Operations in Sudan: Reviving CEWARN
A CONVERSATION WITH TWO GOVERNMENT DIPLOMATS

All the CEWARN national steering committees (or CEWERU) are designed to do the same thing in terms of early warning, security, and development. But conditions vary, sometimes wildly, and in terms of the member nations’ internal development, Sudan probably qualifies as the outlier among the countries active in CEWARN. The Sudan achieved independence in 1960 with the potential of becoming one of Africa’s wealthiest and most influential nations. Endemic conflict instead compromised the country’s developmental potential. This is not surprising. The Sudan is an expansive territory with poor infrastructure and multiple ethnic communities. A wide spectrum of cultural orientations complicated the country’s formidable logistical and political challenges. It gained independence beset with deep-seated regional dichotomies and equivalent socio-economic divisions.

Two wars of secession waged by the Anya Nya and the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation
Movement (SPLM) have tended to overshadow both John Garang’s ‘New Sudan’ vision and the region’s structurally embedded insecurity. Instead of alleviating the conflict constraining Sudan’s potential role within the greater Horn of Africa region, independence for the South aggravated the internal frictions beleaguering Africa’s largest state. CEWARN officially came into existence in Khartoum and promptly inherited one of IGAD’s most intractable problems.

South Sudan’s independence in 2011 disrupted the rollout of CEWARN’s early warning mechanism based on the CEWARN Protocol of 2002. But the vagaries experienced along the way are also emblematic of the organisation’s unique developmental pathway. CEWARN’s Sudanese project is on track despite the interruptions and shifting system parameters. In this chapter, two Sudanese diplomats share their experiences to provide some perspectives on past developments, present activities, and future prospects for the organisation.

Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar

I became the national conflict coordinator for Sudan when CEWARN moved to the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs in 2006, a position I continue to hold. I attended many workshops during the time and made two visits to the South during the transitional period leading up to secession. We travelled across the region: from Juba to Torit and from Torit to Kapoeta. The objective at this time was to meet the people responsible for the peace process in the South. Security was always a problem. We were to travel by convoy but it was delayed so we took a helicopter to Torit, then we travelled by bus and by other means. We met the Governor and after discussion we were in agreement about the nature of our work with CEWARN.

During the first trip, we met with government officials and during the second we met with civil society representatives. The main objective of these missions was to determine CEWARN’s areas of operation. The dynamics of conflict in this area involve groups and alliances. The Didinga are with the Jie their allies in Uganda, and then there is the Toposa who are allied to other groups at different times, like the Mursi on the other side of the Ethiopian border. In Kenya there are the Pokot and Turkana. The groups have different strategies.

The Toposa, for example, are known to travel long distances inside Sudan. They raid livestock and they sell the cattle locally but they never go across the border with them. They enter an area in stealthy fashion, but do not encroach upon their allies. These alliances are very important. They can move very long distances but
they do so with a plan. They bring food with them that they stash in different places so they have supplies for when they come back in the same direction. They leave cattle with their friends, a few here and there, and then they return and utilise them when they need to. The alliances do not extend to all the groups of course—the Turkana and Pokot, for example, have their own systems on the other side of the border.

It’s all very complicated; alliances shift, and the briefing was very informative. The fact of the matter is that it is clearly necessary for the sake of conflict prevention to know and understand the alliances among these groups. This was one important factor. A second challenge was to know the differences in their culture and how their culture can change over time. This represents a big challenge for the monitors working in the area.

What was it like coming from Khartoum and dealing with these issues while at the same time coping with the North-South divide?

This is part of what we do, and at the same time it was something totally different and interesting. We had some prior experience in this area. There was a large roundtable conference in Khartoum that was convened in 1965 to address the same kind of issues on the national level. We looked at the issues of contention in the South with a view to finding a common solution. The commonalities between our governments’ mandate and CEWARN’s mission remain.

The issues of cross-border interaction, for example, are critical to the work CEWARN does. This means we have to be cognisant of the economic and political relationships between different areas. It is something we observe as diplomats, and was a critical area of interest before the civil war. The position of pastoralists in the borderlands is a longstanding concern and the problems between the Turkana and neighbouring herders across the border at that time led the government to deploy the military in the area. This is the kind of problem CEWARN was created to resolve. The issues go back to the colonial era. The Toposa claim that the area we now call the Ilemi triangle is theirs; it has always been their land. But the administration based in Kenya allowed the Turkana to move in. This led to periodic clashes where as many as three hundred people can die in a single incident.

