NIGERIAN LIBRARIES AND INDIGENOUS CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: PAST AND CURRENT ISSUES IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE TOWARDS PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Subair, Roselyn E. and Adetoun A. Oyelude
[1]National Archives, Ibadan Office, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria
[2]Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Conflict Management is an issue that concerns everyone and has implications for future existence and co-existence of people. Where conflicts abound, resolution of such is of importance to prevent escalation of the conflict and resultant chaos. The role of Public, Research, Academic and Special libraries in Indigenous Conflict Resolution is explored in this paper. A study of 15(fifteen) libraries was undertaken, and their role in Conflict Resolution examined. The challenges faced and successes recorded are reported. However, the study also majors on the activities of Conflict Awareness and Prevention Initiatives (CAPI) Research Library, Ibadan whose unique services provide unique information towards global peace and development. Recommendations are made on how better provisions can be made for the libraries using new Information and Communication Technologies and even Indigenous methods (Native intelligence) to build peace in various communities where conflicts arise or are likely to arise.

INTRODUCTION

"Consider an American tourist in a foreign land. She asks an old man, a native of the country, for directions to the train station. The old man does not speak English. He looks at the tourist quizzically. The tourist repeats her question, this time in a louder voice. From the old man another quizzical look, perhaps a nod of the head or shrug of the shoulders. The tourist speaks yet more loudly, and, looking around tries to imitate (pulling an imaginary cord to train whistle: "choo choo") the sound of a train. Now the quizzical look becomes open amazement, but still without comprehension. The tourist looks around again and sees a young boy approaching them. "Do you speak English?" "A little." "Do you know where the train station is?" "I do not, but I will ask the old man." And he does and the tourist will make her train." This quotation is a borrowed scenario from Avruch & Black (1993; 136 – 137). The scene describes a situation of conflict which arises from cultural differences. There is language barrier here and also lack of understanding of the sign language used. The conflict is resolved however when a third party intervenes. Note that the tourist has to ask, that is seek the information needed elsewhere.

WHAT IS CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION?

The term 'conflict' means to strike together, that is, technically it can be defined as opposition among social entities directed against one another (Wright, 1990). Opposition here means that there is no co-operation from the opponent. Therefore, a conflict situation could be said to be where there is little or no cooperation between social entities. Conflict emanates from social relationships and can be defined variously depending on the situation. It is a relative concept, a phenomenon that occurs in all aspects of social life – interpersonal, intergroup, interorganizational and international. Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, an unavoidable concomitant of choices. Some are not only inevitable but functionally necessary and useful. However, protracted conflict is dysfunctional (Zartman, 1989). Zartman later opines that conflict can be prevented on some occasions and managed in others, but resolved if the term is taken to mean the satisfaction of apparent demands rather than the total eradication of underlying sentiments, memories, and interests. Only time really resolves conflicts, and even when the wound heals it leaves the scars for future reference (Zartman, 1991). Many conflicts are about power, because of the rewards it can bring. Those who hold most power may depend mainly on the influence of ideology to refrain their dominance, but are usually able also to use force if necessary (Giddens 1989: 705). Fisher et al (2000: 8), identifies with the community relations theory which assumes that conflict is caused by ongoing polarization, mistrust and hostility between different groups within a community. No matter the type of the conflict, the resolution of it is an important issue, conflict resolution being "the process of facilitating a solution where the actors no longer feel the need to indulge in conflict activity and feel that the distribution of benefits in the social system is acceptable" (Nicholson, 1991). The resolution usually involves the activity of a third party, as in the scenario

