Preventing Violence: Community-based Approaches to Early Warning and Early Response

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Preventing Violence: Community-based Approaches to Early Warning and Early Response

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Foreword

Switzerland has been a long-standing supporter of early warning initiatives in the field of conflict management. In the 1990s the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) mandated the non-governmental organization, swisspeace, to develop a system for anticipating armed conflicts and political crises. This became the FAST program (Frühanalyse von Spannungen und Tatsachenermittlung). FAST was relatively successful in generating early warnings. However, as this publication highlights, FAST and the previous generations of early warning and early response systems were less successful at preventing violence, since the links between warning and response were not clear.

This publication presents an important overview of how the thinking and practice on early warning and early response has evolved since those days. Nevertheless, the gap between warning and response remains a challenge. I have experienced this gap myself during my time as head of the Task Force established for Switzerland’s Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Since its inception, early warning, conflict prevention and response to crisis have been the core business of the OSCE. However, recent challenges, such as the conflict in the Ukraine, have shown that despite its early warning instruments, effective preventive action often remains elusive. There is still much room for improvement in how we approach early warning and early response.

Three messages in this publication particularly resonated with me, as they are at the heart of the peace promotion work of the Human Security Division at the Swiss FDFA.

Firstly, as outsiders, we need to be humble. The most intelligent and capable people working in the capitals of the world cannot tell what changes are actually relevant in which conflict and what responses are appropriate. It is the local people closest to the conflict, who can call attention to the subtle changes that may indicate an escalation of tensions and know how best to address them. We must therefore ensure that local people are at the heart and the forefront of all our efforts to prevent violence and promote peace. External actors like Switzerland or the UN can support and enable local processes, but we cannot impose peace.

Secondly, processes need to be inclusive. “Inclusion” has become something of a buzzword in current peace policy and practice. This publication reminds us why it matters, at every level, whether in the peace negotiations on Syria, or at the community level in Wajir, Kenya. For Switzerland inclusion means not only ensuring that all groups in society are represented, but also all spectrums of opinion. Too often there is a tendency to work with the like-minded, yet we must also reach out to the actors who may be contributing to tensions, no matter how difficult this is.

Finally, dialogue is a key tool in managing and transforming conflicts, and effective dialogue takes time. It takes time to change attitudes, for people to get to know each other and to accept each other. And the sooner dialogue starts, the better. Too often, we get active only when conflicts have escalated, making their resolution all the more difficult.

These are just three of the many valuable points highlighted in this publication. While its focus is on community-level conflicts, many of the lessons and insights are relevant for anyone working to address conflicts and build peace.

Heidi Grau
Head of the Human Security Division,
Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Summary

Community-based early warning and early response (EWER) systems are locally-rooted initiatives designed to prevent violence and transform conflict through an inclusive, participatory process, built on a foundation of consensus. While the form and function of community-based approaches to EWER are context specific, there are some common themes and learning outcomes, which anyone interested in community-based approaches to EWER will want to consider. Listed below are key points related to the four themes of set-up and structure, indicators, monitoring, and response.

Set-up and Structure
• Top-down models are more common than bottom-up models; both have been effective in different contexts and both come with different challenges.
• Inclusion of all stakeholders, including minority and marginalized groups, is essential.
• Legitimacy and effectiveness rely on wide community support, as well as the support of the authorities.
• Context sensitivity: all EWER systems will be shaped by the community in which they develop and may not be directly replicable in other contexts.
• External parties can strengthen local capacities and aid in process design, but the process must be led and owned by the community.

Indicators
• Both qualitative and quantitative indicators are important. Past emphasis on quantitative indicators has detracted from the value of qualitative indicators for community-level monitoring.
• Indicators of immediate risks of escalation tend to be prioritized, yet indicators identifying the structural and underlying causes of conflict are essential for long-term violence prevention and conflict transformation.
• Indicators can be based on factors that contribute to conflict escalation, but also on community practices that contribute to peace and social cohesion.
• Good indicators are specific to the local context, up-to-date, developed in a participatory and inclusive way, and gender-sensitive.
• The list of indicators should avoid being overly ambitious to lessen the risk of exceeding capacities to monitor and respond.

Monitoring
• The selection of monitors should reflect the diversity of the community.
• Verification of information is an important function of EWER systems in order to ensure EWER reports are credible and to counter the negative effects of false or inflammatory information.
• Information collected should be analyzed in a participatory manner and reports should be made widely available.
• New technologies can facilitate communication, but the questions of “if”, “where” and “how” they can be useful in a specific context should be considered before integrating them into an EWER system.
• Transparency is essential to avoid suspicion from members of the community, government, or security forces.

Response
• Response capacities should shape the overall design of the system. A gap between a system’s ability to warn and its ability to deliver responses can undermine its credibility and the support it receives.
• Community-based direct response to conflict favors interests-based and transformational approaches over power- or rights-based approaches.
• Community-based approaches are consensus-based, building on existing local capacities, and are carried out by members of the community.
• Communities need a network of established relationships in order to mobilize external actors to respond to situations that are beyond their capacity to manage.
• Regular communication and reporting can help to foster constructive, collaborative relationships with external actors.
Introduction

“People were warning that it was coming but no one has listened and now you see this. If it’s not dealt with quickly it’s going to get a lot worse.”¹

These words were spoken by a community member in Pretoria, South Africa, as riots unfolded over a political dispute. He, and other members of the community, could feel tensions rising; they knew outbreaks of violence were becoming ever-more likely, yet they did not have the power or forum to address the escalation. This is a challenge facing communities all over the world.

Community-based early warning and early response (EWER) systems are one possible response to this challenge. They are locally-rooted initiatives designed to prevent violence and transform conflict through an inclusive, participatory process, built on a foundation of consensus. This publication aims to summarize, in an accessible way, the current body of knowledge about community-based EWER systems. In doing so it draws on the literature and experiences related to early warning and early response systems and to local peace committees.²

While the form and function of community-based approaches to EWER are context specific, there are some common themes and learning outcomes, which anyone interested in community-based approaches to EWER will want to consider. Each of the following chapters offers a series of considerations intended to empower communities and peacebuilding practitioners interested in exploring these themes. The first chapter discusses the set-up and structure of community-based approaches to EWER. In the second chapter the establishment of indicators is discussed, which act as a basic tool for information collection. The third chapter on monitoring looks at how information is gathered, analyzed and reported. Finally, the paper focuses on response in the fourth chapter and examines how both communities can respond themselves in the face of rising tensions and how they can cooperate with others when the situation exceeds their capacity to address it.

There is no paradigmatic case of community-based EWER; each system is unique. Nevertheless, by way of illustration, reference is made to a number of examples throughout the paper. Some of these, such as the case of Wajir, Kenya are relatively well known while others may be less familiar. As a complement to the examples running through the text, sketches of two lesser-known examples describing the activities of Belun in Timor-Leste and Search for Common Ground in north-eastern Nigeria are offered in annexes 1 and 2.

The nature of community-based early warning and early response

While responding to conflict may be viewed as the traditional domain of the police and security services, there is often a need for alternative or complementary approaches, especially in communities where governance is weak and security forces are ineffective or absent. Community-based early warning and early response systems arise out of the conviction that members of the community are uniquely positioned to understand subtle changes – the warning signs, or indicators – before local-level conflicts turn violent. They draw on the fact that community members, as those most likely to suffer directly from the effects of violence, have the greatest motivation to collaborate in creative ways to prevent violent conflict.

Community-based EWER systems have developed in a wide variety of contexts to address, for example, inter-clan conflicts in Kenya, inter-religious conflict in Indonesia, inter-ethnic conflict in Burundi, and intra-religious conflict in northeastern Nigeria. These approaches to EWER often aim to be both preventive and responsive: prevention is about addressing the underlying and long-term factors that drive conflict, while response is about reacting to rising tensions and violence.³ Operating at the heart of community-based approaches to EWER is a commitment to conflict transformation. Conflict transformation is “a complex process of constructively changing relationships, attitudes, behaviors, interests and discourses in violence-prone conflict settings.”⁴ Such an approach acknowledges that conflict is multidimensional and complex and is founded on a belief that

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² Because community-based EWER and local peace committees are very similar concepts, this paper treats them as largely interchangeable. “A Local Peace Committee (LPC) is an inclusive forum operating at the subnational level (district, municipality, town, or village) that provides a platform for the collective local leadership to accept joint responsibility for building peace in that community.” Odenaal, A., (2013), A Crucial Link: Local Peace Committees and National Peacebuilding, Washington: United States Institute of Peace, p. 6.


constructive change can strengthen community resilience and prevent violence.

Community-based EWER is concerned with local-level conflict. While the larger context is relevant, particularly the system of government and the relationship between the state apparatus and society, the nature and structure of local-level conflict is ultimately rooted in local relationships. National processes are significant, but communities are not simply microcosms of a larger context. Each community has its own structures and relationships in need of transformation. Community-based EWER systems are a tool for such transformation.

The evolution of early warning and early response

Early warning and early response systems aim to identify and preemptively address situations at risk of becoming violent, or to prevent escalation within already violent contexts. The concept is not new, though systems designed for this specific intent are generally dated to the mid-20th century. Four generations of EWER systems have been identified, with significant changes in the last twenty years.

The first generation of EWER evolved within the security sector, before spreading among international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations (UN). Their set-up involves monitors in offices distant from a context gathering data for expert analysis. Early models relied upon monitors to access publicly available data, such as newspapers, while current models often involve intense quantitative data analysis and harness local insight. First generation systems report to actors in the international community and seek diplomatic, political, or military intervention at the Track 1 level.

The UN has several offices with an early warning function, such as the UN Special Adviser to the Secretary General on the Prevention of Genocide. Oft-cited examples of EWER projects led by international NGOs include FrühAnalyse von Spannungen und Tatsachenermittlung (FAST), of swisspeace, and the Forum of Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), both now defunct.

The second generation of EWER in many ways reflects a regional or multinational version of the first generation. Monitors, who may be local or external, collect data in the field, occasionally with qualitative elements, but still heavily quantitative (i.e. numbers-based). Data feeds into regional centers where experts, from within a region, or beyond it, analyze the information and report to international, regional, and national bodies. Response is, as with the first generation, focused on diplomatic, political, or military intervention at the Track 1 level, with occasional inclusion of Track 2 actors. The most widely discussed iterations of second generation EWER systems are the Early Warning and Response Network of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWARN) and the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). While both have design roots firmly in the second generation, ECOWARN and CEWARN have also adapted during their lifetime, and some now argue that they are better understood as third generation.

In both first and second generation systems, warning and response tend to be distinct responsibilities. One of the greatest criticisms of these first two generations of EWER systems is the disconnect between warning and response; while the early warning functions are usually highly sophisticated, often there is a lack of a corresponding response to the warnings issued. Amid a wave of scholarly inquiry into EWER systems from 2006 to 2009, the apparent shortcomings of first and second generation systems, most notably the warning-response gap, led the conversation to more local systems and a third generation of EWER.
Third generation EWER aims to eliminate the warning-response gap by unifying the functions of monitor, analyst, and responder. Examples of such systems are national in scope, supported by a central hub, and involve local forums. Most third generation systems are initiated with external support, and are thus still top-down. Local actors are equipped for monitoring and response functions, though analysis often occurs in a central office with the aid of local and/or external experts. A balance is struck between quantitative and qualitative measures. Response may occur through local structures, in which response capacities are cultivated, or through state or civil society mechanisms. One of the most widely documented examples is the Foundation for Co-Existence in Sri Lanka.\(^\text{10}\) Belun in Timor-Leste, which features as a case study in this paper, is a current example.\(^\text{11}\)

Fourth generation systems are not well-researched or reported. Their main characteristic is the use of crowd-sourcing and crowd-mapping technologies. Instead of cultivating local monitors, they aim to utilize anyone and everyone as a source of information. Information is still gathered through a centralized computer system and categorized according to expert design. It is believed the public availability of such information will empower individuals to quickly act in ways to reduce violence. The assumption remains, however, that responses aimed at preventing violence or managing conflict will be guided by specific relevant and interested actors.\(^\text{12}\)

Some approaches do not fit neatly into one of the above typologies. As suggested above, the work of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), for example, in partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), reflects aspects of both second and third generation approaches. Broadly stated, however, the main difference between first and second generation EWER systems and subsequent generations is the degree of local ownership. Some third and fourth generation EWER systems are similar to first and second generation systems insofar as they are initiated by external parties. The difference is that first and second generation EWER systems not only initiate such systems but keep them in the service of the external parties. In the case of third and fourth generation systems, attempts are made to “hand them over” into local ownership. Whether the system being handed over is suited to the context will depend upon the level of context sensitivity and level of local participation in set-up and structure.

