



# Libraries Role in Information Services for Conflict Resolution and True Democracy in Nigeria

**Innocent Chima Mmejim<sup>i</sup>**

Department of Library and Information Science  
Faculty of Education  
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education  
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria  
[profinno97@gmail.com](mailto:profinno97@gmail.com)

**Bassey Onyemaechi Umahi<sup>ii</sup>**

Jesuit Memorial College Library  
Mbodo, Aluu, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria  
[umahigov@gmail.com](mailto:umahigov@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

Promoting national unity, peace and the fostering of true governance, and stability that ensures that the living standards of the people are high, creativity, and intellectual development are fostered, human rights are respected, leaders are responsible, and accountable, poverty and inequality are significantly reduced, and there is freedom from fear and oppression is one of the cardinal goal of libraries. This is why the government of an developing or even developed country should not undermine the relevance of libraries in conflict resolution and true democracy. It is in the light of this that this paper discussed the roles of libraries in enshrining peace that will position the country for true governance. This new era is associated with modern sophisticated tools which have given libraries a new dynamic role in bridging the gap in order to function and serve in the information service services system in order to resolve conflicts and serve in ensuring true governance in better ways than hitherto. Libraries have great role to play in conflict resolution and true democracy. They provide a link through which people achieve free access to information and diverse knowledge and also serve as a link in developing and creating a lasting and co-existent society. The paper equally enumerated some roles of libraries towards conflict resolution and true democracy, and also the need situating libraries and involvement in good governance. It is therefore the position of this paper that library management must sit up to their responsibility of information services and it must bridge the gap between the government and the governed, if peace must prevail and true democracy.

**Keywords:** Libraries, Information Services, Conflict, Conflict Resolution, True Democracy.

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of libraries is changing, and with it, her information services are changing as well. Being a place for knowledge creation and sharing, libraries anywhere in the world are major providers of information services of diverse kinds. Issa (2010) affirm that libraries today have shunned the mantle of being mere repositories of books and other print materials. The changes in technology using electronically stored and retrieved information has changed the way patrons and students are able to access, retrieve and use information. However, the emphasis should be placed on assemblage and disseminating information services outside its wall, even as clients still anchored on it for prompt and up-to-date information. Information is a conveyor, conflict resolution, a reinforcement of ideas and opinions, an enhancer and pace-setter. Rendering such services by libraries will create and foster a meaningful social awareness, cohesion and integration of reliable and stable democratic system. Hence, dynamic and quality information and its services is the growing demands in the present set of the society. Dike (2010), assert that the position of nations power and influence increasingly depend on their access to and ability to use information. As libraries have the capacity and inherent function of providing multiple access points to electronic print information and information services.

Information services encompass services through which librarians directly supply users with information but also interfaces created by librarians through which users could independently find needed information. Despite the location such services are built on information resource selection (both print and non-print), acquisition, organization, dissemination among others. Thus, a knowledge based society, open access to information services conveys the idea of sharing and promoting knowledge without boundaries. Jadranka and Papic (2012) confirmed that information services should be offered in regards to users need which should be built on two main categories; assurance of information needed by users and awareness of users about available information resources and ability to find the information appropriate to given needs by themselves. Furthermore, they encompass services through which libraries and librarians directly supply users with information but also interfaces created by librarians through whom users could independently find needed information, (i.e. reference, browsing & searching service).

However, one factor that has been found common in a conflict resolution situation is the absence of the right information. Accurate and reliable information plays a very important role in rumors control and can wedge mis-information carriers. Thus, information dissemination should be accurate, timely, reliable and relevant to the needs of the people. Conflict and peace are based on deficiency of information, stressing that cases of misinformation, wrong information or missing information enhance disparity in opinions and social and political differences which may lead to, as well as heightens conflicts.

Obegi and Nyamboga (2008) viewed conflict as having structural causes, proximate causes and negative trigger which are evident in the presence of pervasive public policies and structures, inadequate security measures and unsatisfactory state of economy in the society. Human society is made up of people with information interest and information disposition, thus, the will of choice of which information you may wish to access and acquire has caused disparities in choices, associations and parties, which its negativity has resulted in loss of many lives and properties worth millions of naira. Notably, Ndagama and Ogun-ombi (2006) pointed out that in resolution of conflict, libraries create opportunities for her citizenry to be employed especially in restive communities which in turn is a background for national security. Thus, a permanent way of resolving conflict should make use of negotiation, arbitration, information reliability and

sharing. Also, a process of attempting to find solution to or settle a dispute entails greater resolution (Wikipedia, 2005). In as much as conflict can always occur in a society, peace, stability and flow of information is needed. Information must be used effectively to accomplish a specific purpose and the wide understanding of economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and its access should be a concern for stability and true democracy.

