the key for analysis and advocacy. Thus, a more detailed and focused indicator manual is needed with proper networking between the AU and CSOs as well as organisations like the Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC). This also needs to be well integrated within the RECs.
Once the indicators are formed, the analytical capacity of the staff in the situation room and the EW unit becomes very crucial in terms of specific fields (gender, law, history etc) and geographical expertise (national or regional).

Above all, the indicators, processes and structures of early warning systems should consider the main goal and core value of such systems - the protection of individuals;

ultimately, human security. Tensions may never escalate or may take very long before causing violent conflict. Therefore, a single focus on violent conflict may increase individual casualties while states, in general, appear to be safe.

About the author: Birikit Terefe Tiruneh wrote this paper while she worked as an intern at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre from May to October 2009