

Anticipate and prevent violent conflicts

Again and again, there are conflicts over the scarce resources of land, water and pasture in parts of the Horn of Africa region where pastoralism is predominant – and they often lead to deadly violence. The Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) has opted for regional, cross-border co-operation to tackle the root of the problem.

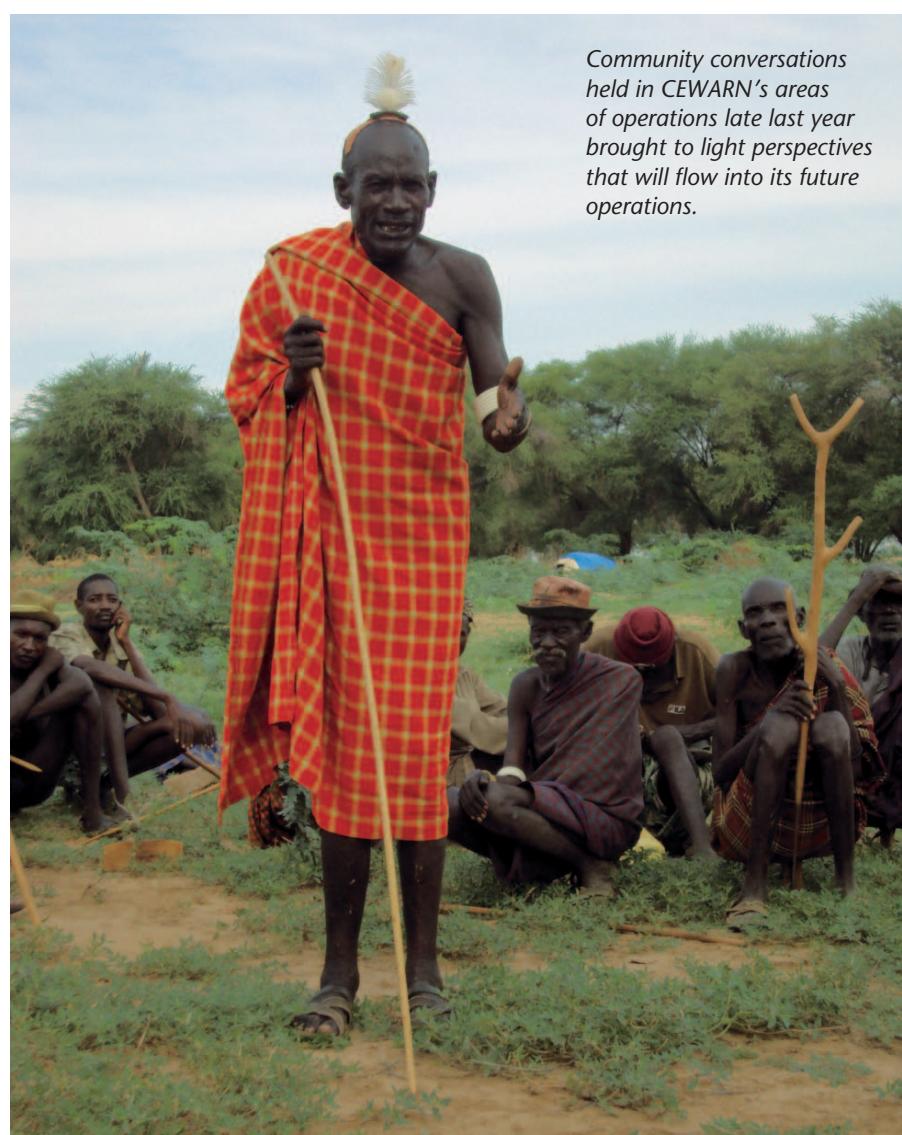
It is 7 pm on a Sunday evening in August; CEWARN staff are far away from Addis Ababa, at a strategy development retreat. The Director, Dr. Martin Kimani Mbugua, receives an SMS message from the co-ordinator of CEWARN's national early warning and response structure in Kenya. It recounts a report received from field reporters on the killing of 22 Kenyan pastoralists and the theft of their cattle that were allegedly driven across the border into Ethiopia by armed attackers. The attackers are believed to be from a neighbouring community in Ethiopia.