A true democracy ‘presupposes’ and informed citizenry, ‘presuppose’ means to require as a ‘precondition’. Therefore, an informed citizenry is a ‘prerequisite’ for democracy. As information is the lifeblood of democracy so the library is the ultimate democratic institution. According to Nnoli (2003) Democracy as a form of government entails the freedom of the individual in much respects-political freedom, equality among citizens, justice in the relations between the people and the government and the participation of the people in choosing those in government. Stressing this ‘freedom’ further, Jemo (2008) states that citizens in an ideal and true democracy are entitled to equal protection of their persons, possessions and rights, equal rights for political participation, freedom from undue interference and domination by government. Freedom within the ambit of the law is to belief or expression of views, to associate, to work and live where you choose, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, of worship and religion.

Political freedom and participation implies that they will be free to choose their representatives (electoral choice) in a process characterized by free and fair elections and the electorate can question government decisions through their elected representatives (rights) in parliament without fear of intimidation (Nwafor & Ilorah, 2015). Among which its characteristics include: free and fair elections, majority and minority rule recognition, constitutional recognition and governance, party system and adherence to its structure, information freedom and undue government interference. For democracy to evolve good governance, Linz and Stepan (1999) suggest five inter-related conditions that must exist which include: the rule of law to guarantee citizens’ freedom and independent associational life, functional state bureaucracy which can be used by the democratic government to deliver public good, free and lively civil society, a relatively autonomous and valued political society and an institutionalized economic society.

Unarguably democratic institutions in Nigeria are very fragile and are often unable to protect and promote sustainable democracy. Fragrant disrespect for and disobedience to the constitution has become a feature that is conspicuous in Nigerian democratic experience coupled with weak or lack of political will and judicial system; poverty and ignorance; corruption; citizenship; settlers/ strangers crisis; political violence; absence of internal democracy in political parties; political intolerance and winner-takes will syndrome; inexistent deep-rooted ideology in political parties among others. However one believes that some these conflicts in governance would be reduced if there is a stimulus that regulates uncertainty and denotes the knowledge communicated which in turn will help society to understand the realities of conflict resolution.

Though information can be gotten anywhere but the library through her community service, selection of information dissemination and information documentation of the act of resolving conflict can offer a positive information thought. Vogel (2011) argued that ‘as a man’s desire for information increases, he becomes decent in his conduct and language, he becomes sober and discreet, while he rises, the uniformed man sinks. This implies that libraries have an important role in ensuring that all sections of society are brought into the democratic process since it offers equality of access to information- an important ingredient in the democratic decision making process. Perhaps the knowledge of the valuable roles of libraries in information services for conflict resolution and good governance should be seen as a prompt need for

attention. Hence, these and many other questions keep re-occurring. What exactly is the role of libraries in conflict resolution and good governance? How can libraries be more involved in good governance?

### **Understanding the Libraries and Conflict Resolution**

Conflict resolution is the name of a body of knowledge which has been developed to deal with conflict in the world and the workforce. Inger (1991) assert that conflict in the world is a constructive approach to interpersonal and intergroup conflicts that help people with opposing positions which work together to arrive at mutually acceptable compromise situations. Thus, conflict resolution includes post-conflict activities such as reconciliation, reinsertion, re-integration, and rehabilitation of ex-combatants and war-affected persons, plus the design and implementation of early warning systems. However, conflicts are unfortunately a constant phenomenon in the world. In the same vein Obachi (2008) explained that 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 its causes. Hence, resolution is a collaborative problem-solving, co-operative taking together process that leads to choosing a plan of action that both of the parties can feel good about (Heither, 2011).

Importantly, they are two basic approaches to resolving conflict. Firstly, to allow the disputants to work together to solve their own problem (This can be as simple as the two sides agreeing to compromise or finding a creative alternative solution together). Secondly, to bring a third party to help the disputants reach a resolution (This can entail mediation, arbitration, or in some cases relationship therapy. Despite the aforementioned, all encouraging active listening, co-operation, acceptance of difference and creative problem-solving. The ideal is to have the disputants being able to summarize the view of the other party and to be empathic to them. This certainly proper resolution. Unarguably libraries are fore-front and brain-box behind lasting ensuring peace and absence of conflicts.

