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The Role of Librarians in Resolving Conflict in Nigeria: Case Study of University Of Agriculture Makurdi Library

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This study examined the role of librarians in resolving conflict in Nigeria with particular reference to University of Agriculture Makurdi library. Three objectives were achieved and three research questions were answered. Population for this study was 120 subjects comprising of professional and para-professional librarians and was used as sample for the study. Instrument used for this study was constructed questionnaire title 'Role of Librarians in Resolving Conflict in Nigeria Questionnaire (RLRCNQ)' and it was validated and tested by lecturers in department of library and information science of Benue State University Makurdi. Data was collected and analysed using mean. Findings revealed that there are services available for librarians in conflict resolution in University of Agriculture Makurdi. Also use of electronic mobile technologies and social media tools were the media through which librarians offer their services. The study concluded that there are problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service. Library staff play vital role in resolving conflict. It was recommended that the identified strategies for conflict resolution should be used by agency for conflict management to resolve conflict among people in Nigeria, University management should ensure proper implementation of established library policy on conflict management information services and technological infrastructures like internet facilities for enhancing information dissemination should be established.

Key words: Librarians, Resolution and Conflict

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of conflict in the country has become a major concern for the well-meaning Nigerians considering the impact on the peace, security as well as the economy of the nation. Destruction of lives and properties has almost become an everyday affair. These happenings have created a fearful atmosphere that discourages investors both domestic and foreign. By and large the economy of the nation is threatened. In explaining the political situation in the country; three terms need to be clarified. They include: crisis, conflict and violence. Crisis is the aftermath of conflict and violence.

The high level of insecurity occasioned by armed robbery, kidnapping, the agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra, militancy in the Niger-Delta, the menace of Fulani's herdsmen, *Miytti Allah* and Boko Haram terrorists activities necessitated the need more than ever before to

interrogate the concept of governance. This is because it is believed that governance has a role to play in ensuring security and sustainable peace in Nigeria and elsewhere. It is against this backdrop that Section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended regards security and welfare of the citizens as job number one of government (Blench,2010).

Resolution is a collaborative problem-solving, a cooperative taking together process that leads to choosing a plan of action that both of you can feel good about. (Heitler, 2011) There are undoubtedly serious security issues challenging the peace and national security of the nation. Security is crucial to a nation's sustainable development. Production and industrial activities can only strife in an enabling environment. Challenging issues currently facing the country include: Political Violence, Extremism (Boko Haram) or insurgency, Communal violence, kidnapping, the Niger Delta, Maritime insecurity among others. If these issues are considered critically, irreconcilable differences and struggle between individuals and groups over access to power, opportunities and privileges that go with it are not farfetched. (Fred-Mensah, 2008) provides a broad definition of the term conflict resolution, to embrace conflict management and social control. This involves the principles, methods and skills that are employed to prevent, reduce, or resolve conflict. Thus, Conflict resolution includes post conflict activities such as reconciliation, reinsertion, reintegration, and rehabilitation of ex-combatants and war-affected persons, plus the design and implementation of early warning systems.

Libraries are part of the community. They are more than four walls and shelves of books. A library is a place where all walks of life may be present; a place where people can gather to meet new people, discuss books read or articles discovered even get together with others is a valuable component of successful community life and increase people's confidence and self-esteem. According to Zickuhr, Rainie & Purcell (2013), library is a place where community-building connections are happening. Library provides the opportunities for people to interact and connect with others and foster a sense of belonging to a community. People may go to the library looking mainly for information, but they find each other and discuss current and pressing events in the community. The roles of librarians are crucial in this era of fading service personnel. They provide help and ensure the library functions effectively; they are also a part of the community who utilizes available resources within the four walls and outside in the whole world in meeting the information needs of the community. Librarians know their communities firsthand, and are often the first to recognize a pressing local need, owing to their interaction on a daily basis with patrons from all walks of life. They are in the best position not only to bring local issues to municipal governments and social agencies, but also to partner with local governments and agencies to address the needs of a community.

