The Contribution of CEWARN to the Region’s Future

We live in a region where a great number of people whose histories have often clashed live together in countries and areas that are undergoing rapid change. This is the basic underlying issue that make peace and security in Africa and in the Horn of Africa a challenge. Ultimately, problems of peace and security and violence mirror the problem of underlying structures and contradictions within the society. Insecurity is itself a signal that tells us that there is something about the evolving social arrangements that has yet to create proper mechanisms for mediation. It alerts us to act in order to ensure that the inevitable political, geographical, and demographic forces responsible for differences between people are resolved peacefully.

The IGAD region is characterised by its varied geography, including extensive semi-arid and arid lands inhabited by groups whose livelihoods derive from
pastoralist activities. With the exception of one country, the rest of the IGAD region has in common a particular colonial history, which has meant that a lot of the problems the region faces are quite similar. The mechanisms of state administration are based on histories of domination. The well-meaning governments of the day have struggled to reform those mechanisms, and to make them more aligned to the realities of the people of the Horn. These are two of the characteristics that make the countries of IGAD similar to one another in terms of peace and security.

The region is also characterised by the fact that given its geography, there is a great deal of current and historical contact between the different countries. For centuries, for example, the Ethiopian walled city of Harar plied its trade with the city-states of the Indian Ocean, evolving common patterns and intertwined histories among people. You find old migration routes, old routes of movement and even now it is not uncommon to find certain Somali people in Sudan during certain times of the year—and Nigerians in Sudan as well. The people of IGAD know each other very well and that brings the regions together and forces the governments to follow where their people are leading.

The IGAD region hosts the greatest concentration of pastoralists in the whole world. If there is anywhere on the planet that can be called a pastoralist zone, it’s the IGAD region.

**Who are these pastoralist peoples, what are their characteristics beyond the modern tropes of food insecurity and resource conflicts and what is the impact of their movements?**

The constant mobility in search of food and water gives rise to particular organisational forms and social technologies that are aligned with that lifestyle. The need for movement informs the politics and their transhumance shapes the socialising of pastoralist peoples. People who move without regard to borders or without regard to shifting boundaries are people who appear very curious to others in this age of settled states.

The important innovation here in the IGAD region, and it is a significant development, is that states now implicitly recognise the legitimacy of these movements. There is no single IGAD member state that tries to stop them. There is an understanding that this is the way the region is, even though we have our territorial integrity; the states understand that there are people in Ethiopia who will come to Kenya and that there are people in Kenya who will go to Ethiopia. The states here are now trying to facilitate their movements as much as they can. I think that is indica-
tive of our unique sense of the relationship between citizenship and geography. This is not something that is always recognised about IGAD states but you can see the dynamic at work all the time. Kenya was until recently host to the largest number of refugees on the globe. The movements of refugees in the IGAD region are massive and yet governments in the region have not moved aggressively to stop these flows. IGAD countries are actually very generous when it comes to letting in people who are fleeing drought or insecurity. The Horn of Africa is a region that is driven by people who move with a great deal of freedom but also by governments that acknowledge that this freedom of movement comes with the territory.

Naturally there is always a great deal of tension between tradition and present realities. If you look at the population of Kenya at independence in 1963, there were about 6 or 7 million Kenyans. Now there are over 48 million. When you compare the movements that were in northern Kenya in 1963 to the ones now, you find very different realities.

Are the social norms and technology evolving as fast as the realities; what forms of mediation can now be brought to bear as these groups move?

Because they have been moving historically for generations, pastoralists developed intricate ways of communicating and agreeing on their movements. There was no chaos. It was not just a matter of going wherever you are going; rather, it was a decision based on the supposition that wherever you are going, you will find people there. So you developed ways of agreeing with them about why you are there. The traditional methods for mediating these interactions have struggled to keep up with the changes impinging on their way of life. These include some positive developments in infrastructure and in economic development that have overtaken aspects of the pastoralist way of life and how they negotiate their physical and social environment. That is why sometimes we see spikes of very intense violence that suggest the way these groups on the move understand each other have become strained. The means of violence have changed.

Today 15 raiders with AK-47s can kill dozens of people where a generation ago those same 15 raiders armed with less lethal weapons would not have killed nearly as many. The social realities and technologies are in constant tension with one another. The great challenge facing the IGAD region and organisations like CEWARN is the prerogative to be part of something new, especially with respect to adapting social technologies to facilitate mediation and structures promoting peace.
James Scott’s book, The Art of Not Being Governed, speaks to the different experiences of colonial governments in this region. Colonial administrators tended to leave the region’s pastoralist people alone after the initial efforts undertaken to control them. The terrain was a factor as was the attitude of the pastoralists that conveyed to the colonial regimes they preferred to be left to their own devices. Also, through the colonists’ eyes, the dry and semi-arid conditions did not appear ripe for commercial exploitation in the same way as the highlands where they concentrated their economic interventions.

