



# **Community-Based Conflict Early Warning and Response**

## **The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative for Humanity United**

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The purpose of this deliverable is to present an operational alternative to state-centric conflict early warning and response systems. The study first introduces the concept of community-based approaches and then draws on four innovative community-based conflict early warning and conflict prevention initiatives in Kyrgyzstan, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and Guinea Bissau. The deliverable concludes with recommendations to Humanity United with respect to supporting these innovative approaches.

The deliverable is not written as an academic paper but rather as a practical overview. To this end, the analysis does not dwell at length on the failings and shortcomings of conventional conflict early warning systems as these have already been described in previous deliverables. Instead, this study identifies the strengths and potential of community-based early warning projects for the purposes of early response and violence prevention.

The role of information communication technology (ICT) in conflict early warning and response will be the subject of HHI's fourth deliverable to Humanity United. To this end, the current deliverable does not specifically emphasize the use of ICTs.

## Introduction

As has become apparent during our Shared Learning Group Early Warning conference calls, the majority of what we know and read about conflict early warning refers to state-centric, regional and or international systems. These systems are designed and operationalized by organizations in the West for use by organizations in the West. Indeed, the current discourse on early warning continues to label communities at risk as the intended beneficiaries; but in practice, the real end users of early warning systems are Western organizations. The purpose of this deliverable is therefore to chart a less state-centric approach to early warning and response—one that seeks “the proper balance between the need for external assistance and the capacity of local people to deal with the situation.”<sup>1</sup>

Local communities facing harm or assault are subject to the interests of the great powers, despite the moderating influence of international norms (such as the Responsibility to Protect) and international law and treaties (both international human rights law and international humanitarian law). It takes a great deal of public outcry, or a synergy of important national self interests, or both, to prod the international community to intervene against the wishes of a sovereign nation state. Yet, if we were the ones facing impending violence, would we patiently await the possible moment when our assailants might heed international supplications, or would we in the interim find more tactical and practical means to manage the violence that appears to be heading our way?

The disaster management community defines the purposes of community-based early warning and response as a process whereby individuals and communities threatened by hazards are empowered to act in sufficient time and in an appropriate manner so as to reduce the possibility of personal injury, loss of life, damage to property and the environment, and loss of livelihoods.<sup>2</sup> Note that the traditional division of labor between those who warn and those being warned is bridged in the context of people-centered early warning. In other words, community-based initiatives address “the capacity of disaster-affected communities to ‘bounce back’ or to recover with little or no external assistance following a disaster.”<sup>3</sup>

To this end, this “bottom-bottom” approach emphasizes community preparedness and contingency planning. As French scientist Louis Pasteur wrote, “In the field of observation, chance favors only the prepared mind.” A community-based *conflict* early warning system would therefore seek to inculcate a situational or security awareness within high-risk

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<sup>1</sup> Bankoff, G., Frerks, G. and D. Hilhorst (2004). *Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development & People* (Earthscan, London).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (UN). *Global Survey of Early Warning System: An Assessment of Capacities, Gaps and Opportunities towards Building a Comprehensive Global Early Warning System for All Natural Hazards*. A Report Prepared at the request of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (Pre-print version released at the Third International Conference on Early Warning, Bonn, 27-29 March 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Manyena, Siambabala (2006). “The Concept of Resilience Revisited,” *Disasters*, 30(4): 443-450.

communities. This systematic awareness would build on local capacities to address and reduce individual and group vulnerabilities in a sustainable way that departs from the traditionally more ‘remote’ and ‘vertical’ monitoring.