Social responsibility is a part of librarianship (Kagan, 2005). The issue of national security is therefore core value of librarianship. Since no meaningful learning, education and development can take place in a context of insecurity and brazen destruction of lives and properties, the onus lies on the library for responsible librarianship through dissemination of information that can contribute to peace and national security in Nigeria by helping the citizens to understand their role in national security. The library as a storehouse of information has positively altered its scope of influence across time to become not only a place that houses books but a gateway through which information can be conveyed to people irrespective of location.

Threat to Conflict

For a long time after African countries gained their independence; there is a growing recognition among Africans themselves that the continent must look beyond its colonial past for the causes of current conflicts. The major factors identified are political, external, economic motive, and ethnic and religious in nature.

Political Factors

The nature of political power in many African nations, together with the real and perceived consequences of capturing and maintaining power, is a key source of conflict across the continent. It is frequently the case that political victory assumes a winner-takes- all form with respect to wealth and resources patronage, and prestige and prerogatives of office (Blench &Denodo, 2003). Anatolii Karpou, President, Informational Peace Foundation said that "The cause of conflicts in the commonwealth of independent states was, for the most part, not ethnicity but political power. For example, while there was no personal hostility between the people of Georgia and Azerbaijan, they struggled for authority to govern territory" (Fiki& Lee, 2005).

External Factors

During the cold war, external efforts to bolster or undermine African governments were a familiar feature of super-power competition. With the end of the cold war, external intervention has diminished but has not disappeared. In the competition for oil and other precious resources in Africa, interests external to Africa continue to play a large and sometimes decisive role, both in suppressing conflict and in sustaining it. Foreign

interventions are not limited, however, to sources beyond Africa.

For example, during Sierra Leone civil war, Charles Taylor was interfering by supplying arms and fighters to rebels in exchange for diamond. Likewise, Britain supplied arms to Nigeria against the Biafran rebels during the Nigerian-Biafra crisis (Adewuyi, 2009).

Economic Factors

Despite the devastation that armed conflicts bring, there are many who profit from chaos and lack of accountability, and who may have little or no interest in stopping a conflict and much interest in prolonging it. Very high on the list of those who profit from conflict in Africa are international arms merchants. Also high on the list, usually are the protagonists themselves (Ani, 2009). In Liberia for instance, the control and exploitation of diamonds, timber, and other raw materials was one of the principal objectives of the warring factions. Control over these resources financed the various factors and gave them means to sustain the conflict. In addition to the broader sources of conflict that have been identified, a number of other factors are especially important in particular situations and sub regions which include government policies, development patterns, ethnic/religious factors, and inadequate information dissemination.

Government Policy

The first root cause of war was that most governments used models of economic development that hurt the poor. Such polices had been implemented in countries such as Zimbabwe and the United States, widening the income gap between the rich and the poor. Another important cause of war was the growing intolerance for diversity, especially by people in power. For example, Echezona (2007) explained that the policy of redistributing white owned-lands in Zimbabwe could be a political game play by Robert Mugabe to get rural farmers on his side and, at the same time, a pragmatic policy to "right the wrongs of the past". Whichever way it is, the success of such a venture has been hinged on international goodwill, which has, however, allied itself to popular opposition forces against Mugabe.

Zimbabwe has since been mired in economic cornucopia, a situation that has arisen due to possible incorrect approaches to development and pressures from donors and foreign concerns. Another example is the transition to civil rule policy of the Babangida regime in Nigeria, which came to an impasse with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election, that the SDP (Social Democratic party).

Presidential candidate, MKO Abiola, was poised to win. Consequently, there was conflict on the street, and

eventual loss of lives.