Insofar as they fit into these categories, community-based approaches to EWER reflect third or fourth generation systems, as local ownership is central to the way they function. As such, they reflect the growing acknowledgement within development and peacebuilding work of the limits of external intervention and technological innovation. They are based on a recognition that the deepening of human relationships, particularly in contexts marked by suspicion, is critical for violence prevention and societal transformation.

In community-based approaches to EWER, community members are empowered to establish indicators, to monitor their communities, and to proactively respond to escalating tensions. They may draw on local civil society capacities or refer criminal and security matters to appropriate channels, but most responses are not reliant on external intervention, and instead rely upon collaboration and relationships within the community.

\(^{10}\) See Rupesinghe (2009).

\(^{11}\) See the case study in Annex 1.

\(^{12}\) Meier (2009).
1 Set-up and structure

Key points

- Top-down models are more common than bottom-up models; both have been effective in different contexts and both come with different challenges.
- Inclusion of all stakeholders, including minority and marginalized groups, is essential.
- Legitimacy and effectiveness rely on wide community support, as well as the support of the authorities.
- Context sensitivity: all EWER systems will be shaped by the community in which they develop and may not be directly replicable in other contexts.
- External parties can strengthen local capacities and aid in process design, but the process must be led and owned by the community.

Community-based approaches to EWER may originate within a local context, or may be part of a national initiative. This chapter will give examples of both. All cases of effective community-based approaches to EWER involve building consensus in order that the initiative enjoys legitimacy, both within the community and also with government and security forces. This requires broad inclusivity and active participation from all stakeholders, including marginalized and disempowered groups. Establishing an EWER system is not without its risks and challenges which also need to be considered in order to avoid doing harm.

1.1 Starting out

There are two approaches which will be considered here. The first is a community-based approach to EWER as a component of a national system, whether initiated by an NGO or by a government; the second is a community-based approach to EWER as part of a system arising from within the community.\(^1\)

Top-down models

South Africa’s National Peace Accord (NPA) created a National Peace Secretariat, regional peace committees, and local peace committees (LPCs).\(^2\) Signed in 1991 in response to increasing violence amidst the transition from minority rule to full political participation, the NPA established eleven regional peace committees, each of which then established local peace committees at the town and village level.\(^3\) The LPCs were broadly inclusive, seeking to include key representatives from influential organizations in the community, including civil society organizations. Odendaal identifies three functions of the LPCs:

1. To prevent sporadic violence associated with protest actions.
2. To mediate local disputes that had the potential for violence.
3. To contribute to social cohesion.\(^4\)

The South African LPCs provided a nationally-initiated, community-based approach to EWER. Each LPC was established within a given context and, by virtue of its composition, had access to all the major political and social networks in the community. Importantly, the existence of a national mandate and regional peace committees meant the local peace committees had institutional support.

Belun, as described in detail in Annex 1, provides an example of a top-down system that explicitly describes itself as an EWER system. Based in Timor-Leste, Belun, a well-known and highly respected national NGO, established its national EWER system in 2008. As part of this system, Belun proposed “Conflict Prevention and Response Networks” (CPRNs) at the local level. They provided guidance to sub-district communities, but the decision to create a CPRN and of how it should be formed was left to the community; emphasis was placed on local ownership and local design. Each CPRN has autonomy, and Belun supports their work with ongoing training and through the facilitation of periodic analysis and response workshops. CPRNs are thus centrally initiated and vertically linked to a national initiative, but are locally developed and independent from other CPRNs. Belun includes information gathered from the CPRNs in its reporting, but only as a supplement to other monitoring; CPRNs are thus not designed for the benefit of a larger system, but are there to serve the local community.

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13 These categories reflect Odendaal’s discussion of formal and informal local peace committees (LPCs) in Odendaal (2013), Chapter 2: “Infrastructures for Peace.” The examples of South Africa’s NPA and the Wajir Peace and Development Committee are drawn from the same source.


16 Odendaal (2013), pp.41–42.
in the early stages, and following that, funding support from international donors (previously IrishAid, GIZ, and the European Union; currently USAID and the United Nations Development Program), with a small amount of support from the national government. Most attempts at community-based EWER are initiated as components of a larger system. Such top-down models provide invaluable support to local structures. Where this support can be institutionalized so that it is not dependent on external funding, it can help to guarantee the sustainability of EWER initiatives.

Top-down models also come with specific challenges, including showing sensitivity for the local context and establishing legitimacy at the community level. While all 43 sub-districts in Timor-Leste that Belun approached created a CPRN, many South African communities did not create local peace committees. This suggests that while national level support is helpful, initiative and capacity at the community level are necessary for local EWER mechanisms to be established.

Bottom-up models

The Wajir Peace and Development Committee is a well-known example of an EWER system that began at the local level. In 1992, in the District of Wajir, Kenya, a group of women met together to discuss how they could address communal tensions, which were often becoming violent. They began by monitoring the market. The women’s familiarity with the context meant they were sensitive to signs of tensions between clans, which was sometimes as straightforward as people refusing to do business with those from other clans. Identifying the problems before they escalated, the women were able to address certain concerns themselves.

The women’s group reached out to the District Commissioner, local elders, and youth, slowly building a coalition to address the broader concerns underlying the tensions and conflict between the clans. By May 1995, three years after the women began their work, the Wajir Peace and Development Committee was created—a combination of the networks of women, youth, businesses, elders, and others. The breadth of the coalition enabled the committee to address significant communal tensions and limit the impact of violent actors. The success of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee led to a national initiative promoting district-level peace committees, some of which have been more successful than others at replicating the Wajir model. What is notable is that the formal structures evolved from the conversation and action of a group of women operating at the community level.

The Kibimba Peace Committee in Burundi is another example of a locally-initiated EWER mechanism. 1993 marked the beginning of a twelve-year civil war with the assassination of Burundi’s president. Kibimba, a colline in Burundi, was not spared the violence, with 450 people estimated to have been killed. In December 1994, over a year after the outbreak of violence, the first peace committee was established. Composed of a mix of Tutsi and Hutu members, it brought together representatives of the military, religious leaders, internally displaced people, and returnees from exile for informal dialogues about the issues in the area.

In 1998, several participants from the Kibimba Peace Committee formed the Ministry for Peace and Reconciliation under the Cross (MI-PAREC), which has engaged in peacebuilding on a national scale. The Kibimba Peace Committee remains active, with early warning a formal component of their work, particularly in relation to the elections in 2010 and 2015.

In Wajir and Kibimba, locally-led initiatives grew into successful mechanisms for preventing violent conflict. In both cases, attempts were made to replicate this in other communities. As with South Africa’s LPCs, some efforts were more successful than others, highlighting again the importance of local initiative and capacity.

17 Timor-Leste has 65 sub-districts but Belun only had funding to support CPRNs in 43 sub-districts.


20 Niyonkuru (2012), p. 25. Note: “colline” is the term for the local administrative unit in Burundi. Several “collines” make up a “commune”.


1.2 Participation

The legitimacy and effectiveness of community-based EWER systems rest on two important dimensions: the support of the community and the support of the authorities (whether local, traditional, national or state). They derive their strength and guarantee their sustainability through building connections both across the community (horizontal links), and upwards to national, regional, and international sources of support (vertical links).23

Engaging the community: inclusivity as the key to legitimacy

If members of the community are to be responsible for establishing indicators, to act as collectors and analysts of information, and to provide the first response to rising tensions, then they need to be included in the earliest stages of the system design. Inclusivity is central to the success of a community-based EWER system. It is about ensuring that the many interest groups in the community are represented: women, elders, youth, business people, religious and traditional leaders, government administrators, security forces, as well as majority and minority groups. Including representatives of as many of these groups as possible increases the likelihood that the EWER system will be accepted as legitimate.

Inclusivity also implies participation across lines of potential tension. In South Africa, local peace committees facilitated communication between white police and black communities, the women of Wajir brought together clans in competition with one another, and the Kibimba Peace Committee brought together Hutu and Tutsi, while a civil war unfolded around them. However, when conflicts are already highly escalated, it may be difficult to bring conflict sides together. It is, therefore, important that EWER mechanisms are established before tensions are so high that groups in conflict will not be willing to work together.

Inclusivity is important for three main reasons:
1. Access to information: the wider the range of groups, the greater the diversity of information sources the EWER mechanism will have access to. Each group will also bring its own perspective and its own sensitivities to particular kinds of social changes, helping with the early identification of sources of tension;
2. Support: building consensus, especially to transform social structures, requires cooperation from all corners of a community. Each group will also have its own strengths and resources that can be drawn on to support the EWER initiative.
3. Addressing grievances: including antagonists (who do not have explicitly criminal motives) and representatives of all groups affected by tensions and conflict, ensures all grievances are heard and the EWER mechanism can provide a forum for non-violent redress of concerns.24

Thought also needs to be given to how the different groups will be represented. Some systems, for the sake of order and efficiency, invite one representative from each group, while others remain open to anyone who would like to participate. Odendaal identifies two problems with committees comprised of one representative per group. First, groups are rarely homogenous and it is unrealistic to think that one person can represent an entire group. Second, it risks excluding the peacebuilders. If a group sends one representative, this will be either a leader or someone who is mandated to represent the interests of the group. These people are unlikely to be the bridge-builders and insider mediators essential to the cohesion of an EWER committee.25 A more open approach, which invites participation from anyone sharing the consensus that there is a need to prevent violence, may be more desirable. It also has the advantage of not excluding anyone, thus minimizing the risk of spoilers.

Engaging the authorities

If community-based approaches to EWER are to be properly inclusive they must also involve the authorities in some way. Establishing connections with the authorities can be challenging, but it is critical. If excluded, they can quickly become obstacles. However, once involved, they bring with them important resources and connections.

Forms of authority and leadership can vary across different communities. Community-based approaches to EWER are often employed in contexts where state presence is weak. Nevertheless, there may be government officials and police who, at least officially, have responsibility for security in the area. Alongside, or in place of, state structures there may be traditional leaders, and other formal or informal authorities, who

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23 Odendaal (2013), p. 64.
have a role to play in the resolution of conflicts and the provision of security. In the case of Wajir, where state presence was weak, the District Commissioner still gave his blessing (see Box 1), and the inclusion of clan elders proved essential. In South Africa, where governance was weak but the police force was strong, the inclusion of the police was essential for legitimacy and efficacy of the LPCs.

Authorities have the capacity to be potential obstacles or spoilers, should they not be included. They may perceive community-based EWER initiatives as an encroachment on their role as providers or guarantors of security. Initiatives may also be perceived as an attempt to establish a new or parallel governance structure, in competition with their authority. When authorities feel threatened by community-based EWER initiatives, they may find ways to disrupt the process. It is, therefore, important to engage them early on. It can be helpful to present EWER initiatives as complementary to, rather than in competition with, the work of the authorities. Where there is significant resistance from authorities, it may be necessary that initiatives be developed with a consciously limited scope and capacity, in order to win their acceptance. While they may be reluctant to participate fully at the beginning, contacts should be established in order to allay their fears, receive their blessing and open a channel of communication so they can be kept informed of developments.

