Early Warning and Early Response Best Practices

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Advancing Tolerance in the Middle East & North Africa Program

USAID/ Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM)

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About the Authors

The research team was composed of both international, Libyan and Yemeni researchers and support staff. The outcomes of the research are thanks to their tireless efforts. In addition, Search would like to thank all Early Warning and Early response experts and practitioners who were consulted and interviewed for their valuable contributions.

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Acronyms

ABA-ROLI	American Bar Association — Rule of Law Initiative
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
CPRN	Conflict Prevention Response Network
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FEWER	Forum on Early Warning and Early Response
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HRSM	Human Rights Support Mechanism
ICT	Information Communication Technology
KII	Key Informant Interview
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PNTL	National Police of Timor-Leste
REM	Religious and Ethnic Minority
UNDDR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

Within the framework of a Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM) project on atrocity prevention against religious and ethnic minority (REM) groups in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Search for Common Ground (Search) has conducted research on Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) systems. In order to establish best practices in designing and implementing EWER systems, Search consulted secondary sources, and organized 22 key informant interviews (KIIs) and six focus group discussions (FGDs) with international practitioners and local stakeholders in Yemen and Libya.

KEY FINDINGS

- Community-led and community-owned EWER systems are most effective in producing sustainable impact

- Communities' capacities and resources to respond to particular identified threats should be an important factor in determining systems' location and objectives

- Accessibility and favorable social and political dynamics are critical in determining systems' success in any particular community

- Systems obtain more buy-in and are more sustainable if they operate through pre-existing security and social structures, as opposed to parallel institutions

- Potential spoilers in the community who may aim to undermine the system must be anticipated and considered

- EWER system warnings must take care to avoid creating panic, leading to pre-emptive attacks, or causing a "crying wolf" syndrome

- Identifying local "champions" to act as focal points is critical to establish open and transparent two-way communication between any external organization and local management teams

- The system should be as inexpensive as possible to maintain and members should participate on a voluntary basis to promote sustainability and community-ownership

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Determine simple, specific, and flexible objectives

- Select a location based on need and potential for impact

- Design a whole-of-society system that depends on a coalition of local supporters

- Organize inclusive evaluative committees with local communities to better understand local contexts and advocate for local ownership

- Operate within local social norms and gender dynamics, and use contextually-relevant tools

- Conduct regular evaluations to identify lessons learned and improve the system over time

- Encourage women's participation in all phases of the system, and particularly in positions of leadership

1. Introduction

Through the Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM) led by Freedom House, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is supporting Search for Common Ground (Search), the American Bar Association-Rule of Law Initiative (ABA-ROLI) and Pact to implement a two-year project from October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2021 with the overall goal of identifying atrocity risks and resilience mechanisms to support religious and ethnic minority (REM) populations in Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen. The goal will be achieved through the following three specific objectives: 1) Conduct an atrocity risk assessment and identify early warning and other prevention and response mechanisms for at-risk REM populations; 2) Pilot an Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) system based on recommendations for at-risk REM populations; and 3) Support additional atrocity prevention, response, and recovery efforts for REM populations.

As part of specific objective 2, the HRSM team will design and pilot for six months an EWER system in Libya and/or Yemen. Broadly speaking, EWER systems are mechanisms used to anticipate catastrophic events - including natural disasters, epidemics, famines, and conflicts - in order to preemptively respond to prevent or minimize the impact of such disasters. In order to design an effective and relevant EWER system, Search has conducted research into best practices and lessons learned from previous such initiatives, compiling a brief literature review and holding consultations with international experts and local stakeholders. This research sought to answer the following broad set of questions:

- What existing successful EWER systems or models are in place inside and outside the region? What makes them successful in preventing the escalation of violence, as well as preventing atrocities turning into large-scale conflict?

- What types of stakeholders are most relevant to engage in an EWER system? What are the types of tension that EWER systems have been most successful at deescalating?

- What is the role of collecting incident data or trends analysis in the success of EWER systems?

- How can EWER systems be effectively initiated in a context where the response to triggers faces structural or political challenges? Where has technology contributed to success?

- What are target communities' existing capacities to identify and analyze early warning signs of violence and develop a strategy for improving community collaboration?

- What is the right balance between a 'many' or 'few' approach in terms of participation in EWER systems (e.g. observers in every community, or rather key thought partners who are collecting data from various sources before it is then shared and analyzed)?

The literature review focused on the history, composition, and scope of EWER systems around the world. This initial research allowed the team to determine which areas of inquiry required further exploration through primary research, as well as to identify a first sample of EWER academics and practitioners to interview, who in turn recommended others to speak to on the subject. Indeed, the HRSM team consulted a range of experts including practitioners experienced in implementing EWER systems in different countries, and academics who have specifically studied EWER systems or atrocity prevention in general (see Annex II for a list of interviewees). During these discussions, experts shared their knowledge on what makes a EWER successful, what pitfalls to avoid, how sustainability can be ensured, and how gender inclusiveness can be fostered (see Annex III for the discussion guide that was used during these interviews). The research team conducted 12 key informant interviews (KIIs) and four focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 25 different international experts.

In addition, Search organized "national dialogues" with local stakeholders in selected communities in both Libya and Yemen in order to better understand the local context, and how guidelines and recommendations garnered from international experts could best be applied in a sensitive and sustainable manner. The research team

carried out two FGDs in Yemen - one in Aden and one in al-Turbah - as well as 20 KIIs and two FGDs in Tarhuna, Libya (see Annex IV for the discussion guide that was used during these interviews).

This report synthesizes the information gathered from the literature review and the discussions with EWER experts and local stakeholders in Libya and Yemen, providing an overview of best practices, guidance for the implementation of an EWER system, and recommendations to take into account for the design of the HRSM pilot EWER system.

2. Background on Early Warning and Early Response Systems

According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), an EWER system is an "integrated system of hazard monitoring, forecasting and prediction, disaster risk assessment, communication and preparedness activities, systems and processes that enables individuals, communities, governments, businesses and others to take timely action to reduce disaster risks in advance of hazardous events."[1] As explained by David Nyheim, a leading expert on EWER systems who helped establish the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), these systems essentially serve to predict conflict trends, notify local communities of possible risks, and formulate and implement responses to such risks. A basic EWER system can therefore be broken down into five main phases: 1) data collection on risk indicators, 2) data analysis to determine the level of threat of violence or disaster, 3) warning dissemination to alert the population of the threat, 4) response design and implementation to ensure the population's protection, and 5) evaluation of the system's effectiveness in view of potential improvements to be made. Best practices for each of these components of the EWER process will be explored later in the report.

Three generations of EWER systems have been developed over time and all three generations are still currently in use today. According to Kumar Rupesinghe, a leading expert and advocate of EWER systems, in first generation systems the collection, monitoring and analysis of conflict data and trends is conducted by outside experts located far from the area of concern.[2] These systems often make use of open sources such as newspapers, and often do not involve local stakeholders, so that these systems are top-down in nature.[3] Responses to any detected threats are also generally

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1 "Early Warning System," UNDRR. Accessed November 24, 2020. https://www.undrr.org/terminology/early-warning-system.

2 Anna, Mateeva, "Early Warning and Early Response: Conceptual and Empirical Dilemmas," European centre for conflict prevention, Global partnership for the prevention of armed conflict, September 2006. https://gppac.net/files/2018-12/Early%20Warning%20and%20Early%20Response.pdf.

3 Carmen Lorena, Ortiz, "Practical Guide: Early Warning and Response Systems Design for Social Conflicts," United Nations Development Programme; Organization of American States, n.d. https://www.oas.org/es/sap/pubs/GuiaAlerta_e.pdf.

carried out by external actors, in the form of military or diplomatic intervention.[4]

In second generation EWER systems, data collection is conducted in conflict zones themselves and carried out by local actors - such as field monitors who record incidents.[5] These systems make use of both quantitative and qualitative data, although greater focus is placed on quantitative data. Once data is collected, it is, like in first generation systems, analyzed by external actors outside of the conflict zone, who also generally design responses to any impending violence without significant input from the local community.[6] Both first and second generation EWER systems have been criticized for separating the processes of detecting and warning about impending violence or disaster on the one hand, and designing and implementing appropriate responses on the other. Because the local community is not involved in the system to a high degree, responses can be either ill-conceived or even neglected.

Finally, third generation EWER systems are implemented at the local level.[7] The concerned community is responsible for identifying signs of probable violence or disaster using both quantitative and qualitative data, they participate actively in the analysis of the collected data, and they are charged with devising responses that are context-appropriate. In addition, in these systems, the two processes of disaster warning and disaster response are more closely linked together as a simultaneous process, ensuring that the ultimate objectives of the system to enhance the protection of the community are met.[8] According to Steven Leach, an EWER system practitioner, third generation EWER systems have been determined by several studies to be the most effective because they 1) incorporate the local community, and 2) draw a strong link between warning and response.[9] For the purpose of the HRSM project, the implementing team, in this case Search and ABA, will design and set up a pilot EWER system that closely emulates best practices found in third generation systems.

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4 Steven, Leach, "Preventing Violence: Community-Based Approaches to Early Warning and Early Response," Center for Security Studies (CSS), 2016. https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/334d021b-5e7e-4ce0-999b-354983e015d5.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Steven, Leach. Preventing Violence: Community-based Approaches to Early Warning and Early Response https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/334d021b-5e7e-4ce0-999b-354983e015d5.

9 Ibid.

Belun, Timor–Leste

The Belun organization is a non-profit organization in Timor-Leste founded in June 2004 with the purpose of preventing conflict and improving community support and outreach. In 2008, they implemented a third generation EWER system which is considered a "vector of stability" in Timor-Leste because it effectively identifies and addresses some of the main drivers of conflict in the area.[10]
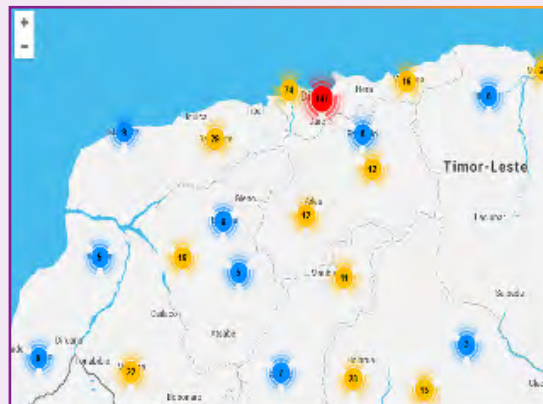
Belun's EWER system is run by a management team of 19 members, six of whom work at Belun's head office and the remainder who work as district coordinators.[11] It makes use of a large volunteer monitoring network in which about 10 enumerators in each of 43 administrative posts (sub-districts) collect data on violent incidents and situational changes, that are then sent to Belun's headquarters for analysis.[12] Data is collected using an online "crowdmapping" tool that allows the team to map out the date, location, and type of threat.[13] Communication on risks is then disseminated in four ways:[14]

1. **EWER Community Alerts:** for immediate, serious concerns identified by the system

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10 Shaw, F. (n.d.). Early Warning, Early Response in Timor-Leste. Peace Insight. https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/articles/early-warning-early-response-in-timor-leste/?location=&theme=.

11 Leach, Steven. "Preventing Violence: Community-Based Approaches to Early Warning and Early Response." Center for Security Studies (CSS), 2016. https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/334d021b-5e7e-4ce0-999b-354983e015d5.

12 Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System. Belun- Empowering Communities Together. (n.d.). https://www.belun.tl/en/early-warning-and-early-response-ewer/.

