In terms of the analytical and methodological frameworks of early warning, the CEWARN data gathering system is cutting-edge. It is based on recent theoretical and methodological frameworks. It tries to marry quantitative and qualitative methodologies, fusing the strengths of both sides into the system. In terms of design, that makes it a most relevant methodology for the issues it is meant to address.

It is not only that we have a combined quantitative-qualitative methodology, it is also advanced in regard to the data collection intervals. There is no organisation out there that I know of that is collecting data on a weekly basis. CEWARN collects data on weekly basis at a local level. That is very different from other systems. Also, the data we collect is disaggregated, which is unique. There are some institutions out there, universities like Uppsala University that use what they call a quantitative-conflicted database, which scholars use to see correlations between different conflict incident data. The data they collect is aggregated, meaning that

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it’s collected at the national level. You don’t see variations; it is not disaggregated at the sub-national level. Even the indicators are national, without regional variations and most of them are compiled on a yearly basis. In our region it is critical to identify regional, time, and seasonal variations. By establishing the variations among these variations, you can begin to understand and explain the context.

All conflict is local, events all occur in certain areas, certain places. The more disaggregated the data collection methodology you have, the better you are able to capture contextual variations and predict or analyse more precisely than you can with aggregated data.

Let me give an example; if you want to measure the relationship between economic performance and conflict you will not be able to capture the inter-regional variations if your data is only aggregated at the national level, based on GDP, or some other form of economic data measuring the influence or relationship with conflict. GDP is aggregated data, but there are different levels of economic growth in different regions and variations that aggregated analysis does not capture.

The easiest way to collect data is to start from the aggregated level. Disaggregated data is the toughest one. This is where we started. Disaggregated data can be easily aggregated once you have disaggregated data; you can easily convert disaggregated data to the yearly and to sub-national levels. But if you have aggregated data and you don’t have the capacity of accessing the disaggregated streams, then it becomes difficult to distinguish among the smaller units. We have taken the toughest route in terms of the design, but we are doing fine.

There is more than one way of utilising the information we gather. When you collect data on a regular basis and over a long period of time, what you are doing is establishing a behaviour pattern. You cannot simply say that during the wet season the Turkana will behave like this unless you have data to support that statement.

To establish that kind of pattern, you need to collect wet season data for a long period of time, over five or six years. Only after you have done that will you have a rigorous enough database and credible enough information to say that during the wet season the Turkana are likely to behave in a certain manner so that whenever the wet or the dry season comes, you can propose a certain response. This is one way of making a trend analysis on a year-to-year basis. But you have to collect, document, and compile the data on a weekly basis.

Another kind of analysis is to try and identify a weekly change of behaviour. This may not be as rigorous as the former, but it will capture certain, immediate, escalating situ-
ations that you can make available for rapid response at the local level. The relevance of this methodology can be seen from two angles.

What is normally done with this methodology, these two angles, is using the vertical and horizontal flow of information. The field monitors have the leeway to communicate horizontally so that the people at the local levels are able to respond immediately to the field information or to any local peace actor. That is one. But that same data will also be relayed to the national level, the vertical process. We may not have a big role on this one although we issue weekly reports which we started doing in the last three or four years. Given the dearth of the data, analysis of the weekly situation will not be as rigorous as the larger data we have because you cannot specify patterns.

Long-term analysis will inform long-term responses; you are establishing long-term behaviour so the response can also be midterm or long term, to be able to determine that, for instance, environmental stresses have an impact on conflict that allows one to propose an appropriate response based on the data. The value of the system derives from proper use of the data-driven analysis.

Before the weekly reports, the statutory reports were filed each quarter during the initial phase. At a certain stage in 2008, we narrowed the time period to one month. By 2009 the reports were being generated on a weekly basis. Why did we do that? We had to produce information. There are institutions mandated to respond to conflict on a day-to-day basis. They cannot wait another four months to get some kind of report. They have to be provided with some kind of report of the areas on a very short period of time if possible. That is why we are now producing it on a weekly basis. At least they will be kept abreast of developments on a weekly basis. The analysis will not be as rigorous but at least it will keep them informed, it will enable them to devise some kind of intervention before the situation escalates. They will get the big picture later, showing how the region looks over the year. That is where we are now.

For example: in Ethiopia there are mandated institutions (at the federal level, like the Federal Affairs Ministry) established to support peace building and conflict prevention. At the regional level where we work, there are institutions that mirror the federal structure. In each state there is a situation room or line bureaus that resemble those at the federal level. These are the institutions that get the information. There are also institutions on the executive side and on the legislative side, including standing committee members, who also receive the information.

The weekly reports are very helpful.
There are two things to understand as to how this system is very important to the structures. One is that given the nature of cross-border areas where we work, the government presence and systems that feed information to government are weak, which means they do not get enough information about cross-border conflict and cross-border pastoralist issues. Their main source of information, at least on the national level, is the CEWARN reporter. The mechanism is there to complement the existing governance structures. We are giving them the relevant data they were not able to acquire through their own structures. We are feeding the system with additional analytic capability. They have left this kind of analysis to the NRI, a civil society system. We fully understand that governments, even before CEWARN started, always collected information. That is their function, which we are complementing.

