The role of library and information services in resolution of national conflicts

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Abstract

This paper is on the role of library and information services for resolution of national conflicts. Peace is an antidote of conflicts; no nation can experience true development without peace. Subsequently, no meaningful development can occur without proper knowledge which is the base of library and information services. Therefore, libraries and information scientists have been strategically expedient in the provision of peaceful environment for resolution of national conflicts considering the need for peace in the global world of today. This paper adopted a non-empirical study and document research method. However, it is a known fact that no two people can think and view things exactly in the same way, so this paper focused on how libraries can help shape the way individuals in the society can reason and think alike through the availability and use of the information resources made accessible to them in the library. Consequently, this paper aimed at assessing the impact and role of librarians in curbing national conflicts using the school and academic libraries, the public libraries and information centres, and library associations to achieve these objectives. It identified various causes of national conflicts and ways in which library services can be used in resolution of those conflicts, it includes: alternative dispute resolution, resolution of African disputes, negotiation, and mediation among others. Challenges of library and information services in resolution of national conflicts were presented, conclusion drawn while and recommendations were made..

Keywords: Libraries, Library and information services, Conflicts, National conflicts and conflict resolutions

Introduction

In recent times, the library has evolved not only as a store house of knowledge but also as an information centre where people can get vital information about their immediate environments and also around the world to help make it a better place. Jabo and Bayero (2014) opined that libraries are to provide free access to information, as well as uphold the principles of intellectual freedom, and ensure that information resources representing various points of view, at least opposing points of view on any given issue made available, are not necessarily succumbing to political and religious persuasions.

National conflicts are conflicts in which a part of a nation turns against another part of the same nation. Conflicts are an inevitable part of human existence. Oyeshola (2005) defined conflict as disagreement, dispute or controversy in ideas, viewpoints held by two or more individuals/group. Conflict resolution is the process involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of a conflict. Committed individuals, groups or organizations/associations attempt to resolve conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group by engaging in collective negotiations. The greatest threat to any nation is conflict. The whole world today is faced with all manner of conflicts emanating from different angles of colorations. The human race all around the world are in dire need of peace, as a result, people move around with fear and go to

bed with one of their eyes opened on a daily basis. Some of these national conflicts are politically motivated; some are through religious and ethnic bigotries. The need to foster peace among the various divides in the societies, nation and the entire world using the instrumentality of library and information services is the gap this paper intends to fill.

Historically, libraries and librarians have played major roles in creating, accumulating, organizing and disseminating information. Since the coming of Information Communication Technologies (ICT), there have been major breakthroughs and revolution in library services. Libraries have changed in their service delivery to embrace the coming of ICT. With the revolution of ICT and introduction of ICT in libraries, services such as internet, websites, email, teleconferencing etc have been significantly implored as veritable channels in resolving national conflicts. Gisesa (2008) revealed that conflicts are based on deficiency of information, that cases of misinformation enhance disparity in opinions and social differences which may heighten conflicts. The library is in better position to educate people in the community both formally and informally towards promotion of peace. Information and knowledge as maintained by Ifidon and Ahaiazu (2006) help maintain attitudes of collaborative and cooperative intent and change the dynamics of negotiation from mistrust to trust. Library is the only organ that has the capacity to collectively bring people together to achieve a common goal irrespective of their differences in opinions, ethnic, political, religious, economic, educational and social status. The library takes care of everyone's interest; respect their intellectual contributions in order to promote peace that will bring about national development. The library can achieve this by providing the needful information to educate its various users through the different types of libraries in Nigeria and these include:

School libraries: This library can play vital role in resolving national conflicts through their users, resources, services and facilities at various levels. The users will at a very young age be able to inculcate in them how to avoid conflicts or any issue that may lead to conflict. The users will in turn reflect what they have gained from the library in their societal lives, relationships, and interactions as they grow up.

Academic libraries: Echezona (2001) stressed that libraries should equip researchers with techniques of identifying and preventing conflicts at an early stage. This could be achieved by inviting discussions and brainstorming from experts on conflict resolution in workshops, seminars and documenting the information so generated for the users to learn the art of resolving national conflicts. The academic libraries can help in conflict resolutions by making materials available for the users of the library and its immediate community by holding out-reach programmes once in a while.

Public libraries: Public libraries and information centres or national archives are strategically positioned to reach out to various groups of people in the society. They serve all and sundry; from much younger ones to much older people. As Bhatti (2010) has put it, public libraries and archival centres can and should expand their concepts of services beyond their immediate environments to building up positive interactions among various groups within their communities. These inclusive engagements should be built with teachers, civil societies, lawyers, social workers, youth workers and peace and reconciliation officials.

