Methodological Appendix 1

Review of Study Approaches to Conflict

E Bennett and A Neiland

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature that describes approaches to studying conflicts. The paper is divided into 3 sections. Part one discusses the theoretical approaches to the study of conflict; part two analyses the theory and practice of using typologies in the study of conflict and part three discusses the approaches used in some prominent studies of conflict.

Much debate exists over whether conflict can be regarded as generic or not and thus whether or not it is useful and correct to separate conflict out into a number of boxes in terms of its cause and nature is debatable. Both Jabri (1996:12) and Simmel (1972:91) argue that it is generic. On the other hand Coser (1972) disagrees arguing that different types of conflict require different theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches and Hibbs (1973) considers that the different forms of conflict are empirically distinct and, being products of different social forces, cannot be looked at generically. Jabri points out that the orthodoxy of conflict studies is that trends can be found that will throw some light on when how and why conflicts emerge, but she argues all of this has so far failed to explain conflict as a social continuity (Jabri, 1996:54) and that because conflict is pertinent to its place and time regularities between conflicts cannot be found (Jabri, 1996:77).

In order to describe the causes of conflict, it is useful to be able to draw up a typology of conflicts: the commonalties can then be safely assumed to be possible causes. A typology creates a constructed order out of a set of data so that scientific methods, including prediction can be applied to it. Typologies aid in the codification of the real world, thus enabling the formation of hypothesis through the unification of a myriad facts under general categories. A typology lists the most salient features of the chosen phenomenon. The list of features will change dependent upon the boundaries defined when the typology is built. A typology is abstract generality and is not intended to be, and should never be regarded as a mirror for empirical reality. It is because it is an abstract reality that comparisons across types and sectors can be made and that a set of hypotheses can be formulated.

A typology does not attempt to list all empirical evidence, but to distil out of the unique, the non-recurring and the extraordinary, the general and the representative (McKinney, 1966). By reducing the perceptual down to the conceptual, the typology acts as a tool for comparison and prediction. As described by McKinney (1966):

> A scientific function of the constructed type is to order the concrete data so that they may be described in terms of that make them comparable so that despite the fact the experience/phenomenon might be unique, it might reveal with some degree of probability what may be expected in others.

Hence, it is the capacity of the typology to explain that makes it valuable, not its ability to correspond to perceptual experience. The constructed type is a heuristic device that does not attempt to explain the directly experienced form, rather it provides a useful basis for comparing and understanding the empirical world.

The construction of a typology has of necessity to be an iterative process whereby an initial typology is constructed and then as each hypothesis is tested against the model, the model is refined. As the model is refined, so the typology may take on more specificity.

For the typology to fulfil its purpose it has to be able to demonstrate a clear link between the constructed type and the systematic theory. That is, there must be a clear understanding of *how* it was produced (what variables were excluded/included) and *why* it was produced (what did it attempt to show?).

A typology can have two functions: to act as a filter device in the initial stages of research to order and analyse hypotheses and data from secondary sources; in later stages of research it acts as a means for ordering data from primary sources and concrete evidence. Because the typology provides a means of measuring the degree of deviation of an observation from the expected construct, it can also stand as a benchmark for future research.

Typologies can also serve to highlight significant relationships that might not have come to light otherwise and thus can point the way for future research.
There are many typologies to be found in the literature, although, as Miall et al (1999) point out, the proliferation of typologies has to an extent rendered them largely meaningless and often contradictory. Aubert (1963) and Powelson (1972) both use the consensual context within which the conflict is fought and the definition of the goal over which it is fought to categorise conflict. Obserschall (1973:32) states that many researchers into conflict find it useful to base a typology on the form the conflict takes and its ultimate outcome. Charles (1992) has constructed a typology of fishery conflicts conflicts. He classifies them around a number of nodal points that form the basis of the conflict: jurisdiction: who owns the fishery and who controls access to it; management: conflict over harvest levels, no-fish times and enforcement; internal allocation or inter-sectoral conflicts and external allocation or intra-sector conflicts. Warner and Jones (1998) create a typology of conflicts categorised as intra micro-micro conflicts, inter micro-micro conflicts and micro-macro conflicts thus recognising the many levels at which conflict can occur.

Typology of fishery conflicts (Charles, 1992)			
Fishery Jurisdiction	**Management Mechanisms**	**Internal allocation**	**External allocation**
Property rights	Management plans	'gear wars' conflicts	Domestic vs foreign
The role of government	Enforcement conflicts	User group conflicts	Fishermen vs aquaculture
Intergovernmental conflicts	Fishermen/government conflicts	Fishermen vs processors	Competing ocean users

Looking at the issue of communal land conflicts in Zimbabwe, Sithole and Bradley (1995) categorise conflicts in terms of the actors: between the state and institutions (those governing the resource) or between users of the resource.

A more sophisticated typology categorises conflicts according to the level at which they occur (from household through to international) and the nature of the cause of the conflict (access, resource quality, authority, value based, information processing, legal/policy reasons) and the status of the cause to that conflict: immediate, intermediate, root. (FAO, 1996).

Level of conflict		**Cause of conflict**	
Household	These impact upon appropriate mechanisms for resolution	Access	immediate intermediate root
Intra-community		Resource quality	
Inter-community		Authority	
Local		Value of resource	
National		Information processing	
international		Legal/policy issues	

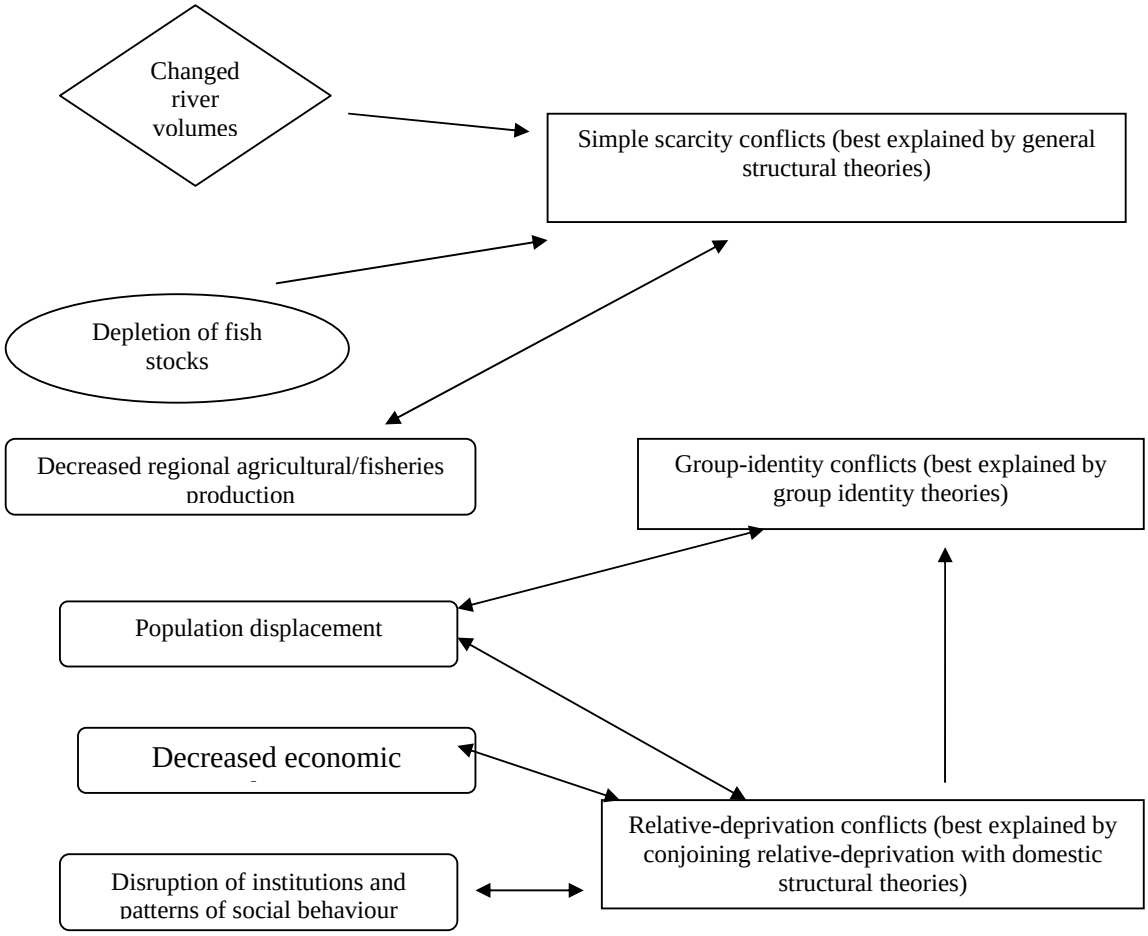
Conflicts can also be classified according to the type of interactions of the livelihood activity, differentiating these with regard to time, space, visibility, sector and decision making unit.

