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Introduction

Conflict in simple terms, means a state of disagreement, controversy or opposition. It could also mean the existence of a prolonged battle, struggle or clash between two or more parties. Obegi and Nyamboga (2008), quoting Nicholas (1992) described conflict as situations where two people (or groups) wish to carry out acts which are mutually incompatible. He further states that conflict involves, “the pushing and pulling, giving and taking, process of finding the balance between powers”. In either case, conflict is generally characterized by a breach of peace or understanding among parties involved.

Various dimensions to the causes of conflicts have been identified by writers. Namande (2008), citing Donelson (1999) asserts that any factor that creates dissatisfaction can increase the chances of conflicts among people and this may include struggle for resources, egocentrism, ethnocentrism, bigotry, assertion, struggle for recognition, ignorance, pride and fear. According to Obegi and Nyamboga (2008) conflict has structural causes, proximate causes and trigger which are evident in the presence of pervasive public policies and structures, inadequate security measures and unsatisfactory state of economy.

Though it is often said that conflicts are desirable in shaping human ideologies and relationships, they never occur without negative consequences. Very often such consequences constitute serious threats to humanity and undermine particular human development objectives. Such threats may be in the form of diseases, hunger, poverty, high death toll and destruction of property which are evident in the wars going on in some countries of the African sub-region.

There is therefore the need to design effective measures for resolving conflicts. Wikipedia (2005) sees conflict resolution as the process of attempting to find solution to or settle a dispute. This process may take different patterns which include the use of force or authority of the state to enforce peace and the establishment of relationships or agreements among groups (Obegi and

Nyamboga, 2008). The application of force or coercion and adjudication in resolving conflicts seem to be harsh strategy capable of bringing about uneasy peace that could be easily eroded. Thus, a more permanent way of resolving conflict should make use of negotiation and arbitration. This approach relates to the “conflict transformation” approach of Lederach (1997) as identified by Obegi and Nyomboga which sees conflict as caused by changes in relationships which can only be resolved when negative or destructive interaction patterns are transformed into a positive or constructive relationships and interactions. The application of this approach would result to lasting peace between the groups in conflict.

However, one factor that has been found common in a conflict situation is the absence of the right information or breach of communication between the parties involved. Provision of the right information has been seen as the Panacea for conflict resolution. According to Gisesa (2008), researches regarding conflict and peace have revealed that conflicts are based on deficiency of information, stressing that cases of misinformation, wrong information or missing information enhance disparity in opinions and social differences which may lead to as well as heighten conflicts.

Against this backdrop, the library is seen as a very important system that provides the relevant information that helps society to understand the realities of any conflict situation. In addition to providing information for resolving conflicts, libraries can as well help in preventing conflicts.

Echezona (2001) citing Ogunkelu asserts that libraries equip researchers with techniques of identifying and preventing conflicts at an early stage, which could be by inviting discussions and brainstorming from experts on conflict resolution in workshops and seminars, and documenting the information so generated for users to learn the art of resolving and managing conflicts, thereby increasing the value of human intellectual output. Though the public library has been conceived by many as being better situated to reach out to the society for conflict resolution, the academic library through the community service aspect of its function is also in a very good position to offer conflict resolution services. Perhaps, the realization of the potential roles of the academic libraries in offering congenial services for conflict which is now seen as a global problem has prompted some universities to introduce the course “Peace and conflict resolution” as general studies course. Thus, the academic library is expected to offer conflict resolution services by making materials available both for teaching and learning as well as for community out-reach programmes. There seems to be total lack of research on the role of the academic library in conflict resolution. This research, therefore intends to bridge this gap.

Statement of the Problem

The prevalence of conflict in the world and particularly in the African sub-region has been a major source of concern to individuals, families and (the) society at large. People have become apprehensive about the negative consequences of conflict, due to the way and manner it erupts in our society. At the global level, nations of the world are concerned about conflict and its effects as a result of globalization (which has reduced the world to a global village), to the extent that the negative impact of conflict in one country is shared by others.