Early attempts to impose government on the pastoralist people in this region often failed. They tended to leave the pastoralists alone except for the occasional punitive expedition to teach them a lesson of one kind or another. That is simply because government in the modern sense of the word is not designed to govern people on the move. States emerged in the presence of settled populations that over time evolved economic activities that yield some form of revenue that central governments taxed in return for the provision of security and services.

People who are on the move and have been on the move for generations need to be given a similar social contract. The deal is very simple: by being part of this national project, you will benefit. Where the governments have been able to make that deal and impart substance to it, the result is a more peaceful environment and a much greater sense of attachment to the national project. This has been difficult in the IGAD countries. As mentioned, it is not an easy task taking over essentially colonial forms of government and, in the space of a few decades, reforming them to effectively govern socially and economically diverse communities. The representation of the central state in many arid and semi-arid areas is still very thin. As a result, there is still a great deal of reliance on traditional on-the-ground systems of management. The struggle is how to make these systems function together with other forms of governance and at the same time extend government security provision and all the other public goods that are known to people in Nairobi, Kampala, and Addis Ababa to their territories.

The delay in realising this objective comes at great cost for the poor. The slow extension of government services, on the other hand, was compensated for with a very robust sense of self-governance from the pastoralist institutions on the ground. Indigenous structures are still able to deliver for their peoples in respect to mediation and conflict management and perhaps other public goods. At the same time, we need to reach a certain threshold of stability before the full rollout of government services can occur.
We are now making good progress towards achieving that threshold.

I like to think of CEWARN in several ways. On a philosophical and political basis, I think of it first as Pan-Africanism in practice, not in words. I think of CEWARN as a sort of messenger to the future. That is, today CEWARN reflects a region whose states have come together and even though sometimes our interests differ, we are creating institutions that bring us all together. In this sense, CEWARN is a sort of profound promise that institutionalises, that says we can do it together, and that we can work with those who are living with the threat of violence to prevent conflict through the use of openness and informational tools. Such a promise, which is itself a historical proposition, is always going to be difficult to fully roll out. In its fullest expression it is about working to make a more perfect union—to paraphrase the popular American term. It is an idea that you are constantly moving towards. CEWARN is predicated on the promise that governments of the region can, together with their people, create and evolve ways of anticipating violence and stopping it.

The people of the Horn and African people in general have been sold on the view that they live in a particularly brutal environment, perhaps even a brutish environment. They have been sold the idea that these are possibly the most violent of times and that your fellow citizens and people are possibly the most violent people on the planet. This is not true. If you look at it from the perspective of Europe between 1914 and 1945, there is no war no matter how brutal in the Horn even remotely comparable to the kind of violence that was meted out in that 30-year period. If you look at all the wars of independence of South East Asia, if you look at China during the Japanese invasion of the Second World War, the level of violence was immense. Let’s make it clear that in fact the Horn, given its contradictions, is far more peaceful than might be the case. In fact, the people of the Horn by and large are far more patient, far more flexible than many other people on the planet in light of the challenges we have here. The general rule has been live and let live, wait till another day. There is certain wisdom in the Horn. The violence is there, you can’t refute that. But when examined objectively you will conclude that the casualties are far fewer than the numbers of people in the Horn who died during the Cold War; the many people killed by gunshot wounds and bombs who were killed during proxy battles instigated by the two blocs. They called it a Cold War; for us it was hot.

Since the end of the Cold War we have witnessed the rise of institutions like CEWARN and African countries have taken the initiative
in building up a peace architecture. IGAD began in 1986, during the Cold War, and quickly evolved into a peace and security institution. The moment that global struggle ended and our region was left to its own devices, IGAD quickly went into the business of building institutions and mechanisms to prevent violence.

Although the propensity of the region’s warrior peoples is to seek peace, we are moving into a period of more intensified conflict. The rapidly growing populations and the expansion of commerce means that the privatisation of the commons is accelerating. Land that used to be held in the commons is being transferred into private hands and being exploited for private gain because of this dynamic. This is leading to a significant disruption of old patterns and that leads to more social volatility. Economic progress does not necessarily ensure peace, even as a region becomes more economically independent.

The IGAD region has arrived at a very important moment. As we build more roads, railways, and airports, as we expand commercial farms and promote tourism, the challenge is how to maintain ways of mediating conflict and to institutionalise preventive measures so that conflict does not evolve into violence. The countries and governments will have to decide how exactly are we going to handle being prosperous and having much more economic activity in our territory. In the meantime, there is going to be a gap between now and the time when all the people in the countries are included in that prosperity. Handling that gap requires intensified peace-building, systematic social and economic inclusion and the awareness that since some people will inevitably be left behind we need to keep the peace with each other.

