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Conflict early warning systems: its challenges and the continental early warning system

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Abstract

The international community's security dynamics have undergone significant changes since the 1990s. Famine, economic insecurity, and ethnic and religious animosities have greatly contributed to the emergence of conflicts globally. Preventive approaches, tools and structures in dealing with emerging conflicts rapidly became a global trend. Early warning systems (EWS) were such preventive tools that bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the three regional economic communities (RECs) in Southern and West Africa and the Horn of Africa adopted to prevent conflicts on the African continent.

EWS are essential in anticipating and preventing emerging conflict/s and serve as a basis for decision making and early action and response. Despite the existence of EWS in the AU and three of its RECs, the levels of insecurity on the continent continue to raise questions as to whether the EWS have achieved their mandate.

With reference to the UN's recommended five elements of an effective EWS, the study aims to identify whether the AU's continental early warning system (CEWS) and its three RECs have included the UN's five key recommended elements in modelling their EWS.

The study reveals that even though the EWS have been implemented at regional and sub-regional levels to prevent the emergence of conflicts, they have not been sustainably effective in doing so. This is because these EWS have not included some of the key recommended elements that the UN has endorsed. The study also highlights that EWS do not operate in a vacuum, there are various factors such as lack of resources, communication, civil society participation and politics that can constrain its purpose.