

Unit 1
Understanding and Analysing
Conflict

Unit 1 Learning outcomes



At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Understand in a technical manner what constitutes a conflict
- Identify the different levels and types of conflict
- Examine the positive and negative functions of conflicts
- Identify the main causes of conflict
- Understand and apply different conflict analysis tools

LECTURE 1: Basic Concepts of Conflict

- ***Student Reflection:***

- What associations and images come to mind when you hear the word "conflict"?
- Write down the words you think of and/or draw pictures you associate with conflict.
- What do the words and images you associate with conflict signify?
- Discuss the words and images with your neighbour. Do they have a positive, neutral or negative connotation?

- Conflict refers to a struggle between two or more people over incompatible goals. Conflict occurs when there are real or perceived differences in interests (i.e., wants, needs, and concerns) that cannot be simultaneously satisfied. Conflict is a relational concept
- Conflict arises from incompatibility of interests, perceptions, or goals between two or more parties
- Common issues for goal seeking incompatibility:
 - Control over resources (e.g. money, property, power, prestige...)
 - Value differences
 - Values are informed by beliefs and discrepancies over beliefs
- Conflict vs violence

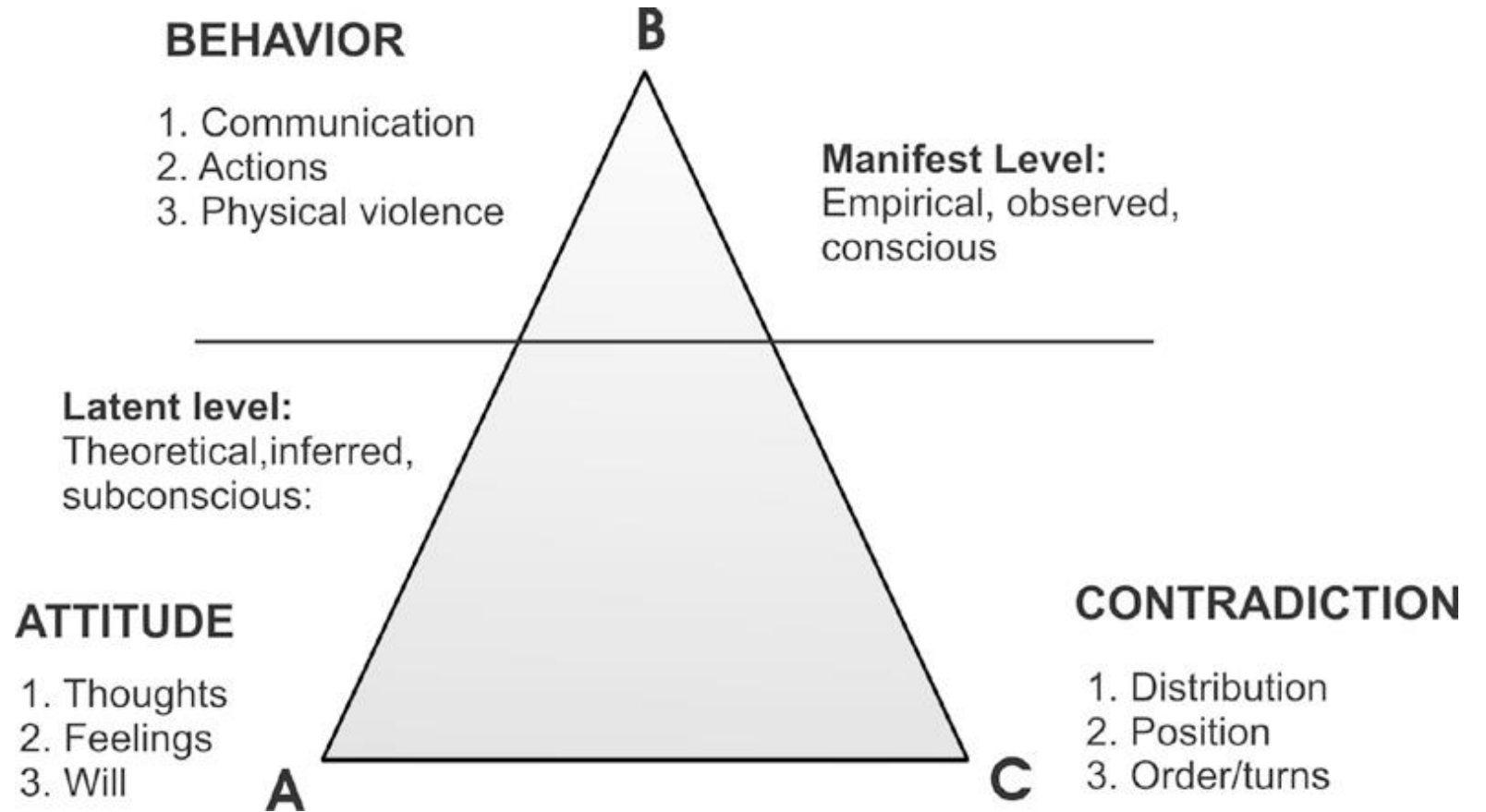
Student Reflection:

- Think of a conflict you have experienced in your life.
- Try to think of the issues that drew you into the conflict.
- What kind of emotions did you experience and what actions did you take?
- Discuss with your neighbour.

Understanding Conflict

The Conflict ABC Triangle

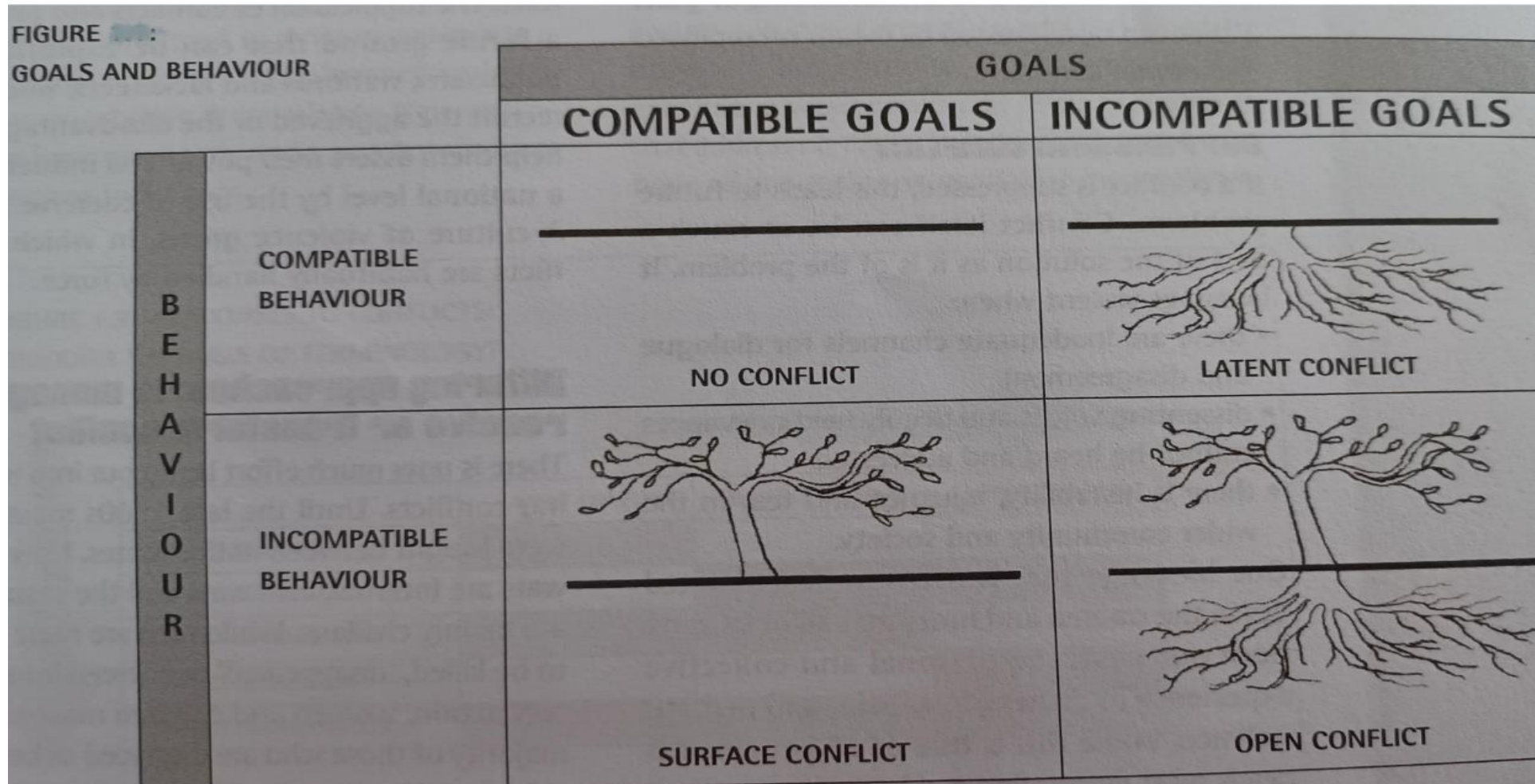
- Attitude
- Behaviour
- Contradiction/
Context