Once on board, authorities can bring significant added value to an EWER initiative. Community-based approaches to EWER by and large favor non-violent approaches to preventing and managing conflict. Some situations may, however, require the intervention of security forces. In these cases, having a direct channel of communication with the authorities can help to ensure such interventions are timely and conducted in an appropriate manner. Ideally, the relationship becomes symbiotic, with security forces recognizing the potential for community members to intervene in some situations, and communities trusting security forces to protect them in others. Authorities, governmental and other, also often possess important connections to national, or even international institutions, which can be significant sources of support for strengthening local systems.

1.3 Do no harm

Establishing a community-based EWER system is not without its risks and challenges. One is the temptation to impose structures and principles that are not supported, or are not appropriate. Another is that the EWER system exacerbates existing tensions or causes of conflict, rather than preventing and transforming conflict.

Being context sensitive

The exact form of a community-based EWER system will be shaped by the context in which it develops. One of the key findings of a three year study by Lederach and Thapa in Nepal is that all local mechanisms in a national system take on their own dynamics. Belun assumed local dynamics would positively and necessarily shape a process, and thus introduced CPRNs with loose guidance, to be refined by local insight and development. More often than not, however, there is pressure to scale up successful local initiatives, or to translate design across contexts, as was attempted in Kenya based on the Wajir experience. As the mixed results in Kenya show, what is successful in one context, may not be in another. The temptation to import models from one context to another can be strong. It should be remembered, however, that most community-based approaches to EWER begin reactively, in response to rapidly escalating violence. A crisis provides the energy and motivation for community members to engage in establishing an EWER system. For example, in Myanmar rising tensions and outbreaks of violence in 2012 and 2013 provided the impetus for a number of communities to establish interfaith EWER committees in order to manage tensions and prevent further violence.


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Box 1: Engaging the authorities in Wajir

In Wajir, the women went to the District Commissioner early in their process, long before the Wajir Peace and Development Committee was established at the district level. The connection with the District Commissioner built the women’s legitimacy within the community, and positioned them to connect with the youth and clan elders. Thus, in spite of weak governance in the region, it was a government actor who enabled the expansion of their work and the establishment of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee.

Odendaal (2013), p 76.
While the effectiveness of community-based EWER systems rests on their inclusivity, it is important to acknowledge that broad inclusivity can be perceived as challenging social norms in many contexts, especially with regard to the inclusion of women, youth, and marginalized groups. The very formation of an inclusive group may thus be structurally transformative and a potential challenge to the status quo. Lederach and Thapa explicitly acknowledge this transformative objective when describing a community mediation project in Nepal, in which they were involved. They note how the 27 mediators trained in nine wards provided “an adequate base to reflect the true diversity of the local community, while at the same time constituting a new formation within that community sufficient in size to support a process of social change.”

Building an inclusive EWER system therefore needs to be done gradually and in a manner sensitive to local norms and power dynamics, in order to avoid antagonizing key actors in the community. Most community-based EWER systems take months, or years, to reach effectiveness. Efforts to import models, or to establish mechanisms where community motivation is lacking, or before community relationships are built and legitimacy is established with relevant actors, may not only fall flat, but may exacerbate conflict dynamics and impede later intervention. While inclusivity remains the goal, achieving it may be a gradual process, requiring careful negotiation. It can help if inclusivity is framed in terms of the benefits to the community, rather than a requirement of third parties, and for time to be allowed for relationships to develop and perspectives to change. In the case of Wajir, for example, the women worked gradually, tactfully building consensus and drawing in different groups over several years.

Avoiding marginalization or co-option

If an EWER system is broadly inclusive and, as suggested above, welcomes the participation of all who wish to be involved, the possibility arises that participation will mirror the demographic of the community, and minority or marginal voices will be limited. There is a risk that a majority perspective will dominate and concerns or perspectives of marginalized groups will be ignored. If this happens, the system may in fact replicate the status quo and be ineffective in addressing tensions and conflicts concerning minority groups.

Linked to this risk, an EWER system may also be co-opted by a particular group or constituency wishing to use it to serve their own interests and agenda. Fear of such co-option is often evident amongst civil society groups when it comes to the question of involving authorities and security forces in an EWER system. Particularly in contexts where there is already high distrust between civil society and the state, there is often suspicion that these actors will simply use the system for intelligence gathering and as a means of control.

The risk that the system is dominated or co-opted by a particular group can be mitigated in two ways. Firstly, truly broad participation where as many groups as possible are represented will dilute the influence of any one group and reduce the risk that they can dominate or co-opt the work of the EWER system. Secondly, community-based approaches to EWER usually work to build consensus, not to represent a majority view. Building consensus requires skilled facilitation and the creation of space, where all voices are heard and incorporated. The alternative not only risks mirroring communal demographics, but also creating another platform for conflict dynamics to expand. The successful establishment of an inclusive, consensus-based EWER system therefore requires the support of a strong facilitator. The role of the facilitator is not to drive the process, but to gently help it move forward in a constructive way. This includes helping the stakeholders to reflect critically on what they are doing, and raising crucial considerations issues such as inclusivity and legitimacy. Whether the facilitators come from within a local initiative, or are invited from outside of the community, great skill and awareness is required for this delicate task.

27 Lederach and Thapa (2012).
2 Indicators

Key Points
• Both qualitative and quantitative indicators are important. Past emphasis on quantitative indicators has detracted from the value of qualitative indicators for community-level monitoring.
• Indicators of immediate risks of escalation tend to be prioritized, yet indicators identifying the structural and underlying causes of conflict are essential for long-term violence prevention and conflict transformation.
• Indicators can be based on factors that contribute to conflict escalation, but also on community practices that contribute to peace and social cohesion.
• Good indicators are specific to the local context, up-to-date, developed in a participatory and inclusive way, and gender-sensitive.
• The list of indicators should avoid being overly ambitious to lessen the risk of exceeding capacities to monitor and respond.

An indicator is a sign, something observable, which provides information about a situation. Indicators are at the heart of early warning work, providing a systematic framework for monitoring the situation and creating an alert, using signs that show a situation is deteriorating. This chapter examines different types of indicators used in community-based approaches to EWER and considers how they are developed.

2.1 Types of indicators

There are three helpful ways of categorizing indicators: quantitative and qualitative indicators; immediate and structural indicators; and conflict and peace indicators. See Box 3 at the end of this section for examples of each.

Quantitative and qualitative indicators

Simply put, quantitative indicators are observations that can be expressed using numbers. Examples include the number of violent crimes, or the unemployment rate. Qualitative indicators are expressed using words and are more descriptive. Examples include changes in socializing habits (e.g. people going out less, or people mixing less with people from other ethnic groups), or political changes (e.g. disputed local elections, emergence of a new political party with an antagonistic agenda).

Quantitative approaches can be useful for summarizing large amounts of data, for facilitating the identification of conflict trends, and for producing visuals such as graphs. However, decisions on how to categorize quantitative data involve making difficult choices which can “be problematic and often political” and may have a bearing on the predictions made. Numbers and statistics do not create objectivity, but merely the appearance of objectivity. First and second generation systems initially relied heavily on standardized, national-level quantitative indicators such as infant mortality, employment rates, education levels, measures of infrastructure, and arms availability. An over-reliance on quantitative data has been one of the critiques of these types of systems. The idea that a quantitative EWER system could be built that would accurately predict conflict is now generally accepted as unrealistic. Nevertheless, quantitative indicators can be useful and are employed in some community-based EWER systems. For example, Belun in Timor-Leste releases reports that include quantitative data in order to describe trends in the nature of violence; they also use an index, established in partnership with Columbia University’s Center for International Conflict Resolution, to evaluate whether the potential for violence is increasing or decreasing.

The appeal of qualitative indicators is that they allow for more nuanced analysis than the simplifying nature of quantitative indicators and can capture important factors that cannot be reduced to numbers. They also give more freedom to monitors to describe factors that they think are important, factors which may not have been previously identified, or are yet to be fully understood. Qualitative analysis invites depth, as well as context- and actor-sensitivity. Therefore requires familiarity with the context and is usually gathered by monitors on the spot. Qualitative analysis also allows members of the community to see and understand their roles in a conflict, rather than reducing people to numbers and figures.

30 Austin is so bold as to compare the search for accurate quantitative EWER systems to the search for unicorns: “[Levels of grievance and tolerance vary considerably from person to person, and cannot be known empirically, only conceptually. As a result, [quantitative early warning systems] will remain to be a quest for a mythical beast.” Austin, A., (2004), Early Warning and The Field: A Cargo Cult Science? Berghof Center for Constructive Conflict Management, p. 16. Austin identifies “four methodological categories” for EWER systems: “quantitative, qualitative, a dual process of quantitative and qualitative, and finally networks”, focusing most of his attention on the weaknesses of quantitative.
There is now an emerging consensus that both types of indicator are necessary, as each has their advantages and disadvantages. The balance struck between the two types will vary. Quantitative indicators may be more appealing to external actors because they produce neat summaries and visualized outputs and are, therefore, helpful for reporting to funders and policy makers. Qualitative indicators, because they are more context specific, may be harder for external actors to interpret, but they may be more meaningful for actors in the community who are familiar with the context.

Immediate and structural indicators

As noted, many EWER systems are established reactively, in response to a crisis. It is natural that indicators are often based on immediate concerns: people arming themselves, hate speech being used in the media, individual violent incidents, etc. These kinds of indicators help to identify situations of rising tension that are prone to escalate into violence, raising the possibility of intervening to address a situation before it escalates further. However, intervention in response to an imminent threat or escalating situation often comes too late. This can be because the type of information being collected already indicates a high-level of escalation and the possibilities for intervention are reduced.

Thought should also be given to identifying indicators which can describe some of the structural and long-standing trends that give rise to situations of tension. Measures could then be taken to address structural causes so that crisis situations are avoided in the first place. Examples of structural indicators include climate factors such as floods or drought (increased competition over natural resources), migration (rapid population growth may place a strain on resources and infrastructure and lead to violence against migrants), and economic disparity and social exclusion (groups may resort to protests and violence in search of redress for social and economic grievances).

Community-based EWER systems have tended to prioritize short-term indicators over long-term structural ones, thereby limiting themselves to identifying immediate crises but missing an opportunity to use their capacities for work on longer-term prevention (see Box 2). One reason structural indicators have been difficult to incorporate into community-based EWER systems is that the structural aspects of communal conflict may be beyond the control of the local community. National laws, weather patterns, and conflicts in neighboring countries that cause migration into already strained situations are not within the ability of many communities to influence. This then becomes a question of response, as we will see in chapter four. Community-based systems may not have the capacity to address all issues themselves, and may need to develop the capacity to mobilize the support of others who do have the relevant capacity or influence.

Conflict and peace indicators

When identifying indicators it is common to focus on conflict indicators: the signs that tensions are rising and a situation is deteriorating. However, it is also important to consider peace indicators. The concept stems from the importance of not only identifying drivers of conflict, but also the resources for peace that exist within a community. While measures of peace have been carried out by NGOs, academics, and practitioners for many years, the idea of incorporating peace indicators into EWER work is relatively new. Peace indicators can be thought of as “types of social practice that constitute everyday peace,” such as avoidance of contentious topics and offensive displays, concealing signifiers of identity, ritualized politeness, or celebrations and festivals involving the

Box 2: Immediate and structural indicators in a local EWER system in Nigeria

"[A] meeting participant raised the salient point that although the project is referred to as an “early warning” system, much of the information that focal points and the public were encouraged to report was in fact incidents of aggression that had already taken place, and that a true ‘early warning’ system would take a broader and more nuanced approach to examine conflict drivers or the root causes of the conflict, such as economic and social changes within target communities”.


