How and where did the peace architecture model in Kenya start?

The Wajir peace committee model that emerged during the early 1990s was an innovative model created by communities, civil society organisations and government officials who came together to seek the peaceful resolution of conflict in Kenya’s North Eastern Province. Local activists brought together elders, women, and youth, who worked with the district administration and security heads to bring the region’s endemic banditry and clan warfare under control. This initiative became the forerunner of the peace committee model. The civil society groups working on peace-keeping and conflict management lobbied for the establishment of a national level steering team to coordinate peace activities. In 2001, the government accepted the idea of establishing a national steering committee on peace building and conflict management. That is how it all started.
The Wajir Peace Committee originated from within the community. Several prominent women leaders led by the late Deqa Ibrahim played key roles in starting the initiative. The committee also included Ambassador Mahboub Maalim, who later became the Executive Secretary of IGAD and another leader who is a former MP for Wajir, Mr. Elmi Mohammed. Adoption of the model by IGAD members to serve as the basis of the CEWARN model in effect revised the common perception that pastoralists are the people most prone to be involved in conflict.

I was in the ministry dealing with disaster management and humanitarian affairs at the time. In 2002 my Permanent Secretary asked me to form a team. I helped establish the new steering committee’s secretariat while at the same time working for the national focal point on the control of small arms and light weapons (SALW). After the member states signed the CEWARN protocol in 2002, there was a request from IGAD headquarters asking the member states to establish national conflict early warning and response units.

We started a directorate that also doubled as the CEWARN team on national and regional issues that began work on a policy framework for building this new peace building and conflict management architecture in 2004. By 2006, we had completed the first peace building and conflict management policy draft. The idea was to come up with a national framework for handling and coordinating peace building and conflict management with a focus on pastoralist-related conflicts. Many of the rangeland communities felt they did not have adequate security, weapons were spreading, and commercial incentives were accelerating the traditional cattle rustling across the region. The Wajir community in Northern Kenya provided the framework for coordinating various actors to address conflicts in a non-violent way.

The Wajir model was used to resolve serious clan conflicts in the 1990s, not just cattle rustling in Northern Kenya. During 2000 to 2001 the Somali in Garissa and Borana of Isiolo agreed upon a community peace accord, the Modogashe Peace Accord. The problem was some said it was largely based on Somali and Islamic traditions. We initiated the communal process of developing similar peace accords during the Borana and the Gabra conflicts in Marsabit. We’ve lost several leaders along the way, but such tragedies are part of resolving these community problems.

In 2007–2008, the eruption of post-election violence led to an expansion of the Kenya steering committee’s work. We were asked to replicate the peace committee’s work...
model in the areas outside the pastoralist districts experiencing post-election violence. A circular was sent to all districts to establish peace committees with a view to ensuring people or their communities resolved their conflicts in a peaceful way. We sent teams to the Mathare and Kibera informal settlements in Nairobi, and to the Rift Valley among other areas to convince them that they should adopt the peace committee model. These communities eventually agreed they needed to talk to each other in a formal way to resolve conflicts. They began assisting each other, even those who had lost their property. So that’s how the peace model spread to the larger nation.

The Maikona Peace Accord grew out of successful efforts to resolve the conflicts of 2005 between the Borana and the Gabra. It became a casualty of the fierce ethnic clan conflict in Marsabit and Moyale that emerged after the elections and during the implementation of the new constitution in 2013. The conflict was fanned by certain actors based across the border in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. This in turn led to a series of productive cross-border meetings that resulted in the complementary incorporation of the cross-border framework into the CEWARN model.

The CEWARN early warning mechanism is based on an expanded version of the Wajir model. In 2009-2010 we began supporting field monitors across the country, especially among communities that experienced the post-election violence. Things worked very well during the Constitutional referendum. We used the model to support monitoring by peace workers and to enhance the district security architecture.