Recent United Nations research into “the response strategies of internally displaced people found that their information-gathering systems were often highly developed and far superior to those of the humanitarian community.”<sup>4</sup> To this end, the use of the term ‘victim’ (by the mass media, NGOs and international organizations) to label affected communities tends to suggest they are powerless when in fact there is often considerable capacity, resilience and ingenuity at the community level. As a seasoned practitioner with *Medecins sans Frontiers* states, “People will continue to survive as best they can, relying more on their own communities and traditional networks than on [us] ... It is not the fault of the displaced persons and refugees, but our system for providing protection and assistance does not work. They have, after all, had to learn the hard way what it takes to survive.”<sup>5</sup>

Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen echo this sentiment when they write that “the empowerment of internally displaced persons has not received enough attention, despite the crucial role [they] play in meeting their own needs and influencing the course of conflict. In many situations internally displaced persons develop survival and coping strategies. In some, they and host communities develop self-defense units to ensure that people have time to flee...”<sup>6</sup> Clearly then, some versions of community-based approaches are not new to local people who have struggled to survive conflict. The question is how the humanitarian community can best build on these indigenous practices.

In drawing from local experience, the intent is to point out valuable directions for further elaboration and development of a range of strategies and tactics that could be deployed in at least two different situations—in acute and rapidly unfolding crises and in settings of impending but more distant threat. The deployment challenge in the first situation is urgent mobilization of logistics, including communications. In the second instance, the challenge for the community, and for those who would assist in this endeavor, is timely assessment of risk. In both situations, community deliberations and actions must be carried out in ways that do not alert antagonists that preparations are under way.

In this respect, survival testimonies provide particularly rich insights into how local communities employ a variety of tactics to manage conflict and outmaneuver assailants. The striking resourcefulness of peasants during the 1980s civil war in El Salvador is a case in point. Despite punishing government bombardment of villages thought to harbor insurgent guerrillas, many peasants survived through the use of tactics that community-based conflict

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<sup>4</sup> UN OCHA (2003). *No Refuge: The Challenge of Internal Displacement*. Internal Displacement Unit.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Barrs 2006b. Casey Barrs at the Cuny Center has over the course of many years developed a complete manual for Locally Led Mobile Aid (LLAMA). The manual includes over 1,600 citations from diverse studies on humanitarian aid, civilian protection, people-centered early warning and nonviolent action. For more information, please email Casey at: [cbarrs@mt.gov](mailto:cbarrs@mt.gov)

<sup>6</sup> Ogata, Sadako and Amartya Sen, Co-Chairs, *Human Security Now*, May 2003.

early warning and response initiatives can draw on. To be sure, “no sophisticated warning systems were available, so people had to develop their own skills in detecting and identifying aircraft.”<sup>7</sup>

Concealment, for example, was widely practiced. People hid during the day and only moved at night, often for weeks at a time. Peasants wore dark clothing to avoid detection and grew crops not easily noticeable from the air because of their colors. They also grew crops next to larger plants for cover. Leafy foliage and trees were grown next to houses to camouflage them, while houses that were partly destroyed were not rebuilt to give the impression that they were not inhabited. Natural features such as ravines were also used as shelter. When reconnaissance military aircraft were spotted, local communities would set off firecrackers to warn others since these planes often preceded fighter jets. Any open fires were quickly put out and underground ovens with long tunnels were used to absorb the smoke. The communities had also built extensive tunnel systems in order to get out of harm’s way undetected. They even carried out regular shelter drills as part of preparedness and contingency planning.

Evasive action was another tactic. For example, the communities used evasive movements called *guindas* to outflank military sweeps. Thousands of villagers were often massacred in such sweeps. More often, however, villagers were forewarned and managed to flee in *guindas*, which were short, rapid evacuations into the mountains. As the war progressed, larger-scale evacuations replaced short-term *guindas*. Indeed, when facing ground invasion, villages would activate alerts and try to evacuate into the countryside or neighboring Honduras, returning only when the threat had passed. Further historical research is needed to outline how exactly they anticipated ground invasions and organized for it. For example, how much time did they have to get out of the area? How far and into what terrain did they flee; did they use the same hiding places that they used for shelter from air attack?

