

Conflict Early Warning Signs and Nigerian Government Response Dilemma: The Case Of Increasing Agitations for Statehood by Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASOB)

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Abstract

The basic goal of Conflict Early Warning systems (CEWs) is to prevent loss of lives, economic and material resources. Against the backdrop of a bloody three-year Civil War (1967-1970), the Nigerian Federal Government ought to be wary of the renewed agitation for a Biafra state – a consequence of unfulfilled aspirations of the Igbo population. To forestall a repeat of the past, this paper identifies the early warning signs and proposes proactive early warning responses suitable for a peaceful co-existence of a united Nigeria, as the option of conflict will roll back the progress made so far in nation-building over the years.

Introduction

A popular axiom states that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Humankind has always sought to get prior information about future impending dangers and calamities, either to prevent them or to adequately prepare for them. Although the idea had always been there, the concept of conflict early warning was first introduced during the Cold War as part of national military intelligence of the rival superpowers (US and USSR) to improve the ability of predicting potential ballistic nuclear attacks. Subsequently, early warning systems were introduced to predict and manage the outbreak of epidemics and natural disasters, such as droughts, storms and earthquakes. Today, early warning is employed to forecast and respond to violent conflicts, epidemics and natural disasters. Early warning efforts do not intend to eliminate conflicts from human and group relations, but to prevent it through appropriate mitigating response to observable indicators of conflict. This study examines the conflict potentials inherent in the struggles of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) by highlighting the signals of early warning indicated over the course of relations among the peoples of the South Eastern Geopolitical zone and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in a historical perspective. It is aimed at proposing possible early warning responses, the goal for which early warning system was developed.

Understanding Conflict

Generally, conflicts are associated with destruction and negative consequences. Yet, conflicts have beneficial outcomes that have effectively contributed to human progress. The root causes of conflict often being cultural or moral differences, scarcity, inequality, distribution of power, grievance, oppression, among other causes, foster an awareness of existing problems and encourage those problems to be addressed. In an online article entitled, *Beyond Intractability*, Guy Burgess (2006) is quoted as saying that “conflict is the engine of social learning.” By this, conflict provides a window for finding solutions to problems. Conflicts, when lacking in relationships, imply that one party is suppressing his view or stance to the other, with the result that the eventual reaction in future occurs with intractable intensity. The Niger Delta militant rebellion at its height fits this picture, in which the indigenes had suffered environmental degradation and oil wealth deprivation over the years without commensurate recompense. The insurgency that followed still lingers till date, though uneasy calm has returned to the region after an offer of Amnesty and reformation of the rebels.

At the national level, the quota system introduced in the 1970s and the Federal Character principle that became officially recognized in the 1979 constitution were aimed at addressing inequality among the ethnic groups in the country in the areas of admission, recruitment, promotion and appointments. As a way of promoting balance among its ethnic affiliates, some political parties have adopted the principle of rotation in political office occupations, failing which may result in regional agitations and restiveness. The above example with respect to Federal Character explains how conflict fosters the creation of new ideas in the service of peace and harmony among diverse people.

Modern nation-states came into existence in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War in Europe in 1648, just as the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations, as well as the European Union were founded upon the ashes of devastating wars at great human and economic costs. Accompanying these institutions are new rules and norms enacted and collectively accepted globally by member nations to uphold for the continued peaceful co-existence and amicable settlement of disputes among humankind. The establishment of Unity schools (Federal Government Co-educational Colleges) and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Nigeria came about after the Nigerian Civil War as a way of bringing Nigerians of diverse cultural backgrounds to develop a shared sense of community with a view to the promotion of common ties among the youths of Nigeria as well as the promotion of national unity. It is therefore expected that with this and other related programmes in place, a new generation of Nigerians will co-exist devoid of mutual suspicion.

It must be stated at this point that no matter the advantages of conflict as we stated, its destructive toll on humans and economy makes it an unworthy enterprise. To borrow the words of (Betrand, 2016), in an online essay, “War does not determine who is right but only who is left”. Conflict when it escalates to a full scale war serves no positive utility in the face of human losses and devastation that attend its occurrence. Wars bring weapons with which combatants and by-standers (civilians) alike are killed, thereby depopulating nations. It causes families to break up, renders people homeless, and stunts development opportunities for children and youths as it affects their psychological and cognitive make up. Today’s Syria in the Middle East is a typical example of the negative effects of conflict. Its citizens, regardless of former social status

in society, have become unwilling beggars and destitute. War brings starvation, innocent death, disability, poverty, and economic crash.