earlier painted, and libraries are one of the third party groups that help resolve conflicts through provision of crucial information needed in the resolution process. It is necessary to improve communication and understanding between conflicting groups, and to promote greater tolerance and acceptance of diversity in the community. Therefore, the basic information by the peacemakers is required to prevent recurring conflicts and wars if the basic conflict is unresolved, or when one party takes advantage of the other etc. In every African pre-colonial traditional society, peacemaking secrets were known to be embedded within their customs in various ways even though the societies were multicultural (Zartman 2000). He equally asserts that, the persistence of violent conflict in African generally indicated that modern international methods of peace making are also defective in facing the challenges of today despite, the activities of seasoned peacemakers using the best of personal skills and recently developed knowledge about ways of managing and resolving conflict. Therefore, data collection of Indigenous Conflict Resolution resources is an identified relevant source of information in helping to resolve conflicts.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The objectives of this study are:
(i) to focus attention on the documentation of information in Nigerian libraries to prevent and manage conflicts, and
(ii) to determine the role and contributions of library professionals in the libraries in the quest for sustainable peace and development in our immediate environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Conflict Resolution and Peace Processes in Indigenous Societies
In indigenous societies, there are many institutions through which conflicts can be resolved. The religious institutions had avenues for settling disputes. The markets had leaders who treated cases, and the palace was also a place to settle as the traditional ruler was the one to consult in conflict time. Within the family, the head of the extended family, usually the oldest man was also called upon to resolve conflicts. Social Institutions also had conflict resolving mechanisms in the age grade groups, and professional bodies like those of the blacksmiths, dyers, weavers, hunters etc. people met at the market square to deliberate on issues affecting the whole community. Markets would even be closed at particular times for resolution of issues, some of which could involve performing rituals in the market place (Olaoba, 2001). However, there is a perceived gap or "disconnect" between modern and indigenous conflict resolution philosophies and practices. Ben-Mensah(2004) noted that chances for peaceful resolution of Africa's conflicts can be enhanced considerably if the region's indigenous principles, skills, and methods of conflict resolution are understood and harmonized with those of the modern nation-state. Oguntomisin (2004) expressed the opinion that peace is the greatest investment of all human communities at all times since it is the basis of political stability. Without it, there can be no economic development and societal well being. He also indicated that because of its importance, traditional and orthodox religions world over preached the message of peace. For centuries, local communities have relied on their indigenous knowledge and expertise to cope with the challenges posed by conflicting issues in their environments, because of the validity, appropriateness, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of indigenous solution for local problems. (Ben – Mensah, 2004). The main purpose of peace making is to return a society already dislocated by conflict or war to a state of equilibrium. Oguntomisin (2004), looked at four (4) communities and observed that in the pre colonial times, formal and informal processes of resolving conflicts were used since it was not always possible for individuals and communities in conflict to resolve their conflict by themselves. These were Informal courts at the family compounds, Courts of the king, and external agents i.e. spiritual or mundane which are all geared towards ensuring harmonious living among members of the families. He further analysed and identified that the Yoruba communities had three grades of courts i.e. "Ile ejo agbo ile" (the compound court) where disputes were settled by arbitration, fines were not imposed, and appeals could be made to the second court known as "Ile ejo ijoye adugbo" (the court of the ward-chief) which tried all civil cases but criminal within its jurisdiction and conducted preliminary investigation into criminal cases before transferring them to the third court, "Ile ejo oba" (the court of the king) which was the last highest court and last court in which appeals could be made. In segmentary communities like the Ebiraland, peace-making processes began in the households. The head of each household who incidentally was the family head kept peace within the members of his family. Sani (1995)

noted that conflicts or minor quarrels between individuals from different households or families were settled by elders. The heads of each clan was present in council meetings with representatives of households. Many methods of getting to the root of the problem were employed. According to Olaoba (2000; 3), cross-examination of witnesses to disputes or disputants is seen as being germane to the peaceful harmonious relationship among the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria. "The cross-examination gives a sense of direction to the verdict of a dispute, thus asserting equitable distribution of justice and restoration of peace and harmony to the society". An important aspect of peacemaking in pre-colonial communities as identified by Oguntomisin (2004) is the use of an outsider or external agent who could be a neighbour or neighbouring authority in a state invited to intervene for the sake of making peace. He however noted that the outsider was regarded as non-partisan whose verdict could be impartial. Note again third party intervention in indigenous societies.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Information is an essential data of value in planning, decision-making and the execution of programmes (Oyegade, Nassarawa & Mokogwu, 2002). Information appropriately disseminated becomes a powerful tool. There are various available channels of information dissemination in Nigeria, which include information dissemination through the Town Crier, Age-grade associations, Political organizations, women special meetings, T.V. Drama, Radio, Educational institutions, Adult Education Centres and Community/ Project leaders (Oyelude &, Subair, 2003). Information given out by various categories of givers especially in the indigenous setting is very useful in conflict management. Mkapa (2004) argues that indigenous knowledge is a pathway to global development as they provide local ways of solving problems in all works of life and local needs and constraints and challenges drive the quest for knowledge through information. The indigenous information dissemination method (like the town crier) is identified with the virtues of honesty, truthfulness and as a powerful agent in our traditional communities. This approach links the palace for example with the community towards enhancing law and order to maintaining peace. Yakubu (2003) equally expressed the view that Nigeria, a strategic country in Africa lost its indigenous systems of administration as the various traditional settlements were brought together by the British and by 1914, the northern and southern protectorates were alma gated and inadequate. Thus, the various indigenous communities with diverse ethnic and cultural identities and values were transformed to the British pattern i.e. indigenous laws and practices were permitted to operate either simultaneously or in the alternative. The various traditional courts were enjoined to observe and enforce the various customary laws which gave focus to the multi cultural ethnic identities or ethnic pluralism (peace was therefore destabilized). Edde (2001) briefly analysed that language and communication in peacemaking are the tools for the analysis, synthesis and the possible contradictions required for passing or sifting the information necessary for conflict resolution. Similarly, communication is a phenomenon that activates or facilitates the sharing of meanings ideas, messages/information, experience or feelings etc., through the instrumentality of organic signs and symbols, with perception, encoding and decoding as another irreducible process or phenomenon of human interactions. When ready to be expressed ideas or thoughts become the stream of consciousness to which language is their channel and communication their medium of projection to the end-users or target audience. Used in this way, language and communication can be regarded as a Siamese twin, the separation of which cannot be affected without a mortal damage to each other.