Consequences of Conflict

Africans have witnessed many civil wars to date: the Liberian internal crisis, the Angolan civil war, the Sierra-Leone political internal strife under Mobutu, in the former Zaire (now Democratic of Republic of Congo –DRC), and the Nigeria-Biafra war, among others. These countries have witnessed negative consequences such as poverty and displacement of people in Benue, Taraba, Rivers and in Ekiti state as a result of herds men killing. A former defunct OAU

Secretary General has this to say:

> *Conflicts have cast a dark shadow over the prospects for a united, secure and prosperous Africa which we seek to create--- conflicts have caused immense suffering to our people, and in the worst case, death. Men, women and children have been uprooted, dispossessed, deprived of their means of livelihood and thrown into exile as refugees as a result of conflicts…. Conflicts have engendered hate and division among our people and undermined the prospects of the long term stability and unity of our countries and Africa as a whole." Quoted in (Deng, et al. 1996).*

Conflict and poverty are intricately interrelated. It retards economic and social developments and may be conceptualised as "development in reverse" (World Bank, 2005).

Information Dissemination: The Role of librarians in Conflict Resolution

Historically, libraries have always been a key contributor to national development and it is appropriate that they take a leadership role in the current movement on national security.

Recent studies have noted that lack of adequate or balanced information was the most significant cause of most of the violent conflicts. This seems to be true because without knowledge and information, there is likely to be a conflict. The African continent, witnessed the introduction of "genocide" in the African lexicon in Rwanda in 1994, and evidence points to the negative role of the mass media, especially Radio Miles Colines, in preparing the minds of Hutus against Tutsis. As the apparatus of the Hutu State, the radio station tried to portray Tutsis as demons that must be exterminated from the face of the earth, and in an attempt to wipe the Tutsis out, Hutus themselves suffered one of the worst refugee crises on the African continent (Haruna, 2009).

Information dissemination or communication has been

described as a need comparable with other basic human needs. Free flow of information is a right of the people which enables them to participate effectively in the process of economic, social and political activities in the society, and enhances education, knowledge and learning (Laloo, 2002). Therefore, for any nation to make meaningful impact in conflict prevention, peace promotion and conflict resolution, early warning information is needed. 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. Such alertness underlines the predictive capability of any early warning system. To that extent, therefore, early warning should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather, as a tool for preparedness, prevention and mitigation of conflicts, the efficiency of which is predicated upon a clear methodology for data collection, analysis and information exchange (Laloo, 2002).

Early warning information should be facts on the matter. Some of this early warning information, which could include internet, community radio, television, video conferencing and voice over of Internet protocol (Volp), email, print media, and reference services, are important, in order for people to know the implications of embarking on the conflict. This information can be given first to those who can take constructive action. This generally means government and groups likely to be immediately involved in efforts to prevent the crisis such as the United Nations, UN Security Council, religious and media organizations.

Libraries, information centers, and librarians have a strategic position in taking the role of information dissemination through the library resource and programs which include: talk show, symposium, library week, book exhibition, book fair, mobile library in rural areas. It is believed that some of these conflicts could be avoided, if there were adequate communication among the warring communities and peace makers before they 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 (Echezona, 2007). For any nation to make meaningful impact in conflict prevention, peace promotion and conflict resolution, early warning information is needed. Free flow of information in any society is also very important because absence of it brings about conflict (Laloo, 2002). (Echezona, Ozioko, & Ugwuanyi, 2011) stressed that Library and information service is a key player in providing unhindered access to essential information resources for economics and cultural advancement. Effective information dissemination through libraries and internet will put the leaders and the people at alert on facts of potential and conflict, including their causes, evolution, consequences and solutions (Echezona, 2007). Services that could be rendered and

the collection of an academic library determine its involvement in conflict resolution. (Haruna, 2009) included in his study current awareness services, selective dissemination of information and organizing seminars, conference, workshops and symposia as services that could be rendered by academic libraries for conflict resolution. (Adewuyi, 2009) considered government publications such as gazettes, constitutions, government bulletins and materials of cultural heritages as veritable tools in conflict resolution that should be included in the library collection. Research has revealed the efficacy of libraries and information centers in conflict resolution. The World Bank Report (World Bank Report, 2005) states that countries such as Ethiopia, Namibia, Uganda, Somalia and Liberia had mobilized library community resources in innovative ways, such as organizing seminars, conferences and workshop on conflict resolution, creating access to free information, providing links with non-governmental organizations, extension services and indigenous knowledge systems, repackaging information in a way that illiterate ones would be able to comprehend it, creating a web site on conflict resolution where the target users can access and discuss matters relating to conflict resolution.