Libraries are part of the community. They are more than four walls, store houses and shelves of books. A bridge between diverse information resources and her clientele, an assemblage of man's thought in print and hidden treasures of peace, stability and unity, where individual trust, confidence and growth are re-shaped. To Zickuhur, Rainie and Purcell (2013), library is a place where community building connections are happening. Hence, it has made inevitably present in all sectors. Tinuade and Fadekemi (2015) affirm that conflict resolution performs a healing function in the society, of which he believes that library can be instrumental as an exclusive preserve for everyone. Thus, the enlisted the following services rendered by libraries in conflict resolution as:

- Public enlightenment or rights in the society, understanding social values and expected conduct in public life.
- Assisting to adjust to existing social, political, spiritual and economic activities of the society.
- To cultivate and maintain reading culture and promotion of good literature.
- Facilitating free-flow of relevant and up-to-date information.

However, the purposes of libraries have been changing over times, of which it's becoming more faceted and multifarious. Been a knowledge based institution, which has defy the definition of a

store house, book center or keepers of books, but have become a major player/ front bearer of educational, social, economic, political and religious transformer gearing towards peace stability and enshrining self-growth and societal/National unity. By preserving knowledge libraries ensure that the records in her custody are preserved firmly, in a reliable form and made available for present and later use. In support of the above, Onwubiko and Uzoigwe (2004) affirm that the library is an information center that is located in an organization, institute, agency, industry, government agencies, societies, communities and Nation, etc. to satisfy the information needs of the individual client and the realization of the broad goals and objectives of the parent organization/country. Hence, libraries provide insight into how to satisfy patrons' needs and preserve information for Analog and Digital places. Lichertman (2011) assert that the school of information is trying the next generation who can be fully expert in information usage. Thus, the library is key to such aspects:

- Serve as a knowledge sharing center and serves as practical role in sharing expensive information.
- Libraries also provide the services of librarians who are expert at finding and organizing information and interpret information needs.
- Libraries help to connect with the researcher, thereby enhancing the values of library services.
- Libraries serve social and intellectual role in bringing together people and ideas, thus allowing people with different perspective to interact in a knowledge space that is both larger and more general than that shared by shared individual or discipline or group.
- Libraries promote learning as exploration and self-development.
- Libraries provide a social wide programme that addresses information literacy.
- Libraries are knowledge center that is dynamic, the librarian, the books and users engage exchange in an interchange of ideas.
- Libraries are a physical manifestation of the value of an entity.
- Libraries serve cultural role in preserving personal, organization and a nation's memories.
- Libraries are bridge builder to National security, and promotion of a nations unity in diversity.

In order to continue to remain relevant and valuable libraries must strive to provide the right amount of information to the right clientele at the right time with a right expense of financial /human resources, and library operational efficiency in order to meet the challenge (conflict resolution). Essentially, libraries are equipped to work as conflict resolution agent and in such capacity create true governance and stability of reliability in all sectors. Thus, it is only through this process that libraries of all kinds can stand the heat and wave of the present, as they are known as one of the places where lifelong learning abilities could be developed

### **The Role of Libraries in Conflict Resolution and Good Governance**

In modern societies', libraries are a place where individual access information and ideas. As such they bring about moral as well as peace and social order because they are organized through institutions. The central mission of a library is to collect, organize, preserve and provide access to knowledge and information (Edoka, 2000). In fulfilling this mission, libraries preserve a

valuable record of culture that can be passed down to succeeding generations. Libraries are essential link in the communication between the past, present and future. This is because libraries represent a structure that house a collection of services and resources and sometimes alludes to an alternative meaning of an aggregation of useful material, published, or audio-visual content that serves a common use (Kalu and Ndulaka, 2018). With Nigerian elections around the corner, libraries of diverse kind need to have the reliable and proven information for the society and also stand as a bridge between the electorate, electoral body and political parties on conflict matters and governance, that stem up during and after election. Hence, community of users will see the library as a repository of knowledge that fill the information gap of her citizenry.

The role of libraries in information provision on conflict resolution and true governance makes them an institution of relevance. Hence, libraries are structured in such a way as to provide free and unrestricted access to information sources, and information services to her community of users. The users in her quest for knowledge update on happenings around the globe (local, national and international) can only be attained to by libraries. Library can work with non-governmental organizations to organize out-reach programmes for distribution of information materials, delivering of lectures, and talks which would stimulate discussion among groups and help them to promote embrace simple steps to promote peace, resolve conflicts and ensure true democracy. These resources include: periodicals (newspapers, journals, magazines), cultural literature (dealing with peace, governance and democracy), audio-visual materials, internet resources, academic, political and other relevant books, amongst others aiming at true democracy and peace related.