Information centres: Information centres should be fully supported by providing required information resources and services, and liaising with these groups in organizing seminars, conferences,

workshops and community development meetings, can prove their usefulness and contribute their own quota in national conflict resolution.

Library associations: Librarians through the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) can go an extra mile in touching the lives of the people by becoming advocates of peace building. This can be done by creating room for exhibitions and symposia, workshops and seminars addressing conflict resolution and peace to be part of their general meetings and conferences. Bhatti (2010) further stressed that library associations should be committed to motivate and facilitate its professionals towards facilitating research activities influential to a growing educated society, peaceful culture and conflict resolution in the nation.

Resolution of national conflicts

Conflict exists in all countries and in every level of society. The history of conflict is as old as humanity itself. On the most basic levels, conflict occurs when interest differ. As soon as two or more groups exist in a situation, there are two or more points of view and two or more sets of ambition as well. While sometimes each group can pursue its own ambitions without interfering with the others, quite often conflicts will arise. Conflicts may have negative or positive effects. Burton (1990) noted that some people extol conflicts as 'an essential creative element in human relations, the means to change the means by which some social values of welfare, security, justice and opportunities for personal development can be achieved. This definition is apt because the absence of peace is conflict. Usually, after conflicts are resolved, it paves way for peace and development. On the other hand, some people can steer up crises because of the benefits they derive from it. After every conflict a gap to be filled and individuals that are ingenious often see opportunities to create new things or bring about ideas that could respond to the immediate needs

of people. This makes them to break even. The library is very important here in preserving and disseminating useful information in restoration of peace.

The need for resolution of national conflicts is universally acknowledged. Conflict resolution is a subfield of peace researcher Desmond Tutu, the Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of South Africa is reported to have commented from within the situation of social revolution in South Africa 'without reconciliation, there is no future' (Wustenberg, 1998). This assertion by the astute cleric and winner of this Noble Peace Prize underscores the universal desire for conflict resolution.

Miller (2003) posited that 'conflict resolution is a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflicts''. Miall and Wood House (2001), by conflict resolution, it is expected that the deep rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved, and behaviour is no longer violent, nor are attitudes hostile any longer, while structure of the conflict has been changed. In the understanding of Mitchel and Banks (1996), conflict resolution refers to an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries; and process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved.

In all this, one understands conflict resolution to imply that conflict is bad hence it is something that should not be encouraged. It also assumes that conflict is a short term phenomenon that can be resolved permanently through mediation or other intervention processes. Best (2006) putting these ideas together, conclude that in principle, conflict resolution connotes a sense of finality, where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the

outcome of a settlement and the conflict is resolved in a true sense of it. Some conflicts, especially those over resources are permanently resolvable.

Sequel to the views above, a conflict is resolved when the basic needs of parties involved have been met with necessary ''satisfiers'' and their fears have been allayed. However, Best (2006), identified the following approaches to conflict resolution:

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR): This is an application of ''non-conventional peaceful methods of settling disputes and resolving conflicts using the least expensive methods and in ways that satisfy the parties and preserve the relationships after settlement might have been reached.

African traditional dispute resolution: In Africa, there is diversity of cultural and religious practices. They affect the ways by which conflicts are resolved generally. For instance, the kings and chiefs practice their indigenous culture admirably in resolving and managing conflicts within and between their domains. Those who are dissatisfied with the verdict of the functionaries proceed freely to settle the conflicts in the modern westernized sector for example the magistrate courts, Adeniji (2003).

Western alternative dispute resolution: This method seeks to promote the use of non-violent approaches to conflict resolution. It involves the use of government ministries, police and the courts-from magistrate to the Supreme Court.

Negotiation: Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1999), defined negotiation as the process where the parties within the conflict seek to settle or resolve their conflicts. 'The goal is to reach agreements through joint decision making between parties' (Jeong2000).

Mediation: This is a popular method used in conflict resolution. It involves the intervention of a third party who does not impose solution on the parties. The role of the method is to create an enabling environment for the parties to have dialogue that will lead the resolution of pending conflict.

Arbitration: This is the use and assistance of a neutral third party in conflict, who hears the evidence from both parties, and renders a decision which is binding on the parties. Best (2006) Arbitrators fulfil this role by virtue of the positions of authority they occupy in the society.

