



# Gender-Responsive Early Warning: Overview and How-to Guide

# GENDER- RESPONSIVE EARLY WARNING: OVERVIEW AND HOW-TO GUIDE

## Acknowledgement

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\*Any reference to “UNIFEM” in the document must be understood to refer to “former UNIFEM”, one of the four entities merged into the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on 21st July, 2010 by United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/64/289.

\*Any reference to United Nations “resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions or 5 WPS resolutions” in the document must be understood to refer to Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security 1325 (2000); 1820 (2008); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2009); and 1960 (2010).

On the cover: Women leaders of an IDP camp in West Darfur meet with the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping  
*Credit: UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran*



UN military observers distribute radios to a community in Cambodia. *Credit: UN Photo*

## INTRODUCTION

Between 30 July and 2 August 2010, a coalition of armed groups attacked 13 villages in Walikale territory in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A United Nations investigation concluded that at least 387 people had been raped during this attack.<sup>1</sup> Timely and reliable information on signals such as movements of armed groups or their proximity to civilian centers could have minimized the incidence of rapes if not prevented them. In a special session following this incident, members of the Security Council demanded stronger early warning systems to prevent atrocities and prompt a timely response.

UN Women and UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, in collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, were tasked by the Secretary-General to develop the first-ever set of early warning indicators specific to conflict-related sexual violence, and these are now being integrated by field-based protection actors into their own monitoring and information systems.

Over the last few years, early warning systems have proliferated and have been transformed by the availability of new information and communications technology. Experts speak of third and even fourth generation early warning, and the sophistication and variety of systems continues to grow. However, the challenges that concerned gender experts a decade ago, namely the lack of attention to gender issues and the low participation of women in early warning initiatives, have not been overcome.

This paper summarizes the last decade's efforts to mainstream gender into early warning systems, as well as the latest developments in this area. As practical guidance, it provides a simple checklist of recommendations for those planning, implementing, or evaluating gender-responsive, community-led early warning.

**THE CHALLENGES THAT CONCERNED GENDER EXPERTS A DECADE AGO, NAMELY THE LACK OF ATTENTION TO GENDER ISSUES AND THE LOW PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN EARLY WARNING INITIATIVES, HAVE NOT BEEN OVERCOME.**

# CONFLICT EARLY WARNING

Early warning has been used to predict a wide range of phenomena, from natural disasters, to stock market crashes, famines, refugee flows, genocide, and violent conflict. Since the 1980s, a number of conflict-related early warning initiatives have sprung up in the academic and NGO communities, as well as throughout the United Nations system, where the first specific proposal for an early warning system dates from a 1981 report to the Human Rights Commission on “Massive Exodus and Human Rights,” and became widespread as a method of work after the Brahimi report in 2000 and the failure to prevent the Rwanda genocide.<sup>2</sup> After the establishment and dissolution of the UN’s Office for the Research and Collection of Information in the late 1980s, early warning has remained decentralized in the United Nations, from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to the Framework Team<sup>3</sup> to the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Early Warning-Early Action quarterly reports produced by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s working group on Preparedness, among many others.

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Typically, early warning systems involve the collection and analysis of open source information to enhance prevention or early response, mainly before violence has erupted or, in the conflict and post-conflict phases, to contain the outbreak, mitigate its effects, and prevent its recurrence. Most consist of networks of local monitors collecting data on context-relevant indicators, the analysis and dissemination of such information, and its linkage to possible response mechanisms. A frequent criticism of such systems has been that warnings often go unanswered, so in recent years the emphasis of some early warning systems has been on empowering local communities to better prepare themselves and respond to threats, rather than waiting for the information to trigger external intervention.<sup>4</sup>

While some early warning systems operate at the national level, such as in Colombia, Timor Leste, or South Sudan, and even at a subnational level, most operate at a regional level. Examples of regional early warning systems include the African Union’s Continental Early Warning System, the Central Early Warning System (MARAC) of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Warning and Response Network of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWARN) in and the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) in East Africa. The European Union has established a watch list that is updated twice a year by civilian and military analysts from the European Council, the European Commission and the EU’s Joint Situation Center (EUSITCEN). It also houses a Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit located in the European Council.

Not all early warning relies on the regular collection of data on a set of indicators. Political analysts and country desk officers frequently monitor events without reference to a specific set of indicators. Most countries simply rely on intelligence gathering or the analysis of their diplomatic missions. Some rely on quantitative models. For example, several universities, such as Leiden University, Carleton University, and Georgia Institute of Technology, and the Global Peace Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit have developed very sophisticated quantitative models to predict violent conflict and recognize patterns. Others, such as the UN’s Framework Team and the Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Network, have based their early warning frameworks on a qualitative model based on answers to broad questions about social, political, demographic, security, or environmental factors.