The library is and always has been the information crossroads of the community of users, where real information are preserved by information professionals (librarians) to help community of users evaluate the validity and reliability of diverse information. The focus of such role aimed at increasing movement towards:

- What the library does over what the library has.
- An emphasis on information and information services in both print and non-print formats.
- The library been a place of genuine knowledge growth.
- Broadening literacy and learning goals beyond mere reading.
- Greater initiation in peace advocacy and involvement in service design, resolution and delivery.
- Increased outreach and collaboration with non-library agencies.

Thus, it is obligatory that the citizens are well informed of their rights, obligations and privileges so as to maximize and maintain peace, settle conflict amicably and participate in facilitating true democracy. Omekwu (2003) opined that information reduces uncertainty, while improving the accuracy of decision. Our democratic way of life depends upon an informed electorate. Hence, the vigilance and activism of those concerned with protecting democratic values and promoting free expression is more important than ever if Nigerian deals are embedded in the constitution are to remain strong in the digital/information ages. As libraries tend to fill the gap, its democratic mission believed in and raises high so as to fight for information access and equity for all. Otherwise, we will endanger our most precious rights in a democratic society (the rights of free speech, information inquiry and self-governance. Hence, libraries are determined to play a leading information role in helping the citizenry bridge the called ‘information gap’. Now helping bridge the electoral divide is a great use of invaluable role of libraries.

It is obvious that what has been the core of democratic discussion, dialogue and open meetings has disappeared. And what has replaced all this? It seems the media. Today, contacting the media seems to be a better way of making your voice heard than talking directly to an association or a public authority. Thus, the important encounter between human beings has vanished. This is a threat to true democracy since many have the opportunity to be heard in the media. If people think they cannot be heard and that no one pays attention to their opinions, public dialogue ceases to exist and confidence in democracy declines. However, information freedom leads to freedom of speech which is the cornerstone of democracy. Democracy is based on public opinion and expression. Hence, public office holders (i.e. politicians) should encourage freedom of opinion and expression; they should seek opportunities and arena for this in the society. Libraries are such places, but they seem to be forgotten in the debates and the discussion about reclaiming democracy. Libraries provide services needed by society for all to participate in an equitable manner. Furthermore, libraries can help the citizenry to:

- Access information about the laws that protect and govern them for free;
- Realize the right of access to public information;
- Enhance the development of structured, user-friendly portals for government documents and data;
- Support civic participation; and
- Increase the availability of information about governmental activities.

Therefore, sustaining the peace depends on restoring true governance and building trust through information access and delivery among people in society who had been dissatisfied with or excluded from participation in political and administrative processes, and doing so in a way that reflects the values and interest of all groups in society. Hence, libraries can be used in a myriad of ways; as a place of research, study, conversation, recreation, shelter, safety and countless other possibilities which are dependent on the imagination and actions of the patrons and staff of the library and on the trust that is assumed between the library and its patrons. However, libraries also enhance the activities of their users by facilitating growth in their information assemblage and retrieval. Jimoh and Onalopo (2015) opined that the public libraries can play a large role in economic development by providing resources for existing business and for potential business strategy (these resources should be seen as a source of value-added information that is got in time and accurately).

Also, adequate information enables policy makers to formulate policies that will be compatible with needs of the citizenry and subsequently assist them to make decisions that will benefit the people. These researches furnish individuals, corporate bodies and the government of the happenings and reliable ways of solving societal problems, among others. This account for the reason why research institutes have libraries attached to them (i.e. special libraries), of which Edoka (2000) supports that the special library is maintained by its parent body and it provides information resources and services which are of direct relevance to the interest and activities of that body. However in bid to help create a peaceful and sustainable society, analyzing, organizing and managing information and data will increase positive atmosphere, co-existing environment, and harmonious, and bid as agents of promotion of communal peace ,reconciliation and true governance.

## Nature of Libraries Involvement in Good Governance

Good governance according to the World Bank (1992), cited in Jimoh and Onalopa (2015), is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development, which reflects true democracy. Good governance ensures that the living standards of the people are high, creativity and intellectual development are fostered, human rights are respected, leaders are responsible and accountable, and inequality are significantly reduced, and there is freedom from fear and oppression. Although, good governance still remains an elusive reality in most African countries, particularly Nigeria.

