

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has reviewed the history of the early warning field, discussed the range of current early warning tools and operational systems, assessed a selection of early/rapid response mechanisms/instruments, and discussed future directions for the field. What then is the big picture? What does it mean in relation to the critical questions raised in this report? Where is future work required? And what should the OECD DAC and its members do about it? This concluding chapter attempts to answer those questions.

What does it add up to?

Conflict early warning has evolved significantly since its initial conceptualisation, with important contributions from many individuals and organisations over the years. However, can we say today that we are in a position to prevent another Rwandan genocide? We probably cannot. Conflict early warning faces the same challenges as it did 15 years ago. Early response remains elusive, and with it our ability to protect and preserve life in the face of war remains weak.

The conflict early warning field is trying to find a balance between staying relevant to its funders and doing what it is supposed to do. However, it is tilting significantly towards the former, in part because of changes in the geo-strategic environment and Northern perceptions of threats. The notion of an open source, pro-people and pro-peace conflict early warning system is giving way to one with a far more pronounced intelligence dimension.

Advances over the past 15 years or so in early and rapid response have been made in the range of institutions, mechanisms, instruments and measures available to manage violent conflict as well as in national, regional, and international willingness to use force in situations of violent conflict. However, more has not necessarily meant better. In fact, the multiplicity of actors and responses means that the problems of late, incoherent, fragmented and confused responses is perhaps greater today than it was at the time of the Rwandan genocide.

Further transformation of the geo-strategic context and perception of threats is certain to occur over the next decade. This is likely to involve a mix of the repercussions of climate change, fallout from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the war on terror, and the transformation of violent conflict into criminalised armed violence, among other factors. Whether advances in technology, early warning and global response capabilities are likely to place us in a position to effectively manage these threats is questionable.

The big picture that emerges from this report is that 14 years after the Rwandan genocide, early warning systems still cannot claim to be in a position to prevent situations of mass violence. Part of the reason for this is poor early warning. Another part is that efforts to “wire warning to response” have found growing but still immature and incoherent response capabilities along with a set of personal, institutional, and political obstacles to response. As such, the international and regional response mechanisms are working rather poorly. With a future filled with new and significant threats, the early warning and response field needs leadership and a vision to guide its development over the next decade.

Revisiting critical questions

What is the value of early warning for the prevention of violent conflict and peacebuilding? What role does early warning play in prevention?

The review of governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental early warning systems concludes that these 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 on crisis-affected countries that sets the stage for more coherent responses.
- An ideas pool for responses, and sometimes the forum to meet fellow responders and plan joint response strategies.

What are the most effective early warning systems? Why they are effective and what impacts do they have?

Governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental early warning systems have different purposes. However, it is generally accepted that an effective early warning system: (a) is based “close to the ground” or has strong field-based networks of monitors; (b) uses multiple sources of information and both qualitative/quantitative analytical methods; (c) capitalises on appropriate communication and information technology; (d) provides regular reports and updates on conflict dynamics to key national and international stakeholders; and (e) has a strong link to responders or response mechanisms.

There are several reported impacts of different systems – including crises averted, lives saved, and informed responses – many of which have been included in this report as case studies. However, more rigorous evaluations of these impacts are required.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of different methodologies – quantitative/qualitative and conflict analysis/state fragility?

Most analytical methods will serve particular institutional interests and agendas – there is, therefore, not necessarily one method that is better than another. The strengths and weaknesses of the quantitative and qualitative methods surveyed are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods

	Quantitative methods	Qualitative methods
Strengths	<p>Their predictive capacity, particularly related to political crisis and instability, is high.</p> <p>Their immediate policy value – in terms of priority setting and “watch listing” – is significant.</p> <p>Models that draw on a larger number of significant indicators provide pointers for programming.</p>	<p>They provide rich contextual information and analysis that can be simple enough for desk officers to absorb and incorporate into action.</p> <p>They often have strong planning and evaluation applications built in.</p>
Weaknesses	<p>Unreliable and incomplete data from crisis-affected countries affect reliability of findings.</p> <p>Even the best quantitative models will at times have reduced predictability.</p> <p>The graphs, charts, country lists, etc. in themselves provide little insight to decision makers into what is happening on the ground or what needs to be done.</p>	<p>Unreliable and incomplete data from crisis-affected countries affect reliability of findings.</p> <p>They are often one-off snapshots of rapidly evolving situations and thus quickly outdated.</p> <p>Sometimes they oversimplify the complexity of violent conflict and state fragility situations.</p> <p>Usually they proffer technical solutions to complex political issues.</p> <p>They are fundamentally based on personal judgement.</p>

What does it take to really prevent violent conflict? What do we currently know is good practice that works?

From evaluations of responses to violent conflict, several “good practice” principles have been drawn by scholars, including: (a) understand the problem, hold the “ground truth”; (b) ensure that responses are diverse, flexible, and sustainable; (c) invest time in planning and strategy; (d) be conflict-sensitive; (e) do not push technical solutions onto political problems; (f) balance speed, ownership and co-ordination.

What early/rapid response mechanisms/instruments are available?

There is a range of response mechanisms/instruments hosted by different institutions. However, these response “delivery systems” cannot be dissociated from their host institutions (with the latter’s mandates, structures, resources, etc.), or from the operational and structural prevention measures they deliver.

What influences and blocks early response? What are the personal, institutional and political factors at play?

The lack of political will is often cited as the main blocker of early response. This report has sought to unpack “the lack of political will” and argues that it follows from weak warnings, immature response mechanisms/instruments and measures, along with a range of personal, institutional, and political shortfalls. Together, these prevent us from responding in a timely and appropriate manner to situations of violent conflict and state fragility.

Emerging questions and research needs

A set of emerging questions and research needs related to early warning and early response emerge from the chapters above. They include:

- What are the success stories in conflict early warning? Why were these warnings successful? What can early warning systems learn from these experiences?
- What should the global conflict early warning architecture look like in order to be able to prevent another Rwanda and manage future security threats? What regions need to be covered? What types of systems and groups should, in combination, comprise that cover?
- What are the cumulative key lessons learned in conflict early response – particularly in the involvement of different agencies, mechanisms/instruments, and operational and structural measures?
- What is the true nature of weak political will to respond? What are its constituent parts? And what strategies should be deployed to address them? How can accountability in responses be bolstered?
- What is the “lay of the land” in current regional and international institutions involved in responding to violent conflict and state failure? What does the broad picture – institutional base, response mechanisms/instruments, and operational/structural measures – look like?

Recommendations for the OECD DAC

This report concludes with key recommendations for the OECD DAC on how to support effective early warning and early response efforts.

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 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 measures 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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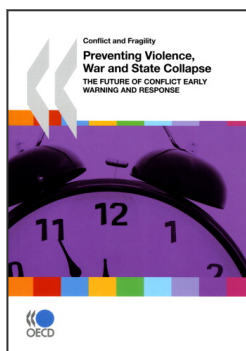
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List of Abbreviations

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	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</i>
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	<i>Système d'Alerte Précoce</i> (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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