Existing early warning systems are often geared towards assessing risk and structural fragility or predicting conflict and instability in general and do not typically focus on a particular type of atrocity. The exception to this is genocide. Early warning systems for genocide have been developed by Genocide Watch,<sup>5</sup> who track the sequential “eight stages of genocide” and Barbara Harff’s early warning model of genocide,<sup>6</sup> as well as the Office of the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG), which has developed an analysis framework comprising eight categories of factors deemed to affect the risk of genocide.<sup>7</sup>

The diversity of methods employed ranges from simply coding news stories by pre-specified indicators, to more survey-based

approaches and, recently, the use of technology, from high-frequency radios to cell-phone messaging and various forms of crisis mapping. To name a few examples, in the Karamoja areas of northern Uganda or Turkana areas of Kenya, local monitors use high-frequency radios to disseminate their reports when they are hundreds of kilometers away from cell-phone coverage. The Satellite Sentinel Project in Sudan and Southern Sudan combines satellite imagery, Google's web platform, and the research and analysis of Harvard Humanitarian Initiative.<sup>8</sup>

In late 2007, in the midst of mass violence in Kenya, a non-profit company called *Ushahidi* put to use for the first time software that allowed local observers to submit reports of violent incidents using their mobile phones or the Internet, and placed these incident reports on a Google map. Since then, the field of early warning has been profoundly transformed by the rapid proliferation of actors and initiatives and the growing use of information and communications technology. Terms like crisis mapping, data mining, crowdsourcing, and social media analysis have become commonplace, and have breathed new life into this field. An ever growing number of actors have put these new technologies to use in Haiti, Libya, Egypt, Somalia, or Syria, in contexts ranging

from natural disasters to armed conflict to mass protests, including with a specific focus on gender-violence.<sup>9</sup> Leading UN agencies in this field, including UNDP, OCHA, DPKO, and DPA, as well as the UN Global Pulse, are engaged in a number of collaborative projects with research institutions and private companies to take advantage of the use of these technologies for conflict prevention, humanitarian relief, and peacekeeping.<sup>10</sup>

The application of new ICTs brings with it a new set of challenges and ethical dilemmas, which is compounded by the lack of an agreed code of ethics, standardized training, or technical benchmarks. If the main challenge used to be the paucity of information, now it seems as if information overload, and the difficulty to sift through it, analyze it, and corroborate it, has become the main concern. Most importantly, many question whether better technology for early warning leads to early action and appropriate response, which has been the central criticism of early warning initiatives for some time.<sup>11</sup>



Misseriya community people listen to a traditional community leader, advocating for peaceful coexistence between Misseriya and Dinka neighbors. The absence of women is evident. Credit: UN Photo/Fred Noy

## GENDER-RESPONSIVE EARLY WARNING:

More than a decade ago, Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security and 1366 (2001) on conflict prevention highlighted the role of women and the importance of a gender perspective in conflict prevention. Subsequently, a number of projects implemented by the former United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, now part of UN Women) and the NGOs International Alert and Swisspeace, among others, attempted to ensure that women were fully involved in data collection, data analysis, and the formulation of appropriate responses. Efforts were also made to ensure that a gender analysis was employed in identifying indicators of conflict and peace.

These efforts were premised on the realization that by overlooking female stakeholders early warning systems were missing women's potential contribution to more comprehensive information. Early warning reports downplaying the likelihood of an outbreak of violent conflict might fail to notice other signs presaging a spike in gender-based violence. In addition, there was the recognition that a gender-blind early warning system could lead to a response that is inadvertently harmful to women or detrimental to gender relations. For example, weapons accumulation and proliferation may be one of the principal signs of impending conflict, and local women often know about the location of arms caches, the routes used to transport them, and the social changes brought about by an influx of guns. UNIFEM's early warning project in Solomon Islands quickly identified that men rated inter-ethnic relations much higher as a source of

tension than women, thereby confirming the suggestion that women were better able to maintain inter-ethnic alliances.

And yet, out of a 2008 compilation of 30 early warning and assessment frameworks totaling 832 indicators, only 11 indicators made any reference to gender or women and only one of them was about monitoring women's human rights violations—in this case, so-called "honor killings." The remaining 10 were about collecting sex-disaggregated data on governance and development and measuring women's political, social, and economic status.<sup>12</sup> Other frameworks fare better. For example, the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy' Fragility Index contains 83 indicators, nine of which make reference to women or gender, though mainly under categories like human development, governance, and demography, and none under security or crime. CEWARN, for example, has added several gender-related questions and

indicators to their field surveys. These include stability of “bride-prices,” which tend to fluctuate based on the availability of livestock and the frequency of cattle raids, the frequency of inter-group marriages, and unusual movement of all-male groups.

## BY OVERLOOKING FEMALE STAKEHOLDERS EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS WERE MISSING WOMEN’S POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO MORE COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION AND RESPONSES

The World Bank’s Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) measures, which are used in its country strategies, are based on 16 indicators. Gender equality constitutes one of these indicators, composed of a broad range of different data such as access to primary and secondary education, access to antenatal and delivery care and family planning services, business ownership and management, land tenure and inheritance rights, legal and policy measures to address violence against women, political participation, family law, access for men and women to productive and economic resources, and equality and protection of men and women under the law. Similarly, the Index of African Governance (IAG) contains only five indicators out of 57 related to women, including maternal mortality, female primary school completion rate and female adult literacy rate, ratio of girls and boys in primary and secondary education. None of the 23 so-called peace indicators of the Global Peace Index are related to gender inequality, though this is taken into account in a list of related indicators, including data on the number of women in parliament and the gender ratio of the population, as well as being correlated with the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum. Finally, the Gender Inequality Index of the Human Development Report measures women’s disadvantage in reproductive health, the labor market, education rates, and political participation.<sup>13</sup>

