

# **CONFLICT, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEM IN NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the last four decades, the international peace agenda has been dominated by debates on conflict prevention. In Africa, the post-Cold War era has witnessed a shift in emphasis from conflict management to conflict prevention processes. Essentially, the shift is necessitated by the shortcomings of the reactive nature of conflict management approaches. Irrespective of the paradigm shift towards conflict prevention, most African countries continue to witness persistent overt conflicts which requires an urgent need for effective mechanism. This paper therefore explores early warning system early response (EWSER) in explaining the causes of conflict in a multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria to avert the tendencies of conflict eruption, escalation and resurgence. The study finds that early warning and response interventions are less effective if they fail to address the underlying causes of conflict, this study further finds that institutionalized internal and external oppression triggered early warning signs, which breeds natural resistance against endemic structured inequality and create avenue for struggle, competition, high rate of crime, disrupts peaceful co-existence and peace-building in Nigeria. This study therefore proposes state autonomy to enhance grass root empowerment and development which will help in alleviating poverty, monitor early warning and stimulate prompt response in mitigating eruption into conflict.

**KEYWORDS:** Conflict Management, Early Warning (EW), Response System, empowerment

## **Introduction**

Conflict is a globe social issue of an intense concern that has kept national and international organizations in perpetual need of finding means of combating its eruption, escalation and resurgence. This concern with its adverse consequences resulting in the use of arms, killings of innocent souls and the violation of human right gave rise to a quest of finding solution to these menaces. Chung and Megginson (2004), defined conflict as, "the struggle between incompatible or struggling needs, wishes, ideas, interests or people. Conflict arises when individuals or groups encounter goals that both parties cannot obtain satisfactorily". It is on this backdrop that most conflicts emanate. Conflict signs if not monitored and arrested, disrupts harmonious social relationship, causes disagreement, create animosity and struggle among parties.

The Forum for Early warning and Responds (FEWER) defined early warning as the systematic collection and analysis of information coming from the area of crises for the purpose of anticipating the escalation of violence, development of strategic responses to these crises; and the presentation of options to the critical actors for the purpose of decision making.

Early warning system according to Boutros-Ghali (1995), helps to assess the situations of a threat to peace and prepare actions based on the information about natural disasters and political indicators. Its efficiency relies on good forecasting of the probability and severity of a potential conflict escalating into violence. This includes a comprehensive tool for identifying risks, reducing their impact and coping with the residual effects. Several early warnings indicated interventions following the warning signs of crises are often late. The analysis of early warning systems in this study testified to inconsistencies in the identification and analysis of risks and prompt response even in most repeated trends. At the core of a well-functioning system is a common understanding and agreement on identifying, analyzing and evaluating risks, with an indication of the significance and effect of the risk for the affected population in its realm of economic, social, political and cultural life. Its ultimate goal is anticipation and thereby mitigation.

Boutros-Ghali (1995), said that key components of a comprehensive conflict prevention strategy included early warning, preventive deployment, mediation, peacekeeping, practical disarmament, accountability measures, as well as post-conflict peace-building, recognizing that those components were interdependent. The number of violent conflict has increased since 2010 thus, raising the question of how violent and its escalation can be prevented in Nigeria especially violent conflict which has become endemic and require preventive strategies to address the root causes of conflict in a comprehensive manner as a means of promoting sustainable development, poverty eradication, national reconciliation, good governance, democracy, gender equality, an end of impunity, the rule of law and respect for protection of human rights, among other principles upon which crises erupt.

Since conflicts frequently manifest itself despite various means deployed, it become imperative that conflict early warning system and early responses should be adopted to address these factors upon which conflict erupts in Nigeria as it is designed to scan for conflict risks.

Nigeria is multiethnic nation with different cultural orientation, religious background, language, values, norms, belief system whose unity due to structural unification continually play its diversity in political, social and economic affiliation strengthen their differences causing competition, rival and nepotism resulting to disagreement on who controls who and the what and why that arises from it, with its consequences that end in crises and most times in violent conflict.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The relevant theory of choice for this study is the structural conflict theory. This theory with two branches comprising the radical structuralism and the liberal structuralism. According to Faleti (2006), the structural radical comprising the likes of Marx, Engel and Lenin. The liberal structuralism includes Ross (1993), Scarborough (1998) and Galtung (1990). The structural theory of conflicts assumes that social conflicts arise due to imbalance in the structure of social system in a given locale. Structuralists opine that society with unjust and exploitative organization makes one class subservient to another, especially when the subservient

constitute the majority, are prone to conflicts. This has been traced to the discrimination and inherent imbalance in access to the means of production, which favors the few at the expense of the majority.