We work with some 12 Field Monitors in Ethiopia, one Field Monitor per Woreda (district). In some Woredas we have two. This is also the case for both the Somali and Karamoja Clusters. The information is out there, scattered across the region. The task is to collect it. The field monitors have different sources of information within the community. That is not difficult. What was difficult, given the nature of information and communication infrastructure problems of the time, was to get information on time, on a weekly basis, particularly the Situation Report. Sometimes it took two weeks or even more for information to reach us because they were sending it through the Post Office. But now things have improved because monitors can now send all the 54 indicators on a weekly basis by SMS.

Later it was decided that rather than simply sending the form on the 54 conflict indicators, they can offer their own opinion of developments together with the indicators. Those two sets of responses now comprise the weekly report. But parallel to that, that data is inputted into our special software, the early warning tool. Why do we do that? The long-term trend analysis based on this data enables us to generate the curves and the graphs generated by the software to give the long-term outlook of the area.

The more visible CEWARN became, the more people understood what CEWARN was about. At the beginning, field monitors were intimidated by local officials. Community sources were reluctant to give them information. Some of the information could be about the mobilisation of the youth to attack another community. These field monitors are going to send this information to us, which made the sources appear to be accomplices acting against their own communities; they were leaking the information. There were the kinds of challenges facing the Field Monitors.
What begun to change perception was our ability to induct the official and community structures into the work of CEWARN. That was one step. Two: we were also able to walk the talk; we were able to give, to a certain extent, real peace-building support. When we did that, people started to accept what we were doing. You can talk, but it becomes difficult to win people over to your side if you are not able to act. Establishing of the Rapid Response Fund in 2008 was crucial in this regard. We have been able to support local initiatives. That visibility and support together convinced and changed the perspectives of the communities and officials.

There were two other things that helped. Given that CEWARN is a Civil Society-Government system, we were able to bring government officials along whenever we went down to the areas where we operate. They heard for themselves, from the mouth of their own colleagues, what we were doing. Originally the Civil Society Organizations had seen us as a competitor. But their attitude begun to change when they saw the officials brought along on different trips. Even the fact that the data we collected came to the capital was important. The central government calls a zone where there is a problem and says we are receiving this information, what are you doing about it?

People began to consider this work in a different light. One testimony that I encountered concerned a US-AID-sponsored program supporting cross-border peacebuilding. It was to be run by an international NGO called PACT. They were trying to find a way to distribute money for peace-building activities to the local communities through civil society actors. PACT undertook a stakeholders’ mapping exercise to identify Civil Society Organisations to work with over a five-year period. In the Karamoja and Somali Clusters, all the participants, community representatives and government officials were asked who they thought were the most active and credible institutions. There was a consensus that the funds should be channelled through the CEWE-RU and the CEWARN structure. That is what they said. We were not there; we did not influence anything. That shows we are doing something that is earning credibility and legitimacy. The people are beginning to see us and the larger network as relevant peace actors.

Bias will always be present. What is important is to build the system with attention to limiting such biases. Everyone has a value system; any research is influenced by these factors to a certain extent. There are certain ways we try to limit biases in our system. This works at various levels. How do we monitor favouritism or bias of field monitors? Since we have two sets of field monitors, we can always crosscheck the data. If there is conflict, say between the Nyangatom and Dassenech, and we
have two field monitors, each from these two communities, then if we get the same kind of data from the two of them, we can use the one report to check the credibility of the other. But at the same time we also check from other sources. Field monitors are just one source, a paid, continuous source. There are many other sources we can use to triangulate the data. We even access government information. We may feed the government with information but they also give out information. There are many ways of quality control we use to crosscheck and validate the data.

One way is in-built into the CEWARN Reporter software. When the data is inserted in the Reporter, the system itself crosschecks, especially the Situation Report. Contradictory answers to certain kinds of questions can be flagged through the software. Logically you expect that if someone answers one question in a certain way, then, somewhere else the response to another linked question should be consistent with the first query. If there is an economic question that asks if sales of livestock in the market has increased, and another question asks if the price of livestock has decreased or increased, then we should expect a positive correlation. The increase in livestock sales usually positively correlates with an increase in livestock price. But if the answer to the first is there is an increase in sales yet the answer to the other question indicates that the price has decreased, the system flags you. There is some incoherence that is picked up by the system. That may not be the case; the price could have decreased while livestock sales has increased because a large number of animals could have been dumped on the market. There may be many reasons or potential explanations, but the system still flags you. Then you go back and ask why this is so.

There are some inbuilt cross-checking levels. There are three, four, levels through which the data passes. It may not be totally fool proof. And we are not saying that our data is perfect but it is the best data out there on pastoralist conflict. That I can guarantee.