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Libraries as Channels for Disseminating Information and Educating Communities for the Resolution of Conflicts and Promotion of Peace in Africa

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present a model that can be adopted to enhance the role of libraries in the resolution of conflicts and promotion of peace for the establishment and sustenance of democracy in Africa in a sustainable manner. The paper highlights the devastating effects of conflicts between 1990 and 2007 with Africa having the highest percentage of 80% per square area.

To assess and understand the roles of Libraries in peace and conflict resolution, related studies /papers were reviewed. The review revealed that the Libraries are repositories of current and relevant resources that are required for peace and conflict resolution. This includes research findings, reports, historical accounts and other non print materials. It also exposed the non-implementation of recommendations and ideas in the papers. It goes further to put forth a Practical Action Plan (PAP) for utilizing libraries as the nucleus for disseminating information on resolving conflicts and promoting peace in communities. The PAP provides a schematic representation of the Community Library, Peace, Education and Development Center (CLiPED) Center Interactive and Information Flow Model. It also outlines a framework for the implementation and sustainability of the PAP.

Introduction

In the last 20 years there has been an increase in the frequency of occurrence and the scale of conflicts around the world. These conflicts have been mainly as a result of political up-rising, ethnic and religious intolerance, terrorism, scramble for resources, and growing inequality amongst the populace. The Gulf war, Rwanda genocide, unending Israel and Palestine war, Zimbabwe power tussle, Liberian war, Sudan war, Nigeria Niger Delta militancy, and the recent Boko Haram terror attacks in Nigeria, are some the consequences of conflicts.

According to Hawkings 2008, (as indicated in Figure 1. below) death toll per square area is highest in Africa (88%), followed by Asia (8%), Europe (2%), America (1%) and Middle East (1%). The figure for Africa is alarming and calls for a multidisciplinary, multidirectional and practical approach to tackling this problem which according to **Global Issues** has produced over 9 million refugees and internally displaced people (See Figure 2.). With the recent uprisings across North Africa (Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya), and on-going conflicts in other parts of the continent, the percentage of fatality and population of refugees and internally displaced people in Africa is definitely on the increase.