The literature on gender-sensitive early warning often distinguishes between root causes or underlying trends that forewarn of the likelihood of violent conflict or indicate state fragility, such as the fertility rate, the percentage of women in parliament and the formal labor sector, the prevalence of social norms that condone violence against women, or average levels of female education on one hand, and more proximate causes and indicators that reflect rising tension, on the other. These are typically violations of the rights of women and girls, such as rape,

domestic violence, sexual abuse by security forces, displacement, the killing, abduction, and disappearance of women, increased rates of sex work and survival sex due to military presence, imposition of restrictive laws that lead to abrupt changes in gender roles, impunity for perpetrators of violence against women, and inflammatory public rhetoric and propaganda emphasizing hyper-masculine behavior and rewarding aggressiveness, among others. For example, a rising level of domestic violence was observed in Ethiopia prior to the war with Eritrea. Inter-group rape as a form of intimidation of Kosovar Albanians by Serbs and vice versa was already increasing in 1989, and Muslim women were observed to flee Prijedor between March and April of 1992, six to eight weeks before the situation deteriorated. In Rwanda, as early as 1990, extremist Hutu press and radio began to target Tutsi women as a threat to Hutu society, depicting them as spies and seductresses, including via pornographic material. The “Hutu Ten Commandments,” a document published in 1990 by an anti-Tutsi newspaper in Rwanda, explicitly targeted Tutsi women.<sup>14</sup>

Some early warning and assessment frameworks contain not only potential triggers or accelerators, but also intervening conditions that may diminish the likelihood of conflict or enhance the capacity of a society to settle disputes and diffuse tension. For example, the weakness of women’s civil society could indicate that women do not feel secure and that civil society is not strong enough to play a helpful role in conflict management and conflict resolution. Alternatively, strong women’s organizations could present a given society with a variety of coping strategies, including at the micro-level of intra-family and intra-community disputes, which may be overlooked by gender-blind early warning systems.

Gender-sensitive early warning indicators are not only about women and girls. As tension escalates, the overall level of aggressiveness in society may be reflected in alcohol-related fights, vandalism, ganging up and harassment of men from out-groups, and persecution of men who refuse to take up arms or are not fulfilling the ‘masculine’ ideal of combatant. Similarly, the presence of a large percentage of unemployed or idle young men is frequently noted as an indicator of potential instability.

UNIFEM (now part of UN Women) implemented several pilot projects in Colombia, Ferghana Valley, Solomon Islands, and the Democratic Republic of Congo that demonstrate the importance of context-specific approaches.<sup>15</sup> In Colombia, UNIFEM teamed up with the National Ombudsperson’s Office, which has issued hundreds of alerts to the Colombian military, national police, and other state institutions, to develop gender-specific indicators and integrate them into the Ombudsperson’s early warning system. Their indicators were tailored to the particular characteristics of the Colombian conflict, including kidnappings, armed groups’ threats to women leaders and women’s organizations, increased

sex work, HIV/AIDS, and female-headed households in areas where illegal armed groups are present, discriminatory practices against afro-indigenous women, and strict control of sexuality and social behavior of women and girls, among others. In the Ferghana Valley, UNIFEM's analysis and early warning indicators focused on the relation between gender and land rights, water management, and conflict, as these were seen as key variables in the region. In the Solomon Islands, avoidance of markets and public gardens by women due to fear, the gendered dimensions

of gun ownership and increasing militarization, and media content derogatory to women were seen as key threat factors. In the DRC, UNIFEM's project focused on monitoring political trends affecting women's condition and situation in the run-up to the country's democratic elections in 2006, with an emphasis on monitoring not only conventional media, but also cultural productions such as songs and theatre. Box 1 includes a longer list of gender-sensitive early warning indicators, gleaned from these projects and previous compilations on this matter.<sup>16</sup>

<b>BOX 1: Compilation of examples of gender-sensitive indicators</b>	
<p>NOTE: The language of some of the indicators has been modified to collapse several similar indicators into one. These examples have been identified after a comprehensive review of gender-sensitive early warning indicators as well as individual ones that have been incorporated into broader early warning frameworks, although the list is not exhaustive. They are grouped according to common conflict analysis categories, distinguishing between indicators most relevant for conducting initial assessments or gathering baseline data and indicators for ongoing monitoring of trends.</p>	
<b>Assessment Indicators</b>	<b>Periodic/Ongoing Monitoring</b>
<b>Context/Demographic</b>	
<p>Male/Female life expectancy at birth</p> <p>Gender ratio at birth</p> <p>Percentage of female-headed households</p> <p>Fertility rate</p> <p>Access to antenatal and delivery care and family planning services</p> <p>Use of contraception</p> <p>Maternal mortality rate</p> <p>Infant (and Child Mortality) of girls</p> <p>Percentage of adult females with HIV/AIDS</p>	<p>Displacement (percentage of women in refugee and displacement flows)</p> <p>Unusual movement of all-male groups</p> <p>Changes in female-headed households</p> <p>Changes in HIV/AIDS, STI cases in areas with illegal armed groups</p>

**Human Rights and Security (including Violence against Women)**

<p>Prevalence of sexual violence (including rape)</p> <p>Prevalence of domestic violence</p> <p>Impunity for perpetrators of violence against women (e.g. number of cases reported, investigated, prosecuted and resulting in convictions)</p> <p>Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation</p> <p>Percentage of women who feel violence against them has reduced during specific time period (e.g. in the last 5 years)</p> <p>Policies/Programmes which force birth control</p> <p>Existence and quality of legislation on gender-based violence</p> <p>Existence of crisis centers and hot lines directed to support women</p>	<p>Conflict-related deaths (male/female)</p> <p>Reports of physical assault or knowledge of physical assaults against a family member (disaggregated by sex)</p> <p>Incidence of various forms of violence against women (rape, domestic violence, honour killings, bride-abduction, female genital mutilation, etc.)</p> <p>Sexual abuse by security forces</p> <p>Sexual abuse by law enforcement agencies</p> <p>Killing, abduction, and disappearance of women</p> <p>Cases of women/children trafficked</p> <p>Discriminatory practices and attacks against indigenous population</p>
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**Political and Institutional Factors**