Sounding public alerts was a related tactic, in that it promoted national and international awareness of the plight of local people. Methods used included “broadcasting reports of deaths or injuries of civilians due to air attack. Such human rights appeals were highly effective, and would be even more so in the context of a purely nonviolent resistance.”<sup>8</sup>

The case of El Salvador is by no means unique. Indeed, many of the tactics employed in El Salvador had historical precedent and similar tactics have since been used in many cases since. In Timor-Leste during the 1990s, for example, villagers hid in the forests, with each family hiding by itself in order to minimize detection. Around this same time period, communities in Burma used a rotating network of villagers to keep watch. Radios were also used to prepare villagers for evacuation ahead of time. Also in the 1990s, in Northern Uganda, threatened villagers would climb up mountains each night and sleep under animal hides tanned to look like rocks. They also dug underground rooms to hide supplies near their encampment.

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<sup>7</sup> Meyers, Barton (1994). “Defense Against Aerial Attacks in El Salvador,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 22 (Winter): 327-342.

<sup>8</sup> Martin, Brian (2001). *Technology for Nonviolent Struggle* (London: War Resisters’ International).

These examples reflect only a few of the varied tactics that local communities have employed to survive attack. They emphasize the pivotal role that preparedness and contingency planning can play in early warning and tactical response, especially when these plans and the actions that flow from them are carried out routinely, with marked group discipline.<sup>9</sup> Not enough research has been done to provide information on the cumulative impacts of these tactics (overall number of lives saved or livelihoods preserved) nor is enough yet known to be able to construct a useful cost-benefit analysis (for the number of times these tactics have worked, how many times have they not, what have been the negative consequences of deploying these tactics, how would one define success?). That being said, the field of nonviolent action does document some of these factors in order to better train pro-democratic resistance groups around the world.<sup>10</sup> In any case, while significant issues remain, there are a growing number of anecdotal reports in the literature to suggest that this general field of community-based early warning and response holds tremendous promise.

Other objections raised to this topic often come from some scholars and practitioners whose focus is less on saving lives in the immediate instance of crisis than on longer-term conflict mitigation and prevention.<sup>11</sup> Recent empirical assessments on nonviolent movements demonstrate, however, that tactical approaches to evasion and resistance have in certain instances been more successful and contributed to sustainable transitions to democracy.<sup>12</sup> The most recent statistical analyses reveal that major nonviolent campaigns have achieved success 55% of the time while only 28.4% of violent resistance actions have succeeded.<sup>13</sup> Case studies suggest that nonviolent resistance is more likely to win legitimacy and support, both domestically and abroad—a factor that facilitates the sustainability of democratic transitions. Furthermore, conventional state-centric approaches to conflict early warning have a dismal track record, so a search for other means is certainly warranted. Others argue in a similar vein that emphasizing preparedness will shift the focus away from conflict prevention towards more reactive measures,<sup>14</sup> but it is worth pointing out that the current state-centric humanitarian system is in itself usually reactive rather than proactive, let alone preventive.

Other scholars and practitioners point to the fundamental difference between natural disasters and conflicts—the latter being an expression of the political animus, the hostile

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<sup>9</sup> Barrs, Casey (2006). “Conflict Early Warning: Early Warning for Who?” *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, February.

<sup>10</sup> Conversation with Dr. Maria Stephan, International Center for Nonviolent Action (ICNC), March 2008.

<sup>11</sup> USIP Panel on “Community-Centered Conflict Prevention and Preparedness: New Paradigm?” May 21, 2008. Available online at: [http://www.usip.org/events/2008/0521\\_conflict\\_prevention.html](http://www.usip.org/events/2008/0521_conflict_prevention.html)