This region is a place of immense differences in lifestyle and economic livelihoods. Pastoralist peoples who depend upon their expansive herds of cattle should be free to continue to nurture their livelihoods based on livestock. Not only do they make a large contribution to their national economies, their unique way of life feeds into the region’s cultural tapestry. It follows that they should enjoy the option to pursue commercialisation of livestock production in a way that is environmentally sound and peaceful. This is not necessarily something that can be organised from the top. Policy makers and planners need to appreciate that pastoralists’ use of the region’s extensive rangelands may be very different but it is also productive and sustainable.

Harmonising the cultural diversity of our region would see the Horn evolve into perhaps the most unique political and economic system on the planet. It is not a ques-
tion of trying to make the Horn become like China, Singapore, or North America. It is a matter of shaping our geographical and cultural diversity so that other multicultural regions will ask, “how can we become more like the Horn of Africa?”

Even though we are different communities inhabiting different landscapes, we are on a continuum; all of us are on the same road. I hope we will see the new social technologies and innovative applications help take the Horn in its own direction. Sometimes you see a glimmer of that but we are still to get there; peace is part of the method and not only a goal in these circumstances.

Peace—and it is very important for me to say this—is not simply participation. These are two very different things. Nor is peace stability and by stability I mean the sort of slow-motion politics of northern Europe. We are in a time of rapid and highly compressed change. You cannot move from what we call poverty today to what experts call wealth in a stable manner. The transition is going to be volatile by nature because you are trying to move lots of people from being desperately hungry to not even thinking about hunger. It is important to recognise that everyone should work to prevent violence in these circumstances.

That work is building and experimenting and seeing what institutions on the ground the people respect, how we can work through those institutions and how we can assist those institutions to keep up with the times.

The volatility I am talking about here is the volatility of a young man coming from the countryside to Addis Ababa with all his dreams and aspirations. He’s been told that if he does A-B-C, he will succeed. But then he finds that actually he’s arrived too early, or too late and that our rapidly changing society has moved on. This young person starts to get desperate. That desperation leads him to seek some form of relief and that may come via participation in different social movements or criminal diversions and out of that emerges the volatility. Can you even stop that person from coming to the city with those dreams and expectations? But he will still come to a city where many people do not have jobs and there is no plan to alleviate the problem over the short term. We can’t just police the population. That is not enough.

**How do you actually create structures that understand this?**

These are ideas that will have to be taken on at some point but they are slow in coming and late in being applied. Too many people in the Horn of Africa continue to believe that the debate over models
of socioeconomic change is already settled. Unfortunately, it is not. All these things matter because underlying the quest in the Horn for greater prosperity is not so much a desire for wealth but more a demand for basic dignity and less humiliation. Being hungry is a humiliating condition. With the accelerating pace of change, we need to comprehend and factor for the incidence of humiliation and indignity that accompanies rapid economic development.

Approval of the new strategy was acknowledgement of CEWARN’s good work in the previous phase, and acknowledgement that the CEWARN mechanism is relevant. CEWARN created a unique presence within governments that was seen to be effective. The member states recognised this by ratifying the agreement to expand the work of CEWARN to different typologies of violence.

CEWARN is nevertheless best seen as an experiment that needs to be watched and supported very closely. It is like a sniffer dog or a canary in a mine. It’s a unique institution that can really make a big difference. The mechanism, in my opinion, should never become a large bureaucratic institution because there is a great deal of value in being small and flexible. It should be able to constantly change with conditions, it’s evolution based on experimentation and not bureaucratisation.

At the same time, governments must uphold the CEWARN mechanism in its totality and treat it as their common possession.

CEWARN is an organisation that works with governments and within government to resolve the security problems of the day. The mechanism does not set its own priorities. Its success is predicated on dealing with sensitive issues. This will be a function of demonstrating to member states that it is interested in solving problems and addressing issues of a political nature while the organisation itself does not have a political angle. The degree to which the member states can see that written into the institutional fabric of the mechanism will enable them to remain open to working with the mechanism on issues of the gravest concern to member states. Over the next ten years, I anticipate CEWARN employing the best and brightest young people from the IGAD countries. I see it as being a coveted vehicle for peace and security professionals and for others who can bring their expertise to bear on the issues—whether they are in technology, in communication, or even in event management. I see CEWARN being something that you can aspire to professionally.

I see a CEWARN that supports research done by social scientists who can use their findings to generate unique new approaches to the challenges we face. Finally, I
hope to see a CEWARN mechanism that is completely funded by its member states. In the coming years we will be living in a region whose economy has doubled or trebled in size. We will have a growing middle class, but we will also have a much larger lower class population. CEWARN must pioneer peace building within this economic paradigm. In the histories of economic change, rapid economic development revolves around industrialisation and urbanisation. The histories of urbanisation are driven by the growth of manufacturing. In China, for example, people are not leaving their farms to go get jobs in restaurants or tourism, but in factories. One of the great puzzles of our region is that economies are growing but without significant industrial development. Unless nations of the Horn find ways of being globally competitive in manufacturing or find a substitute that can play the same role, the volatility I talked about earlier is going to be more pronounced and governments are going to need the services of CEWARN even more.