Children are the worst hit in war zones as they die mostly from preventable diseases. The disruption of their education also lays the foundation for a society of miscreants and vices, in which future adults become a liability to their society. In her report entitled '*The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*', Marchel (1996), noted that the physical, sexual and emotional violence to which they [children] are exposed shatters their world. War undermines the very foundations of children's lives, destroying their homes, splintering their communities and breaking down their trust in adults. More than 2.7 million children are reported to have died in Democratic Republic of Congo in 2008 (Machel, 1996). Girls and young women are not left out as many of them are being used as sex slaves, with the result of either contracting deadly or incurable diseases, or worse yet having babies being raped by combatants.

Nations also suffer tremendously in times of war as the economy falls when war destroys industries, jobs and infrastructure. Inflation is the most salient feature during war as prices become higher, thus reducing living standards. War efforts bring about tax increase, in addition to borrowing and printing more currency, thereby deepening inflation while reducing government spending in critical areas of benefit to the citizenry. The outcome of this is the reduction in value of national currency as in the case of Angola during the civil war (1975-2002), in which bottles and cans of European or South African beer came to replace the national legal tender, Kwanza, as currency of choice for monetary transactions (Bloomberg.com,2015).These should encourage the embrace of the popular quote by Ellis (2016) that "there is nothing that war has ever achieved that we could not better achieve without it." It brings to fore the necessity for conflict prevention mechanisms aimed at nipping in the bud potential outbreak of hostilities in our societies, regions, countries and the world at large

Conceptual Clarification.

Early Warning System

Conflict Early Warning refers to a conflict prevention system aimed at detecting potential conflict and therefore forestalling an outbreak of one. It is a system because it is a set of procedures which involves data collection, analysis, and transmission of the information gathered to the appropriate authorities to take necessary action in preventing the outbreak of violent conflict. According to Adelman (2016: np),

Early warning is intended to detect rising tensions headed towards violent conflict. It is therefore complementary to conflict prevention when it focuses on tensions that are already rising. Early warning does include not only the gathering of data but the analysis of that data to develop strategic options for response but does not include the responses themselves which come under conflict prevention.

In other words, Conflict Early Warning cannot prevent the generation of conflict but does detect the incipient stages of conflict and suggests possible responses aimed at averting an eventual

conflict. Longman(2016 :np), also defined EWS as “any initiative that focuses on systematic data collection, analysis and/or formulation of recommendations, including risk assessment and information sharing, regardless of topic, whether they are quantitative, qualitative, or a blend of both.” EWS, it is argued, prevents loss of life, economic and material resources. These fundamental purposes of EWS accounts for its adoption by the United Nations in the area of disaster management, where Human Early Warning Systems (HEWS) had been deployed to forewarn of floods, hurricane, tsunamis, famine and drought, diseases, among other potential humanitarian disasters.

Evolution of Early Warning System

It is recorded according to Krummenacher and Schmeidi(2016 :np),that the idea of early warning has its origins in the Cold War, where it was employed notably by the USA and USSR intelligence to prevent surprise attacks and enhance the capacity of predicting potential ballistic military attack by rival superpowers. According to (Wikipedia, 2016),the Middle East Yom Kippur War in 1973 and the Falkland War between Britain and Argentina in 1982 foreshadowed the institutionalization of the early warning concept in international relations. Having been jolted by these wars, which necessitated the involvement of humanitarian agencies to make provisions for displaced people (refugees), the United Nations initiated an early warning mechanism with the goal to forecast potential conflict within and among nations. In 1994, the Rwandan genocide reinforced the need for early detection of conflict before escalation. The aftermath of the conflict was the establishment of Swiss Peace Foundations International aimed at enhancing the ability of decision makers and their staff in state and non-state institutions to identify critical developments in a timely manner so that coherent political strategies could be formulated to either prevent or limit destructive effects of violent conflicts, or to identify windows of opportunity for peace building (<https://www.swisspeace.ch/archive...>). Another response to the Rwandan Genocide was the establishment of the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) (<http://www.eawarn.ru>, 2016). With a network of 35 organizations worldwide FEWER publishes regular early warning reports from member regions in addition to hosting forums for suggestions on integrated responses and conducting research with sister organizations.

Conflict Development

Typically, conflicts develop in stages. According to Davies and Gurr(1998:np), three broad stages lead to conflicts, namely: structural tensions, escalation and crisis. Also known as root-causes, structural indicators of conflict are political, social, or economic background contexts under which conflicts fester and erupt in the medium or long term. They include systematic political exclusion by one group against another; inequalities in economic opportunities; corruption, government failure to deliver political goods, such as security, law and order, medical and health care delivery, schools and educational instructions, critical infrastructure, among others over time.

The second stage of the evolution of conflict – escalation – arises from *events* or *dynamic* indicators occasioned by accelerators and triggers. Accelerators are events that are capable of sparking the outbreak or escalation of violence. They are feedback events that rapidly increase the level of significance of the most volatile of the general conditions, but may also signify system breakdown or basic changes in political causality (p.206). An example of an event indicator was the killing of Ken Saro Wiwa by the Nigerian military junta under General Sani Abacha in 1995. This was a build up to the eventual armed rebellion of Niger Delta militants.

Finally, conflict outbreaks are caused by triggers – sudden or immediate events, which when combined with structural indicators (accelerators) and cumulative events of the past, sets off the chain of events that ignite a conflict. The shooting down and assassination of former Rwandan President on April 6, 1994 is a typical illustration of a trigger event or catalyst for the Rwandan Genocide.

Early Warning Methodologies

No one variable can definitively explain the incidence of conflict. In other words, an effective early warning system relies on both long and short term analysis – structural and events data respectively. These are subsumed under qualitative and quantitative analysis. The quantitative approach aims to identify and predict structural conditions susceptible to cause conflict. It involves the constant monitoring of events through local and expert networks, such as Non-Governmental Organizations, as well as fact-finding missions. A combination of structural data and events data are analyzed about a country for the purpose of predicting and warning relevant authorities of impending crisis. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch use this approach.

Quantitative analysis by contrast refers to the collation of data on events. These events are codified according to the types of event, dramatis personae of the event, dates and locations of events, and fatalities involved. Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) is a comprehensive online quantitative event data site. According to (Acleddata.com 2016), “the data can be used for medium and long term analysis and mapping of political violence across developing countries... through real time updates and reports.” Event data analysis is based on aggregating, revising and coding news reports from around the world on countries and regions in its areas of focus. It enables the use of statistical methods to validate results.

Conflict Early Warning indicators in Nigeria

The indicators of conflict in Nigeria are rooted first in the cobbling together of an estimated 250 diverse and distant ethnic groups by the former British colonial powers who administered the geographical space called Nigeria. By bringing together these disparate groups, nation-building has been a near-impossible task for successive administrators of the Nigerian state. To the extent that nation-building has been a challenge, political participation has since before independence been along ethnic lines. The reason for this is not farfetched. An ethnic group on which the control of government apparatus falls dominates the others and is favoured with comparatively better delivery of political goods, such as security, law, medical and health care, schools and educational instructions, and critical infrastructure, among others. On the whole, however, Nigeria is rated rather poorly in major standard of living indicators. The following illustrates the current state of Nigeria in terms of political, economic and social rating: In the Fragile States Index (2015), a publication of Fund for Peace (FFP), Nigeria was ranked 14 in the *Very High Alert* category among the most unstable countries in the world. Under the social, economic and political indicators, Nigeria is rated high (failing) in the following categories: Group governance, Poverty and economic decline, State Legitimacy, Public Services, Human Rights and Rule of Law, Security Apparatus and Factionalized States, giving it a total score of 102, where South Sudan and Somalia are ranked first and second with 114 and 114.5 points respectively. The Human Development Index (HDI) Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2014), is equally unimpressive with Nigeria ensconced in the 152nd position with an HDI value of 0.514. Life expectancy at birth, according to the report, is 52.8; mean years of

schooling stood at 5.9 years; while Gross National Income per capita reveals an abysmal minus 24. Such damning report demonstrates to a large measure the negative effects of corruption in Nigeria, which Transparency International in its report of Corruption Perception Index (2014), ranks Nigeria as the 27th most corrupt country in the world.