The African sub-region has been identified by Kidei (2008) as the worst hit by conflicts when compared to other sub-regions of the world. The wars and crises in Somalia, Kenya, Republic of Congo, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria (Niger Delta crisis), to mention but a few, have resulted to serious threats to humanity. These threats according to Kidei include high death tolls, displacement of people from their homes and livelihood, increasing number of

civilian casualties, increased violence, human abuse and mutilation, resulting to the use of children as instruments of war. Kidei further presented a statistics on child soldiers world-wide which show that out of about 350,000 child soldiers in the world, 200,000 are Africans. The above situation, no doubt presents a serious threat to Africa's development (millennium Development Goals) as children are looked upon as responsible future leaders of tomorrow. The problem of this study, therefore, is to identify the services which academic libraries can offer to bring about conflict resolution and peace in societies.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include the following:

1. To identify the services offered by academic libraries for conflict resolution.
2. To identify the problems affecting academic library's services for conflict resolution.
3. To suggest ways of improving the services of academic libraries for conflict resolution.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided e study:

1. What are the services offered by academic library for conflict resolution?
2. Through which media does academic library offer services for conflict resolution?
3. What are the problems affecting academic library services for conflict resolution?
4. What are the ways of improving academic library services for conflict resolution?

Review of Literature

A number of literatures have indicated that the library has enormous roles to play for societal cohesion. Opinions of link (2004), and Roosevelt in Kotanga (2008), and Hossfield and Nyamogo (2008), show that the library is an institution that promotes democratic ideals by protecting intellectual and scholarship integrity, freedom of the mind, free and open access to information and survival of culture, including societal cohesiveness.

Making relevant materials available for the achievement of the above function of the library is an important instrument for conflict resolution. Commenting on the resources required in the library for conflict resolution, Echezona (2007), Obachi (2008), Malesi (2008), and Namande (2008) identified such resources as cultural literature, materials dealing with peace and security (such as books, magazines, newspapers, journals, audio-visual materials) and internet resources.

In the same vein, Kachero (2008) reflecting on the recent Kenyan post-election crisis highlighted some services which the library can provide for conflict resolution to include, workshops, training visits by experts, exchange programmes, conferences and projects that promote readership and book culture. Wekala (2008) added that the library can 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.

The availability of the above resources and services cannot make desirable impact unless they are made accessible to the public. Malesi (2008), recommended that the existence of these materials and services should be communicated to the people through advertising using flyers or handbills, radio announcements/interviews, one-on-one message, organization of library week (with conflict resolution as the theme), publicizing the stock and services on conflict, peace and reconciliation through displays, using community leaders and inviting authors of publications related to peace, conflict resolution and management to talk to the people about the subject Information Communication Technology(ICT) services have also been found useful in conflict resolution. Such services include, e-mail, teleconferencing, list serve and other forms of on-line reference services offered by the library (Echezona, 2007).

A number of problems have been identified as hindrances to the achievement of the aims of the libraries in conflict resolution. Thairu (2008) and Malesi (2008) pointed out such problems as inadequate technological infrastructure and knowledge, lack of government support in the generation of vital information related to social cohesiveness, lack of skills/training of information professionals in processing and disseminating indigenous information/knowledge for conflict resolution and breakdown in communication of information due to high illiteracy level of the grassroots community members.

Most references to the role of the library in conflict resolution are directed to the public libraries. There seems to be dearth of literature on the role of the academic library in conflict resolution. This study, therefore, tends to bridge this gap.

Methodology

The descriptive survey was adopted for this study. The population comprised eighty-eight academic librarians in the four federal universities of South Eastern Nigeria. This is made up of University of Nigeria(UNN,50), Federal University of Technology Owerri(FUTO,25),Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka(NAU, 7) and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture (MOUAU, 6). There was no need for sampling due to the smallness of the population.

A 34- item structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a trial-test carried out using five librarians each from two state university libraries in Enugu and Ebonyi States. This is to ensure the clarity of the items and to modify or correct any ambiguity. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to establish the reliability of the instrument at 0.76.

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on each of the identified items on a four-point weighting scale, ranging from 1-4. The decision was taken based on the mean value of the scale which was 2.50. Any mean that was less than 2.50 indicated a negative opinion and vice-versa.

Only 80 copies (70%) of the questionnaire were completely filled, returned and analyzable. Two of the remaining questionnaires were not retrievable while six of the respondents did not participate in the study as they were away from office during the time of the study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Availability of Library Services Related to Conflict Resolution.