Levels of Conflict

- **Intra-personal conflict:** this refers to when one person struggles to reconcile conflict *within themselves* such as internal contradictions in their beliefs or attitudes.
- **Interpersonal conflict:** refers to conflict *at individual levels*. It means conflicts occurring between individuals or small groups of people at personal levels such as within a small family.
- **Intra-group conflict:** refers to conflicts that happen *within* a particular group, whether it is a religious, ethnic, geographical, or other type of group.
- **Inter-group conflict:** refers to conflicts occurring *between* organised groups such as conflict between different ethnic or religious groups.
- **International conflict:** refers to conflict *between states*.

Latent and Violent Conflict



Fisher, S. et al (2000) *Working with conflict: skills and strategies for action*. Zed Books: London, p.5.

Latent conflict

Sometimes parties have incompatible interests, but these are not openly acknowledged. This may be caused by lack of awareness or lack of opportunity to be open. We call these latent conflicts.

Open/Surface conflicts

Conflicts *manifest* when these unacknowledged contrary interests become conscious and voiced. Latent conflicts can turn into either nonviolent (peaceful) or violent conflicts as discussed below.

Open conflict: If conflicts are openly expressed then all the three elements of the ABC Triangle (attitude, behaviour and contradiction) must exist at the same time and be acknowledged. Otherwise, the conflict remains latent or at surface level.

Violence does not always occur within conflicts even when interests differ. Violence is contingent upon the availability and application of conflict regulating mechanisms and perceptions of how costly and damaging violence will be.

Definitions of Conflict and Violence

Conflict- involves a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have or think they have incompatible goals.

Violence- consists of actions, words, attitudes, or structures that cause physical, psychological, social or environmental damage and /or prevent people from reaching their full human potential.

Student Reflection:

- Think of your own example of conflict that you identified earlier – do you think it was latent, surface or open?
- Would you consider it to have been peaceful or violent?

Functions of Conflict

Functions of conflict:

Conflict is part of daily life. What matters is whether and how the conflict can be resolved constructively.

➤ **Constructive conflicts**

Conflict can lead to positive change. These include making people aware of problems, promoting necessary change, improving solutions, raising morale, fostering personal development, increasing self-awareness, and enhancing psychological maturity. Constructive conflicts do not need to resort to violence, as there are resolution mechanisms available and the solutions address the grievances of parties and restore their human dignity.

➤ **Destructive conflicts**

Destructive conflict is often characterised by coercion, threat and violence. Conflict can also be destructive if the resolution does not satisfactorily address the various parties' needs and interests, if it does not address social injustices or if the conflict is 'won' through force and therefore leads to a victor's peace.