The Turkana were not resident in the Ilemi Triangle before. They occasionally accessed it for grazing, but their home was always in northwestern Kenya and they only came into Ilemi to stay while President Daniel Moi was in office. This has created a lot of problems for the Toposa, especially during
the dry season. It is around 136 kilometers from one side to the other border. It took us two hours to drive across this area. The Toposa move from inside South Sudan into the area during the dry season and when they meet the Turkana, there are often clashes. Skirmishes can occur on a day-to-day basis during the dry season. There are dynamics at work that governments do not deal with so well; for long the local communities managed things better among themselves. It is obviously something that someone who is actively working in the area will understand better than someone based in a distant capital.

We have a similar problem in Hala’ib, an area of around 18,000 square kilometers in the north of Sudan. It is sometimes called the Hala’ib triangle, a region that was part of Sudan and administered by Sudan since independence but taken by Egypt in 1992. It is another of those complicated stories.

As CEWARN national coordinators, we belong to something called the National Research Institutes, or the NRIs. We share all our reports with the CEWERUs. The CEWERUs convene steering committees that we participate in. CEWARN is intergovernmental, but it is also governmental. I am a government employee. I am also the national coordinator in the CEWARN system. Like myself, the assistant national coordinator, field monitors, and other support staff are all part of the same system. But we work for the CEWERU that is inter-governmental. There is a system for coordination that’s spans CEWARN, the CEWERU, and the governments.

**Does it work well?**

That’s the idea, but sometimes the reality is more complicated. The government is concerned with secrecy and this can be a bit obsessive at times. It’s a shared tendency that at times affects the partner organisations participating in cross-border communications. They are supposed to operate independently but then they are told to report directly to the headquarters and the government. This leads to delayed responses.

All of this refers to the time before the separation. After separation, everything changed. Now our concern is about the border problem between the North and the South in addition to the usual pastoralist conflicts. Our pastoralist communities living on the northern side have always moved into what is now the South. Modern developments are impacting on this arrangement, and the mix of issues are discussed in an article I wrote on the issues called Oil and Pastoralism in Sudan.

Investments like oil production in these settings require trade-offs. If we can better involve the pastoralists in our negotiations over the re-
sources we should be able to arrive at a resolution over time.

Sustaining any solution requires the involvement of CEWARN. The model is designed for monitoring cross-border interactions. The greater problem is how to get the two governments involved on the ground. This is a prerequisite for CEWARN to become operational in this zone. Again, there is a trade-off. If we can get all the stakeholders involved, solving the pastoralist conflicts becomes easy. There is a pastoralist problem and there is the government problem but we have a political problem between the north and the south that is much more difficult than the pastoralist—government problem. Getting the governments to come together over this border is much more difficult to resolve. There are issues on each side. Do we use the pastoralist problem as the entry point for resolving the government problem, or is it the other way around?

Information drives the process. Of course the pastoralist problems link up with the political problems and all of these forces link up with the problem of the South and the North in Sudan. There are some ten areas that are disputed; if questions of these areas cannot be fixed then the pastoralist conflicts aligned with them also cannot be resolved. Many of the larger challenges are to be found on higher scales of the system. Ceding sover-

eighty is not the real problem; the actual issue is one of security and how this undermines confidence among the member states. It is easier to sort out a conflict among pastoralists on the ground than to deal with differences on this scale.

To do justice to CEWARN and its development we have to look at the model in terms of the process, which has, for the most part, been a bottom up phenomenon. Having said that, we know most of the blockages in respect to conflict are higher up. Despite the arguably more complex issues of operationalising CEWARN in Sudan, it appears that all or most of them were overtaken by the larger matter of the division following the separation of South Sudan.

