

foreign ministries and development aid agencies evolve internal frameworks for standardised early warning analysis. Such frameworks can help structure the usual reporting from desk officers and field personnel, and can more precisely identify and prioritise options for operational responses. Such internal initiatives will also help to orient thinking on early warning towards the crucial process link between warning and response, as this connection is easiest to make if both functions are carried out within the same bureaucracy. This does not presume, of course, that early warning analysis should remain the sole preserve of governmental and intergovernmental bodies. The non-governmental sector, particularly the large humanitarian relief NGOs with field operations in conflict-prone regions, can provide valuable independent information on political instability and governance crises, as can some academic networks. This inter-agency coordination on early warning is an important issue, and recent initiatives such as the Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) hold much promise in this regard.

A response-oriented early warning framework must strike a balance between a number of difficult choices. There must be a measure of *flexibility* so that officers will not feel constrained in their analyses, yet enough structure in the indicator categories to provide effective analytical guidance. In other words, a balance between a general "model", and detailed context/case specificity. As noted above, there is a need for early warning to be more than simple reporting, but generic models are unlikely to offer real insight into actual conflict dynamics on the ground. So a balanced approach is necessary, and there will be much need here for countries to share views on what form this balance should take for maximum effectiveness. It may also be argued that conflict typology varies from region to region to such an extent that it may not be possible to come up with an effective early warning framework that applies as well to Central Africa as it does to Central America. It may be preferable to devise region-specific analytical frameworks in concert with regional capacity-building for preventive action. Such regional capacity-building, widely understood to be among the best options for conflict prevention, should be targeted as an important area for ODA programming.

Another difficult issue is how to provide a concise, clear framework that does not overburden officers with too many categories to track, yet covers the dynamic "trigger factors". A long, unwieldy listing of indicators that are not set into an analytical framework, or that are too general to be of real use (e.g. poverty, infant mortality, dictatorship), is not going to be used by officers that are burdened with competing demands for their attention. Thus, an effective early warning system will focus on near-term trigger factors rather than the broader structural/background factors that may contribute to societal tension. One might also add, however, that such structural indicators (see C below) can be incorporated with parsimony if they are viewed as factors which must interact and overlap with other trigger indicator categories to be relevant for early warning. Abandoning reference to structural tensions altogether risks losing important contextual elements, such as unresolved inter-group disputes over land ownership, which is common in sub-Saharan Africa, for example.