LIBRARIES AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Hattotuwa (2008) describes the use of Information and Communication Technology in the process of making peace. He notes that the technology helps in collecting vital information even through mobile phones and creating virtual awareness for broaching peace regardless of geographic location. Libraries are not left out in this as pointed out by Ezechoni (2007) who discusses the role of libraries in conflict situations. She identifies their role in organizing seminars to sensitize their clientele, training of staff and users in handling conflict situations and provision of documentation to help conflict managers in their work. Public libraries assist in issues of litigation and a designated staff of the libraries has to go to court to present documents that are used by litigants in cases.* (information got from interview with public library staff). These documents often serve as tools to help in resolving conflict. Research libraries provide information needed in advocacy and training of conflict managers. Some special libraries actually are involved in advocating peace, negotiating for peace and in adjudication. For the libraries in this study, the indigenous information collected helps in conflict resolution. Libraries used were:

Special libraries
1. The Nigerian Society for Information and Culture (NSIAC) Library, Jericho, Ibadan.
2. Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) Library, Lagos.
3. National War College Library, Garki, Abuja.
4. NNPC Towers Library, Abuja.

Public Libraries
5. Oyo State Library Board Library, Ibadan.
6. National Library of Nigeria, Abuja.
7. Edo State Library Board, Benin City.

Research Libraries
8. African Heritage Research Library (AHRL) Library, Adeyipo, Ibadan.
9. The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CEPACS) Library, Ibadan.
10. Conflict and Peace Initiative (CAPI) Research Library, Ashi, Ibadan.
11. Institute for French Research in Africa (IFRA) Library, Ibadan.

Academic Libraries
12. Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
13. Ambrose Alli University Library, Ekpoma
14. Delta State University Library, Abraka.
15. Ahmadu Bello University Library, Zaria.

METHODOLOGY

The libraries in the study were purposively chosen due to their focus, or the nature of their collection which had indigenous knowledge materials in stock. Observation and Interview methods were used to gather information from the librarians and library officers working in the libraries. Over a period of three months, the researchers either went to the libraries or used research assistants who had been trained to get the information. The collection was browsed through and some staff interviewed on what portion of their collection was on conflict resolution and what programmes (if any) they had for conflict resolution.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Documentation: All fifteen libraries are into documentation, that is gathering or acquiring materials on or related to the subject. Their collections are well stocked but only CAPI and CEPACS library stock most materials on Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. IFRA library comes next in terms of such materials. NSIAC library has an American Corner Collection and the Kenneth Dike Library has an American Studies Collection, some of which address American History and their wars. The KDL and AHRL libraries also have Africana Collections rich in indigenous knowledge materials.

Training: It was discovered that seven (7) of the libraries organize training in conflict prevention, management and resolution for their users and community periodically. They are the CAPI, NIIA and Nigerian War College, IFRA, CEPACS, AHRL and NSIAC libraries. These libraries being research and special libraries have as part of the mandate of their parent body, the duty to conduct training and organize seminars for the sensitization of members of the community and stakeholders in the issues being discussed. They were found to be doing some work in the area of conflict resolution.

Advocacy: Though none of the libraries is solely into advocacy for Conflict Resolution, it was found that the OYSLB, the National Library of Nigeria and the Edo State Library Board are into advocacy in a way. They have facilities for moving round the communities with their mobile libraries and the programmes run by their branches in the case of the National Library of Nigeria.

The Nigerian War College, CAPI, and the NIIA were found to perform all three activities i.e Documentation, Advocacy and Training. The diagram below shows the overlap in the functions of the libraries as it concerns their role in Indigenous Conflict Resolution.