**Abdelrahim Ahmed Khalil**

The pastoralist areas are a major focal point of the north-south border conflict, so solving the conflicts arising there is part of the larger regional problem. The insecurity caused by the militias is a bigger problem than the pastoralists themselves. Controlling the militias, which may include pastoralist fighters, is the larger priority. That is to say, the pastoralists are actually a sub-set of the larger problem. Almost all the conflicts in Sudan are by definition cross-border. We are a large country with very lengthy boundaries. The South may be one source of cross-border conflict but there
are the same difficulties in northern Darfur, eastern Darfur, and Kordofan. The militias fighting the government are a source of insecurity in all these places.

The demarcation of the north-south border is another source of friction. The North says the border is 2,010 kilometers; but the South claims the border is 300 kilometers longer. The North treats the border as more or less a straight line, but the South claims that it is uneven, in other words not a straight line but one that zigzags in a number of places. A zigzag line is longer than a straight one and the pockets of land where it zigzags are disputed.

So we have the militia problem, we have the border problem, and we have the pastoralist problem all operating together. Which one comes first? When one settles down then we go to the next one, but naturally one cannot start with the pastoralist problem. For the pastoralist problem we have to do something, but to do something in this case means a lot of work. We have to bring them together in meetings, we have to appoint coordinators, we may have to do some kind of environmental rehabilitation, and finally, we have to deal with the across-border dimension. But presently we cannot operate in cohesion with out counterparts in the South. This delays everything in Sudan.

Sudan is a very unique case with its own distinct variations. There are many kinds of conflicts to address in addition to the cross-border ones. There are communal conflicts, environmental conflicts, resource-based conflicts, farmer-herder conflicts, and internal pastoralist conflicts. There are many complications. The role of the African Union and IGAD is to resolve conflicts among the Member States. This does not necessarily mean resolving conflicts within the Member States. The priority of the AU is to deal with cross-border conflicts and not internal ones, and you can see where this leaves us in Sudan. This is part of the reason why CEWARN’s progress in Sudan is lagging behind. Without solving the larger problem, it will be very difficult to resolve the pastoralist dilemma. In theory there is the mandate, but it cannot be put into operation.

The protocol is there, but so are the intra-state problems. The objective truth is that the progress of CEWARN has been effectively short-circuited by the separation of the North and South into two different countries. CEWARN had a plan to look at the Sudan conflict; during the transitional period the relationship between the South and the North could be described as a case of two systems within one state. It was similar to the situation in the former Yugoslavia involving the Serbs and the Bosnians, again two systems within one state. The
cross-border issue is important but not as important as the question of sovereignty for each side. Before the separation it was much easier to deal with cross-border pastoralist conflict. This continued to be the situation during the period between 2006 and 2011—one state but two systems.

It functioned up to 2011 reasonably well, before independence for the South led to a new system based on two states. We ended up with two competing sovereign states. Subsequently, the focus of the government in Khartoum shifted away from cross-border conflicts.

MohaMMed AbdUL GhaffUR

Up to the time of the separation, development of the CEWERU progressed reasonably well. But then the segment of the Karamoja cluster that was the focus of Sudan’s participation in the regional organisation and remained with the South. Not surprisingly, progress for the Sudan CEWERU started to decline at this point. There was supposed to be identification of new conflict areas for the North, but until now this has not happened. We were also thinking something could be done on the border with Eritrea where there are problems of cattle rustling and other cross-border conflicts but nothing was done to address this in the end. So we were left without anything to do in our region, and the role of the Country Coordinator ended. Now it is time we revive it, appoint a new coordinator, and work with the CEWARN Secretariat to identify new areas. There is no shortage of problem areas to focus on, like northern Bahr Al Ghazal to name one.

We need to revive the national mechanisms. In Sudan there was a national committee to get things going in the beginning and the two of us happened to serve on it. We established the national early warning mechanism according to the blueprint. Now we need to reactivate the CEWERU, identify reporting areas, set-up the local structures, and to move forward in general. We have to return to the border zones, specifically the conflicts occurring across the borders with Ethiopia, Eritrea, and South Sudan. The AU has actually asked all member states to do this.

Abdelrahim Ahmed Khalil

The new border zone with the South is now the most important for managing pastoralist conflicts. We need to reinvigorate the National Research Institute and appoint a new Country Coordinator. We can do this in conjunction with the CEWERU Secretariat. When I first came to CEWARN the mechanism had already been operating for three years. The CEWERUs had been established in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and were in the process of being established in the other member states.
We participated in the meeting held to establish the strategy for the five years between 2006 and 2010. The process was set in motion and we agreed on several objectives.