From the above, it becomes obvious why competing ethnic militias are constantly up in arms against the governments in power. Notable ethnic militias are: Odu'a People's Congress (OPC) in the Yoruba West; Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the South-East; Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND); Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF); and the bloodiest of all in the North-Eastern region – Boko Haram, an Islamic movement which according to New Africa Political Violence (2016), has been ranked the deadliest terrorist group in the world, ahead of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or Levant (ISIS or ISIL) in the Middle East. The origins and the causes of these ethnic rebel movements can be generally found in mass resentment of citizens who share common unfulfilled aspirations under a perceived illegitimate governing class that has failed to adequately address the concerns of large segments of the population.

Separatist Biafra Movements

Separatist movements in the South-Eastern geo-political zone of Nigeria have as its common objective, the creation of the state of Biafra, inhabited predominantly by the Igbo ethnic group. They are seeking for the establishment of an Igbo-dominated nation, begun in 1967 by the former military governor of the Eastern Region, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu. The Nigerian Civil War (July 6, 1967 – January 13, 1970) was essentially caused by economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among widely diverging ethnic groups in Nigeria. Other prominent secessionist movements agitating for the restoration of a Biafra state are the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereignty State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the less well known Biafra Zionist Movement (BZN).

The more active MASSOB is a pseudo-militant group formed in the year 2000 and led by Ralph Uwazurike, a graduate of Political Science from the University of Bombay. He is also a trained lawyer. The emergence of MASSOB can easily be attributed to the claimed long years of Igbo “marginalization” from adequate representation at the national level and the neglect of the Federal Government (FG) in terms of provision of infrastructure, especially since the end of the Biafra-Nigeria war, after which the FG had guaranteed a program of 3Rs – Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation. Claims by the Igbo people of discrimination in political, economic and social spheres of government are still rife and apparent.

Missionary penetration into the Igbo-dominated region might have come later than the Yoruba-dominated regions. The Igbo were so quick to adopt Western education and civilization that by the 1940s they had acquired political, economic and social status rivaling the Yoruba ethnic group, with which they competed in the civil service and other professions, notably the military. Military coups led by Igbo dominated officer corps triggered the Nigerian Civil War that eventually saw the fall from an elevated socio-political status of the Igbo ethnic group to a minority one characterized by structural inequity commonly called “marginalization” in Nigeria. In addition to being politically sidelined, the Igbo people as a result of a severe population pressure in their homeland and desire for prosperity have been the most widely dispersed in Nigeria, thereby making them the most vulnerable ethnic group during hostilities. The pogroms that preceded the Biafra Civil War are illustrative.

MASSOB in particular led grass root campaigns for the self-determination of the Igbo, initiating a Biafra renaissance in the South Eastern part of the country and in the Diaspora. Indeed, according to WARN policy brief (2016), it was reported that some local Igbo communities were levied to the tune of six million naira monthly for the prosecution of the resurgence. In 2009, Nnamdi Kanu, with the support of MASSOB, established Radio Biafra and later the Biafra Television for the dissemination of the Neo- Biafra propaganda. Newspapers such as Biafra Herald and other social media were also created to sustain the campaign. Pro-Biafra T-shirts, caps and posters were also printed and doled out, yet the agitation remained at the passive and non-violent stage until 2015 when the Nigerian government declared MASSOB an extremist group and launched a clampdown on its members, arresting, detaining, torturing, and jailing its leaders for sedition and treason charges. Splinter groups also sprung up from MASSOB in support of the pro-Biafra movements, including the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by Nnamdi Kanu, and the Biafra Independent Movement (BIM), formed in 2015 by Ralph Uwazurike. The latest string of agitation for Biafra secession is led by IPOB, whose leader, Nnamdi Kanu, was arrested and detained by the Federal Government of Nigeria since 17 October 2015. Kanu's arrest exacerbated the Neo- Biafra agitation, giving the conflict a more violent dimension in the form of protests and demonstrations in South Eastern states as well as some South-South states. These protests led to pro-Biafra protesters and Joint Task Force clashes, resulting in the death of several protesters, police officers and some members of the Joint Task Force. Property worth millions of naira has been destroyed since the last few years as a result of confrontations between the security agencies and Biafra agitators.

