Seven countries of the horn of Africa formed IGADD, the Intergovernmental Authority for Drought and Development in 1986 to tackle the challenges of drought and development in the range-lands. IGAD then emerged out of the original IGADD a decade later in the shadow of civil war and intensifying conflict with a mandate that emphasizes promoting regional peace and a.

Early warning methods for monitoring droughts and famine were already present in the IGAD region, so using a similar approach to track conflicts was not new. The shock generated by the 1994 Rwanda genocide led to a shift in IGAD’s institutional focus from conflict management to prevention. Conflict prevention, management, and resolution subsequently appeared as Article 125 in the East African Treaty, and the African Union (AU) also decided to prioritise a similar approach.

The IGAD assembly in Khartoum voted to establish an early warning system in 1999 and this led to the deliberations on
the CEWARN Protocol in 2000. Although the initial proposal was to address the range of potential conflicts in the IGAD region, concentrating on cross border pastoral conflicts was a useful entry point for implementing an early warning mechanism as a pilot project. The project’s success would enable the extension of the system to other forms of conflict over the long run.

The governments of Kenya, Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia in particular expressed a high level of interest. Diverse military, administrative, civil society and intelligence institutions were represented in the inauguration meetings of the newly constituted national Conflict Early Warning and Response Units (CEWERUs). It was a positive beginning although setting up of rules of procedure for the technical committee was not easy. The civil society participants, for example, wanted the same voting rights enjoyed by the member-states.

I participated in the early stage of setting up CEWARN and ended up serving as the first coordinator. Initial recruitment for CEWARN started in 2000 and was completed in 2002; reporting commenced in mid-2002. During the period I was there, we concentrated on methodology and the tools of early warning and we started compiling early warning reports.

The key challenge we faced was translating early warning information into timely interventions. Even with robust intelligence, would decision makers in Member States be ready and willing to act quickly to circumvent imminent clashes?

Making decisions based on anticipation of something likely to happen is a very difficult argument to sell to a bureaucrat. Decision makers are moved by what happens, not by what may happen. That’s why it is not enough to report what is likely to happen or what may or may not happen.

Outcomes are dependent on the particular circumstances. Decisions based on intelligence are subject to different criteria; they are never a predictive exercise. The next issue here is, does the principal recipient trust your information? And the third is does he act on the formal report and not on the basis of other information he may have received. No agency has a monopoly when it comes to information.

**How do you assess if the decision maker is in conflict prevention mode and not in management and resolution mode?**

So, yes we can have an early warning system, but remember that the principal decision makers in intergovernmental bodies are diplomats. So if you raise an issue to a diplomat from, say, Kenya, Ethiopia or Djibouti and claim that certain
things are happening in their country, they may deny that the information is a true reflection of the internal situation. They are not in conflict prevention mode and in any event they are trained to prioritise the diplomacy of conflict management and resolution.

The tendency is to equate handling prevention with fire brigade thinking, either calling for the intervention of the military or supporting the observation of a ceasefire. We have to explore the dynamics of the larger mechanisms and modes of intervention required for conflict prevention. We have yet to reach the point where we can confidently claim we are ready to act effectively on conflict early warnings.

Secondly, there is also a difficulty of measuring success of conflict prevention. How are you able to tell that a conflict prevention effort has succeeded? The fact of the matter is if you prevent a conflict, it didn’t happen. Are you going to then tell the public that the proof of what you prevented is that it did not occur?

It is difficult to measure the success of conflict early warning and preventive interventions in most situations. This is why we need to reconsider how to communicate to the public the efficacy of an early warning system where the proof of success is invisible and conjectural. Although decrease in violence by itself is not a reliable as a criterion, this does not mean that there are no success stories in Rwanda, Burundi, and Darfur for the African Union, and for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Liberia. This is why assessing the role of an early warning system forces us to think in terms of process. The approach that we developed in 2006 featured the use of early warning reports to initiate dialogue with decision makers. It is important to remember that the instruments deployed on the regional and continental level are not designed solely for prevention, but also for conflict management and resolution.

In CEWARN’s case, we sought to base our case on assessment of indicators on the ground to enhance our credibility rather than rely on what are considered to be measures of the success of early warning systems. I think to optimise the influence of an early warning report requires engaging the decision makers in a manner that balances the influence of other competing ‘reports’ and the level of doubt they may convey.

But we are beginning to collect the information, we’ve developed the tools and the methodology for analysing it and we have recorded some successes in regard to briefing special representatives and the AU Panel of the Wise and similar institutions. There is still the chal-
lenge to do more, but the focus of how to increase our impact requires linking prevention to the domain of management and resolution.

What we needed in IGAD was not a fire brigade, but for the member states to address the structural causes of cross border pastoral violence, whether through disarmament or through better livestock husbandry and food security. Every time there is a raid you cannot rush in and bring people together—that’s the fire brigade approach. Cattle raiding and stock theft is a problem where someone comes to take away your livestock and maybe your life as well. By treating cattle rustling as a pastoralist tradition, we give the practice a more acceptable connotation when it is actually criminality. Instead of looking at pastoral issues as something that only affects pastoralist communities, we need to treat them as systemic problems with regional ramifications.

In Kenya and Uganda where we have relatively developed economic systems, livestock is a critical part of the agricultural sector. So you address food security by growing more vegetables and maize, but do not factor for the fact that livestock households are important producers of animal protein, the result is a calorie rich but protein poor society. We need to find solutions for the problems of pastoralism because among other things, open range livestock systems are the most productive use of the region’s extensive arid lands.

Many interventions in this sector cannot succeed as long as herdsmen are so dependent on climatic conditions. Settlement works when it supports the diffusion of technology. Technological solutions have taken longer to take root in these areas and across Kenya’s borders and this highlights the role of the educational system in opening people to different perspectives and production methods. This returns us to the original issue of combining early warning and prevention with conflict management and resolution. CEWARN cannot solve the developmental problems of the rangelands, but by contributing to regional stability it helps create the kind of enabling environment where other solutions can flourish.
A principal challenge CEWARN faced, particularly in its early phase of operations, was linking its strong early warning system to an effective response component that generates appropriate and timely actions to curb the spread of violent conflicts. Response actions initiated by CEWARN were often reactive and sluggish. Member States’ efforts to mitigate the cross-border conflicts centred on security responses by military and police forces to separate the warring parties. The response structures known as the Conflict Early Warning and Early Response Units (CEWERU) were ineffective and lacked a coordinated approach to the cross-border dimensions of the violent conflicts. Many of the challenges related to lack of resources needed to mount a timely and effective response.

Aware of the gaps and challenges in its response arm, in 2008 CEWARN began to strengthen the response side of the mechanism. CEWARN sought resources from its development partners for the establishment of a Rapid Response Fund.