

Local manifestations of international conservation ideologies and biodiversity conflicts in developing economies

Summary

The study explores “local manifestations of international conservation ideologies” through lenses of conflicts and interplay of international/EU, national and local biodiversity governance in Estonia, India and Madagascar. We develop an analytical framework for the conflict interpretation. Results show how conflicts manifest differently in 3 countries, but they are all resultant of international and national conservation agendas, the nature of local participation, natural resource dependence, local institutional and historical factors. Despite global shift towards people-oriented conservation, conservation governance at the local level tends to display path-dependence. The study shows how recognition of local institutions and genuine participation in decision-making process is needed. Importance of country-specific and locally-adapted solutions for the conflict resolution and effective biodiversity governance is underlined.

KEYWORDS: Estonia; India; institutional analysis; Madagascar; participation; protected areas,

1. Introduction

PAs governance has been reshaped to fit different interests of various actors at the international, national and subnational levels, but frequently not taking into account local people needs and resulting in higher social costs over benefits. This study analyses “*local manifestations of international conservation ideologies*” (Kull et al., 2007:724) through examples of biodiversity conflicts in Estonia, India and Madagascar. We aim to answer how international or EU biodiversity conservation regimes influence local PA governance in different countries under study? Which forces at international, national and local level affect conservation conflicts in different contexts?

2. Framework and methods

We define conflict as the in-acceptance of a conservation initiative measured with attitudinal, behavioural and outcome-related indicators (see White et al., 2009). The analytical framework (*Figure 1*), adapted from Vatn (2011) and Ostrom (2011), analyses conflicts around biodiversity conservation within PAs at three governance levels: 1) international or EU, 2) national and 3) local. We identified three additional analytical elements at the local level: a) nature of participation, b) dependence on natural resources, and c) historical and institutional context.

To compile data for the analysis, we reviewed literature on PA governance, international conservation, national legislations and biodiversity conflicts in three case-countries: Estonia, India and Madagascar.

