Conflict Early Warning Systems: The Guatemalan Experience

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From 2006 to 2008, Guatemalan national authorities and members of the international community worked towards the creation of a Conflict Early Warning System (CEWS), in an effort that built on the existing institutional base for conflict prevention. The CEWS functioned as a pilot project over the course of two years in six departments in Guatemala[3], under the guardianship of the Vice-Presidency of the Republic. Following a change of administration in the executive branch, the project was discontinued, and to the best of the authors' knowledge, has not been resumed. This study represents an effort to document the most important aspects of the project and to salvage those lessons learned from the CEWS experience.

First, the article reviews the history of Early Warning Systems (EWS) and conflict-specific EWS. A brief summary of the project's history and the institutional framework into which it was embedded is then presented. The models and methodological instruments used by the system are then described – how the database operated and the types of information it produced, as well as the analytical utility of these products. Finally, a series of lessons learned from the project are drawn for future interventions.

Early Warning Systems

In the 1970s, the international community began exploring the potential of EWS in response to a series of humanitarian crises in Africa. Initially, early warning systems were used to produce prioritized lists for intervention in situations of severe food insecurity. Now, early warning systems are used in a variety of areas, from natural disaster planning to conflict prevention (Harff & Gurr, 1998; ESIG, 2004: 1). EWS constitute an entire sub-discipline within Peace and Conflict Studies, and encompass a diversity of theoretical and methodological typologies. Thus, they range from models that deal with international armed conflict to others that work on the community level to avert social and domestic conflict. Early Warning Systems must be considered a subsystem within a larger system of prevention and monitoring of social conflict. However, this subsystem occupies a central place: EWS are responsible for providing information critical to directing political decisions on intervention, and also define the more practical and logistical issues of management and coordination of these interventions.

There are three general models for CEWS. The first involves the compilation of diachronic, statistical information and the construction of predictive mathematical models. The second is of a more qualitative nature and is centered on the periodical consultation of experts via

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[3] Guatemala is divided into Regions (8), Departments (22), and Municipalities (334).

questionnaires. Oftentimes, these experts include political analysts, journalists, respected politicians, and community leaders, who share their knowledge on conflict-related trends in their districts. The third model considers the monitoring and analysis of news reports, especially news agencies such as Reuters (Hagmeyer-Gaverus and Weissman, 2003: 4). Recently, a fourth, emerging model has gained attention. It focuses on the recovery of traditional community knowledge on confronting conflictive issues in everyday life. One of the most interesting projects related to this last model is the gender-focused early warning system in the Solomon Islands funded by the United Nations. Each of these models has been applied with varying degrees of success, especially in Africa (Anderlini and Nyheim, 1999; Davies, 1999:Alker et al., 2001; Srinvasan, 2006; Cilliers, 2006).

The CEWS in Guatemala

After 36 years of gruesome civil war (from 1960 to 1996)[4], Guatemala became fertile ground for a diversity of social and political conflicts. Towards the early 2000s, some efforts had been made towards creating institutions for conflict management, especially relating to land tenure issues. But the National Security Doctrine[5] still dominated many spheres of the intelligence and security apparatus, and there was an urgent need for an integrated, systemic and preventive approach in approaching conflict.

The conceptual emergence of the project arose principally from a fundamental notion: the repositioning and reorganization of states' intelligence services during times of peace. Particularly in post-conflict countries, considerable resistance exists to considering intelligence services as a legitimate component of the state. In Guatemala, the abuse of intelligence powers during the Civil War has led the populace to conceive of the intelligence community negatively. The Guatemalan project tried to modify traditional collection strategies by including civil society participation. This approach would, in theory, help to alleviate some of the pressure that the country's security system has (including the very challenging problems of youth gangs and drug trafficking), by preventing the escalation towards violence of social, political and environmental conflicts.

Dialectic models were adopted, in which local actors were empowered, not only to convey information, but also to become involved in the process of analysis and thereby participate in public policy processes. Thus, the CEWS came into being to provide "alternative intelligence," and given its suitability with the Peace Accords and complementarity with existing social, economic, and political institutions, could provide a much needed channel for transforming conflict. The process for creating the CEWS was initiated in 2005, with the outlining of various draft frameworks. The project was officially launched in 2006 under the Vice-Presidency of the

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[4] For details on the human rights violations occurred during these years, see the official Truth Commission Report, *Guatemala, Memory of Silence* (1999) and the independent report by the Catholic Church, *Guatemala, ¡Nunca Más!* (1998). Both reach similar conclusions, including a death toll of more than 200,000 people, the fact that more than 90 % of the atrocities were committed by the State-sponsored army and paramilitary groups, and the fact that the most affected areas were the indigenous northern and western highlands.