13 Ibid.

14 Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System. Belun- Empowering Communities Together

2. **Monthly Situation Reviews:** monthly report that summarizes important incidents and trends

3. **Conflict Potential Analysis Reports:** reports compiled every four months to a year on long-term trends and shifts in the security situation to identify potential structural changes

4. **Research Reports/Policy Briefs:** Present findings on a specific theme or risk for a more in-depth understanding of how such a risk might have an impact on the security situation in the future

Regardless of the risk identified and which of the four dissemination methods is used, the EWER team includes recommendations for relevant stakeholders on best responses. Indeed, it is important to note that Belun's EWER system creates a vital communication platform between local communities, governmental authorities, security actors, and other important local stakeholders. Communication is facilitated between these actors by Conflict Prevention and Response Networks (CPRNs) that have been established in each administrative post. The CPRN includes representatives from CSOs, youth groups, national police, religious and tribal leaders, political parties, and local government.[15] Any interested community member is also welcome to join.

According to the Belun team, these structures allow the EWER system to improve local communities' capacities to prevent conflict and to build on existing security mechanisms.[16] The CPRN is able to quickly act on warnings and facilitate efficient responses because security actors and authorities are directly involved. In addition, the management committee has trained personnel to intervene to directly de-escalate specific tensions. For instance, Belun's Land Dispute Mediation and Resolution team is charged with intervening when land conflicts risk causing violence.[17] Finally, the CPRN also attempts to address long-term issues, meeting every few months to discuss and design peacebuilding activities and interventions with the overall goal of circumventing the root causes of violence.[18]

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15 Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System. Belun- Empowering Communities Together

16 Ibid.

17 Shaw, F. (n.d.). Early Warning, Early Response in Timor-Leste. Peace Insight. https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/articles/early-warning-early-response-in-timor-leste/?location=&theme=.

18 Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System. Belun- Empowering Communities Together

3. Designing the System

Throughout discussions with international academics and practitioners, the proper design and inception of an EWER system was highlighted as a key factor in determining its success. In particular, it is important to define clear, achievable, context-specific objectives, and select an appropriate location in which local stakeholders are capable and willing to participate in and take ownership of the system.

DETERMINING OBJECTIVES

The first step in laying down the foundations of a successful EWER system is defining its purpose and expected outcome. The setting of objectives includes considering the type of impact that is sought for, the types of violence to be curbed or prevented, the duration of time the system will be in operation, and the population to be targeted. Defining these objectives will allow the team to develop an effective implementation strategy and understand how best to secure local buy-in.

The most important objective to determine at the outset is the desired impact of the system, most notably in terms of the threats from which to protect the community. Although many practitioners focus on the quantity and quality of warnings to be produced, the true impact of a EWER system originates in the effectiveness of the response mechanisms formulated to prevent identified threats. In other words, it is not very useful to warn the population about impending violence if there is nothing they can ultimately do about it. Unfortunately, however, the most common reason EWER systems can be ineffective is that there is such a gap between early warnings and early responses, in which a greater focus is placed on the former and little planning goes into the latter. Indeed, Leach heavily stressed that the purpose of a EWER system should not be to develop a reporting and analysis system, but to design a system based

> **"Evaluate what your response mechanisms are, what they can achieve, and [then] build backwards."**
>
> **—STEVEN LEACH**

on possible action.[19] He mentioned the best way of doing this is to design a system "backwards" with the outcome in mind to avoid facing this warning-response gap.[20] As Leach explained, you should be "evaluating what your response mechanisms are, what they can achieve, and build backward."[21]

The success of these responses, in turn, depends on the resources and capacity the community has at hand to combat the types of violence it is experiencing. As experts explained, for example, the resources needed to keep people safe from air-strikes and from gender-based violence (GBV) are not the same. As a result, in order to define a system's objectives, its managers need to determine 1. The types of violence a particular community is experiencing or is vulnerable to experiencing in the future and, 2. For which of these types of violence might the community already have some resources and capacities to effectively respond, resources and capacities which the EWER system can help enhance or support. Indeed, an EWER system is more likely to be impactful and successful if it focuses on types of violence to which the community already has some ability to respond. This is the recommended process whereby the implementing team for a third generation EWER system can decide which specific threats to focus on, for which it has a higher likelihood of producing a positive impact.

Although it is important at the outset to identify which threats the community is facing in order to determine the EWER system's objectives, Dr. Anna Matveeva, an academic and practitioner specialized in conflict studies, points out that, at the same time, it is critical that the system remain flexible to shifting security contexts.[22] In other words, EWER systems should not only identify the likelihood that a specific local violent incident may occur, but the system should also help identify triggers that can lead to major social or political changes, and help the local population prepare for such shifts. Khaled Salem, a practitioner who has implemented EWER systems in the MENA region, concurred, saying that an EWER system should be limited in the sense that it targets specific types of violence, but that it should also allow for the possibility of changing contexts.[23] Matveeva shared that a EWER system she worked

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19 Leach, Steven. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 10, 2020.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 `Salem, Khaled. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 14, 2020.

on in Kyrgyzstan had identified warning signs of possible political   upheaval which had not ultimately been monitored - a few months later there was a revolution, and the community was not prepared.[24] For this reason, when determining which threats to focus on, the EWER system should consider a range of types of violence that the community is vulnerable to in the present but also possibly in the near future, as long as it can reasonably expect the community to be able to respond to those threats in an effective manner.

In addition to displaying flexibility in terms of the types of violence it can respond to, an EWER system should strive to focus on immediate threats but to also understand those structural issues which may cause those threats to emerge in the first place. While addressing the underlying causes of conflict may be beyond the scope of an EWER system, identifying them is essential for predicting future patterns of violence, and which responses may be most appropriate.[25] The risk of overlooking these structural issues is that the EWER system will be unable to anticipate violence, and will therefore become an "early reporting system," as described by an expert, in the sense that it is able to rapidly identify violence right after it happens, but not before it actually occurs. Search's team in Nigeria has experienced this limitation as they implement an EWER system in the northeastern part of the country, limiting their ability to anticipate violence early enough to protect the communities they are working in. Therefore, it is important for the system to 1. Focus on those threats which can be anticipated and 2. Identify those triggers that can lead to a particular type of violence. For instance, the EWER system can be designed to prevent direct violence against locals carried out by a terrorist group, but it can also monitor local recruitment to that organization to assess the likelihood of violence in the future - even if it will not be able to prevent that recruitment in the first place. Determining these triggers will require a sophisticated understanding of local dynamics, which can be attained through community-led evaluation sessions and significant qualitative data collection to identify the reasons that insecurity may exist in the community.

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24 Ibid.

25 Steven, Leach, "Preventing Violence: Community-Based Approaches to Early Warning and Early Response," Center for Security Studies (CSS), 2016. https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/334d021b-5e7e-4ce0-999b-354983e015d5.

While establishing a flexible EWER system that can focus on a diverse array of threats and structural issues is ideal, it is also important that its objectives are realistic, given the financial resources at its disposal as well as its expected time of operation. Wessam Keewan, a practitioner with the non-governmental organization (NGO) SIREN who has worked on implementing EWER systems in the past, stressed that these systems often fail because NGOs set out with high, complex, and unrealistic expectations, expectations which the community itself then comes to share.[26] In designing an EWER system, therefore, it is important to tailor the scope of threats to be addressed and the types of responses to be developed to what is reasonably possible to implement. It is certainly better to focus on a few threats effectively than to spread oneself too thin across an ambitious set of targets. As mentioned above, EWER systems are not designed to address long-term grievances — they are rather last gasp protection mechanisms — and objectives must reflect that reality.

> **"EWER systems can be set up to fail if they are rushed and set up at the very end of a project's timeline."**
>
> **—KHALED SALEM**

Given that the HRSM implementing team will set out to implement a six-month pilot EWER system, it must lay out objectives that fit that timeframe. Alternatively, if a timeline is to be determined based on the objectives to be met, rather than the reverse, this timetable should be practical and take into consideration the time needed to conduct outreach, test the system, and evaluate its effectiveness. Khaled Salem warned that EWER systems can be set up to fail if they are rushed and set up at the very end of a project's timeline.[27] He noted that one of the reasons an EWER system project he worked on in Libya did not succeed was the little time that was afforded to its implementation.[28] Since the efficiency of an EWER system relies on strong networks and building trust within a community, it tends to be a long and thorough process that requires extensive groundwork and time to incorporate lessons learned, especially if the system is to be sustainable.

Finally, it must be determined which populations in a given community the EWER system is designed to benefit and protect from violence. Minority groups generally

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26 Keewan, Wessam. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground,* December 10, 2020.
27 Salem, Khaled. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 14, 2020.
28 Ibid.

bear the brunt of violent conflict, and it is therefore essential to include them in any EWER system. Although the HRSM project focuses on REM groups, almost all interviewed experts agreed that designing an EWER system to benefit only a specific group of people could cause more division and exacerbate already tense relationships between minority and majority groups. Local stakeholders in Yemen shared this sentiment, mentioning that host communities often feel excluded from assistance programs that focus on internally displaced persons. This increases tensions which interviewees explained sometimes led to violence between different groups. Moreover, given the sensitive nature of the information being collected and shared in such a system - the majority population may be nervous that the system's managers are only getting one side of the story, and there is a risk of building resentment both within and between communities. In this case, the EWER system would do more harm than good, as majority populations may question why they have been excluded from the process, and may therefore act as spoilers.

Furthermore, the success of the system depends on a whole-of-society approach, in which local leaders, security personnel and the population have all bought in and are depended on to be the drivers of change in improving the community's security situation. As Leach explains, "At the end of the day, the trajectory of violence and conflict is that it expands until it encircles everyone...so [it is important to help everyone] understand that violence prevention is in their best interest."[29] As noted by Shabnam Moallem, a member of Search who previously participated in implementing an EWER system in Nigeria, "by bringing representatives from different groups together, you create a space that will help promote inclusion and underscore the importance of inclusion," which ultimately leads to the creation of a solid community response network.[30] This will therefore limit spoilers and facilitate securing community buy-in. If the majority population is excluded, on the other hand, it is unlikely that the EWER system will be successful, particularly as some may be actively benefiting from the minority population's precarious condition, or may even be perpetrators themselves. In a community where minority groups are most often on the receiving end of violence, it is therefore important to consider and communicate how the intervention

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29 Leach, Steven. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 10, 2020.

30 Search Nigeria EWER System team. Focus Group Discussion moderated by Wiam Ayachi *Search for Common Ground*. December 16, 2020

can benefit the majority population as well, so that it is also in their interest to buy into the system. Part of how this buy-in can be secured is by accompanying EWER interventions with other types of assistance that the community needs. For the HRSM project, the best practice would appear to work in a community where REM groups are present, but to aim to involve the community as a whole.

SELECTING A LOCATION

A final parameter to consider in the design of a third generation EWER system is the selection of a specific location for implementation. In fact, the selection of a location on the one hand, and the determination of EWER objectives on the other, are complementary and simultaneous processes. Experts identified several criteria that should be considered when choosing a community to operate in that, if met, will enhance the likelihood that the system brings about the desired impact, and meets its objectives. These criteria focus on communities' need for such an intervention, the feasibility of impact, and the likelihood that the system can eventually be run in a largely autonomous and sustainable manner.

