Executive Summary

Introduction and background

The aim of this report is to support the efforts of OECD DAC members and others to better integrate conflict early warning analysis and response into their programming. The report is based on a review of the literature on early warning and response and inputs from surveyed agencies. It seeks to assess the value and role of early warning for the prevention of violent conflict and peacebuilding; identify the most effective early warning and response systems; evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different systems; pinpoint the obstacles to early response; and make some tentative judgements on what the role of OECD DAC could be in influencing future developments in this field.

Historical review of the early warning and response

Conflict early warning was conceived as a means of protecting and preserving life. The field has evolved significantly since its initial conceptualisation, and early warning has been integrated into the policies of many organisations. Today it cannot be said, however, that the international community is in a position to prevent another Rwandan genocide. Conflict early warning faces challenges similar to those it faced 15 years ago – and there are new challenges on the horizon.

From initial conceptualisation in the 1970s and 1980s, conflict early warning only really emerged on the international policy agenda after the end of the Cold War, when the conflict environment and the international conflict management framework evolved rapidly in response to the new geo-strategic reality. The failure to respond to the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and the experiences of the Balkans conflicts were major spurs to the development of better conflict early warning and response; they led to several major policy initiatives in governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental sectors.

From the start, conflict early warning was envisaged as distinct from intelligence-based analysis that focused on protection of state interests. It sought multi-stakeholder solutions, was gender-sensitive, used open source information and aimed at protecting human lives and creating sustainable peace based on locally owned solutions. However, this approach has been overshadowed by the new Northern perception of international threats that emerged after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and consequent counterterrorism and counter-proliferation measures taken by the United States and its allies. Those attacks also acted as a spur to growing interest in and analysis of weak, fragile and failed states.

In spite of the increased resources going into early warning, key shortcomings of governmental and multilateral interventions in violent conflict remain. These include faulty analysis, late, uncoordinated and contradictory engagement, and poor decision making.

Conflict early warning as a field of conflict prevention is today undergoing significant scrutiny. There have been inaccurate predictions, failure to foresee important events, and inadequate linking of operational responses to warnings. From a donor perspective, the visible impacts of early warning are often seen as meagre. Indeed, at times early warning analyses can provide donor officials with political headaches, by being alarmist or offensive to other governments, or by advocating responses that are not feasible. However, proponents of conflict early warning insist that it contributes to the evidence base of conflict prevention decision making.

Early warning tools and systems

The focus of this report is on tools/systems that deal with violent conflict and state fragility.

The evolution of the conflict early warning field has been driven by the advances made in quantitative and qualitative analytical tools. As the capabilities and value of the tools grew, they were integrated into the different early warning systems operated by governments, inter-governmental organisations, and NGOs.

Such tools have enjoyed significant advances. Quantitative methods have strong predictive capabilities, particularly in relation to political crisis and instability. State fragility indices provide easily graspable “watch lists” and help agencies working on these issues to set priorities. Qualitative methods provide rich contextual analysis, as well as ways to plan programmatic responses and assess the impact of these responses on violent conflicts. The more recent qualitative methods for state fragility analysis provide useful planning frameworks for programmatic responses.

Qualitative tools satisfy important analytical requirements among development agencies, particularly in terms of informing programming. Nonetheless, numerous weaknesses persist. Analytical tools fundamentally oversimplify complex and fluid violent conflicts and situations of state fragility. They provide simple snapshots that are quickly outdated, and the quality of analysis suffers from data deficits that characterise many of the countries covered by such studies.

Two conclusions can be drawn when it comes to quantitative and qualitative tools. First, there is no "best methodology" or "best set of indicators": there is basic good practice in analysis. Many methods are based on this good practice and are designed to address the needs of specific institutions. Second, the best way to use these methods is to combine quantitative and qualitative tools. This ensures the necessary triangulation required for creating a robust evidence base for decision making.