Fault Lines of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

The renewed wave of pro-Biafra agitation, the largest and most violent since the end of the Nigerian-Biafran War, championed by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is not without adequate early warning signs. The movement cites perceived injustice, inequality and marginalization of the Igbo by the political leadership of Nigeria since the end of the secessionist attempt by Biafra in 1970. This perceived marginalization, according to the group is further aggravated by the under-representation of the South Easterners in the present Buhari-led administration. A *Premium Times* Report (2016) of 28 August, revealed that 75% of the 29 appointments made by the President are Northern Nigerians, 25% from the Southern part of the country, while the South East had 0%. A statement credited to President Buhari in the previous month (July) that he would treat the different regions in the country according to votes cast for him further fuelled the fear among the Igbo who were said to have voted en- mass for the president's opponent, Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 general elections. Prominent Igbo leaders and politicians from the South East, including the Ohaneze Ndigbo, the highest trade-political organization has affirmed that the region is highly marginalized socio-economically and politically. These no doubt, constitute early warning signs for the Federal Government to take heed of in order to prevent the crisis from escalating thus far.

Furthermore, the Radio Biafra was allowed to broadcast for almost three years before its frequency was jammed by the Nigerian government in 2015. The threat of such propaganda can be likened to that of Rwandan Radio Television Libre de Millie Collines (RTL), established by Hutu extremists to transmit racists and hatred jokes, music, commentaries and propaganda against the "cockroaches" (Tutsis). The RTL propaganda was most influential in inciting the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s; the worst genocide incidence in twentieth century Africa.

Youth unemployment and the proliferation of small and light weapons also aided the Biafra agitation. At the climax of the crisis, youths from the region were seen in their thousands barricading the highways and causing mayhem in the region. It is only unemployed youths that can provide the needed human capital for such venture. Statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics (2012) revealed that apart from the North Eastern Region of the country that is currently facing insurgency, South Eastern states like Anambra, Imo, Enugu and Abia ranked among the highest in unemployment rate. The region also ranked high in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which flow from the neighbouring militants from the Niger Delta region. Some of the peace conditions laid out by the pro-Biafra separatists include the dredging of the river Niger to allow the Igbo have access to the ocean, the construction of the second Niger bridge flagged off by the previous administration, the construction of federal roads in the region, provision of employment and empowerment opportunities. These conditions further underscore the argument that the agitation may not be as much a separatist agitation as it is for improved standard of living and employment opportunities. The above scenario clearly point to structural imbalances in the Nigerian system giving a cause for the vent for the neo-Biafra agitation. These structural imbalances are issues that an effective conflict early warning system would have identified and recommended strategies for nipping the crisis in the bud. Adequate early response measures to this should include provision of jobs, infrastructural development, and poverty reduction strategies.

IPOB: The Federal Government Early Response Dilemma

An escalating factor in recent agitations for a Biafra state is the arrest and continued detention of Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Although justified on the ground of sedition charges against Mr. Kanu, this act by the Nigerian government has been adjudged by many as a major strategic blunder in the Nigerian government's conflict early warning and early response system. History is replete with examples of separatist, nationalist, and dissident movements becoming burgeoned and turning into full-scale war when the government started clamping down on their leaders, especially if the clampdown leads to the death of the said IPOB leader. In Nigeria, the Niger Delta agitation for a fair share of the oil revenue escalated to a militant proportion when the federal government's arrest, detention, torture and extra judicial killing of their ringleaders pitted the population against the government. Consequently, the local population started providing support, sanctuaries, information and supplies to the militants who they saw as fighting for the rights of the people of the oil-bearing Niger Delta region. Similarly, the on-going Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern part of the country remained relatively at the latent stage until the arrest, incarceration and extrajudicial killing of the group's founding leader, Mohammed Yusuf while in police custody. The death of Yusuf marked a turning point in the conflict, causing the insurgents to adopt terrorist tactics against the federal government, innocent and harmless by-standers with the result being the protracted insurgency we have in the region today.