To determine where there may be a need for an EWER system in a given country, the implementing team must first conduct "hotspot" mapping. According to Nagwan Al-Shawal, an academic who has overseen various EWER systems, including in Egypt and Tunisia, hotspot mapping classifies different communities as "cold spots" (fairly stable areas), "potential spots" (areas with some violence and tension), and "hot spots" (areas where there is severe violence).[31] To develop such a classification system, it is first necessary to develop those indicators with which to evaluate locations, such as the type and frequency of violence that they are experiencing. Once these indicators have been determined, the next step is to collect data in-country or to use existing databases recording violent incidents if appropriate, such as those produced by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). Mapping software, such as ArcGIS or the statistical package R, is readily available to then map and categorize these data points. For instance, Nyheim explained that his EWER system team in Ethiopia put together a geo-reference map that pulled data from the United Nations

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31 Al-Shawal, Nagwan. Interviewed by Wiam Ayachi and Edward Sloan. *Search for Common Ground*, December 28. 2020

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).[32] Nyheim noted that "you can map out the micro-conflicts and the hot spots in the country over a certain period of time…these maps were done to increase the data quality, [and] they were done in over two rounds, each of two weeks, involving four government agencies and the human rights commission of Ethiopia and UN agencies."[33] It is also important to consult with country experts who "will know where the conflict zones are and the intensity of the situation."[34] Overall, this process helps to determine the level of insecurity different communities are facing, and therefore where it would be most relevant to establish an EWER system. Al-Shawal, however, recommended that for a pilot system, it may be best to select "potential spots" for implementation in order to build the organization's credibility locally, develop its capacities and skills, and produce tangible success before potentially expanding to other, more complicated, locations.[35]

Another important consideration for selecting a location for the EWER system is the feasibility of addressing local security issues. First and foremost, the chosen communities must be consulted to determine whether they are interested or not in the establishment of a system. Without local demand for such a system, a community-led third generation EWER system will not create the enthusiasm or spur the diligence necessary for its success. A request for such assistance is more likely to come from communities facing sustained threats to their well-being - it would be hard to motivate people to participate in a system in an area where violence is uncommon. Second, the implementation team must have access to the chosen community. A best practice for ensuring this is selecting a community in which the external organization overseeing the system already has trusted contacts who can facilitate this access, and operating in areas where other NGOs are already present and working without significant restrictions or risk. These NGOs may also be able to support the implementing team with its local expertise and networks. Third, as mentioned previously, the selection of a location will be heavily dependent on the type of violence that it is experiencing, and whether the organization and the community has the experience and resources

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Experts Focus Group Discussion. Moderated by Wiam Ayachi and Edward Sloan. *Search for Common Ground*. January 5, 2020
35 Ibid.

to realistically make an impact. In addition to working in communities with strong civil society organizations, experts recommend, where possible, choosing a location that has previous EWER experience, or where it has at least some semblance of established security mechanisms that, if supported by the implementation team, can reasonably be expected to protect civilians. Indeed, it would be very difficult for an EWER system to create security structures where none exist already, or to create "better" parallel structures from scratch - this is not a realistic nor a sustainable goal. Leach mentioned, for instance, a successful EWER system in Afghanistan in which the implementing team operated through local jirgas, or "traditional assemblies of local leaders in which disputes are settled," and adapted them in several ways, including to make them more inclusive.[36] Additionally, those pre-existing security structures to be relied on by the EWER system must be seen by the local population as legitimate, objective and trustworthy, as it will be important for citizens to listen to and cooperate with these authorities.

In addition, in selecting a location for the EWER system, the implementation team should consider whether the local conditions favor the system's sustainability. Indeed, a third generation EWER system requires that the community be eventually able to manage it on its own, without significant interference from an outside organization such as Search. Firstly, Wessam Keewan advises choosing a location where locals have at least some access to basic services.[37] If locals do not have their most immediate needs met, they will be less likely to invest their time to work on an EWER system that, while it may be very relevant to them, cannot put food on the table. As mentioned earlier, Keewan also noted that, in addition to the EWER system, the implementing team could consider additional and simultaneous programming to respond to people's social services needs in the selected community, if necessary, which would also have the advantage of gaining locals' trust and motivate them to participate in the system.[38]

Secondly, as noted by Nyheim, it is important that social relations within a given community be relatively good generally-speaking, and to avoid working in a "fractured

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36 Steven, Leach. "Preventing Violence: Community-Based Approaches to Early Warning and Early Response." Center for Security Studies (CSS), 2016. https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/334d021b-5e7e-4ce0-999b-354983e015d5.

37 Keewan, Wessam. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 10, 2020.

38 Keewan, Wessam. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 10, 2020.

community." Because the system will require frequent data collection, the deployment of observers and informants, and the dissemination of messages, it is crucial that there be a baseline of trust and collaboration among the community's inhabitants. It is typically difficult for those implementing the EWER system to convince the population that the information or testimonies they share will be kept confidential, leading many to refuse to talk openly to enumerators and informants. In communities in which two or more groups are in conflict with each other, this mistrust is only enhanced and makes the sharing of information — the basis of any successful EWER system — that much harder. Of course, it cannot be expected that an EWER system should only be established in places where the conditions are ideal and everyone gets along, otherwise the system would have little purpose — but there may be a higher chance that the EWER system is successful if it focuses on violence perpetrated on the selected community by groups external to that community, rather than by groups residing within the community itself.

> **"The implementing team could consider additional and simultaneous programming to respond to people's social services needs in the selected community, if necessary, which would also have the advantage of gaining locals' trust and motivate them to participate in the EWER system."**
>
> **—WESSAM KEEWAN**

Finally, an additional consideration for determining the system's location is the area's reputation or potential for being a "trendsetter."[39] According to Nyheim, "trendsetters" are places that other communities in the region or the country pay close attention to, or which may be covered in the media more than others. The idea is that if a successful EWER system is implemented in a community that others traditionally look to, that system may naturally be replicated in other parts of the country, permitting its rapid and autonomous scale-up.[40] Nyheim further explained that this would shift a EWER system's purpose from a "supply-driven" to a "demand-driven" project, which would be beneficial when expanding interventions to other areas.[41]

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39 Nyheim, David. Interview by Wiam Ayachi and Edward Sloan. *Search for Common Ground*. December 9, 2020
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.

With these considerations in mind, it is clear that although a high rate of insecurity is an important factor in choosing a location for an EWER system, the locations most likely to spur success will not always be the most violent - other factors play a significant role. It also appears that choosing a location is a multistep process. First, hotspot mapping can help create a shortlist of locations which have been determined to be in need of such a system, because of the type and frequency of violence that they are experiencing. Second, additional scoping work and/or research must be conducted to determine which of the locations on such a shortlist may most meet those conditions necessary to ensure that the system is successful: accessibility, potential for impact, adequate social relations, and pre-existing security structures. As noted by Khaled Salem, conducting an assessment to evaluate these conditions will demonstrate whether community buy-in is possible and what resources and institutions are available, and on which areas the implementation team will have to place greater focus. Search, for example, has collected qualitative and quantitative data in Yemen and Libya which will allow it to perform hotspot mapping, then evaluate a shortlist of locations based on most of the above criteria. Its partners in-country will then conduct additional scoping work by contacting the leaders of some of the identified locations and organizing with them evaluative committees, to better understand specific communities' realities with respect to the violence they experience, their security structures, their resources, their social norms, and their interest in having and eventually running a EWER system. Based on these criteria, the implementation team will set itself up for successfully bringing a positive impact to the selected community.

4. Securing Community Buy-in

Although a location for the EWER system should be chosen, in part, on the likelihood that the community will enthusiastically participate in its management, once that location is actually selected many efforts will be needed to ensure comprehensive and long-term local buy-in to the system.

Aubert Kadogo Kanega, who manages an EWER system being implemented by the American Bar Association in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), noted that the first step to securing such buy-in is to conduct evaluative committees with the local population and local authorities, as previously described above.[42] Among other considerations, these discussions should focus on local power and security dynamics, and cultural and gender norms. Such locally-specific dynamics must be identified and understood through consultations with the community to set up an effective system, which in turn will also increase buy-in.

"People who would not approve of the system would most likely be those who instigate or benefit from violence. The system would put them in a position where they are constantly being monitored and held accountable for their actions."

—FGD PARTICIPANT

Organizing consultations with these committees allowed Kanega's team to better understand how the EWER system should be set up in such a way as to garner the trust of the population and, also, in a way that avoided negatively affecting certain groups of individuals. For instance, these dialogues can help determine which security actors are trusted by the community and which are not, and which interest groups might be wary of a EWER system. In Tarhuna, Libya, for example, local stakeholders shared that they do not believe that the police has the capacity to protect them, and so in general they refrain from requesting their direct assistance. Instead,

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42 Kanega, Aubert Kadogo. Interview by Edward Sloan. *Search for Common Ground*, February 1, 2021

tribal leaders protect locals by arming their fellow tribesmen to "solve crimes" and to hand over criminals to the police.[43] As a FGD participant explains, "Tribal sheikhs are the leaders, alongside the police...Without the tribal leaders, the police will not be able to do anything, meaning that the tribe has a great role that goes beyond even policemen, and the police cannot intervene without the leaders' knowledge."[44] As another interviewee stated: "Tribal leaders are seen as the most able at security needs of the community...If you want to secure community support, you go through tribal leaders."[45] In more extreme scenarios, certain groups must be avoided at all costs as they may have acted as perpetrators in the past: as one FGD participant in Tarhuna said, "In my opinion, and for the time being, we have no trust in any [security apparatus] since the war was because of them in the first place...The people had been killed and displaced by individuals who would claim that they are law enforcement authorities...So, how can one trust these law enforcement authorities after what happened?" Local stakeholders in Yemen, however, also cautioned about the possibility of local security forces disrupting the system if they are excluded from the EWER process. One FGD participant explained that, "People who would not approve of the system would most likely be those who instigate or benefit from violence...The system would put them in a position where they are constantly being monitored and held accountable for their actions."[46] With such knowledge in hand, those designing the EWER system can make sure to rely on those actors that are the most trusted, to include youth and women in the process in ways that are socially acceptable to the local community, and to understand what spoilers might exist so that ways to placate them might be devised.

Indeed, according to Leach, local buy-in requires satisfying - and not disrupting - different groups' interests, otherwise they will not support the system and may even feel threatened by it: "The last thing you want to do is start disenfranchising some of [the local] leaders."[47] As a result of these consultations, therefore, an EWER system is

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43 National Dialogue Discussion for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021.

44 National Dialogue Discussion for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021.

45 Ibid.

46 National Dialogue Discussion conducted by ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021.

47 Ibid.

more likely to have a higher rate of buy-in because it will have been designed in an inclusive and context-specific manner.

In addition, the holding of such consultations displays to the community that their voices matter and that they are being listened to. In interviews conducted in Libya, local stakeholders noted that it may be challenging to gain the support of people who have been victims of violence, who may not trust an EWER system because previous security mechanisms have failed to prevent perpetrators from attacking them in the past or to hold them accountable. As an FGD participant in Libya stated, "If law enforcement authorities [were involved], this [EWER] system will never succeed because they have not previously succeeded in their basic and most fundamental duties."[48] Indeed, another interviewee explained that in Tarhuna, locals often turn to the 444 Brigade for protection, yet their capacities are limited: "This mechanism is not effective because usually when help arrives, the damage or abuse has already occurred...The Security Directorate does not have sufficient resources and has a shortage of personnel and equipment."[49] Making the system community-led and inclusive will permit the external organization to push aside certain individuals' apprehensions of its potential impact by identifying and overcoming those limits which have constrained the community in the past, all while demonstrating that their concerns are being actively taken into consideration. Letting the community know that their experiences and demands are the drivers of any EWER system is bound to facilitate buy-in, in addition, of course, to ensuring that past lessons are learned and the right local actors are chosen to lead the intervention.[50]

Furthermore, in addition to bottom-up communication, such evaluative discussions will allow the implementing team to advocate for the system and communicate its objectives. First, it is an opportunity for the implementing team to explain its intervention and, therefore, to build trust and buy-in. It will allow, as Steven Leach explained, for "building a coalition around the idea of early response."[51] This is important because, depending on the local context, EWER systems can be seen with

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48 National Dialogue Discussion for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021.

49 National Dialogue Discussion conducted by ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

distrust, especially because they are used to collect sensitive information that can be perceived as "intelligence gathering," and which can put people's lives in danger. As Chom Bagu, Search's former Country Director in Nigeria, explained, the implementing team needs to clearly explain to the target community that information that is collected "will only be used to help better understand their environment and tackle issues based on facts."[52] Leach concurred and added that, "no information that is extracted from a community, for a central office, should be extracted without having also been presented to the community…That creates transparency and creates the opportunity for the community to validate the information."[53] Transparency and open communication should be prioritized from the very beginning to establish rapport with the community and ease the proper functioning of the EWER system. This includes, as concerns the HRSM project, being transparent on the system's source of financing - although it should not be overtly publicized, it is important to be transparent with the community that USAID is financing the system, despite the negative perception that this might create, particularly in Yemen.

Second, these dialogues allow the implementation team to communicate on objectives and expectations. A common risk of implementing EWER systems is that the local community has a false sense of safety, believing that with such a system they are no longer vulnerable to different and sudden acts of violence. Tempering communities' expectations, therefore, especially for a pilot EWER system, is important to mitigate this risk, and to ensure that the limitations of the system's ability to predict violence do not lead to a deterioration of trust in the system.

Most importantly, these consultations would allow for the identification of local focal points who can serve as "champions" for the establishment of an EWER system. Participants who prove themselves to be most knowledgeable, respected and enthusiastic should be relied on to bridge the gap between an external organization like Search and the local community, and to lead the management of the system. These individuals can be relied on to secure yet more buy-in from other members of the community, to relay concerns from the community to the external organization, and to continue a dialogue about the most contextually-appropriate ways of

52 Bagu, Chom. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*. December 17, 2020.
53 Leach, Steven. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground,* December 10, 2020.

implementing a system. Bagu also stressed that these interlocutors can facilitate "introductions" to the wider community and provide yet more trusted contacts who can help initiate, run, and advocate for the system.[54] Nyheim similarly recommended the creation of such "integrity corridors," or groups of individuals who are trusted within their communities and can act as the external organization's local representatives.[55] In addition, Wessam Keewan mentioned that these contacts can also serve as entry points for communicating and collaborating with certain tribal structures to which the individuals belong to, structures which otherwise might be hard to access.[56] Not only is the creation of such a network crucial for the successful management of the EWER system, it directly ensures that it is community-led, and that, therefore, local buy-in is more likely to be secured.

Finally, relationship-building and advocacy to secure buy-in may be important at the regional or national level as well, depending on the context. The team working at Belun, an NGO based in Timor-Leste that runs an EWER system, mentioned that if there is a security apparatus present in the target area, they need to be introduced to the project and should be involved, if they are accepted by the local community.[57] The team explained how they involved local and national security actors in the system by creating a Conflict Prevention Response Network (CPRN) in their target area, which consisted of local and regional authorities, representatives from NGOs, and local citizens.[58] The team shared with the CPRN information that was gathered in the field, and they were directly involved in implementing responses to address security issues.

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54 Bagu, Chom. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*. December 17, 2020.

55 Nyheim, David. Interview by Wiam Ayachi and Edward Sloan. *Search for Common Ground*. December 9, 2020.

56 Keewan, Wessam. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 10, 2020.

57 The BELUN EWER system team. Focus Group Discussion moderated by Wiam Ayachi *Search for Common Ground*. January 14, 2021

58 Ibid.

5. Capacity-Building

After securing the community's buy-in, the implementing team must focus on building local capacities, if necessary, so that the community can run the system effectively and, eventually, in as autonomous a manner as possible.

There are various skills locals need to successfully run an EWER system. During initial evaluative committees, it will be important for the implementing team to assess local partners' capacities related to the various steps of the EWER system: how to identify triggers of violence, how to collect data, how to analyze data, how to communicate warnings and how to plan responses. Some local actors may have more capacities than others, so it is important to give relevant responsibilities to those most knowledgeable with regards to a particular topic, if possible. Alternatively, it may be necessary to identify which actors are going to be made responsible for which activities first, then to evaluate their capacities with regards to that responsibility — as discussed earlier, it may not always be contextually-appropriate or socially acceptable for one person or group to take on the responsibilities typically overseen by another, even if they are more knowledgeable in that area. It may create tension to place duties relating to response design in the hands of an actor not traditionally in charge of this, as it can be seen as posing a challenge to established authority. In any case, it is generally preferable to select trainees who already have some knowledge on the relevant material, so as to make use of existing knowledge and facilitate the creation of a sustainable train-the-trainer system.

Search's team in Nigeria also highlighted the importance of conducting rumor management training.[59] In their experience, this helped to combat misinformation that can trigger violence, ensure that information shared by the community with the system's managers is factual and based on first-hand observation, and even stymie rumors spread by "spoilers" seeking to undermine the EWER system itself. Senior staff members conducted in-person training workshops that brought together different

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59 Search For Common Ground, "Final report Early Warning / Early Response Mechanisms in Northern Nigeria," October 29, 2019

community observers from each of the target locations and, to the team's surprise, those "spoilers" were receptive to the training and became productive members of the system. Search's team in Nigeria also trained locals on the difference between conflict and violence, mapping local actors, and how a locally-driven EWER system can empower the community.[60] In addition, the Search team conducted training sessions for government officials on conflict sensitivity, and how to limit any unintended consequences of programmatic interventions.

The Belun team also provides training in mediation to empower communities to directly respond to the threat of violence, as they found that this could play a significant role in their EWER system.[61] Indeed, oftentimes, locals were able to use mediation to intervene and solve situations among themselves before they escalated, or even used mediation techniques to engage their government. Their organization also provided training on national laws and public policies, how to engage vulnerable groups, how to de-escalate violence, and how to access basic services in their respective areas such as legal services to combat GBV.

Typically, data analysis tends to be the area that poses the greatest challenge for capacity-building and self-sustainability. It may be worth establishing a collaborative process between a local committee and the external organization for this facet of the system, although the results of the analysis should always be produced in an inclusive way in which the community at the very least validates the results and is given access to them. Matveeva mentioned that to increase local analytical skills, training on critical thinking could be pursued.[62] In her experience, qualified field monitors were sometimes unable to efficiently record their observations and their work was lost in translation or misinterpreted. Following up with their work and validating the information they had collected took extra effort and time, which can be avoided with more substantial training. Matveeva also noted, however, that the amount and complexity of training on monitoring and reporting processes should be limited to start out and then gradually become more complex, if necessary, so as to

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60 Search For Common Ground, "Final report Early Warning / Early Response Mechanisms in Northern Nigeria," October 29, 2019.

61 The BELUN EWER system team. Focus Group Discussion moderated by Wiam Ayachi *Search for Common Ground*. January 14, 2021

62 Matveeva, Anna. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 9, 2020.

avoid overwhelming the trainees with information, which can then lead to mistakes in managing the system.[63]

63 Ibid.

6. Managing the System

THE MANAGEMENT TEAM

At the outset of implementation, it will be important to consider how to structure the local EWER system management team. In third generation EWER systems, it is critical to ensure that the local community is in charge of its proper functioning and final decision-making related to data interpretation and early response design. According to Matveeva, these managers should be qualified, motivated, and well-respected volunteers who have received the necessary training to perform their duties effectively.[64] It is key that these volunteers should not receive any financial benefits from this work, to ensure that the system is sustainable and that its managers truly are committed to its proper functioning.[65] These individuals may have been identified during evaluative committees, or been recommended by key focal points. They would then be united in a management committee responsible for running the system — Matveeva contends that it is important that this committee be formed for this express purpose, rather than leveraging an existing organization or group. Assigning civil society organizations (CSOs) or other local organizations the role of managing the system is a risk, as it is difficult to evaluate its members' backgrounds and level of commitment. In addition, existing organizations may not be perceived as legitimate by all community members, they may not be representative of the community, or they may have internal problems or limitations that would limit their effectiveness.[66] For example, local stakeholders in Libya noted that they lacked robust CSOs in their communities, and that those that existed were often limited by their fear of local militias. An EWER system that relies too heavily on existing structures can even reinforce problematic power dynamics that are at the source of the violence certain minority groups face. Existing institutions may therefore be perceived as incompetent

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64 Ibid.

65 Search Nigeria EWER System team. Focus Group Discussion moderated by Wiam Ayachi *Search for Common Ground*. December 16, 2020

66 Ibid.

due to past failures and so would not be likely to elicit enthusiasm among community members: as one FGD participant in Libya recommended, "Why not create a new administration without relying on the existing authorities? Because if they were good, they would have provided better services than the existing ones." So while the EWER systems should, if possible, make use of existing security structures to design and oversee early response mechanisms, it is recommended that the actual EWER management committee responsible for final decision-making related to all aspects of data collection, analysis and warning dissemination be independent and newly established.

In addition, the external organization, in this case Search or ABA, has a role to play in supporting this management committee. Christopher Tuckwood, the executive director of the Sentinel Project, an NGO that assists communities threatened by atrocities, noted that the overall team responsible for the EWER system should be a mix of local and non-local staff.[67] Locals who live through and understand the daily experiences of conflict zones are of course key in providing contextual knowledge and locally-appropriate response mechanisms, in addition to being a more legitimate and sustainable source of leadership. Tuckwood noted that non-local staff, however, may at times be better placed to cast an unbiased eye on certain processes, and thus can be valuable in providing quality

> **It is key that these volunteers should not receive any financial benefits from this work, to ensure that the system is sustainable and that its managers truly are committed to its proper functioning.**

assurance oversight.[68] Indeed, there have been instances in past EWER systems in which local monitors undermined the severity of a particular threat because it targeted a community other than theirs. So while the management committee should be staffed entirely with locals, running the day-to-day operations of the system, and having final say on all decisions, external actors such as Search or ABA should provide direction, advice and oversight where needed, especially early on in the implementation of a EWER system. Nyheim notes that the external organization's role

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67 Tuckwood, Christopher. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 18, 2020
68 Ibid.

should indeed only be to facilitate discussions and meetings, and oversee the system's processes.[69] Indeed, it can have a consultative role, but it should not push its agenda or perspectives. As mentioned above, this external role could also focus on assistance in data analysis in communities in which this proves to be a greater need, and which is a critical step for enabling locals to design informed and sensible early response mechanisms. In initial discussions between the management committee and the external organization, each party's respective roles and responsibilities should be agreed upon.

In the following sections, greater detail is provided on best practices for managing each step of the EWER process.

DATA COLLECTION

The first stage of an EWER system is data collection. First, indicators related to those specific types of threats the EWER will focus on, and associated triggers of violence, must be identified during initial evaluative committees with the local community. Identifying indicators can be facilitated by considering observed violence in the past and, with the community, charting out in hindsight the causes and potential warning signs of that violence - this can help determine what factors might be observable before violence happens in the future.[70] For instance, stakeholders in Libya explained that common indicators of impending violence in their community include increased hate speech on social media or, in some cases, bullets placed in front of a potential victim's doorstep. A FGD participant shared an example of such a threat, stating, "Four bullets were put in front of my maternal uncles' shop, which was a direct threat that they will be killed."[71] In Yemen, several FGD participants explained that the increased spread of weapons among civilians and the recruitment of children by violent groups also tend to indicate that violence may occur in the near future.[72]

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69 Nyheim, David. Interview by Wiam Ayachi and Edward Sloan. *Search for Common Ground*. December 9, 2020

70 Steven, Leach, "Preventing Violence: Community-Based Approaches to Early Warning and Early Response," Center for Security Studies (CSS), 2016. https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/334d021b-5e7e-4ce0-999b-354983e015d5.

71 National Dialogue Discussion for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021.

72 National Dialogue for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by Search, Taiz - Ash Shamayatayn District, March 20th, 2021

Studying the underlying causes of such violence is also crucial, as it will enable the community to understand what responses might stamp out those threats from the outset.

Data on these indicators is then collected from primary sources (such as local monitors reporting threats) or secondary sources (such as news reports) on a regular basis, depending on the type of EWER system to be implemented. In a third generation system, quantitative and qualitative data is collected from community members, and can be later cross-referenced with secondary data. To collect this data in the field, it is necessary to recruit local monitors. For instance, the EWER system implemented by the Belun organization in Timor-Leste relied on a large contingent of community volunteers to monitor and record incidents, who then relayed that information to Belun's head office for analysis.[73] The team of monitors should be diverse, trustworthy and well-respected, as they will need to earn the trust of the members of the community they are interviewing, who may be wary of sharing sensitive information for fear of retaliation. Indeed, it is also critical that field monitors obtain interviewees' informed consent and ensure that their data remain confidential and anonymous.