Adjudication: This involves the use of courts and litigation process to resolve conflicts. The judgement given by the court is legally binding on the conflicting parties.

Communication: This involves the use of sharing and exchanging information between individuals, groups; and parties in a conflict situation. This is where the services of libraries and information centres are needed in a conflict resolution. Libraries are repositories of information and knowledge in various formats. Best (2006) noted that the exchange and sharing of information between conflicting parties can help remove doubt, suspicion, ignorance and contribute to the process of peace building. All the methods of conflict resolution discussed above have one thing in common, that is 'information' therefore, the place of information in conflict resolution cannot be over stressed.

Religion: Oyeshola (2005) added that religion is one method which can be used to resolve conflicts. He noted that all the methods discussed above are basically human and the spiritual dimension must be part of the efforts in negotiating for a conflict resolution. Religionists should be sincere in their practice of their faith, thus

bringing about permanent resolutions of conflicts.

How library and information science can help in resolution of national conflicts

Libraries have always played key roles in national development and integration. It promotes intellectual contribution that is geared towards peace and unity. As a result, it is appropriate to recognize the relevant roles they play in resolution of National Conflicts in the society. National Conflicts may arise due to misinformation; therefore information is a crucial factor in resolutions. The ability to utilize and make good use of information tools is a powerful way of aiding resolutions in nation conflicts, which is a special duty that the librarians and libraries are very well equipped to do. Anasi (2010) citing Sokari (2006) agrees that information is necessary for people to be liberated from shackles of ignorance, misconceptions, economic stagnation, social unrest and political instability. Libraries promote access to information; the importance of libraries to a Nation can be seen through the statistics of people who use the library to gain access to print media.

Furthermore, libraries and librarians can effectively and efficiently engage in resolution of national conflicts through the various services they render. Thus, library services according to Edoka (2000) and Aina (2004) are the overall activity that goes on in the library geared towards effective utilization of resources by the users. Accordingly, Imeremba (2011) describes library services to mean all those services provided by the library to her community of users in order to ensure the full access, exploitation and utilization of the entire resources of the library in meeting the information needs of her patron. Inclusively, from the above definitions, library services are the general conduct of both human and material resources that pervade the library functions in its effort to provide for the immediate information needs of the clients. In other words, it is the total set of activities or duties carried out by the entire library staff applying the information materials available to them for the purpose of meeting the information needs of the library users and the general community or public they serve. It is in this vein that Metzger (1991) emphasized that library services are needed for the following:

- Public Enlightenment or rights in the society, understanding social values and expected conduct in public life.
- Assisting to adjust to existing social, political, spiritual and economic activities of the society.
- To cultivate and maintain reading culture and promotion of good literatures.

Libraries and librarians have a strategic position in taking the role of information dissemination through the library resource and programs which include: Talk shows, film shows, Symposium, Library week, Book exhibition, Book fair, Mobile library in rural areas etc.

However, Haruna (2009) further identified these library services as an important tool in resolution of national conflicts, they include:

- Current Awareness Service (CAS).
- Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)
- Indexing and abstracting
- Referrals
- Conducting literature searches
- Current contents
- Organizing seminars, conferences, workshops, symposia
- Exhibition of information resources on conflicts and related topics
- Translations
- Mobile library
- Resource sharing
- Provision of security awareness measures

- User education services
- Corporate social responsibility services
- Electronic Document Delivery Services (EDDS) etc.

According to Echezona (2007), it is believed that some of these conflicts could be avoided, if there were adequate communications among the warring communities and peace makers before the conflict broke out. In other words, if there were information channels that are open to everybody, then the conflict would have been contained. Timely alert to potential conflicts is central to an early warning system which in order to be meaningful, must be complemented by early political action. Library has potentials to work with any of the media e.g.TV, radio for propaganda through which the ideology and beliefs of a group is expressed to effect a timely intervention in conflict periods. Some early information media through which library can create awareness of the imminent conflict include internet, community radio, television video conferencing, email, print media and reference services. Ahiazu (2007) stated that the need for libraries and information in the developmental efforts of any society is basically that of survival. Libraries have the capacity to work with non-governmental organizations to organize out-reach programmes for distribution of information materials, delivering lectures and talks which would stimulate discussion among the participants to encourage them to embrace simple steps to promote peace and resolve conflicts. Essentially, public and academic libraries are equipped to function in this capacity.

Challenges of library and information science in resolution of national conflicts
Obviously, library like every other organization is not exempted from a number of challenges faced in resolution of national conflicts. As a result, Ilorah

(2009) identified some of these challenges which include:

1) Over reliance on government as the only authority that could resolve national conflicts. Most people believe it is only the government that could find solutions to conflicts, as a matter of facts they refuse to cooperate with non-governmental organizations bodies (Best, Idyorough and Shehu 2007).
2) Inadequate fund is one of the global major problems of libraries. Most libraries cannot adequately finance some special projects by acquiring needed information materials and programmes that conform with the effective services libraries renders to their clienteles.
3) Unavailability of relevant information resources is another challenge. Some information resources are not available for-the-shelf purchase; examples are government publications, materials on cultural heritage, and proceedings of court cases or judgements. Audio visuals items like oral testimonies, films, videos, recorded speeches and news items. They could only be acquired by the libraries that have their depository right.
4) Translating information materials into local language is not an easy task. Library staff has to be trained to acquire the requisite skill. In addition, some of the indigenes need

training and retraining to facilitate information dissemination to rural dwellers who are mainly illiterates. Conference, workshops, seminars and symposia should be organized to enlighten them on issues bordering on land, resources, government decisions, the law and the needed peace for mutual co-existence. Exhibition of information resources on conflicts and related topics is also necessary as well as using experienced people in conflict resolutions to be resource persons. All these activities no doubt require special training using library staff and other resource persons.

5) Digital information systems such as electronic mail, internet, video conferencing, web chat, listserve, teleconferencing etc, could be used by libraries to promote conflict resolutions, Haruna (2009). Librarians and their library clienteles should acquire ICT skills before they could be able to utilize the above listed digital information systems. Unfortunately, most people in the developing countries are not computer literates.

Additionally, Thairu (2008) also listed some challenges faced by libraries in resolution of national conflicts, and they include:

1) Lack of established library policy on conflict management information services.

2) Lack of funds for rendering the right information services for conflict resolution.
3) Lack of technological infrastructure, example internet facilities for enhancing information dissemination.
4) Breakdown in communication due to lack of literacy skills of community members.
5) Librarians lack skill in organizing and disseminating vital information for conflict resolution.
6) Lack of government support in generating vital information for conflict resolution.

Conclusion
It has been established that libraries have strategic roles to play in resolution of national conflict through their services. To enable libraries to play their supposed role in promoting peace and conflict prevention and resolution campaigns, all hands must be on deck. Conflict resolution cannot only be achieved through the medium of law enforcement agencies alone, but can be achieved through information dissemination; librarians and libraries should be seen as an important tool in resolution of national conflicts.

Preservation and dissemination of sensitive information materials such as books, periodicals, news items, official documents, films and videos of crises that need to be preserved in the libraries for posterity purposes are not available in most libraries. For instance, when potential crisis is detected, such relevant materials could be used by the libraries to the members of the public indicating the dangers that such crisis will likely result to. They could use such medium to ensue for peace, unity and resolution of conflicts in affected area or the nation. Examples of the Nigeria Civil War, Hotel Rwanda, Sometimes in April, the Liberia war, Somalia, the World War I & II, the Boko Haram Insurgency, the Niger Delta Militancy, the Syria crisis, South Africa

Xenophobia, the Columbus crisis, Netherlands, Venezuela, Religious, and Ethnic crises around the world etc. Library and information science can support such advocacy with documentary evidences using various media. These are critical areas where library and information services can be applied in resolution of national conflicts. Therefore, the importance of library to the nation are enormous especially its roles in resolution of national and international conflicts which cannot be overemphasized.

The following are recommended in order for libraries to improve on their roles in conflict resolution:

1. Libraries should embrace the challenges of assisting the immediate environment to reach out to the communities through the organization of educational programmes geared towards public enlightenment for the avoidance of unhealthy relationships that could lead to national conflicts.
2. The Nigerian Library Association should encourage the administration of the libraries to develop policies on conflict resolution of national. This will enable the libraries to contribute meaningfully as agents for promotion of democratic ideals and societal cohesiveness, instead of leaving the task to the public libraries alone.
3. Government should provide enough funds as well as state-of-the art ICT infrastructures to libraries and ensure that librarians have unrestricted access to ICT facilities in order to facilitate dissemination of information services for resolution of national conflict.
4. Government should also ensure the enforcement of legal deposit laws in Nigeria with respect to information resources related to national conflict resolution.
5. Finally, constant training of librarians on resolution of conflicts should be done to keep the librarians updated on any recent development and librarians and libraries should also design a blueprint for security consciousness.

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