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. However, the realization of the potential roles of the academic libraries in offering services for conflict resolution has prompted some universities to introduce the course "Peace and conflict resolution" as general studies course as it is the Nigerian University where peace and conflict resolution studies is taught as one of the general studies. (Ani, 2009) also agitated for the learning of inter-religious socialization as a peace education subject for lifelong education that would promote peace in the country.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The main objective of this paper is to examine the role of

librarians in resolving conflict. Specifically, the study seeks to:

i.   examine the services available for librarians in conflict resolution;
ii.   identify the media through which librarians offer their services;
iii. identify the problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions guide the study:

i.   What are the services by Liberian in conflict resolution?
ii.   What are the media through which librarians offer their services?
iii. What are the problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service?
iv.   What are the roles of Liberians in resolving conflict?

METHODOLOGY

The area of the study is Benue State. This study employed a survey research design. The population for this study was 120 subjects comprising 31Professionalsand 89Para-Professionals from University of Agriculture Makurdi library. There was no sampling for the study. The entire population was used for the study as sample because the population size could be handled effectively by the researcher.

The instrument for the study was a structured questionnaire titled "Role of Librarians in Resolving Conflict in Nigeria Questionnaire (RLRCNQ). The instrument which was developed by the researcher was divided six sections based on the research objectives. The questionnaire had restricted response options of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) with corresponding values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The data for this study will be collected by the researcher and 3 research assistants.

Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics. Mean was used to answer the research questions. The bench mark for this was 2.50 (4+3+2+1=10/4=2.50). The decision rule was: any item with a mean value of 2.50 or above was regarded as agree while any item with a mean value of less than 2.50 was regarded as disagreement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Questions 1

What are the services available for librarians in conflict resolution?
Data for answering research question 1 is presented in Table 1.

Results in Table 1 shows that all the 8 items had mean values ranged from 2.86 to 3.22 and were above the bench mark of 2.50 while the standard deviation of the respondents ranged from 0.97 to 1.33 which was an indication that the respondents were not too far from the mean and from one another in their responses on the services available for librarians in conflict resolution. This implies that the items are services available for librarians in conflict resolution in University of Agriculture Makurdi.

Research Question 2

What are the media through which librarians offer their services?
Data for answering research question 2 is presented in Table 2.

Results in Table 2 shows that all the 9 items had mean values ranged from 2.68 to 3.43 and were above the bench mark of 2.50 while the standard deviation of the respondents ranged from 0.57 to 0.98which was an indication that the respondents were not too far from the mean and from one another in their responses on the media through which librarians offer their services. This implies that the items are the media through which librarians offer their services in University of Agriculture Makurdi.

Research Question 3

What are the problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service?
Data for answering research question 3 is presented in Table 3.

Results in Table 3 shows that all the 9 items had mean values ranged from 2.59 to 3.38 and were above the bench mark of 2.50 while the standard deviation of the respondents ranged from 0.79 to 1.36 which was an indication that the respondents were not too far from the mean and from one another in their responses on the problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service. This implies that the items are the problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service in University of Agriculture Makurdi.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the services available for librarians in conflict resolution

S/N	Item Statement	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Remarks
1	Organization of workshops on conflict resolution	26	16	10	68	120	3.00	1.26	Agree
2	Display of topical issues concerning conflict resolution	13	40	18	49	120	2.86	1.08	Agree
3	Dissemination of information resources on security issues	4	50	17	49	120	2.93	0.98	Agree
4	Organization of lectures	13	14	46	47	120	3.06	0.97	Agree
5	Organization of conferences	2	23	42	53	120	3.22	0.81	Agree
6	Library week activities	7	41	14	58	120	3.03	1.03	Agree
7	Organization of seminars on conflict resolution	6	44	14	56	120	3.00	1.02	Agree
8	Radio/TV partnership programs	5	26	34	55	120	3.16	0.91	Agree

