

In its ten years of existence, IGAD's Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) has been a principal platform for regional cooperation on conflict prevention and mitigation, in what is often dubbed as the 'conflict-ridden' Horn of Africa region. The fact that IGAD member states have agreed to cooperate to deal with trans-boundary security issues is a proof of its importance. CEWARN's Director, Dr. Martin Kimani, in an interview with the author reflects on its achievements so far and its role in the future.

CEWARN:

Data-based conflict early warning – a vital instrument in peacebuilding

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CEWARN is first and foremost a promise by the states of the Horn of Africa to their people to work to prevent violent conflicts that have cost so many lives and destroyed so many hopes. The name stands for the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism, and represents the need for consistent conflict prevention through early warning that was on the minds of many at the end of the 1990s when so many lives had been lost to mass violence that could have been averted.

CEWARN as an organisation was established in 2002 on the basis of a protocol signed – and later ratified – by the member states of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Its mandate was bold: to provide credible, evidence-based early warning information and analysis in a fashion that would inform timely action to prevent or mitigate violent conflict.

This network of actors, driven by a secretariat based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was, from the very beginning, forged to join government and civil society, at a time when security had mostly been the exclusive preserve of states. This, plus its fractal structure, joining regional, national and local dimensions in data collection, analysis and decision making, made it a significant milestone in the regional and continental efforts to build peace and security. That member states in a region with such a long history of violent conflict could agree to establish an organisation cementing a

joint response to trans-boundary security challenges is a further testament to the critical hope that CEWARN's existence represents.

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For hope to tangibly improve lives, concrete work in the real world is needed. This has been the case with CEWARN. The IGAD member states decided a decade ago to set an operationalising challenge to the men and women recruited to start up CEWARN. They would work to provide conflict early warning analysis and response options on cross-border violent conflicts between pastoralist groups and communities. This would be the starting point for an eventual expansion into covering other kinds of violent conflict types and areas throughout the region.

After nearly a decade in operation, focusing on pastoralist and related conflicts, CEWARN has become a continental benchmark for data-based early warning and response systems, as well

as a pioneer in setting up a region-wide mechanism that constitutes a whole spectrum of governmental and non-governmental institutions. Its presence stretches from local communities to policy-level structures in member states. During this time CEWARN has gained invaluable experience and credibility with officials and peace workers in its areas of operations, and acquired methods that are needed as much today as they were a decade ago.

Recognising this, the member states have asked CEWARN to expand the kinds of conflict types it covers and to expand its work significantly. This reflects not only a welcome faith in their ownership of the mechanism, but also a real sense that solutions to preventing violent conflict must be home grown and must arise from combining local, national and regional efforts. CEWARN is a rare institution that does this as a matter of course. Meeting the demands of the member states, the CEWARN mechanism has crafted a forward looking, innovative strategy for expansion, increased relevance to decision making and actions that widen and entrench peaceful outcomes to conflict throughout the member states.

High-level IGAD member state officials endorsed the CEWARN 2012-2019 Strategy on 4 September 2012 in Kampala, Uganda. This historic meeting was presided over by H.E. First lady and Minister of Karamoja Affairs of the Republic of Uganda, Hon. Janet Museveni.

Dr. Martin Kimani has been Director of CEWARN's regional office in Addis Ababa since April 2011. He played a crucial role in leading the mechanism's transformation and describes CEWARN as "a regional hope in peace built on shared understanding and united action against violent conflicts". Below are excerpts of conversations with Dr. Kimani:

In your view, what are the major peace and security challenges facing the IGAD region at the moment and how is CEWARN positioned to respond to these challenges?

The major peace and security challenges facing the IGAD region center on scarcity, perceptions of scarcity, and group alignments to fight for scarce resources. These perceptions and realities cause conflict. However, that conflict becomes violent to the extent that communities and government structures don't have the tools and orientations to encourage and facilitate peaceful mediation. Added to this, environmental stress, climate volatility, fast population growth, urbanisation, politicised identity and economic

disparities, among others, form the context that turns group conflict into mass violence.

CEWARN is a unique institution in its structure and its mandate. It brings together government and civil society. It operates on the regional, national and local levels. This means it is very well structured to support peaceful mediation of conflicts from an early warning perspective, and its decade long experience has served as a continental benchmark that is now going to expand to deliver more tools and more opportunities for conflict prevention.

What are your immediate priorities as you implement the new strategy?

The new strategy that informs CEWARN's work in the post-2012 period calls for an expansion of the monitoring and analysis of the types, causes and drivers of violent conflicts, as well as our geographic focus. This expansion is based on extensive national consultations on priorities and will be led by the mechanism's national arms. For instance, in Kenya, we will be working

with the mechanism's regional, national and local actors to provide analysis and scenarios that help deliver a peaceful election and its aftermath.

