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Practices of the Conflict Early Warning System and Timely Police Response in Selected Areas of Ethiopia, by Abdo Beshir¹ and Fikadu Kassa²

Abstract

The practices of conflict early warning (CEW) and police response systems in Ethiopia have not been thoroughly captured and demonstrated in the setting of the field. The dearth of critical scrutiny and the escalating nature of violent conflicts in the country initiated this research project. This study explored the practice of conflict early warning (CEW) and timely police responses, focusing on multiple cases in conflict-affected areas of the country. A qualitative research approach and exploratory research design were employed. Purposive sampling was used to select informants from the Ministry of Peace, the federal and regional Police, regional peace and security bureaus, and public universities. In the data collection, thirty-nine interviews, six focus group discussions, and document analysis were conducted. The data were analyzed and interpreted thematically. The study found that the CEW structure, placed in an inappropriate institution and lacking uniformity across the country, is responsible for ineffective conflict early warning and delayed police responses. Despite these differences, some common CEW activities include identifying conflict indicators, documenting conflict incidents, conducting situation analyses, and performing pre-conflict assessments by field monitors and focal persons. Additionally, the police response to CEW information was found to be minimal and inconsistent across regions and city administrations. Establishing a uniform and clear CEW structure is recommended to address the sector's challenges. Moreover, greater attention should be given to actively involving and consulting communities in the implementation of the CEW system.

Keywords: Practices, Conflict Early Warning System, Timely Police Response, Ethiopia.

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Introduction

Conflict early warning is a system designed to assist in decision-making, anticipate and analyze conflict trends, shape response strategies, alert communities to potential risks, and trigger responses to violent conflicts (Nyheim, 2015). The nature of the early conflict response is highly dependent upon the nature of the conflict and violation prediction (Rohwerder, 2015).

The practice of conflict early warning and response (EWR) systems is diverse and often controversial, particularly concerning who should issue warnings and how to ensure timely interventions. There is no consensus on identifying the causes of conflicts. Matveva (2006) suggests an ideal model that involves data collection, analysis, scenario assessment, action proposals, recommendation transmission, and prompt response evaluation. However, in practice, the theoretical framework of these systems often diverges from real-world applications, as noted by Rohwerder (2015). This discrepancy highlights the challenges in implementing an effective and consistent EWR system.

EWR systems frequently exhibit weak connections between warnings and subsequent actions, influenced by cognitive biases and incomplete information. Governments may perceive warnings as alarmist, while regional organizations often struggle to respond due to political differences and a preference for non-interference. Furthermore, global, and regional initiatives tend to overlook the significance of local dynamics and coping capacities in preventing violence (Wulf & Debiel, 2009). Critics contend that early warning systems are not always accurate in predicting crises and can be as biased as traditional reporting methods, making the ideal model difficult to achieve (Matveva, 2006).

Different countries design Conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWR) tailored to their specific contexts. In Sri Lanka, the system relies on community involvement and local knowledge, with a focus on early intervention and collaboration among community members (Palihapitiya, 2013). Also, in Indonesia 'Peace through Development' (PTD) program enhanced community-

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based CEWR which involves local structures and integrating police and military efforts (Arnado, 2012). In Africa, many countries have engaged in establishing early warning and response systems. For instance, in Nigeria, the US Institute for Peace piloted an SMS-based system, training community members to send alerts and report incidents, highlighting the need for collaborative early interventions (Stine, 2013).

The Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), established by countries in the Horn of Africa, initially focused on addressing drought issues and later shifted to conflict prevention. They used technology for monitoring and analysis and established Conflict Early Warning and Response Units (CEWERUs) and a Mediation Support Unit to enhance mediation efforts and institutional capacity (Kaiza, 2020; Mwara & Kaiza, 2020). Many countries of horn adopted IGAD's Conflict Early Warning and Response (CEWR) framework, leading to the preparation and approval of the CEWARN Protocol in 2000. The governments of Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Eritrea showed an elevated level of interest, particularly in addressing cross-border conflicts among member countries (Mwaura, 2020).

In Ethiopia, before the Ministry of Peace was established, the Ministry of Federal Affairs was responsible for managing conflict early warning and response systems. In 2019, the Ministry of Peace established a conflict early warning and rapid response directorate (Pact, 2019). The Federal Police Proclamation No. 720/2011 outlines that crime and violence prevention is primarily the responsibility of police organizations, including the prevention of conflicts to save lives, prevent crime, and maintain social order.