As the evening wears on, details of the attack are updated through SMS, telephone calls and email amongst field reporters, national co-ordinators of Ethiopia and Kenya as well as the CEWARN director. In less than two hours, reports are in on senior officials in both capitals being briefed and their taking immediate steps to deal with the situation. The conversation of updates, clarifications, questions and developments continues for the next four days until the perpetrators have been arrested, their weapons seized and the stolen livestock recovered. There is a

handover ceremony carried out with the help of local officials that blends the legal state approach with the local practices of reconciliation. At the end, the relationship between the countries is strengthened by their ability to agree on a version of what happened in an area where communication is poor,

while the violence is prevented from escalating to claim even more lives and property.

The anecdote is based on an actual event and is a glimpse of CEWARN in action. Set up as a pioneer regional early warning and response mechanism in



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CEWARN uses sports events to facilitate positive interaction among youth and other community members previously locked in conflict.

Africa, The Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism CEWARN was established in 2002 by the seven Member States of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD; see Box on page 20). It is a network of governmental and non-governmental institutions that operate at local, national and regional levels. These institutions work in close co-ordination, supported by a protocol that has the broad support of policy-makers and officials. Taken together, the many parts of the CEWARN Mechanism represent a profound regional hope in peace built on shared understanding and united action against violent conflicts.

■ A tightly woven net of stakeholders

At the local level, CEWARN's field monitors and locally constituted peace committees – stationed along the Djibouti-Ethiopia; Ethiopia-Kenya-Sudan-Uganda as well as Ethiopia-Kenya-Somalia borders – work on sourcing real-time early warning information and sharing the information to stimulate response action. While Field Monitors are mainly responsible for sourcing early warning information, local peace committees that comprise representatives of provincial administration, government security structures, civil society organisations, traditional and religious leaders as well as women undertake response measures.

At the national level, CEWARN works through early warning and response hubs called National Research Institutes (NRIs) and national Conflict Early Warning and Response Units (CEWERUs.) These hubs co-ordinate early warning and response measures at the national level with field monitors

Photo: CEWARN



and local peace committees. Country analysts based in the NRIs are responsible for receiving information from field monitors, verifying the information as well as undertaking thorough analysis and recommendations on response options. On the other hand, CEWERUs, whose composition is similar to that of local peace committees, in other words a blend of government and NGO actors, are responsible for undertaking response measures.

CEWERUs are composed of representatives of government institutions working on peace and security, including ministries of interior and foreign affairs, national parliaments, civil society organisations and women who are actively engaged in national peace-building efforts.

Cross-border linkages and collaboration are key aspects of CEWARN's mandate and amongst its core strengths with local peace committees and national CEWERUs collaborating across borders to undertake joint interventions against cross-border threats. In addition, CEWARN's senior technical and policy structures that oversee its work also provide avenues for high-level regional co-operation.

■ Pastoral conflicts and regional peace and security dynamics

Pastoralism is a livestock-based production system that involves extensive use of land for grazing and seasonal mobility of people and livestock. Pastoral communities in the Horn of Africa region inhabit up to 70 percent of the region's land mass and make up the largest concentration of pastoral communities globally.

Pastoral communities comprise from 95 percent of the population in Somalia and Djibouti, to about 60 percent in Ethiopia and Uganda. In Kenya and Sudan, the numbers are between 20 and 25 percent. These communities are concentrated in semi-arid and arid areas and are spread along common borders of countries in the region. They often straddle long borders with their livestock in search of increasingly scarce water and pasture.

Pastoralists depend on an intimate knowledge of the environment and the climate. This awareness is built on generations of observation that allow them to survive in environments that are generally resistant to other more sedentary livelihood systems.

CEWARN and IGAD

The Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) was established by the seven Member States of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to fill a critical gap in crisis management and conflict prevention in the region.* The gap was considerable given both the prevalence of armed conflicts in the region and their considerable human and material cost. In addition, conflict management and resolution efforts had proven expensive and generally ineffective, necessitating a more proactive approach to anticipate, prevent and mitigate organised violence.