If quality assurance and data verification is overlooked, the system may not only lose credibility within the community, but, in more serious cases, may be used by bad actors to spread misinformation in order to settle personal disputes.

EWER systems observe different approaches in terms of the targets of this data collection. Some systems collect data from a random sample of individuals, while others create a hotline that community members can contact to alert of threats they are directly observing — many systems incorporate both. A third component of data collection to be considered is rumor monitoring. In this approach, certain individuals would be responsible for following discourse on social media and on communication platforms to see if there is an increase or change in rumors regarding a particular group or community. Belligerents can spread such misinformation to gain support for violence against certain populations, as hate speech can rile people up

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73 Reliefweb, "Early Warning, Early Response in Timor-Leste," August 18, 2015. https://reliefweb.int/report/timor-leste/early-warning-early-response-timor-leste.

and push them to action, especially in conflict settings. Disinformation is therefore often a precursor or trigger of violence.

An important element of data collection is quality assurance and verification. When collecting data from a random sample of individuals, it is important that supervisors check among other issues that the sample truly is representative, that the sampling methodology has been respected, and that interviews have not been fabricated. When collecting data from a hotline, it is important to verify that the source of information is unbiased, and to seek out at least one other person who can corroborate the shared information. Nyheim mentioned the possibility of sending EWER system representatives themselves to follow up on incidents to confirm their authenticity.[74] Secondary sources can also be used to verify trends in the data, although in sensitive contexts such information may not always be published and available. In any event, verification is critical to ensure that the formulation of early responses is informed by reality, and not biased testimonies. If quality assurance and data verification is overlooked, the system may not only lose credibility within the community, but, in more serious cases, may be used by bad actors to spread misinformation in order to settle personal disputes.

Finally, it is ideal to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data is valuable in providing statistically significant information on the security situation in the community, while qualitative data is useful in better understanding the causes and consequences of the threats of violence being observed, which is critical for designing effective early response mechanisms.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once data is verified and cleaned, it must be analyzed. According to Leach, the analysis phase serves three purposes: 1) to determine what warnings and interventions are required for identified risks, 2) to allow for ongoing adaptation of indicators that will ensure the EWER system is properly identifying the risks it seeks to prevent, and 3) to ensure everyone in the community has access to information about the

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74 Nyheim, David. Interview by Wiam Ayachi and Edward Sloan. *Search for Common Ground*. December 9, 2020

security situation in their area.[75] As mentioned previously, the external organization and the management committee can collaborate on this analysis, depending on local resources and capacities. This same management committee, a separate committee, or an existing local structure is then charged with discussing the findings and assessing what warnings and interventions might be needed. As previously mentioned, the Belun team, for example, created separate Conflict Protection and Response Networks (CPRN) that included representatives from different parts of the local community, who together determined whether intervention with regards to specific findings was necessary, and what the best approaches might be.[76]

As regards the second purpose highlighted by Leach, it is also important for the findings to be used to adapt the type of data being collected, if necessary, depending on how and whether the security situation is evolving. Initial indicators may be determined to be irrelevant, and new ones may be identified as important to include moving forward - this is a critical factor in ensuring that the system is adaptable and flexible, and makes use of learning to continually improve its effectiveness. Finally, it is key that the findings be shared with the local community when possible. Locals have the right to know what the security situation is in their community, and they are the ones most able to conceive of measures and responses to alleviate observed threats. The Belun team, for example, publishes monthly "situational reports" that summarize their findings, empowering the community with the knowledge necessary to improve security conditions, while transparency strengthens trust between the population and the system's managers. Search's team in Nigeria publishes bulletins based on data collected on their website and distributes them via email and as hardcopies during community meetings.[77] As discussed below, however, care must be taken that such publications do not accidentally inflame tensions and cause panic, and therefore some findings may be determined as too sensitive to share publicly.

75 Steven, Leach. "Preventing Violence: Community-Based Approaches to Early Warning and Early Response."

76 "Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System," Belun, 2019. https://www.belun.tl/en/early-warning-and-early-response-ewer/

77 Search For Common Ground, "Final report Early Warning / Early Response Mechanisms in Northern Nigeria," October 29, 2019.

WARNING DISSEMINATION

Once clear analysis has been produced, the committee or structure in charge of early warnings and early response must decide which threats pose enough of a risk to warrant disseminating warnings. Then, first and foremost, those responsible for warning dissemination must make sure to avoid any unintended consequences their information-sharing could entail. According to Matveeva, there is a risk that if warnings are not communicated to the right people and in the right way, they can become a self-fulfilling prophecy in which certain individuals use information on potential impending violence to preemptively strike would-be aggressors. In addition, there is a risk that warnings of violence that do not subsequently materialize lead to "crying-wolf syndrome," wherein the local community no longer pays attention to any warnings because of previous false alarms.[78]

To avoid these deleterious consequences, three considerations should be well thought-out when communicating warnings: 1) when should the warning be disseminated, 2) how should the warning be formulated, and 3) to whom should the warnings be disseminated.[79] It is important to warn of threats in time for the community to protect itself, but a warning that is issued too early in advance will provide less time for verification, and therefore may indicate that there is a lesser degree of certainty that a particular violent event will materialize. It may also provide the community with the time to mobilize and arm itself for an attack of its own, in certain circumstances. In addition, the wording used to communicate the warnings must be chosen in such a manner as to avoid panic and retaliation, and in a way that is transparent about the uncertain nature of whether the threat will truly emerge or

> **There is a risk that if warnings are not communicated to the right people and in the right way, they can become a self-fulfilling prophecy in which certain individuals use information on potential impending violence to preemptively strike would-be aggressors.**

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78 Anna, Mateeva, "Early Warning and Early Response: Conceptual and Empirical Dilemmas."

79 Carmen Lorena, Ortiz, "Practical Guide: Early Warning and Response Systems Design for Social Conflicts." United Nations Development Programme; Organization of American States, n.d. https://www.oas.org/es/sap/pubs/GuiaAlerta_e.pdf.

not. Tempering expectations regarding the predictability of violence, as mentioned previously, is important to retain the community's confidence in the EWER system. Finally, some warnings may be communicated only to certain leaders, rather than the community as a whole, because the risk of escalation is too high or because the likelihood of the occurrence of violence is too low or cannot be determined. The Belun team, for instance, coordinates with governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Interior and the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) with regards to certain threats, and ABA's EWER system in DRC shares data findings and warnings solely with the Congolese army.[80] In any event, any warning dissemination must include foresight about what the consequences might be when the community receives this information.

With the above considerations and caveats in mind, it is generally important for warnings to reach the widest audience possible within the community. Therefore, it is important to determine with community leaders what communication mechanisms are most contextually-appropriate, considering potentially limited electricity, phone network, or internet in the community. Communicating warnings through WhatsApp or text messaging is common but in certain areas this may need not be appropriate. For instance in Libya, local stakeholders mentioned disseminating warnings after Friday prayer because there is usually large attendance and warnings can reach a greater audience.[81] In Yemen, stakeholders suggested communicating warnings during "Khat sessions," during which locals convene to chew tobacco, or even firing bullets into the air to warn locals of impending violence and to find shelter.[82] Finally, a key lesson identified through discussions with EWER experts is that it is not effective to separate communication on early warnings and communication on early responses. If local leaders warn about impending violence without providing potential solutions at the same time, it is difficult to prevent panic and retaliation, and implement effective protection measures.

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80 "Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System," Belun, 2019. https://www.belun.tl/en/early-warning-and-early-response-ewer/.

81 National Dialogue Discussion for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021.

82 National Dialogue for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by Search, Aden, March 20, 2021

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING RESPONSES

Along with formulating and communicating warnings, the local committee or structure must devise responses to address the risks that the community faces. Ordinarily, the data findings concern indicators or threats to which the community had initially identified as having the capacity and resources to respond. Those capacities and resources must therefore be activated and mobilized, and, if necessary, other trusted actors can be called upon to assist in neutralizing the threat or in protecting the population from its effects. Typically responses focus on bringing groups to safety, conducting mediation, or contacting the appropriate security services or forces to intervene. In Tarhuna, for example, locals direct their concerns about possible threats of violence or conflict to tribal leaders or to the local security force, the 444 Brigade. Depending on the threat, tribal leaders mediate between conflicting parties or may coordinate with the Brigade to protect victims or diffuse tensions. The EWER system should be designed to build on such existing response mechanisms, so long as they are trustworthy.[83]

The nature of the responses should, to the extent possible, be entirely devised and decided upon by the community and the EWER management committee. Of course the external organization should be available to provide advice if necessary, but the community and its leaders are best placed to understand which responses are possible, likely to be the most effective, acceptable to the community, and cause the least unintended consequences. As mentioned above, the community should be made aware of what responses are being prepared when they are alerted of any threats, to keep them calm and inform them that their leaders are working towards ensuring their safety. Indeed, in certain circumstances, particularly when mediation is used as a response, it is important for authorities to publicize that they are actively responding to an identified threat, so that the community does not try to take matters into their own hands.

When directing the community to implement a particular response, some EWER systems mobilize the same field monitors who typically collect data in the community. Having these monitors involved in both the early warning and the early response

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83 National Dialogue Discussion conducted by ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021.

facets of the EWER process can help overcome the warning-response gap that so often undermines EWER systems' effectiveness. As well-respected individuals who have already had contact with informants or interviewees, they are trusted and already have a good understanding of the security threats people are facing.[84] For example, if one of the early response initiatives involves mediation or negotiation, these monitors, as data collectors, would already be familiar with the issue at hand, and they would also be perceived as objective actors based on the fact that they initially listened to and reported people's concerns.

Alternatively, Kanega explained that in the DRC his team preferred to employ different volunteers for the data collection phase of the EWER system and for the implementation of early responses. ABA was concerned that if enumerators were empowered to enact response plans in addition to collecting information, community members would feel less comfortable in sharing their views and observations with them. Indeed, some community members were afraid that, although data was collected in a confidential and anonymous manner, these enumerators still knew who they were and what they had told them, and that if they were elevated to positions of response implementation, they would have the power to denounce them or neglect them in favor of others.

EVALUATION

Finally, it is important for the EWER system to allow for regular performance and impact evaluations so that lessons can be learned, and the process can continually be made more effective. In addition, it is important through these evaluations to be able to demonstrate, if applicable, that the system is having a positive impact on the community, to build trust between its managers and the community, and to justify scaling up and implementing similar interventions in other communities that need it.

These evaluations are primarily conducted through data collection that is already an omnipresent part of the EWER system - although to measure impact from the inception of the system, it will be important to conduct a baseline study even before any interventions begin. As previously mentioned, this data collection not

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84 Nyheim, David. Interview by Wiam Ayachi and Edward Sloan. *Search for Common Ground*. December 9, 2020.

only allows for the EWER team to assess differing levels of threats over time - and thus, in part, the degree of impact of the system — but also whether the indicators need to be modified, added to, rephrased, or measured in a different way.[85] Additional questions can be added to these surveys to enable the population to also evaluate the system's general management, warning dissemination practices, and response design.

85 Experts Focus Group Discussion. Moderated by Wiam Ayachi and Edward Sloan. *Search for Common Ground*. January 5, 2020

7. Ensuring Sustainability

As has been touched upon throughout this report, aiming for the sustainability of the EWER system is an important, if difficult, objective to consider. Not only would this allow the system to last over time, with little external support, but if it is done successfully it is a critical factor for the system's replicability and scale-up in other communities.