Early warning systems now exist within governments, multilateral agencies and NGOs. They play different roles – ranging from sounding alerts and catalysing response, to bolstering the evidence base of decision making, to serving as response mechanisms themselves. There is consensus on what constitutes a "good" early warning system, and this good practice has been put into operation in several initiatives. Early warning systems provide: a crisis prediction capacity that enables proactive decision making; a stronger basis for evidence-based decision making on countries affected by crisis; improved programming through systematic country reviews and expert analysis; a priority-setting contribution through watch-list type products; a starting point for developing a shared problem definition for crisis-affected countries that sets the stage for more coherent responses; and an ideas pool for responses and sometimes the forum to meet fellow responders and plan joint response strategies. However, with a few exceptions, early warning systems suffer from under-investment. The more natural clients for early warning systems are political decision-making entities.

Still, the often poor/shallow quality of analyses, unrealistic recommendations, and biased or ungrounded opinions present in many early warning products means that "poor early warning" remains an important cause of non-response to violent conflict.

Response tools and systems

Advances over the last 15 years or so in early and rapid response have been made in the range of institutions, mechanisms, instruments and processes available to manage violent conflict – and in national, regional

and international willingness to use force in situations of violent conflict. At national, regional and international levels, capabilities to respond to situations of violent conflict and state fragility have evolved significantly. Institutional mandates for response have been strengthened, funding has increased, there is a greater range of operational tools, and mechanisms have been refined on the basis of applied experience. However, the multiplicity of actors and responses means that the problems of late, incoherent, fragmented, and confused response are perhaps greater today than was true at the time of the Rwandan genocide.

Numerous challenges are identified in the literature and in the survey of practitioners carried out by this study. First, the role of analytical evidence in determining response (as opposed to political expediency, budgetary considerations, etc.) remains limited. Second, *ad hocism* and limited strategic thinking is prevalent. Many actors do not define or share a clear strategy for supporting peace in violent conflict situations. The absence of such strategic frameworks leads to incoherence and uncoordinated responses. Third, sustainability concerns remain unaddressed. Whether related to macro-level strategies for stabilisation or sector-specific approaches, responses are rarely designed to outlast themselves. Fourth, stove piped responses**,** based on narrow institutional interests have not been overcome. Deep divisions between security and development agencies and a propensity for "blueprints" in responses to different countries with problems perceived as similar remain cause for concern.

From evaluations of responses to violent conflict, several "good practice" principles have been drawn by scholars, including: *(a)* understand the problem, base analysis on evidence from the ground; *(b)* ensure that responses are diverse, flexible, and sustainable; *(c)* invest time in planning and strategy; *(d)* be conflict-sensitive; *(e)* don't push technical solutions onto political problems; *(f)* balance speed, ownership and co-ordination. This review identifies a number of important gains from the development of governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental response mechanisms/instruments, including: more rapid, coherent, and informed responses within institutions to situations of violent conflict and state fragility; the potential for reducing costs associated to expensive "late" responses to violent conflict and state fragility; the promotion of more consensus-based decision making within both the bureaucracies and political leadership in crisis situations; and their role as a resource to help avoid the derailment of developmental investments by crises and conflict.

However, more mechanisms/instruments have not translated into better responses. The link between warning and response remains weak. This is due to the poor quality of early warning and immature mechanisms/instruments and response measures, along with a range of

personal, institutional, and political shortcomings that affect decision making. If the problem was formerly that "early warning is not wired to the bulb", today it may be that there are too many "bulbs" competing with each other or not working when they should.

Future directions for early warning and early response

Early warning and early response will be faced with an evolution of threats over the next decade. These threats will come from the combined impacts on conflict and instability of climate change, fallout from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, fallout from the war on terror, and the increasing criminalisation of conflict, among other factors. There is little indication of forward thinking among early warners on these critical issues. However, the future relevance of the field depends largely on work undertaken now to be able to understand and provide useful analysis on these new emerging threats.