Causes of Conflict

Causes of conflict:

There are many causes of conflict and identifying these is essential to dealing with it effectively and is a key part of conflict analysis.

➤ **Structural causes**

Structural causes of conflict (also called root causes or underlying causes) refer to the underlying fundamental incompatibilities of a conflict.

➤ **Proximate causes**

Proximate causes of conflict (also called immediate causes) constitute more easily identifiable events or factors that accentuate structural causes and lead a conflict to escalate.

➤ **Miscommunication**

Ineffective communication exacerbates conflict. Even if there is no fundamental incompatibility between groups and individuals, poor communication can lead to conflict. Moreover, stakeholders may have different understandings of the facts in a situation and no resolution can be reached until they are clarified.

➤ **Identity**

There are two major factors that endorse identity-based conflicts. First, discrimination along cultural lines creates grievances as the oppressed groups strive for their cultural freedom. Second, in some instances, conflicts between identity groups are used as a smokescreen for political elites to avoid taking responsibility for their lack of effectiveness in catering for the basic needs of those they govern.

Group Activity: Conflict in Zemasona City

Carefully read the hypothetical scenario of conflict in Zemasona City.
Working in small groups:

1. Describe the conflict in terms of the conflict triangle discussed in the lecture (see Figure 1.1).
2. Describe the conflict attitudes, behaviours and contradictions displayed by both the youth group and the city administrators.
3. Describe the causes of the conflict, distinguishing between structural and proximate causes.
4. Why did the youth who were not members of the ZRMG join their protest on the first day of the conflict? Why did so many youths in the city protest on the second day?
5. Discuss the role of misinformation in exacerbating the conflict.

LECTURE 2: Conflict analysis

Student reflection:

Think of one particular conflict that you are familiar with:

- How was this conflict depicted in order to begin a peace process?
- What tools were used to analyse the conflict?
- What was the outcome?

The concept, principles, and elements of conflict analysis

Conflict analysis is a structured process to understand conflict by focusing on:

- *The conflict profile (background of conflict)*
- *The parties involved and their perspectives*
- *The causes and the dynamics of how these elements interact*

(Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 2012)

The main purpose of conflict analysis is to understand the many variables related to a specific conflict including its causes, the roles of parties involved, and the dynamics, trends, and impacts of the conflict.

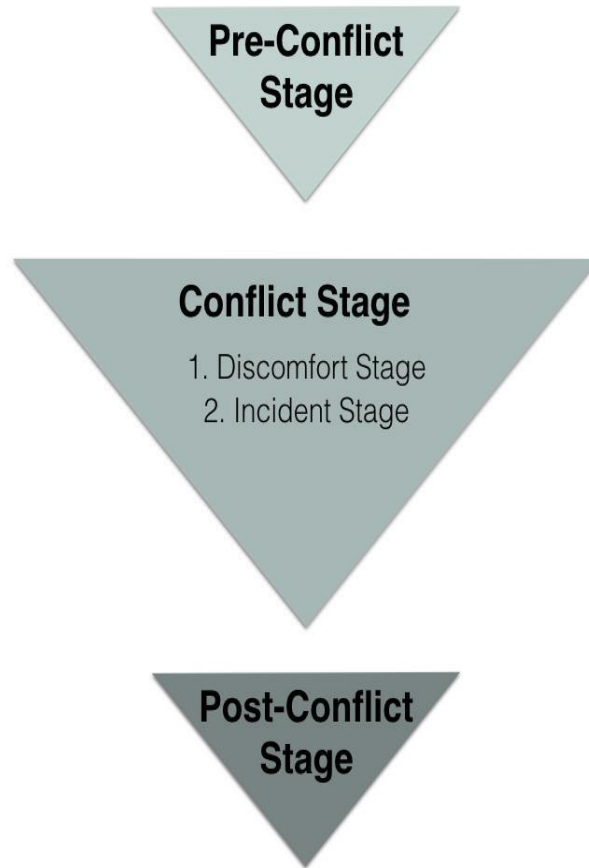
It is fundamental to adopt a multifaceted and multidimensional framework to comprehend the various aspects of an existing conflict.

