

Information Dissemination Role of Libraries for Conflict Resolution, Peace and Reconciliation

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Abstract

Man has continued to live in a world in which the prospects for universal and continuous peace and security remain dark with a plethora of global conflicts involving nations. Consequently, the themes of war, conflict resolution and peace promotion have dominated social science discourse, particularly in sociology, political science and international relations. As a result, peace and conflict research has become one of the cardinal pursuits of human societies and communities. What has remained, in all of this development, is the role of library in disseminating information for conflict resolution. The study highlights various strategies for conflict resolution, causes of conflict, consequences of conflict, information and conflict resolution, conflict resolution through information literacy and library, and conflict resolution. It concludes that libraries have many challenges in meeting up with conflict resolution. Such challenges include inadequate or lack of well equipped ICT laboratories, inadequate funding, inadequate number and right caliber of academic staff, and irregular power from the public power supply.

Keywords: *library, conflict resolution, peace management*

1. Introduction

The establishment of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945 (after World War II) was the result of a desire to save succeeding generations of mankind from any major war of global dimension. The architects of this global body desired to work together to prevent the outbreak of new global conflict, as well as build a world of freedom, progress, prosperity and justice for all nations (UN, 2001).

Conflict affects countries at all levels of economic development, but its disproportionate affects least developed countries or countries in economic stagnation. Conflicts vary widely in their nature, extent, duration, range of contributory factors, and the ways in which they impact education. Using the Uppsala data set of armed conflict 1946-2001, the study identified 52 countries or territories that have been affected by war or intermediate conflict since 1990 (World Bank, 2005) and most of these are in Africa.

Conflict can be seen as a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals, which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both. This compact definition can be opened up and clarified by saying that there must be at least two parties; one party in mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired objecting or situation, and the other party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal..." quoted in(Michael,1981). From the above definition, conflict resolution is a post conflict negotiation that ends in peaceful agreements.

Collette, et al. (2003) are of the view that shortening conflicts might seem to be the most effective way of building a more peaceful world. However, in isolation such an approach is less effective than it might appear; unless post conflict risks are reduced.

The United Nations and its members face a pressing need to establish more effective strategies for conflict prevention. Furthermore, the organization would continue to face the challenges of having to assist communities and nations in making the transition from war to peace. Conflicts in Africa pose major challenges to the United Nations efforts towards global peace, prosperity and human rights for all. The main aim of these conflicts, increasingly, is the destruction, not just of armies, but of civilians and entire ethnic groups. Preventing such war is no longer a matter of defending states or protecting allies. It is a matter of defending humanity itself (UN, 1998). Since 1970, numerous bloodier wars have been fought throughout the world; the vast majority of them are intra-state. During past few years alone, 8 middle east Asia and north African countries were afflicted by armed conflicts, accounting for more than half of all war related deaths worldwide and resulting in more than 8 million refugees, returnees and displaced persons. However, one believes that some of these conflicts would have been avoided, if there were adequate communication among the warring communities and peace makers before the conflicts broke out. In other words, if there were information channels that are open to everybody, then the conflict would have been contained. Information could be defined as a stimulus that reduces

uncertainty and denotes the knowledge communicated, concerning some particular facts subjects or events (Laika, 2018).

2. Causes of Conflict

The major factors identified are political, external, economic motive, and ethnic and religious in nature.

2.1 Political Factors

The nature of political power in many nations, together with the real and perceived consequences of capturing and maintaining power, is a key source of conflict across the globe. 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 (UN, 2014). 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” (UN, 1991).

2.2 External Factors

During the cold war, external efforts to bolster or undermine 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, interests external 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. 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.

2.3 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 are international arms merchants. Also high on the list, usually are the protagonists themselves (UN, 2014). 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.

2.4 Government Policy

The first root cause of war was that most governments used models of economic development that hurt the poor. Such policies 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.