Technological advancements have played an important role in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of early warning systems. Most inter-governmental and non-governmental systems, however, have not gone beyond the use of email and websites for dissemination, and communication technology for data collection. Governmental and some inter-governmental systems do benefit from access to and resources for satellites and GIS in their analysis and reporting. However, access to technology remains very unequal among systems and the field of conflict early warning lags far behind in the use of innovative technologies and Web 2.0 applications.

There are several important trends in the early warning community that should be noted. First, with the closure of FEWER and FAST, there is now less diversity in early warning analysis at a global level. Exclusive reliance on few sources, no matter how good they are, is not smart decision-making practice, particularly in complex issues such as violent conflict and state fragility. Second, development agencies working on structural prevention see less value in early warning than before. Agencies involved in operational prevention remain interested, but current early warning systems need to consider how to shift their networking efforts to these actors if they have not done so already. Third, with increased corporate use of early warning and risk assessment tools, there are new partners to bring into the early warning fold.

In terms of early response trends, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, along with work to ensure greater governmental and inter-governmental coherence, there is a need to empower officials working on conflict and state fragility (through capacity building, etc.) to do their work

well. Second, an increase in response capabilities and experience needs to be bolstered by initiatives to document and share good practice. Not doing so will constitute a missed opportunity. Third, micro-level responses to violent conflict by "third generation early warning systems" are an exciting development in the field that should be encouraged further. These kinds of responses save lives.

Conclusions and recommendations

Considering the balance between future security threats and trends in technology, early warning, and early response, this report concludes that the early warning and response field is unprepared for the challenges that it is likely to face over the next decades.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations, including:

1. Assist in the consolidation of good (quantitative and qualitative) methodological and applied reporting practice for conflict analysis and state fragility analysis.

The consolidation of good methodological practice needs to focus on both methods and their application (see Chapters 1 and 2). It needs to include the following:

- The organisation of a conflict and state fragility analysis workshop that brings together method developers to discuss and document good practice. Topics covered should include how different (quantitative and qualitative) methods can best be combined to yield a more robust evidence base for decision making.
- Increased funding of efforts to develop more applied qualitative state fragility assessments – particularly as these relate to institutional planning cycles and impact assessments of efforts to reduce state fragility. This is a very new area and the DAC may have a comparative advantage here.
- Explore further (through applied research) how state fragility indices or assessments can be used to better inform resource allocations and what their limitations are for that purpose. This would entail expanding the DAC work on monitoring resource allocation by monitoring how resources are allocated in relation to state fragility – and the strengths/weaknesses of basing resource allocations on "watch list"-type assessments.

- Prepare a short DAC "recommended reporting standards" document for conflict analysis, early warning and state fragility reports, and disseminate these broadly as part of ensuring improved reporting on violent conflict and state fragility. Such reporting standards will provide important benchmarks for early warners to attain, and will help improve how analytical methods are applied.
- Concretely outline the critical importance of adopting innovative information communication technologies for data collection, communication, visualisation and analysis.

2. Consider how early warning systems can promote improved understanding of armed violence dynamics (see Chapter 4).

- An indicator list based on case studies is required to help identify what factors early warners need to analyse when operating systems in areas affected by armed violence. Such (non-prescriptive) indicators should include those related to, *inter alia,* the political economy of violence and supply and demand of weapons.
- More sophisticated methods for stakeholder analysis are required to capture group motivations (beyond grievance) and relationships, especially given the importance of group and leadership culture and psychology in violent conflict situations.

3. Consider the need for a bolstered global early warning and response architecture (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4).

- Consider how a shared, diversified and more robust evidence base for decision making on violent conflict and state fragility can be created – particularly in view of the reduced number of global sources of analysis and the need to align current early warning systems (and funding pools) with political (as opposed to developmental) decision makers. Explore the establishment of a new global network for early warning and response (involving regional organisations, governments, and non-governmental agencies) to address this deficit.
- Endorse efforts to build internal capacity and functional external relations among staff dealing with conflict-affected countries and situations of state fragility. Capacity building needs to involve skills development, and internal reviews of existing institutional processes that enable (or disable) officials from pursuing appropriate and rapid responses.