The first was to improve the coordination among the neighbouring states, especially in relationship to the three clusters. It was agreed to launch the CEWERU in Sudan and that was done, along with the National Research Institute. We toured the cluster as discussed earlier, established the requisite committees, but then the progress on this front was overtaken by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement opening the way for South Sudan’s independence. We had made some progress, and there were discussions of which areas in Sudan with incidents of cross-border pastoralist conflict should be a priority, but movement forward stopped after the subsequent separation.

Another objective was to develop the capacity of the organisations and their partners. Workshops were convened and training sessions held for the peace committee members. One other objective was to widen the resource base of the mechanism. The operation depends upon two sources of funding: the first is the member states, and the second is contributions from our partners. Everyone agrees the governments need to increase their support for CEWARN.

In addition to growing the basic functionality, the creation of the Rapid Response Fund (RRF) was among the other major achievements of that period. During the 2006 meetings we discussed the need to establish a separate fund that could respond by promoting peace interventions in the conflict areas. This was done and we canvassed for funds to support peace building activities in the different clusters. So the RRF was established as an entity with its own budget and a separate operational mechanism.

Another achievement we saw as being significant was to broaden CEWARN’s relationship with the governments by fostering mutually beneficial relations with Civil Society Organisations. We were able to develop CSO partnerships in many of the conflict areas, bringing in the elders and various youth and women’s organisations. We met our objectives for the most part, although there were many challenges. We held a comprehensive evaluation, and then we sat again to discuss a new strategy framework for the post-2011 phase.

One of the largest challenges had to do with how the member states emphasised their own priorities in regard to national security, and this impacted on the effectiveness of the individual CEWERU. The location of these units within their respective government structures was especially important. In Ethi-
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opina, for example, the CEWERU is located in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; in Kenya the National Peace and Security focal point is based in the Office of the President; and in Sudan it is parked in Humanitarian Affairs. The most successful CEWERU, from my point of view, is the one in Kenya because of the more central location of the CEWERU within the structure of the national government.

The Kenya CEWERU is able to act effectively because it can maintain close contact with the National Security Council and other government bodies. If they have a problem, they can talk to someone without many delays. The Sudan example is a case of the opposite situation. Humanitarian Affairs deals with relief, disasters, natural events, donations and funding support and does not deal directly with conflict. The Ministry’s priorities are different; the concerns are different. This is a factor that should be emphasised in tandem with the need to enhance CEWARN’s administrative and technical capacity. We need to develop or raise the competencies for the different countries to the same level. In the specific case of Sudan, we need to improve relationships with the authorities and improve accountability in order to make it more effective and more responsive. The CEWARN secretariat will have to reach out and help us realise these objectives.

Is this to say that not all the problems of the CEWERU in Sudan are due to the secession of the South?

They are actually two different issues. When we look at the effectiveness and priority of the CEWERU, it is a function of its location within the government. If you look at Kenya again, they have set up peace committees everywhere, they have a security presence on the ground and their people are for the most part supported with the proper equipment. This is not the case in Sudan. Sudan has many problems and many conflicts and not all of them are pastoralist ones. So when two communities are fighting each other in the middle of the country, that is not necessarily a concern for CEWARN.

We need to develop a new strategy for Sudan, and the mandate of the CEWERU needs to be updated. We need to amend our approach so the focus is not so much on conflict within pastoralist communities, but more on the larger problem of conflict between pastoralists and settled farmers. This issue is becoming more fractious over time. The other issue abetting local conflicts is the problem of land grabbing. In Sudan the current problems over land are predominantly due to the government’s allocation of large areas to foreign entities. The government is giving land to different interests including wealthy Gulf-based companies,
and similar allocations are also being made in areas of neighbouring countries that aggravate pastoralist frictions.

Of course we do not want to call it ‘grabbing’ all the time; this term is perhaps not the correct word to use because it is too emotive. Large tracts of land are being given away for development of modern agriculture on a commercial basis. But it is creating hostilities and frictions among the indigenous residents and the local settlers and those who come in search of employment in two ways. It creates a backlash among the communities, and it generates friction between the federal and the state governments. I come from the far north area of the country and even in such remote areas this has become the burning issue and the major source of conflict.

The major challenge for CEWARN turns on matters of national sovereignty and security. This brings us to the role of the NRI in the different countries. The NRIs are an independent body insofar as they report to CEWARN but not to the security agencies. This is not always taken well by the security bodies in a country. This is a very sensitive issue that will continue to be one of the challenges CEWARN faces as more such national conflict early warning units become active across the region.

Another challenge CEWARN is quite aware of is the changing nature of cattle raiding and the increasing influence of commercial forces. There are third party interests that benefit from this kind of raiding. There is a lucrative regional market for livestock exports and this is now a major driver of conflict across the IGAD region. This commercialisation also abets the spread of small arms. Before, raiders used spears and arrows but no longer. The adoption of firearms has created new illegal markets for weapons while intensifying cross-border conflict.

Mohammed Abdul Ghaffur

The situation across large areas of our region has been chaotic with no form of weapons control. The solution comes down to the ability of the states in the IGAD region to cooperate and coordinate actions. It is the same for the IGAD region, the region of the Great Lakes, the western Sahel, and Central Africa. There are now linkages between these areas that further encourage the circulation of small arms.

One source is the zone bordering Darfur in western Sudan. Although some may see our country as the source of weapons proliferation, Sudan is actually a victim of the phenomenon, and a destination for weapons pouring in from Chad, South Sudan, and Libya. They fil-
The question of where CEWARN is placed within the larger IGAD administrative architecture parallels the issue of the location of the CEWERUs within national governments. CEWARN is under the Director of Peace and Security in the IGAD Secretariat. I attended a series of meetings including ones with high-level Ministerial delegations and not once did I hear the name of CEWARN mentioned, or any of the issues we have discussed here mentioned at the Council of Ministers or at the Heads of State Assembly. I don’t think it is really a matter of obstruction. Maybe we should say it’s a matter of under-exposure or the message being lost within the high volume of information being reported. There are many things that come under the category of peace and security and many reports dealing with them. Sometimes CEWARN’s contribution is reduced to one paragraph in a large document.

The role of CEWARN is vulnerable to issues affecting IGAD’s membership and to bilateral relations between individual states. Maybe sometimes we are seen as part of this problem, although that is not really the case. That is not to say we have not exerted some internal influence internally within IGAD and some of its departments, including the orientation of how people view conflict and how they coordinate efforts to address it. These are not small developments within the greater scheme of things. Although appearances may suggest otherwise, in the Sudan we have made strides towards developing a new approach for managing conflict.

For the Sudan, IGAD is a very important organisation and the Sudan is a unique part of IGAD. It is a large country and in terms of conflict, it should be of very real concern and treated as a priority country. If you want to enhance regional peace, you need to elevate the CEWERU in Sudan to the level of other countries. We will have to identify the appropriate regional cluster or focal area, like Darfur, where the mechanism can be operationalised in the future. To do this you need to empower the CEWERU. We are ready to work with all the IGAD countries and with partner organisations.

The reality is we are two countries but one nation. The South Sudanese call themselves Sudanese and we call ourselves Sudanese and this is not disputed even though there are two governments. When
the clashes started between President Salva Kiir and his rival Riek Machar, it affected everyone, and set people in motion through all of the Sudan. We do not refer to those displaced by the conflict as refugees. The Khartoum government said they are all free to come here; they are all Sudanese and we deal with them like they are Sudanese.

The relevance of the mechanism is global. Its methods and approaches are tested on the ground and what has been accomplished up to this point is very credible. There is something to be said for the way managing conflict is being integrated into conventional approaches to the developmental process and not treated as something separate and operating on its own. We have done a lot to raise awareness in the clusters where CEWARN has been operating. Even in Sudan, we have done a lot of work with community-based organisations at the local level. There is a new more devolved way of dealing with cross-border issues. I think one can say we have pioneered some new ways of thinking, a form of culture change. We can see some change of viewpoint and attitude in different actors’ contribution to conflict prevention, and even in traditional sectors like the military.

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