

Library and information services (LISs): A panacea for conflict resolution in Nigeria

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Abstract

Lack of adequate and proper information is fundamentally responsible for several threats to lives ranging from kidnapping, communal and tribal clashes, herdsman and farmers clashes and insurgencies in general, all over Nigeria today. The thrust of this paper is at investigating the roles of Library and Information Services (LISs) in conflict resolution for peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. The paper is in the opinion that the aforementioned threats to lives can be curbed through Library & information services. Premised on these, the paper reflects on the vigorous roles LISs can play in resolving conflicts and in encouraging peace and security in different parts of the country. The paper also tries to identify some of the obstacles hindering libraries and information services in maximizing their full potentials in conflict resolution and the promotion of peaceful coexistence amongst communities in Nigeria. The paper considers the role of library and information services in conflict resolution as very crucial and concludes that any peaceful developmental efforts of the nation made in the absence of adequate information service delivery will be a chimera

Keywords: Library, Information Services, Conflict, Conflict resolution, Peaceful co-existence.

Introduction

The pervasiveness of conflict in the country has become a major worry for the goodhearted Nigerians considering the impact on the peace, security as well as the economy of the nation. According to Idowu (1999), its prevalence of destruction of lives and properties has almost become an order of the day. The ugly trend has threatened the lives of people and has created a dreadful atmosphere that discourages investors both domestic and foreign. By and large, it has threatened the viability of our economy and the nascent democracy of the nation. Security is crucial to a nation's sustainable development. Production and industrial activities can only thrive in an enabling environment. There are undoubtedly serious security issues currently challenging the peace and national security of the nation such as Political Violence, Extremism (Boko Haram) or insurgency, Communal violence, kidnapping, the Niger Delta, IPOB among others. These puzzling issues need to be addressed urgently and permanently using the best strategies and means to pave way for peaceful co-existence between individuals and groups struggling over access to power, opportunities, and privileges that go with them.

In today's complex society, access to library & information services has become very imperative in making the decision about the daily conduct of private and public lives and in resolving most of the intractable conflicts. Thus, Oguntuase and Akinbode (2007) observed that this vital tool (information services) is central to human activities, very essential to human survival and life-wire of any organization because it is crucial in rational decision making and a data of value in planning and the execution of a program in any given society. Hence, Kemp (1976) measured information as the fifth of the human needs in ranking with air, water, food, and shelter. Virtually every facet of social endeavor that thrives is sustained by a good flow of information service delivery. Consequently, Popoola (2002) observed that information services have become very

essential and has become an effective tool for development in any society. In the same vein, Uche (1999) noted that information is the key resource for the development and progress of a nation which, touches on the socio-economic, cultural and political development of its citizenry; and no nation can develop above her information infrastructural capacity and effective information service delivery. A society becomes moribund and motionless when the information service system stagnates or when an effective information service delivery is lacking. Information is a vital commodity that is indispensable in any developmental process and it is anchored by effective library and information services

The foregoing implies that information as a strategic resource for virtually any person, organization or establishments must be adequately made accessible at all times to all people no matter their social, economic and political deprivations. As a result, contemporary library and information services entail not only the conventional functions of preserving and providing access to a vast amount of printed and non-printed materials but the creation of a more cultured information service delivery approach in Libraries and Information Centers for its patrons.

Libraries and information centers as custodians of information play a very prominent role within the communities they find themselves by proving and offering useful information services to the people. Libraries through the information services offered had provided the opportunity for the people to interact and share ideas with others and foster a sense of belonging to the community. Besides, the library as part of the community utilizes available resources by providing print and non-print resource materials that contain relevant information on agriculture, politics, economy and religious issues to meet the ever-increasing needs of the community. All these information services offered by the libraries are geared toward creating awareness on government programs, social

and political issues bordering the lives of the people and create a sense of belonging to the community. The library through its process of taking a sociological assessment of its patron community can identify the demographic and occupational characteristics, educational level, needs, and interests of the community and this forms the basis of the knowledge of their information needs which are addressed through its information delivery system.

Conceptual framework

Conflict according to Wikipedia is a natural disagreement arising between two or more people. It exists when they have incompatible goals and one or more believe that the behavior of the other prevents them from their goal achievement. It is a process in which one party (person or group) perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by the other party. In the same vein, Green (2017) and Gillin (2017) conceptualized conflict as whenever two individuals opine in different ways, a conflict arises. In layman language conflict to them is nothing but a fight either between two individuals or among group members. They further opined that conflict arises whenever individuals have different values, opinions, needs, interests and are unable to find a middle way.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict Resolution, according to Heilter (2011) is a collaborative problem-solving, a cooperative taking together process that leads to choosing a plan of action that both parties can feel good about. Fren-Mensah (2008) on the other hand, 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. The term conflict resolution may also be used interchangeably with dispute resolution, where arbitration and litigation processes are critically involved. The concept of conflict resolution can be thought to encompass the use of nonviolent resistance measures by conflicted parties in an attempt to promote effective resolution.