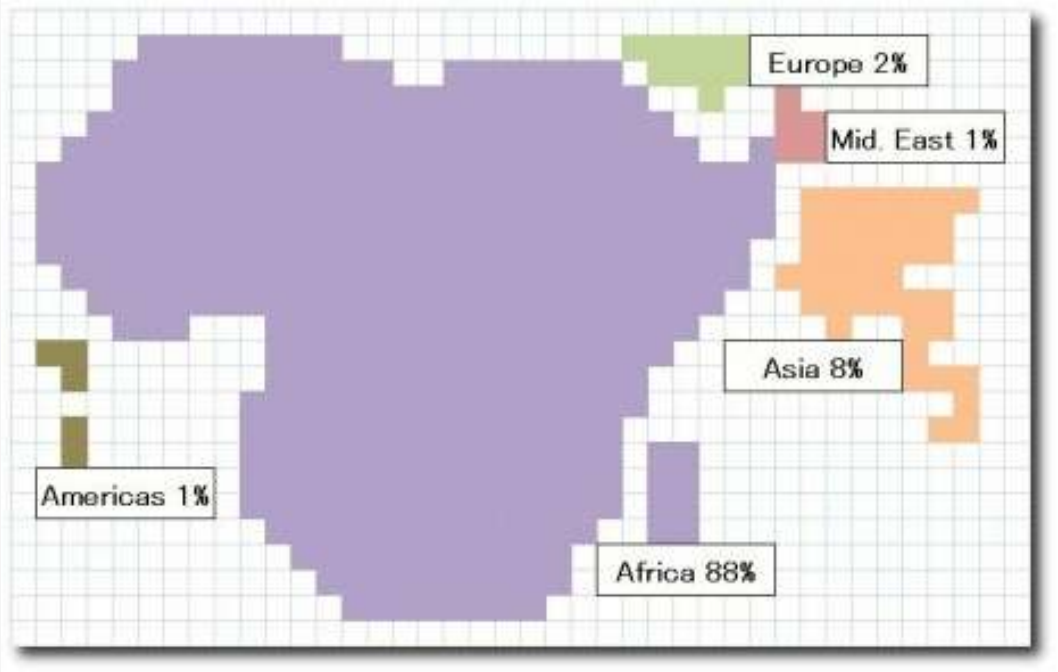

FIGURE 1. MAP SHOWING DEATH TOLL PER SQUARE AREA

Source: *Virgil Hawkins, New World Maps, Stealth Conflicts, December 30, 2008.*

A well-known theory in research regarding peace and conflict resolution states that conflicts arise from misinformation and prejudice (Gisea 2008, in Onuchukwu 2011). In the quest to find practical and feasible solutions to these conflicts, the library and other information organisations can play a pivotal role. The variety of libraries and its ability to cater to myriad groups (academics & researchers, policy makers, NGO's, Communities, etc.), and wide network, and reach spanning across geopolitical and ethnic boundaries positions libraries at a vantage point to intervene before, during and after any crisis, for maintenance of peace and resolution of conflicts. Bhatti, (2010) stated that "Information is a key resource for conflict resolution, peace promotion and security. Through the provision of relevant information at all levels, libraries can support government, policy makers, civil society and communities by serving a channel or conduit for disseminating information for the effective functioning of a democratic system. Also, Kenya Library Association 2008 submitted that "Libraries are preservers and custodians of human knowledge, which history has retained in a current form. Libraries serve the purpose of affording a society a collective memory into which highly valuable information flows**".**

Therefore the function of a library or information centre is to, identify, select, acquire, organise, and provide information resources in the right formats for prompt dissemination at all times to the various stakeholders for the purpose of educating, empowering and taking decisions for the promotion of peace. To further buttress the importance of information institutions in conflict resolution, **Obachi (2008),** stated that "Conflicts are part and parcel of the inevitable dynamics of societies and that it is possible to resolve such conflicts only on the basis of an existing and available reservoir of knowledge about the issues on which the conflicts are based." However, this

knowledge must be accessible to the decision makers and to the citizens through information institutions (like Archives, Museum, and Libraries) with libraries at the fore front **(KLA 2008).**