However, Ethiopia is struggling with major economic difficulties, coupled with ongoing violence, ethnic strife, and extensive lawlessness. These issues have resulted in a large number of internally displaced people (IDPs) and present considerable obstacles for humanitarian response efforts. The 2020 DTM report by the IOM indicates that Ethiopia has one of the world's largest IDP populations, with ongoing risks of displacement. Similarly, UNHCR's 2021 report indicates a substantial refugee influx into neighboring countries due to these conflicts. Despite government efforts to bolster security, persistent conflicts result in mass killings, property losses, and displacement. Human rights and humanitarian organizations, such as UNHCR and the International Crisis Group, emphasize the necessity of early conflict prediction and prevention systems to save lives. Since April 2018, the country has experienced heightened ethnic tensions and violence, resulting in thousands of deaths and millions of displacements, with 2.7 million people displaced by July 2021, primarily due to conflict (UNOCHA, 2021). Effective early intervention requires multi-sectorial cooperation, with the police playing a key role, as outlined in the Federal Police Proclamation No. 720/2011, which assigns them primary responsibility for crime and violence prevention, including timely conflict intervention.

While researchers have shown interest in the recent complex conflicts in Ethiopia, existing studies have not sufficiently explored conflict early warning systems and timely police responses within the Ethiopian context. For instance, Grunewald et al. (2006) and Damtie and Asmare (2020) focused on early warning systems for natural disasters in Ethiopia, highlighting issues such as a shortage of experts, lack of permanent staff, delayed data collection, and insufficient stress indicators in these aspects. These studies did not address the issues of conflict prevention or mitigation. Conflict prevention involves actions and mechanisms to address risks and prevent violence escalation, emphasizing the need for effective early warning systems (Tiruneh, 2010). In Ethiopia, despite global efforts to improve early warning systems, there is a lack of focus on predicting and warning about potential conflicts.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the practices related to conflict early warning systems and timely police responses in selected Ethiopian areas since the 2018 political reforms. It specifically examines the practice of conflict early warning (CEW) systems, and the practice of timely police responses in selected areas of Ethiopia. This study aimed to explore practices related to conflict early warning systems and timely police responses in Ethiopia. It specifically

investigates the practices of conflict early warning (CEW) systems and timely police responses in selected areas of Ethiopia since the 2018 political reforms.

Research Methods

This study was conducted in purposively selected areas of Ethiopia. Based on data from the Early Warning Rapid Response Directorate of the Ministry of Peace (2021), some hotspot areas of conflict were identified. Accordingly, the study covered areas such as Ataye, Kemise, Bahir Dar, Adama, Bordode, Guji, Shashemene, Dire Dawa, Harari, and Addis Ababa. Among higher educational institutions, Ambo, Dire Dawa, and Bahir Dar Universities were included. Following the 2018 political reform in Ethiopia, these areas experienced violent conflicts, which continued through 2021. Thus, the study focused on the multiple conflict cases that occurred between 2018 and 2021 in the selected study areas.

The study employed qualitative research approach to thoroughly investigate the practices related with conflict early warning and timely police responses in selected areas of Ethiopia. As Creswell (2017) notes, qualitative approaches are valuable for exploring participants' viewpoints and gathering detailed insights on issues. Furthermore, an exploratory research design was adopted, appropriate for situations with limited prior research on the topic (Stebbins, 2001). A cross-sectional study design was used to assess the challenges at a specific point in time, which facilitated efficient data collection, minimized costs, saved time, and mitigated participant exhaustion.

The study targeted experts and officials involved in conflict early warning and response, including staff from the Early Warning and Rapid Response Directorate of the Ministry of Peace, regional peace and security bureaus, federal and regional police crime prevention departments, university administration and student affairs vice presidents, campus police, and student union leaders. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with specific expertise essential to the study, ensuring that critical knowledge was obtained (Babbie, 2020). This approach identified key informants from relevant security and crime prevention agencies and universities, with the sample size determined by reaching data saturation.

As a method of data collection, the study employed interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with thirty-nine informants from the Ministry of Peace, police, security offices, and universities, involving thirty-four males and five females. Six FGDs, divided between police officers and peace/security experts, were held across selected regional states, each with twelve participants, directed by researcher-developed guiding questions. As a documents review, the relevant manuals, guidelines, and security documents were analyzed using a prepared checklist. The study utilized both primary data from interviews and FGDs and secondary.