<sup>12</sup> Chenoweth, Erica and Maria Stephan (2008). “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict,” *International Security* (forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> Chenoweth, Erica and Maria StpehanStephan (2008)., “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict,” *International Security* (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> USIP Panel on “Community-Centered Conflict Prevention and Preparedness: New Paradigm?” May 21, 2008. Available online at: [http://www.usip.org/events/2008/0521\\_conflict\\_prevention.html](http://www.usip.org/events/2008/0521_conflict_prevention.html)

intelligence that will second-guess survival strategies of communities. Some therefore argue that little cross-fertilization is possible, or indeed advisable, between the fields of disaster management and conflict prevention. However, natural disasters and violent conflicts can both be highly politicized, as evidenced by the recent cyclone in Burma. Furthermore, as contemporary disaster research suggests, “There is no such thing as a natural disaster. In every phase and aspect of a disaster—causes, vulnerability, preparedness, results and response, and reconstruction—the contours of disaster and the difference between who lives and who dies is to a greater or lesser extent a social calculus.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, there are important functional parallels in disaster and conflict early warning vis-à-vis risk assessments, monitoring and warning, dissemination and communication, response capacity and impact evaluation. These analogous functions have real operational consequences for implementing organizations and local communities.

Our interest here is to explore the potential of community-based approaches when political barriers such as sovereignty prevent operational responses in disaster and conflict environments. At the same time, we are also interested in community-based approaches that empower local communities to evade and or manage violent conflicts. The four case studies that follow on Kyrgyzstan, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and Guinea-Bissau begin to operationalize and/or address the concept of community-based *conflict* early warning and response in concrete terms.

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<sup>15</sup> Kelman, Ilan (2007). “Addressing the Root Causes of Large-Scale Disasters,” in M. Gad-el-Hak (ed.), *Large-Scale Disasters: Prediction, Control and Mitigation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

## Kyrgyzstan Project

Managed by the Foundation for International Tolerance (FTI), “The Early Warning for Violence Prevention Project” takes a particularly novel approach to conflict early warning and response.<sup>16</sup> First, the project prioritized public operational response from the outset. Second, the initiative was specifically community-based and participatory. Third, the FTI prioritized real-time community-led responses by offering mediation trainings and round tables. In addition, an emergency fund was established to provide local organizations with small grants for rapid interventions.

The FTI project was initially funded by the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) and focused specifically on election-related violence. The analysis of the election incidents and the associated formulations of recommendations for response were communicated publicly via a weekly bulletin board as well as regular briefings. The experience gained in monitoring, analyzing and responding to incidents gave FTI a solid base upon which to build a community-centered conflict early warning and response project. The Foundation drew on the lessons learned during the election monitoring campaign and employed some of the same successful strategies such using regional monitors, weekly bulletins and an emergency fund.

The conflict early warning and response project now employs 31 regional monitors across the country to continually document and analyze conflicts with violence potential. The early warning team also includes two dedicated analysts who are responsible for compiling and analyzing the information used in the weekly bulletin. The bulletin provides an overview of conflict events with in-depth analysis of certain conflicts, which in FTI’s opinion run the risk of escalating into more widespread violence. The weekly bulletin is disseminated both electronically and in hardcopy to about 2000 recipients inside and outside the country in three languages (Kyrgyz, Russian, English). According to FTI, the project’s “weekly bulletin is by far the most demanded written product of the country’s NGO sector.”<sup>17</sup>

The project places equal emphasis on response. Unlike conventional conflict early warning systems, FTI manages an emergency fund and offers regular mediation trainings to local civil society group. These local organizations are invited to apply for small grants to carry out urgent conflict intervention strategies based on their own analysis. Regular mediation trainings and round tables are also organized for both local individuals and groups to build on their existing capacities. These also include problem-solving workshops. In carrying out these activities on a regular basis, FTI fosters a social network of skilled interveners. In addition, imparting communities with conflict management skills, i.e., empowering local

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<sup>16</sup> The overview of the Kyrgyzstan project is based on a conference call with Kristel Maasen who worked with FTI, and on her 2007 report for the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), as referenced below.

