Review

Towards the resolution of conflict for research and sustainable development in the developing countries: The role of libraries and information centers

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One of the greatest problems ravaging developing nations and, in fact, the entire world is war. Consequently, no meaningful research and sustainable development or advancement can take place in an atmosphere of war, chaos and acrimonies. There is an enormous amount of peaceful and non violent settlement of disputes taking place at various levels and in many communities all over the world. This paper intends to introduce and discuss ways by which library and information could serve as a peaceful and non violent method of managing conflict in the developing nations in order to have research and sustainable development. The paper discusses conflict and its stages, conflict resolution and management, general overview of libraries and information centers. This takes us to the role of libraries and information centers in conflict resolution. The paper concludes by providing recommendations.

Key words: Library and information center, conflict, conflict resolution, research, developing nations.

INTRODUCTION

In virtually all known human societies but especially those that are diverse, advanced and heterogeneous, conflict is not only widespread but also constitutes a very significant phenomenon - a social factor in the relation existing not only between individuals but also in groups and major social institutions between the school and the family, the state and business organizations, politics and religion as well as within single organizational systems as that between husband and wife or parents and children within the structure of a family (Owoseni, 2005).

One of the greatest problems ravaging African continent and in fact the entire world is war. Consequently, no meaningful development or advancement can take place in an atmosphere of war, chaos and acrimonies. A lot of unnecessary wars had been generated due to lack of adequate information. Ifidon and Ahianzu (2001) attributed the lingering carnage and pogrom in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria significantly and partly to inadequate information about the terms of agreement between the Federal Government and the oil companies and the representatives of the local communities. It was also shown in the study that the communities were not aware of their rights, obligations and issues and events that ultimately affect their existence. Thus, the concept of conflict is an overriding factor and an everyday reality in the whole realm of human social action and relations.

CONFLICT AND ITS STAGES

Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. It is the resort use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and goals (Francis, 2006). Each conflict has its dynamics, characterized by different stages and phases of change and transformation. This is because, as Best (2006) points out, conflict is not static phenomenon, but is expressive, dynamic and dialectical. Fisher et al. (2000) identify five stages of conflict, as follows: pre-conflict stage which is a period when goals between parties are incompatible, which could lead to open conflict. At this stage, the conflict is not well known because parties try to hide it from public view, but communication is undermined between them. The second stage is the stage of confrontation, at this point the conflict becomes

open or manifest. This is characterized by occasional fighting, low level of violence, search for allies by parties, mobilization of resources, strained relationship and polarization. The third stage is the stage of crisis, which represents the peak of the conflict. In violent conflict, this is stage of war and intense fighting, leading to killings, injuries, large scale population displacements, and the use of small arms and light weapons, etc. The fourth is believed to be the outcome stage. There is an assumption that all conflicts will pass through this stage, one way or the other. Either side wins or loses or a ceasefire may be declared; one may surrender, or the government or other third party intervening forces stronger than the warring parties intervene to impose a solution and stop the fighting. The critical issue at this stage is that the violence is decreased, which allows room for some discussion to commence, or alternative means of settling the conflict. The fifth is the post-conflict stage. At this stage, violence has either ended or significantly reduced, and the parties have gone past the crisis stage. This is the stage to address the underlying causes of the conflict, those incompatible goals which created the conflict in the first instance, such as the needs and fears of the parties. If they are not tackled at this stage, the conflict cycle may be re-enacted and return to the pre-conflict stage.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT

Miller (2003) sees conflict resolution as a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict. Also, Mitchel and Banks (1996) use conflict resolution to refer to:

(i) 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 productivity of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries;
(ii) Any process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved.

On the other hand, conflict management is the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict. It covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively at different stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict, by being proactive. It encompasses conflict limitation, containment and litigation.

To effectively handle this aspect of discussion one has to explain some key words in the context and they are developing countries and libraries and information centers. For convenience, the characteristics of developing countries could be classified into seven broad

categories which are low levels of living, characterized by low incomes, high inequality, poor health and inadequate education, low levels of productivity, high rate of population growth and dependency burdens, high and rising levels of unemployment and underdevelopment, substantial dependence on agricultural production and primary product export, prevalence of imperfect market and limited information and dominance, dependence and vulnerability in international relations.

LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTERS: AN OVERVIEW

Libraries and information centers are the Institutions that are generally responsible for the collection, processing and storage of recorded knowledge for the purpose of reading, study and consultation (Aina, 2004: 8). Libraries and information centers are saddled with the responsibility of providing information services to meet the information needs of people in a given society. The information rendered by these institutions are basically free since information is regarded as essential commodity and an indispensable instrument for planning, decision making, economic management and conflict resolution.

Library and information centre in any society provides a unique service that is accessible to everybody. According to Ottong and Edem (2007) citing Aboyade (1987), the provision of information through library and information centers has been shown to be a major factor because of its potential for giving new knowledge, raising consciousness, strengthening links and achieving the integration of disparate social groups. It is an important means of mobilizing people for social, political and economic development. With the Internet, libraries and information centers have become more valuable in the knowledge management process, and they have become crucial partners in learning, nation building, community development as well as conflict resolution.

ROLE OF LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTERS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The library and information centre, without any question has always been and will continue to be one of the intellectual wonders of life and one of the greatest and remarkable innovations and inventions that have proved man's creative audacity. It is a splendid educational masterpiece, a redemptive global phenomenon with robust capacity and ecumenical power and capability to bring the desired and unimaginable transformation and positive changes to the society; the results which are immeasurably eternal (Ajidahun, 2005: 1).

In a similar vein, research has revealed the potency and the efficacy of libraries and information centers in conflict resolution and reconciliation. The World Bank

Report (2005) states that countries like 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, links with non-governmental organizations and provide extension services and indigenous knowledge systems, repackaging information in such 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, to preserve and resolve conflicts.

In Nigeria political system, conflicts often occur due to the inadequate information on the electoral processes. In resolving the conflicts, lawyers and judges need legal information for them to thrive in their legal profession. It is in this view that Ajidahun (2008) asserts that a lawyer who wants to succeed in the profession must have a personal law library however small it may be. This can be complemented with e-library and virtual library facilities as they (lawyers and judges) depend and consult on regular basis law reports, law dictionaries, digests, indexes, statues, constitutions, law textbooks, journals, edits, acts, and so on to corroborate or invalidate seeming facts and figures, to disambiguate ambiguities, clarify or verify statements and opinions and to demystify legal mysteries and bewildering and puzzling legal theories and submissions. This is to prevent a miscarriage of justice and thus give credibility to the justice system so that the judiciary can be the last hope of the masses in resolving conflicts.

More recently, Echezona (2007) emphasized that the role of the library in resolution of conflicts is incontrovertible. In using libraries to resolve conflicts, Echezona (2007) further stated that library can create a website on conflicts resolution where the target users can access and discuss matters relating to conflict resolution. The library can also organize seminars, create access to free information, create links with non-governmental organizations and provide extension services and the indigenous knowledge systems.

Also, on the solution to the militancy in Niger-Delta, Nigeria, the former chairman of National Examination Council (NECO), Mr. Isaac Kekemeke suggested that free education from primary to tertiary level is the solution to the militancy and other violent crimes in the region. According to him;

"education should be made free and compulsory from nursery to university level. Niger-Delta states must invest massively in education. This is a way to end militancy in the region".

With the statement above, it then means that standard library equipped with relevant and current materials should be constructed in all the schools if any meaningful and productive education should be expected, which is also in line with Olajide and Ariwodola's (2009)

submission that government at all levels should construct a standard library equipped with relevant materials in line with school curriculum in all primary and secondary schools in order to achieve academic excellence. With all these in place, the library and information centre would have contributed significantly to the enhancement of conflict resolution and reconciliation for research and sustainable development in the developing nations. After all, information is power.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has attempted to give the general overview of libraries and information centers, conflict and its stages, and the role of libraries and information centers in conflict resolution. Therefore, it is recommended that:

1. Standard library equipped with current and relevant materials in line with school curriculum should be constructed in all schools.
2. Library should acquire various current information materials on conflict resolution and related topics.
3. Library should organized seminars, conferences and workshop on conflict resolution.
4. Library should create access to free information, links with non-governmental organizations and provide extension services and indigenous knowledge systems.
5. Library should also repackage information in such a way that illiterate ones would be able to comprehend it.
6. Library should create a web site on conflict resolution where the target users can access and discuss matters relating to conflict resolution.

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