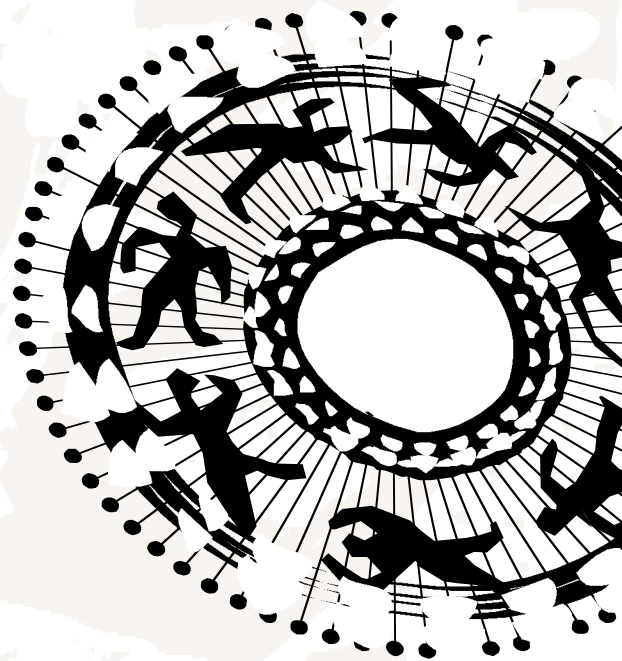


I N T R O D U C T I O N
TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



T R A I N I N G



Transforming conflict: Seeking African Solutions to African Challenges
Through a Participatory Learning Process -
Learner Workbook

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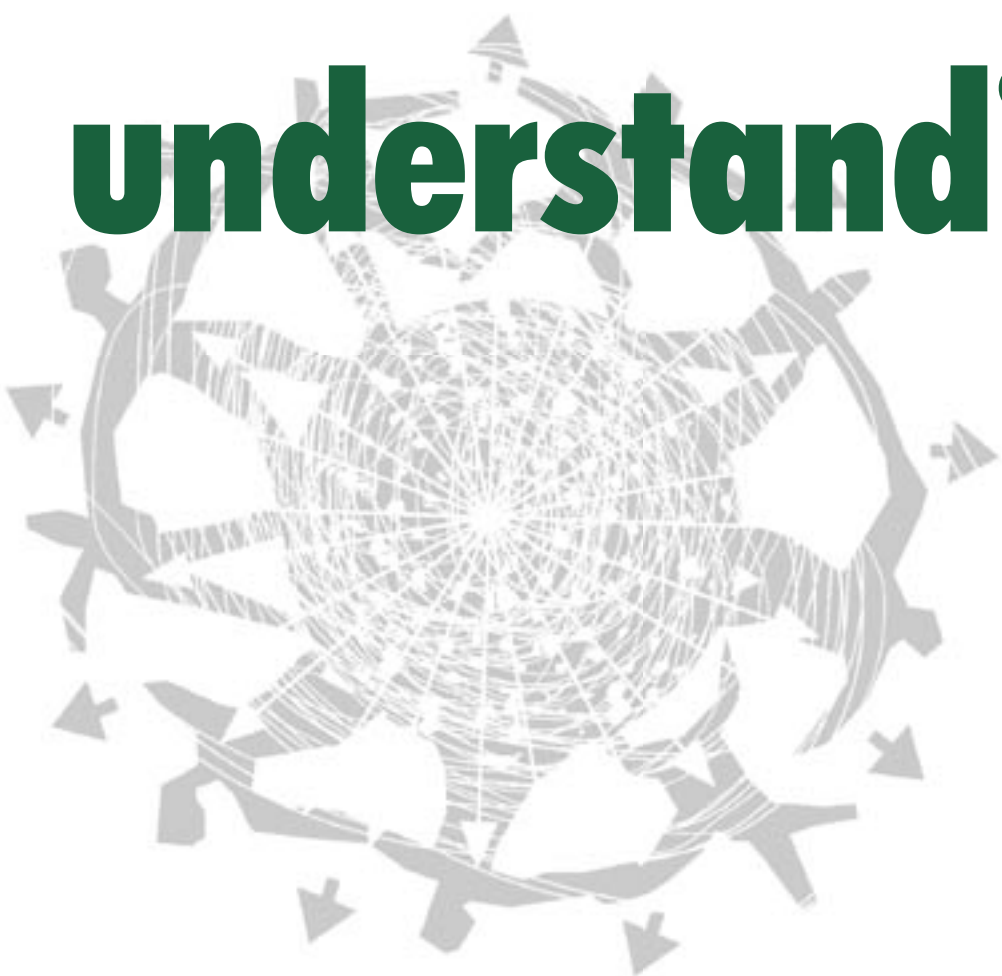
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MODULE 1: UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

understanding

conflict



towards a **definition** of conflict

Purpose:

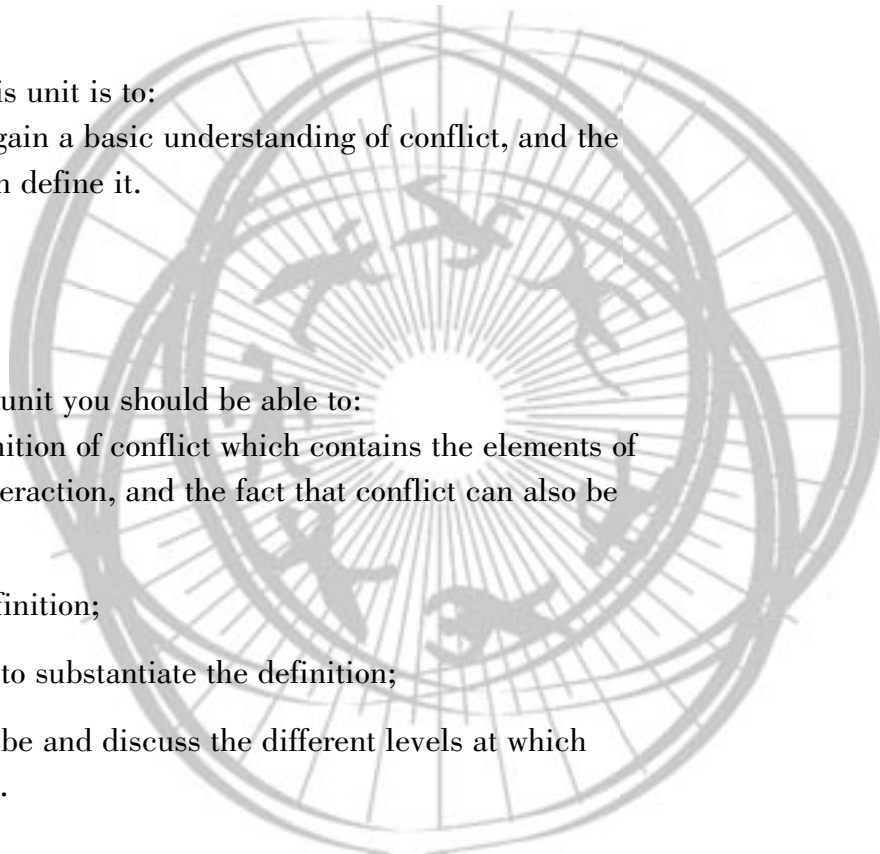
The purpose of this unit is to:

- enable you to gain a basic understanding of conflict, and the elements which define it.

Outcomes:

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

- provide a definition of conflict which contains the elements of complexity, interaction, and the fact that conflict can also be positive;
- explain the definition;
- give examples to substantiate the definition;
- identify, describe and discuss the different levels at which conflict occurs.



What is conflict?

- Conflict involves people: It is a state of human interaction between two or more parties.
- Conflict is a state of human interaction where there is disharmony.
- It emerges when parties compete over perceived or actual goals, values or interests.
- It occurs when parties confront each other with opposing actions and counter-actions.
- It is an indicator that something is changing, has changed or needs to change.
- It is an interaction which aims at 'beating' an opponent.

Conflict is a form of competitive behaviour between people or groups. It occurs when two or more people compete over perceived or actual incompatible goals or limited resources (Boulding 1962, cited in CDR 1986:2).

A social conflict exists when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives (Kreisberg 1988:2).

Conflict relationship is one in which the parties have incompatible preferences; a co-operative relationship is one in which the parties can obtain highly preferred outcomes if they work together (e.g. marriage, employer-employee relationships). Most relationships involve a mixture of conflict and co-operation (Kent 2000:4).

Conflict is an outgrowth of the diversity that characterises our thoughts, our attitudes, our beliefs, our perceptions, and our social systems and structures. It is as much a part of our existence as is evolution (Weeks 1994:7).

...[W]hile individual people continue to relate to each other, but in pursuit of differing goals, there will always be conflicts of one kind or another (Rupesinghe 1998:27).

The existence of social or political conflict is not in itself a cause for concern. Conflict is often a source of creativity and change (Rupesinghe 1998:27).

Conflict can be positive

Conflict is often seen as negative. But, conflict can:

- create an opportunity for balancing the power within a relationship or the wider society and the reconciliation of people's legitimate interests;

Example

An important example of this is South Africa's move from an apartheid to a post-apartheid society. In this case, conflict between the apartheid government and the mass democratic movement led to the creation of a democratic state.

- lead to greater self-awareness and understanding and awareness of diversity and differences between people, organisations and societies;
- lead to personal, organisational and even systemic growth and development;
- act as a useful medium for airing and solving problems;
- allow for different interests to be reconciled;
- foster group unity.

Why do we need to see the positive aspects of conflict?

So that we don't:

- avoid dealing with conflict or doing battle with the 'adversary';
- see conflict only as a battle between incompatible self-interests and desires;
- see the conflict in terms of absolute differences. This colours the whole relationship and ignores healthy, more positive aspects of the relationship.



Types and levels of conflict

There are three levels of conflict:



Example:

Conflict between a parent and child over responsibilities within the household.



Example:

In 1991 conflict broke out between two rival taxi associations in the Western Cape. The conflict centred around control of lucrative taxi routes.



Example:

In the late 1970s, there was conflict in the Sinai Peninsular. Egypt was demanding the immediate return of the entire Sinai; Israel, who had occupied the Sinai in the 1967 war, refused to return any of it. Israel's underlying interest was in security – that its borders were safe from attack by Egypt. Egypt's interest was sovereignty – control over land that had been part of Egypt for centuries.

When the elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers – Uganda





analysing

conflict

Purpose:

The purpose of this unit is to:

- enable you to understand the complexity of conflict, in terms of the causes and manifestations of conflict, and the parties involved and their interests;
- enable you to have an understanding of the stages of conflict;
- ensure that you have the necessary skills to analyse a conflict within its specific context.

Outcomes:

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

- understand the complex nature of conflict;
- show knowledge of the different tools for analysing conflict and the stages of conflict, in particular the Circle of Conflict;
- identify the causes and results of a conflict;
- identify the parties to a conflict and their positions, interests and needs;
- identify the stages of a conflict and describe the development of a conflict;
- identify influencing factors, including culture and power.



Analysing conflict

In order to be able to deal constructively with conflict, it is necessary to analyse it, to find out what really is the problem. If this is not done, then the real problem will not be effectively dealt with. This means that the conflict must be broken down and its parts examined – in other words, the conflict must be analysed.

Conflicts are often complex, with a number of overlapping problems. Through thorough analysis, it is possible to see what needs to be dealt with first, as well as how to deal with it. Often, analysing a conflict and solving it overlap.

There are three things which should be carefully analysed:

- the parties to the conflict;
- the broader context and history of the conflict;
- the root causes of the conflict.

