CEWARN commenced operation in 2002 with the mandate to extend peace and security to the far-flung regions of their territories. The IGAD Member States did not expect at that moment that the technicians, analysts, and administrators implementing the system would pioneer a data-driven multi-tiered early warning mechanism that would come to be replicated across the continent.

The journey involved a matrix of inter-connected activities: testing different tools, compiling data-sets; operationalising Member States promise to work together on early warning and early response; engaging and demonstrating the value of working with different stakeholders; and empowering citizens at the grassroots to assume ownership of their efforts to sustain peace. CEWARN has been, in short, a workshop for putting ideas into practice, and a laboratory for testing different methodologies, integrating information from a range of sources, and factoring for sensitivities within a process that gradually built confidence among our governmental stakeholders.
In 2011 the Member States re-affirmed their commitment by authorising CEWARN to go beyond its original focus on pastoralist conflict and to play a more central role in their security agenda by adapting its innovative early warning system to an expanded set of conflict drivers. CEWARN is now enlarging its operations in order to engage in reducing risks of violent conflict through early warning and responses, each stakeholder in the system contributing by utilising their comparative advantage.

Diversifying thematically and geographically required that CEWARN put in place a new Strategic Framework. The framework was developed through an intensive and extensive process that involved consultations with over 5000 participants across local, national and regional levels, and it was designed to evolve apace with the high priority conflicts and criminal activities the region’s governments expect to encounter during the coming years. The new strategic framework facilitates the formulation of preventive measures for diverse conflict drivers that work in tandem with existing early warning approaches.

To this end, CEWARN’s focus was broadened to address sixty conflict typologies synthesised into 15 conflict themes, and organised under five distinct economic, environmental, security, governance, and sociocultural sectors. This entails actively monitoring a comprehensive set of conflict trends and drivers that includes variables related to terrorism and violent extremism, border disputes, the surging youth population, migration and displacements, decentralisation of power, environmental degradation, exploration and extraction of natural resources in historically neglected borderlands, economic situations, pastoralism, and tensions accompanying electoral processes.

Navigating through the multiplicity of the conflict drivers in a manner that enables CEWARN to anticipate and prioritise prevention over intervention is a daunting task. The Strategic Framework anticipates this enormous challenge by identifying specific capabilities that CEWARN needs to cultivate if it is to respond efficiently to existing and emerging trends and conflict drivers. These include:

A. Ability to gather credible and sufficient data to turn into high quality analysis;
B. Skills to map and analyse violent conflict risks and responses from a complex systems perspective;
C. Ability to serve the appropriate decision-makers with risk and contingency assessments in a timely fashion;
D. Capability to effectively grow and evolve the network in line with the need to prevent violent
conflicts or enable successful responses;
E. Support for on-the-ground projects that reduce risks of violent conflict or mitigate it and promote scaling for widespread effect; use of in-built learning mechanisms that refresh and reorient strategy and operations;
F. Cultivating outstanding facilitative and collaborative capabilities at the local, national and regional levels.

Conflict prevention is a constantly evolving and transforming challenge that requires constant review of what we do and how we do it. CEWARN has upgraded its data collection and analysis software, the CEWARN Reporter, to better cater for the additional conflict themes and data sets. Partnerships and networks are being expanded, and the role of CSOs in data collection and analysis is being entrenched. GIS (Geographic Information System) technology is being rolled out; and we have improved our performance monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework.

CEWARN is developing a response strategy that will complement the interventions of other important players in areas of our operations while enabling us to evaluate the impact of our response capacity within the early warning system already in place. Improving the latter will involve ensuring closer contact with beneficiaries in the field to ensure that preventative responses align with the early warning feedback generated. Our capacity to do this will be complemented by deployment of a CEWARN Peace Facilitator Corps (trained local mediators) to help support peace negotiations, communal conflict mapping, participatory development of peace dividend projects, and participatory evaluation and learning of on-the-ground projects.

It is important we continue to envision CEWARN as the ‘laboratory’ noted above, dedicated to the mission of developing capabilities that anticipate and prevent conflicts from turning violent. CEWARN will continue to ‘experiment’ with diverse socioeconomic, environmental and political drivers of conflict in order to devise more effective conflict early warning indicators and response options. In this sense, CEWARN is not just a program; it is also a tool at the disposal of IGAD programs and the African Union’s initiative to develop the continent’s African peace architecture to enhance their objectives of regional stability, prosperity and integration.

CEWARN has performed better than expected up to this point. In the course of pioneering a multidimensional, data-based early warning system we have demonstrated
the value of incorporating CSOs and research institutions into the Mechanism while empowering the participation of local communities in order to make the Mechanism truly inclusive and broad-based in its work. By focusing on one of the most complex socioeconomic syndromes in Africa, the problem of pastoralist conflict, we have demonstrated the utility of a cluster-based approach to regional security and the synergies generated by fostering cross-border communications and peace-building activities on the local level. The adoption of the Informal Cross-border Trade (ICBT) policy framework in 2018 represents another critical achievement advancing the process of regional integration and cooperation in the IGAD region. The ICBT recognises the importance of borderland economies as a source of employment and capital for millions, while assisting IGAD member states’ governments to tackle the Horn of Africa’s borderlands’ larger and multifaceted security issues.

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