- Promote the practice of regular assessments of "whole-of-system" responses to violent conflict and state fragility situations (along the lines of the Rwanda Joint Evaluation) to build the knowledge base from the applied "do's and don'ts". Ensure that the reviews both tackle the institutional mechanism/instrument and measure dimensions of responses.

- Call for the standard use of multi-stakeholder platforms for joint problem definition and planning of responses to situations of violent conflict and state fragility. Ensure that such platforms include both state and civil society groups, along with regional and international organisations.

- Consider how well placed (or not) current regional and international early warning and response capabilities are to assess and respond to global current and future security threats. This could involve calling for a high-level meeting to review the current global conflict early warning and response architecture.

4. Increase support for regional early warning systems, and third generation systems that address micro-level violence.

There is a need to invest more effectively in conflict early warning systems. Such investment should be focused on the early warning efforts of regional organisations and those of non-governmental organisations that fall into the category of third generation systems (see Chapters 1 and 2).

- Investments in the early warning efforts of regional organisations need to focus on bolstering: *(a)* the quality of reporting; *(b)* the warning-response link; and *(c)* sensitivity among senior policy making of the value of evidence-based decision making in situations of violent conflict and state fragility.

- Investments in third generation systems need to be focused on strengthening the institutional capacities of operating organisations. This needs to include core funding for permanent staff, funding for capacity building, access to technology, and other network running costs.

- All regional and third generation systems need to be encouraged to consider how their efforts could be adjusted to enable analysis and response to future security threats. Bringing these groups together onto a broad global platform can also facilitate the exchange of lessons learned and cross-fertilisation of good practice.

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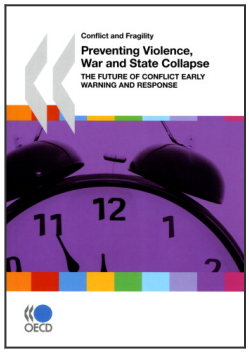
List of Abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
APFO	Africa Peace Forum
AU	African Union
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)
CDA Inc.	Collaborative Learning Projects
CEWARN	Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism
CEWERU	Conflict Early Warning and Early Response Unit
CEWS	Continental Early Warning System
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIFP	Country Indicators for Foreign Policy
CPDC	Conflict Peace and Development Co-operation Network
CPP	Conflict Prevention Pool
CPR Network	Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Network
DFAIT	Department for Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Canada)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EAWARN	Network for Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWARN	ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network
ECOWAS	Economic Community Of West African States
EDF	European Development Fund
EISAS	Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat
EU	European Union
EUSITCEN	European Union Situation Centre
FAST	Early Recognition and Analysis of Tensions
FCE	Foundation for Coexistence
FEWER	Forum on Early Warning and Early Response
FEWER-Africa	Forum on Early Warning and Early Response-Africa
FEWER-Eurasia	Forum on Early Warning and Early Response-Eurasia
FSG	Fragile States Group
GCPP	Global Conflict Prevention Pool
GEDS	Global Events Data System

GIGAS	German Institute for Global Area Studies
GTZ	*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury
ICG	International Crisis Group
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
IGO	Inter-governmental organisation
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
KEDS	Kansas Events Data System
LICUS	Low Income Countries Under Stress
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MARAC	Mécanisme d'alerte rapide de l'Afrique centrale
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity (now AU)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PANDA	Protocol for the Analysis of Nonviolent Direct Action
PCIA	Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment
PITF	Political Instability Task Force
PPEWU	Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit (EU)
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAP	*Système d'Alerte Précoce* (France)
START	Stabilisation and Reconstruction Task Force (Canada)
UN	United Nations
UNDHA	United Nations Department for Humanitarian Affairs (now UNOCHA)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDPA	United Nations Department for Political Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIFEM	United Nations Fund for Women
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VRA	Virtual Research Associates
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WARN	West Africa Early Warning and Response Network



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