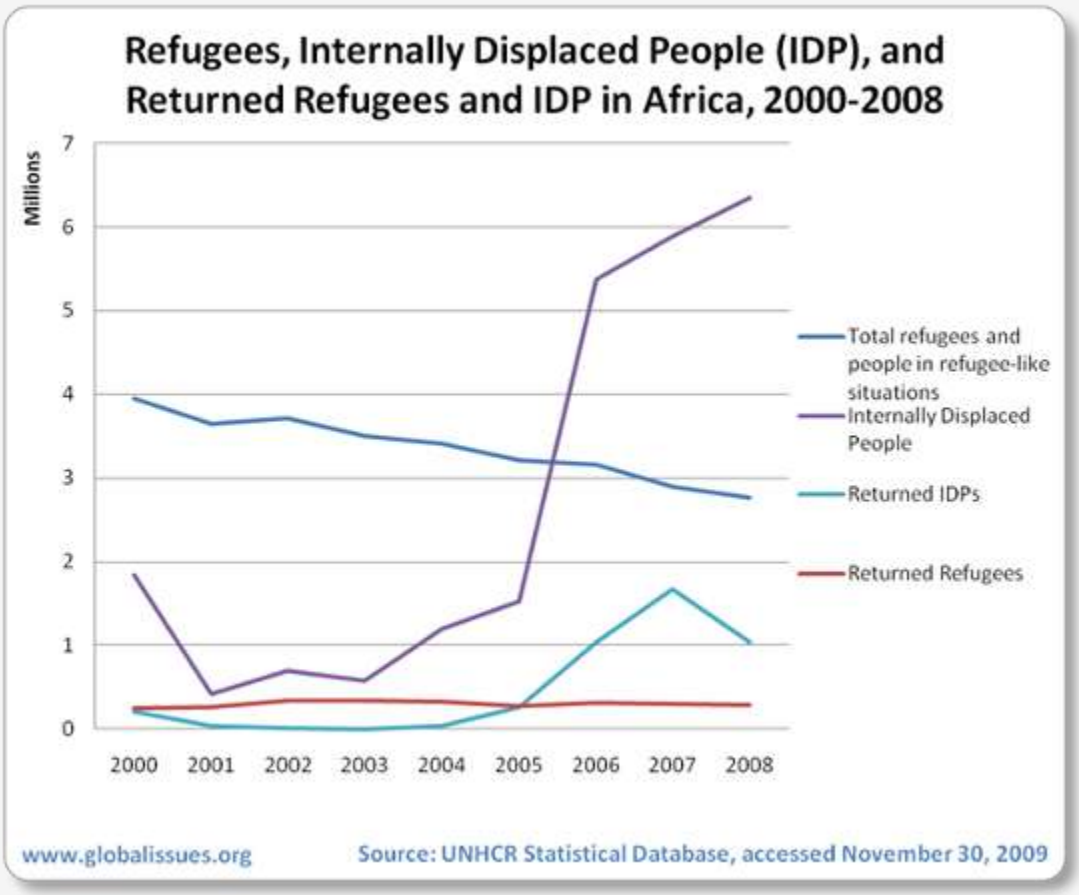

FIGURE 2. GRAPH REFUGEES & INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE IN AFRICA

Source: UNHCR, through Global Issues February 2012

Unfortunately, most conflicts around the world can be attributed to misinformation by or and complacency of information institutions. In a world plagued by political unrest, war, ethnic and religious violence, and terrorism, the onus is now on information institutions of which the library is one, to rise up to the challenge, by becoming more proactive in the dissemination of the right information for maintaining security, justice and peace.

The Aim of this Study

The aim of this paper is to position and show the relevance and importance of libraries in the resolution of conflicts and promotion of peace for the establishment and sustenance of democracy in Africa.

What is Conflict and Peace Resolution?

According to Dictionary.com conflict is defined as "a fight, battle, or struggle, especially a prolonged struggle; strife between parties". In 2006, the Kenya government's National policy on peace building and conflict management, states that conflict is the existence of inharmonious relationships resulting from incompatible interests or behavior. The inharmonious relations may be latent or violent. While Obachi (2008) says it is "violent clashing, being at odds,

differing and disagreeing strongly. In the opinion of Francis (2007), he defines conflict as "The pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different groups". While Echezona (2007), sees conflict 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. For Dokun-Oyeshola (2005), "essentially, conflict concerns disagreement, dispute or controversy in ideas or viewpoints held by two or more individuals or groups." Conflict is a relationship between two or more parties who believe they have incompatible goals or interests. It is a misunderstanding that involves negotiable interest. Conflict might be as a result of religious, social, political, or economic misunderstanding, while conflict resolution as stated by Wikis, is a series of methods and processes involved in promoting the peaceful ending of conflict. This is achieved when parties involve in conflict attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group and by engaging in collective negotiation or dialoguing.

In the opinion of Obachi (2008) Conflict Resolution is the process of analyzing, unraveling and separating components in order to resolve the deeper rooted causes of conflict, unanimously and with firmness for the purpose of clearing causes of the conflict. Successful conflict resolution occurs by listening to and providing opportunities to meet the needs of all parties, and to adequately address interests so that each party is satisfied with the outcome. While the Peace part of the phrase (citing Hague Appeal in Bhatti 2010) includes teaching for and about democracy and human rights, nonviolence, social and economic justice, gender equality, environmental sustainability, disarmament, traditional peace practices, international law, and human security. Some of the cause of Conflicts are the struggle for resources Like the Niger Delta Case in Nigeria), egocentrism, xenocentrism, ethnocentrism, bigotry, assertion, and struggle for recognition, ignorance and pride. Conflicts, according to Donelson 1991, can also be caused by prejudice, and stereotype. It is argued that "any factor that creates dissatisfaction can increase conflict among people".

Methods of Resolving Conflicts

Major approaches to conflict resolution according to Obegi & Nyamboga (2008) are:

Coercion: This approach involves the use of force. In this approach warring parties are forced in to a particular conclusion.

Negotiation: This method makes use of mediation and bargaining, or involves a process of discussion involving the parties bringing them into voluntary agreement.

Adjudication: This use of the power of state and its legal system to provide an authoritative conclusion.

Mediation: This involves using a third party to help in conflict comes to a mutually satisfactory agreement.