Most capitalist societies characterized by the exploitation of the proletariat are referred to by Marxists and radical structuralisms as prone to social conflicts. They argued that such structural imbalance can only be solved through a revolution or civil war spearheaded by proletariat. The liberal structuralism advocates the removal of exploitative structure through new policies among states. The structural basis of conflict is a theory that attempts to explain conflict as product of the tension that arises when groups must compete for scarce resources. According to this theory, Structural conflicts are caused by forces external to the people in dispute. Thus, conflict does not just happen, that it goes through a cycle of phases, and that preventing the outbreak of overt conflict is possible depending on three assumptions:

1. Timely response to manifestations of danger.
2. An all-inclusive, coordinated approach to mitigate the threats to violence.
3. A comprehensive attempt to transform the root causes of violence.

Conflict prevention requires the identification of both structural and proximate causes of conflict, as well as efforts to avert causes before the outbreak of violence Reychler (2020). The championing for conflict prevention does not imply that conflict is undesirable, it just simply means that trying to resolve a conflict after it has happened complicates its resolution and it is costly. For conflict to be forecasted, information about its characteristics is crucial on one hand and the situation at risk on the other hand. As a result, early warning mechanisms especially in Nigeria due to multiple violent conflict confronting her needs the formulation of early warning frameworks that are context-based. Just merely having a regularly-updated database on states at risk of conflict, whose data has been shared among interested parties, is not exhaustive of an early warning system.

### **Early Warning Signs of Conflict**

- i. Body language: How peoples' facial expressions of frustration and body language reveal;
- ii. How they are really feeling;
- iii. Behavioural changes: People withdrawing, not inputting or remaining silent;
- iv. Cliques developing: This condition heightens dangerous affiliation;
- v. Strange comments: Animosity/Hate speech are made inciting people to take up violent option;
- vi. The words people choose: These become more and more emotive as the conflict;
- vii. Deepens;
- viii. People taking sides and ganging up: Forming opposition to drive their points;
- ix. The desire to attack or do away with opposition develops;
- x. A lack of tolerance: If not checked creates crises situation.

### **The Establishment of Early Warning in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, early warning program was established in 2003 by the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) regional office which at the time was partnering with an unstable network of Nigerian CSOs, because of the urgency to institute an official platform for Nigeria, a WANEP country office was founded in 2002. Specific successes of this structure include reinforced response system and production of Nigeria incidence and situation accounts for ECOWARN as an appendage of the ECOWAS/WANEP early warning system for West Africa. A different achievement has been the evolution of Election Barometer monitoring and analysis system for Nigerian elections of April/May 2007, culminating into a letter of cooperation with WANEP regional office by the Action Congress before the elections. This set the pace for consequential early warning issues that Nigeria applies in any anticipated conflict situation.

### **Structural Causes of Conflict in Nigeria**

It is important to understand the history behind contemporary conflict in Nigeria. This will help to give an insight on how to adequately mitigate them. Many of these causes are linked to the countries colonial roots as can be seen from the discuss below.

### **Dual-Ideology of the Constitution**

The federal constitution of Nigeria has become dual interface of military decree and the inclusion of sharia as legal system in 1912 under Native Ordinance Law. During the drafting of the 1979 Constitution, the Muslims saw it as a chance to introduce Sharia into the rest of the country by establishing a Federal Sharia Appeal Court and by instituting it in all states. Muslims argued in this vein: “since half the population of Nigeria was subject to Islamic....law, it was ...for this basic necessary diversity to be fully acknowledged”, Lateef Adebite. According to Mr. Adewumi, What the supporter of Sharia are after, is a dual society along Sharia laws.

### **Religion**

Durkheim (1965), viewed religion as integrative power in human society, according to him, religion bond often transcends personal and divisive forces which gives people meaning and purpose for their lives as well as certain ultimate values and ends to hold on in common. Religion is another major cause of conflicts in Nigeria, it creates atmosphere of exclusivism, intolerance and clashes which sometime break out into open conflict some of which are bloody (Nigeria–Biafra war. Religious bigotry between Christians and Moslems history shows that religious intolerance was the **cause** of the Riot that took place in Kano on May 1, 1953 which began a series of violent attacks against non-Muslims in the Country. This scenario never stopped till date. Religion is essentially political in nature and hardly can the two be separated.

### **Hate Speech**

This is usually a means of expressing animosity, an early warning sign usually through verbal expression majorly caused by people of reputable status with influence and follower-ship, who use the opportunity they have as a result of their position to incite violence and creating tension. For example, the call for all the Igbos’ in the North to vacate the land and go back to their land can cause a major bloody conflict in the country. The verbal IPOB demand and the urgent need to jettison Nigeria to a Biafran state to mention but few.

### **Ethnic Hegemony/Tribalism**

The solidarity to pursue sectional goal/agenda as against national interest is the undoing of Nigeria as a nation. One of such is the call for all Fulani across the globe to come to Nigeria. The IPOB agitation for Biafra is another case that has eaten deep into the so-called unity we all find ourselves as one Nigeria. The Niger Delta agitation for resource control is another issue of reference, the Oduduwa awareness for Oduduwa state is also a situation that exposes ill health of Nigeria as a united front. Ethnic hegemony has proved that even though we are one Nigeria, the originality in us, is speaking forth by our attitudes towards the peaceful co-existence of Nigeria as a nation.

### **Farmers and herdsmen clash**

Many bloody conflicts have been recorded because of farmers and herdsmen clash across Nigeria especially in Benue state. The disagreement between the farmers, struggling to make ends meet through farming, and the Fulani herdsmen whose nature is nomadic, has caused a major bloody conflict in the country. The situation has created a condition of unrest and unpredictable outcome of where the conflict between the two parties is leading the nation into. Many states within the Federation have faced one attack or confrontation by the conflict between the farmers and herdsmen. Statistical and non-statistical records show that, humanitarian crises have arisen from it, souls lost and properties damaged.

### **Favouritism/Nepotism**

This aspect is endemic in the system. There is no major sector in the country where nepotism is not found. Favouritism is preference of your ethnic brother than the other ethnic groups which is sign of ethnocentrism. Appointment into key offices are along ethnic line and faith based, into key government positions. It has become institutionalized as a culture of importance to strengthen ethnic hegemony at the expense of others in the country.

**Propaganda and misinformation**

This is information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view mostly used by politicians and other fields related to politics to demean someone or group/groups seen as an opposition for their mischievous motives.

**Corruption and inept leadership**

Majority of our leaders are incompetent, unskilled, unproductive and ineffectual in carrying out their duties. Meritocracy is being crucified at the altar of godfatherism, party interest and zoning without consideration to competency of the person in quote, this practice is now a social norm whose manifest shows during electioneering, job allocation, scholarship/contract awards, sentimental policy making and decision making, injustice in economic distribution; heightening the already existing inequality emanating from corruption. The resultant effect is uneven distribution of the common wealth of Nigeria, hijacked by few in the corridor of power at the expense of the majority. Corruption in the high places has become an institutionalized norms to uphold political power.

**Early Warning and Early Response in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, peace building stakeholders' responses to early warning signals are weak and inadequate due to lack of coordination between major stakeholders – policymakers, civil society and local actors. There is an urgent need to develop conflict prevention and management mechanisms to enhance political stability, peace and human security in Nigeria. There is no synergy between the bodies entrusted with intervention in various capacity. For EWER systems to be successful in Nigeria to avert, mitigate or curb resurgence, closer engagement between local actors and government are essential. Most of conflicts in Nigeria emerge from the local community. This requires an active role of traditional and local leaders, community-based organizations and faith groups to become more prominent in providing information and support which will be relevant in deploying the necessary force/mechanism to combat escalation both at the state and federal level. It is of great importance to recognize the traditional and cultural institutions in towns and



villages in Nigeria as having various workable mechanisms for EWER that influence conflict mitigation, response and peaceful coexistence, such as village assemblies and town hall meetings, the use of age group and secret cult and even masquerade to enforce peace negotiation. These mechanisms are often not documented, but play a crucial role in peace building and community resilience to violent conflict. An effective early warning system is a catalyst for policymaking, conflict prevention and peace building without taking the required step to ensure mitigation, conflict is bound to erupt.

A Pilot SMS-based conflict early warning system was used by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and Community Action for Popular Participation to test early warning system in the Jos region of Nigeria. This was adequately reported by Stine (2013). He further explained that 109 focal points were trained to send SMS messages of conflict early warning signs, to encourage others in their community to send SMSs, to a centralized system. Through the project, people could also submit incident reports through the project's Crowd map website. The validity of each alert was verified and key stakeholders (security, government and NGO partners) notified of the incident via SMS (it's urgent) or in a daily email report). However, such problems associated with mobile phone connectivity and lack of sufficient public outreach and training of focal points impacted on the number of incidents reported plagued the system (Stine, 2013, p. 5). Also, not all the information sent in was relevant as some of it consisted of requests for further information or greetings. Other problems of EWS in Nigeria are discussed below.

### **Problems Associated with Early Warning System in Nigeria**

The dynamics of capacity, willingness and cooperation of relevant institutions and stakeholders towards early warning signs are always treated with laxity. Timely response to early conflict indicators is very helpful in the prevention of conflict. Nigeria approach to early warning is a one-off activity and a military junta approach rather than a due process of the proceedings of peace initiative in addressing the root causes that trigger conflict ranging from factors such as apathy, social contract agreement, ethnic hegemony, political

party affiliation interest, the state actor factor, caber ideology, immigration and border porosity and indifference to conflict warning signals in Nigeria among others, most often, lead to escalation of conflict.

Early warning without early response is counterproductive, early response takes into consideration structural and systemic causal factors that constitute the root cause of emerging or ongoing conflicts. Clear and accurate information is integral to Early Warning Early Response (EWER). Wrong or subjective information can lead to a wrong response. In most cases, most people in Nigeria sold their conscience for money either to diverge information or give false information concerning any conflict anticipated situation mostly to safeguard selfish interest. This scenario always set the wrong pace in an early warning response. Importantly, verified information should reach decision-makers fast enough in order to make quick decisions. The contribution of local, state and national systems to conflict prevention in Nigeria will depend on how strong the linkages between them are, and how they can adequately complement each other.

Political willpower is a common weakness cited around failures in early warning in Nigeria. Carment and Schnabel (2004), argued that the challenges of linking early warning to response are abundant and come about as a result of what is time and again dubbed “lack of political will.” Unloading the key components of political reluctance to act is the first move towards building approaches to tackle the problem. Countering these challenges is a difficult task and conceivably an unrealistic mission. It calls for realistic and rational responses to deal with the lack of political will to take action. The lack of political will has meant that conflict anticipation has been ad hoc and inept.

There are a number of complex organizational, hierarchical, political and economic factors limiting early warning system in Nigeria. Research into early warning decision-making has revealed a number of challenges, such as message resonance, communication of warnings, source credibility, cognitive biases and institutional incentives to act, which are important reading for those embarking on the development of an Early warning (EW) mechanism.

Furthermore, An Early warning system (EWS) needs predictable and consistent decision-making steps following previous trends which must be well defined, clearly visible and realistic to implement and adhered to by Early Warning stakeholders. This will in itself create incentives for follow-up action, which will be more transparent and more accountable.

EWS tend to be characterized by participatory and accountable institutions, able to accommodate vested interests and promote incentives for cooperation among their citizenry. An enabling political environment should be marked by a degree of transparency and accountability in responsiveness to emerging trends and risks by information sharing, and willingness to act timely. In Nigeria, several states have repeatedly stated their commitment in strengthening their preventive capacities via Early Warning Signals unfortunately, full support is yet to be gotten to this effect. Those who dare to, are doing it on individual might.

The prerequisite resources – human expertise, technological infrastructure and political will needed for successful early warning and early response mechanism are lacking. Without which necessary information to combat conflict eruption may not be easily accessible and responses as a result cannot be rapid. The attitude of playing politics with EWER in Nigeria remains evident, specifically of national security, which is paramount for peace building. Looking back at conflict incidences across Nigeria, we see that often, decision makers were surprised and inadequately prepared, responding with a series of reactive actions. In an effort to address gaps in the anticipation and mitigation of conflicts, Nigeria should endeavour, delve into the development of early warning models and considerably advance their methodologies according to new trends development of early warning sign and the trend of violent conflict that clip the nation's capacity to contend.

Data analysis has to be the backbone of Early Warning in order to pinpoint specific regional and local factors that might mobilize people or groups to engage in violence. This should enable all stakeholders in an EW process to agree about which events or developments could increase tensions in this context, e.g. incitements to violence by influential actors, the electoral cycle, announcements of major policy initiatives, imposition of candidate during

election or agitation of ethnic minorities. Even though information becomes increasingly available, sheer quantity does not imply quality. Rather, the challenge is how to ‘filter the signal through the noise’.

### **Prospects of Early Warning in Nigeria**

It is important to highlight the significant progress Early Warning Early Response (EWER) has made in Nigeria in spite of the prevailing challenges. Civil society organizations such as the West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP), Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and Inter Faith Mediation Center (IMC) have been involved in sensitization, capacity building, design and implementation and reporting of EWER Program in Nigeria. For example, WANEP established a Nigeria Civil Society early warning-response mechanism, and SFCG runs a participatory EWER system in Plateau State.

There are occasions where interceptions are made by our security officers like the Joint Military Force, the Army, the Police, the Civil defense, Nigeria custom Service, the NDLA etc. due to prior information. This is evidence in most arrest of bandits, kidnappers, terrorist and a host of them. Sometimes, security operators mount the road for thorough check on our major roads to track or prevent crises anticipation. The relation between warning and response still remains inadequate. According to Evans, as cited in Kuwali and Viljoen (2014) “if early warning alarm bells do not generate enough response they might as well not be rung at all.”

According to Lawrence (2009), “the historical patterns of conflict early warning suggests that new wars will continue to erupt unabated if greater and smarter efforts are not made to prevent them”. Nigeria is already swimming in a pool of crises among which are the suicide bombing techniques adopted by the Boko Haram terrorists and the herdsmen /farmers clash in the Benue state. The IPOB activities in the eastern Nigeria especially the attack on security officers and burning of police stations, every Monday stay at home in the East with its economic consequences, the hijack of the situation by hoodlums, the killings of prominent figure - Professor Nwabueze, the Amotekun in the southwest, the North east crises and many

others. These factors including other several factors are pushing the country into a new period of significant dangers and state of anarchy. To further point at limitation of early warning in Nigeria is the construction of rail ways without security presence which resulted in the bombing, killing and hijacking/kidnapping of prominent Nigerian men of caliber along Abuja Kaduna route. The negligence of government to heed to the Minister of transport's request of 3 billion naira to put security presence along the rail way route is lack of anticipating danger of terrorist attack on such remote route. Now the money that will be spent to repair the railway will no doubt outweigh the minister's request. The bombing of Kaduna railway shows that the bombers have more information, more intelligence network, more dispatch intelligence information to secure their safety attack as if they are government on their own, while government cannot heed to preventive measures in combating the incessant attack by this terrorist or share intelligence information.

### **The Roles of Stakeholders in Early Warning Systems**

The entire linkage of early warning stakeholders and target groups should be made up of networks of local volume, monitors, trained analysts, journalists and media, intelligence services, diplomatic missions, development agencies, local committees, early warning country coordinators, research institutes, donors, economic actors and their local affiliates as well as even the rule of law bodies (Buchanan-Smith and Davies, 1995). For the purpose of decision-making warning happens when predictive conclusions and a verification to support them are produced and disseminated to various stakeholders. Thus, warning entails championing for well-timed and proper restorative actions as response options for prevention and transformation before conflict intensifies. This perspective presupposes a consistent, well-timed, and regular practice, in which inputs and decision-making processes about the information that is disseminated are comprehensible and sufficiently flexible to produce well-timed interventions.

## **Conclusion**

Unchecked early warning signs and negligence have been the genesis of crisis in Nigeria. Conflict early warning machineries have not necessarily produced the anticipated result as the relation between warning and response still remains inadequate in mitigating the eruption of conflict. These lapses show social contract, ethnic hegemony, lack of political will power, activities of state actors and cabers, selfish interest among many as the key factors limiting prompt responses to potential conflict eruption in Nigeria.

Early warning stakeholders required to be made up of networks of civil societies, local communities, state and federal government with the operation of monitors, trained analysts, journalists and media, intelligence services, development agencies, early warning experts, research institutes, donors, economic actors and their local affiliates, collaboration with international organization (immigration and border porosity) as well as the of rule of law to secure decision-making and enforce timely response to risk anticipation. However, these are not adequately operational in combating conflict as a result of warning signs negligence, which makes response delayed in averting eruption, escalation and resurgence into violent conflict.

1. Application of Early Warning System (EWS) in Nigeria needs predictable and consistent decision-making steps following previous trends which must be well defined, clearly visible and realistic to implement and adhered to by Early Warning stakeholders.
2. There is need to decentralize Nigeria and empower state resource control to enhance grass root social development which will enhance poverty alleviation and encourage self-emancipation thereby reduce the tendency for conflict eruption.
3. State autonomy and state policing as necessary tool to compliment early warning system. This will help in the development of various states in Nigeria without unnecessary interferences that causes animosity, competition and rivalry that give rise to sense of inequality and marginalization.

4. There is an urgent need to uphold the rule of law and the will power to respond to warning signs and prosecute anyone who violates the law or incite people into creating disharmonious situations as well as eliminating social contract and caber entanglement with internal and external actors whose primary objective is violence.

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