2.5 Ethnic/Religious factors

Ethnic or religious dominance rather than diversity is also a powerful contributory factor in civil conflicts. Egwu, et al. (2003) in his study on the communal conflicts in Zango Kataf explained that what started as communal crisis between the Hausa and Kataf assumed a religious dimension, when it spread to other towns in Northern Nigeria. He notes that two issues arise from the Zango-Kataf conflict: the need to develop a system of early warning signals, and the challenge of peace-building and consolidation. The consequences are that there was a lack of coordination among the security agencies in the area of information sharing and collaboration aimed at nipping the conflict in the bud. What the situation suggests is that government should, based on the potentially recurrent nature of the crisis, develop an early warning system signals that can carefully anticipate and warn of the outbreak of communal violence.

3. Libraries and Conflict Resolution

Historically, libraries and librarians have played a major role in creating, accumulating, organizing, and disseminating information. Libraries are key players in fostering the information society. The advance in the area of computer hardware and software, as well as breakthrough in the field of communications, brought about a great revolution in the way libraries deliver their information service today. With this revolution of ICT systems such as internet, website, email,

teleconferencing, and information super high way, etc, libraries can then play a role in conflict resolution. Libraries can have a web site on conflict resolution to reach potential users, NGO and Government. Internet- based services are a more recent introduction, but already, demands for the services are expanding quickly. Library can do that through the creation of a website, where adequate information on conflict resolution can be discussed, accessed and disseminated to a wider population through email, list serve and teleconferencing. Such information dissemination is needed, in order to succeed with any meaningful conflict resolution or reconciliation. Libraries can clearly play a major role in conflict resolution in the following ways:

3.1 Seminar

Ogunkelu (2001) stated that seminars would go a long way in equipping researchers in the techniques of identifying and preventing conflicts at their early stages, as well as manage and resolve them. The library could invite experts on conflict resolution as resource persons and provide them with information materials to back up their discussions. The transcripts of the discussions could be put into pamphlets or on tapes. Reports have shown that various countries have mobilized library community resources in innovative ways to prevent and resolve conflicts (World Bank, 2014), cited in World Bank,(2016). Libraries could also organize seminars not only for the purpose of building the capacity of conflict researchers, but also for conscientising members of the public on the importance of peace for meaningful development.

3.2 Extension Services and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Libraries increase the value of human intellectual outputs by enhancing access to them through professional information processing, storage and dissemination functions. Public libraries have a solid tradition of outreach. This outreach means taking the library to the people (mobile libraries), so that they would read to illiterates in their communities, translate, interpret, photocopy, ask, and answer questions concerning human rights, causes and consequences of war and other relevant information. Invariably, this information would help to prevent conflicts and wars (Population Reference Bureau, 2012).

3.3 Library in Collaboration with NGO

Saunders's study, (quoted in UN, 2002), suggested five ways to broaden theories of international relations to include not only state and governmental interaction, but also many interaction, that take place within body's politics. He also stated that "many conflicts such as those arising from identities or differing views of history were not suitable for governmental mediation, but were best handled by NGO's and libraries". Personnel from these organizations have visited communities, schools, to give lessons, stimulate discussion, and encourage children and adult in the simple steps to promote peace and resolve conflict. The United Nations has been deeply involved in many of these advances by supporting peace promotion and conflict resolution through sending their publications to the depository libraries all over the world, which the depository libraries invariably made accessible to their clients.

4. Conclusion

The development of any nation is undoubtedly impossible in an environment of crises, political instability and insurrection. It therefore becomes imperative for all nations to make meaningful effort in conflict prevention which is a necessary corollary for peace, development and good governance. Everybody therefore has a collective responsibility to help every nation and communities to foster peace and resolve conflicts. Community based organizations could be encouraged to constantly meet, process, review and monitor progress and implementation of information dissemination that would foster peace, and libraries have important role to play in identifying, collating and enhancing access to information for peace making and conflict resolution.. Security agencies also need to redirect their focus from military intervention to early warning information gathering. Peace promotion and conflict resolution cannot be achieved through establishment of permanent standing army, but it can be achieved through information gathering and dissemination.

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