<sup>17</sup> Maasen, Kristel (2007). “Early Warning and Response Workshop,” Report to the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, August 2007, Ghana. All future citations vis-à-vis the Kyrgyzstan project stem from this report.

stakeholders directly, serves to bridge the warning-response gap by minimizing the need for external intervention. In other words, FTI recommends that warning and response not be divided but carried out as one continuum:

“... whenever a problem is picked up for an analysis the work should not end at publishing a certain report but be carried out and lobbied. It does not work when we stop ourselves and do not acknowledge the responsibility for our prognosis and recommendations. In fact, even our bulletin is a tool of an Early Response by changing the behavior of certain actors and influencing the decisions being made. But this is only one of many other possible tools, which we have to develop and exploit in order to raise our efficiency.”

To this end, the initiative provides support to potential interveners from civil society, government structures, and law enforcement agencies willing to contribute to nonviolent intervention. Indeed, FTI has created a National Network of Interveners with Regional Coordination Councils (RCCs) and trained more than 50 potential interveners from law-enforcement, public bodies, civil society and NGOs across the country. A number of these interveners are said to have “implemented successful interventions into potential conflicts thus diminishing their violence potential.”

The project is not without its challenges, however. FTI has faced difficulties when seeking to build effective ties with state level institutions. This is in large part due to existing prejudice toward civil society organizations. NGOs are generally not taken seriously at high political levels. FTI is therefore planning to launch an Institute for Political Mediation, a first in the Kyrgyz Republic. The professionalization of mediation training for state officials is expected to increase FTI’s standing and credibility vis-à-vis the government. By organizing trainings for state officials, FTI will develop a network of respected individuals with improved skills in conflict management and mediation. The Institute is thus expected to enable FTI in more effectively addressing political deadlocks in the future.

In terms of next steps, FTI plans to widen the scope of activities towards effecting decision-making at a legislative level. In particular, FTI is “currently developing a project proposal on assisting a number of Parliamentary Committees in assessing the potential risks of violent conflict of draft-laws on the early stages.”



## Timor-Leste Project

The first phase of the early warning initiative in Timor-Leste was also funded by IFES and initially focused on election-related violence by drawing on the same methodology as the one employed in Kyrgyzstan. IFES's implementing partner was Belun, Timor-Leste's only national NGO, established in 2004 in partnership with Columbia University's Center for International Conflict Resolution (CICR).

This initiative is particularly noteworthy for several reasons. First, the project began in February 2008. This means that lessons learned from Kyrgyzstan and the important findings drawn from HHI's Humanity United research have both been directly integrated into the project design from the outset. Second, the project takes a two-pronged approach by developing parallel yet integrated early warning/response strategies and tactics for state-level institutions and local communities respectively. Third, Belun already has core competency in conflict management training with a large number of local civil society organizations in the country. Fourth, given that this is the second early warning project initially funded by IFES, the latter has approached HHI for recommendations on how their other election monitoring programs across the globe can both lead to future community-based conflict early warning/response projects and learn from existing field-based conflict early warning methodologies to improve their own monitoring efforts. Lastly, the project was in part made possible by Humanity United's Learning Group since CICR invited HHI to engage in the first phase of the initiative following HHI's January 2008 presentation to the Learning Group on alternative approaches to early warning and response.

Thanks to IFES, Belun gained substantial experience in monitoring and documenting violent events using incident and situation reporting. As in Kyrgyzstan, the transition between the election monitoring and conflict early warning projects proved particularly fruitful since much of the groundwork had already been laid prior to the first phase of the early warning project. IFES is therefore seeking funding to initiate similar early warning projects as follow-ups to their election violence programs around the world.

Belun completed the first phase of the project in March 2008 in collaboration with CICR and HHI. This phase included the development of an operational framework for the early warning system along with communication protocols and the selection of context specific indicators. The latter was based on a countrywide local conflict assessment initiative that yielded over 50 community-based conflict assessment reports with important findings vis-à-vis conflict early warning indicators and existing local capacities for early response. The initial phase also included a full proposal and detailed implementation plan with an action-oriented timeline and associated budget.