[5] The dominating paradigm in Security Studies during most of the Cold War. Although officially Guatemala adopted the concept of Human Security since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, the transition has been hard to implement, especially regarding the idea of conflict prevention through the transformation of cultural and structural violence. For details see Arévalo, 2001 and Álvarez Castañeda, 2011.

Republic and combined financing of PCON-GTZ[6] and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) project GUA / 04-032. Its main objective was to provide timely information for decision makers at all levels, in order to prevent the escalation of violent conflicts. The main beneficiaries of this information were the Vice-President, Ministers and Secretaries of State and Municipal Governments, although many times the decision making process was left at the most local level of community leaderships.

Many actors were involved in creating the CEWS. Contributing to the project were important analysts and planners from different sectors, especially the Presidency and Vice-Presidency of the Republic, various Ministries and Secretariats of State and GIZ. For its part, UNDP undertook a workshop seminar in 2005 entitled, "Conflicts in Democratic States", the contributions of which were pivotal in developing the conceptual and operational design for the CEWS (PNUD, 2005). The preceding efforts of other countries should also not be forgotten, especially the CEWS implemented in Bolivia. It is also important to consider the influence of the PROPAZ Foundation throughout the design and implementation of the CEWS. PROPAZ is one of the oldest and most established NGOs relating to Peace and Conflict issues in the country They have developed training methodologies, based on the theoretical input of John Paul Lederach, and adapted to the Guatemalan context. These methodologies were very important during the training period of all of the CEWS staff.[7].

Internal Organization of the CEWS

The CEWS' structure was conceived at three different levels: local, national, and the central CEWS offices. The first one was comprised by the Department Coordinator, who would function as a local data collector and facilitator of processes with other local actors, such as local State offices (such as the Secretariat for Agrarian Affairs, or local Police Stations), NGOs with presence in each region, the departmental and municipal governments, local leaderships (usually the COCODES)[8] and specific individuals known for their knowledge and positions of power within the most local villages and communities. At this last level, figures like priests, pastors, elementary school teachers and traditional indigenous leaders were a fundamental asset for the CEWS. The Departmental Coordinator would then develop rapport with these actors, the same way as an anthropologist would during the initial phases of ethnographic research. Great effort was put into explaining the new model, how it differed from traditional security or intelligence agencies and the potential benefits that local communities could have by collaborating with the CEWS.

At the national level, an advisory committee was conformed. It included representatives in charge of conflict analysis, negotiation or mediation within State institutions. Some of the offices represented were: Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of the Environment, Secretariat of Strategic Analysis, Secretariat for Agrarian Affairs, the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, the Presidential Office for Human Rights, as well as the President's and Vice-President's key

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[6] German Technical Mission, now known as GIZ.
[7] More information about Propaz can be accessed through the following website: www.propaz.org.gt
[8] The Community Councils for Development, or COCODES, are the most local level of governance within the Guatemalan system. Their members are elected publicly by community members.

negotiators. These representatives would convene regularly to assess the state of the CEWS project and to analyze regional trends, and more rarely, to discuss specific conflicts and ways to resolve them.

The central CEWS office was comprised of a Project Coordinator, a Administrative Assistant, two Analysts (each specializing in three Departments), a Technical Assistant (in charge of helping out analysts with organizing and analyzing information) and a programmer in charge of the database and software used by the project. Monthly, this core staff would meet with the Department Coordinators in long sessions where the latter would give a briefing on the latest conflict trends in their jurisdictions.

Figure 1
Guatemalan CEWS Structure

Local Level

- CEWS Departmental Coordinator
- Departmental and Municipal Governments
- Local NGOs
- COCODES
- Local, individual leaderships

National Level

- Ministries
  - Interior
  - Environment
- Secretariats
  - Strategic Affairs
  - Agrarian Affairs
  - Food Security
- Other
  - Presidential Commission on Human Rights
  - Specific Negotiators

CEWS Central Office

- Project Coordinator
- Administrative Assistant
- 2 Regional Analysts
- Technical Assistant
- Programmer

Analytical and Methodological Models

An important contribution to the launching of the CEWS was the elaboration of case studies in conflict issues in different departments throughout the country. Following the conclusion of the initial studies, the CEWS was established in seven priority departments: Huehuetenango, Quiché, Alta Verapaz, San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, Suchitepéquez, and Escuintla. A study was later undertaken in these departments, to identify existing State institutions for conflict resolution and their methods of intervention, as well as a preliminary typology of the most common conflicts in each area.

A second point of departure was the design of an appropriate conflict model. The team sought to create a model with high analytical utility but that could be validated by the field teams in each department. The idea was to work from the bottom up, with a model that would eventually allow nuanced types of analysis, but that would also be flexible and permit continuous feedback between local and central teams. The goal of the model was to identify opportune moments in which it would be possible to avert or reduce conflict escalation.

A first element used in the creation of a conflict-phase model was the state of structural weakness or the presence of potentially major or minor contingencies. Collective action was also taken into consideration, especially action that could involve organized or unorganized social groups. The model also took into account the imperfect nature of the state, in the sense that the level of state response could be more or less intense depending on many political circumstances. There are a number of ideal responses to collective demonstrations or actions, but many times, a state's reaction to collective action can be disproportionate, especially if the intervention method is not chosen with the context in mind. Taking this into account, Figure 2 illustrates the Conflict Phases model utilized by the CEWS, in which the "traffic light"- type colors correspond to the conflict's level of severity (See Figure 2).

The previous figure, in its original version in Spanish, was a simple two-way matrix that considered contingencies, collective actions, State responses (ideal), the social environment, conflict phases and the policy agenda that would tend to the conflict. Thus, during latent and early phases (marked in green and yellow) of conflicts, possible contingencies vary from people expressing public concern for a problem to secondary social organization (strategic alliances between affected groups and international actors, for example). State responses go from normal intervention through usual channels, such as the reception of citizen's complaints, to more focalized actions such as establishing *ad hoc* dialogue commissions. The social environment surrounding the conflict could vary from open communication between conflicting parties towards the progressive loss of trust. During these initial stages, the policies used by the State should be contemplated within the "normalcy" of the development agenda, or emerging conflict management policies.

The following conflict phase (late or advanced, marked in orange), is one that demands a more specific attention by State actors, including the implementation of specific mediation and negotiation protocols. Contingencies and collective actions are more intense, and the social situation is more and more hostile. After this phase, a clear distinction is made with the following one. This "point of no – return", was called the security threshold, and was the decisive moment after which existing institutions within the state working on development, dialogue and negotiation processes had to give way to the intervention of the police, and in extreme cases, the army. Identifying this threshold allowed the CEWS to work closely with several institutions in order to avoid reaching that point.

Another important part of the methodological tools was the creation of a series of indicators used to identify trends within conflicts. Three trend categories were defined: escalation, stagnation, and de-escalation. Escalation refers to the evolution of a conflict from its Latent Phase to higher phases (Early, Late, and Crisis). The Stagnation Phase occurs when a conflict shows no signs of progressing or regressing with respect to its phase. Check-lists were created so that the Department Coordinators and the central analysts could easily determine trends, and monitor the evolution of conflicts through time.

Collective action, which has been classified along a continuum with more than 20 typologies, from primary social organization through total loss of governance, is categorized in relation to