<p>Equality and protection of men and women under the law</p> <p>Female suffrage</p> <p>Women as voters, candidates, election monitors</p> <p>Percentage of women in parliament</p> <p>Political leadership of women (or ratio of men to women in power)</p> <p>Gender awareness of the security sector and response to violence against women</p> <p>Impact of gender training among the military</p> <p>Resistance to women's participation in peace processes and negotiations</p>	<p>Threats to politically active/visible women or their children</p> <p>Threats and restrictions by illegal armed groups on women or women's organizations</p> <p>Forced recruitment and conscription</p> <p>Utilization of women to obtain information and infiltrate in the community by illegal armed groups</p>
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Economic Factors	
<p>Women's involvement in decisions on water and land resource management</p> <p>High number of young males (particularly unemployed) within the population</p> <p>Percentage of women in the formal labor sector</p> <p>Feminization of poverty and increased economic burden placed on women</p> <p>Engagement of women in a shadow war economy (trafficking, prostitution, extraction and sale of precious metals)</p> <p>Prostitution (forced or voluntary) and commercial sex work due to military presence</p> <p>Access for men and women to productive and economic resources</p>	<p>Fear that land will be taken away by armed groups or security threats while working the land</p> <p>Pressure (on men and women) to migrate for work</p> <p>Level of personal security while crossing borders, traveling to markets</p> <p>Avoidance of markets by women due to fear</p> <p>Disruption of women's cross-border trade activity</p> <p>Changes in sex work/survival sex in areas with illegal armed groups</p> <p>Stability of bride-price/dowry</p>
Social Factors	
<p>Average level of female education</p> <p>Female literacy rate</p> <p>Male/female expected years of schooling</p> <p>Existence of special programs on gender equality in schools</p> <p>Primary and secondary school enrolment rates for girls and boys</p> <p>Land disputes, especially in areas with illegal armed groups</p> <p>Reintegration of male and female ex-combatants</p> <p>Growth of fundamentalism or imposition of restrictive laws that lead to abrupt changes in gender roles</p> <p>Incidence and frequency of inter-group and inter-ethnic marriages</p> <p>Lack of women's organizations and of women in civil society organizations</p> <p>Level and quality of funding to women's organizations</p> <p>Women's involvement in the management of tensions between groups and parties (peace messengers)</p>	<p>Girls' primary/secondary school attendance vs. boys</p> <p>Avoidance of schools by girls due to insecurity</p> <p>Threats to female teachers</p> <p>Use of propaganda emphasizing and encouraging militarized masculinity (often in defence of a violated or threatened femininity).</p> <p>Development of a culture or sub-culture that scapegoats women, accusing them of political or cultural betrayal</p> <p>Control of sexuality and behavior by illegal armed groups</p> <p>Women's lack of participation in social gatherings due to increased insecurity</p> <p>Peacebuilding programmes addressing the needs of women</p>



Members of the Belun-supported Conflict Prevention and Response Network in Ermera, Timor-Leste, prepare for the “Tara-Bandu” customary justice ceremony to strengthen natural resource management and prevent violence (including against sexual assault) in the community. *Credit: NGO Belun*

Other projects also reflect some of the principles of gender-responsive early warning. The peacekeeping mission in the DRC, for example, revamped its early warning system in the wake of mass rapes in Walikale territory to be more attuned to the movement of armed groups and their proximity to civilian centers, their patterns of looting, pillaging, and sealing-off escape routes, and the security concerns raised by local women. Through community alert networks that operate through closed mobile phone lines, focal points are linked with the closest peacekeeping presence, and hundreds of communities are now linked to MONUSCO’s bases throughout the country. Finding female focal points to operate these phones remains a challenge, as the one cell phone is typically taken by the male village leader, and peacekeepers often report that they receive more information from people that were not given cell phones. *Voix des Kivus* has addressed this by distributing three cell phones per community: one for the village leader, one for the women’s representative, and one for a democratically elected individual.

In South Sudan, UNMISS supports the Community Women Peace Dialogue Forum, which engages women in the identification of conflict early warning signs in solving community conflicts and in leading campaigns to prevent sexual and gender-based violence. Additionally, the peacekeeping mission is the first one with a mandate to establish an early warning system.<sup>17</sup> It involves a 24/7 hotline, the distribution of communication equipment to high-risk communities, and the collation and analysis of the information in the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) and the mission’s operations centers at the national and state level.

Early warning indicators of conflict in Jonglei state, for example, include unusual movement of all-male groups, rising bride-price, and an increase in pregnancy terminations, among others. The mission’s early warning system, however, is only one of many in South Sudan, and ensuring coherence and meaningful community engagement represents a significant challenge. The Catholic Relief Service assists the government in capturing community complaints, violent incident reports, and concerns of growing tension at the county level in Eastern Equatoria and Northern Bahr el Ghazal. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports the government through its Crisis and Recovery Mapping and Analysis Project (CRMA). Parallel to this, the United States and the United Kingdom have funded the government to set up prefabricated containers with communications equipment in the ten state capitals as joint operations centers for early warning, and several other projects are focused on the distribution of communication equipment to various actors for this purpose, such as high-frequency radios and regular mobile and satellite phones.

In Timor-Leste since 2009, the NGO BELUN has coordinated a national early warning and response system. It tries to maintain gender balance among its community-based monitors, though it struggles to reach above 30 to 35 percent. They also work to ensure women’s active participation in the community-designed action plans, disaggregate by sex many of the questions in their situation and incident forms, and include indicators related to gender-based violence in its periodic monitoring reports.

The Conflict and Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) is an initiative of the seven-member Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which promotes peace and security in the Horn of Africa. It has been active for more than ten years and it is based on a sophisticated structure that goes from local field monitors and local committees, to national research institutes and early response units, to sub-regional peace councils and the regional IGAD Secretariat and Council of Ministers. It focuses on pastoralist conflicts over grazing and water points, forced migration, and smuggling and illegal trade. CEWARN has mainstreamed gender in its system by ensuring that its early warning reports provide highlights on the impact of pastoral and related conflicts on women and girls, incorporating indicators that capture the role of women in peace-building or promoting violent behavior, training field monitors on gender, and adding gender-related questions and indicators to their field surveys.

Most of the systems and frameworks described above are set up to anticipate conflict or the escalation of conflict and mass atrocities, not specifically an increase in sexual violence. However, changes in the incidence of sexual violence itself is often an early warning indicator of violent conflict, such as in CEWARN local reports, the Conflict Early Warning and Early Response System (CEWERS) in Southern Sudan, described above, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Early Warning Early Action Report, and the Analysis Framework of the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide.

As mentioned above, mass rapes in Walikale in the Democratic Republic of Congo in late July drew attention to the weakness or near absence of early warning systems for conflict-related sexual violence. After visiting the area, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC) Margot Wallström emphasized the notion that planned or organized sexual violence must be viewed as preventable, and underscored the importance of developing an early warning matrix of risk factors to draw attention to the "red flags" that may signal a spike in sexual violence.

One of the many challenges of early warning as a tool is that our ability to anticipate impending mass atrocities in a defined timeframe and context is more limited than our ability to identify populations, communities, or countries at risk over a longer period of time. Proximate and immediate causes are more unique to a particular situation, and more random in nature, than the typical set of factors or preconditions of instability that we encounter in most indices, rendering them tentative and diminishing their predictive power. For example, hate speech and incitement in the media have been found in nearly all historical cases of genocide, but these signs are also evident in scores of

cases that never led to genocide, even in the absence of an effort to prevent it.

The same can be said for conflict-related sexual violence. It is unlikely that any of the listed signs alone can presage a sudden increase of rape, an impending attack on a village or town, or alert to previously undetected high levels of sexual violence. Instead, it will be a combination of several of these factors and signs, and strong knowledge of the actors—including leadership, sources of funding, methods of conscription, ethnic composition, and past history of abuses- and conditions on the ground, that can enhance prevention and a more efficient implementation of protection tasks by security actors and self-defense mechanisms by affected communities.

Timing is another important consideration. Atrocities committed during wars do not occur uniformly across time and space. Violence comes to different cities, towns, and neighborhoods at different times, and there are lulls and peaks. The first entry of armed actors into town, either before or after fighting, may be more associated with spikes of sexual violence than periods of heavy combat between two armed groups. Thus, the entry of armed actors into a population center, coinciding with battle lulls or rest periods, requires special monitoring.<sup>18</sup>

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In 2011, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, with lead contributions from UN Women and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and other relevant entities,

developed a framework of early-warning indicators specific to conflict-related sexual violence. These indicators could be integrated into existing and emerging UN early-warning and prevention systems at sub-national, national, regional or global levels, and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is ensuring their adaptation in the context of peacekeeping

missions. This framework was based on a desk review of existing early warning systems and academic literature, an analysis of salient features of past conflicts characterized by widespread or systematic sexual violence, and consultations with relevant actors. A short excerpt of this tool is included below (Box 2).<sup>19</sup>

### Box 2: Early Warning Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

This matrix was produced by UN Action as an illustrative, system-wide reference document and inventory that can be adapted and integrated into existing and emerging early warning systems and prevention mechanisms at the local, national and regional level, on a case-by-case basis. It can inform the tools used for planning, reporting, information-collection and analysis within DPKO-led Peacekeeping Missions, DPA-led Special Political Missions, UN Country Teams, or at Headquarters-level. The list of indicators is meant to enrich the overall reading of the environment by monitors and prompt an analysis of changes in the operating environment, such as in the mobility patterns of women and girls (e.g., absence from schools or market-places), in the conduct of armed groups (e.g., pillage or proximity to civilian centers), or in terms of escalated political rhetoric (e.g., ethnic/gender-based propaganda) to name a few.

The indicators were weighted according to three categories: potential risk, indicating a possible risk of sexual violence in the medium to long term; impending risk, indicating that sexual violence is likely to take place in the near future; and ongoing sexual violence, which often goes undetected by protection actors. They were structured around six pillars that highlight the various dimensions of the problem and the constituencies needed for action, namely: military/security; social/humanitarian; political/legal; economic; media-related and health. For example, two of more than 80 listed signs are a sudden increase in the absence of women from market places, water-points and/or firewood collection sites or other changes to mobility patterns, such as self-imposed curfews and diminished activities and a marked absence of girls from school; and an increase in reports – even anecdotal or non-verified - of gang-rape, relative to single-perpetrator rape, or other forms of ‘aggravated rape’ accompanied by torture and mutilation.

These signs must be read in conjunction with relevant contextual factors provided in the matrix to assess the level of risk in a specific setting. For example, in some contexts, like the DRC, women anticipate predatory attacks when there has been a delay in soldiers receiving their rations or salary. In other settings, like eastern Chad, an increase in sexual violence by the Chadian army has been observed when soldiers receive their salaries, as this is linked with members of the military entering towns/civilian areas and consuming alcohol. Similarly, an increase in female-headed households may signify sexual violence and the attendant stigma, or rather routine seasonal migration for employment by male community members or high mortality among male combatants.