The early warning project in Timor-Leste is particularly innovative since, unlike in Kyrgyzstan, the project takes a two-pronged approach by working both "top-down" and "bottom-up" from the outset. Indeed, the project is designed to contribute to national stability and promote overall human security by increasing early responses to conflict and preventing the escalation of violence at the national and community level. To this end, the initiative is expected to strengthen state *and* civil society preparedness for conflict and will advance early responses that serve to prevent the escalation of violence and minimize its impact across communities.

At the national level, Belun will provide targeted policy recommendations and implementation support to specific state institutions and relevant international actors aimed at reducing the potential of violent conflict. Policy support will be based on regular field reports from monitors positioned throughout the thirteen districts. These reports will be analyzed by Belun and CICR, and will form the basis for informed and targeted early response recommendations to state institutions. It is anticipated that an outcome of these efforts will be the establishment of a national commission involving a range of state and non-state stakeholders. The reports will further highlight the relationship between conflicts experienced in the country as linked to development needs across sectors.

Field monitors will connect with local authorities and civil society actors with a shared interest in conflict preparedness and response through the establishment of sub-district Conflict Prevention and Response Networks. These networks will bolster local responses to conflict and strengthen linkages between relevant state and non-state actors to maximize cooperation in addressing conflict and the associated development concerns where these contribute to tension. Belun will encourage each network to determine their own goals as a group and to create a regular meeting schedule. After meeting regularly for eight months, networks with a sound organizational structure in place will be eligible to receive funding from the project's Conflict Prevention and Response Fund, pending their development of a conflict response strategy for their respective sub-district or community. Over time, these networks will develop increased capacity to assist community members as they seek to address tensions without violence, such as those related to land and property, and stimulate change at the broader community level, providing a critical contribution to security and peaceful development locally.

In addition, Belun will implement a phased capacity-strengthening program with monitors to improve their conflict sensitivity, preparedness and resolution skills. Specifically, activities will focus on six core conflict resolution competencies developed throughout the implementation of the project.<sup>18</sup> Beginning with self-awareness to enable monitors to understand their own role in conflict situations, other skills that will be developed include: communication skills, perspective taking, conflict analysis, creating effective processes and third side roles.<sup>19</sup> Engaging women and men equally in the capacity strengthening activities will support closer examination of the gender dynamics of conflict and expand violence prevention to include the household level, improving the overall impact of conflict prevention efforts at the community level. Through strengthening monitors' skills in the six core areas over time, Belun will increase constructive responses to conflict and encourage alternative mechanisms to address tensions identified within the community.

To achieve the above objectives, the project has been designed following a comprehensive review of international best practices in early warning and response. Advancing beyond existing models to date, Belun's project is distinct because it incorporates a community

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<sup>18</sup> The Core Competencies approach was developed by Consensus and has been modified by Belun, in collaboration with Consensus (2007).

<sup>19</sup> The Third Side, developed by William Ury (1999) explores the roles third parties contribute to conflict prevention, resolution, and containment.

perspective on early warning and emphasizes both preparation and response. Unlike conventional conflict early warning systems, Belun has recognized that field reporting and quantitative analysis of conflict trends is more geared towards state level officials and decision-making at the policy level than local communities and community-based organizations.

## Afghanistan Project

Like the initiative in Timor-Leste, the conflict early warning project in the South of Afghanistan is in the early stages of design and development. The organization operationalizing the early warning system is the Tribal Liaison Office (TLO), a local NGO.<sup>20</sup> The initiative focuses specifically on human security, as opposed to the security of the Afghan state. To this end, the TLO seeks a “lower-level” entry-point, i.e., the low-intensity conflicts that mire Southern Afghanistan. “While these conflicts may be at the micro-level, they nevertheless contribute to insecurity in the South of Afghanistan, and furthermore, the losers of such conflicts are often easy recruits for the insurgency.”<sup>21</sup>

In laying the groundwork for this initiative, the project has drawn on existing lessons learned and best practices in the field. These in turn have been applied to the context of Afghanistan, which has a “rich set of community based governance mechanisms (mainly *shuras* and *jirgas*) tasked with governing traditional communities. Most decision-making bodies gain in influence if they have the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully, thus they also would have an interest in being included into an early warning system, especially if it helps them to live more peacefully.”

The methodology considered for the community-based early warning system in Southern Afghanistan does not rule out quantitative indicator monitoring even though this approach has been the subject of much criticism, especially among practitioners. A simple approach to quantitative monitoring may be of value in Afghanistan since the “level and magnitude of community conflicts is not known...” which means this data-driven approach would help to make these conflicts visible by drawing attention to the need for conflict resolution and management. At the same time, since there are generally a number of different actors linked to community conflicts, the project would have to “integrate other kinds of qualitative assessments [...] such as actor profiling and context-specific analysis.” To this end, the project advocates for a mixed method approach.

The early warning system is also being designed with operational response squarely in mind. While warning and response has traditionally been divided in past projects, “it may make sense for community- (or citizen)-based early warning at the grass-roots level to integrate the two. After all, it is the affected communities that have to live through conflict themselves, and often lack the time to wait for outsiders to ‘come to their rescue.’ This would also enable communities to form a ‘culture of prevention’ for themselves.”

For response to be effective, the capacities of those who respond need to be addressed from the outset. If the early warning system in Southern Afghanistan focuses strongly on

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<sup>20</sup> This project is being lead by Susanne Schmeidl. The overview is based on Schmeidl’s recent presentation at the International Studies Association (ISA) Convention in San Francisco, March 2008. See full reference below. All future citations stem from this source.

<sup>21</sup> Schmeidl, Susanne (2008). “Early Warning at the Grassroots Level,” Paper presented at ISA 2008 panel (organized by Lawrence Woocher at USIP), San Francisco, California, March 2008. All future citations on this project stem from the ISA paper.

“communities and civil society actors to respond, then a facilitative approach between conflict parties should be considered.” Since the TLO has worked on conflict resolution issues in the past, the Office may be best placed to “assess which of its past activities can be linked to such a new system.” These activities would likely include interactive peace dialogues, problem-solving/resolution (*jirgas*), advocacy and lobbying for action in specific regions, capacity building in nonviolent conflict resolution mechanisms, mediation and negotiation, etc.

The initial deliberations on the design of the early warning project suggest “that community (or citizen)-based early warning may be the way forward for early warning systems in conflict zones. The ideal would be to initiate a south-south exchange on what has worked and what has not, and why. This can only help to make early warning systems stronger and more effective.” The project also recognizes that “early warning has to be developed in a participatory fashion” for all this to work. In other words, “one should not shy the time needed up front when developing a functioning early warning system, if the system is to be embraced and trusted among the various stakeholders involved.”

In conclusion, any early warning system should be a “flexible and learning system, so it can adapt to changing contexts and user needs, else it may not prove to be sustainable in the long-term.”

## Guinea Bissau Project

The International Peace and Prosperity Project (IPPP) in Guinea Bissau was originally developed as a pilot to test the viability and usefulness of an innovative approach to the prevention of violent conflict developed by a small group of international experts known as the Reducing Political Violence Action Group (RPVAG).<sup>22</sup> This project is different from the previous three described above in that the language used to describe the initiative is “violence prevention” as opposed to conflict early warning and response. However, the project’s innovative, operational and proactive approach to conflict prevention provides valuable insights vis-à-vis alternative paths to early warning and response. Like the previous projects, this initiative is not a state-centric.