Source: Field study, 2018

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the media through which librarians offer their services

S/N	Item Statement	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Remarks
	Use of electronic mobile technologies								
9	IPads	12	10	33	65	120	3.26	0.98	Agree
10	Kindles	11	15	90	4	120	2.73	0.67	Agree
11	Smartphones	9	9	61	41	120	3.12	0.84	Agree
12	other mobile devices	3	7	90	20	120	3.06	0.57	Agree
	Use of social media tools					120	2.93	0.63	
13	Facebook	4	49	48	19	120	2.68	0.78	Agree
14	Google	6	24	24	66	120	3.25	0.95	Agree
15	Twitter	12	2	29	77	120	3.43	0.94	Agree
16	LinkedIn	8	17	27	68	120	3.29	0.95	Agree
17	Academia.edu	5	28	12	75	120	3.31	0.97	Agree

Source: Field study, 2018

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question one was on the services available for librarians in conflict resolution. Findings revealed that organization of workshops on conflict resolution, display of topical issues concerning conflict resolution, dissemination of information resources on security issues, organization of lectures, organization of conferences, library week activities, organization of seminars on conflict resolution and Radio/TV partnership programs are services available for librarians in conflict resolution in University of Agriculture Makurdi. This finding support the study of Laloo (2002) who found out that free flow of information is a right of the people which

enables them to participate effectively in the process of economic, social and political activities in the society, and enhances education, knowledge and learning. Therefore, for any nation to make meaningful impact in conflict prevention, peace promotion and conflict resolution, early warning information is needed. 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. Such alertness underlines the predictive capability of any early warning system.

Research question two was on the media through which librarians offer their services. Findings revealed that use of electronic mobile technologies such as iPads, Kindles, Smart phones and use of social media tools,

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service

S/N	Item Statement	SD	D	A	SA	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Remarks
18	Lack of established library policy on conflict management information services.	30	11	3	76	120	3.04	1.32	Agree
19	Lack of funds for rendering the right information services for conflict resolution.	37	13	6	64	120	2.81	1.36	Agree
20	Lack of technological infrastructure e.g. Internet facilities for enhancing information dissemination.	6	5	46	63	120	3.38	0.79	Agree
21	Breakdown in communication due to lack of literacy skills of community members	22	33	29	36	120	2.66	1.09	Agree
22	Librarians' lack of skills in organizing and disseminating vital information for conflict resolution.	34	16	11	59	120	2.79	1.32	Agree
23	Lack of government support in generating vital information for conflict resolution.	28	40	5	47	120	2.59	1.23	Agree

Source: Field study, 2018

Facebook, Google, Twitter, LinkedIn as well as Academia.edu were the media through which librarians offer their services. The finding affirms a study by (Ahiazu, 2007) who found out that 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.

Research question three was on the problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service. Findings revealed that lack of established library policy on conflict management information services, lack of funds for rendering the right information services for conflict resolution, lack of technological infrastructure e.g. internet facilities for enhancing information dissemination, breakdown in communication due to lack of literacy skills of community members, librarians' lack of skills in organizing and disseminating vital information for conflict resolution and lack of government support in generating vital information for conflict resolution were the problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of librarians in resolving conflict in Nigeria with particular reference to University of Agriculture Makurdi library. The study found out that there are services available for librarians in conflict resolution in University of Agriculture Makurdi. Also use of electronic mobile technologies and social media tools were the media through which librarians offer their services. However, there are problems encountered by librarian in rendering conflict resolution service. Library staff play vital role in resolving conflict.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are made:

i.   The identified strategies for conflict resolution should be used by agency for conflict management to resolve conflict among people in Nigeria

ii.   University management should ensure proper implementation of established library policy on conflict management information services

iii.   Technological infrastructures like internet facilities for enhancing information dissemination should be established

iv.   Library staff should be given proper training on skills organization and dissemination of vital information for conflict resolution.

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