The strategy is now open, and we’ve started monitoring all conflicts in the region based on the model borrowed from the Kenyan experience. We further modified the system by introducing an SMS platform so we could receive reports from a wider base of informants across the country, and by utilising other social media popular in the region. We used it to mobilise many Kenyans and organisations to campaign for peace, especially in the areas where we expected potential violence during the 2013 general election.

The hot spots, in this case, were identified in reports from the security and intelligence agencies. We also shared our reports with these agencies. And the communities likewise agreed that they were conflict areas. We worked around the clock with the security agencies, civil society, and other stakeholders to support peace campaigns during the elections.

We did a lot of work in peace building and conflict management to ensure the communities talk to
each other and while in regard to reconciliation the results were limited, through the influence of the peace building committees peace was maintained during the 2010 referendum and the 2013 elections. The result gives us hope for the implementation of the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission’s (TJRC) report and other reports that highlight historical injustices in Kenya. At least we now have a framework that others can work with to not only manage conflict but also to promote reconciliation.

How can issues raised by the field monitors like making the Rapid Response Fund to be more responsive be addressed?

I am a big critic of the RRF framework because since its formation in 2009-2010 it has never been adequately responsive. There are always delays. A good example is a recent program we are implementing. We started in November with regional RRF steering committee, of which all of us in the CEWERU are members. We presented proposals on the conflict situation during September and October, but we only received the funds between June and July of the following year. Is that responsive? We should remove the ‘rapid’ and just say ‘response framework’, because since its inception there have always been delays. In any event, we are trying to address these glitches and lapses. That’s why we say we want to domesticate some of our mechanisms so that we have a working situation room with people designated to address various clusters. Every time we get a report we should be able to promptly inform the field monitor or whoever is reporting that we’ve received the information and to communicate what kind of action will be taken. That is what we’re trying to encourage, but sometimes early warning systems do not work as efficiently as they are supposed to.

The larger problem was difficulty in adequately facilitating a sizeable group of field monitors. These challenges are there, but sometimes it also depends on individuals. At CEWARN regional and national levels there are individuals who respond very fast while others do not, and delays are very frustrating for the reporters in the field. When you take action on a report after six months, it’s no longer ‘early warning’. We had the same issue before domesticating our own system to embrace new technology. Facilitating urgent alerts through SMS helps expedite coordinated responses. During the referendum and 2013 elections, we even introduced sending money via the mobile money platform Mpesa to the local committees to cover their response activities. From late 2011 to 2012 there were clear signs that a renewal of the Borana-Gabra conflict was imminent.
Why were the available mechanisms like the quick disbursement fund (RRF) not activated to at least mitigate it to some extent?

Remember in the same Marsabit region we almost achieved a lasting peace through the Maikona Declaration that addressed the earlier conflict between the Borana and the Gabra. But the new constitution and the devolved system of government generated new issues of people competing for power in the devolved county governments. The government funded peace campaigns spearheaded by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission during the referendum and elections. In some cosmopolitan areas like Nakuru and Isiolo it worked. But in Marsabit and Mandera, the campaigns encountered problems because there were coalitions of small communities, like the Regabu Alliance-uniting the Rendille, Gabra, and Burji against the previously dominant Borana. This brought a new dimension to the conflict. It was no longer triggered by traditional cattle rustling, but over access to power. The government addressed it by sending mediators to Marsabit. Although it took time to control the violence, the situation also highlighted new factors. The escalation of conflict did not imply the failure of the existing mechanisms, but it did lead to the improvements in cross-border communication noted above.

We are beginning to see tensions associated with the development of new infrastructural projects and issues related to resource extraction like oil in northern Kenya and the ambitious LAPSSET project’s impact across the larger region.

What kind of response is CEWARN planning to address the potential for new conflicts?

These issues underscore why we must address the new dynamics driving current and future conflicts. Some of these conflicts have their own challenges. In Lamu it is related to land; in Tana River, it’s related to the multi-national corporations investing in sugar production. The discovery of oil is a new development in the region and we’ve seen a different dynamic of conflict emerging around it. For instance, the traditional conflict between the Pokot and Turkana has shifted because the former are claiming their region extends to some of the areas in Turkana where oil was discovered.