The Action Group developed a “Basic Concept for Violence Prevention” which recommended that projects aim to reduce major political violence by:

- Reviewing the best available research on conflict and its sources and stages, with particular emphasis on interventions and what is needed to make them effective;
- Establishing a core group of internal and external actors to work together closely on the project;
- Carrying out - in this core group - a joint analysis of the situation, to determine the greatest threats to security;
- Agreeing on measures to be undertaken, such as conciliation efforts at various political and other levels;
- Considering how such measures might help to address immediate violence and conflict issues as well as the underlying sources of discord that might be addressed over time;
- Galvanizing a coalition of actors and supporting groups who could be encouraged to direct parts of their own activities in the country towards addressing the identified threats;
- Using mainly non-official channels for this work, but with selective involvement of governmental as well as non-governmental actors; and encouraging all these actors to develop policies, incentives and disincentives that will be supportive of stability and peace; and
- Stimulating appropriate and complementary actions aimed at addressing the kind of escalating tensions that can very often lead towards serious violence.

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<sup>22</sup> The overview of the IPPP project is based on conversations with the group’s team: Ben Hoffman, Michael Lund and Milt Lauenstein. The overview also draws on the team’s latest report (not yet published). The group has given HHI permission to relay relevant information from the report in this deliverable.

The group commissioned the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University in Ottawa to select an appropriate country in which to run a demonstration project of the above concept. The case study selection began with a list of thirty countries that exhibited many of the factors that indicate a likelihood of serious violent conflict within one to three years. The RPVAG had also decided to limit the list of candidate countries to those who were not already receiving significant outside help but might likely do so in the future if its situation “unraveled” for various geo-political or economic reasons. Ultimately the group chose Guinea Bissau because there was not a lot of outside effort at the time and there were good local forces in place, particularly in civil society.

The role and purpose of the IPPP as it began its activities at the field level in Guinea Bissau was to act as:

- A catalyst dedicated to prevention with a multi-service, multi-sectoral approach;
- An elicitor of solutions;
- A supporter of local leadership; and
- A facilitator of collaboration.

The IPPP subsequently carried out a number of field missions to Guinea Bissau during which the group engaged directly with civil society actors, the army and other government institutions. The IPPP played a pivotal role in making sure the ensuing elections did not turn violent. Since then, the group has continued to play a facilitative role in attracting additional resources to Guinea Bissau. A defense strategy paper developed by the IPPP subsequently opened the door for substantial support to be released through the UN for military reform. The main political crises having passed, the IPPP has increased its activities in highlighting the need for economic development and in supporting small projects where appropriate.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this group is the proactive attitude taken on by a small number of individuals to make a visible difference in a country on the brink of potential violence. This non-state centric approach, along with the best practices gained over the past four years, can certainly be replicated in different countries experiencing a precarious conflict situation.

## **Recommendations**

HHI recommends that Humanity United support the convening of a small group of individuals engaged in the four community-based conflict early warning and conflict prevention projects described above. This would serve to promote a south-south exchange on what has, and has not, worked, and why. HHI further recommends that Humanity United consider setting up a Shared Early Warning Learning Group on Community-Based Approaches to facilitate the ongoing exchange of lessons learned and best practices between these projects.

HHI also recommends that the Timor-Leste Project be considered for funding based on the four following reasons. First, the project has the potential to serve as an excellent demonstration of the impact that an alternative approach to conflict early warning can achieve. Second, the context and current political environment in Timor-Leste means that now is an ideal time to operationalize the second phase of the community-based project. Third, the project also plans to use information communication technologies (ICTs) in innovative ways to demonstrate the added value of linking local conflict early warning initiatives with distributed, decentralized and mobile technologies, such as mobile phones and hand-held radios. The role of ICT in early warning and response has been an expressed interest of Humanity United's. And fourth, HHI has already collaborated with CICR and Belun in designing the project's novel approach. Moving to the next phase would enable further collaboration between Belun, CICR and HHI, and by extension, Humanity United's Shared Learning Group on Early Warning.