Indicative response options have been included in light of the recurrent critique of early-warning systems that signs go unheeded. For example, some response options for protection actors include undertaking ‘hotspot mapping’ in consultation with women who are often the first to be aware of incidents or threats of sexual violence; followed by increased troop deployment to identified ‘hotspots’.



Bangladeshi all-female Formed Police Unit arrives in Haiti to support the peacekeeping mission. *Credit: UN Photo/Marco Donino*

## COMMUNITY-BASED GENDER-RESPONSIVE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS: A HOW-TO GUIDE:

Recent reviews of early warning systems indicate that there is consensus that ‘good’ early warning is based close to the ground or has strong field-based networks of monitors, uses multiple sources of information and both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods, capitalizes on appropriate communication and information technology, provides regular reports and updates on conflict dynamics to key national and international stakeholders and has a strong link to responders or response mechanisms. However, most early warning and early response systems are still gender blind, hampered not only by the skepticism about the effectiveness of early warning in general and the challenges of implementing such systems, but also by difficulties that are specific to the gender mainstreaming agenda, such

as lack of understanding and commitment by non-experts in gender, the usual socioeconomic and security barriers to women’s participation, and the elusiveness and sensitivity of data on gender-based violence, including trafficking for sexual exploitation, and related issues such as teen pregnancy, or unsafe abortions, to name a few.

Bearing that in mind, the following checklist may be useful to consider in the design and implementation of a community-based early warning system. These steps aim at promoting the meaningful participation and inclusion of women, and attention to gender inequality and related issues within an early warning and response system.

Planning and Design	
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Consult and partner with, the groups of women (across ages and socio-economic levels) most affected by violent conflict to inform the system’s design.</b> This can highlight issues that need to be monitored by the system, which may not be part of existing security agendas; identify potential partners and data sources; and clarify the distinct needs and capacities of women in relation to addressing tensions and violence in their communities.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Ensure women’s participation and integration of their inputs in the establishment of monitoring indicators.</b> This should involve an analysis of conflict dynamics and peace capacities in the targeted communities. Participatory methods such as mixed and same sex focus group discussions and key informant interviews may be useful to engage women in the process, and should include marginalized groups within the targeted communities.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Determine, in consultation with women, how monitoring will be conducted.</b> The monitoring methodology should reflect community members’ inputs, and demonstrate an understanding of women’s position within the home and community as well as their existing and potential roles in conflict prevention activities. Issues to consider include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Will there be a target or pre-determined number of women involved as monitors? What will be the criteria for monitors and will they create barriers for particular women to participate (e.g. related to education level, work experience, particular conflict resolution skills, as well as specific family or social obligations, expectations or restrictions, such as childcare, livelihood activities, freedom of mobility, etc.)?</li> <li>b. What approaches can be used to overcome potential barriers and ensure women’s full participation (e.g. working with women already active in existing networks of civil society organizations or partnering with local women’s networks to identify potential monitors and provide a support system for female monitors; facilitating transportation and communications; providing childcare, etc.)?</li> <li>c. What security measures are needed to support monitors to collect information on violence and track conflict factors in their community (e.g. increasing visibility of monitoring activities, engaging police or community leaders to support the system, creating a protocol for monitors to safely collect data on indicators, verify and report on information gathered, etc.)?</li> </ol>

**Ensure the different indicators being monitored are designed to capture the specific experiences of women:**

- a. Monitoring specific incidents of violence:
  - i. Information regarding the sex of the perpetrator(s) and victim(s) should be included, where possible, without documenting identifiable details or information regarding the individuals involved (i.e. name, address, etc.). This can safely highlight trends in the types of violence experienced by women in the community.
  - ii. Data regarding individual cases of gender-based violence should be based on information from service providers supporting survivors (e.g. NGOs, police, health workers, etc.) rather than being collected by community-based monitors. Documenting cases of violence against women requires specific training and adherence to ethical principles focused on the rights and decisions of survivors regarding their experiences.
- b. Monitoring the conflict dynamics at a specific point in time (e.g. based on a conflict assessment conducted at baseline, or around seasonal or socio-political events – i.e. harvests, elections, etc.) or trends in conflict factors over a specific monitoring period (e.g. month, quarter, etc.)
  - i. Indicators should be sex-disaggregated, where possible, to enable more accurate analysis of the gender dimensions to conflict (e.g. including separate indicators or options to specify whether changes in a particular factor – i.e. employment levels/ programmes - particularly affect or target women and/or men).
  - ii. Concerns specific to or disproportionately affecting women (e.g. domestic violence, sexual assault) should be included among indicators, noting sub-groups (such as women with disabilities, adolescents, etc.) who may be particularly vulnerable to violence.
  - iii. Methods of collecting information for each indicator should be reviewed, ensuring the identity and confidentiality of individuals providing information to the system (in a personal capacity rather than as part of their official responsibilities) are protected.
  - iv. Specific guidance should be developed to standardize the process of gathering information and assigning a score for each indicator. This is particularly important for indicators related to perceptions of security, available survivor services or proxy indicators identified for highlighting specific forms of gender-based violence (e.g. trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, etc.), which should be designed to complement data on incidents provided by existing reporting mechanisms.

Implementation	
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Monitors should have training in basic concepts related to gender equality and specific knowledge on violence against women</b>, including its causes and consequences, the relevant legal framework, response mechanisms available within the communities in which the early warning system is operating, and the role of monitors in safely gathering information and responding to disclosures of violence.</p>
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Ongoing capacity development of monitors through periodic skills training, mentoring and knowledge exchange opportunities should be supported</b>, addressing topics such as conflict prevention (including communication, perspective-taking, negotiation, mediation and related skills); prevention of gender-based violence (covering individual attitudes and social norms which condone and perpetuate abuse), and peacebuilding (related to facilitating dialogue, advocacy, leadership, etc.). Service providers working with survivors of violence and conflict prevention practitioners should be engaged as trainers, where possible, with content delivered gradually over time and linked with the system's monitoring and response activities to reinforce understanding and integration of key lessons.</p>
<b>7</b>	<p><b>Organizations assisting survivors of violence (across sectors, including coordinated community response mechanisms) should be involved in the operation of the system.</b> Service providers may be engaged in a variety of capacities, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. to help identify proxy indicators related to violence against women and safety protocols for monitors and informants;</li> <li>b. as trainers to orient monitors on the issue;</li> <li>c. to provide administrative data to the system to help track reported incidents of violence over time;</li> <li>d. to serve as focal points for monitors who receive disclosures of violence or requests for individual assistance; and</li> <li>e. to facilitate the development of community responses to gender-based violence.</li> </ol>
<b>8</b>	<p><b>Organizations coordinating the early warning system should provide specific support to facilitate and sustain women's participation in the system.</b> This includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. providing ongoing orientation and communication on the system for community members and government actors. This is important to formally introduce monitors and the system to communities and clarify any concerns or questions from local authorities and other stakeholders.</li> <li>b. maintaining regular communication (e.g. weekly or monthly) with individual monitors and establishing periodic opportunities for all monitors to meet and discuss concerns or challenges. It is important that specific barriers experienced by female monitors (e.g. security concerns or resistance from families or communities) are identified and addressed early, which is critical to retaining their participation and sustaining the system over time.</li> </ol>

9	<p><b>Analysis of trends in women’s experiences with conflict and violence should include data from indicators being monitored as well as findings from research and other information sources such as media and policy developments.</b></p>
10	<p><b>Monitoring reports should consistently present gender-specific trends in conflict dynamics and highlight particular distinctions in women’s and men’s experiences of violence.</b> Publications generated through the system should include concrete recommendations that can be implemented by women and men at the community level as well as state actors operating at a national or sub-national level. Reports should be presented in various formats and languages and distributed using a range of approaches (e.g. presentations/ group discussions, hard copies and electronic versions) to maximize accessibility by community members with various literacy levels and language capacities.</p>
11	<p><b>Women should be key actors in the design of early response initiatives, with a critical mass of women participating as beneficiaries of any programme developed.</b> This may be supported by establishing a gender-balanced team of community stakeholders responsible for generating response initiatives or identifying key contacts within communities or institutions who will be consulted throughout the development and implementation of response interventions.</p>
<p><b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b></p>	
12	<p><b>Specific gender-related indicators and benchmarks should be included in the system’s results management framework or logframe.</b> It is important to identify targets that are realistic to achieve during the programme cycle, particularly given the significant time required to set up a functional early warning and response system as well as shifting attitudes and behaviors perpetuating gender inequality.</p>
13	<p><b>A gender impact assessment or analysis should be conducted</b> upon establishment of the system and periodically, to examine the actual effects of the mechanism on intended outcomes related to women’s roles, decision-making capacity, and rights at the individual, family, community and wider societal level (i.e. along the ecological model). Such assessments can facilitate design changes in the system most effectively, and enable implementing organizations to maintain an integrated approach to engendering the system.</p>

## Endnotes

- 1 United Nations, “Final report of the fact-finding missions of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office into the mass rapes and other human rights violations committed by a coalition of armed groups along the Kibya-Mpofi axis in Walikale territory, North Kivu, from 30 July to 2 August 2010” available at [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ZR/BCNUDHRapportViolsMassifsKibuaMpofi\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ZR/BCNUDHRapportViolsMassifsKibuaMpofi_en.pdf).
- 2 The first conflict prevention NGOs, such as International Alert, were born in the mid-1980s, and most of the better-known early warning initiatives were launched in the late 1990s after the failure to prevent the Rwanda genocide: the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), Early Recognition and Analysis of Tension (FAST), the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the Network for Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning (EAWARN). Since then, FEWER and FAST have closed, thereby reducing the number of systems for early warning analysis at the global level, such as Crisis Watch by the International Crisis Group.
- 3 The UN Interagency Framework for Coordination on Preventive Action (the “Framework Team”) is an internal UN support system that promotes inter-agency collaboration on early preventive action and assists UN Resident Coordinators (RC) and UN Country Teams (UNCT) in this regard. It has been operational since 1995.
- 4 For further information, see OECD-DAC, “Preventing Violence, War and State Collapse: The Future of Conflict Early Warning and Response” (2009).
- 5 Genocide Watch is the coordinating organization of the International Alliance to End Genocide (IAEG), an international coalition of organizations that aims to educate the general public and policy makers about the causes, processes, and warning signs of genocide. Genocide Watch uses predictive models such as Gregory Stanton’s “Eight Stages of Genocide” to analyze high-risk areas. For more information, see <http://www.genocidewatch.org/> and <http://www.genocidewatch.org/images/8StagesBriefingpaper.pdf>.
- 6 See Harff, Barbara, “No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955,” in *American Political Science Review*, February 2003, and “Could Humanitarian Crises Have Been Anticipated in Burundi, Rwanda, and Zaire? A Comparative Study of Anticipatory Indicators,” in H. R. Alker, T. R. Gurr, and K. Rupesinghe, eds., *Journeys Through Conflict: Narratives and Lessons*, 2001.
- 7 The Office of the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) has developed an analysis framework comprising eight categories of factors deemed to affect the risk of genocide, namely inter-group relations, including record of discrimination and/or other human rights violations committed against a group (such as history of serious and massive human rights violations against a particular group and its denial by the perpetrators), circumstances that affect the capacity to prevent genocide, presence of illegal arms and armed elements, motivation of leading actors in the State/region, circumstances that facilitate the perpetration of genocide (such as the sudden strengthening of the security apparatus or increased support to militia groups), actual genocidal acts, evidence of intent, and triggering factors (such as upcoming elections or a change of government outside of an electoral or constitutionally sanctioned process, among others). The OSAPG is currently developing early warning indicators for genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, as the four crimes that trigger the principle of the Responsibility to Protect. This includes sexual violence on a widespread or systematic scale; persecution on grounds of gender as a crime against humanity; and genocidal acts that intend to prevent procreation, such as involuntary sterilization, forced abortion, prohibition of marriage, and long-term separation of men and women. The analysis framework can be accessed at [http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg\\_analysis\\_framework.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg_analysis_framework.pdf).
- 8 The Satellite Sentinel Project was launched at the end of 2010 with the goals of deterring a return to full-scale civil war between northern and southern Sudan and deterring and documenting threats to civilians along both sides of the border. It uses satellite imagery and analysis to generate rapid responses on human rights and human security concerns. For more information see [www.satsentinel.org](http://www.satsentinel.org).
- 9 For example, the Women’s Media Center and its Women Under Siege initiative began to document and map reports of sexualized violence in Syria during the conflict. By using Ushahidi crowdsourcing technology, survivors, witnesses, and first-responders could report incidents via email, Twitter, or directly to a website: <https://womenundersiegesyria.crowdmap.com/>.
- 10 Peacekeeping missions have recently placed greater emphasis on early warning as part of protection of civilians. See Holt, Victoria and Glyn Taylor, *Protecting Civilians in the Context of UN Peacekeeping Operations: Successes, Setbacks and Remaining Challenges*, Independent Study Jointly Commissioned by DPKO and OCHA, United Nations (2009); Giffen, Alison, *Addressing the Doctrinal Deficit: Developing Guidance to Address and Respond to Widespread or Systematic Attacks Against Civilians*, Henry L. Stimson Center (2010); DPKO-DFS DPET, *DPKO/DFS Lessons Learned Note on the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping Operations: Dilemmas, Emerging Practices and Lessons* (2010).
- 11 Baud, Jacques F., “ICT Support to Peacekeeping,” Gujer, Eric, “Intelligence of the Masses or Stupidity of the Herd?” and Meier, Patrick, “Early Warning Systems and the Prevention of Violent Conflict” in *Peacebuilding in the Information Age – Sifting Hype from Reality*, ICT4Peace Foundation (2011);
- 12 This review was conducted in 2009 by UNIFEM’s Ending Violence Against Women section, based on the publication of “Early Warning? A Review of Conflict Prediction Models and Systems” by Frederick Barton and Karin von Hippel with Sabina Sequeira and Mark Irvine, Center for Strategic and International Studies (February 2008).
- 13 Zdunek, Gabriele, “Gender-Sensitivity and Gender-Blindness in Conflict Early Warning Systems – with a case study on the Niger Delta region.”
- 14 Berry, John A. and Carol Pott Berry (eds.) (1999). *Genocide in Rwanda: A Collective Memory* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press), pp. 113–115.
- 15 UNIFEM, “Engendering Conflict Early Warning: Lessons from UNIFEM’s Solomon Islands Gendered Conflict Early Warning Project” (2006); “Monitoring Peace and Conflict in the Solomon Islands: Gendered Early Warning” (2005); “The Ferghana Valley: Current Challenges” (2005); and “Porque el conflicto golpea, pero golpea distinto – Herramientas para la aprobación de los indicadores de género del Sistema de Alertas Tempranas de la Defensoría del Pueblo para el Monitoreo del Conflicto Armado” (2007).
- 16 See Hill, Felicity, “Women’s contribution to conflict prevention, early warning, and disarmament” (2003); Schmeidl, Susanne and Eugenia Piza López, “Gender and conflict early warning: A framework for action.” (London, Bern: International Alert/SwissPeace Foundation, 2002); Ohman, Linda, “Gender and Early Warning Systems,” Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2009); FAST, “An example of a Comprehensive Early Warning Methodology” (2001).
- 17 Resolution 1996 (2011) authorizes UNMISS to support the GRSS “in exercising its responsibilities for conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution and protect civilians through,” inter alia, the “establishment and implementation of a mission-wide early warning capacity, with an integrated approach to information gathering, monitoring, verification, early warning and dissemination, and follow-up mechanisms.” See S/RES/1996 (2011).
- 18 See Cohen, Dara Kay, “Causes of Sexual Violence During Civil War: Cross-National Evidence (1980-2009), prepared for the Minnesota International Relations Colloquium (2011); Wood, Elisabeth Jean, “Variation in Sexual Violence During War: in *Politics and Society*, 34, 3 (2006); Hultman, Lisa, “Targeting the Unarmed: Strategic Rebel Violence in Civil War,” Uppsala University (2008).
- 19 For the full matrix, please contact Letitia Anderson ([letitia.anderson@unwomen.org](mailto:letitia.anderson@unwomen.org)) at UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict.



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
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