**Figure 2
The CEWS Conflict Model**

Contingencies	Collective Action	Governmental Response	Relationships Between	Conflict Phase	Suggested Agenda
Moderate Structural Problem	Identification of the problem Primary social mobilization Presentation of projects and proposals	Early identification of latent conflicts; receiving and channeling proposals through state system	Direct communication between parties; feelings of mutual trust	Latent	Agenda for overall development and conflict prevention
Serious Structural Problem/ Moderate Contingency	Specific demands Assemblies Press releases /press conferences Legal measures/ultimatums Secondary social mobilization: strategic alliances between social groups, international pressure	Call for dialogue Dialogue process	Openness to dialogue; with the failure of the development and conflict prevention agenda, distrust emerges; communication between parties begins to suffer; there are fewer proposals and more threats	Early	Development agenda/ emerging agendas for specific petitions from the state
Serious Contingency	Breakdown of communication with the government	Deployment of special negotiators	Breakdown of dialogue; social unrest; need for intervention of negotiators and specialized mediators to reestablish dialogue	Late	Negotiation and mediation agenda
	Peaceful demonstrations; other alternative demonstrations (hunger strikes, artistic)	Preventive police presence	Application of national and international pressure for the resolution of the conflict; represents critical moment for negotiation and mediation; use of confrontational and aggressive language		
	Demonstration with roadblocks; Sit-ins	Reactive police presence; ad hoc dialogue and subsequent eviction			
Security Threshold					
Catastrophe or Disaster	Takeover of strategic targets (government buildings, energy plants)	Ad hoc dialogue and subsequent eviction; use of special police forces	Social and international pressure for active state intervention; polarization of actors' positions; need to remove negotiators and mediators	Crisis	Security agenda
	Private or state property damage	Use of moderate force; possibility of judicial proceedings; use of special police forces			
	Physical violence toward state officials or third parties; hostage-taking	Use of proportional force; judicial proceedings; use of special police forces in large numbers	Loss of control by leadership; no longer the possibility of containing the social movement through peaceful means		
	Violent acts by third parties				
	Violence toward local authorities				
	Lynchings or assassinations				
	Total loss of governance	Intervention of combined forces			

these phases. In certain cases, the State Responses and the Social Situation may indicate a conflict in the Latent Phase, but action by certain actors can precipitate a crisis. In the same way, certain crises might be easily defused through political, legal, or police action, which would indicate a conflict has entered the De-escalation Phase. There many variations to these dynamics.

Another important component of the methodological tools used by the CEWS was the establishment of a conflict typology. This taxonomy attempted to integrate the work already in place in participating public institutions, including those involved in security, human rights and land rights issues. This typology was validated in the field, and included many types and variations of conflict, including conflicts between local powers and state-level government, labor and union conflict, or conflicts relating to access to justice. A total of 15 types and 101 subtypes of conflict were defined. The most important types identified since the earliest stages of the CEWS project were: land-tenure issues, conflicts involving the use of strategic natural resources (including mining, hydroelectric plants and the use of forests), land-limits between neighboring communities and conflicts based on the historical exclusion of vulnerable communities. Closely related to conflict typologies was the creation of different ways to classify social actors involved in specific situations (community, national, regional, union, or private organizations).

It was also necessary to establish the criteria for the social conflicts that would be monitored by the CEWS. This allowed for a more focused, efficient, and effective monitoring mechanism. In a society as conflict-ridden as that of Guatemala, it is impossible to monitor and manage all social conflict simultaneously and with the same level of priority. Usually, conflicts considered to be within priorities B & C were handled by Ministers, Secretaries and local governments. A- level conflicts were immediately transferred to the Vice-Presidency and / or the Ministry of the Interior (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Criteria for Assessing Conflicts

No.	Criteria	Weighing
1	Collective conflicts (those involving more than 5 families or 25 people).	20
2	Conflicts that could potentially endanger the integrity of those involved or private property.	20
3	Conflicts that could eventually involve or affect third parties.	20
4	Conflicts that are specially sensitive in the eyes of the citizenry. Conflicts with high media exposure.	10
5	Conflicts with grave political or economic implications (for example, the degradation of relations between central government and local communities, or conflicts that could eventually result in the stagnation of an important economic activity).	10
6	Conflicts that involve leaderships with great capacity for convening allies and massive popular support. Conflicts involving organized social groups.	5
7	Conflicts involving legitimate grievances by social groups that have been long ignored by the State.	5
8	Conflicts that probably will not find an expedited solution within existing State institutions.	5
9	Recurring conflicts.	2.5

| 10 | Conflicts involving several institutions (both governmental and non-governmental). | 2.5 |

If a conflict complies with one of the criterions, it will be weighed accordingly. The simple sum of all the criteria will give a final score, which in turn will help define three distinct categories:

0-10: The conflict will not be registered by the system. It will, however, be kept on file for future reference.
12.5-35: The conflict will be categorized as priority level "C".
37.5-60: The conflict will be categorized as priority level "B".
62.5 and above: The conflict will be categorized as priority level "A".

Data Collection

After the analytical criteria had been established and validated, a process was initiated to develop research instruments for the CEWS, mainly questionnaires, but also observation guides and elements of visual anthropology. These instruments departed from common political and social science models, although important elements for the analysis of conflict were included (principally, certain criteria established by the PROPAZ Foundation, see Aguilar et al. 2007; and by Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2006).

These instruments were then transferred into a database, which had several sections or tabs: the early warning tab, the initial conflict registration tab, and the conflict-tracking tab. The first tool was conceptualized as an initial approach to any conflict. In other words, by way of the early warning tab, it would be possible to obtain initial data for a new or emerging conflict. This tab would also facilitate communication with decision makers in situations of escalation or periods of crisis that required immediate attention. The initial conflict registration tab was envisioned as a type of detailed logbook on particular conflicts. Within this tab, general data was recorded: plaintiffs, defendants, third parties, institutions managing the problem, and concrete demands. A detailed inventory was also regarding the needs, interests, roles, and demands of all actors involved. Finally, an initial catalogue of qualitative data was taken, with information on the prevailing social climate in the region, historical background to the conflict and other pertinent observations.

The conflict-tracking tab sought to approach the data from a diachronic perspective, with the underlying idea that the conflicts of highest relevance or longest duration could be monitored periodically. In this way, it was possible to collect serial data on the evolution of a conflict with respect to its phase, trends or typology. It was also possible to catalogue collective actions, State responses and other important data over time.

Secondary instruments of great utility were designed and included in the database. Within these secondary instruments was a detailed registry of state and non-state institutions that manage different conflicts depending on the specific topic, the actions undertaken by them, and their geographical coverage. A registry of the most important collaborators was also included, as they could serve as potential links in moments of crisis and with whom a channel of communication could be maintained at all times. A series of monographic data was also collected, with the intent of contextualizing each municipality's historical, political, economic,

and cultural background. Finally, coordinators were encouraged to annex all relevant information, from digitized documents to digital photographs or videos related to the different conflicts. The process was automated in such a way that Departmental Coordinators could directly submit information to the database in real time, via the Internet, without the need for paperwork to be filled out.

The Database

The database constituted a fundamental component of the CEWS, since all products of the System were stored in it, both raw statistical data as well as complementary items such as photographs, videos, and scanned documents. The versatility of the database allowed the compilation and systematization of all the information, be it quantitative or qualitative. The program's design was constructed on web-based technologies, with the necessary precautions taken to protect information security. A flowchart was also constructed, in which detailed the types of data entry and outputs or products that could be provided by the database.

The following is a list of the outputs provided by the database:

- Historical and up-to-date record of conflicts (both latent and manifest)
- National typology of conflicts
- Conflict mapping
- Actor mapping
- Conflicts' phases and trends
- Permanent tracking of conflicts' status and dynamics
- Alerts utilizing the "traffic light" warning system
- Systematic tracking of agreements between the parties in conflict

The Analysis Process

The process of analysis was complex and consisted of many phases, which varied depending on the urgency of the user[9] for the information and on the conflicts or specific aspects of a conflict being studied. In general, it can be said that analysis was based on thorough knowledge of the contents of the database and a close relationship between the analysts and Departmental Coordinators. It was through regular monthly meetings and daily telephone conversations that the analyst was informed first-hand of the information collected by the Coordinator.

Afterwards, analysts cross-referenced information in the database with information from other sources, principally news agencies, but also academic information and inputs from analyst partners or friends. Ideally, this was a continuous process, so that analysts could be ready to report to users at any moment on a conflict situation at the departmental, regional, or national level.

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[9] Usually the Vice-President, but also the Minister of the Interior, the Police Director and other public officials.

The specific products of analysis were of the following types:

- Analysis of particular conflicts
- Status report on conflictivity (quarterly)
- National report on conflictivity (annual)
- Briefings on specific conflicts (verbally, given to decision-makers)
- Monographs on specific topics
- Segmented political mapping (the System had to be capable of creating political maps surrounding themes such as health, education, and the environment; or on specific conflicts or particular geographic areas)

These analyses had the purpose of informing decision-makers at all levels of government, as well as other actors of interest, such as the international community. In practice, it was at the local level that the most effective influence was exercised, as the analyses succeeded in the prevention of lynching, mob violence and other acts of social violence.
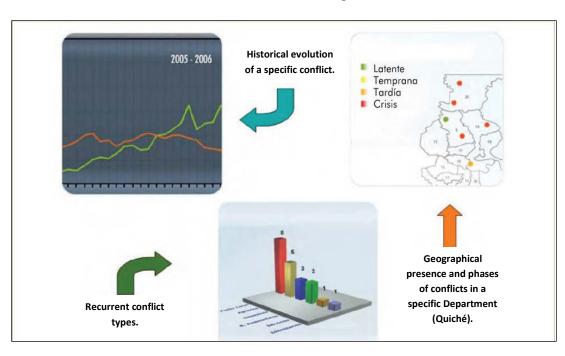
Figure 4
Some of the CEWS's outputs

Lessons Learned

The project, the only one of its kind in the country thus far, contributed a number of important elements to the understanding of conflict as a national reality. Furthermore, the project produced concrete results in the reduction of violence in certain cases. From the entire experience, the following strengths and opportunities can be drawn.

- *Intervention in localized conflict*

The mere presence of the Departmental Coordinator in the daily life of different communities made a significant difference in the manner in which social and political actors of confronted problems. On a number of occasions, the Coordinators functioned as proverbial "Occam's razors," in helping relevant actors understand that the simplest solution to a problem was probably the correct one, and that this solution definitely did not require the use of violence.

- *The scientific study of conflict*

One of the most important lessons learned from the CEWS experience was that the scientific study of conflict is possible in Latin America. Although the strength of analytical and predictive models must still be tested in more depth, it is clear that they represent a qualitative leap within the field. In this sense, it is worth mentioning that a national conflict index was being constructed at the time of the project's closure, and this tool had the potential of informing public policy, both preventive and reactive. It could have also eventually helped in defining priorities for public spending.

- *A systemic approach*

Operating at multiple state and non-state levels, the system was able to collect a wide range of information, thereby permitting a deeper level of analysis of the information and in some cases, facilitating concrete action toward the prevention of violence and social unrest. The versatility of a systemic focus also made it possible to affect different levels of public policy. In the future, the CEWS could be conceived as one of the several tiers within a larger conflict and violence prevention system.

- *The CEWS within the National Security System (NSS)*

When the CEWS project was still active, the National Security System (NSS) was still an emerging idea. Now, with its institutionalization by means of a law and the creation of the post of Technical Secretary, the NSS represents one of the hopes for the institutional management of violence in the country. An entity such as the CEWS has much to contribute to the NSS. For example, the conflict phases tool, developed for the CEWS and previously discussed in this paper, represents an important advance for the security institutions of the country, as it delineates different opportunities for prevention and intervention in conflicts as well as appropriate responses within the security agenda. Additionally, the CEWS could provide valuable information to security forces on specific conflicts, or inform the judicial system on the true nature of certain conflicts to facilitate their management through alternative, non-legal means.

- *The CEWS and Futures Studies and Planning*

At the moment, there is a poorly understood relationship between futures methods and conflict, although there are a number of coincidences at the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological levels (Álvarez Castañeda, 2012). Perhaps the most important area of agreement relates to the final purpose of the prospective method: selecting the scenario that is most beneficial to the highest number of people possible out of all the potential choices. In that sense, the futures element was important the whole experience of the CEWS. On the one hand, the System could be conceived as a planning tool for local authorities. On the other, with further development of the scientific and technical tools for the study of conflict, the System could come to possess some level of forecasting capacity.

- *The CEWS as a body for public transparency*

Parallel to the process of information collection, an unexpected byproduct of the CEWS arose. In having the Coordinators in such close contact with communities and their needs and everyday aspirations, they learned about numerous dissatisfactions with spending, corruption and the overall efficiency of State institution. The Departmental Coordinators' involuntary supervision of diverse programs and state offices (and in some cases, NGO offices) was a double-edged sword: on the one hand, this situation could provoke unnecessary suspicion that might eventually hinder the CEWS. On the other, there was the potential that the System could be configured as an ally of the state in the creation of closer, functional, and transparent relations with the citizenry, particularly at the local level, and this would eventually help the prevention of certain conflicts, especially those related to governmental institutions and their performance.

It is also important to recognize the weaknesses and challenges faced by the CEWS for future interventions.

- *Legal and institutional weakness*

In not having ministerial status, the CEWS was oftentimes not considered a "serious" or "formal" entity. It was only through the continuous production of satisfactory results that the CEWS was able to gain the confidence of participants. Paradoxically, this also created other opportunities for collaboration, especially with NGOs that felt more at ease sharing information with a "mixed design" entity than with the traditional governmental bureaucracy.