This means we have to look at things from lots of different directions and perspectives.

- As key principles, a conflict analysis needs to be:
- **Multilevel:** looking at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, regional, national, and global levels, focusing on their complex interactions;
- **Multidisciplinary:** drawing on psychology, anthropology, politics, sociology, history, economics, law, philosophy, and religion;
- **Multicultural:** identifying conflict as a worldwide phenomenon and conflict resolution as a cooperative international enterprise;
- **Participatory:** enabling the involvement of different ethnicity, gender, generations and religious groups;
- **Flexible and Timely:** up to date with changing situations/contexts and consistent monitoring.

(Herbert, 2017)

Stages of Conflict



- The first stage is the **pre-conflict stage**. In this phase a problem between parties begins to manifest itself without the parties' knowledge.
- The second stage is the **conflict stage**. This stage marks the point where the conflict emerges. This may be due to a specific trigger or an increase in underlying tensions.
- The third stage is the **post-conflict stage**. The conflict comes to an end and a peace settlement is reached. This settlement then has to be implemented.
- Each stage will require the use of different analysis tools in order to understand the conflict and to find a peaceful resolution.

Figure 1.4: The Three Stages of Conflict.

Conflict Analysis Tools

Conflict analysis is usually conducted using several tools.

In this unit we are going to introduce you to three of these:

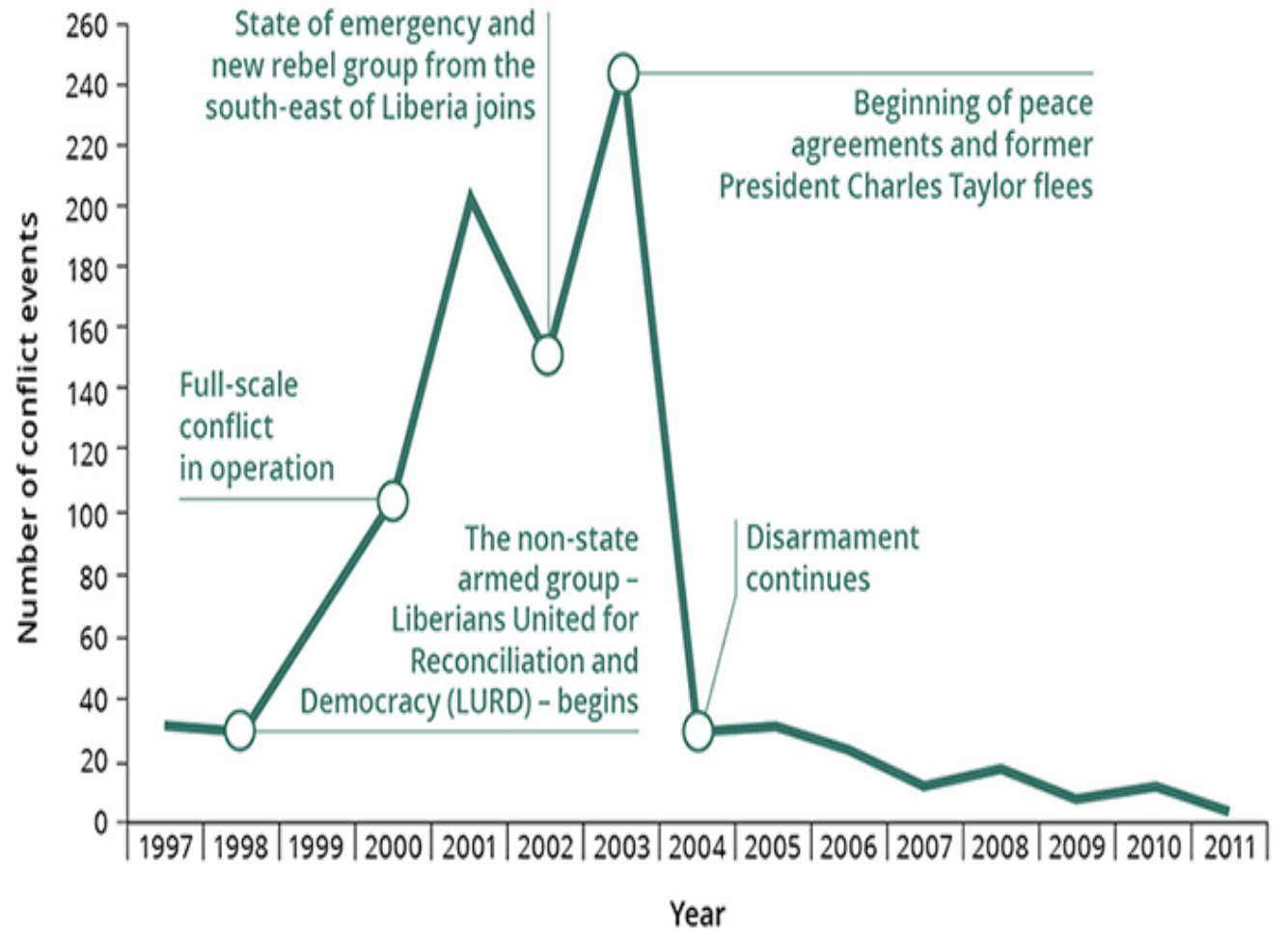
- Timelines
- Conflict Tree
- Stakeholder Analysis: The Onion Model