How would you describe the CEWARN mechanism's work?

At the heart of the functionality of the CEWARN mechanism is data collection, data analysis and the dissemination of information and knowledge to the right people and institutions in a timely manner. The driving idea is that effective conflict early warning is best delivered and acted on by governmental and non-governmental actors. Through practice, the CEWARN mechanism has evolved the working understanding that solutions are best developed and delivered as close to the problem as possible.

What are your major achievements and challenges in preventing conflicts in your areas of operation so far?

We have a decade of experience in supporting local institutions to expand their capabilities and responsibilities in conflict prevention. This involves

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Conflict prevention has proved to be more efficient if it is well anchored at all levels. Through the CEWARN mechanism, local voices are integrated into national and regional peacebuilding discourse and action.

the recognition that the solutions are located among the people most at risk during violent conflict. We have married contemporary and customary Conflict Prevention Management and Resolution (CPMR) tools and social structures, supported local peace champions, and have been identified as an important partner in peacebuilding in regions such as the Somali Cluster.

In terms of challenges, we struggle daily to align our operational methods and tempo with an extremely dynamic and complex region. We, like the rest of the conflict prevention community, are often playing catch up. Much of the challenge revolves around infrastructure and communications technology needed to effectively link actors locally and nationally. But this challenge will be overcome with time. The region's phone and data networks, not to mention its roads, are growing rapidly. We will only need to ensure that these tools meet with a well-developed culture of collaboration so that they really deliver.

Do you believe there is enough good will among the governments of the region to collaborate on peace and security matters that are politically sensitive?

The existence of CEWARN is living proof that the governments of the region have a profound understanding of the need to cooperate on peace and security. IGAD, as a community of member

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states, has delivered high-level peace agreements in Sudan and Somalia to mention just a few. States have interests. This is a fact not only in the IGAD region but throughout the world. We also observe that many state interests have points of convergence. It is these that provide opportunities for CEWARN to facilitate effective collaboration in addressing peace and security challenges.

How does CEWARN relate to other sub-regional and continental mechanisms such as the African Union (AU) continental early warning system?

Dr. Martin Kimani, CEWARN's Director since April 2011, giving a speech at a launch event of the national CEWERU of South Sudan in Juba.



PHOTO: CEWARN

CEWARN is part of the African Peace and Security Architecture through its working and legal linkage with the African Union's continental early warning system. The principles of vertical coordination, subsidiarity and coherence, among others enshrined in the continental architecture, inform the relationship between the AU and IGAD.

In operational terms, the CEWARN mechanism is a building block of the AU's continental early warning system. We regularly engage with the AU and other sub-regional early warning institutions to share experiences and coordinate the development of our technical tools, methodologies and best practices.

What is the CEWARN mechanism doing in Somalia? And what is your role in the peace process between Sudan and South Sudan?

We think that the new government in Somalia and the rather peaceful separation of the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan offer the region great opportunities to build sustained peace and prosperity. This of course does not mean that there are no problems or risks of violent conflict.

In Somalia, the government's stabilisation policies will deeply involve the Somalia Conflict Early Warning and Response Unit (CEWERU) which is the in-country unit of the CEWARN mechanism, and its member institutions. We are already working hand in hand with the Somalia CEWERU to strengthen its capabilities and extend its data gathering and analytical reach and to support its development and implementation of local developmental projects that cement peace and good governance.

In South Sudan, the government has set up a national early warning and response system modeled after CEWARN. While the system's geographic coverage is currently limited, it is growing steadily towards nation-wide relevance. This is an important effort, given the multiple internal and regional risks of violent conflict facing the world's newest nation-state. CEWARN is a strong ally in support of this effort and is already structurally present in the country to contribute to the process.

In addition, CEWARN launched a national unit in South Sudan in May 2012 with the inspiring leadership of H.E. Vice President Dr. Riek Machar. The national unit brings together key government and non-government institutions. Through CEWARN, these structures are linked to the early warning and conflict prevention systems run by South Sudan's neighbours who are part of the seven IGAD member states.

As we were closing our conversation, Dr. Kimani shared some of CEWARN's aspirations going forward, contained in its 2012-2019 strategy framework:

– CEWARN is keen to avail deep analysis that informs policy decisions in the region. It will also promote the integration of early warning and preparedness in regional governance. In addition, CEWARN will continue to focus on sustaining preventive response initiatives by increasingly engaging individuals as well as private and other enterprises to contribute to human security in the region. 🌿