Until the recent government clampdown on the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra, the movement and its agitations attracted very little attention outside the Igbo area, with no clear arrowhead. The agitation for the secession of the Biafran Republic lacked a decipherable focal point around which the struggle coalesced, a role Odumegwu Ojukwu gallantly played for the same struggle during the Nigeria-Biafra war. The activities of IPOB prior to this time were still at the non-violent stage, limited only to anti-government propaganda. Even when on November 2012, the BZM declared the independence of Biafra, there seemed to be no panic in the polity. However,

with the government's crackdown on IPOB, the resistance is now identified with a leading figure to rally round – an unintended goal of the Federal Government. Kanu has now been designated some eulogized names like the “liberator of the Igbo,” “the Igbo messiah,” and ‘the conqueror of the zoo republic’ (referring to Nigeria as the zoo republic). The forceful crack down on IPOB has also attracted international attention for the movement. There has been an unprecedented surfeit of calls for the release of Kanu from across the globe, especially from human right groups and even from some superpowers in the international community. For instance, Mrs. Harriet Harman, former Home Secretary and former Leader of the United Kingdom's Labour Party, as well as the Russian and Israeli governments, have appealed for Kanu's release from detention. The Biafra question has also garnered significant CNN effect, and some international jurists have come out to state that the Igbo have a right to self-determination under international law.

The above scenario is a clear indication of early warning for the Nigerian state. The West African Early Warning and Early Response Network, an integral part of the West African Network for Peace building, in its January 2016 policy brief identified the current neo-Biafranism as a serious threat to peace and conflict early warning sign for the country. The WARN policy brief presents a three case scenario that may become of the neo-Biafra question, depending on how (and how early) the Federal Government responds to the crisis and take steps to prevent its escalation to a fiercer conflict. In the best-case scenario, the federal government may engage the leadership of the IPOB and other pro-Biafran groups and the umbrella ethno-political group in Igbo region, the Ohaneze, in a negotiation to articulate their grievances and agree on implementable agenda towards addressing them. The groups are expected to lay down their arms and drop their agitations allowing for a peaceful atmosphere that will spur development.

The federal government can also engage southeastern governors, traditional rulers and other political appointees in a discussion about the perceived marginalization and an agreement may be reached on the government's agenda for the improvement of the lots of the region. Nnamdi Kanu may be released on conditions that will be difficult for him and his supporters to carry on with further protests. A court order banning protests and all media of agitation (like Radio Biafra) could be issued. The struggle may fissile out in the event of lack of credible leadership and coherent activities.

If the Nigerian government decides to commence accelerated trial of Nnamdi Kanu, he may be found guilty and possibly sentence to jail for treasonable felony; an event that may spark further violent protests as well as agitation in the southeast and among Igbo in Diaspora. This will inevitably lead to the collapse of Socio- economic activities especially in the region leaving the federal government no option than to declare a state of emergency in the region. Then, if the federal government obtains a court order declaring IPOB, MASSOB, BIM, and BZM illegal groups with terrorist tendencies, it may escalate violent protests, and military onslaught and Human rights concerns will be raised. Igbo in the north may start returning to the southeast while northerners in the south start returning to the north. This may present a scenario similar to the eve of the Nigeria-Biafra War and the country may once again be thrown into another war. This scenario is however less likely at this stage of the conflict.

Conclusions

Conflict Early Warning and Response (CEWERS) have now gained ample popularity as effective conflict prevention and peace building strategies in local, national, and international conflicts.

Gone are the days when conflicts tended to spring surprise to governments. In Nigeria however, conflict early warning and response mechanisms still tend to be weak and inadequate to abate the outbreak of potential conflicts. This is largely due to the apathy and lack of political will by the policy makers to respond to conflict early warning signals as well as the lack of coordination between major stakeholders – policymakers, security agencies, civil societies, traditional rulers and local actors. It has been established from the foregoing that these early warning-early response gaps in the Nigerian setting permitted the IPOB led agitation for the secession of Biafra from the Federal Republic of Nigeria to escalate to its present violent dimension. The gap, if not substantially narrowed, has the potential of further escalating the conflict to a fiercer proportion that may threaten the unity of the Nigerian state.

Thus, for a thriving CEWER system in Nigeria, there is need for increased coordination and co-operation among the various early warning agencies and organizations in the country. There is also need for better commitment on the part of the policy makers who are responsible for early response to warnings from these agencies and organizations. Finally, since most conflicts emerge from the local settings, there is need to integrate the traditional rulers, religious leaders, community based organizations and other local actors and stakeholders in the conflict early warning and response arrangement.

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