S/N	Services	UNN	FUTO	MOUAU	NAU	Xo	Decision

1	Dissemination of information on culture.	2.86	3.26	3.17	3.57	3.22	Available
2	Dissemination of information resources on conflict.	3.01	3.15	3.20	3.35	3.18	“
3	Dissemination of information resources on peace.	3.03	3.26	3.17	3.43	3.22	“
4	Dissemination of information resources on security.	3.53	3.22	3.17	3.29	3.30	“
5	Provision of networked television services (eg. CNN), showing conflict situations around the world.	1.94	2.22	1.83	1.00	1.75	Not available
6	Organization of multi-cultural gatherings.	1.92	2.30	1.67	1.00	1.72	“
7	Provision of internet information services.	3.01	2.87	2.00	1.29	2.30	“
8	Displays on topical issues concerning conflict.	2.00	2.37	1.67	1.00	1.76	“
9	Organization of workshops on conflict resolution	1.86	2.48	1.67	1.29	1.83	“
10	Organization of conferences on conflict resolution.	1.94	2.32	1.00	1.00	1.57	Not Available
11	Organization of talks using authors on conflict resolution as resource persons.	2.00	2.45	1.83	1.00	1.82	“
12	Organization of library week with the theme on conflict resolution.	2.00	2.43	1.50	1.29	1.81	“

Data in table 1 show that only UNN and FUTO provide internet information services for conflict resolution. Hence it can be inferred that ICT is poorly applied by libraries in information services for conflict resolution. Apart from disseminating information resources on culture, conflict, peace and security, the libraries are yet to apply other services of items 5-6 and 8-12. This situation places the library services for conflict resolution in Nigerian universities at variance with the views of Kachero (2008) and Wekala (2008) who opined that organization of workshops, conferences and other out-reach programmes by libraries are very vital for conflict resolution.

Table 2: Media used by the Libraries for Disseminating Information on Conflict Resolution.

S/N	Media Resources	UNN	FUTO	MOUAU	NAU	Xo	Decision
13	Handbills/flyers	2.00	2.49	2.00	1.57	2.02	Not used
14	Radio interviews	1.86	2.35	1.83	1.86	1.98	“
15	Radio announcements	1.61	2.30	2.00	1.43	1.84	“
16	Television interviews	1.83	2.26	2.00	1.43	1.88	“
17	Television announcement	1.83	2.26	2.00	1.71	1.95	“
18	One-on-one message	1.92	2.43	2.33	1.43	2.03	“
19	Liaison with community leaders.	1.92	2.39	2.33	1.43	2.02	“
20	Liaison with NGOs(church)	1.97	2.17	1.67	1.29	1.79	“
21	E-mail	1.92	2.22	2.00	1.57	1.93	“

22	Teleconferencing	1.83	2.17	1.50	1.71	1.80	“

In table 2 above, all the university libraries have mean responses below the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that none of them makes use of any of the identified media for disseminating information on conflict resolution, despite the recommendations of Echezona (2007) and Malesi (2008) that existence of materials and services for conflict resolution should be communicated to the people using handbills/flyers, radio/TV. Announcements/interviews, one-on-one message, organization of library week as well as application of such ICT services as e-mail, teleconferencing, list serve and other on-line reference services.

Table 3: Problems affecting Library Services for conflict Resolution.

S/N	Problems	UNN	FUTO	MOUAU	NAU	Xo	Decision
23	Lack of established library policy on conflict management information services.	3.75	3.48	3.80	2.99	3.51	Accepted
24	Lack of funds for rendering the right information services for conflict resolution.	3.64	3.57	3.83	2.86	3.48	“
25	Lack of technological infrastructure eg. Internet facilities for enhancing information dissemination.	3.00	3.13	3.00	3.57	3.18	“
26	Breakdown in communication due to lack of literacy skills of community members.	2.97	3.13	3.33	3.29	3.18	“
27	Librarians’ lack of skills in organizing and disseminating vital information for conflict resolution.	2.46	2.34	2.17	1.71	2.17	Rejected
28	Lack of government support in generating vital information for conflict resolution.	3.31	3.43	3.33	3.14	3.30	Accepted

Data in table 3, show that all the university libraries are faced with the problem of lack of established policy on conflict management information services, including lack of funds and government support.