When identifying indicators it is common to focus on the social cues or signs that suggest a situation is deteriorating. Peace indicators can be thought of as “types of peace” that are the result of social practices that constitute everyday peace, such as local religious and cultural rites that promote tolerance and non-violence. Peace indicators are manifested in many different forms:

- **Quantitative:** Number of violent deaths
- **Qualitative:** Song and dance. (In several contexts in East Africa, when men are preparing for a raid, women will sing particular songs to encourage the men to battle. The performance of such songs becomes an indicator that an attack of some sort is imminent.)
- **Immediate:** Increased presence of young male strangers (new in-migration, all male, all young)
- **Structural:** Lack of prosecution of crimes associated with [livestock] raids (including violence against women)
- **Peace:** Inter-group marriages

Whole community changes or neglect of these practices may be a sign of rising tensions, making them an additional important indicator for early warning. Encouraging and supporting such practices may, conversely, be a constructive means of violence prevention through strengthening social cohesion. Adopting peace indicators may therefore help to lead EWER systems beyond reactive prevention work towards pro-active peacebuilding.

### 2.2 Developing indicators

How do you develop indicators? “You ask people.”

The process of developing indicators is very similar to that of performing a conflict analysis and is best done in a participatory manner, involving as wide a range of local stakeholders as possible. A number of simple conflict analysis tools can be readily used to develop indicators. One such tool involves establishing a timeline to look for precipitating events. Identifying relevant events that may have preceded or led to conflict or outbreaks of violence and charting them along a line is a good way of opening a discussion on possible indicators. Another is a factor analysis, in which participants chart structural and proximate drivers of conflict in relevant categories (e.g., social, economic, climatological and political). (For further conflict analysis tools see Box 4). In the process of selecting indicators, the key is to always be clear about why particular indicators are relevant. Good indicators also exhibit a number of qualities: they are specific to the local context, they are developed in an inclusive manner, they are up-to-date and they are gender-sensitive.

#### Specific to the local context

For effective community-based EWER, indicators must be developed within the context where they will be used. First and second generation systems initially used standardized indicators for all contexts. Third and fourth generation systems have also employed standardized indicators, sometimes directly appropriating lists from first and second generation systems, or adapting standardized indicators to the local context. For example, both CEWARN in the Horn of Africa and the Foundation for Coexistence (FCE) in Sri Lanka based their indicators on those of FAST, but they fine-tuned the indicators to match the contexts in which they were employed. While some indicators may be obvious, even to outsiders, others will be more subtle. Local indicators, developed in a participatory manner with an inclusive group comprised of relevant stakeholders, are much more likely to be effective.

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**Box 3: Examples of Indicators**

Remembering that indicators cannot be simply transposed from one context to another, the examples below are offered by way of illustration. They are taken from a list developed by CEWARN in a series of workshops in 2002. The full list can be found in Annex 3.

**Qualitative:** Song and dance. (In several contexts in East Africa, when men are preparing for a raid, women will sing particular songs to encourage the men to battle. The performance of such songs becomes an indicator that an attack of some sort is imminent.)

**Immediate:** Increased presence of young male strangers (new in-migration, all male, all young)

**Structural:** Lack of prosecution of crimes associated with [livestock] raids (including violence against women)

**Peace:** Inter-group marriages

**Box 4: Conflict analysis resources**


A list of further conflict analysis tools has been compiled by the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium and can be found at [http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/conflict-analysis-tools](http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/conflict-analysis-tools).

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35 Thanks to Susanne Schmeidl for giving permission to share this document. Further examples of indicators are given in Matveeva (2006). Matveeva identifies five clusters (social-economic; social-cultural; border issues; politics and conflict resolution; environment and natural disasters) under which she fits nineteen other categories, varying from labor migration to religious considerations to policies and actions of local authorities. See pages 50–53 of the document downloadable at [https://www.peaceportal.org/documents/129200679/12921767/issue_papers31_+Early+Warning+and+Early+Response.pdf](https://www.peaceportal.org/documents/129200679/12921767/issue_papers31_+Early+Warning+and+Early+Response.pdf).

36 Interview with Susanne Schmeidl, about EWER and her work with both East Africa and the Tribal Liaison Office in Afghanistan, October 2015.
of members of the community, will be the most useful for a community-based EWER system intent on preventing conflict and violence in that context.

Up-to-date

Some indicators only become apparent after violence occurs. In one workshop on the topic of EWER “participants noted that signs that should serve as ‘early warnings’ of violence are frequently identified retrospectively, after conflict has broken out.”

Indicators need to be adapted and revised according to experience. Just as conflict is dynamic and ever-changing, so are the signs of conflict. (See Box 5 for an example.)

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**Box 5: A South African example of how meanings of events can change over time**

In his book, *A Crucial Link*, Andries Odendaal recounts a phone call from a local African National Congress (ANC) chairperson in a small town, alerting him that “comrades” were organizing and arming in response to the movement of police vehicles. In the experience of the comrades, the movement of police vehicles indicated a raid, which brought violence and reprisal, with quick escalation a likelihood. Odendaal phoned the police commander, who promptly explained the police were moving to a better parking spot. Odendaal was able to relay this information to the local ANC chairperson and prevent an unnecessary escalation of the situation.


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The development of indicators is, therefore, an ongoing process. Many EWER systems, no matter the scale, lose momentum after the initial concerns are addressed or evolve; very few are sustained through shifts in context, and indicators are rarely revisited and refined. Ensuring indicators are regularly discussed and revisited will help them to remain relevant and useful.

**Developed in an inclusive manner**

The importance of inclusivity was highlighted in the preceding chapter on the set-up and structure of a community-based EWER system. Participation from as wide a cross-section of the community as possible, remains critical at each stage, including the development of indicators. Different groups and sections of a community will have their own perspectives on what conflict is and what issues to monitor. The more inclusive the process of developing indicators is, the more comprehensive the list of indicators is likely to be, and the greater the chance that problems will be preemptively identified. Marginalized and neglected people are often more sensitive to changes within the community and provide invaluable input. Failure to include marginalized and historically excluded members of the community in the identification of indicators risks neglecting their perspectives and concerns. This could actually reinforce their sense of exclusion. Care must be taken, in facilitation and process design, to ensure that a community-based EWER system does not unintentionally fuel, rather than prevent, conflict.

**Gender-sensitive**

Thinking about inclusivity naturally raises the topic of the inclusion of women. While indicators introduce certain standards into the information collection process to avoid information being biased, as Schmeidl points out, “too often...the bias goes into the direction of leaving out information linked to gender in general, and issues pertaining to women in particular.”

Women have often been excluded from participation in EWER systems, or kept at the periphery of processes, in spite of one of the strongest examples in this field being the leadership of women in Wajir. Gender-sensitive indicators are not only aimed at ensuring that both women and men are involved in the establishment of indicators, but also at ensuring indicators reflect both men’s and women’s perspectives and experiences. The exclusion of women and women’s perspectives continues to be a strong criticism levelled at EWER systems. (See also Box 6.)

Developing indicators that take gender differences into account is critical, for at least three reasons. First, an ethic of equal regard underlies conflict transformation – that one human being is as important as another human being. Women’s rights must be protected, as well as men’s. Second, because women experience and observe conflict differently from men,
they have access to a different set of indicators (and a different set of responses). Gender indicators not only give access to a broader understanding of a context, they may also provide a much deeper understanding of a conflict. Women, as with marginalized people, often experience the early stages of conflict more acutely than men, making gender-conscious indicators essential to expanding prevention capacity.41

Third, conflict presents a real opportunity for change. The inclusion of women in both analysis and transformation processes is a rare opportunity for social transformation, as occurred in Wajir, where the prominence and influence of women increased.42 In sum, a gender-sensitive approach to indicator development includes women and men in the process, explicitly considers the different ways in which men and women are affected by conflict, includes both the perspectives of men and women on the causes of conflict, and ensures data collected is disaggregated along gender lines. Examples of a gender-sensitive list of indicators can be found in the CEWARN list in Annex 3.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, however, promoting a gender-sensitive approach is not always straightforward. In societies where gender equality and the inclusion of women is not the norm, there may be significant resistance to efforts which are perceived to threaten existing social norms. This is especially the case when a gender-sensitive agenda is imposed by external actors. Raising issues of gender and inclusion requires creativity and sensitivity and needs to be led from within the local context.

41 For examples of gender indicators see Annex 3; see also Diaz and Caminha (2012), pp. 6 – 8.
42 Thanks to Andries Odendaal for this third observation.

2.3 Do no harm

In establishing a list of indicators to be monitored, there is a balance to be struck. Is the community capable of monitoring the established indicators, or responding to all signs of trouble it identifies? There is a risk of establishing a list so big and broad that it is beyond the community’s capacity to monitor. In some cases, such as rapidly escalating violence, the community may identify problems that are beyond its response capacity. A perception that a system is over-ambitious can be disheartening and disillusioning, ultimately discouraging participation by those eager to prevent violence and transform conflict and playing into the hands of critics of the effort. This dynamic is more likely to affect EWER systems started from the top-down. Ambitious initial plans and over-reaching in these projects can undermine or detract from other important examples of success, strengthening the overall critique of conflict prevention and EWER systems.

As with the women of Wajir, one possibility to avoid such concerns is to begin with a limited scale and defined scope. The Wajir Women’s Association for Peace first focused on the market, where they could monitor the context, detect changes, and address escalating tensions. From there, they grew gradually. In terms of matching response capabilities with early warnings, it is also about recognizing that effective response capacities may require reaching out to other actors beyond the community. For more on this, see chapter four.
3 Monitoring

Key Points

- The selection of monitors should reflect the diversity of the community.
- Verification of information is an important function of EWER systems in order to ensure EWER reports are credible and to counter the negative effects of false or inflammatory information.
- Information collected should be analyzed in a participatory manner and reports should be made widely available.
- New technologies can facilitate communication but, the questions of “if”, “where” and “how” they can be useful in a specific context should be considered before integrating them into an EWER system.
- Transparency is essential to avoid suspicion from members of the community, government, or security forces.

Once indicators are established, strategies can be implemented to monitor tensions within communities. Following a brief overview of how monitoring has been approached in the different generations of early warning systems, this chapter goes on to consider how monitoring often works in community-based contexts and are less well-equipped for informing local-level responses.

3.1 The evolution of approaches to monitoring

First generation EWER systems tend to gather and analyze information at a distance. They rely on publicly-available information such as newspaper clippings and publicly available reports. Second generation systems use similar sources, verified and nuanced with local insights gathered among diaspora communities and regional offices. In such systems the information that reaches analysts has often been filtered through several tiers of communication, each of which adds subjectivity in the way data is communicated. Third generation systems are less remote, insofar as the gathered information is kept within a country, but the information still leaves the community to be analyzed at a central office (see also Box 7). Fourth generation systems draw on crowd-sourcing technologies, such as Frontline SMS and Ushahidi, to gather information directly from people in the community. Using such an approach shrinks the gap between first and fourth generation systems, with data provided by people on the ground being transmitted directly into publicly available data sets through formats such as crowd-maps, without being filtered along the way.

In all four approaches described above, the analysis of the data tends to be done at a central level, outside of the immediate community. The first three generations often employ analysts with a political or security background. Second and third generations have tended to also rely on analysts directly familiar with the contexts, although they still often work outside the contexts in question. This remove from the local context means such systems are usually more focused on mobilizing national or international-level responses and are less well-equipped for informing local-level responses.

3.2 Community-based approaches to monitoring

Community-based approaches to EWER are distinct from all four generations in that the primary location for use of gathered information is within the community. Information may be reported to third parties (see section 4.3 in the next chapter on response), once received and analyzed by the community, but the raw information gathered is not collected with the intention for it to leave the immediate community. Monitoring at the local level requires systematic effort. This implies a clear process to gather, verify and analyze...
information. See Box 8 at the end of this section for an example of how this process works in an EWER system in north-eastern Nigeria.

**Gathering information**

The indicators, discussed in the last chapter, provide a framework for the information-gathering process. Often they form the basis of a questionnaire that will be completed on a regular basis by monitors. Monitors may also fill in specific incident reports when something out of the ordinary occurs. (See Annex 4 for an example of an incident report).