CEWARN's structures and operations typically deploy early warning information gathering, analysis, and formulation of policy options as well as catalysing and supporting response initiatives at local, national and regional levels. These activities complement IGAD's wider interventions towards fulfilling its arduous mandate of promoting and maintaining peace and security.

While IGAD as a regional bloc was founded in the 1980s to address the twin challenges of drought and desertification, it is currently regarded as a leading peace and security institution, having steered the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the long process of establishing Somalia's Transitional Federal Government. This work in fostering a more secure region is complemented by longstanding efforts in strengthening food security, environmental protection as well as economic co-operation.

Conflict early warning is a central feature of IGAD peace-building efforts with CEWARN having been established in 2002 as part of the Peace and Security Division. Since then, CEWARN has been a regional and continental pioneer in early warning methodologies and operations, and more recently in supporting local and national response as well.

*IGAD's Membership comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. All except Eritrea and South Sudan were founding members. The two countries joined the bloc upon gaining independence in 1993 and 2011 respectively.

In economic terms, pastoralism is the backbone of a multi-million dollar livestock industry in the region. In Ethiopia for instance, the livestock sector contributes about 40 percent of agricultural GDP and more than 20 percent of total GDP. According the 2007 National Census, Ethiopian pastoralists own 42 percent of cattle, 75 percent of goats, 25 percent of sheep, 20 percent of donkeys and almost all the camels.

Despite their economic contributions to national economies, pastoralists are often politically and socially marginalised; especially from the concerns and priorities of national capitals. Their remote – at least according to capital city dwellers – and difficult-to-access areas enjoy patchy and thin government presence in terms of service delivery. Their livelihoods are also increasingly under threat from natural and anthropogenic factors such as environmental degradation, a sharp

increase in drought and desertification, as well as decreased access to pasture land due to inadequate protection of pastoral property rights. Add extensive insecurity to this brew and you have a large percentage of pastoralists living precariously, ever vulnerable to crashing poverty and violent attack.

■ A new dimension of violence

Conflicts among pastoral communities both within and along international borders in the Horn of Africa are not new. The pastoral way of life characterised by high mobility is often accompanied by fierce competition and, in many cases, by violent conflict with other pastoralists, farmers and ranchers vying for the same limited resources. Pastoral communities also engage in cattle raiding, which pits different communities against one another as a means of replenishing depleted livestock – espe-

cially following the losses that come from a drought.

In yesteryear, raiding did not have the destructive capabilities now enabled by the access to cheap modern armaments. The AK-47 assault rifle has transformed the lethality of the raid for the worse. And matters have not been helped by the progressive breakdown of traditional mediation systems as pastoralists join the rest of the globalising world in leaving much of their tradition behind in favour of expectations and practices that hail far from their lands.

Today, raiding is far more commercialised and violent. Government security staff are thin on the ground and are often unable to provide comprehensive security – meaning that a culture of self-defence has taken root, unfortunately accompanied by the logic of revenge and escalation.

Local conflicts can have regional and even international significance. Recall Darfur's conflicts becoming part of UN Security Council deliberation when they started as localised fighting for resources. The fact that many pastoralist communities live along the borders which they cross frequently also means that it is extremely important that the violence occurring in these areas is well understood by the governments to avoid bilateral tensions. These border areas are also theatres for threats such as illegal arms running, border disputes and insurgencies.

It was this strong regional dimension of pastoral conflict and associated risks of disruption in inter-state harmony that led the IGAD Member states to choose cross-border pastoral and related conflicts as an entry point of collaboration through CEWARN. While cross-border pastoral conflicts present a complex shared concern for the region, they also offer a rare opportunity in terms of building capabilities and confidence in regional co-operation in conflict prevention.

CEWARN thus came to being as a mechanism with unique expertise for anticipation, prevention and mitigation of conflicts in the region as well as a platform for dialogue and co-operation among IGAD member states on policy and visions for cross-border peace, security and development.

■ Successes ...