To promote sustainability, it is firstly important that the initial EWER system intervention and implementation last long enough for it to bring impact and be fully adopted by the community. According to Matveeva, it would take at least six months to set up an EWER system and about a year to see evidence as to whether the EWER system has had a positive impact.[86] Salem agrees: "[the EWER system] is a long-term process. It is not something that you can do in three, five, six months or one year... You need to take your time to develop a proper, workable, sustainable system."[87] This timeline is not only important for identifying impact, building trust, and enhancing local capacities, but also for incorporating lessons learned. Search's team in Nigeria found that, over time, they were able to expand and iterate different aspects of their EWER system. Danjuma Mohammed, from Search's team in Nigeria, explained that, "as we expanded the communities [covered by the system] and replicated that approach in those communities, we also adapted how we were managing the project...We learned and we were pretty agile...That helped a lot, in terms of how we were structuring [the EWER system]."[88] It is therefore necessary for the system to be able to incorporate lessons learned and apply them in subsequent iterations of the system, to ensure it functions properly and has positive impact, which, in turn, promotes sustainability. As a EWER system is adapted and demonstrates success, it will favor scaling up and expanding to other communities, not least because local

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86 Matveeva, Anna. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 9, 2020.

87 Salem, Khaled. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 14, 2020.

88 Search Nigeria EWER System team. Focus Group Discussion moderated by Wiam Ayachi *Search for Common Ground*. December 16, 2020

buy-in will be easier to obtain. For the HRSM team, a six-month pilot EWER system is planned, after which it is recommended that the EWER system be continued.

Secondly, sustainability can be promoted by ensuring that the local community takes ownership of the system with, over time, as little oversight or management by external organizations as possible. One of the main ways of ensuring this is by limiting the external organization's footprint in the organization and setup of the EWER system. As Leach mentions, "If you're creating [new security structures] that require any maintenance, then in the long term, it would definitely fail because the infrastructure will change."[89] Creating onerous parallel security structures from scratch is not only unrealistic and overly ambitious, it also does not favor sustainability because they require extensive oversight, and time to build trust in them. While, in contrast, local EWER management committees will often be put together where none existed before, depending on the community, these will become autonomous over time, and will not require complex monitoring or resource provision by external organizations, especially as they will be composed of volunteers.

In order to ensure this local ownership, the external organization must also, from the beginning, exert many efforts to build a coalition of local actors who support the system. Indeed, the external organization should ensure the EWER system is supported by reliable and durable coalitions so that it will continue to operate over time. As Salem pointed out, this coalition will likely include the government: "[it is important] to have it as an ally, as a key-partner in developing the system and ensuring sustainability."[90]

Thirdly, an EWER system should be as simple and as inexpensive as possible — without foregoing impact — to facilitate the community's ownership. The EWER system should have low operating costs with most funds allocated only for start-up activities covered by the external organization — such as training and dialogues.[91] It has further been mentioned that objectives should be limited, creating new structures should be avoided, and that personnel should participate on a voluntary basis. In addition, trained personnel should be positioned to train yet other members of the

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89 Leach, Steven. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 10, 2020.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

community over time, so that costs are limited and the external organization's role can be reduced. As Leach explained, the system should be designed so that the community can overcome the eventual withdrawal of the external organization, "but [that's only possible] if the infrastructure isn't expensive."[92]

92 Ibid.

8. Ensuring Gender Inclusiveness

Women are generally the first to experience the repercussions of escalating tensions, and oftentimes GBV is a precursor to broader violence.[93] However, in many conservative societies, such as in Libya and Yemen, women's voices are often not sufficiently represented, and men have an outsized role in decision-making. Efforts must be made, therefore, to include women in all phases of an EWER system, to fully capture their experiences and formulate appropriate responses.

The first step to ensure gender inclusivity in an EWER system is to understand local social norms and the role of women in a selected community. Bagu mentioned that this is critical for understanding local gender dynamics and windows of opportunity for mitigating any gender discrepancies.[94] While Bagu suggested consulting any experiences or analysis produced by other NGOs in the area, Kanega mentioned that initial evaluative discussions with local community leaders should also delve into local gender norms.[95] Once there is an understanding of local gender dynamics, the implementing team can work within these locally accepted norms to design, with locals, various strategies that will ensure that the system is gender inclusive and responds to women's specific needs. Indeed, local stakeholders in both Libya and Yemen expressed that there was a need to increase women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives, but that women's involvement should not "compromise [local] conservative cultural values."[96]

Experts shared different initiatives they implemented that helped increase women's participation in EWER systems. Bagu underscored the importance of ensuring there are safe spaces for women to participate and be listened to, which can often

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93 Siân Herbert, "Links between gender-based violence and outbreaks of violent conflict," April 04, 2014. http://gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq1169.pdf.

94 Bagu, Chom. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*. December 17, 2020.

95 Ibid.

96 National Dialogue Discussion for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by Ahmed Bel Fekih Abu Bakr Dufani, ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021; National Dialogue for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by Search, Aden.

be addressed by placing women in positions of power: as enumerators, as management committee members, and as trainers.[97] This will make female members of the community more comfortable in expressing their concerns, in addition to ensuring that decision-making incorporates women's voices. It will be particularly important to connect with local women "champions" or focal points to obtain more insight into what inclusive initiatives are possible, and to work with already established and accepted local women and youth groups, if applicable. Again, in some areas, this may prove difficult: a few local stakeholders who were interviewed in Libya did not believe it to be important to include women in the EWER system. As a participant noted, "I am against women working in such places in the first place."[98] Conducting gender sensitivity training for the community as a whole, as Salem mentioned, could therefore be necessary to enhance an appreciation for the need of a gender-balanced EWER system.[99]

Search's team in Nigeria explained that while it was difficult at first, they eventually achieved great results including women in their activities. As Moallem noted, even when they included only a few women in any activity, it changed perceptions around women's participation because men saw the value of women's inputs and the information and perspectives they possessed.[100] She explained that these gender inclusion efforts expanded beyond the EWER system, as many local leaders adapted their own community meetings to include more women.[101] Mohammed also highlighted that after creating separate and safe spaces for women to voice their perspectives, women became more invested in the success of the EWER system.[102] While it is a gradual process that must navigate cultural realities — so as not to create spoilers — promoting women's participation from the beginning will likely snowball over time so that women gradually take up more leadership positions.[103]

97 Ibid.

98 National Dialogue Discussion for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by Ahmed Bel Fekih Abu Bakr Dufani, ABA, Tarhuna, Libya, 2021.

99 Salem, Khaled. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*, December 14, 2020.

100 Search Nigeria EWER System team. Focus Group Discussion moderated by Wiam Ayachi *Search for Common Ground*. December 16, 2020

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 Bagu, Chom. Interview by Wiam Ayachi. *Search for Common Ground*. December 17, 2020.

Ensuring women's perspectives are taken into account will have a tangible effect on the success of the EWER system. For example, understanding the types of violence that women face, and the triggers for that violence, will allow for the development of relevant indicators, which will then ensure that those threats they face can be evaluated, and warnings and responses can be implemented if necessary. Furthermore, understanding their realities - what resources they have, what decision-making power they have in the household - can impact the design of warning dissemination and response formulation. If warnings are shared, and responses developed, in ways that are not gender sensitive or relevant to women's realities, the system will be unable to offer protection to women. Gender-inclusive EWER systems, on the contrary, can lead, for example, to specific responses that take the form of awareness campaigns on domestic violence laws or, as initiated by the Belun team, the development of a referral network to tackle GBV, which links victims to local assistance organizations.[104]

> **Even when including only a few women in any activity, it changes perceptions around women's participation because men see the value of women's inputs and the information and perspectives they possess.**
>
> **—SHABNAM MOALLEM**

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104 The BELUN EWER system Team. Focus Group Discussion moderated by Wiam Ayachi *Search for Common Ground*. January 14, 2021

9. Using Technology

Given EWER systems' reliance on data collection and communication, and the reality that many such interventions occur in areas with infrastructure limitations, the proper use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a final important element to consider.

As with most aspects of an EWER system, local leaders will be depended on to identify which communication tools are the most accessible for data collection, reporting incidents or threats, and disseminating warnings and responses. These tools should be those already most frequently and commonly used in the community, as long as different segments of society have equal access to them. They should be easy to use for most of the population, inexpensive, and take into consideration limitations in access to the internet, network, credit and electricity for charging devices. For instance in Yemen, stakeholders noted that radios are the most common and effective means of communication and can be used to disseminate warnings to community members.[105]

The tools to be used may change depending on the EWER system phase: typically smartphones or tablets are used for data collection, and text messaging, WhatsApp or other locally popular social media networks are used for reporting incidents and communicating warnings and responses, although in-person verification and mobilization is also often required.[106] For instance, an EWER system developed in Kenya to prevent election violence provided local monitors with cell phones and created a hotline center for locals to report incidents - local leaders then conducted on-site field visits to assess the situation.[107] In Nigeria, Search's team used Datawinners, a basic

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105 National Dialogue for Early Warning and Early Response Systems conducted by Search, Taiz - Ash Shamayatayn District, March 20, 2021.

106 Patrick Meier, "How Ushahidi Can Become a Real Early Warning Platform," Conflict Early Warning and Early Response, December 1, 2009, https://earlywarning.wordpress.com/2009/06/21/ushahidi-early-warning/.

107 Bridget Moix, "A local approach first early warning and response," Peace Insights, July 11, 2013. https://www.peaceinsight.org/fr/articles/a-local-first-approach-to-early-warning-and-response/?location=kenya&theme=conflict-prevention-early-warning.

SMS-based service, which allows local monitors to submit data via text message and which is then compiled in real-time to create reports and visualizations.

In designing an EWERS system, it is also important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of using modern technologies. Tuckwood notes that utilizing modern technology in an EWER system can increase the speed of information sharing and can allow the system to access certain populations that may otherwise not have been reachable in non-digital settings.[108] The use of modern technology can therefore allow the implementing team and local partners to quickly identify if there are rumors spreading, or if an imminent threat has been identified to which they can swiftly respond. Generally-speaking, however, experts warned against introducing new, complex technologies into a community. In fact, such practices can impede the proper functioning of the system — the new technologies are not adapted to local realities and it is time-consuming to train the community on how to use them.

As Search's team in Nigeria shared, an over-reliance on complex technologies can actually be counterproductive, as it can increase distrust and suspicion. As Moallem noted, "No matter how much we invested in training our community members that were reporting, documenting, and sending us these reports…No matter how much we explained how the system works, there was still a lot of mistrust in terms of using technology, to send that kind of information [electronically] and not knowing where it goes…Not seeing the point of doing that type of reporting."[109] The use of such technology can, therefore, accentuate fears concerning confidentiality, anonymity, and possible retaliation, because the community does not understand how that technology works. They therefore do not trust the system and avoid participating in it. The Search team found that shifting to in-person meetings or paper-based questionnaires as opposed to collecting data on smartphones sometimes made locals feel more comfortable in sharing information. As has been a common theme throughout discussions with experts, sometimes less is more, and the simpler and more contextually-specific the system, the higher the chances it will succeed.

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108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.

10. Recommendations

Based on these consultations with experts and local stakeholders, as well as the available literature, the following practices are recommended for designing and implementing a third generation EWER system.