The nature of the indicators will also guide which person in the community is best situated to be a monitor. Another important consideration in selecting monitors is diversity (gender, geography, social group), in order to ensure that information is gathered from all sections of the community. It is not uncommon for monitors to be young people, as is the case in both the EWER system supported by Search for Common Ground in Borno State in Nigeria and that of Belun in Timor-Leste. Young people often possess the necessary basic skills and have the time and motivation for this kind of work. Monitors typically will receive training in relevant skills such as active listening, interviewing techniques, conflict analysis, and conflict sensitivity. This is an area where external actors can provide support, if the necessary capacities do not exist locally.

Consideration should be given to what language is most appropriate for recording the information gathered. For example, Belun’s incident reports are in Tetun, the predominant language in Timor-Leste, because the information gathered by monitors is primarily for the use of the communities, and national government (police, relevant ministries and the Office of the Prime Minister). Aggregated reports are available in Tetun but are also translated into English for consumption by the international community.

**Verifying information**

Verifying information is an important function of many EWER systems. Rumors can quickly escalate tensions and misinformation can place people at risk. Ideally, the relationships in the community are sufficient to quickly and responsibly gather accurate information about an evolving situation. Information is usually verified in a number of ways: by comparing information received from multiple sources, by contacting monitors or people in the relevant part of the community, or by members of an EWER system visiting the concerned area. Essential to any community-based EWER system are regular meetings of its members. These meetings are used both to verify incidents that may indicate a rise in the potential for violent conflict and to carry out analysis of information gathered.

**Analyzing information**

The analysis stage has three purposes. First, to identify trends and situations that need responding to. In analyzing the information gathered, similar tools may

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46 “The process for gathering and analysing data can be as important as the data itself. The inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders in participatory analysis processes not only contributes to richer analysis but also builds trust, confidence and the potential for mutually supportive action.” SaferWorld and Conciliation Resources (2016), Effective Local Action: From Early Warning to Peacebuilding, p3, http://www.c-r.org/resources/effective-local-action-early-warning-peacebuilding, accessed 03.08.2016.

47 Personal correspondence with Zach Abugov, 10.08.16.
be used to those employed to identify indicators, e.g., timelines, factor analysis, relationship mapping. Second, to revise and adapt indicators. As noted in the previous chapter, it is important that indicators are regularly reviewed and updated. Third, analysis ensures that important information is made available to all sections of the community. As community-based EWER systems are based on the principles of inclusivity and participation, it is essential that the information they collect is widely available. Ensuring information is available creates transparency, which eases suspicion and builds trust. It also helps to raise awareness of the experiences of others and to foster mutual understanding. Having a common data set from which to work, is an essential first step for EWER systems intended to engage in joint problem-solving.

In a community-based system, analysis of the information collected is usually conducted in a participatory manner. An agreed forum or mechanism will meet regularly to review information gathered, discuss and analyze it, and decide on possible action. In some cases, a smaller committee will be responsible for collecting and analyzing all the information, which will then be presented to a wider forum. (See Box 9 for an example). One insight from the Wajir experience, was the importance that meetings were held regularly, rather than just when there appeared to be an urgent situation which required a response. This helped to reinforce the idea that the mechanism was something permanent and established, rather than ad hoc. It also helped to reinforce the long-term prevention work of the system because regular meetings facilitated the systematic analysis necessary to identify longer term trends.

3.3 Information and communication technology

A wave of innovation in information and communication technology (ICT) has brought great interest and increased funding to the practical application of new technology in EWER activities. Mobile phones, in particular, offer many possibilities in terms of connecting people, facilitating fast communication and gathering large amounts of information direct from the source. While innovations in ICT offer many exciting prospects, there are some important questions to bear in mind with regard to the use and introduction of any new technology. (See also Table 1 for a summary of the pros and cons of ICT.)

First, will it work? Search for Common Ground Nigeria’s pilot project in Jos employed Frontline SMS to collect alerts from the community, but Frontline SMS did not function for two of six months in the pilot period. The relatively cheap and simple infrastructure that mobile phone networks require has revolutionized connectivity in many countries. Nonetheless, many community-based EWER systems are implemented in areas with poor network coverage and limited access to technology. Mobile networks are also vulnerable to being shut down, either unintentionally by power outages, or intentionally by state authorities, particularly when they wish to control a crisis. It is important to check that the technical infrastructure to be used is present, functioning and accessible to all.

Second, will it be used? In the six-month pilot project in Jos, after receiving 72 messages in the first month of the project, the next highest accumulation came in the final month of July – a total of just 8 messages. Overall, most messages received were designated as “other” (e.g. personal greetings), than as either peace or incident indicators. Interviews with key stakeholders revealed that no-one – including people in the community, as well as the eleven key stakeholders who participated in monthly analysis meetings – utilized the crowd-mapping website, though all of the latter knew of it. Despite having access to technology, people may not make use of it, either because they remain unconvinced of the value, or because they do not have the knowledge. The level of access and ability to use technology are important considerations. Certain sections of the community may have better access, or be more technologically literate than others. Care must be taken that introduction of new technologies does not exclude some people from participating in the EWER system, or bias the system toward those who do engage through certain technologies.

Third, what is its purpose? Much of the appeal of ICT is its ability to collect and compile large amounts of data. This can be very useful for quantitative analysis. The data-crunching abilities of ICT may not, however, be of great use to community-based EWER systems and, as already discussed, is often of more


49 The information about the first six months of the Plateau State pilot project can be found in Stine (2013). The pilot project and assessment resulted in significant revisions and the system continues at the time of writing.
interest to external audiences. Community-level systems often find qualitative information more useful and the expertise required for such data-crunching may not be present in the community. The ability to exchange information quickly with other members of the network can, however, be very helpful in combating rumors, or responding quickly to escalating situations. ICT tools, therefore, need to be adapted to the needs and interest of the community.

Fourth, what confidentiality concerns exist? Phones, emails and websites are vulnerable to monitoring and hacking. Consideration needs to be given to what kind of information is transmitted electronically, who could potentially access it, and whether this would place anyone in danger.

Ultimately technology may offer new ways of doing things, but it is not a replacement for human relationships, particularly in contexts marked by suspicion. As one technology expert put it, “You might have the best technology in the world, but if you don’t engage people, it’s worthless.”

For example, the International Law and Policy Institute conducted a mobile survey via SMS in Zanzibar and discovered high levels of suspicion and low participation upon the initial project launch. Only after relationships were cultivated – through meeting in person or speaking on the phone – were participants responsive to the survey.

The most successful community-based models use technology to communicate within the context of existing relationships, where legitimacy has already been built.

### Table 1: The pros and cons of using ICT in EWER mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can increase inclusivity in hard-to-reach areas</td>
<td>Unequal levels of access or technological literacy can lead to certain population groups being excluded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology permits information to move quickly</td>
<td>Because technology permits information to move quickly, false information also moves quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enables the processing and representation of large amounts of data</td>
<td>Often favors quantitative analysis, at the expense of qualitative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can increase frequency and reduce cost of communication</td>
<td>May increase chances of sensitive information falling into the wrong hands</td>
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### 3.4 Do no harm

#### Managing suspicion

Unless conducted in a transparent manner, monitoring activities can be easily misunderstood. Perceptions that monitors are engaged in spying within the community can result in suspicion, or even violence against them. In a context where there are strong community divisions and tensions, monitors from one group may be regarded with great suspicion by members of the other group. In Afghanistan, for example, pervasive suspicion prevented the Tribal Liaison Office from introducing an EWER system. Particularly in contexts where trust in the security services is low, monitors may be suspected of spying for police or security services, or for other actors outside the context. In systems where third parties or external actors are involved, whether directly present in the community or remotely, suspicion may also exist about their agendas and what kind of information is reaching them.

For these reasons, transparency about the purpose and functioning of an EWER system is essential. As many people as possible should be aware of who the monitors are, what their function is, what kind of information they collect, where it goes and what is done with it. Links to the security services must be clear and explained to people. If third parties or external actors are involved, the nature and extent of their involvement must be apparent to all members of the community, ideally rooted in personal relationships developed over time.

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51 Interview with ILPI staff in Zanzibar, September 2014.

52 Referring to a CEWARN initiative, Musila writes, “the fact that two of the major communities in the pilot space were engaged in conflict with each other for decades meant that field monitors selected from those communities were compromised in a context of deep suspicion.” Musila, G., [2013], “Early Warning and the Role of New Technologies in Kenya” in New Technology and Prevention of Violence and Conflict, Mancini, F., (ed.), New York: International Peace Institute, p. 53.

53 Correspondence with Susanne Schmeidl, January 2016.
Responsible information management

By their very nature, monitoring activities involve the gathering and handling of sensitive information. Taken out of context, or in the wrong hands, such information could be used to fuel tensions and exacerbate conflict. It is therefore important that clear guidelines exist and are followed about how information is to be managed.

When it comes to the spread of false, or inflammatory information, new technologies such as mobile phones can play a facilitating role. Some argue, therefore, that technology must become a component in the solution. In researching this topic, Warren has found that radio is often a more effective tool for peacebuilding than social media platforms. He argues: “The evidence demonstrates that the geographic reach of mass media penetration generates substantial pacifying effects, while the reach of social media penetration generates substantial increases in collective violence, especially in areas lacking access to mass media infrastructure.”

What is clear from his work and that of others, is that much at the intersection of technology and conflict transformation remains unknown, and thus is in need of careful study and due caution.

4 Response

Key points

• Response capacities should shape the overall design of the system. A gap between a system’s ability to warn and its ability to deliver responses can undermine its credibility and the support it receives.
• Community-based direct response to conflict favors interests-based and transformational approaches over power-or rights-based approaches.
• Community-based approaches are consensus-based, build on existing local capacities, and are carried out by members of the community.
• Communities need a network of established relationships in order to mobilize external actors to respond to situations that are beyond their capacity to manage.
• Regular communication and reporting can help to foster constructive, collaborative relationships with external actors.

The true test of an EWER system is its ability to deliver an effective response once problems are identified and warnings given. The potential for community-based approaches to provide an effective response is increasingly recognized. As noted in the introduction, the predominant critique of EWER systems relates to the gap between warning and response. In early generations, this was because those doing the warning were not the same as those responding. Early warning and early response should not be treated separately, but as intimately connected. “Early response is the goal, early warning is a tool to achieve it.”

Community-based approaches seek to bridge the warning-response gap by creating a response capacity within the community. It has been suggested that to successfully bridge this gap, EWER systems should be “built back to front.” By first establishing what capacity exists to respond, it is possible to tailor warning mechanisms to match the capacity. This chapter looks at different kinds of possible responses, the characteristics of community-based responses, what the community can do to mobilize external actors when the required response exceeds their capabilities,

55 In theory, civil society has a greater capacity to respond to events more quickly than the UN… [In reality, this does not happen often enough] (Matveeva (2006), p. 45); “Especially community (or citizen)-based early warning may be the way forward for early warning systems in conflict zones” Schmeidl (2008), p. 23; and “HHL… recommends that Humanity United consider setting up a Share Early Warning Learning Group on Community-Based Approaches to facilitate the ongoing exchange of lessons learned and best practices between these projects” Leaning, J. and Meier, P. (2008), “Community Based Conflict Early Warning and Response”, The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative for Humanity United, Harvard University, p. 16.
and identifies a couple of key risks that should be taken into account.

### 4.1 Types of response

There are a range of possible approaches to managing and resolving conflict. Odendaal, drawing on Ury, et al., differentiates between power-based, rights-based and interests-based approaches. The distinction is summarized in Table 2. Power-based approaches rely on coercive force, often with the threat, or use of physical force. Rights-based approaches rely on laws and norms; these could be state laws but equally local or “traditional” rules and norms. This approach gives a judge, arbitrator, or someone in authority, the power to decide the solution to a conflict. Interests-based approaches take a collaborative and consensual approach. The aim is to uncover the interests of the different parties in conflict and through various dialogue-based approaches to jointly arrive at solutions that can best satisfy the interests of each party.