CEWARN's greatest achievement has been building on the strengths of existing government and non-government institutions and creating functional linkages and synergy amongst them. By doing so, it is able to intervene locally, nationally and regionally. Through the synergy among its units, CEWARN has also closed the gap between early warning and response. It applies state-of-the-art technology for this purpose: It utilises a custom-made software tool called the CEWARN Reporter in collating, organising, analysing and disseminating large volumes of early warning data from its areas of reporting. The various features of the Reporter allow analysts to make a compelling presentation of peace and conflict trends. CEWARN has recently expanded its use of information and communications technology (ICT) by supplying high-frequency radios to field monitors in the most inaccessible of its areas of reporting to ensure timely flow of information.

One important success factor is the active part played by civil society in all its interventions. The role of civil society is prominent in information gathering through field monitors; analysis through National Research Institutes and decision making through representatives in local peace communities and national conflict early warning and response units. Civil society representatives also have equally significant roles in the design and implementation of response measures through the same structures at both national and regional levels. This has created a strong sense

Providing high frequency radios to field monitors in areas with no communications infrastructure ensures timely flow of early warning information.

of transparency and local ownership of efforts.

In terms of response efforts, the composition of local peace committees and CEWERUs allows co-ordination of efforts as well as complementarities between government-led responses to curb violence that often employ security structures with other dialogue-centred peace building efforts.

CEWARN's use of traditional dispute resolution methods and innovative approaches such as holding youth sports events alongside peace dialogues has ensured the success of its local efforts. This is most visible along the Ethiopia-Kenya-Somalia border as well as the Kenya-Uganda border where violent incidents have sharply decreased.

In short, it is the sum of this approach, developed over a decade, that has earned CEWARN its reputation as a continental pioneer in using timely information to prevent and mitigate conflict. The IGAD member states, as well as other regional mechanisms in Africa, have increasingly adopted its systems for their own use.

■ ... and challenges

However, understandably, CEWARN faces multiple challenges in fulfilling its mandate. These include poor infrastructure and inaccessibility of its areas of reporting as well as limitations in governments' capability to ensure physical security throughout their territories. Furthermore, CEWARN's long-term impact will depend less on local interventions and more on broad and implemented policy shifts, and stronger collaboration among member states in addressing the underlying structural causes of conflicts.

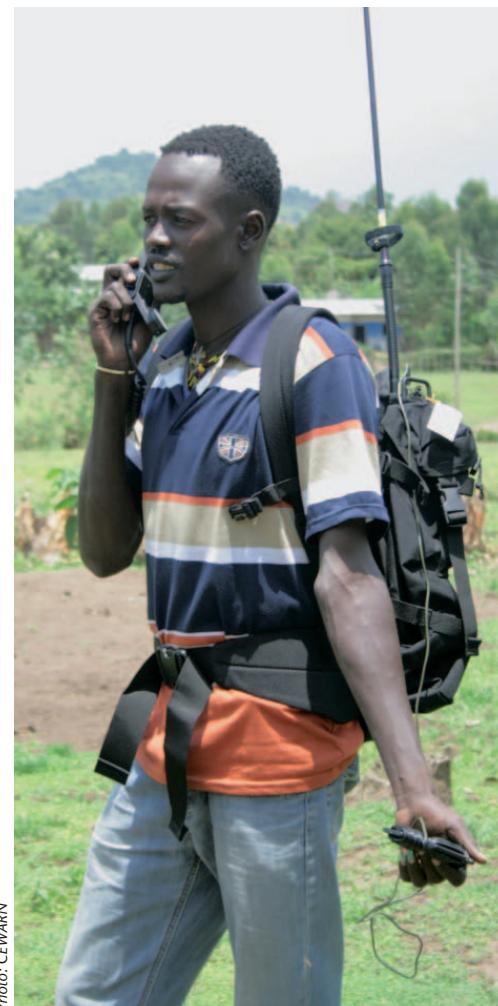


Photo: CEWARN

CEWARN is currently undergoing a period of expansion and growth both in thematic and geographic terms. It is set to expand its areas of reporting to cover new areas in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan. It will also be closely monitoring and driving response in relation to conflicts driven by factors connected to food security, environmental degradation, volatile climate, and migration, just to mention a few. To this end, CEWARN is engaged in a bottom-up strategy development process encompassing local peoples and communities, national stakeholders and regional actors to determine its priorities and foci in the next few years.

Sources for further reading
can be found at:
www.rural21.com