Arbitration: This involves using a third party to decide through prior to mutual consent, the issues in dispute.

Review of Related Papers on Libraries in Peace and Conflict Resolution

Papers relating to the role of libraries in peace and conflict resolution were reviewed. The summary table below was the outcome of this exercise.

Title & Author	Suggested Roles of Libraries	Findings/Recommendations
Services for Conflict Resolution: The Role of Nigerian Academic Libraries. M.O. Okoye, M. T. Imo and U. T. Imo	1.Organization of Educational programmes on peace and conflict resolution geared towards public enlightenment for the avoidance of unhealthy. 2.The Nigerian Library Association should encourage the administration of the academic libraries to develop policies on conflict management	Government should support libraries by providing funds and state-of-the art ICT Infrastructures to academic libraries. In order to facilitate dissemination of information services for conflict resolution, peace and

	Information services.	reconciliation. Enforcement of legal deposit laws in Nigeria with respect to information resources related to conflict resolution. University administrations should sponsor the training of academic librarians in services related to peace and conflict resolution, the human angle that touches on global peace and stability. Academic libraries are not rendering the necessary services for Conflict Resolution in Nigeria; neither do they use the required media for such services.
Public library intervention in conflict resolutions in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: Librarian's perspectives R. I. Echezona, R. E. Ozioko and C. F. Ugwuanyi	Libraries cam provide of the right kind of information to the people through workshops, seminars, extension services and collaboration with non-governmental organisations	Public Libraries should be properly funded by government so they can acquire materials that will help realize the objective of resolving conflict in the region
Role of Libraries in Conflict Resolution: The Niger Delta Case. Friday B. Batubo Beleudaara Nelly Digitemie-Batubo (Mrs.)	Batubo (1986) decried the gross inadequacy of public libraries in the then Rivers State (now Bayelsa and Rivers States) and appealed to government to establish libraries especially in the rural areas. It was surprising to note that after more than two decades the situation has not changed much.	Government should establish more well - equipped libraries in rural areas.
Libraries and Education for Peace in Pakistan Dr. Rubina Bhatti	The literature and interview responses suggested that libraries should focus on the following to support peace building and become agent of change in the society: • Seminars, Lectures, Conferences • Book fairs and library exhibitions • Display of new publications about the subject • Clippings maintenance • Bibliographic services, • Reference services, • Selective dissemination of information and current awareness services • Reprographic services • Translation services (Maheswara, 2008). Libraries should organise talks, lectures, seminars, conferences addressing the issues relating to peace building process and resolving conflicts.	Utilisation of new technology for peace promotion and for communicating positively and logically with global communities. Provision of relevant resources and services tailored to the immediate and imperative needs of their communities
Role of Libraries in conflict and peace process in Sri Lanka	The library must collect , organize, arrange and	

Ma heswaran, R	display materials that could provide the actual basis of the conflict, the pattern of the conflict, effects of the conflict, the peace process, intension and fears of parties involved. Library should be able to provide specific information about the actual basis of the crisis, what are the facts relevant to both parties a to struggle, the motivations of foreign intervention. Libraries, government agencies and non-governmental organizations are expected to hold library exhibitions of the materials that will explain the conflict and the peace process. Libraries need to have current publications about the conflict and the peace process. There should be paper extracts about the conflict and peace process, role of religious dignitaries in the peace process, the mistakes committed in past peace attempts, the basis of failure in negotiating process to find amicable solution with foreign intervention, etc. The library must have books and materials in different languages and translated copies of the originals: in order to meet the information needs of different ethnic groups. The library can also contribute by preparing hand books of library publications, library bibliographies, and collection indexes on conflicts and peace process. Libraries, should organize, and conduct various workshops with the help of the experts in the resolution of conflicts, develop problem solving workshops based on basic human needs and right theory, and interacting workshops based on socio-psychological approaches	
"The Ugly face of Society": The role of the Library Esther K. Obachi	libraries and information centres in multi-ethnic environments can be used to suppress conflicts by disseminating information and knowledge on cultural, political, religious and social beliefs of their users, thereby eliminating stigma and stereotyping of other ethnic communities.	Libraries should partner with popular brand like MTN, Coco cola etc to organize library week with the objective of promoting peace and resolving conflicts. Libraries in multi-ethnic environments can foster peace by organizing Multi-ethnic gatherings and talk shows that can shade light on cultural differences among the community members.