There can, of course, be overlap between the three approaches. For example, power-based approaches often work in tandem with rights-based approaches, to enforce laws and protect human rights. Moreover, common interest is not always an option, as it can be difficult to achieve consensus where strong actors do not see a benefit to collaboration.

As they are often civil society-led initiatives, community-based approaches to EWER tend to apply interests-based approaches to conflict management. Because they are often operating in areas marked by weak or corrupt governance, the classic power and rights-based tools of the state (police, courts systems, etc.) may have limited reach. Even where power and rights-based approaches exist, they may not always be effective or appropriate. In some situations, their use can even serve to escalate conflict. Interests-based approaches are therefore an important complement and alternative, and community-based EWER mechanisms offer a platform for them to be developed and employed.

However, a purely interests-based approach focused on addressing the issues at hand, may not be enough. Positions and attitudes, hardened by experiences of antagonism, discrimination, or violence, may make identifying common interests difficult. For this reason, community-based EWER systems often find it necessary to go beyond an approach that only tackles the immediate issues, and to engage in long-term prevention work, which aims to transform community relationships and the underlying causes of tensions.

### 4.2 Community-based response

Community-based responses empower by giving communities a role in managing their own security. Focus is shifted from the failures of external actors, to the opportunities available to the community. Available responses vary greatly by context (see Box 9 for some examples). Traditional resources, the extent and nature of external support, the state of the conflict, and the level of consensus within the community all impact what is possible. Often short-term conflict management responses will involve some form of mediation or dialogue, while longer term prevention efforts can take many forms depending on the analysis of the underlying problems. Whether seeking to man-

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**Table 2: Three approaches to managing conflict**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power-based</td>
<td>Relies on coercive force</td>
<td>“Might is right” interventions by security forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Political or economic sanctions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiation backed up with threat of sanctions or use of force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights-based</td>
<td>Relies on laws and norms</td>
<td>Court system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Formal and informal arbitration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests-based</td>
<td>Relies on non-coercive approaches to reaching agreement</td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mediation</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Dialogue</td>
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</tbody>
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age short-term situations, or address long-term issues, community-based response mechanisms derive their legitimacy from three core characteristics: they are consensus-based, they build on existing local capacities, and interventions are carried out by “insiders”.

Consensus-based

A successful response is planned and carried out by consensus. In chapter two, the importance of a community-based EWER mechanism having an inclusive structure was emphasized. Adopting an inclusive and consensus-based approach ensures that no one in the community is excluded and that the actions and interventions decided are viewed as legitimate. This does not necessarily mean that all sections of the community have to be involved in the response intervention. For example, if a mediation intervention is decided, the mediation team’s composition will have to take into consideration the exact situation in which it is intervening. Usually, however, there will be some kind of inclusive mechanism — a steering group or a community forum — which validates by consensus the team’s composition and mandates it to intervene.61

Building on existing local capacities

Using and adapting existing resources and mechanisms is key to a successful response. Making use of approaches that already work can help to ease suspicion, strengthen local ownership, and promote sustainability. For example, Schmeidl identifies jirgas (traditional assemblies of local leaders where disputes are settled) as a critical element for response in southern Afghanistan.62 This is not to say that existing local practices should not be examined critically. Often ex-

Box 9: Examples of community-based responses from Zanzibar and Colombia

Inter-religious action in Zanzibar

During Ramadan in Zanzibar in 2012, tensions rose between a group of evangelizing Christians and the local Muslim community which was breaking their fast. The Mufti phoned his colleagues in senior positions of the largest denominations, who phoned their local parishes. The priests of the community discovered the evangelizing group was visiting from Dar es Salaam, and requested that they respect their Muslim neighbors and stop evangelizing during Ramadan. Some members of the community were preparing to throw stones, but a series of phone calls among colleagues prevented violence from breaking out.


Peace community in Colombia

The township of San José de Apartadó in northwest Colombia was particularly vulnerable to the conflict between guerrilla groups and paramilitaries owing to its proximity to Panama and the Pan-American Highway. In response to the ongoing conflict around it, it declared itself a peace community and a neutral zone. A low fence was built around the territory, not with the intent of preventing people from entering, but to demonstrate the bounds of the community and to indicate where the rules of the peace community were expected to be observed. The possession or carrying of arms, providing intelligence information to any party, and the sale and consumption of alcohol (which attracted fighters and raised the potential of internal conflict), were all prohibited.

The people of the peace community held open community forums several times each month to exchange information. They also had an immediate warning procedure in the form of a system of bells. The bells initially called the community to the town center, where it was hoped that their numbers and solidarity would be sufficient to confront any armed group that may have been trying to assert itself. The attackers sometimes tried to single out the leaders of the community, but the general population refused to identify them. However, the bell sometimes resulted in casualties, with military groups using the opportunity to kill members of the community. Eventually, the bell became a signal to hide. The general response of the community was, however, solidarity and joint action. When an incursion occurred, a delegation from the community would go to the armed group and ask them to leave. When the army threatened to force its way into town and to establish a military post, the population agreed that they would abandon the town and relocate to the largest village.


existing mechanisms may need to be adapted to be more inclusive. The Kibimba Peace Committee, for example, took several years to formally include women in a leadership capacity. Tradition and custom cannot become an excuse for exclusion, or they will undermine the work. Nor should ideas and approaches that come from outside be automatically rejected. Outsiders can play an important role in bringing in lessons from elsewhere, and helping to build skills in mediation and conflict transformation. However, any new mechanisms or approaches that are introduced should be adapted to the context and should take account of what resources and knowledge already exists.

Insider-led interventions

Because the intervening person or team are local, they will have certain advantages over interveners coming from outside. They often have specialized knowledge of the context and may have established relationships with one or more parties. While these relationships and ties may in some circumstances undermine the mediator’s chance of being accepted as impartial, in other circumstances they may also be an advantage, offering the mediator entry points to engage the parties. Familiarity with the people and the context enables mediators to proceed with appropriate sensitivity, which may be lacking if the intervener is from outside the context. The person or team will need to be chosen carefully in order to find the right degree of closeness to the conflict parties. For example, in the EWER system in Wajir, elders from a minority clan not directly involved in the conflict between the two main clans were chosen to mediate. Due to the fact that they were perceived as non-threatening and as not having a stake in the conflict, whilst at the same time being from the context area, they were accepted by the disputing parties.

4.3 Mobilizing and coordinating with others

Some situations or problems within a community may exceed the community’s capacity to manage them alone. This may be because they lack the necessary tools. For example, in extreme situations bringing violence under control may require police or military intervention. It could also be possible that the roots of the problem lie outside the community and action needs to be taken elsewhere to address it. For example, large numbers of people moving into a community because they have been displaced by conflict elsewhere may have a disruptive effect on the community, but the community itself probably has little control over the conflict happening elsewhere.

Chapter 2 referred to the importance of community-based EWER systems making vertical links and connecting to actors and authorities beyond their immediate community. External actors can be sources of funding and support for the work of the community and some will have the capacity and ability to act to address those situations beyond the community’s control.

Building relationships with external actors

Mobilizing external actors requires pre-established relationships. Rather than approaching key actors when their intervention is required, the participative logic of many community-based EWER systems means that relationships with important actors are already established. If they are outside of the community, they may not be part of the system itself, but keeping them regularly informed of the situation in the community can help to nourish the relationship and to give them a sense that they are somehow involved. Such relationship-building communicates to outside actors that they are viewed as constructive partners and increases the chances that they are willing to cooperate with the community and respond positively to requests for assistance when they come.

Security actors, particularly those operating in unstable environments, may be suspicious of EWER initiatives. Being transparent with them, by providing regular information, and asking for their assistance, can help to ease suspicion and build a partnership. A constructive partnership can be mutually beneficial, also helping the security forces in their job of maintaining law and order. When a community succeeds in building a complementary relationship with official security forces, timely and transparent reporting can lead to effective intervention.

Engagement with policy makers and government officials is likewise important, particularly considering that even a weak government has considerable influence on many issues. Reporting to policy makers, both domestic and abroad, may be necessary to address structural concerns and raise awareness on
policies that may have either positive or negative impacts on communities. For example, in seeking a return to normalcy within the context of civil war, the Kibimba Peace Committee “initiated a petition to the Ministry of Education asking for the reopening of the primary and the secondary schools of Kibimba.”

One of the specific reasons schools had been closed was a massacre of students, and the locally generated petition may have led the Ministry of Education to reopen schools in spite of political reluctance.

Managing communication

Engaging with external actors requires a system for producing and providing them with relevant information. Communication must be carried out with thought and consideration. The right information needs to reach the right people in the right form. Information overload, biased information and poor presentation can all undermine the chances of messages getting through.

As with other forms of response, decisions on what information to transmit to which external actors must be transparent and taken by consensus. This is not always straightforward. A need to involve external actors may pressure the community to speak with one voice about an issue when consensus has yet to arise. In such a case, there is a risk that majority voices may drown out minority perspectives.

Not all communication, of course, is intended for external actors. EWER systems may also have a need to communicate with the community that they serve, either for the purposes of transparency, or in order to prepare a response. Thought therefore needs to be given to which kinds of report are for whom, and whether they are destined for consumption within or beyond the community. For example, Search for Common Ground’s pilot project in Plateau State, had two main communication forms. First, targeted SMS messages, which forwarded verified concerns about specific tensions in communities, were sent only to people who were trusted to not forward them, but to responsibly act on the information. Their second form of communication was daily incident reports, to describe the incident, provide contextual analysis, and offer advice for appropriate precaution. The first party to receive such reports is the Advisory Committee. The primary use of the information gathered is to feedback into the community for reflection.

4.4 Do no harm

There are several very important “do no harm” considerations when it comes to response, two of which are described here.

Managing expectations

Poor or ineffective response can delegitimize EWER systems. Community expectations about what an EWER system can and will do, need to be carefully managed. Many EWER systems, even those claiming to be community-based, try to involve security forces. This can sometimes create unrealistic expectations about the responsiveness of the security services. In Nigeria’s Plateau State, one actor commented: “many members of the public are already tired of sending in SMS because the response is poor and people can’t get the help that they immediately need.” The perception, even by some of the trained “key stakeholders,” was that the security agencies would handle response. Community-based EWER systems must avoid over-promising, not least with regard to security sector responses, and should communicate that all sectors of the community, not just the security forces, can contribute to peace and stability in the community.

Avoiding perceptions of challenging the state

In some contexts where state presence is weak, as in Wajir, the EWER system can de facto assume a governance function, at least in the area of security. In other cases, such as Nepal’s Local Self-Governance Act, the state has legally mandated local processes. When communities create their own system, without a government mandate, and often with the support of international NGOs, they risk appearing subversive to the state, or assuming state functions for which they are not equipped. In seeking to respond effectively to security concerns, communities need to be sensitive to the boundaries between civil society and state functions in order not to endanger their relationship with state authorities. Where new boundaries are being drawn, these need to be carefully and transparently discussed and negotiated.

67 See Annex 4.
70 Lederach and Thapa (2012), p. 4.
Conclusion

The most important learning that this publication has aimed to highlight is that community-based approaches to EWER are rooted in human relationships built on shared trust. Conflict, especially violent conflict, relies on dehumanizing other people and groups; conflict transformation at the community level provides a critical entry point to challenge prejudice and stereotypes, with the aim of preventing violence. The act of initiating and structuring an inclusive, community-based EWER initiative is, in itself, transformative – people from across the community join together in the shared interest of preventing violence and constructively transforming their society. This is the hope and promise of community-based early warning and early response systems.

In attempting to realize this promise, it is important to keep three final things in mind: the sustainability of the system, the relationship with external actors, and the fact that building an inclusive, consensus-based mechanism is a process which takes time.

Sustainability

One of the greatest critiques of EWER systems is their short life-span, particularly as tensions escalate, where the focus should shift from response to violence prevention. The key to sustainability is first and foremost, relationships in the community. Community-based EWER systems are sustainable when they are grounded in a community’s commitment to work together to prevent violence and promote peaceful coexistence, i.e. they are “based on the joint decisions of participants and not on imposed decisions.”