- *Authoritarian tendencies*

The huge success of the CEWS in obtaining information that was accurate, timely and of high quality could be attractive to those sectors interested in returning to authoritarian political dynamics within the country. On occasions, mayors were interested in accessing information gathered by the CEWS for personal political interests. For this reason, all future efforts must establish democratic control necessary to preventing the misuse of information.

- *The "Governor in Need and Helpful Delegate" syndrome*

Another important lesson learned from the field is the urgent need local-level politicians have for trustworthy and timely information for decision-making purposes. On many occasions, Departmental Coordinators found themselves in an uncomfortable position of serving these political figures, whose sources of information and guidance were less comprehensive than those of the CEWS. This created a major challenge: striking a balance between supporting local authorities and avoiding the politicization of the CEWS.

- *Guatemala's "perpetual electoral environment"*

The final lesson learned deals with the so-called "perpetual electoral environment" in Guatemala. The time periods between one administration and another (short in and of themselves) do not facilitate major change in the long term, at least a far as public policy is concerned. Aside from the obvious implications this has for conflict, it created a number of important challenges for Departmental Coordinators in their daily work. In the first place, it severely complicated the collection of information and conflict intervention processes. Maintaining a neutral profile proved difficult, especially if specific mediation or negotiation was required. Good relations were always sought between the group in power and the opposition group and the Departmental Coordinator. Another important point relates to the analytical-technical work, which the Departmental Coordinator was responsible for developing. When analyzing a particular conflict, it was necessary for the Coordinator to keep in mind that partisan political struggles could be an underlying factor. Finally, high staff turnover rates within the State Ministries and Secretariats, due not only to brief electoral periods but the result of budgetary constraints and low levels of institutionalization, did not permit Coordinators to establish lasting contact networks. With respect to the local level, sudden changes in the structure of local power (such as COCODES, for example) often forced the Coordinator to reorganize his work accordingly.

Conclusion

In a recent and thorough evaluation of the performance of different EWS for conflict and violence prevention throughout the world, the OECD (2009: 99) defined a series of characteristics shared by successful initiatives:

Figure 5
Comparison between best practices identified by the OECD and the Guatemalan CEWS

Characteristics identified by the OECD	The Guatemalan CEWS
Are based "close to the ground" or have strong field-based methods.	Departmental Coordinators developed rapport at the most local level, generating high quality information and a more participatory approach to gathering and analyzing information. As discussed before, the country's "perpetual electoral environment" sometimes counterbalanced this factor.
Use multiple sources of information and both qualitative / quantitative analytical methods.	The database was designed to be highly flexible and open to diverse sources of information, including quantitative data, interviews (audio), monographs, scanned documents, photographs, videos, etc. Towards the end of the project, steps were taken towards the creation of a conflict index and in general, towards exploiting quantitative data in a more efficient manner.
Capitalize on appropriate	The CEWS's database used the latest web-based technology and had all

communication and information technology.	the appropriate security measures to insure the safety of the information. A better use of Guatemala's very advanced mobile coverage should be considered in future interventions. For example, mobile devices could be used to scan, photograph, record and upload different types of information in real-time.
Provide regular reports and updates on conflict dynamics to key national and international stakeholders.	Regular briefings were given to key-decision makers and donors. Automatic early warnings and reports generated through the database were sent to certain authorities. A weakness in this sense was the authoritarian tendencies explained previously, since it was difficult to define which official could be trusted with the information. Any future version of the CEWS should consider clear guidelines for defining different levels of security clearance.
Have a strong link to responders or response mechanisms.	The CEWS had access to adequate communication channels with first responders, although many times these key actors lacked in their own capacity of responding. This has to do with many factors, including budget restraints, the difficulty to reach many rural areas in the country, and lack of access to appropriate technology.

Early warning systems are instruments that have proved their effectiveness in the prevention and mitigation of conflict in various parts of the world. The lessons learned from the CEWS in Guatemala illustrate that the strengths and opportunities that early warning systems represent outweigh the inevitable weaknesses and dangers that they imply. The lessons learned also indicate that the CEWS pilot project, implemented by the Vice-Presidency of the Republic, UNDP, and GIZ in 2005, should eventually be resumed. Through a renewed CEWS, it will be possible to gain a scientific understanding of conflict, but most importantly, there will be the potential to intervene swiftly in escalating situations, and mitigate the multi-leveled violence that currently affects the country.

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