Timeline

A conflict timeline shows the important events of a conflict in the order that they happened and can help us identify the different stages in the conflict.

Conflict timelines help us to:

- show different points of view of the same event;
- clarify and increase understanding of each actor's version of events;
- identify which events are most important to each actor/party.



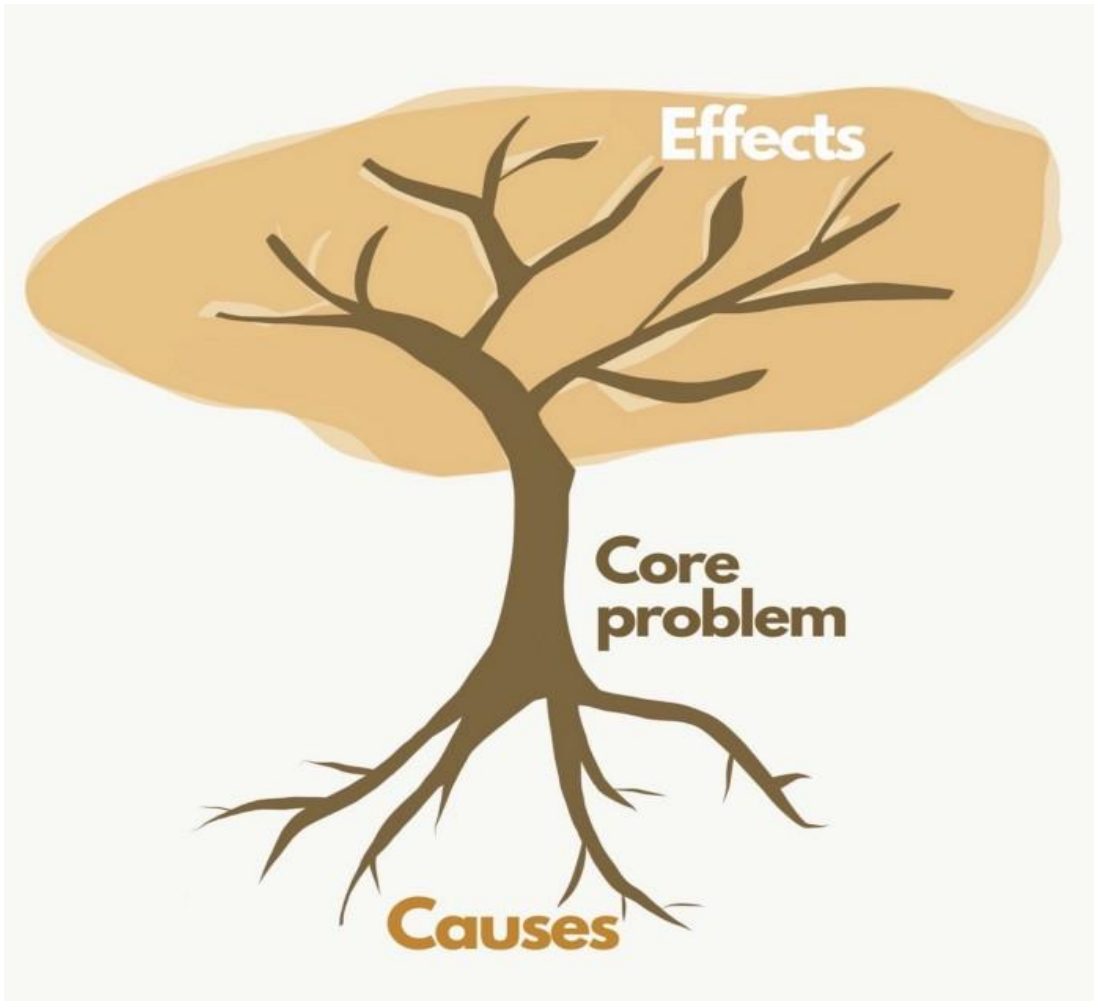
Source: Adapted from Dowd & Raleigh (2012: 14)