To assess and understand the roles of Libraries in peace and conflict resolution, related studies /papers were reviewed. The review revealed that the Libraries are repositories of current and relevant resources that are required for peace and conflict resolution. This includes research findings, reports, historical accounts of events and communities and other non print materials. It also exposed the non-implementation of recommendations and ideas in the papers. The need for government to provide well-equipped libraries was also emphasized. The papers also suggested that information should be packaged in other media, languages and formats in order to facilitate

community empowerment for conflict resolution and peace. The bulk of the job is on the public library and rural information centers. These libraries should stock multi - ethnic materials, collaborate with government, NGO'S, CBO's, Community elders, and international organizations.

Recommendation

The abuse of public office and the widening gap between the stinking rich government officials and the people they govern makes it increasingly difficult to tackle the devastating challenges of conflicts across the continent Africa. The high cost of providing security, funding wars and caring for refugees and internally displaced people puts further pressure on already lean income of most nations with consequences of meeting the MDG targets in general. The situation requires a multidisciplinary and multidirectional approach to resolving conflicts and restoring peace in troubled communities. The role of libraries in peace and conflict resolution has been defined, illustrated and re-emphasised all through this paper. In order to realize the vision of making libraries the nucleus of disseminating information on resolving conflict, promoting peace, healthy livelihood and a catalyst for sustainable development the potentials offered by libraries and its continental network must be harnessed. This will require a practical action plan that will crystalise all ideas and potentials for the empowerment of the communities, nations and continent as a whole.

Practical Action Plan

Community Library, Peace and Development Center (CLiPED Center)

The variety of libraries and its ability to cater to myriad groups (academics & researchers, policy makers, NGO's, Communities, etc.), and wide network, and reach, spanning across regional and ethnic boundaries, positions libraries at a vantage point to intervene before, during and after any crisis, for maintenance of peace and resolution of conflicts. However, lack of information and misinformation are principal reasons for unresolved conflicts and difficulty in promoting peace. The **Continental Network of Libraries (CNL)** must disseminate well packaged information to the various stakeholders in the conflict resolution and peace keeping chain. To achieve this, the services of the libraries must be expanded through innovation, multimedia and information communication technology to deliver value added development services that will aid resolution of conflict and promotion of peace. Therefore, **CliPED Center** is proposed to be a collaboration between Academic/Institutional Libraries, NGO'S, media houses, schools and Local Governments to provide basic library services, special services in the area of peace and conflict resolution as it relates to individual communities and to facilitate rural development and extension services. Information dissemination and knowledge sharing will be made possible through the internet. The newly launched NICOMSAT2 backbone will definitely make possible, fast, robust and reliable internet services with adequate bandwidth required to link the CNL for purpose of sharing knowledge from conflict resolution and peace promotion and the deployment of distant learning and crowd computing services for the empowerment of youths and the communities as a whole. Also the center can provide a base for the deployment of rural extension and community development services.

The diagram below is a schematic representation of the CLiPED Center Interactive and Information Flow Model. The CLiPED centre model is designed to disseminate critical information, messages and knowledge that will empower to have clear understanding of situations and differences for the purpose of resolving conflicts and promoting peace.

As shown in the model the community library is strategically positioned to enable stakeholders interact. Stakeholders include Academic and institutional libraries, government, private sector, NGOs and other information agencies like the Media houses(Radio and TV stations).

The CNL, beyond providing basic library services, will help bridge information gap by re-packaging and clarifying information from research and government for dissemination to the members of the community through the assistance of NGOs and other information agencies.

The CLiPED Center projects will have an immediate positive impact on most public libraries that are already fading out like shadows because of shortage of funds and competition from e- libraries, because the introduction of peace

and conflict resolution, rural development and extension services will provide the justification for government to inject fresh funds. This coupled with private sector CSR-Funding will facilitate joint ownership and sustainability, The CliPED Center if properly structured and constituted will provide a perfect example for Public-Private-Partnership (PPP).