The respondents also identified the problem of break-down in communication, due to low literacy level of members of community. These findings corroborate the opinions of Thairu (2008) and Malesi (2008) who identified inadequate technological infrastructure, lack of fund and government support in the generation of vital information related to social cohesiveness and breakdown in communication due to high illiteracy level of the community as the problems affecting library services for conflict resolution.

We may emphasize here that even though the University of Nigeria and the Federal University of Technology Owerri accepted that they provide internet information services as indicated in item 7 of table 1, the facilities are either not domiciled within their libraries or their usage is very limited due to insufficient computer – systems and constant breakdown of existing ones. That may inform their acceptance of lack of technological infrastructure as a problem affecting their libraries in item 25 of table 3 above. In item 27, the librarians debunked the problem of lack of skills in organizing and disseminating vital information for conflict resolution which was among the problems also identified by Thairu and Malesi. The import of their assertion is that if they are provided with government support, funds and state-of-the art technologies, they will

deliver. Their positive response on the problem of lack of established policy framework on conflict management information services could explain the reason why there was absolute lack of out-reach programmes for conflict resolution in all the libraries.

Table 4: Strategies for Enhancing Library Services for conflict Resolution.

S/N	Problems	UNN	FUTO	MOUAU	NAU	Xo	Decision
29	Establishment of policy framework on conflict management information services.	3.86	3.55	3.28	3.49	3.55	Effective
30	Provision of enough funds for enhancement of library services for conflict resolution.	3.89	3.74	3.50	3.57	3.68	Effective
31	Provision of technological infrastructure to enhance information dissemination on conflict resolution.	3.50	3.65	3.33	3.71	3.55	Effective
32	Educating the community members for effective participation in conflict resolution.	3.31	3.61	3.17	3.86	3.49	Effective
33	Inculcating the right skills on the librarians for effective organization and dissemination of information on conflict.	4.31	3.61	3.00	3.14	3.27	Effective
34	Enforcement of legal deposit particularly on government documents relating to conflict resolution.	3.17	3.52	3.17	3.71	3.39	Effective

In table 4, above, all the respondents rated the whole strategies identified for enhancing library services for conflict resolution as effective strategies. Provision of enough funds to libraries for enhancement of conflict resolution services was rated the highest (3.68). This implies that they recognized finance as a very important factor for the success of any venture, without which the aims cannot be achieved. Infact, such other strategies as provision of technological infrastructure, training of the librarians in the skills of effective organization and dissemination of information and maintenance of steady flow of information depend largely on the availability of funds. Their positive response also on the establishment of policy framework on conflict management information services is very important as such policy will help their academic libraries to realize the roles they have to play in helping the universities to reach-out to the communities for societal cohesiveness.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in the light of the findings of the study:

- Academic libraries should embrace the challenges of assisting the universities to reach out to the communities through the organization of educational programmes geared towards public enlightenment for the avoidance of unhealthy relationships that could lead to negative conflicts.
- The Nigerian Library Association should encourage the administration of the academic libraries to develop policies on conflict management

information services.

- This will enable the academic libraries to contribute meaningfully as agents for promotion of democratic ideals and societal cohesiveness, instead of leaving the task to the public libraries alone.
- Government should provide enough funds as well as state-of-the art ICT infrastructures to academic libraries and ensure that librarians have unrestricted access to ICT facilities in order to facilitate dissemination of information services for conflict resolution, peace and reconciliation.
- Government should also ensure the enforcement of legal deposit laws in Nigeria with respect to information resources related to conflict resolution.
- Finally, university administrations should sponsor the training of academic librarians in the new- fangled aspect of librarianship dealing with services related to peace and conflict resolution, the human angle that touches on global peace and stability.

Conclusion

The conclusions to be drawn from this study include the following:

- The academic libraries are not rendering the necessary services for conflict resolution in Nigeria; neither do they use the required media for such services.
- Absence of established library policy, poor funding, lack of technological infrastructure and lack of government support have hamstrung the imperatives of rendering conflict management information services by academic libraries.
- Strategies such as the establishment of library policy framework on conflict management, provision of enough funds and technological infrastructure, educating the members of the community as well as improving the skills of the librarians and enforcement of legal deposits are effective means of facilitating library services for conflict resolution.

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