Warner (1999) classifies conflict in terms of those due to development pressures and those caused by structural issues.

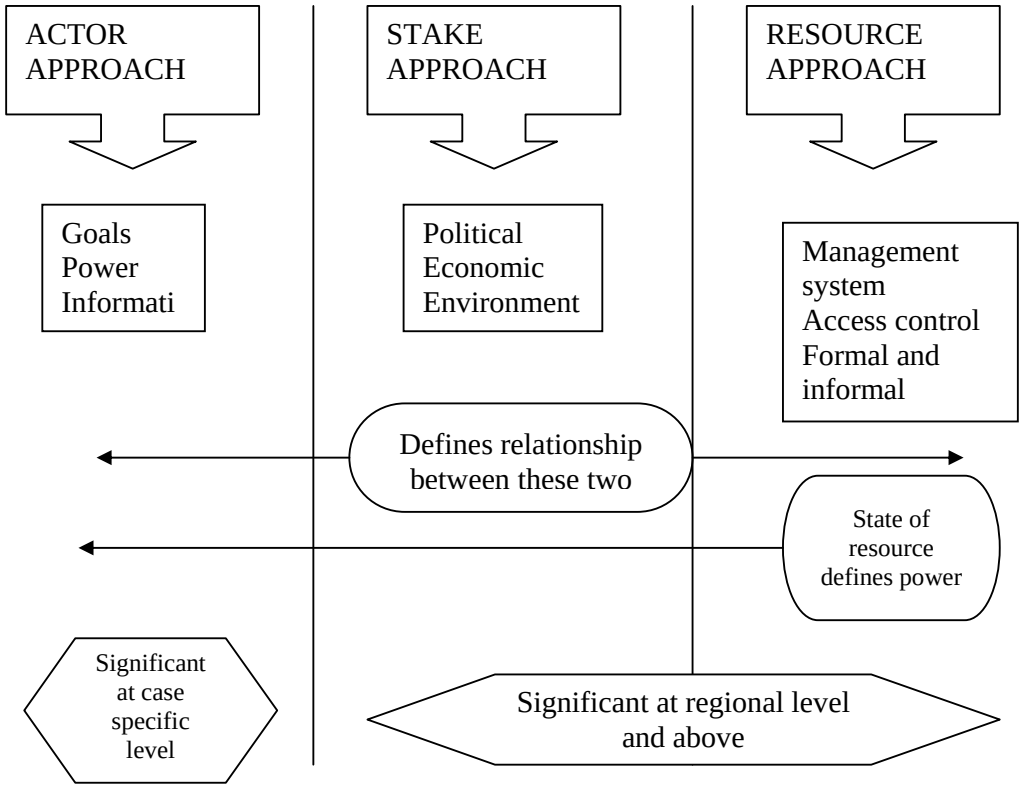
The causal and process models for studying conflict
Conflicts have causes and they are part of a process. There are effectively two means of analysing conflict: by hypothesising what the causes are, and eliminating them through empirical evidence or deciding that Y indeed causes Y and then look at the process by which this happens. Whilst there is scope for a good deal of cross-fertilisation between the two methods, the first tends to be more static than the second that focuses on the dynamics.

The nature of socio-economic-ecological systems is so complex that a study cannot hope to identify all the possible causes of conflict, but might be able to identify a number of clearly important ones. However, reviewing 3 generations of environment and conflict research, Ronnfeldt (1997) states that some have argued that the complex models forwarded by Homer-Dixon (among others) are too complex and return variables that are too broad in scope to analyse properly.

Mapping of conflicts is a useful tool. The following (modified) diagram helps establish some of the causal links and implications in environmental conflicts (after Homer-Dixon,1995)



There are plenty of theoretical frameworks and methodologies within which to study conflict at a national level and above: Regime theory (Ronnfeldt, 1997: 479) looks at the conditions under which states faced with common problems choose out of self-interest to establish institutions to manage, and solve, these in a cooperative manner. At a national and sub-national level, state in society theory can be used. This framework is particularly useful for developing countries and is a critique of theoretical approaches which give either the state or society the dominant role in national political processes, thus allowing the social dynamics that lead to conflict to be examined.



Relationship analysis

Closely related to the analysis of conflict process, is analysis of the relationships between the stakeholders to the conflict. Because the value of what is at stake (political, economic or environmental) often defines the relationship between the actors and the resources, this is often a good place to start (FAO). The political, economic and environmental determinants of conflict will obviously depend upon the level of society used as the starting block for study. When looking at the actors, certain elements are important: their goals, their power relationships and their information needs and uses but Jabri (1996:15) points out that analysing conflict through the role of actors is often complicated by the fact that the strongest actors in the conflict is likely to be the one most heard, over and above their opponents and in fact identifying all the actors will be complicated by power relationships. Power relationships between actors are in turn linked to the status of the resource: as the resource becomes less abundant, power relationships will shift as issues of allocation come to the fore and the weakest lose out.

<u>The process model</u>

Pioneered by Homer-Dixon (1995) this approach defines strategies for studying complex systems. Homer-Dixon was looking at environmental scarcity and social conflict in particular and argues that because the number of unknown variables and causal links is so large, the traditional method of looking at dependent or independent variables fails because it is virtually impossible to control for potentially confounding variables (Homer-Dixon, 1995: 2). In his work, recognising that it was not possible to determine the range of factors that explained the value of the dependent variable

(conflict) he instead settled for determining if the specific independent variable (environmental scarcity) can be an important cause of change in the dependent variable. In other words, he was interested to find out whether variable X impacted upon variable Y and if so how, rather than trying to account for the incidence of variable Y. He poses 3 questions around conflict that might be interesting: can environmental scarcity contribute to conflict, if yes then how, and is this contribution interesting. In order to answer the first question, the causal roles of environmental scarcity have to be established (trigger, aggravator or underlying stressor), this then helps to answer the second question and establish the importance of it to the third question.

Unlike conventional approaches that choose cases on the dependent or independent variable, the process tracing approach chooses cases based on both variables and then, through the examination of many such cases, to determine the patterns of causality. The counter-factual argument is of course to find examples of environmental scarcity/degradation where conflict has not occurred to attempt to determine what factors are present in such a case that perhaps indicate the key cause of conflict. Another problem with this approach is determining whether the independent variable is a sufficient or necessary cause of change in the dependent variable.

Jabri (1996) believes that it is more productive to build of map of the processes by which some issues become salient and lead to conflict rather than building typologies of the issues around which conflicts develop. This would appear to make sense in so far as the process by which conflicts develop is important to understanding power relationships, which are highly pertinent to conflict formation.

Conclusion

There is a large difference between a dispute involving villagers using the same fish pond and war between nations, so, is there anything to be gained from borrowing from other disciplines and can conflict be studied as a generic issue? There is little doubt that the conflict development process is the same irrespective of the final outcome. The same models regarding linkages and relationships between actors to the conflict are consistent across the range of conflicts; the social processes that led to the conflict are the same and the causes are often the same, even though the consequences may vary widely. There are two options for studying conflict: to study the causes (ie identifying possible independent variables that explain what is happening) or the process that helped form the conflict.

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