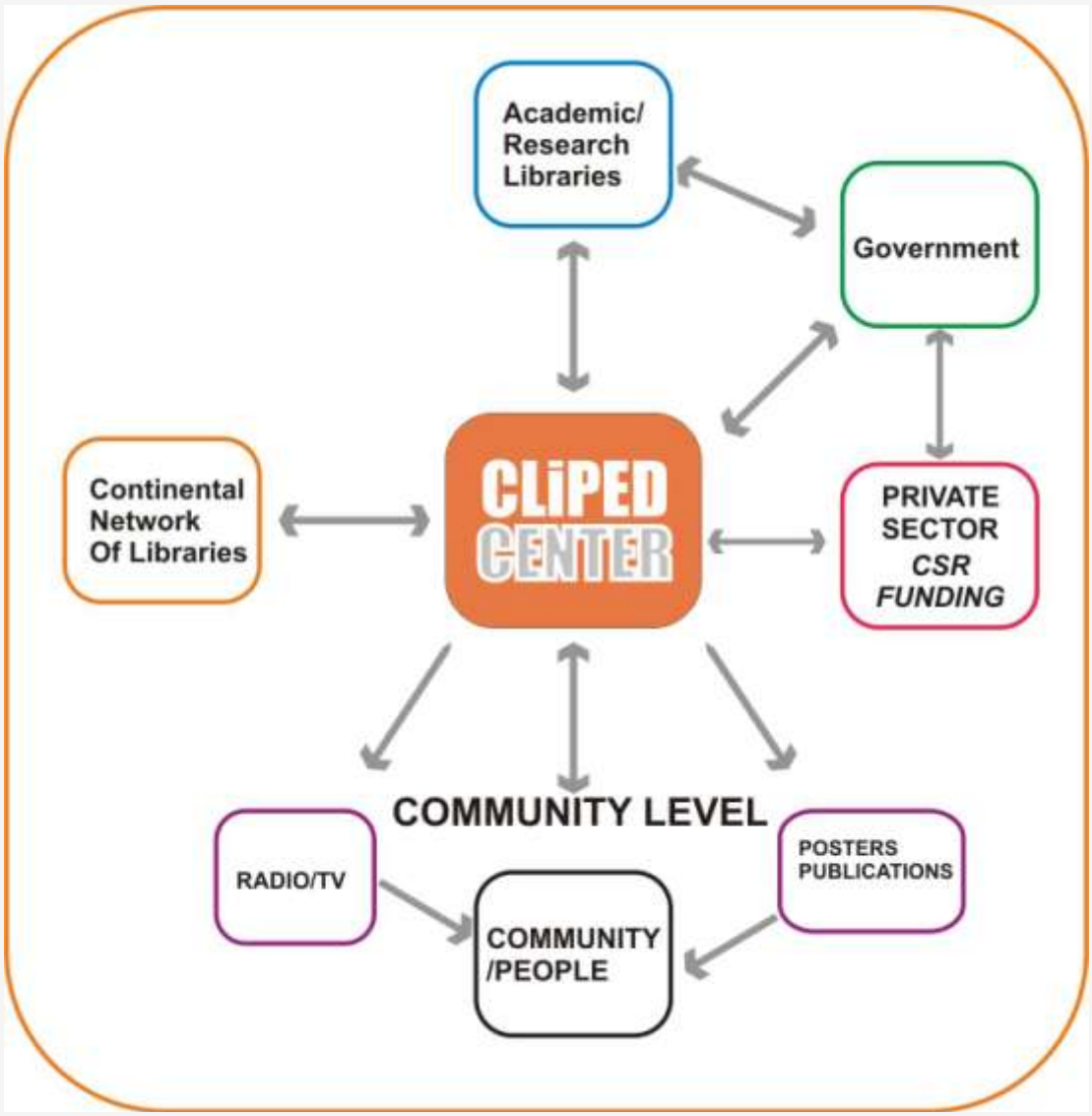

FIGURE 3. CLiPED CENTER --- INTARACTIVE & INFORMATION FLOW MODEL

Conclusion

"*We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.*" Albert Einstein.

Through collaboration, innovation, technology and political will, the library could play an important role in the resolution of conflicts and promotion of peace for the establishment of a stable democracy, and a peaceful Africa.

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