DESIGNING AN EWER SYSTEM

- Determine simple, specific, and flexible objectives
    - The objectives of the system should be simple so that they can realistically be met, specific so that they can be measured, and flexible because the types of threats the local population faces can change over time

- Select a location for the system based on need
    - The location of the system should be an area that experiences periodic violence, but that is not so violent that it is inaccessible or creates unrealistic expectations about the impact the system can bring to bear
    - A shortlist of appropriate locations can be obtained through hotspot mapping via data collection or by relying on pre-existing databases that measure the occurrence of violent incidents

- Select a location based on potential for impact
    - For the system to be more impactful, it is advisable to select a community that requests an EWER system and is accessible to the implementing organization
    - The location should also already have, to some degree, the resources and capacities to respond to some of the threats it faces; in that regard, the system should consider which of these threats the community may be able to thwart, then build "backwards" to monitor and warn about those particular threats

- As it is more likely that communities have the means to respond to "social" violence, such as land disputes and gender-based violence, it is recommended to avoid having a system that focuses on "military" violence such as airstrikes, for which it will be difficult to formulate successful responses
  - It is also beneficial for the selected community to have a baseline of adequate social relations among members of that community, and between the community and its leaders
    - For this reason, it is advisable to focus on threats whose sources are external to the community, as threats from within the community are likely to bring about high degrees of social mistrust
  - The chosen community should also have preexisting structures such as civil society organizations or security services to increase the likelihood that the system will bring a positive impact
    - It is also recommended to avoid creating parallel institutions for which it will take time to build trust, and which will make the system less sustainable
  - If possible, select a "trendsetter" location to enhance the chances that other communities will hear about the system and want to replicate it
- Design a whole-of-society system that depends on a coalition of local supporters
  - The system should aim to benefit the population as a whole, not one group in particular, to ensure all have an interest in its success and no spoilers emerge
  - The majority population and/or spoilers can be placated by providing additional types of assistance to the community beyond the EWER system from which they can benefit
- Consider as long a timeline as possible to favor the system's sustainability
  - The system should be implemented for a period that is long enough to secure local buy-in and adopt lessons learned along the way

IMPLEMENTING AN EWER SYSTEM

- Organize inclusive evaluative committees with local communities
  - These discussions will be important to better understand communities' suitability for an EWER system
  - They will also help in understanding the local context in which that system would be operating: social norms, the type of violence being experience, and the type of technology that is most prevalent
  - Finally they would permit the external organization to advocate for the system, build trust between different actors, and communicate and temper expectations

- Identify respected and motivated local focal points
  - Building a network of local "champions" to enhance two-way communication between the external organization and the community will ensure the system is locally supported and context-specific

- Conduct training on data collection, data analysis, warning dissemination, response implementation, rumor monitoring, mediation and conflict sensitivity
  - Develop train-the-trainer mechanisms
  - Train at a reasonable pace to ensure trainees are not overwhelmed with information

- Facilitate the creation of an independent, trusted management committee
  - Members of the local management committee should be volunteers who oversee all steps of the system, and who would receive training on various topics where needed
  - The committee should require little expense or infrastructure to set up
  - Committee members should be placed in positions in which they can make use of their specific expertise and knowledge, as long as this does not challenge local power dynamics

- Collect quantitative and qualitative data on selected indicators on a monthly basis via hotlines, community surveys, and/or social media rumor monitoring
    - Determine which indicators to focus on by consulting local leaders on typical warning signs and through social media monitoring
    - Verify identified threats by corroboration, field visits and data triangulation

- Disseminate warnings about threats in calm language and through locally appropriate means such as after Friday prayers in Libya or "khat sessions" in Yemen
    - Disseminate these warnings to the community as a whole or specific authorities depending on the nature of the threat

- Implement responses such as mediation, providing shelter, and alerting trusted security officials
    - These responses should be deployed and publicized to the population at the same time as warnings to reassure the community, and to prevent individuals from trying to take matters into their own hands
    - It should be determined whether, in a given context, community responders should be recruited from among those enumerators involved in the data collection phase of the system; in some cases this may breed more trust and adherence to the recommended responses

- Conduct regular evaluations to identify lessons learned, improve the system over time, and update those indicators being monitored, if necessary

- Set up external monitoring processes to guide and advise the management committee where needed
    - After helping the community set up the system, the external organization still has a role to play in ensuring the quality of collected data, advising on response mechanisms if necessary, and assisting in data analysis where needed, all while respecting local system ownership

- In particular, the external organizing can bring an unbiased eye to data analysis that can be helpful in ensuring the largest and most immediate threats are prioritized in response design

- Respect "do no harm" protocols in disseminating early warnings

  - The system must ensure that no unintended consequences emerge from the system, such as causing panic and armed mobilization against an identified threat

  - This can be achieved by implementing rigorous quality control measures to corroborate information collected in the field, and disseminating warnings in calm language and, in some cases, on a need-to-know basis

- Encourage women's participation in all phases of the system

  - Within the framework of local gender norms, it will be important to advocate for the placement of women in positions of power in order to ensure that the system considers threats faced by women in particular

  - Female "champions" can serve as focal points to propose context-specific initiatives aimed at fostering a gender-balanced approach

  - Gender sensitivity trainings can be initiated to attempt to push for greater women's inclusion in the system

  - Data on indicators specific to violence commonly experienced by women must be collected, such as gender-based violence

  - In terms of potential responses, referral networks can be created to which cases of gender-based violence can be reported and through which victims can be connected to personnel that can assist them, awareness-raising campaigns on domestic violence laws can be launched, and safe spaces specifically for women can be established

- Promote the use of locally appropriate technology when beneficial

  - The community should already be familiar with this technology, and any technology that might accentuate the local population's concerns regarding confidentiality should be avoided

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Annex II:
List of Interviewees – International Experts

Al-Shawal, Nagwan

Academic and conflict transformation trainer and practitioner who has worked and supported establishing early warning and rapid response networks in conflict zones such as Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and Sudan.

Bagu, Jam Chom

Former Nigeria Country Director for Search for Common Ground. Bagu has overseen the implementation of various EWER systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

Belun

The Belun organization is an NGO based in Timor-Leste. Belun has been implementing an EWER system since 2008. The HRSM team spoke with the following members of the organization:

- Alldo Caetano
- Romana Guterres
- Eugenia Alves
- Izalde Pinto
- Jesuina Abel
- Luis Ximinez
- Miguel Mau Soares

Cordoba Peace Institute

The Cordoba Peace Institute is an independent organization based in Geneva. They have conducted early warning and early response efforts in various locations including in Tanzania and Egypt. The HRSM team spoke with the following members of the organization:

- Abbas Aroua — Founding Director
- Alistair Davison — Executive Director
- Lakhdar Ghettas — Program Manager

Kanega, Aubert Kadogo

Member of the American Bar Association (ABA) and serves as Project Director in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for ABA's EWER system project.

Keewan, Wessam

Community coordinator with Jordan-based NGO, SIREN Associates. Keewan has previous experience working on EWER systems in various locations including in refugee camps.

Leach, Steven

Conflict transformation practitioner, facilitator, and scholar who has written on local approaches to early warning and early response and local ownership in development.

Leaning, Jennifer

Senior Research Fellow at Harvard University. Her research interests focus on issues of public health and international law in response to war and disaster, early warning for mass atrocities, and problems of human security in the context of forced migration and conflict.

Matveeva, Anna

Academic and practitioner specializing in conflict studies and developmental aspects of international peacebuilding. She has implemented several EWER systems for international organizations such as the United Nations.

Nyheim, David

Executive Chairman at the International Conflict and Security Consulting. Nyheim has vast experience implementing EWER systems and has worked to set up the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response, which was one of the earliest responses to the Rwandan genocide.

Salem, Khaled

Independent consultant who has implemented various EWER systems in the MENA region including in Libya and Palestine.

Schmeidl, Susanne

Academic and practitioner with research interests in gender, community-led EWER systems, forced migration, and conflict management.

Search for Common Ground's Office in Nigeria

- Danjuma Mohammed — Early Warning Coordinator
- Rinji Karwas — Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer
- Shabnam Moallem — Program Associate

Tuckwood, Christopher

Executive Director of The Sentinel Project. The Sentinel Project is a Canadian non-profit organization that works to prevent mass atrocities around the world through direct cooperation and early warning. The organization has experience implementing EWER systems.

Valentino, Benjamin

Associate Professor at Dartmouth College specializing in violence and genocide prevention. He has worked on several projects including early warning models preventing large scale violence.

Annex III:
Discussion Guide – International Experts

EWER System Expert and Practitioner Discussion Guide

INSTRUCTIONS

Key informant interviews (KIIs) are research tools used to gather in-depth qualitative information. This template provides a guide to conducting a semi-structured interview with an individual who has studied or put into practice community-based early warning/early response systems (EWER systems). The overall goal of these interviews is to collect practical information on best practices to facilitate optimal design and implementation of EWER system interventions in subsequent phases of the HRSM project.

Each Key Informant (KI) will have unique knowledge and/or experience that will require tailored follow-up questions in order to gather the most nuanced and substantive information. This template is therefore structured so as to have broad, overarching questions that will facilitate an opportunity for the interviewee to discuss the most pertinent information to his/her specific area of study, with potential follow-up questions which are designed a) ensure that the KI provides essential information b) probe for additional details depending on their answer to the overarching questions. The interviewer will therefore not necessarily need to ask all of the follow up questions; that is, follow-up questions should be omitted if the KI already provided the information, or the follow-up question is deemed to be irrelevant. It is therefore important that the interviewer listen carefully to the KIs original answer so that s/he does not ask irrelevant or redundant questions.

Additionally, the KI may mention details that warrant tailored follow-up questions. In such cases, the interviewer will need to generate and ask specific questions that are not delineated on the list of suggested follow-up questions.

SECTION A: PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION
(To be completed prior to the interview)

A1. Date of Interview _____

A2. Location and Venue of Interview _____

A3. KI's Name, Title and Institution _____

A4. Brief summary of KI's qualifications based on publicly available information (i.e., why was this KI selected for an interview? May include information on the KI's current employer/title/role, publications, previous roles studying EWER system, specific areas of study including location/relevant conflict scenario).

SECTION B: INTRODUCTIONS

1. The moderator should put his/her video on. The interviewee may do whatever they are most comfortable with.

2. Thank the KI for taking the time to speak with you

3. Ask the interviewee if you can record the interview; if so, record the interview

4. Introduce yourself: name, title, organization and a few sentences about your background that will help establish your credibility

5. Brief overview of purpose of interview and how it fits into the project, including:

   a. You are working on a new MENA regional atrocity prevention project that includes both researching and facilitating the development of EWER systems. The EWER system will likely be developed for atrocities against REM groups in either Yemen or Libya.

   b. The initial phase of the project includes research on EWER system best practices. As part of this research, you are carrying out interviews with people who have either studied or implemented EWER systems.

   c. Explain why you chose them as a KI (i.e., why is their research relevant to the project (see A4 for relevant info)?