The parties to the conflict are those individuals or groups who have an interest in the conflict. A party may be an individual, entity, organisation, or agency of some sort that has (or can be understood as having) a distinct set of preferences relating to the possible outcomes of a situation.

Root causes are the factors which cause a conflict. There are usually a number of root causes, and identifying them may be complex. It is important to identify the root causes in order to get to the real problem and to resolve the conflict.

The parties to the conflict

Conflict requires two or more parties for it to exist. To understand the conflict, you need to know who the parties are and how they relate to each other. This is a list of factors which need to be analysed:

FACTOR TO ANALYSE	WHAT IT MEANS...
The parties and their interrelationships	To insure that all parties are included in the resolution process, you should identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those directly involved; • those indirectly involved.
The interests and needs of the parties	Usually, parties want someone or something to change so that their needs/ interests are satisfied. Analysing interests and needs can lead to a better understanding of the real problem, and better methods of dealing with the problem.
The positions and perceptions of the parties	Positions may develop from wants, needs, goals, objectives, interests, ideologies, positions or other sorts of values. Parties may not only have different positions, but might also have different perceptions of themselves, of the other party/ies, or of the conflict. Different perceptions might even be the cause of a conflict, or exacerbate it.
The role of power in the relationship between parties	Power is present in all social relationships and can be used for destructive or productive purposes. Look for visible forms of power like physical, economic, political, military, and those that are hidden or underlying.

Interests are the things that groups voice, or understand, as important for the group's existence, development or position within society. Usually individuals will align themselves with a group if they feel that the interests of the group will result in their needs being met.

Positions, or preferences, are what choice a party would make among possible outcomes to a conflict.

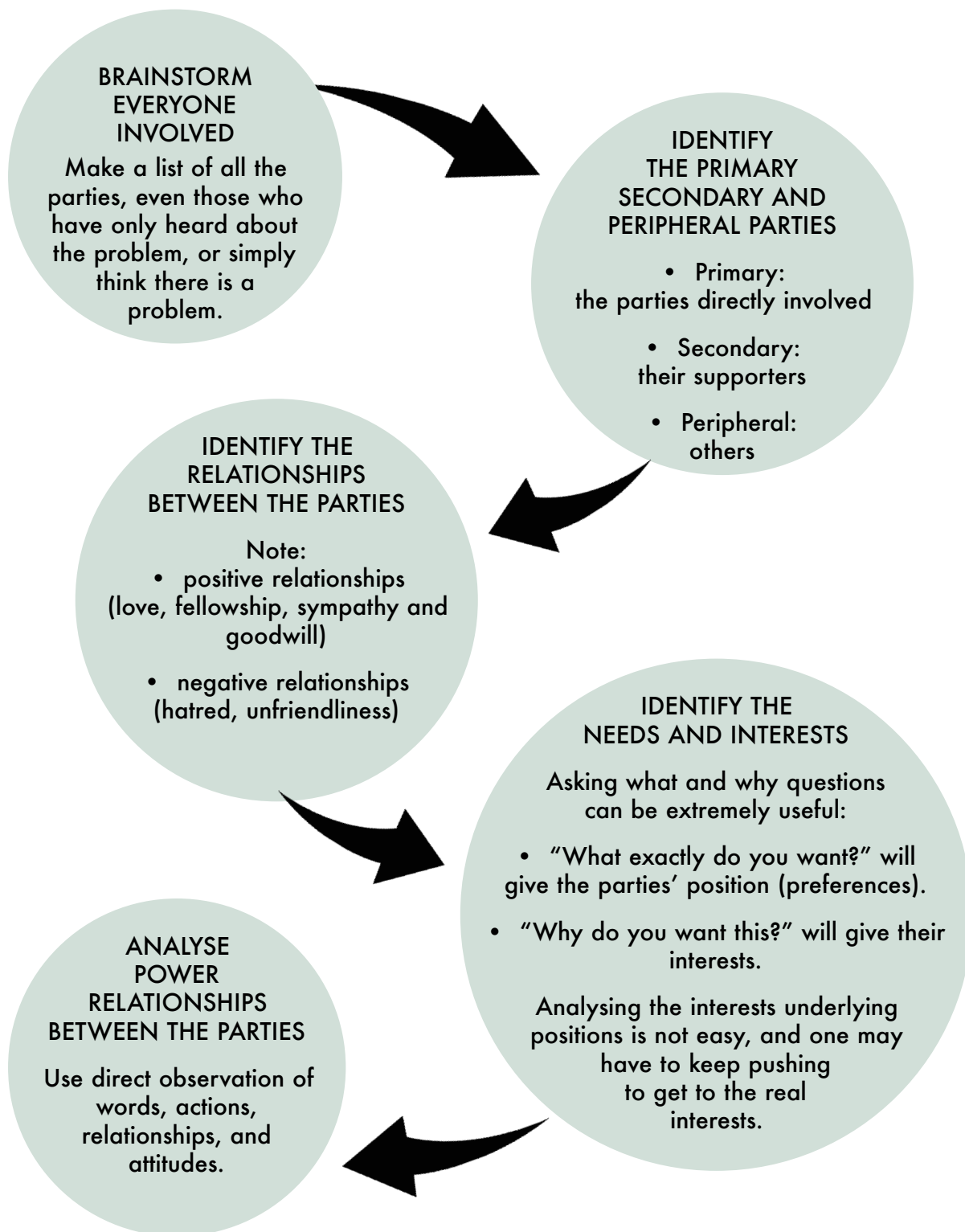
A value is something we consider to be of significant importance. A value can involve a belief, a principle, or even a pattern of behaviour.

The family is like a forest. If you are outside, it is dense. If you are inside you see that each tree has its own position – Ghana

FACTOR TO ANALYSE	WHAT IT MEANS...
The feelings and emotions of the parties	It is almost impossible for conflict to exist without some emotion being invested in it. Strong emotions can play a crucial role in a conflict, causing or exacerbating it. It is a problem when emotions cloud other issues, or when they are ignored or denied.
Outside pressures on the parties	Parties can also be affected by outside forces, be they political, social, economic or cultural.
Socio-cultural diversity and value differences	<p>Every party will have a different view of the conflict based on factors like personal history, culture, background, language, class and gender. Communication is easiest between people who have a common history, roots, routines and rituals which cause them to have similar perceptions, assumptions, values and a common way of expressing these.</p> <p>Socio-cultural diversity can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make communication more difficult; • lead to different perceptions (or wrong perceptions); • highlight differences in interests, needs, and positions. <p>It is important for all the parties to understand the values and principles of the others.</p>

Tools for identifying and analysing the parties to the conflict

Here is a process you could use to identify parties and their interrelationships.



The skin of the leopard is beautiful, but not his heart – Congo



Some important points

- Get information from the parties themselves wherever possible.
- If primary conflicting parties are not accessible, then experts who seem to know the parties should be approached.
- Several different people on different sides need to be spoken to in order to get a variety of perspectives and to cross-check accounts.
- Direct observation of behaviour can also be used, and in some cases the preferences (positions) of parties can be inferred.

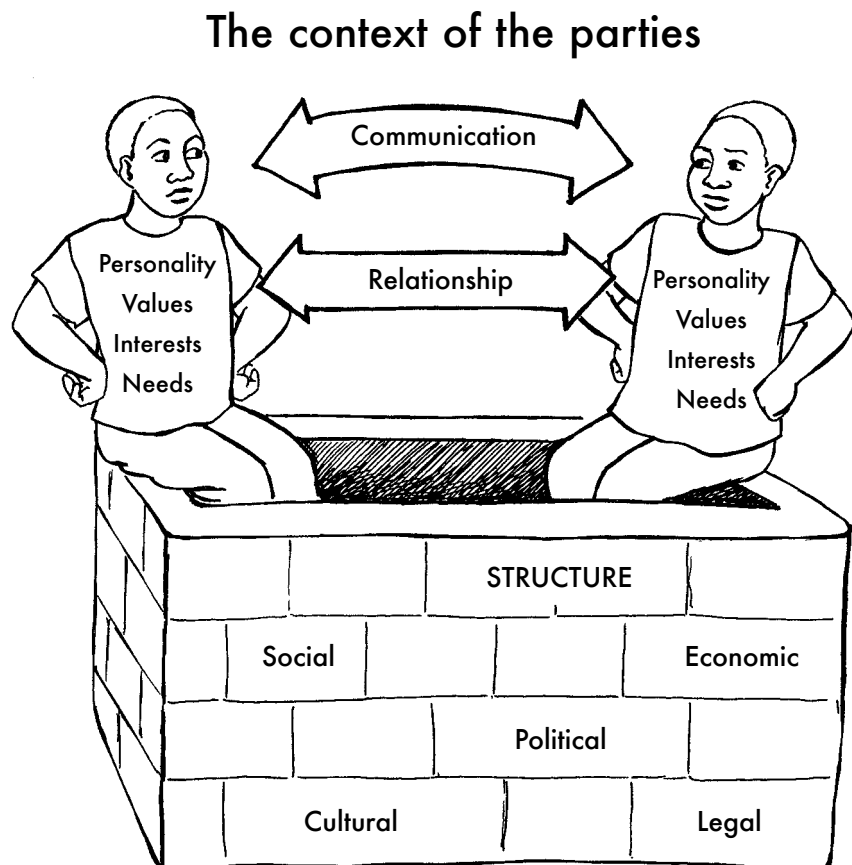
Background and context

All conflicts have a context within which they happen, and usually a history.

The conflict situation will be impacted by:

- the personalities and personal perspectives of the individuals involved;
- the social, cultural, political, economic, and/or religious context within which the conflict is set.

The context can affect the interests, position, power, rights, feelings of, and outside pressures on, the parties.



Worksheet 2a: Identifying the parties and issues



Read Case Study 1 and answer these questions:

1. Who are the parties involved in this conflict?

2. What is the conflict about?



Root causes of conflict

It is important to identify the real root causes of a conflict. If these are not correctly identified, the conflict resolution process will focus on the wrong issues.

There are five different types of root causes:

ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT		EXAMPLES
Relationship conflicts	<p>These happen because of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong negative emotions; • misperceptions or stereotypes; • poor or miscommunication; <p>or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • repetitive negative behaviours. <p>Relationship problems often fuel disputes and/or cause an escalation in a dispute.</p>	Racist conflicts, where an assumption about the worth of another is made on the basis of his or her race.
Information conflicts	<p>These happen when people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack the necessary information to make wise decisions; • are misinformed; • disagree over what data is relevant, or interpret information differently; <p>or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have competing assessment procedures. <p>Some data conflicts may be unnecessary in the sense that they are caused by poor communication. Others may be genuine, because the information, or procedure used to collect it, is not compatible.</p>	Company employees are unhappy because management are rumoured to have decided on a 2% across-the-board salary increase, well below inflation. In fact, the 2% applies only to senior management, and is an attempt to rectify the gross distortion between the amount earned by those at the top of the company, and those at the bottom.
Structural conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are caused by oppressive patterns of human relationships. • They are often shaped by forces external to the parties (limited physical resources or authority, geographical constraints, time, organisational structures etc). 	The struggle against the inherently unjust system of apartheid.

Though the palm tree in the jungle is big, who knows how big its yield will be? – Liberia

ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT		EXAMPLES
Interest conflicts	<p>These are caused by competition over perceived or actual incompatible needs.</p> <p>They happen :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when one or more parties believe that in order to satisfy his or her needs, those of the other must be sacrificed. • over substantive issues such as money, physical resources, time etc; or • procedural issues (how to resolve something), or • psychological issues (perceptions of trust, fairness, desire for participation, respect etc). <p>To be resolved, all parties must have a significant number of interests addressed and/or met in each of these areas – substantive, procedural, and psychological.</p>	<p>When British Columbia joined the Canadian confederate in 1871, a Royal Proclamation which had assumed land unclaimed by “settlers” to be the property of indigenous peoples, was sidestepped and replaced with the doctrine of terra nullus, which denied that pre-contact occupation or land ownership existed for indigenous peoples. However, the First Nations people continued to fight for their inherent rights to the resources on these lands. Anger and resentment led to armed blockades, police standoffs and violent political rhetoric over the question of land.</p>
Value conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are caused by perceived or actual incompatible belief systems. • Different values do not have to cause conflicts. • Conflicts only arise when one party seeks to force their set of values on another party, or lays claim to an exclusive value system which does not allow for divergent beliefs. 	<p>Religious wars, where one group asserts its moral right to “convert” those not of the same faith, or eliminate them.</p>



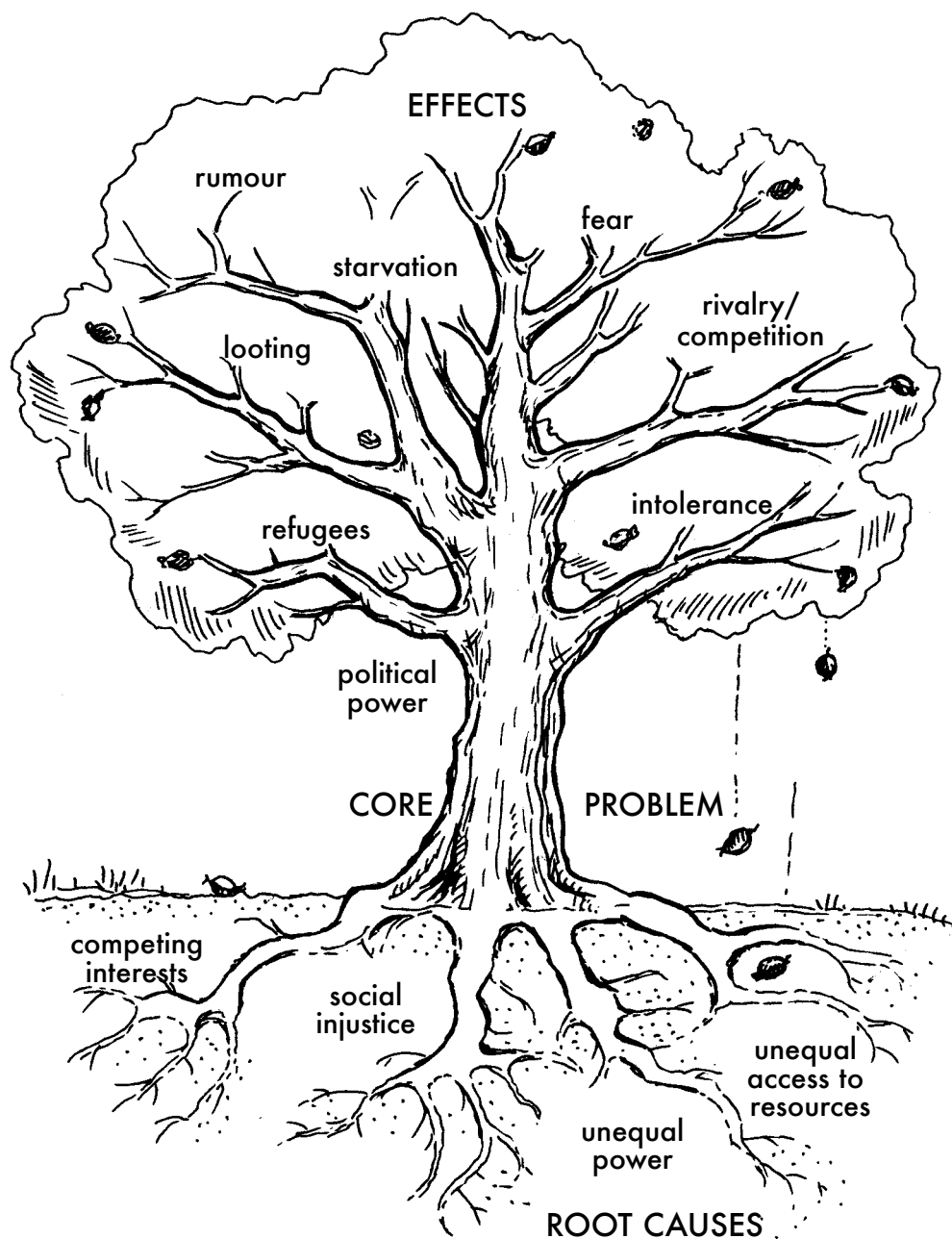
Tools for identifying the root causes of a conflict

It is possible to get to the root causes of a conflict by:

- identifying the background and context of a conflict;
- identifying the parties involved and their power, positions, interests and desired changes.

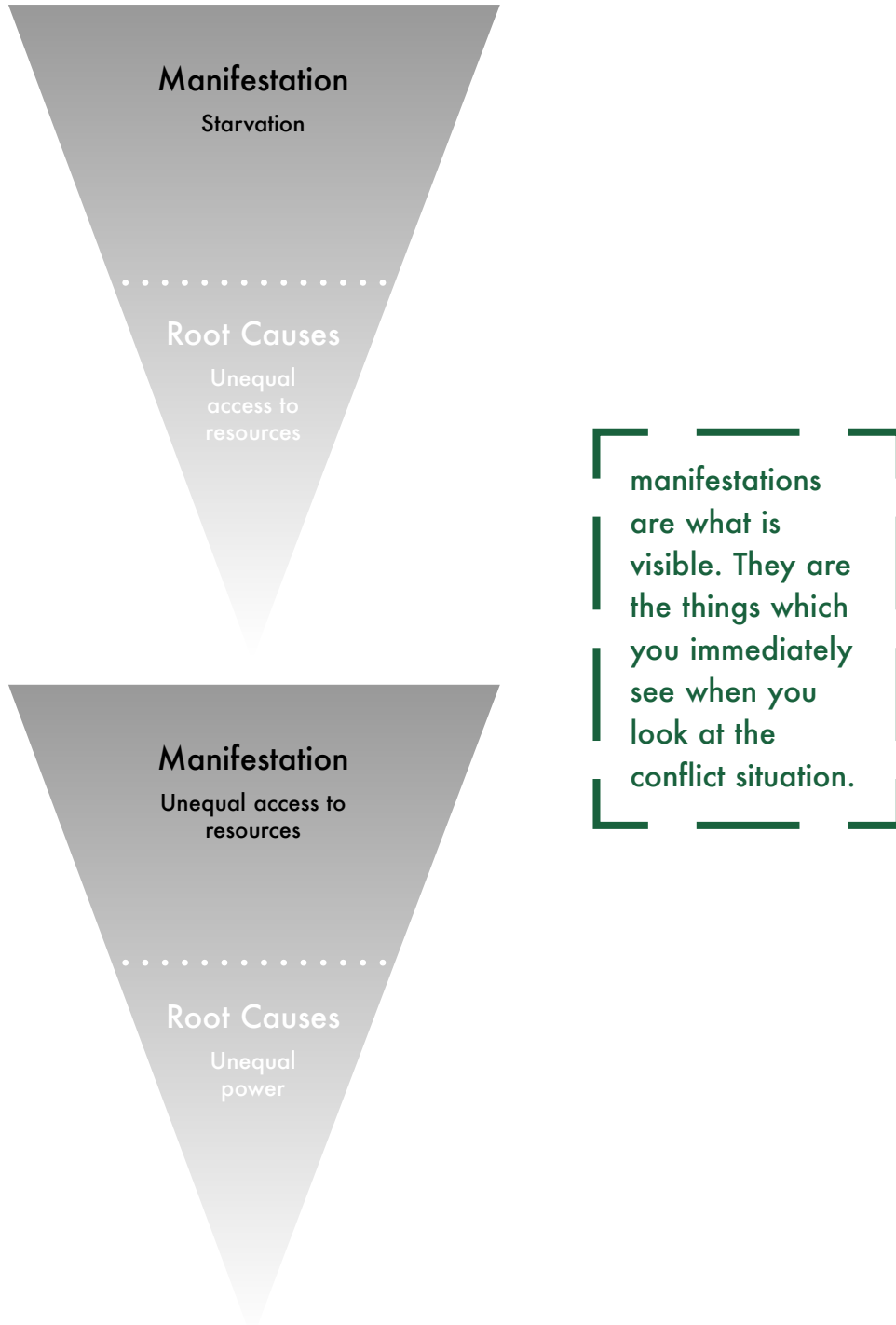
On this page and the following are three tools to help identify root causes.

Root causes versus manifestations of a conflict



Identifying the root causes of a conflict

The inverted pyramid will help you to do a deeper analysis of identified causes:



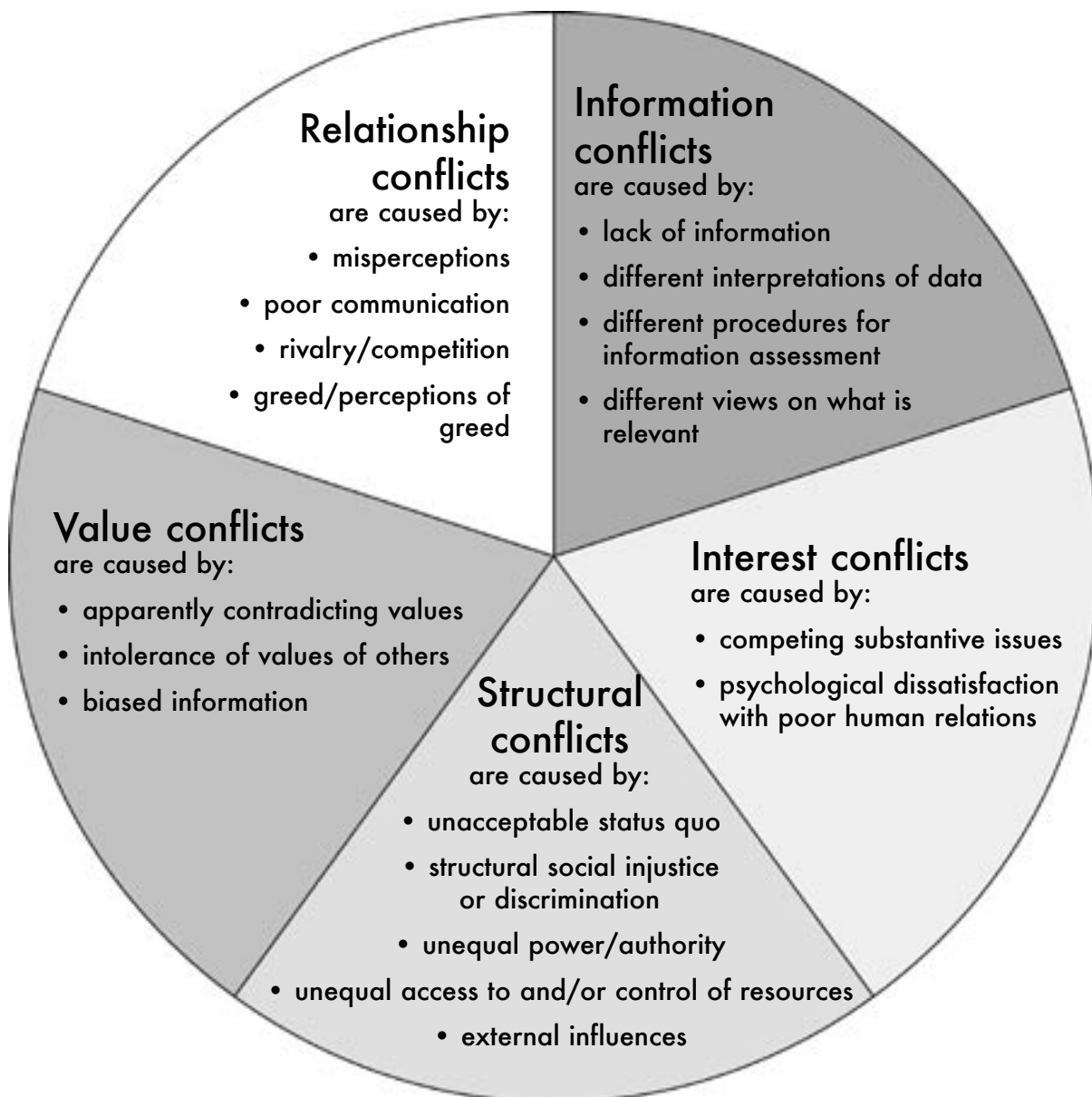
Mole-Dagbon, West Africa

Instead of blaming the spot you fall on, better look for where you tripped –

The pyramid allows for any one part/cause to be interrogated until a point is reached where no further breakdown (deeper root cause) is possible.



The Circle of Conflict



As can be seen, the Circle of Conflict identifies the ultimate root cause/s of a conflict. The Circle of Conflict is not intended to be a fixed, two-dimensional structure – rather, it is assumed that there is considerable flux and overlap between the sectors.

Worksheet 2b: Analysing Conflict



Read Case Study 2 and answer these questions:

1. What is the issue?

2. Who are the parties involved? Which of them are primary, which are secondary and which are peripheral parties?

3. What are the causes of the conflict?

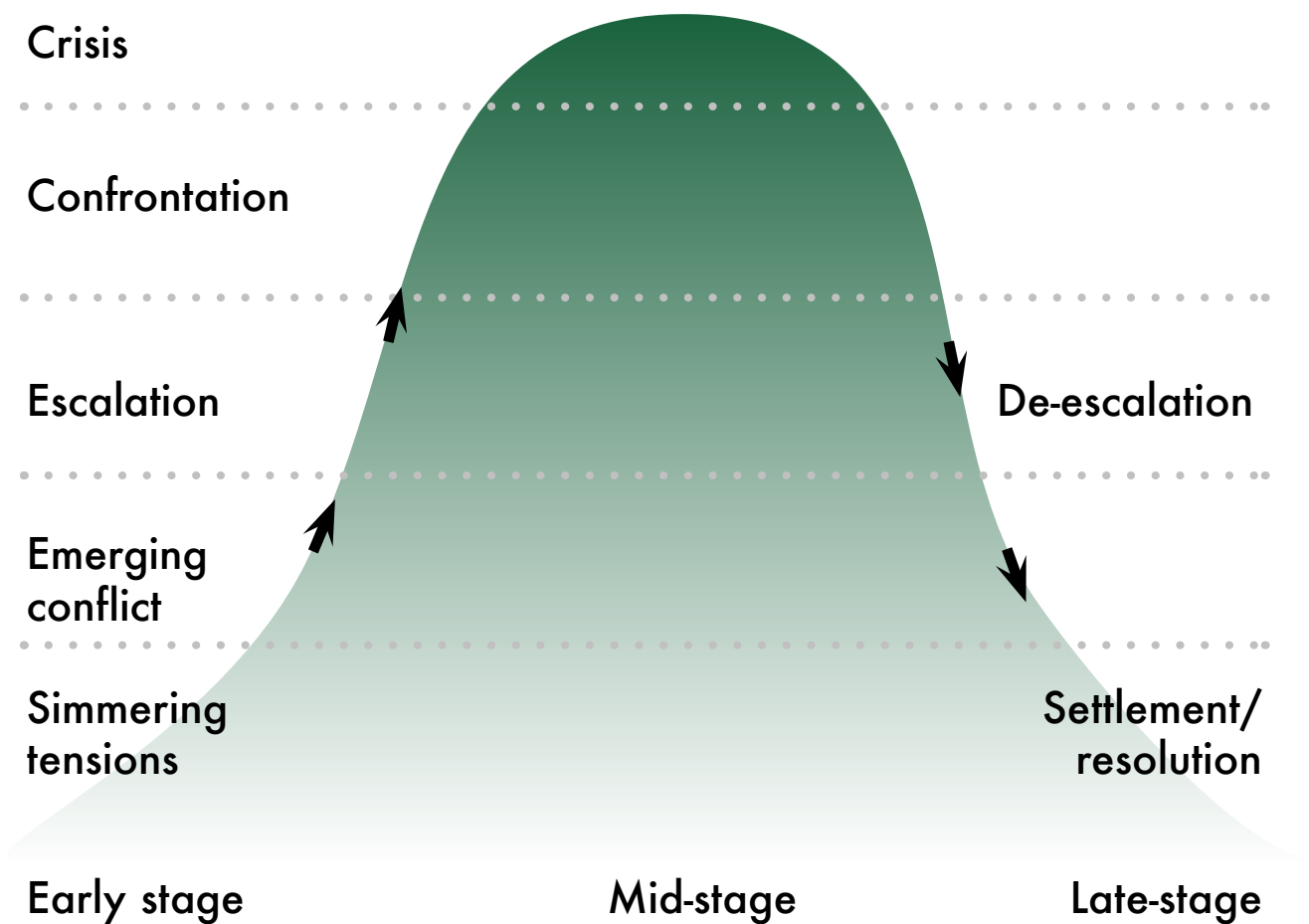


Stages of conflict

There are usually distinct phases of a conflict, but these might not always be in the same order. Moving from one stage to the next is not always the result of a single event or factor.

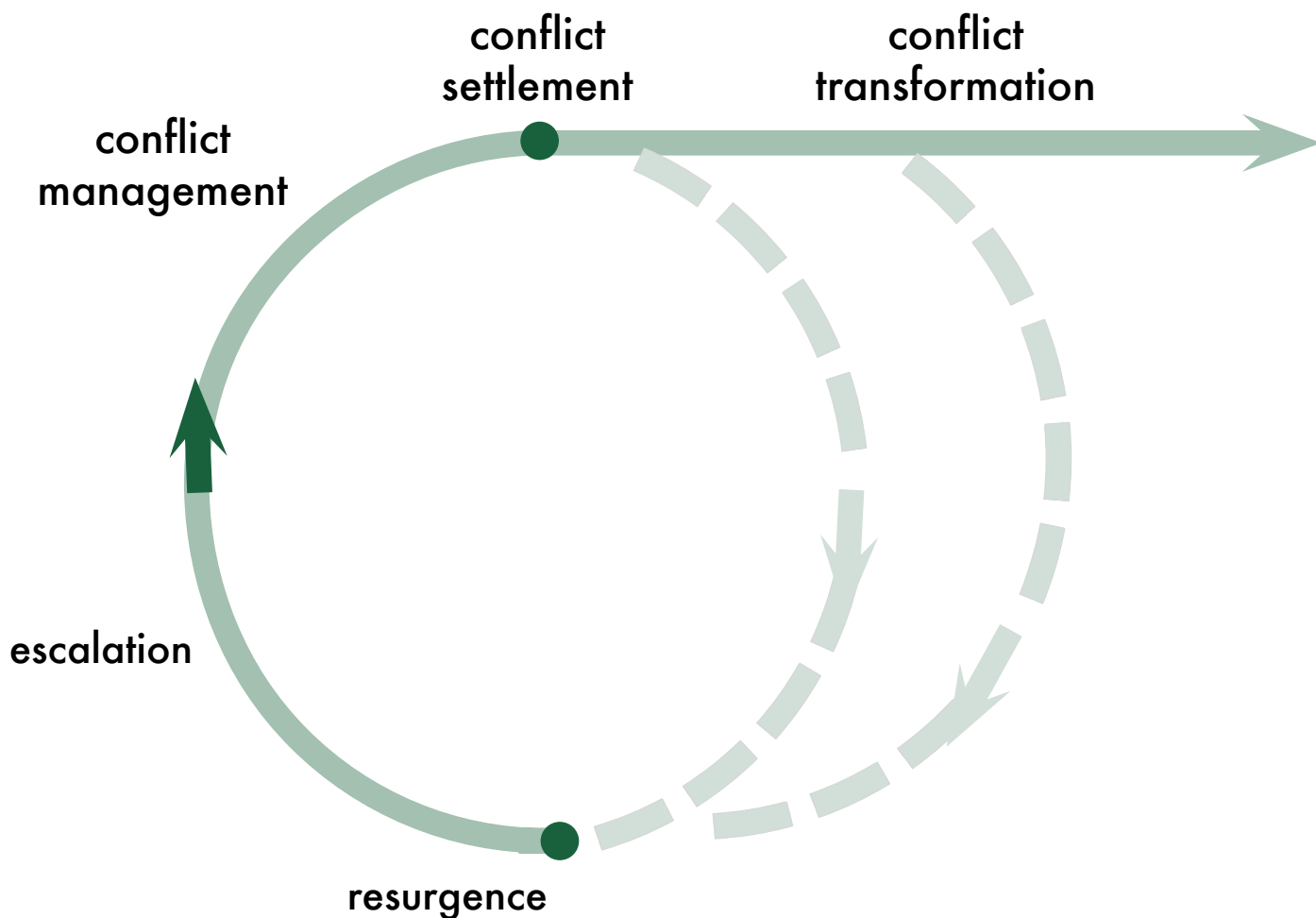
These stages are usually present in a conflict:

THE STAGES OF CONFLICT



A conflict may not move smoothly through these phases, and a single conflict, especially one which takes place over a long period of time, may have several episodes of escalation and de-escalation. A conflict which was apparently settled may also flare up again, and go through another cycle of escalation, de-escalation, and settlement.

The cycle of conflict



Example

The cycle of domestic violence

The cycle of violence in the domestic abuse of women is also an example of the cyclical nature of some conflicts. The cycle begins with tension between the partners, with possible verbal abuse. In this stage, the woman will usually try to calm the man down. However, the tension normally develops into physical violence. After the attack, the man is often apologetic, and may show love and caring, buying gifts or giving additional attention. (He will, however, usually continue to blame the woman for the violence.) He may promise never to hit her again. It is this post-violence phase which often makes it most difficult for women to reach the point of actually leaving an abusive partner. This post-violence phase ends with the beginning of the cycle as tensions once again rise.

Early Warning Signs

Tracking a conflict is important in that it helps you to know:

- when to respond,
- what response is needed,
- whether a conflict is likely to escalate from simmering tensions to confrontation or crisis and if early intervention can prevent escalation from happening. This process is known as early warning.

Early warning systems for conflict involve predicting and monitoring the political, social, economic, environmental and military pattern of events in an area of potential conflict which could lead to an outbreak of conflict. A useful tool which can be used is the Continuum of Community Relationships. It uses behaviour patterns to identify whether a conflict is likely to escalate or erupt in the near future:

Continuum of Community Relationships

Relationship	Interest groups engage in:
Co-operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource trade-offs • Creating value • Agreement of process • Mutual respect
Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging the status quo • Disagreeing over allocation of resources • Testing and stretching existing processes
Heightened Tension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angry exchanges in the media and other public forums • Boisterous public meetings • Positional claiming stances • Challenging public processes
Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewing the status quo as not representative • Engaging in demonstrations and/or lawsuits • Regarding public processes as unfair
Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attacking the status quo • Disrupting public order • Provoking incidents and unrest • Traumatizing policy decisions • Regarding public processes as illegitimate