As a recent report by SaferWorld and Conciliation Resources points out, the most important factor for sustainability is not “institutional capabilities and skills development”, but fostering the necessary relationships and addressing “the relational barriers that inhibit local peacebuilders from maximising their potential impact.” Sustainability depends, above all, on the commitment cultivated within the community.

Nevertheless, knowledge, skills and funding are also important. The more existing resources from within the community that can be leveraged, the better. However, often it will be necessary to seek some form of outside support.

The role of external third parties

Community-based approaches to EWER align with current trends in peace and conflict studies as well as development work: they prioritize local control, acknowledge the resources at hand in a community, recognize the limits of external actors, and also acknowledge the critical nature of context-sensitive support. Great potential exists for community-based approaches to EWER to transform conflict and prevent violence, and the role of external actors can be critical to the success or instrumental in the failure of a system.

Depending on the circumstances and needs, external third parties can play a variety of roles, such as:

- co-convenors or observers, in order to provide legitimacy to an initiative,
- encouragers and supporters, motivating local actors and acting as a “sounding board”,
- process facilitators, providing logistical support or acting as moderators,
- experts, providing advice or training support,
- disseminators, supporting documentation and communication of experiences to a wider audience,
- funders,
- connectors, providing connections to access further support, learn from others, or to assist with mobilizing response.

While all these roles are potentially important, perhaps the most important is that of connector. Local actors will have their own connections, but external third parties can help them to build additional links beyond their local context and help to embed what they are doing in a broader institutional environment. Currently, there is a lot of interest in the idea of building infrastructures for peace (I4Ps). UNDP, one of the main proponents of the concept, defines these as: “network[s] of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills held by government, civil society and community institutions that promote dialogue and consultation; prevent conflict and enable peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society.” Community-based early warning and early response mechanisms can form an important part of such an infrastructure for peace. The current institutional interest in supporting and growing initiatives related to

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71 Odendaal (2013), p. 51.
72 SaferWorld and Conciliation Resources (2016), p. 3.
I4Ps therefore offers opportunities for such mechanisms to connect themselves to wider initiatives working for peace and to attract external support.

Connecting community-based early warning and early response systems to the broader concept of I4P may also attract interest in documenting and understanding better when, how, and why they work. This publication has attempted to summarize the existing knowledge, but there are several areas of community-based EWER that are not well documented and much that communities could learn from each other’s experiences. While the importance of broad inclusivity is understood, more attention needs to be given to what is gained by inclusivity and what is lost by initiatives that do not prioritize this. The role of peace indicators, categories of effective response, the impact of reporting from community initiatives to external parties, and the significance of community-based EWER to urban areas are all topics which have not been studied enough and further exploration holds potential for strengthening the field. External actors could contribute greatly here by supporting documentation of more initiatives and increasing learning between communities through exchanges.

Building an inclusive, consensus-based mechanism is a process which takes time

There is no simple recipe for establishing a community-based EWER system. Each system evolves from within its own context, with a particular set of resources and group of stakeholders. Nevertheless, what this publication has sought to emphasize is that community-based EWER is most successful when based on the principles of inclusivity and consensus. When broad inclusivity is achieved, especially with regard to gender, minorities, and other marginalized groups, it permits the most thorough understanding of the conflict, the establishment of a broad set of indicators, access to information throughout the community, and a host of response mechanisms that are unavailable to sectors of the community in isolation. Furthermore, it is only through an inclusive process that a true community consensus can be reached. Actions taken by the community through consensus, with the recognition of shared interests, have the greatest likelihood of success because of the collective commitment motivating them.

Getting to an inclusive, consensus-based system is a process. This is a process which, as the various cited examples have shown, takes time. Nevertheless, every initiative has to start somewhere and gradually develop from there. Hopefully, this publication has provided some food for thought for anyone involved in such a process, whether they are at the beginning or already some way along.
Annex 1: Belun and EWER in Timor-Leste

Founded in 2004, Belun is one of the largest non-governmental organizations in Timor-Leste. Its stated mission is “to serve society and prevent conflict with integrity and innovation”. Its early warning and early response program is run by a core team of 19 (6 people at HQ and 13 district coordinators), supported by 86 volunteer district monitors across the country. Belun’s work is well-recognized at a national level. It cooperates with governmental and non-governmental actors, and has a close partnership with Columbia University’s Center for International Conflict Resolution in the US.75

In many ways, Belun exemplifies a third generation EWER system. It uses local monitors to collect information, which is logged into a central system and analyzed in a national office, using a specifically-designed index, and then reported to key stakeholders and decision makers. However, since 2010, Belun has also begun supporting community-based response capacities with the establishment of local Conflict Prevention and Response Networks (CPRNs).76

Timor-Leste shares an island with Indonesia, separated by the line established by Dutch colonists in the West (now Indonesia), and Portuguese colonists in the East (now Timor-Leste). When Timor-Leste declared independence from Portuguese colonial rule in 1975, Indonesia invaded and took control of the country for a 25 year period marked by violence and brutality. Only in 1999, with UN support, did Timor-Leste regain independence and commence a process that culminated in popular elections in 2002. In subsequent years, outbreaks of violence have occurred, most notably in 2006, when a dispute about discrimination in the military led to violence between armed groups, including police and military factions. There have also been significant tensions at a community-level in connection with elections, land disputes, veteran dissatisfaction, and family disputes. Timor-Leste continues to face high unemployment, especially among youth, and severely lacks in infrastructural development.

A nation-wide early warning system

Belun began as a partnership between young Timorese and Columbia University researchers in 2004. Columbia’s Centre for International Conflict Resolution conducted a National Conflict Assessment in 2004, which revealed the complexity of the violence being experienced across Timor-Leste. While it had been assumed most of this violence was political in nature, the study revealed that local dynamics played a prominent role. As a result of these findings, and in anticipation of the 2007 elections, Belun established a 2007 election monitoring project, which was a precursor to the EWER program. The community-level EWER program itself was established in 2008 and became operational in early 2009.

The system now has 86 volunteer monitors spread across Timor-Leste’s 13 districts. They are typically young people who receive training from Belun in mediation, negotiation, and conflict analysis. Belun has a 6-module training course, with modules offered two to three times per year. Each monitor completes a monthly survey. The survey is comprised of 66 questions, which reflect indicators of conflict potential. The questions are organized into four categories (social, political, economic, and external) and have simple response options (either yes/no or whether there has been an increase, decrease, or no change as compared with the previous month).77

District Coordinators collect paper incident forms, situation forms, and monthly surveys from monitors and send them to Dili (the capital city) for monthly analysis. The information is coded into a computer database. Belun has developed a customized ‘Conflict Potential Index’ that attributes a numeric score for national and several sub-national levels. Monthly information is compared against previous months to assess whether conflict potential is increasing or decreasing.

Response: from mobilizing others to local peace committees

Belun’s original model focused on mobilizing response through issuing reports and alerts. Since 2010, they are also actively supporting the development of community-based response capacities.

77 As the questionnaire used is only available in the local language of Tetun we have not included an example here.
Mobilizing others

Belun is particularly adept at demonstrating trends and raising awareness about structural concerns, such as pensions, land ownership disputes, and veterans’ issues. It issues three kinds of report: Alerts, in the case of immediate concern; Monthly Situation Reviews, assessing the change in conflict potential according to their index; and Conflict Potential Analysis Reports, a category which includes reports every four months, as well as annual reports. Belun also issues periodical Research Reports and Policy Briefs in response to particular trends and audiences. All aggregated reports are publicly available on their website in English.

Alerts are issued to raise concern about events with the potential to escalate quickly, but Belun does not attempt to respond to incidents themselves. The police have sometimes drawn on Belun’s monitors and district coordinators as resources for information when responding to escalating situations. There have also been cases in which the community has phoned Belun staff members to aid in conflict resolution. While monthly reports are available on the website, they are targeted not only at policymakers but are also intended to be accessible to all Timorese, regardless of their education level. Paper copies are distributed on a monthly basis. Both the four-month and annual Conflict Analysis Reports are targeted at a political level. They are intended to be a resource for the government and international donors and to note longer-term trends. Belun issues an annual thematic report – past topics have included religion, alcohol, martial arts gangs, and state pensions. These policy briefs present analysis of the topic with concrete recommendations to the government.

Community-based response

In 2010, Belun began helping communities to establish Conflict Prevention and Response Networks (CPRNs) at the sub-district level. Out of the 65 sub-districts in Timor-Leste, CPRNs have been established in 43 of them. This includes the 3 most violence-prone sub-districts in 11 districts (as measured by a national conflict assessment), all 6 sub-districts in Dili and all 4 sub-districts in Oecusse (which is an exclave surrounded by Indonesia and a special case).

Belun outlined a vision for the work of CPRNs, as well as suggestions regarding the composition of the networks, but the decision on whether or not to form a CPRN and the degree of formality were left to the community. CPRNs include local administrators, village chiefs, sub-village chiefs, police, veterans, NGOs, women, youth, and religious figures; membership is open. The CPRN concept has been successful because it has been framed in a way that the sub-districts found valuable and relevant, with room for flexibility to adapt to the specific context in each sub-district.

Belun’s district coordinators meet with CPRNs every four months for an analysis of all reported events. The CPRN becomes a space for the community to discuss the issues and to develop strategies to reduce violence. Belun provides training in mediation to empower communities to directly respond, as well as training in proposal writing to enable them to find financial support for longer term programs. It also provides small grants for some CPRN initiatives.

Zach Abugov, adviser to Belun on EWER, while reflecting on its impact, stated:

“The impact of the EWER system as a whole can best be observed in the results of the activities that are carried out by the CPRNs… [T] here have been hundreds of CPRN action plans carried out since 2009. Of course, each would have an individual impact, but one thing we hear repeatedly is that members of CPRNs like how our system empowers them to resolve their own problems, using plans that are designed and carried out in the community itself.”

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78 All 43 sub-districts that Belun approached established CPRNs. Funding constraints rather than a lack of interest on Belun’s or the communities part meant not all 65 were covered.

79 Zach Abugov, personal correspondence, 10.08.2016

80 Zach Abugov, personal correspondence, October 2015.
Annex 2: Search for Common Ground and EWER in Borno State, Nigeria

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is an international NGO headquartered in Washington, D.C. Its stated mission is: “to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions.”

SFCG has been supporting early warning systems in Nigeria for a number of years. In 2012 it piloted an SMS early warning system in Plateau State, and during the 2015 general election it supported the National Election Early Warning System (NEEWS). This case study concerns a pilot project based in Maiduguri, covering the Borno State, which receives funding support from the American Bar Association. At the time of writing, the pilot project was not yet concluded. What is presented here is therefore a sketch of a system in its infancy.

The design of the Borno State EWER system approximates many third generation systems in that data-collection and analysis is centralized. However, indicators were developed with communities and the establishment of local participative community structures is at the heart of the system. While some of these local structures have been involved in directly responding to situations of concern, the main focus is on fostering communication between communities and the security forces in order to improve the responsiveness of the security services. So far, priority has been given to improving response to immediate incidents of insecurity, and less emphasis has been on longer-term structural drivers of conflict and insecurity.

Borno State is in northeastern Nigeria, not far from Chad and Niger, and its capital is Maiduguri, a majority-Muslim city. It has been at the front line of the conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government. In addition to the presence and activities of Boko Haram, communities in the area experience cattle rustling, rape of individuals and reprisal attacks, informal roadblocks (often operated by youth), violence related to drugs, and other communal conflicts. In the absence of a strong state security presence, many communities are dependent upon informal security in the form of the Civilian Joint Task Force, which was created by the military, but consists of local militias. There is concern that such forces will become strong and unregulated, leading to violence rather than security. In this context SFCG is piloting a community-based EWER system. The system ultimately aims to cover the entire state, and has so far been implemented in 10 communities since January 2015.