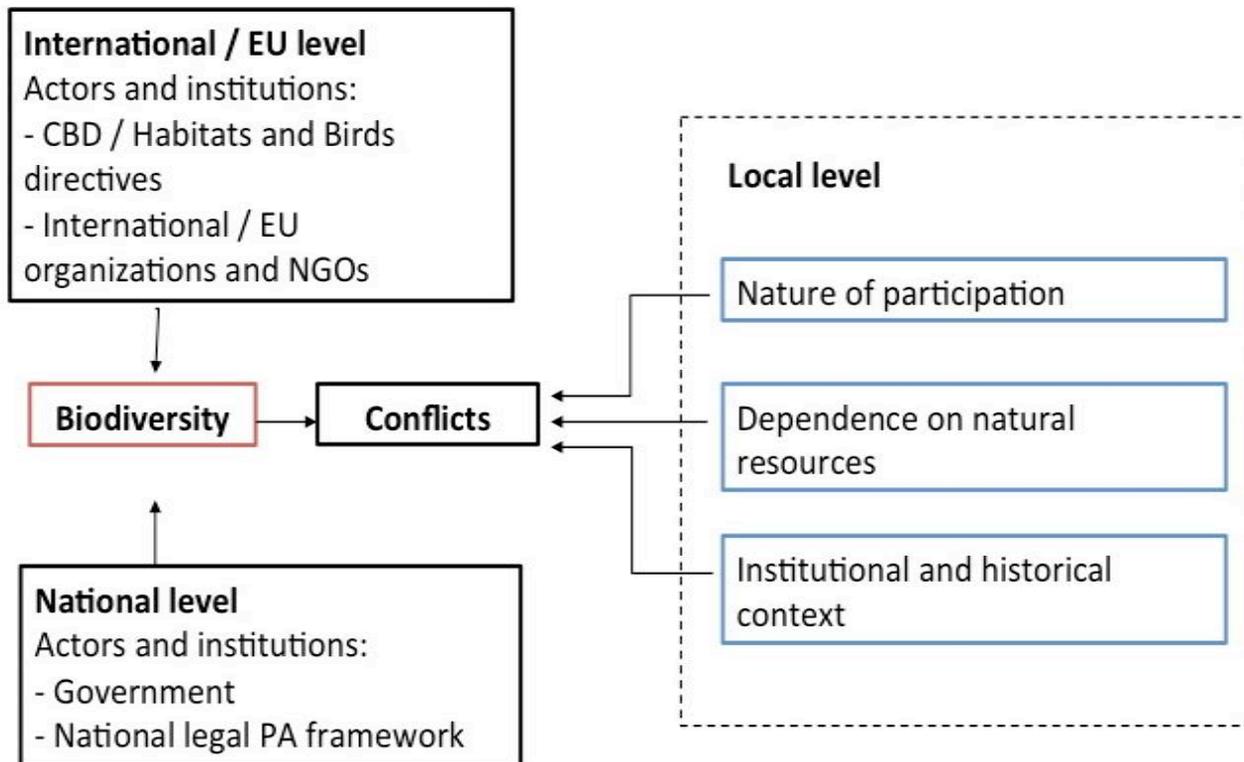


Figure 1: Analytical framework.

3. Case studies

The Estonian case shows conflicts that occurred when designating an EU-wide PA network - the Natura 2000. Indian and Malagasy cases have a bird-eye perspective compiling evidence on PA management strategies, their evolution in national contexts and surrounding conflicts. Specifically, the Indian case describes emergence of human-wildlife conflicts and discusses underlying reasons. For Madagascar, we show the compilation of PA conflicts, focusing on the effects of international conservation actors/large NGOs on the local-level governance of PAs and resulting local resistance.

4. Discussion and conclusions

In Estonia conflict reveals mainly through negative attitudes of landowners and local people towards the PA administration due to inadequate information provision regarding socio-economic implications of designations, and a limited experience with participatory decision-making processes (Suškevičs and Külvik, 2011). In India and Madagascar, conflict manifests as resistance and open protest of locals against the expansion of PAs due to displacement and marginalization, loss of livelihood opportunities, and human-animal conflicts.

The nature of participation can affect and exacerbate the conflicts. It is important both, the way how participation is organized, as well as how stakeholders respond to it. In the

Estonian case, opportunities for participation existed, but these were not regarded as legitimate ways to influence the decisions. This decreased the effectiveness of participatory process. In India, a shift towards participatory governance is reflected more in the legislation rather than in the practice. In Madagascar, NGOs and international organizations seem to have considerable role in advocating and enforcing participation upon the local communities. Such non-voluntary participation might be perceived as a burden to local communities, change local people attitudes towards PAs (Macura et al., 2011) and aggravate existing conflicts.

In the context of Estonia, the factors like land ownership issues, as well as insufficient information provision on land use restrictions and on subsidies resulted in the conflict. In India and Madagascar, conflicts tend to concentrate mostly around questions of resource use. Conflicts have generally emerged due to the fact that PA management practices do not fully take into account people's concerns for livelihood.

Informal institutions, local culture, traditions, norms, value systems, etc. often clash with the national and international conservation agendas. In Estonia, the scientific inputs in Natura 2000 designations made people sceptical towards PAs administration, and diminished the legitimacy of the whole process. In India and Madagascar, local traditional knowledge and lifestyles are undermined by certain historical management practices of government agencies, which might be the underlying cause of biodiversity loss (Kothari, 1996).

Influential interplays between international powerful actors and local institutions have been visible in two cases: Estonia and Madagascar. In the Estonian case, the EU with its conservation agenda brought about a big increase in PAs coverage, and the resultant conflicts between PA administrations and landowners. Big international NGOs had the same role in Madagascar. In contrast, the powerful Indian forest bureaucracy could withstand the international influence to a higher extent.

Conservation is more a social and political problem than an ecological one (Lele et al., 2010). The misfit between international and national governance is leading to mismanagement of the local resources and intensifying local conflict. We show how various context-dependent variables might cause and influence conflict, thus instead of general prescriptions to problems, locally-adapted solutions are needed as well as active involvement of the local stakeholders that are fully empowered to have their voice in the decision-making.

5. References

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