Role of library and information services in conflict resolution

Conflict resolution performs a curative role in society, of which the paper trusts the role of library and information services can be helpful. Metzger (1991) stressed that library services are needed to enable the individual to develop full potentials and widening the horizons of perception, interests, and skills. Library and information services can be instrumental in conflict resolution in the following ways;

Dissemination of information

For any nation to make a meaningful impact on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace promotion, early

warning information is needed. The free flow of information in any society is very important because the absence of it brings about conflict. To buttress this fact, Laloo (2002) stressed that Library and information service is a key player in providing unhindered access to essential information resources for economics and cultural advancement. Also collaborating this standpoint, Adewale (2015) emphasizes that effective information dissemination through libraries and information centers will put the leaders and the people at alert on facts of potential conflict, including their causes, evolution, consequences, and solutions. Consequently, Echezonna (2007) believes that some of these conflicts could be avoided if there were adequate communication among the warring communities and peacemakers 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 to be meaningful, must be complemented by early political action. It is, therefore, the role of governmental, non-governmental institutions as well as individuals, to spread it up to the families through libraries and information centers.

Provision of public enlightenment program

The library provides laudable Public enlightenment programs on the rights of an individual in the society, understanding social values and expected conduct in public life for public consumption. Through such public enlightenment emphasis on the need to adhere strictly to the norms and values of the community are stressed and this helps to restrain and regulate the behavior of the general populace against crime and subsequent conflicts. When people are being enlightened on the need for peaceful co-existence they are bound to shun divisive tendencies and look at each other as one thereby avoid unnecessary conflicts. The library does this as one of its lofty objectives to provide public enlightenment program on issues of national interest both at national and local levels and this has gone a long way to help in curbing sequences of potential conflicts.

Provision of resource materials

The library is the most cost-effective and logical means of providing reading materials for the greatest number of readership. This credible service is geared towards cultivating and maintaining reading culture amongst the people. The provision of good soft works of literature provides a reading opportunity for the people to engage their minds on something meaningful and divert their minds from evil intentions that might generate into conflict. Idle minds they said is the devil workshop. Strengthening on this fact, Laloo (2002) maintained that Library and information centers are the key player in providing unhindered access to essential information resources for economics and cultural advancement. Besides, libraries particularly, Public libraries have created mobile libraries to provide resource materials to homes that are remote from state and local government headquarters. According to Ode & Omokaro (2007), mobile

libraries as the name denotes are the initiatives of the state public library to offer services to schools and homes on wheels. These laudable services have provided a curative measure to conflicts and promote peaceful co-existence in communities.

Current awareness services

A current awareness service is one of the major information services offered by the library aimed at curbing conflicts amongst Nigerian citizens. Consequently, Haruna (2009) in his study 'current awareness services' advocated and included selective dissemination of information and organizing seminars, conferences, workshops and symposia as one of the potent services that could be rendered by libraries in conflict resolution. The library in consideration of the above and as one of its lofty objectives to provide literature for posterity; and in its determined role to promote peaceful co-existence includes in its collection useful and resourceful government publications such as gazettes, constitutions, government bulletins and materials of cultural heritages as veritable tools in conflict resolution. This current awareness services rendered by the library has played a major role in conflict resolution in that by reading the aforementioned publications, the community dwellers are made to aware of the government's efforts in addressing some major differences in the community with the view of correcting them to allow peace to prevail and promote peaceful co-existence

Collaboration with other media houses

Library in its determined efforts in conflict resolution has gone into collaboration with other allied media organizations to further advocate and promote peaceful co-existence. Commending these laudable collaborative efforts by the library, Adewale (2015) maintained that the Library has over the years worked with many of the media houses such as TV, radio for propaganda through which the ideology and beliefs of a group are expressed to effect a timely intervention in conflict periods. He further stressed that some early information media through which library had created awareness of the imminent conflict included internet, community radio, television video conferencing, email, print media, and reference services. The need for the roles of libraries and information in conflict resolution and promotion of peaceful co-existence and overall the developmental efforts of any society, therefore, cannot be overemphasized.

Creation and Organization of outreach programs

Libraries have over the years form a collaborative linkage with some active non-governmental organizations in providing useful information on security issues aimed at promoting peaceful co-existence and in resolving conflicts. For example, the library has formed a coalition with non-governmental such as International peace Bureau, Inter peace, Crisis Management Initiative, Alliance for Conflict Transformation, Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, International Alert just to mention but few to resolve

conflicts. To buttress this fact, Adewale (2015) maintained that libraries can work with non-governmental organizations to organize out-reach programs 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.

Inclusion of conflict resolution in the curricula

The library in furtherance of its role in conflict resolution has instrumented that discipline-based faculty academic and staff partnerships with libraries, particularly academic libraries and information centers to provide support and assistance by integrating peace and conflict resolution courses as core learning courses into the curriculum program. Reinforcing on the above, Adewale (2015) maintained that in the realization of the potential roles of the academic libraries in offering services for conflict resolution has prompted some universities to introduce the courses on "Peace and conflict resolution" as general studies courses as it is today in most of the universities in Nigeria. Consequently, Ani (2009) endorsed the inclusion in the learning curriculum of the universities the learning of inter-religious socialization as a peace education subject for lifelong education that would promote peace in the country. A good example of this is the availability of courses such as Islam-Christianity Relationship in most of the universities in Nigeria.

Setbacks to library and information services in conflict resolution

Digital divide

The digital divide generally referred to as unequal access to information and communication technology (ICT) and the gap between those who are "information-haves" and those who are "information have-nots" has raised great social problems of inequality for the library and information services in the dissemination of information. According to (Tien & Fu, 2008) the digital divide, the divide between those with access to information and those without is now one of Africa's leading economic and civil rights issues hampering its socio-economic and political development. Those who have access to information are always liable to current information provided by the library on prevention of conflicts, peaceful co-existence, and other developmental efforts while those who lack access to information continue to wallow in their ignorance. The government should make information accessible to all people no matter their socio-economic deprivations

Lack of Computer literacy amongst Nigerian

An added obstacle to library and information services in their roles in conflict resolution is the lack of computer literacy amongst Nigerians. Most Nigerians are not computer literate and this has been a major obstacle in the provision of information relating to conflicts in Nigeria. Most of the information is disseminated digitally or

electronically and most Nigerians are unable to access them because they are not computer literate. Also, the kinds of information delivered to the rural communities are very much system-oriented to which most of the rural dwellers cannot understand and benefit due to their illiteracy level.

Lack of awareness of information needs and the importance of information

It is agreed on those information providers and experts do not know the information needs of the rural populace and as such fail to pay attention to the information needs of the various groups whereas knowing their information needs becomes vital in sustaining the information services for the prevention of conflicts and development of rural communities in Nigeria. Adequate knowledge of the information needs of the populace is imperative for the library and information services to be able to meet the information needs of the rural communities. Researchers such as Correa (1997) Mchombu,(2003) and Aina, (2006) all established that rural communities in Africa are often left out from participating in government policies, development, and other important activities because their diverse interest, literacy level, expertise, and their needed information for survival, and development are hidden from the existing information flow. Besides, it has been observed that planners, developers, and governments do not yet acknowledge the role of information as a basic resource in conflict resolution, or are unaware of its potential value to socio-economic growth.

Lack of established information policy

History has shown that rural communities in Nigeria have suffered from enjoying any meaningful development largely because of a lack of information policy and implementation gap artificially created by the Nigerian governments and leaders. According to Kamba (2009), the consequence of this neglect has resulted in rural communities lacking access to basic needs such as water, food, education, health care, sanitation, information on security, leading to conflicts and generally low life expectancy and high infant mortality. Presently in Nigeria, there is no existing policy on library and information services or law backing their implementation

This is particularly obvious in developing countries like Africa where infrastructures and development policies are minimally provided due to unplanned development efforts by the governments.

Lack of funds

The information delivery service is capital intensive. It requires huge sums of money to adequately and effectively provide information service delivery to all and sundry. Unfortunately, most of the African countries, especially Nigeria lacks the resources to handle the information delivery business and this has posed drawback in the provision of information to rural communities. Besides, because of policy implementation gap artificially created by African planners, developers and governments and their

inability to acknowledge the role of information as a basic resource and its potential value, funds are not provided to enhance information delivery service thereby creating an informational gap.

Poor policy implementation

There is a lack of accomplished and effective library and information policy on conflict management by local and national governments. Governments and their agencies have not been able to formulate policies that will enhance the development of library and information services either because they lack a careful and thorough understanding of the information needs, information-seeking behavior, information services and information system of the rural communities. Furthermore, governments and their agencies have not been able to formulate an effective implementation policy that will make the rural dwellers maximize the utilization of information for their daily activities. It is, therefore, desirable to understand the purpose for which information is required, the environment in which the user operates, users' skills in identifying the needed information, channels and sources preferred for acquiring information, and barriers to information seeking and use.

Conclusions

This paper has reviewed the role of libraries and information service as a catalyst in conflict resolution It has argued that library and information services have the potential to curb all the threats posed to lives and property of Nigerians as result of conflicts In nutshell, the provision of information to rural communities in Nigeria through library and information services will serve as a panacea to the problems that have long-time existed and hindered the libraries and information services from exploiting their potentialities in conflict resolution. The setbacks to the provision of information by library and information centers to rural communities identified above should be addressed vigorously and permanently to pave way for peaceful co-existence between individuals and groups struggling over access to power, opportunities, and privileges that go with them. This is a necessity if the rural communities MUST NOT remain perpetually in ignorance, socioeconomic stagnation and informational deprivation in a globally depressed economy occasioned by conflicts and crises.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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