

**Meeting the Challenge of
Conflict Prevention in Africa**

Towards the Operationalization of the
Continental Early Warning System

edited by
Conflict Management Division of the
Peace and Security Department,
African Union Commission



**PROPOSAL FOR AN
INDICATORS MODULE
TOWARDS THE
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THE CONTINENTAL EARLY
WARNING SYSTEM FOR THE
AFRICAN UNION**

ISSUE PAPER NO. 2

African Union
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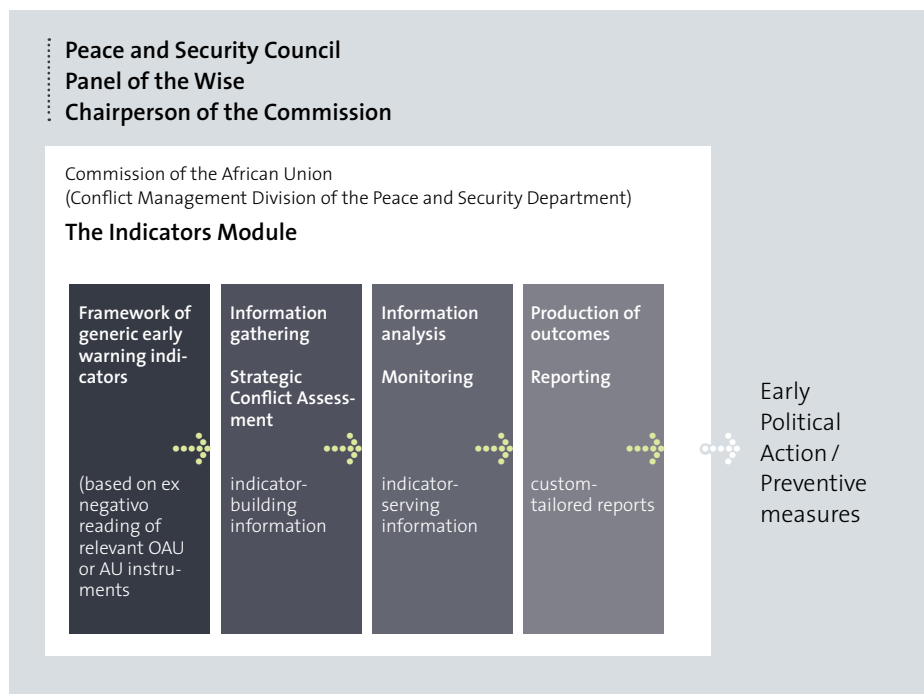
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PROPOSAL FOR AN INDICATORS MODULE TOWARDS THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE CONTINENTAL EARLY WARNING SYSTEM FOR THE AFRICAN UNION ¹

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Within the overall framework of article 12 of the PSC Protocol, the recommendations contained in this document for the development of an Indicators Module of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) are based on a framework of generic indicators derived ex negativo from documents adopted by the African Heads of State and Government (both within the OAU and the

¹ This paper was presented at the Meeting of Governmental Experts on Early Warning and Conflict Prevention, Kempton Park, South Africa, 17–19 December 2006. Reference: PSD/EW/EXP/5(I)

AU). The document details the three basic early warning roles to be conducted by the Commission, through the Conflict Management Division (CMD) of the Peace and Security Department (PSD) – information gathering, information analysis and the production of outcomes – with a view to sketching a workable Indicators Module of the CEWS.

Once a situation matches a limited number of generic indicators, a Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) will be undertaken in order to identify case-specific indicator-building information. On this basis, thresholds will then be defined through analysis by the CMD staff. The generation of this indicator-serving information will allow for a monitoring of the situation. Based on established procedures and standards, the CMD will then report to its end-users to alert them on upcoming potential of / or violent conflict and enable them to take the appropriate political action.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. One of the core objectives of the African Union is the promotion of peace, security, and stability on the Continent, as spelt out in article 3 (f) of the AU Constitutive Act. To strengthen the African Union’s capacity in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, Member States adopted, in July 2002, in Durban, South Africa, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which entered into force in December 2003. The Protocol, in article 2 (1), defines the PSC as “a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa”.
2. Article 12 of the PSC Protocol provides for the establishment of a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), in order to facilitate the anticipation and prevention of conflicts in Africa. As stipulated in article 12 (2) of the Protocol, the CEWS shall consist of:
 - (i) an observation and monitoring centre, to be known as “the Situation Room”, which is located at the Conflict Management Division of the African Union and is responsible for data collection and analysis; and
 - (ii) the observation and monitoring units of the Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (hereunder the Regional Mechanisms), which shall be linked directly through appropriate means of communication to the Situation Room and which shall collect and process data at their level and transmit the same to the Situation Room.
3. In addition, article 12 (3) of the Protocol requires the Commission to also collaborate with the United Nations and its agencies, other relevant international organizations, research centres, academic institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), to facilitate the effective functioning of the CEWS, while article 12 (4) calls for the development of an early warning module based on clearly defined and accepted political, economic, social, military and humanitarian indicators, which shall be used to analyze developments within the continent and to recommend the best course of action. Finally, article 12 (7) stipulates that the Chairperson of the Commission, in consultation with Member States, the Regional Mechanisms, the United Nations and other relevant institutions, shall work

out the practical details for the establishment of the CEWS and take all the steps required for its effective functioning.

4. On the basis of the above, in particular article 12 (4) of the PSC Protocol, this document provides elements and a methodological framework that could form the basis of the indicators module referred to in the PSC Protocol, taking into account the Organization of African Unity / African Union's initiatives that are relevant in indicator development. The objective is, *inter alia*, to enable Member States to agree on the key steps that should be taken to ensure strategic analysis of the data collected, through an appropriate CEWS indicators module.

5. This document firstly deals with some methodological considerations, and then proceeds to describe the various steps of the early warning functions to be performed by the Commission. It concludes with some observations.

II. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

6. The provisions of the PSC Protocol outlined above are unambiguous: the objective is to facilitate the anticipation and prevention of violent conflicts – both internal (intra-state) and external (inter-state). The CEWS should provide the Chairperson of the Commission and, through him, the PSC and the Panel of the Wise with information necessary to assist them in taking action on potential violent conflicts.

7. Time, financial and institutional constraints prohibit an approach where early warning information is gathered in advance for all Member States, irrespective of their mid- to long-term potential of violent conflict in these countries. Rather, attention has to be on a limited number of countries which either (i) are extremely likely to face violent conflict in their immediate future, or (ii) are already in conflict, or (iii) have been in conflict in their more recent past. Up to now, the type of conflicts regularly addressed by the PSC are conflicts which have already escalated to some extent. Attention has been given to a very limited number of potential violent conflicts. This situation is unlikely to change in the short-term, and any CEWS has to address this initial situation. Bearing in mind this combination of constraints, the following proposal attempts to reconcile state-of-the-art reasoning from conflict prevention and peace-building in academia with the practical needs of practitioners in the African Union.

8. There is a rich body of literature on violent conflicts, peace-building and related analytical tools. However, key questions have not been resolved both by social science and practitioners alike. The most severe question is constituted by the dual problem of causation and attribution. How do we know that action A will directly cause violent outcome B? And why does action A – under similar structural conditions – causes violent outcome B in country K and not in country L? These are questions where social science has not yet come up with a consensus. How do we know that intervention X directly causes impact Z? This is a question where practitioners have not yet established sound best practice. Existing theory and practice simply does not provide robust causation / attribution knowledge.

9. Although there is considerable experience with Early Warning Systems (EWS) in different areas – violent conflict, natural disaster, floods, agricultural production, etc. –, this experience is based on imperfect data and often cannot be transferred to other fields. For instance, available data on conflict, by and large, is based on inter-state violent conflicts, while most of the violent conflicts confronting the continent are of an intra-state nature. There is no comprehensive list of intra-state violent conflicts (i.e. a list with small subsets of all conflicts), so it is not possible to generate an inclusive and limited list of universal early warning indicators. In addition, no sound categorization system for violent conflicts exists, i.e. it is easier to find indicators for a specific type or a cluster of violent conflicts (such as so-called ethnic conflicts or pre-electoral conflicts, etc.). Empirical research would suggest that every violent conflict is embedded in a very specific socio-cultural field, and that common patterns between different cases can be identified to a certain extent only.

10. There are a number of serious efforts undertaken. The most sophisticated EWSs operate with very different and often contradictory sets of indicators. The problem is, as argued by one observer, “that there is no strong evidence that any of the indicators they propose are truly conflict early warning indicators”. Partially, this can be explained by the fact that, in most cases, the important distinction is not made between the data that will help us to figure out the best EWS indicators (i.e. to evaluate and test theories), and the data that is gathered to serve as those indicators. Often, theory testing or evaluative data has been by-passed in the quest for indicator-building data. Social scientists involved in the development of conflict prevention tools and the design of EWS have not established common analytical ground. There are debates between those favouring quantitative approaches and those preferring qualitative methods. But there are also fierce debates among scholars working with seemingly similar tools.

11. In principle, there are three different methodological approaches to operationalize EWSs, so-called correlational, sequential and conjunctural models. The first approach is based on the assumption that certain indicators or measures of the political, economic and social situation in a country (independent variables) covary with a measure of the level of violence in that country (dependent variable). The relative weight of indicators which are believed to contribute to the likelihood of violent conflict is tested (mainly through regression analysis). The second approach is working with a sequence of triggers and accelerators, i.e. events. It describes how changes in an environment bring about a specific event or a change in some specified variable. And, finally, the third approach works with combinations of conditions and events. The basic assumption is that different combinations of a polity’s circumstances lead to different outcomes. This approach is trying to identify particular configurations or conditions that consistently precede the outbreak of violent conflicts and that do not occur in places that do not experience violent conflict.

12. Against this background, best practice seems to suggest an approach which abstains from making bold claims towards a universal explanation for violent conflict and, thus, a single list with a limited number of indicators valid for all African countries. Rather, an inductive approach is favoured which operates within the parameters of a generic framework of indicators. At this initial level, the approach is plausibility and probability driven. Only once indicator-building information has been verified (through SCAs), a method is

favoured which is as close to a causal model as one will probably get. A combination of two out of the three EWS models – sequential plus conjunctural – will help to achieve this effort.

III. ELEMENTS OF THE EARLY WARNING MODULE AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

13. As indicated above, the process of early warning, as proposed, is made up of four steps: matching conflict information against a framework of conflict early warning indicators, information gathering, information analysis, and production of outcomes and reporting.

a) Step 1: Matching conflict information against a framework of conflict early warning indicators

14. The African Heads of State and Government have adopted a great number of decisions on political, economic, SOCIAL, military and humanitarian issues – either in the framework of the African Union or its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity. *Inter alia*, this includes:

- the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981);
- the African Union Constitutive Act (2000) and the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (2002);
- all the documents which are part of the NEPAD agenda, such as the Framework Document (2001) and, most importantly, the Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators of the African Peer Review Mechanism (2003);
- the Solemn Declaration (2000) as well as the Memorandum of Understanding (2002) of the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA); and
- a number of declarations and conventions on issues such as unconstitutional changes of government (2002), illicit drug trafficking and abuse (2002) or corruption (2003).

15. These documents represent a consolidated framework of commonly accepted norms and principles, which is reflective of a universal understanding of human rights, as laid down in the United Nations Charter and other related legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948). These documents do not *a priori* provide conflict prevention relevant indicators. But they easily translate into such a framework when they are interpreted *ex negativo*, i.e. when they are translated into a list of attitudes / behaviour which the African leaders disapprove of. This list of generic indicators can be summarized as follows:

Objectives	Documents adopted by the OAU and the AU	Generic early warning indicators
Prevention and reduction of intra- and inter-state conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cairo Declaration on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution AHG/ Decl. 3 (XXIX), 1993 • Tunis Declaration on Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations, 1994 • OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, 1994 • Yaoundé Declaration on Drug Control, Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking in Africa, 1996 • African Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, 1996 • Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000 • NEPAD Framework Document, 2001 • Declaration on the Framework for an OAU Response to Unconstitutional Changes of Government, 2000 • Memorandum of Understanding on the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA), OAU/Civil Society,3 (II), Annex, 2002 • Decision on the CSSDCA, AHG/ Dec. 175 (XXXVIII), 2002 • AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, 2002 • Durban Declaration on the Control of Illicit Drug Trafficking and Abuse, 2002 • Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism, 2003 • Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy, 2004 • The African Union Non-Aggression and Common Defence Pact, 2005 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • horizontal (intra-state) or vertical (inter-state) escalation of violent conflict • increase in human rights violations in a polity • sessionist agendas • proliferation of small arms and light weapons • armed insurrections • territorial disputes • border conflict • cross-border movements of small arms and light weapons • border skirmishes • occasional or regular cross-border raids • preparation of an insurgency from a neighbouring country • expulsion of identity groups

Objectives	Documents adopted by the OAU and the AU	Generic early warning indicators
<p>Constitutional democracy, including periodic political competition and opportunity for choice, the rule of law, citizen rights and supremacy of the Constitution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981 • Declaration on the Framework for an OAU Response to Unconstitutional Changes of Government, 2000 • Coup d'Etats in Africa, AHG/Dec. 142 (XXXV), 2000 • Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000 • NEPAD Framework Document, 2001 • OAU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, AHG/Decl.1 (XXXVIII), 2002 • NEPAD Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance AHG/235 (XXXVIII), Annex I, 2002 • Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism, 2003 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gross human rights violations by state or non-state actors • coup d'etats • suspension of a constitution • limitation of constitutional rights • cancellation or rigging of elections • public or private hate talk in or by the media
<p>Promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights as enshrined in African and international human rights instruments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981 • African Charter of Popular Participation in Development, 1990 • Resolution on the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, AHG/Res.230 (XXX), 1994 • Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000 • NEPAD Framework Document, 2001 • Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism, 2003 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • restrictions of individual or collective economic, social and cultural rights by the state or non-state actors • policies of economic, social and cultural exclusion • gross human rights violations • major changes of the ecological balance • environmental stress (e.g. through natural disaster or climate change)

Objectives	Documents adopted by the OAU and the AU	Generic early warning indicators
Uphold the separation of powers, including the protection of the independence of the judiciary and of an effective legislature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000 • NEPAD Framework Document 2001 • Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy, 2004 • Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism, 2003 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violations of the separation of powers • passing over the judiciary • intruding into parliament's rights
Ensure accountable, efficient and effective public office holders and civil servants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEPAD Framework Document, 2001 • African Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, 2003 • Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism, 2003 • Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy, 2004 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active steps to prevent accountability • widespread corruption in the public service
Fighting corruption in the political sphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEPAD Framework Document, 2001 • African Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, 2003 • Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism, 2003 • Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy, 2004 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • widespread corruption among the political class • misappropriation of funds
Promotion and protection of the rights of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981 • Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 1995 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violations of women's rights

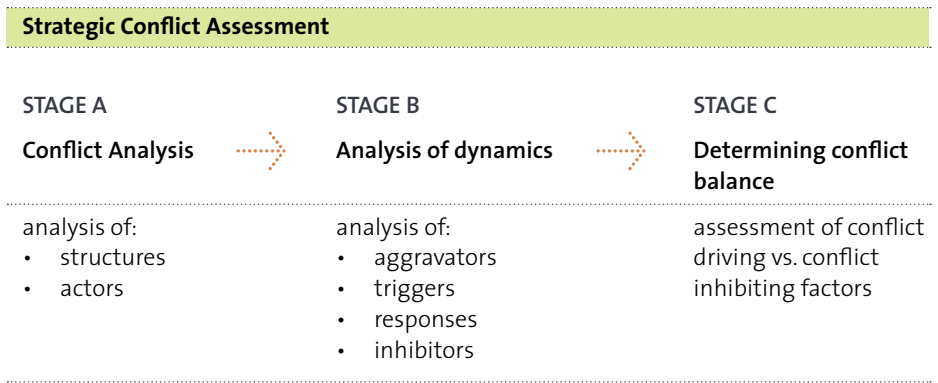
Objectives	Documents adopted by the OAU and the AU	Generic early warning indicators
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision on the 15th Annual Activity Report of the African Commission on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights, AHG/Dec. 171 (XXXVIII), 2002 • Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism, 2003 	
<p>Promotion and protection of the rights of children and young persons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981 • African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990 • Decision on the 15th Annual Activity Report of the African Commission on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights, AHG/Dec. 171 (XXXVIII), 2002 • Decision on the Report of the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, AHG/Dec. 172 (XXXVIII), 2002 • Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism, 2003 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violations of children's and young person's rights
<p>Promotion and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups including internally displaced persons and refugees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, 1969 • African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981 • Decision on the 15th Annual Activity Report of the African Commission on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights, AHG/Dec. 171 (XXXVIII), 2002 • Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for the African Peer Review Mechanism, 2003 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violations of the rights of IDPs and refugees • forced displacement (IDPs and refugees)

b) Step 2: Information gathering – Conducting modified Strategic Conflict Assessments

16. Once there is sufficient match between the list and current developments in a given Member State, the CMD has probable cause to start analysing the situation and to proceed to STEP 2. A Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) of the situation in a Member State will be conducted in order to generate information which will allow the CMD to build more specific indicators consistent with the framework of generic early warning indicators mentioned above (in another step, this *type A-data* or indicator-building information will enable the CMD to define thresholds for monitoring, see below).

17. The international debate on crisis prevention and conflict management among practitioners, international advocacy NGOs and academics has produced a rich experience with different analytical approaches. Drawn from this experience, some common ground has been established. Among conflict prevention researchers and practitioners, the SCA has proven to be a very reliable and robust analytical instrument.

18. The major aim of the SCA is to generate an overview on the background and dynamics of a violent conflict unfolding. For the purpose of the Indicators Module, the SCA has been slightly modified to address more comprehensively problems of causation, action and dynamics (this refers to the recognition of structural root causes, more emphasis on the resources of conflict actors, and a more explicit discussion of conflict aggravating vs. inhibiting factors).¹ The SCA is carried out in three stages:



19. During “Stage A: Conflict analysis”, the analyst is looking at the political culture, issues of inadequate governance, imbalance of opportunities for identity groups (such as youth, women, ethnic etc.) and matters of inequality to determine the structural causes of conflict, sometimes also referred to as root causes. The analyst will also carry out an analysis of the actor constellation and describe their interests, relations, capacities (i.e. capacities to influence conflict either negatively or positively) and resources as well as strategies.

¹ Here, the language used in Background Paper 2 on IT differs slightly. Essentially “Strategic Conflict Assessment” equates “Risk Assessment” and “aggravators / triggers” equates “event indicators”.

He will also look into existing peace agendas and consider incentives, which might work against an escalation of potential violent conflict.

20. During “Stage B: Analysis of dynamics”, the emphasis is on identifying those factors of a potential conflict which could either contribute to a horizontal (spread to other regions) or vertical (increase of the number of actors or conflict parties involved) conflict escalation or which would mitigate the potential for violent conflict:

- (i) mid-term aggravating factors (to name but a very few: promoting ethnic identity discourses with an exclusive undertone, limiting resources for clientelistic distribution, the influx of small arms and light weapons, imminent elections or any other event with a likelihood to change the perceived balance of power, etc.);
- (ii) exit options (what are the strategies of groups / people to avoid becoming part of the conflict, like migrating-out etc.);
- (iii) voice options (how can / do people voice their grievances?);
- (iv) existing conflict prevention and mediation mechanisms (institutions or processes which can mitigate or manage the potential of violent conflict – do they work?);
- (v) government policies (is the government willing and capable to work against conflict, or is it part of the conflict?);
- (vi) policies of international actors and the donor community (how do international interests affect the interests of the conflict parties? are there incentives or disincentives to work against conflict?);
- (vii) short-term triggering factors (what could cause an immediate escalation of conflict?) and inhibiting factors (what could possibly work strongly against such an escalation?).

21. During “Stage C: Determining conflict balance”, the information gathered in Stages A and B needs to be reconciled. (In the case of information on the potential of trans-border or inter-state violent conflict, further analysis beyond the Member State in question is called for. Clearly, many current conflicts go beyond the state and call for a transgressing of the state as the unit of analysis.)

22. The information necessary to feed this type of analysis is strictly open source based. The CMD should look at five different “baskets” of information as provided for by the PSC Protocol and summarized in the relevant paragraphs of the Roadmap on the Operationalization of the CEWS:

- Basket 1: African Union field mission reports and field monitor reports;
- Basket 2: information coming from the Member States and the RECs;
- Basket 3: news agency / services reports;
- Basket 4: submissions from NGOs, academics, civil society, etc;
- Basket 5: online newspaper articles.

23. Based on sound SCAs, case study specific information will be gathered which is both relevant in terms of the indicators framework, i.e. the commonly adopted policy of the African Union and its Member States, and which will enable the analysts to identify case specific indicators for the potential of violent conflict (such as calls for ethnic mobilisation, hate speeches, the deployment of armed or rebel forces, etc.).

c) Step 3: Information analysis – Monitoring

24. On the basis of a SCA, the information analysis role of the CMD will be activated. If a SCA produces information on the existence of a potential for violent conflict, the situation has to be monitored.

25. For this purpose, the indicator-building information has to be transformed by the CMD analysts into *type B-data*, i.e. indicator-serving information. This includes defining thresholds (for instance, what type and measurable intensity of government response will trigger violent responses? what type and measurable intensity of “popular resistance” will trigger violent government responses?).

26. Translating indicator-building information into indicator-serving information is the most challenging aspect of this proposal. It calls for experienced analysts with a good understanding of trend-tracking and a variety of conflict dynamics.

d) Step 4: Producing outcomes – Reporting

27. Once certain thresholds have been passed, the CMD will assume its producing outcomes role, usually by way of reporting. Based on established procedures and standards, the CMD reports to its end-users to alarm them to up-coming potential of/or violent conflict and enable them to take the appropriate political action.

28. The reports currently generated by the CMD (News Highlights, Mission Reports, Chairperson’s Reports, etc.) will continue to serve as a primary tool for engaging decision-makers. These reports need to be complemented by, among others, special Early Warning Reports. In order to ensure effective and timely engagement by decision-makers, regular reporting mechanisms, appropriate timing, standard formats and appropriate storage and retrieval systems will have to be introduced in the production, use and distribution of CEWS reports.

IV. MOVING FORWARD

29. As the design of CEWS is finalized and the analytic framework is integrated with the technological tools that will support it, it is important to remember that the tools support and should not drive the early warning process. It is the analytic capacity of the Situation Room and Early Warning Unit staff members that will lead to data-driven assessments and recommendations that can prevent, manage and mitigate conflict.

30. The Indicators Module as proposed provides for an extensible and amendable mechanism. Indicator-building and indicator-serving information constantly needs to be checked and, if necessary, adjusted. The interactive analytical process will thus produce an in-built control mechanism. This can be assisted by regular evaluations, which should also focus on the specific needs of the different end-users (Chairperson of the Commission, PSC, Panel of the Wise). By the same token, this process easily allows for capacity-building, infrastructural development and the support of individual strengths in analytical skills.