So they also want a share of the proceeds from the oil. The problem also includes tensions between county and national governments in other areas over the sharing of mineral resources. Some variations on this problem include coal in Kitui, titanium in Kwale, and port development in Mombasa and Lamu. These are some of the new challenges and those in conflict prevention, management
and resolution are implementing training programs to sensitise both national and county governments, local clans, and the technical teams planning all of these mega-projects. There are a number of success stories and some have been documented. The international community has asked us to share our experiences with them. We are always working on improving the CEWARN mechanism to extend its capacity beyond the pastoralist-related conflicts. For example, the impact of the Kenyan post-election violence affected the whole region. Uganda and Rwanda suffered as much economically as Kenya due to the disruption of transport and supply chains. So we can't pretend that managing pastoralist related conflicts is the only major objective when there are others that are even more complex.

We sponsored workshops on conflict sensitive reporting in partnership with the Media Council of Kenya and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). This initiative also includes conflict education for technocrats, including policy makers like governors, and other politicians. We need to sensitise them on planning without causing conflict, and inform them about how they can negotiate for more resources without using violence. These are some of the strategies we are implementing. We may end up like Nigeria or the Democratic Republic of Congo, countries endowed with lucrative resources but lacking peace. We have learnt the lessons highlighted by other regions and we are committed to support conflict sensitivity programs when these mega-projects are being launched.

We have both anticipated and advised the government about these issues. There is, for example, a major problem in Isiolo over the construction of the international airport while the LAPSSET project has triggered massive land speculation. The County Governor is now claiming new county boundaries. These are problems we've documented through CEWARN, which has come up with a database for each county in Kenya on peace issues. We began with the national conflict mapping, then after 2010 we started the county conflict mapping that highlighted some of these problems now being witnessed now in the conflict profiles. For instance, we identified seventeen hot-spot counties and convened meetings to discuss how to address the issues highlighted in their profile. We did this in partnership with CEWARN, while encouraging each county to go forward in mapping conflicts in sub-counties.

We believe it is best for us to coordinate and let the other actors do their thing at the local level because each county has its own unique dynamics, whether urban or rural. We are going to work with them but they need to include
conflict sensitivity contingencies within their county integrated development programs, including active measures to address the conflict and peace challenges they face.

What is the strategy for extending the model to matters of food security, and other problems, including the interest in extending the early warning mechanism to other entities such as ECOWAS and other regional variations on the African Union’s African Peace and Security Architecture initiative?

To begin with, we have to work with our regional counterparts to implement the cross-border framework to resolve conflicts across the borders. That framework has worked well in Moyale and was adopted in the Turkana–Omo area. We have a good working relationship with our counterparts on the Ugandan side of the Karamoja cluster; we are also interacting with South Sudan, and we are currently trying to persuade Ethiopia to adopt the same kind of framework for managing the Mandera triangle.

Along the Somali border, there are people working with elders, borrowing from our model, while some of our peace monitors are in Mogadishu working with the CEWERU Somalia to train their local peace committees. We have also hosted many delegations from Uganda, South Sudan, and Ethiopia who come to learn how we have domesticated this model to work for our country.

These are examples of some of the issues now being addressed. We have a regional framework with our bordering nations. The Joint Commissioners and Administrators Meetings also address some of these concerns, encouraging administrators along the borders and county governments to foster engagement with the neighbouring administrative units. Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia currently support effective frameworks through their joint borders administrators’ commission. They meet quite regularly.

This framework is also being implemented to address issues of epidemics, livestock diseases, and immigration and human trafficking. Members of the CEWERU sit in those committees and provide very valuable information. We’ve been invited to Zimbabwe to discuss with their national team on how to use an early warning system modelled on the CEWARN mechanism. In addition to sharing our experiences with ECOWAS, we have also travelled to international meetings abroad to share our experience and the UN system has been quoting our success.