SECTION C: BACKGROUND INFO

C1. Can you give us an overview of your work on EWER systems?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *What institution do you work for?*
- *What is your role?*
- *What are the objectives of your work?*
- *Where is the EWER system?*
- *What is the type of EWER system?*
- *What is the time period of the EWER system under study?*

SECTION D: INTRODUCTION

D1. Generally speaking, how exactly can violence be anticipated?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *What kinds of indicators/signs/triggers can predict future violence, specifically against REM groups?*
- *How can we identify the presence or not of these indicators/signs/triggers?*
- *How can we avoid EWER systems being used to report violence after the fact, rather than warning about it beforehand?*

D2. What are the necessary conditions for setting up a successful EWER system?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *What is a "successful" EWER system? What are its objectives?*
- *What type of conflict context are EWER systems most helpful in? Why? What about EWER systems for REM groups?*
- *How large a geographic area should EWER systems cover to be effective?*
- *What kind of community stakeholders must be on board with EWER systems? Why? What about EWER systems for REM groups?*
- *How can we obtain buy-in from those stakeholders?*
- *How to navigate a context w/ no "stable" political structure?*

- *Who might be "spoilers"? Why? How do we deal with them?*
- *How can we build trust in the system within the population, especially as concerns REM groups? Why might they resist it?*
- *What kind of capacities do stakeholders need to be able to run the EWER system? What might they need training on?*
- *Do you have any examples to share?*

SECTION E: BEST PRACTICES

E1. In your experience, what are best practices for setting up and running EWER systems?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *Who should manage EWER systems, especially those designed for REM groups? Why? What is the population's role in designing EWER systems and being involved in decision-making?*
- *How should EWER systems approach coordination with other institutions, e.g., local govt, national govt, armed groups, tribal councils, religious leaders?*
- *What kind of data should be collected? How should it be collected? By whom? By how many people?*
- *How can confidentiality be assured?*
- *How should reports of potential violence be verified? By whom?*
- *How should the data be analyzed? How can the threat level be accurately assessed?*
- *How should warnings be communicated to the population? By Whom? Why?*
- *What should be the content of those warnings?*
- *What recommendations should be given to the community for how to respond to the warnings, especially as concerns REM groups? Who decides this? How? What preparations are needed in advance to make such responses feasible?*
- *What is the role of mediation as a potential response?*
- *Do you have any examples to share, such as success stories?*

E2. In your experience, what are practices or difficulties that can render EWER systems ineffective?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *Which actors should not be involved in EWER systems, especially as concerns REM groups? Why not?*
- *What processes can lead reporting to be erroneous? How can this be avoided?*
- *How might the data be misinterpreted? Why?*
- *What types of communication might be ignored or missed by the population?*
- *Why might some people not heed the warnings?*
- *How can infrastructure, internet, network and electricity limitations be overcome?*
- *How can financial limitations be overcome?*
- *Why is there often a gap between warning and effective response mechanisms? How can this be overcome?*
- *Are there any complications that could arise from setting up and implementing EWER system specifically for vulnerable groups at risk of atrocity?*
- *Do you have any examples to share?*

E3. In your experience, what unintended consequences might result from EWER systems?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *What are the causes of these unintended consequences?*
- *How can they be avoided or mitigated?*
- *Do you have any examples to share?*

SECTION F: OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

F1. How can EWER systems be made sustainable?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *How can knowledge be passed to others?*
- *How can EWER systems be made durable financially?*
- *What kinds of structural or political resistance can render EWER systems ineffective or unsustainable? How can this be overcome?*
- *How do you measure the impact of EWER systems?*

- *How can successful community-based EWER system models be scaled up effective-ly, if at all?*
- *If scale up is possible, which elements need to be modified for context?*
- *Do you have any examples to share?*

F2. How can EWER systems be made gender inclusive?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *How can the committee running EWER system be made gender inclusive? What about in conservative contexts where this might be resisted?*
- *How can it be ensured that women participate as informants?*
- *How can warnings and response recommendations be made gender inclusive in terms of their content?*
- *How can warnings and response recommendations be made gender inclusive in terms of their reach?*
- *What are the consequences if EWER systems are not gender inclusive?*
- *How can EWER system tackle gender-based violence and sexual harassment/abuse, specifically? How can this be done especially in conservative communities?*
- *Do you have any examples to share?*

F3. What is or can be the role of technology in making EWER systems more effective?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *How can technology help collect or confirm reports?*
- *How can technology help communicate warnings?*
- *How can technology help improve the options people have in responding to warnings?*
- *How can we ensure community buy-in into using any new useful technology?*
- *How can technology help overcome infrastructure, internet, network and electricity limitations?*
- *Do you have any examples to share?*

F4. We are planning on setting up a EWER system in Libya or Yemen - what is your advice on the concrete and practical steps we will need to take?

Potential follow up/probing questions:
- *How should we choose the community to set the EWER system in, or the REM group to focus on?*
- *Once we have chosen a location, what additional research or mapping will we need to do to inform EWER system design?*
- *How should/can we build a relationship with community leaders?*
- *What should our role be in the design of the EWER system given that we want to ensure community ownership?*
- *Once the EWER system is up and running, what should our role be given that we want to ensure community ownership? To what degree should we supervise?*
- *What should our role be from a financial perspective given that we want to ensure community ownership?*
- *Do you have any final recommendations for us?*
- *If the respondent has experience in Libya or Yemen:*
  - *What locations do they recommend?*
  - *What best practices do they recommend?*
  - *What recommendations can they give on community buy-in?*
  - *What recommendations can they give on government liaising?*

SECTION G: OTHER RELEVANT INFO

G1. Is there anything else you think we should know as we move forward to designing and implementing EWER systems in the next phase of the project?

G2. Are there any resources (e.g.,) that you recommend we obtain to help inform our research?

G3. Are there any other people you recommend we speak to help inform the research process?

Annex IV:
Discussion Guide – Local Stakeholders

EWER System Local Stakeholder Discussion Guide

INSTRUCTIONS

For each focus group discussion (FGD) conducted, please fill out one of these forms. Focus should contain 7-10 participants. Please include your name, the date, and the location of the focus group in the same table. Thank you for your help in this important study!

GUIDE TO CONDUCTING FGD

1. Thank the focus group participants for taking the time to speak with you.

2. Introduce yourself: name, title, organization and a few sentences about your background that will help establish your credibility.

3. Introduce your project and explain the purpose of the FGD. You should highlight the fact that participation in the study is completely voluntary and anonymous, and that there is no payment or compensation for participation.

4. Explain that data from the survey will be kept entirely confidential. You will not write down or share the name of your interviewees or any identifying information with others, and that the discussion will not be published or broadcasted.

5. Introduce the note taker and his/her role.

6. Informed consent: It is essential that the FGD participants provide informed consent before you begin asking questions. Tell the FGD participants that they are not obliged to participate in the survey.

   a. If they do agree to participate, they are still free to leave the conversation at any point.

   b. They can also decline to answer questions they would prefer not to.

   c. They will not be penalized in any way if they decline to participate.

   d. If recording is possible, explain that it is for transcription purposes only, and that the files won't be shared, and won't disclose any personal details about the interviewee's identity.

   e. Ask the FGD participants if they have any questions.

   f. Ask the FGD participants if they understand the guidelines and the purpose of the research.

   g. Ask the FGD participants if they consent to participate in the research. If they agree, please continue with the discussion. If anyone does not consent to participate in the research, thank her/him for her/his time and give her/him time to leave before continuing with the FGD.

   h. Make sure that all participants are wearing masks and socially distanced. Do not exceed 10 people in the room, including note takers and interpreters.

7. Please note that some of these questions may be very sensitive, especially for people who either experienced or witnessed violence. Pay careful attention to the FGD participants' body language and reactions. If they are becoming emotional or upset, or you otherwise have concerns that the discussion is/will re-traumatize them, ask them if they want to continue and remind them that they are free to decline to answer any questions, or to leave the FGD at any point.

8. It may be a good idea to start with more general questions and then use the guiding questions below to fill in the gaps. In FGDs especially, discussions may generate organically, providing you with answers to a lot of these questions without you needing to ask them explicitly.

9. Last, explain that everyone's opinions are valuable and we are interested in hearing from everyone as long as they feel comfortable sharing. In the discussion you may need to ask questions of specific people if only a few dominant voices are speaking.

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION
(TO BE COMPLETED BY MODERATOR)

A1. Date of Focus Group Discussion (FGD):

A2. Venue/Location

A3. Team Member(s) Carrying Out FGD

A4. FGD Number

A5. How many participants?

A6. Any other distinguishing characteristics of the participants (eg. elderly, IDPs, youth, visible disability etc.)?

SECTION B: UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMUNITY

B.1 Has there recently been violence in your community? Please describe this recent violence, including the victims, the perpetrators, and the causes of this violence, if possible.

B.2 Before violence occurs in your community, are there any warning signs/triggers/indicators that violence is going to occur? If so, please describe these signs.

B.3 When violence happens, how does the community react? How do people try to ensure their safety? How successful are they? For what reasons?

B.4 When violence occurs or may occur, what security networks and/or mechanisms does your community rely on for protection or mediation? Please describe how this works in detail. Are they effective? Do they have sufficient capacities and resources? For what reasons?

B.5 Please describe the social composition of your community. Are there multiple ethnic and/or religious groups living in this community? Are there Muhamasheen/ Northerners or Tebu/Ahaali/Tawergha/Migrants living in this community?

Follow-up question: How would you describe relations between members of the community? Do people get along or is there conflict? For what reasons?

B.6 Who are the leaders/local actors in your community (such as the government, the police, tribal leaders, civil society and armed groups), in terms of security and justice specifically? What are they responsible for exactly? How are they involved in managing security and justice in your community? How do they collaborate and coordinate when violence occurs?

Follow-up question: How would you describe the relations between the community and these actors? Are these leaders trusted by members of the community? For what reasons?

B.7 In your community, are there women in leadership positions, either in local government, civil society organizations, or other groups? If so, please describe. If not, for what reasons? Are there any women's and/or youth groups in your community? If so, could you describe what they do?

B.8 What forms of communication are frequently used in your area for communication? Is that the case for all groups in the community? Are there factors that can limit communication in your community (for example infrastructure, internet, network and electricity limitations)? If so, how do you overcome this?

B.9 To what degree is your community accessible to outsiders? Are there NGOs working in your community? Can they work in a safe manner? If so, could you please provide their contact information.

SECTION C: INFORMATION ON EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

Please explain to the participants: An Early Warning and Early Response System (EWERS) is a system in which community members collect data about signs of potential impending violence so as to warn community members and provide ways in which they can ensure their safety. For example, community members alert observers of the approach of a particular armed group that could bring violence to the community; observers then verify this information and assess the likelihood that violence might follow; the people managing the EWERS then communicate to community members that violence may occur and offer certain strategies by which the population can assure their safety.

C.1 Is there a formal or informal EWERS already in place in your area that warns the community about potential violent outbreaks? If yes, please provide relevant contact information for focal points who are a part of this system. *If no, go to question C.5.*

C.2 Please describe how this system works: how are threats assessed, what warnings are sent to the community, how are warnings sent to the community, what responses are organized, what kind of violence does the system try to prevent, what population does it target, how long has it existed, how is it financed, and who manages it.

C.3 Do women participate in this system? If yes, how so and in what aspect/phase of the system? Are there warnings that are specific to threats women face more than men? Are there responses designed specifically for women? If women are not involved, for what reasons?

C.4 Do you think this warning and response system is effective in terms of the content of the warnings and responses, how messages are shared, and who manages it? Are there any obstacles to its proper functioning or unintended consequences? Are there any actors who attempt to disrupt this system? Please describe.

C.5 If there is no formal or informal warning system in your community, do you think setting this up in your area would be useful? Would people want this? For what reasons?

C.6 If a EWERS was set up in your community, what capacity building and resources (financial and material) would be necessary, in your opinion?

C.7 Which local stakeholders do you think would be most interested in participating in the development and implementation of an EWERS? How do you suggest engaging with such actors and getting their buy-in? If you have a trustworthy contact in a community that could benefit from EWERS (for example local government authority, civil society leader, ethnic/tribal leader, religious leader, police authority), please provide their contact information.

C.8 Who would the community trust to run the EWERS? Who would it trust to provide warnings? Who would it trust to recommend or implement responses? For what reasons?

> *Follow-up question: Could actors such as the government, police, ethnic/tribal leaders and/or civil society organizations help run this system? For what reasons? Do these actors have the capacities and resources to run such a system? If not, what are they lacking?*

C.9 What kind of warnings and responses would be most appropriate for your community? What kind of violence would this target? What would be the most useful way to communicate warnings and recommended responses? For what reasons?

C.10 Do you anticipate any difficulties or negative aspects of setting up such a system in your community? Who do you think would be more likely to refuse cooperating in or maybe even disrupt an EWERS? For what reasons? How could the community get their buy-in?

C.11 Do you think women in your community would participate in a formal EWERS? Would the community accept this? For what reasons? What initiatives would encourage their participation? What restrictions might need to be considered to respect local norms?

C.12 Outside of your community, what locations do you think are most suitable for implementing an Early Warning and Early Response System? What conditions would be ideal? Do you have any particular place in mind?

C.13 Are there any final recommendations you would like to share?

SECTION D: OTHER RELEVANT INFO

D.1 Is there anything else you think we should know that we weren't able to discuss today?

D.2 Do you have any additional contacts you would like to share with us?