Figure 1. Overlapping Functions of the Libraries studied in Indigenous Conflict Resolution.
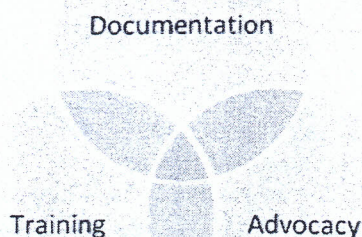
A CASE STUDY OF CAPI LIBRARY

The Conflict Awareness and Prevention Initiative - CAPI

CAPI Research library was establish in 2004 in Ibadan out of a burden to provide fast and dedicated materials for researchers in the field of conflict prevention, management & resolution towards sustainable peace and development. Having observed critically the dramatically increased level and scale of conflict in Africa throughout the 1990s there was then the need for the establishment of Peace Research libraries in our various environments to complement the work of conflict managers, research scholars, stakeholders in conflict prevention, management and resolution in order to reduce the human tragedy, displacement, violence, poverty and loss of lives. However, most of CAPI'S projects and initiatives are designed through reading, interactive approaches to tackle contentious issues in multicultural communities. CAPI organizes trainings for Peace Advocates, Peace Ambassadors, Mediators/ Negotiators, and Training of Trainers for Peace Education. The children's section of the library trains children in the community. Their motto is: to Learn, to Read and to Discover.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The information on indigenous knowledge of resolving conflicts is a resource that can help to solve local problems. Peacemakers in collaboration with information managers should source for the right information to resolve conflicts. In this case, the libraries are a good third party to ask, anytime. There is the need for the libraries and library professionals to begin to validate, appropriate, make effective, preserve and sustain local information to resolve conflicts in Africa at the local, state and national level. This calls for cooperation among the libraries. A national database of conflict resolving documentation could be developed to this end. Conflicts can be better prevented when basic peace information and education are exposed to all human beings especially at an early age through interactive and participatory methods. Libraries should create Conflict Resolution and Management Corners where interested people can get necessary peace information and resolve their conflicts.

REFERENCES

Akinwumi, O. (2004). "Crises and Conflicts in Nigeria: A Political History since 1960". Berlin: Die Deutsche Biblothek. Lit Verlag Munster 2004.

Albert, O. I., (2001). Introduction to third party intervention in Community Conflicts, Ibadan. John Archers (Publications) Ltd.

Avruch, K. & Black, P. W., (1993). Conflict resolution in intercultural settings: Problems and prospects. In Sandole, D. J. D. & van der Merwe, H. Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: Integration and application. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (pp. 136 – 137).

Best, S. G. (2003). "Cultural Contents of Conflict Transformation Training Programmes in Nigeria". A Paper Presented at the International Seminar on Local Approaches to Conflict Transformation: The North and South. Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 26 – 28 May 2003.

Ben-Mensah, F., (2004). Indigenous Knowledge (Local Pathway to Global Development). Indigenous Approaches to Conflict resolution in Africa. Knowledge and Learning Group Africa Region. The World Bank.

Echezoba, I. (2007). The role of libraries in Conflict Resolution, *African Journal of Library, Archival and Information Science*, 17, 2:34 -40.

Edde, M. I., (2001). "Language and Communication in Peace and Conflict Resolution". Paper presented at the Conference on Conflict Resolution in Africa: Towards a Theoretical Framework for Practical Solution. Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja. 12th July, 2001.

Gidden, A. (1990). Sociology, U.K.: Polity Press /Basil Blackwell.

Hattotuwa, S. (2008). Bringing peace to life, *ICT Update*, Issue 4. June 2008. p. 3. [http://ictupdate.cta.int].

Nicholson, M., (1991). Negotiation, Agreement and Conflict Resolution: The Role of Rational Approaches and their Criticism. *In* Varynen, R. (ed.), Conflict Theory: Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation. London: Sage Publications Ltd. pp. 57 – 78.

Oguntomisin, G O. (2004). The Processes of Peacekeeping and Peacemaking in Pre-colonial Nigeria. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd. p. 9 – 10.

Olaoba, O. B. (2000). The significance of cross-examination in traditional jurisprudence. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd. p. 3.

Olaoba, O. B. (2001). The Town Crier and Yoruba Palace Administration through the Ages Ibadan: John Archers. p. 1.

Oyelude, A. A. & Subair, R. E., (2003). The role of Libraries, Archives and Information Centres in Rural Community Development. *Nigerian Library and Information Science Review*, 21, 1; 66 – 73.

Sani, H. A., (1995). 'Sociology of the Ebira Tao People of Nigeria'. Okene: Habibu Angulu Sani & Sons. p. 5.

Yakubu, J. A., (2003). "Managing Ethnic Pluralism through the Constitution in Nigeria" Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd. p. 5.

Zartman, I. W. (ed.), (2000). Traditional Medicine for Modern Problems in Africa. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc.