

make a credible impact on conflict dynamics.² But this handy phrase, most frequently employed by non-governmental advocates to simultaneously blast governments and the UN while uncritically absolving themselves of any "downstream" role, obscures complex realities at the policy and operations levels. Policy-makers must work within program frameworks and criteria, adjust operational recommendations according to resource availability, balance operational options against (where relevant) potential competing policy priorities, and provide their political patrons with demonstrable results, sometimes referred to as "deliverables". Rather than decrying these realities, proponents of conflict early warning would do best to examine their underlying detail, as the opening four questions propose. They may also take note of the rapid transitions in international policy development, such as the extent to which the Northern donor community is beginning to identify violent conflict as perhaps the most damaging impediment to sustainable development programs. Early warners concerned with responses could highlight the added value in OECD development agencies stressing to their governments the attendant need for serious progress on preventive action policy mechanisms at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

One may also add here that as early warning begins to focus more on response-oriented analysis, this will help enable policy-makers to present their political constituencies with specific options for concrete preventive action. But this can only happen where analyses are targeted for the end-user, the policy community. For early warning to be effective in bridging the current gap between warning and action, it must indeed target those governments, IOs, regional organisations, and NGOs that will be implementing specific conflict prevention programs. In short, know your audience. This will require greater information-sharing concerning the existing capacities and options for rapid responses. Where capacity-building is required at the policy level, this must be reconciled with macro policy priorities and political considerations. In countries such as Canada, the Netherlands, Britain, and Norway, where individual ministers have evinced interest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding priorities, new conflict policy mechanisms and units have been mandated. The trend towards regional arrangements for conflict prevention and early warning (by regional organisations such as the OAU and IGAD as well as regional NGOs) will also hopefully make such cooperative targeting easier.³ The point here is that knowing the specifics of what is *possible* in terms of preventive action will help in framing policy recommendations that will both be user-friendly and facilitate mobilising political commitment for rapid, comprehensive responses.

Given this gap between policy-oriented analysis of root causes and preventive responses, there is growing recognition that an action-oriented approach is urgently required.⁴ In terms of how to craft appropriate analyses, however, the focus should not be "whether" a conflict is escalating into war. This merely has the effect of ringing an alarm - policy analysts are alerted to the problem but are not given any concrete ideas on how to respond at the operational level. The analytical focus should rather be on how