The study ensured data trustworthiness by focusing on four key aspects: credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability. Credibility was achieved through diverse data collection methods and triangulation to validate findings. Dependability was supported by peer reviews and audits to verify consistency. Transferability was enhanced by providing detailed context descriptions for broader application of the findings. Conformability was ensured by making sure the data accurately reflected the study's objectives. Data were analyzed thematically, which involved transcribing, identifying themes, and organizing the findings into textual formats. Ethical practices were upheld by ensuring informed consent from all participants, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and providing them with clear information about their rights, including the ability to withdraw from the study. Additionally, support letters were sent to relevant organizations to inform them of the study's purpose and procedures. These measures ensured that participants' rights were respected and that the study adhered to ethical standards throughout.

Findings of the Study

Socio- Demographic Profile of Study Participants

This part discusses the socio-demographic profiles of participants regarding the practices of the Conflict Early Warning (CEW) system and the timely police responses to CEWs. The study involved a total of thirty-nine informants: thirty-four males and five females. Institutional affiliations of the informants were diverse, with sixteen from the Ministry of Peace, peace, and security bureaus of the regional states of Amhara, Oromia, and Harari, and two city administrations: Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Additionally, eleven were from the regional police forces, four from federal police, and eight from public universities: Bahir Dar, Ambo, Hawassa, and Dire Dawa.

Practices of Conflict Early Warning System

This section discusses the sub-themes of the study in relation to the research specifics. Data collected from various study areas showed that there were different conflict early warning (CEW) practices implemented at various times and levels. The nature of the conflict cases influenced the specific CEW practices used to respond to and manage conflicts before they occurred. These practices varied across regions and city administrations.

Practices of CEW at Federal Level:

The CEW process and practice primarily operate at the federal level in Ethiopia; with the Ministry of Peace (MoP) playing a significant role. The MoP has established a mandated structure for these activities, organized as a directorate called "Conflict Early Warning and Rapid Response." This directorate is tasked with a range of responsibilities aimed at early warning of potential conflicts. The primary functions of this directorate include identifying various conflict indicators, such as political tensions, social unrest, and economic disparities. These indicators are crucial for anticipating potential conflicts and understanding their underlying causes. The directorate also monitors ongoing incidents to track the development and escalation of conflicts, ensuring that timely and appropriate responses can be formulated.

A respondent from the MoP revealed that the directorate conducts comprehensive situation analysis to assess the severity and immediacy of potential threats. These analyses consider numerous factors, including the likelihood of conflict occurrence and the potential impact on affected communities. The insights gained from these analyses help in crafting strategies for rapid response and mitigation.

A situation room manager from the MoP discussed that, at the national level, the Ministry of Peace coordinates early warning activities, ensuring a cohesive and unified approach to conflict prevention. Communication methods such as system based, telephone conversations and telegram groups are utilized to gather and disseminate information. These channels enable efficient information flow between different stakeholders, including security forces, and government agencies concerned. However, there is a problem with collaboration among security sectors, which affects the approach designed to facilitate a timely and coordinated response to potential conflicts. This lack of cooperation is hindering the efforts to address issues before they escalate into more serious confrontations.

The structure of the Ministry of Peace (MoP) has not been formally extended vertically to the regional or other administrative levels. The Ministry collects information about potential conflicts on a daily and regular basis, which is then organized and communicated to the Ministry of Defense, Federal Police, regional police, and other security sectors. The structure includes the Conflict Early Warning and Rapid Response Directorate, a data manager in the situation room, CEW experts, and other supporting staff. However, this structure is not functioning at the expected level and has remained dysfunctional. There is no vertical linkage between the structures at the federal, regional, and city administration levels, leading to a lack of responsibility and accountability. Consequently, the CEW structure is not uniformly extended to regional and city administrations across the country. This inconsistency results in the CEW framework being applied unevenly, and the lack of necessary coordination often

hampers a cohesive response to potential conflicts. An official from MoP discussed similar ideas as follows.

The Ministry of Peace, as an institution, operates at the national or federal level and does not have structures extending to regional levels or below, such as zones, woredas, and kebeles. However, it collaborates with regions and their constituents, including zones, woredas, and kebeles.

The federal police do not have a mandated unit specifically organized for Conflict Early Warning (CEW). However, these efforts are handling by the Intelligence Unit and other crime prevention departments that also work with other security sectors and community. According to an informant from the federal police's crime prevention department, the structure for early warning has been organized under an inappropriate organization, the Ministry of Peace. The informant believes that the appropriate organization for this purpose should be a police institution that equipped with trained personnel and professionals, experienced in both the technical aspects and the operational aspects of potential conflicts.

Practices of CEW at Regional States and City Administrations:

The practices of Conflict Early Warning (CEW) at the regional and city administration levels vary from place to place. To address these issues, pilot tests have been conducted with the support of Pact-Ethiopia in three regional states: Oromia, Gambela, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR). These pilot tests focus on early warning and rapid response operations and are being carried out in two zones, 12 woredas, 60 kebeles, and 10 public universities within these regions. These tests aim to develop and improve early warning and rapid response operations that can be adapted and implemented across the country. In these regions, the Peace Values Building Directorate, operating under the regional or city administration peace and security bureau, coordinates CEW activities. This directorate mandated to promote peace and stability by engaging with concerned bodies, collecting data on potential conflict triggers, and mobilizing resources for rapid response.

In the Oromia region, the Conflict Early Warning (CEW) structure includes personnel at various administrative levels. At the region, there are data managers and conflict early warning experts. Similarly, the zones have data managers and conflict early warning experts. At the district level, the structure includes a field monitor, a data manager, and a conflict early warning expert, while only a field monitor is present at the kebele level. Situation rooms, which are essential for CEW activities, are established from the district level up to the federal level except at the kebele level.

A situation room manager at Oromia stated that the field monitor is responsible for collecting information on conflict indicators to assess the likelihood of conflict. This data collection involves using a standardized set of thirty-five questions posed to twenty-five individuals, covering social, economic, political, and cultural issues. The collected data is analyzed, and the findings are reported to all relevant authorities by both the field monitor and the kebele leader.

In the region, the process for reporting and managing conflict cases begins at the kebele level. When a case is reported or occurs, the field monitor, in collaboration with the kebele administrator, forwards the case to the district data manager. The district data manager, with the district administrator's oversight, records the case in the system. Once loaded into the system, the case is assigned a status: green indicates immediate resolution by the responsible body, yellow signifies that the issue is in progress, and red denotes a severe situation. This system allows leaders at all levels, from federal to zones, to monitor and take necessary actions. If a case escalates due to district leaders' negligence, they are held accountable, as the system tracks the time since the case was logged. Field monitors are the main actors responsible for gathering information on potential conflict incidents before they occur. An informant from the Oromia regional state's peace and security bureau confirmed the above notions on the practice of CEW field monitoring in the region as follows.

... When a potential conflict case is reported to the Kebele, the field monitor and Kebele administrator send it to the district data manager, who reviews, signs, and enters it into the system. The system tracks the case's status with colors: green for resolved, yellow for in progress, and red for extremely dangerous. Leaders at all levels can monitor the issue and act as needed. If the case escalates due to district leaders' negligence, the system will track the duration since the case was entered, and leaders will be held accountable.

Despite being formally established, the CEW structure is not fully implemented or operational across the region. In the Oromia region, particularly in areas selected for pilot testing, some components, such as situation rooms, align with the Ministry of Peace's framework. However, these elements are not functional at the kebele level, and the overall structure lacks clarity and comprehensive implementation.

In the Amhara regional state, the Conflict Early Warning (CEW) structure is organized under the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Directorate within the Peace and Security Bureau. This arrangement is legally based on Proclamation No. 176/2010, which outlines the powers and duties of the Amhara National Regional State Executive Organs. The proclamation specifically assigns the responsibility for preventing and resolving conflicts to the Peace and Security Bureau. This structure is different from the CEW structures established by the Ministry of Peace (MoP) and other regional and city administrations. An informant from the Amhara Peace and Security Bureau (APSB) stated that the bureau has a clear mandate to issue warnings about potential conflicts. This mandate is supported by the legal provisions discussed above, which explicitly state that the APSB is responsible for conflict prevention and peace-building activities. It empowers the bureau to prevent conflicts before they occur and to resolve conflicts when they arise. Therefore, according to this proclamation, the issue of conflict, including conflict early warning, falls under the jurisdiction of the Peace and Security Bureau.

Based on this legal framework, the APSB has established an organizational structure to fulfill these responsibilities. This structure includes directorates and experts specifically tasked with conflict early warning at the regional level and extends to lower administrative structures, such as zonal, and woreda. Additionally, there were field monitors assigned to 170 sensitive kebeles for conflict early warning activities in the region. These field monitors are employees of the peace and security offices of the respective woredas and are responsible for monitoring kebeles that are potentially sensitive to conflict. Moreover, in all 4,000 kebeles of the region, there are focal persons for conflict early warning activities. These focal people are voluntary individuals appointed by community policing officers and the kebele peace and security sector. Both field monitors and focal persons assess their kebeles based on predetermined conflict indicators and report the assessment results to the woreda, zone, and region within 24 hours.

A review of the Amhara National Regional State Council Proclamation No. 176/2010 confirms that the APSB is indeed tasked with conflict early warning. Article 23(6) of the proclamation specifies that the former Bureau of Administration and Security Affairs, now the Bureau of Peace and Security, has the power and duty to identify the causes of conflicts, prevent their occurrence, resolve conflicts upon their emergence using both traditional and contemporary conflict-resolution mechanisms, and stabilize actors involved in ongoing conflicts.

Therefore, based on the informant's response and the legal document review, the APSB has formally established a structure for conflict early warning activities from the regional level down to the lowest administrative level, the kebele. However, this structure does not align with the CEW structures of the Ministry of Peace (MoP) and other regional and city administrations.

The Conflict Early Warning (CEW) unit of the Harari regional state was established under the Directorate of Peace Values Building within the Peace and Security Bureau. This directorate focuses on raising awareness and gathering information on daily activities to identify potential sources of conflict in the community. It organizes community groups such as Peace Mothers, Peace Youth, and Independent Advisory Groups, which operate under a broader framework of

peace initiatives. These groups are integral to collecting CEW information and collaborating with the bureau to prevent conflicts.

The CEW structure in Harari has distinctive features compared to other regional states and city administrations due to its integration of grassroots community-based groups. The bureau uses this structure to effectively identify and address various sources of conflict. For instance, they have successfully managed issues like "*religious extremism within the same religion, where one faction insists that others should not worship or preach,*" preventing such issues from escalating into actual conflicts.

In Addis Ababa City Administration, the Peace and Security Administration Bureau manages Conflict Early Warning (CEW) tasks. The bureau has established a CEW structure that spans from the central level down to the woreda levels of administration. This structure is integrated with the Federal Police, Addis Ababa Police, and Oromia Special Zone Police through dedicated conflict early warning and rapid response units. Additionally, it includes broader societal entities such as community police, public army, volunteers, and block coordinators. In city administration, information on emerging conflicts is gathered around the clock through different media, such as Telegram groups, phone calls and messages. An informant from the Addis Ababa Bureau of Peace and Security Administration described these practices as:

CEW information for the city is collected daily. A WhatsApp and Telegram groups and phone calls connect individuals like volunteers to the center of city, allowing information to be shared in real time. Information is compiled and reported every 24 hours to the concerned bodies and shared through the vertical structures. Additionally, a weekly report is presented to the relevant authorities.

This CEW setup bears some resemblance to the structure in some other regional governments. According to interview responses, the CEW management in Addis Ababa involves various levels of administration and societal participation. The structure reflects a multi-actor approach involving various stakeholders, including the federal police and Oromia Special Zone, which collaborate with the bureau.

The responsibility for Conflict Early Warning (CEW) in Dire-Dawa City Administration was assigned to the Directorate of Peace Values Building within the Peace and Security Bureau. This directorate is mandated by collecting and analyzing data on potential conflict threats, which is then provided to relevant bodies, such as the Crime Prevention Department of the Police. While the Peace and Security Bureau holds the mandate for issuing warnings about potential conflicts, the actual response and management of ongoing conflict activities fall under the jurisdiction of the police sector. Thus, the structure delineates a clear division of responsibilities: the Peace and Security Bureau focuses on early warning, while the police sector handles conflict response and management.

CEW practices at Public Universities:

Different observed public universities have various practices pertaining to CEW. **For instance,** Bahir Dar University has established a comprehensive security structure under the President's Office, with 1,077 security personnel working across all campuses. The university's Conflict Early Warning (CEW) system is supported by a dedicated committee that includes campus police, university officials, student committees, Federal Police, city police, campus police, and community leaders. As a campus police, the structure also features various roles, including coordinators and team leaders within each shift, who assess pre-conflict information. Additionally, student members of the peace committee gather CEW information in blocks, classrooms, and cafeterias, and undercover police officers' conduct assessments to identify potential conflicts. The university's security framework comprises the President of the University, the Peace Forum, the Peace and Security Service Team Coordinator, team leaders, and Security Officers.

At Ambo University, the CEW structure is managed by campus police working in shifts, each led by coordinators and team leaders who focus on pre-conflict information assessment. The

university has established a peace forum consisting of campus police, university officials, student Committees, city police, and community leaders. Federal police also maintain a presence on campus and collaborate with the peace forum. Students in the peace forum gather CEW information in various university areas, including blocks, classrooms, and cafeterias, with the aid of ununiformed police officers. The campus police regularly conduct random assessments based on conflict indicators. The university's organizational structure for ensuring peace and security includes the President of the University, the Peace Forum, the Peace and Security Service Team Coordinator, team leaders, and Security Officers.

Diredawa University uses multiple stakeholders to collaborate to prevent conflict by sharing relevant information. While the university lacks a dedicated conflict early warning (CEW) unit, it uses its existing organizational structure, comprising the student union, campus security forces, food coordination teams, dormitory management, and other higher-level administrative bodies to address potential conflicts. The university is committed to fostering a peaceful learning environment by identifying and addressing issues that may lead to student complaints, such as food quality and dormitory conditions. By working with local police, security offices, elders, religious leaders, and the community, the university collects information on potential conflicts and responds promptly. The approach involves discussing issues with students and finding solutions collaboratively.

Therefore, despite efforts to establish CEW systems, a uniform approach from the national to the kebele level remains elusive. While the MoP was responsible for creating a cohesive CEW structure, the sector remained poorly defined. Consequently, regions and city administrations have developed their own CEW frameworks, leading to significant differences both vertically and horizontally. The fragmented nature of these structures results in a lack of integration between federal and regional levels, as well as among different regions. Thus, the CEW system in Ethiopia often employs a sequential model for generating conflict alerts. This model does not involve a causal structure with independent variables predicting conflict likelihood. Instead, it is a method for issuing alerts based on available information. However, the CEW practice in Ethiopia appears inconsistent and unstandardized, as indicators and assessment procedures vary widely across the nation.

Police Timely Response for Conflict Early Warning

Police have a range of response mechanisms to manage received Conflict Early Warning (CEW) information, playing a vital role in preventing and addressing potential conflicts. Timely conflict responses and interventions require multi-sectorial preventive measures involving cooperation among various actors. Among these, the police play a significant role, as they have the capacity to coordinate key players in the security system at various levels. The responsibility of responding to potential conflict incidents officially falls to the police across different administrative levels in the country. In addition to this mandate, the police have various response mechanisms based on the CEW information they receive.

At the federal level, there is no unit specifically mandated for Conflict Early Warning (CEW); instead, responses are based on information received from the Ministry of Peace as a principle. However, the Federal Police utilize their own intelligence unit and other stakeholders to gather conflict-related information independently. The Federal Police hold the primary responsibility for addressing these issues and collaborate with regional and city administration police commissions. In fulfilling this role, they relay relevant information to other security organs to facilitate an immediate response.

In the Amhara regional state, the Amhara police, along with other security sector actors, have made efforts to address potential conflicts. The commission has extensive experience in receiving conflict early warning information, both directly and indirectly. An informant from the Amhara Police Commission (APC) elaborates on this issue as follows.

The commission received early warning information in many ways about almost all conflicts that occurred in the region. They had advance notice of the Qimant-Amhara conflict in North Gondar, the Ataye conflict (which flared up at various

times), and the conflict in Awra Godana Kebele of Minjar Woreda. In these cases, there was information available before the actual conflicts occurred. For instance, indicators of potential conflict, such as the preparation of attacker groups and unusual movements of armed forces in those areas, were reported indirectly. These reports highlighted strange activities and preparations for conflict, with information being relayed by officers both in person and through phone calls.

Also, a police official from Ataye town in the Amhara region shared her views on the situation, stating:

... In many conflict cases in our zone, we received early warning information from various sources. For instance, police officers living and working in Ataye, along with the local community, reported that an informal group was conducting military training in forests near the borders of the Oromo Nationality Special Zone and the North Shewa Zone of the Amhara region. We received this information during different meetings and informal physical contacts from concerned bodies. We relayed this information to higher police and political officials in the zone, as well as to responsible regional officials, seeking directives for a prompt response. Unfortunately, these officials did not provide a timely response.

In the Oromia region, the regional police attempted to address conflict situations based on reports from the CEW department of the regional peace and security bureau and, in some cases, from the situation room data manager for areas selected for pilot testing. The police worked in collaboration with various security sectors, such as the federal police, to act on these reports. However, in many instances, their response was not successful due to several factors. Delayed responses and poor coordination among security sectors were key reasons for these failures. As a result, despite receiving early warnings for many conflict cases, the police were unable to respond effectively.

In Dire Dawa City administration, there is no devoted structural unit specifically established for Conflict Early Warning (CEW) within the police institution. Instead, the intelligence units of the police commission are responsible for collecting and analyzing CEW information. These units play a crucial role in identifying potential conflict-related issues and prevent them by providing relevant information to the crime prevention department. Despite the absence of a particular CEW unit, the police use analyzed CEW information to formulate appropriate responses aimed at minimizing harm to people and property. This approach enables the police to take proactive measures to effectively mitigate conflicts.

CEW practices in the city are implemented through several methods by police. Information is gathered via a toll-free phone line, public calls, an information desk, or a Police Call Center and is then analyzed accordingly. Messages used for early warning come from various community groups, such as community safety patrols, independent advisory group leaders, taxi associations, and school community policing. These groups are vital in identifying conflict risks, mobilizing the community, working with the police to assess potential damage, and providing recommendations for prevention. The police collaborate closely with these community groups to manage and address conflict risks effectively.

In Addis Ababa city, rapid response standard operating procedures are coordinated by the city police and are implemented at various levels: kebele, wereda, sub-city, and city levels. The framework includes components for rapid response, planning, implementation, and monitoring and learning related to conflicts. Using this framework, police attempt at conflicts arising from issues such as land grabbing, religious extremism, public gatherings, and political mobilizations have been effectively managed before escalating.

In the Harari region, although there is no sanctioned unit within the police specifically for Conflict Early Warning (CEW), efforts have been made to address potential conflicts

proactively. The regional police have worked to manage and mitigate potential conflicts before they escalate, despite the absence of a specialized CEW unit. They have carried out these operations in collaboration with the federal police stationed in the region, and community actors. This collaborative approach has resulted in a mix of both successful and unsuccessful experiences for the regional police. The successes highlight the effectiveness of their proactive measures and teamwork with federal counterparts, while the unsuccessful attempts underscore the challenges and limitations faced in managing conflicts without a dedicated CEW unit. Overall, these experiences reflect the ongoing efforts and challenges in maintaining peace and preventing conflict in the Harari region.

Regarding the similarity observed in all study areas, a common issue is the miscommunication between the Peace and Security Bureau, which is responsible for supplying conflict early warnings and providing conflict-related information to the police, and the police, who are mandated with responding to the received conflict related information. Often, the police do not act on information from the Peace and Security Bureau because they believe it is their responsibility, as trained and professional officers, to assess and respond to the issues themselves. This lack of action based on early warnings has led to ineffective control of some conflicts before they escalate and loss of life, properties, and displacements. Thus, there is no cooperation between the two security sectors on this issue.

In general, in Ethiopia, there is a paradox concerning the responsibilities for Conflict Early Warning (CEW) and timely response for received information. The task of issuing conflict warnings falls under the purview of the Peace and Security Bureaus, which are not primarily the profession, is not their concern on this function. In contrast, the responsibility for responding to these warnings lies with the police, who receive information from the Peace and Security Bureaus. Federal Police Proclamation No. 720/2011 designates crime and violence prevention, as a core responsibility of police organizations. However, regional and city administrations typically establish CEW structures within Peace and Security Bureaus, rather than creating dedicated and unified CEW units across different security sectors, particularly in police.

Discussion

A key issue in Conflict Early Warning and Response (CEWR) systems is identifying who should receive warnings and who should act on them (Wulf & Debiel, 2009). Globally, various organizational structures have been established to manage CEWR initiatives. For example, within the UN, the Early Warning System, including Relief Web and the Integrated Regional Information Network, was developed under the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Boshoff, 2003). The International Crisis Group (ICG) uses investigative research and intelligence to warn about potential global conflicts ((Mwaúra & Schmeidl, 2002; Boshoff, 2003).

At the continental level, the African Union Border Program (AUBP) was established in 2006 to prevent conflicts, operating with local stakeholders as key players. AUBP's CEWR framework includes the Structure of FemWise-Africa, formed in 2007 (Campbell, & Meier, 2007). The West African Network for Peace building (WANEP) works with ECOWAS to facilitate the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN). Since 2002, WANEP has been responsible for collecting early warning data on human security issues, including human rights, democracy, food shortages, unemployment, arms flows, civil-military relations, and environmental challenges (Souaré, 2007). IGAD has established a comprehensive strategy for Conflict Early Warning (CEW) in East Africa, leading to the formation of the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) in 2000 (Letvitt, 2003). CEWARN focuses on anticipating and responding to conflicts in the IGAD region, utilizing predictive and risk assessment models and a network of monitors and coordinators. Initially, it focused on addressing pastoral conflicts in the cross-border areas of Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan, as well as in the second set of cross-border areas involving Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia (Keyserlingk & Kopfmüller, 2006).

Conflict Early Warning and Response (CEWR) involve three main prevention approaches: operational, structural, and systemic. Operational prevention focuses on short-term efforts, using political or military means to prevent conflict or contain escalating violence. Structural prevention addresses the root causes of conflict through developmental or economic tools, aiming to reduce risks and establish better regulatory frameworks. Systemic prevention seeks to mitigate conflict on a global scale, beyond the confines of any specific state (Rubin & Jones, 2007). The effectiveness of CEWR practices depends on the chosen approach. While structural and systemic prevention offer long-term solutions, they may not be sufficient in immediate crises, where operational prevention is crucial for containing or reversing violent conflict through diplomacy, economic sanctions, incentives, or military intervention (Campbell & Meier, 2007).

The effectiveness of CEWR practices is influenced by the type of model used. Correlation models focus on structural indicators to predict future violence, while sequential models identify events that accelerate crises. Conjectural models explore escalation scenarios to determine factor combinations and thresholds leading to violence, and response models identify windows of opportunity for early intervention (Verstegen, 1999). These models incorporate both global and regional factors. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, regime type, trade openness, colonial heritage, leaders' tenure, and dominant religious majorities are significant predictors of instability. While global factors like partial democracies and factional competition remain relevant, regional specifics, such as the increased relevance of state-led discrimination and the diminished impact of infant mortality, also play crucial roles (Goldstone et al. 2005).

Many countries and organizations use conflict indicators to anticipate and respond to potential conflicts. The Fund for Peace identifies twelve indicators, including social factors like demographic pressures and group grievances, economic issues like uneven development and severe decline, and political factors such as state criminalization and human rights violations (Fragile State Index, 2005). The African Union's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) uses two mechanisms: an observation and monitoring center at AU headquarters and sub-regional units, both collecting data based on early warning indicators. IGAD's CEWARN focuses on pastoral conflicts, using fifty-two socio-political indicators for reports on violent incidents and broader human security issues (Union & Assembly, 2002). Similarly, WANEP gathers data on human security, including human rights, food shortages, and environmental issues, providing reports for ECOWAS to prompt immediate responses (Souaré, 2007).

Regarding existing Conflict Early Warning (CEW) response practices, the decision not to intervene is not due to a lack of information about potential or urgent violent conflicts, which is the primary focus of early warning systems. The African Union (AU) joint security force is tasked with responding to conflict and crisis incidents across Africa, but its military capabilities remain underdeveloped. The African Standby Force (ASF) is still in its formative stages, limiting its ability to address conflicts early. To strengthen its response capacity, the AU aims to establish five regional brigades, each with at least 3,000 troops, as part of an African Rapid Reaction Force. These brigades would work in collaboration with regional organizations like ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, ECCAS, and the Arab Maghreb Union. The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) is intended to foresee and prevent conflicts from escalating into violence, but it is not yet fully operational due to a lack of specialists. The African Peace Facility Fund, co-financed by the EU and AU, has pledged €300 million between 2008 and 2010 to support these efforts (Kinzel, 2007). This collaborative CEWR initiative has been employed in countries such as Burundi, Darfur, Somalia, and Comoros, where joint military forces were deployed to address potential conflicts and crises proactively (Engel, 2008).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that regions and city administrations have practiced different conflicts since 2018. While conflict is prevalent, its nature and magnitude vary significantly. Numerous factors are cited as causes of these conflicts, with land ownership claims in border areas between regional states and political factors being major contributors.

Regarding Conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWS), regions and city administrations, along with their lower-level structures, demonstrate varied practices and experiences. Officially, the mandate for CEW is assigned to the Peace and Security Bureau. However, the CEW system in the country appears fragmented and disjointed. Police have various mechanisms to respond to conflicts before they occur, but the effectiveness of these responses depends on the CEW information received. Despite using different mechanisms to collect CEW information, the response is often ineffective due to factors such as inaccurate risk analysis and delayed decision-making by officials, among others.

Recommendation

This study recommends several strategies for effectively identifying and addressing conflict threats. To enhance efficiency, an independent CEW unit should be established within police institutions. This specialized unit would leverage police expertise to collect accurate and relevant information about conflict threats, including identifying instigators, assessing human resources involved, estimating potential damage, and understanding the nature of the threat. This approach will enable the police to prepare adequately and respond swiftly and appropriately. Additionally, institutions at risk of conflict, such as public universities, should establish their own CEW departments under police supervision. Effective early warning should involve public engagement, various societal sectors, all security agencies, and relevant government organizations. Regular awareness-raising initiatives should be conducted by the police at all levels, focusing on critical areas like schools, universities, and religious institutions. Collaboration with community elders and religious leaders, who play a key role in conflict prevention and resolution, is also crucial. Continuous and timely training for leaders and professionals in CEW, as well as for supporting bodies, will further strengthen these efforts and improve overall response capabilities.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests that could influence the study's results.

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