Setting-up the EWER system

SFCG has initiated the system in partnership with local communities. Initially, communities were suspicious, particularly since security forces had also approached them for “early warning” information. There was concern that SFCG was functioning on behalf of security forces. To allay concerns, the community was involved in the design and structure of the mechanism.

At consultations with the partner communities, SFCG sat with the community leaders, women’s groups, and youth to create space for them to share their understanding of threats to security and peace. Indicators were developed and established through these communal consultations. Training events with the youth, in particular, were critical to identifying key security threats. Threats that were identified included radical sermons, roadblocks by informal groups, rape and corresponding reprisals, sale of illicit drugs, abuses by security forces, leaflets distributed by insurgents, and youth militias carrying out vigilante justice.

Open Community Forums were used to select an Advisory Committee in each of the 10 pilot communities. The Advisory Committee consists of 5 to 7 leaders representing local security, traditional leadership, women, youth, and religious leaders. The Community Forums also select monitors, who are drawn from amongst the youth of the community. Transparency and community participation in the selection process is critical in order to protect the selected youth from accusations of spying, and to avoid insurgent influence.

At the time of writing, the number of monitors gathering and reporting incidents is small, but is expanding. Based on the key indicators agreed with the communities, the monitors report incidents through the Frontline SMS system coordinated by SFCG. The information is anonymized once received into the system, in order to protect the identity of the monitors. SFCG employs a staff member, based in Maiduguri, who manages the Frontline SMS system.

82 Special thanks to Chom Bagu, Search for Common Ground County Coordinator for Nigeria at the time of writing, whose conversation and correspondence provided the information for this case study.
collecting the data. The same staff member then communicates with local consultants in communities to crosscheck and verify reports.

SFCG compiles the reported information and gives it to a Community Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee analyzes the reports and makes recommendations. They present their analysis to the Community Forum and the Community Forum takes decisions on possible responses. The aim of leaving decision-making with the community is to develop a broader sense of community responsibility for what occurs there.

Coordinating with the security forces for effective response

In certain situations, the Community Forums may decide to directly intervene. In one instance, a group mandated by the Community Forum, went to a location where they knew drugs were being produced and distributed and dispersed those involved.

However, the main function of the system is to create a link between the local community and the security forces. Previous experience of SFCG in Jos indicated that, although security forces are federal, a relationship needs to be built with those locally deployed, and communication needs to be strengthened at the local level. The security forces initially viewed the project with suspicion and were concerned that it attempted to assume their responsibilities. It took considerable effort to convince them that SFCG’s work would be complementary.

The Community Security Network was established as a parallel structure to the Advisory Committee and meets monthly, bringing together the posted security forces with key stakeholders and community leaders to review the security situation and discuss responses. The Advisory Committee also speaks directly to security forces, serving as a liaison between security forces and the community. Such meetings aim to build relationships and to strengthen the capacity of the security forces by providing community-based analysis, leading to a feeling of cooperation through joint action. An example of such joint action occurs when livestock are stolen. While reprisal is typical, better communication within communities permits the tracking of livestock, and security forces may intervene to oversee the return of stolen animals. In the event of roadblocks, where weapons are employed to rob or intimidate, the local security forces are contacted for intervention. The community-led structures do not therefore seek to replace or assume any security or formal governance responsibilities, but rather to improve communication with the security services.

The Borno State early warning system demonstrates the multi-level approach SFCG is implementing and the critical, sustained engagement of local communities in efforts to identify opportunities to prevent violence and encourage constructive responses to conflict. As the project continues, it will be interesting to observe how the system contributes to strengthening the relationship between communities and the security services and whether, longer-term, it will also develop a focus on addressing some of the underlying causes of tensions and insecurity.
### Annex 3: Gendered indicators for CEWARN

This list was developed by CEWARN in a series of workshops in 2002.\(^3\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Cooperation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Practices</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cultural Practices</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Songs/dances (make specific list for area under observation)</td>
<td>- Compensations for raids (blood money)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Festivities (make specific list for area under observation)</td>
<td>- Decrease of blessings for raids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ceremonies/Rituals (make specific list for area under observation)</td>
<td>- Method of payment of bride-wealth (installments is a significant level of trust)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Blessings</td>
<td>- Ratio of bride-price to cattle population*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Trophies for warriors (ritualized killer status)</td>
<td>- Customary (traditional) institutions of conflict-resolution and peacebuilding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Change in traditional gathering behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- E.g., Increase of all male gatherings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decrease of women going to markets, churches etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ratio of bride-price to cattle population*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Age-grading systems disrupted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-Community (ethnic, clan, also across borders) Relations</th>
<th>Inter-Community (ethnic, clan, also across borders) Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breaking off marriage negotiations</td>
<td>Women sent back to other groups as messenger to sense possibility for peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of scapegoating of “other” in child socialization (esp. women)</td>
<td>Return of abducted children and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased violence in child-play (including violence against women)</td>
<td>Inter-group marriages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women given to other groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children associating/playing with neighboring communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peace-efforts by government/community based organizations (esp. women)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Economic Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased use of security escorts (esp. for women)</td>
<td>General Market Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruption of traditional women’s tasks (collect fire wood, go to market)</td>
<td>Unusual pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trafficking of women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of perception of fear within community (feeling of security) – esp. of women</td>
<td>Increased general market activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility in communities (also of women)</td>
<td>Usual patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social ceremonies (including women)</td>
<td>Women can go to markets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Politics/Governance
- Lack of persecution of crimes associated with raids (including violence against women)
- Hate speech/propaganda by politicians

### Politics/Governance
- Persecution of crimes associated with raids (including violence against women)
- Community Development (including facilities that serve women)
- Inclusiveness of governance
  - Increase role of women in decision-making (committees, leadership, issues talked about) mediators, moderators
  - Women as conflict-negotiators (peace crusaders)
  - Inclusion of minorities
  - Good governance (respect of human rights, arbitrary arrests, disappearances etc.) needs to be unpacked

### Migration patterns/Evacuations
- Unusual migrations of all-male groups (warrior groups)
- Increased presence of young male strangers (new in-migration, all male, all young)
- Decreased number of young people in market centers and town (esp. men)
- Restrictions on movements (esp. women)
- Evacuation of women and children (refugee – IDP camps)

### Migration patterns
- Flip-side of what is said under conflict-producing factors

### Kidnapping/Violent Acts/Crime
- Abduction of women and children
- Increased violent death rate (esp. among young men)
- Threats/Intimidation
- Random killing of women
- Rapes (number, scale, HIV)

### Education
- High level of school drop-out (esp. boys)

### Education
- Attendance in schools (number of days, number of children (boys, girls), number of schools)

### Non-Governmental Activities
- NGO-government competition
- Dependence of local communities on NGOs
- Negative influence on traditional mechanisms (social hierarchies, weakening of women’s role etc.)
- Lack of integration of gender (women’s issues) into program work

### Non-Governmental Activities
- Working on Gender issues
- Women organizations working on peace issues
- NGO work is gender sensitive
- Awareness, advocacy (esp. in human rights)
- Lobbying for gov. policies
- Free movement of NGO staff (especially women)

### Mass Media
- Hate propaganda (esp. against women)

### Mass Media
- Campaigning for peace
- Women are given a voice in media
Annex 4: Sample daily incident report

As an illustrative example, this is an incident report by a monitor in a Search for Common Ground supported EWER project in Plateau State.

Country or territory: Nigeria

Affected area(s): Plateau state

Incident: Incident Report (December 30, 2012)

Incident description: According to reports reaching us, the community is calm. However, there is tension in __________ as two people were shot yesterday near __________ and one died. The Vigilante group was making frantic effort to put the situation under control. A contact reported the presence of __________ who were shooting while community members were protesting. Two choppers were seen in the surveying the area. Four reports were received today.

Analysis: Plateau State has been faced with lingering ethno-religious crisis, especially in the four local government areas namely Jos North, Jos South, Barkin-Ladi and Riyom. This prompted the Federal Government to declare state of emergency in these council areas along with eleven others in the country to halt the act of bestiality in vogue in these areas occasioned by the endemic activities of terrorist groups. The four affected local government areas in Plateau State have been under severe siege and attack in the past two years and efforts to arrest the pathetic situations by the government have yet to achieve positive result. Both the state and the federal governments have adopted various approaches to tame the ugly trend without any headway. There have been clashes by unknown gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen and the Beroms. Remote villages have been most of the victims of these attacks with attackers often escaping before the arrival of security agents.

Advice: People are advised to remain calm and report any suspicious movement or persons to security personnel. People are further advised to maintain a low profile, and avoid places of attacks immediately after attacks to prevent reprisal, and avoid travel after dark as far as practically possible.

For further information and/or advice please contact SFCG/CAPP on 002348136341015 (08136341015) or at https://frontlinesmsplateaustate.crowdmap.com/ & Email: SearchinJos@sfcg.org

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About the Author

Steven Leach is an aspiring peacebuilder. He has practiced and researched conflict transformation with community-based organizations in Uganda, South Africa, and Tanzania, living in South Africa from 2011 to early 2016. He previously worked with the ACTION Support Centre, managing the first phase of the project, “From Early Warning to Response in Preventing Violence: Transforming Conflict through Citizen Engagement.” He is currently working on a dissertation, investigating the intersection of religion and human security among the youth of Zanzibar. Originally from Texas, Steven moonlights as a Presbyterian minister and is always busy building something with his hands, from furniture to significant home renovations.

About CARIM

This publication was produced within the framework of the Culture and Religion in Mediation program (CARIM) which is a joint initiative of CSS and the “Religion, Politics, Conflict” sector of activity of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The program aims to address violent conflicts where religion plays a role through a combination of direct process support, research and knowledge management, and capacity-building activities. The publication was commissioned because, while it does not deal directly with the topic of religion in conflict, community-based early warning and early response is increasingly being turned to as a means of addressing inter-community conflicts with a religious dimension.

About the CSS

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich is a center of competence for Swiss and international security policy. It offers security and peace policy expertise in research, teaching, and consultancy. The CSS is part of the Center for Comparative and International Studies (CIS), which includes the political science chairs of ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich (www.css.ethz.ch).
“If we wish to prevent future conflicts, we must strengthen the capacities of local communities to identify and respond to escalating tensions in their midst. This resource on community-based approaches to early warning and early response mechanisms is a constructive and significant contribution to such efforts – I highly commend it to anyone with an interest in preventing violence.”

Father Desmond Tutu

“This is an important study for a number of reasons: first, because of the focus on the relevance of EWER at the local level – a topic that has not yet received sufficient attention; second, because of its usefulness as a guide when planning and implementing an EWER system at the local level; third, and particularly significant, because of the emphasis it places on local relationships and dynamics. Early warning and early response at the local level should no longer be seen as distinct technical and security driven responses, but as aspects of a more comprehensive local peacebuilding or conflict transformation process where attention to the root causes of the crisis and the transformation of local relationships are primary objectives.”

Andries Odendaal author of “A Crucial Link: Local Peace Committees and National Peacebuilding”

Community-based early warning and early response (EWER) systems are locally-rooted initiatives designed to prevent violence and transform conflict through an inclusive, participatory process, built on a foundation of consensus. With chapters on structure, indicators, monitoring and response, this publication offers an accessible overview of the current knowledge and learning about community-based EWER systems. It should be of interest to anyone interested in local approaches to violence prevention and conflict transformation.

**CSS Mediation Resources** is a series that aims to provide methodological guidance and insights to mediators, negotiators and peace practitioners working to address violent political conflicts. It is produced by the Mediation Support Team of the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich, with contributions from occasional guest authors. All issues in the series are freely available for download at [http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/mediation-reports/mediation-resources.html](http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/mediation-reports/mediation-resources.html).

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- Swiss Civilian Peace Promotion: Assessing Policy and Practice (2011)
- Mediating Tensions over Islam in Denmark, Holland, and Switzerland (2010)
- To Be a Negotiator: Strategies and Tactics (2009)
- Unpacking the Mystery of Mediation in African Peace Processes (2008)