Figure 1.5: Timeline Analysis of the conflict in Liberia 1997-2011

Student Reflection:

- How well do you think Figure 1.5 captures the contested timeline of conflicts in Liberia?
- Can you identify the various stages of the conflict?
- How useful is it as a tool?

Conflict Tree



The Conflict Tree helps us to identify key conflict causes using the image of a tree:

- the roots represent the non-visible underlying and structural causes,
- the trunk represents the visible issue
- the branches and leaves stand for the visible effects, symptoms, and consequences of the conflict.

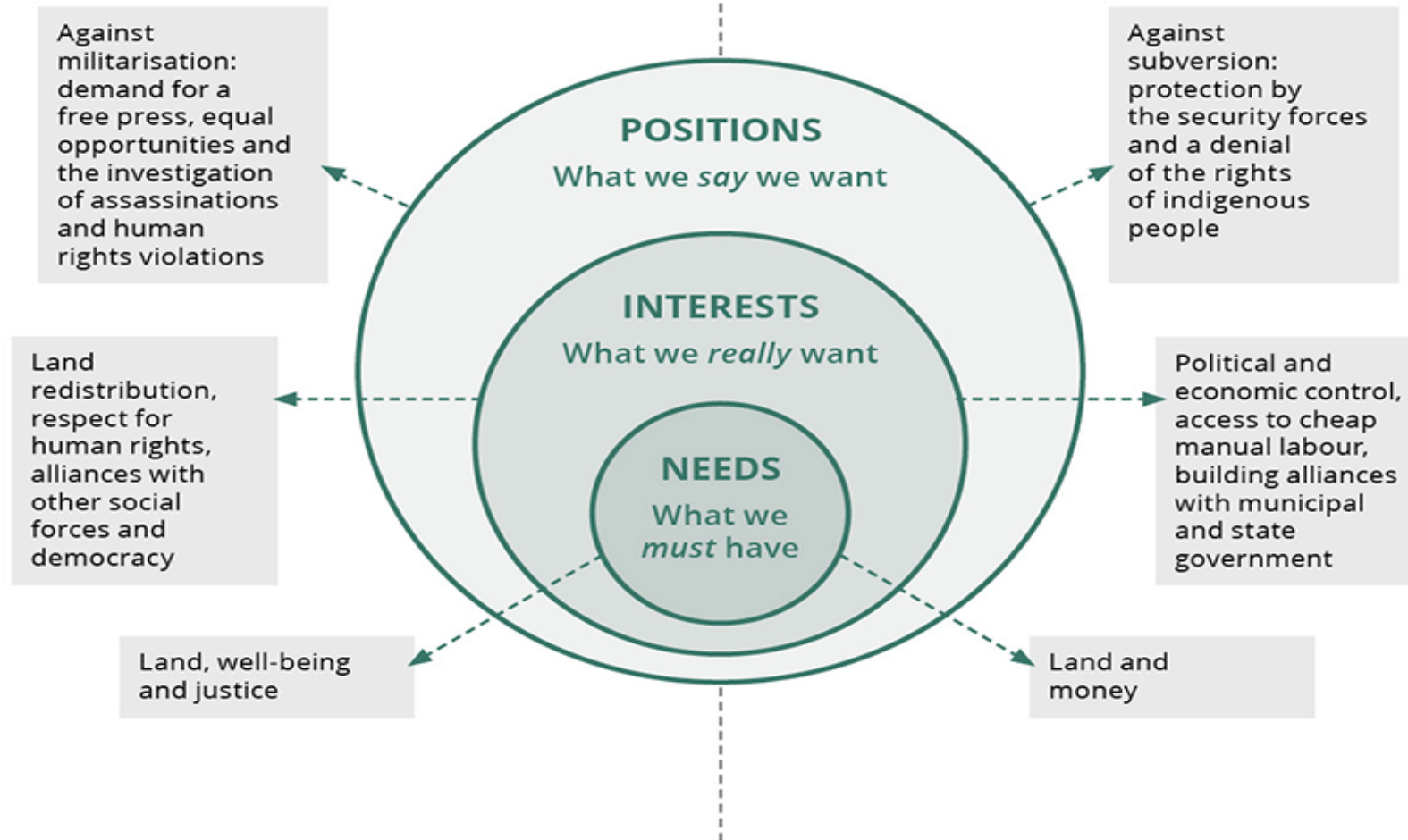
The conflict tree effectively visualises how structural and dynamic factors are interlinked and interact to lead to conflict (see Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6: Example of a Conflict Tree. (Source: [Bergman 2023](#))

Stakeholder Analysis: Onion Model

INDIGENOUS PEASANT ORGANISATIONS

BOSSES AND LANDOWNERS



Source: Adapted from Fisher, et al. (2000: 27)

The Onion Model allows us to analyse the actors' positions (what people say they want), interests (what they really want), and needs (what they must have). This model (see Figure 1.7) is based on a metaphor of an onion whose layers are gradually peeled back.

. The aim is to understand and identify these dynamics and layers so that the real needs at the heart of the dispute can be addressed and the conflict can be resolved. The Onion Model can be used as part of a negotiation or mediation process – even during the post-conflict reconstruction process.

Figure 1.7: Onion actor analysis – actors' positions, interests and needs in Chiapas, Mexico

Student Reflection:

- How helpful do you think the distinction is between position, interests and needs in understanding a conflict?
- Compare notes with your neighbour.

Group Activity: The Effects and Causes of a Conflict using the Conflict Tree Tool

This activity examines the root causes and effects of a conflict. Please read the scenario and work in a team to undertake the tasks listed.

You are welcome to use additional resources and your personal experience.

Please be mindful and respectful of the opinions of your teammates, as everyone has different perspectives on conflict.

In your group:

- Draw two pictures of a tree including its roots, trunk, and branches
- On one tree write words or draw symbols or pictures that indicate the causes of the conflict
- Now transform your Conflict Tree into a Peace Tree. On the second tree note what needs to change or be resolved to transform conflict into peace
- Be prepared to share your trees and explain them to your team members.

Conclusion of Unit

- Summaries
- Reflection
- Questions?