Libraries as store house of knowledge, bridges the gap between knowledge and ignorance. Hence, the link between libraries and democracy has been noted at various times from a variety of sources since the second half of the nineteenth century. Typically, libraries are presented both as a necessity for any country that wishes to be an effective engine of democracy and, to a lesser extent, as a doorway to the right of every citizen to cultural and intellectual development. Also, because of her educative function, libraries are consistently understood as being instrumentally valuable to democracy. Education can be obtained in formal, semi-formal and informal settings. There is need to augment the knowledge acquired through any of these forms by using the library. This is necessary because education and libraries cannot be separated. Libraries, especially, public libraries cater for the educational needs of the general public (Jimoh and Onalopa, 2015). For instance, the public library which mission is to facilitate access to information and resources in a variety of medium to its community serve as a veritable instrument in this respect. Its objective involvement for Africa as stated by the UNESCO seminar of 1953 on public library development (Cited by Agbodike, 1992 in Nwafor & Ilorah, 2015):

- To support and reinforce programmes for adult and fundamental education;
- To provide effective services for children, the aged and young people, including requisite services;
- To provide needed information and reference services;
- To promote and stimulate reading for pleasure and recreation; and
- To provide, whenever needed language groups in order to ensure availability of resources on equal terms to all members of the community.

Corroborating this assertion, Osuigwe et al. (2012) stated that it is a vital part of the civilized society. Hence, libraries among other institutions, like the media, the judiciary have defended access to all kinds of information; ensure intellectual freedom for true democracy/governance to thrive. They also provide information for cultural awareness and social integration and educational needs of the general public. Jemo (2008) stated that public libraries are seen as institutions through which government provide free educational and social services to the people. In the same vein, organizations, government parastatals and research institutions among other agencies cannot perform effectively without the existence of a functional library. These clearly streamline the essence why these agencies have libraries attached to them. These libraries are known as the special libraries. They have specific set of characteristics because many types are included, such as news libraries, law libraries, libraries for the blind and deaf, museums, archives, corporate libraries and non-profit organization libraries, of which it owners may either



be governments and their departments, non-governmental agencies, commercial firms and news agencies furthermore, Poll (2007) affirmed that libraries involvement in true democracy is based:

- A collection that is tailored to suit the needs of the clientele;
- Collections and services that consider current needs more than possess future needs;
- The speed and accuracy of reference services;
- Proactive delivery of relevant information to users. Customized user services (personal profiles, alerting services, selective dissemination of information);
- Efficient background services;
- Cost efficiency of services.

Notably, all form of libraries have active participation in fostering good governance in the society and community at large by enabling the individual to obtain spiritual, inspirational, recreational and political activity through reading, and therefore the opportunity of interacting with the society wealth and accumulated knowledge. Furthermore, they create a link in establishing democratic societies which is engendered by the provision of reading materials, promotion campaign for adults and children. Others include, storytelling hours, use of films and videos are ways of sustaining reading and information literacy skills required for lifelong education by the citizenry (Jemo, 2008) the library involvement clearly displays a phenomenon of reliability and aim at improving the reading culture of the citizens, creating a crop of people who are willing to partake in democratic process empowered to overcome poverty, informed of their rights and poised to partake in decision making and able to learn new skills to enhance their livelihood. Hence, libraries involvement and her service are pivotal to good governance in Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION**

The modern development libraries do engage with their communities to ensure service delivery priorities, which is vital that these conversations not only include but are focused on the next generation. Thus, in order to protect societies against ignorance, disasters, chaos, and conflicts, libraries should be recognized as essential builders of global information providers, educators and knowledge managers. However to adequately address instability and conflict issues, libraries stand point on her roles must be given prompt attention and by following the conflict resolution mechanisms, conflicts will be solved easily. With libraries position as information builders, they pave for lasting peace, stability and helping the society in understanding the essence of unity and peaceful co-existence, thereby creating linkage in all sectors. Hence, understanding the strategies of policy framework, conflict management, educating the members of the community as well as improving library service systems, which will gear towards supporting government libraries and ensuring that they are properly integrated into the work of ministries, to make contribute towards a better informed policy-making and true democracy and it depicts prompt information services, thus conflict resolution and true democracy will be achieved.

## **Recommendation**

The following are recommended:

- The Nigeria librarian association (NLA), in collaboration with librarians' registration council of Nigeria (LRCN) should facilitate the development of policies containing roles of libraries in conflict resolution.
- Libraries should re-claim her information service role, as they should be at the fore-front of propagating peace related campaign and awareness.
- Libraries should improve her social support and social services by focusing on the reduction of social exclusion in communities.
- Libraries should be made to be proactive, resourceful and innovative in delivering information service to users.
- The library should explore the use of printing and pasting posters in public places to sensitize the public to the disastrous effects of conflict and its impediment to true democracy.
- Libraries should re-design a blue print for self-consciousness and re-orientation of citizens on issues pertaining to governance/democracy.
- Libraries should be made to facilitate literacy, reflection on the ideas of the humanities and the ability to find and evaluate information in an information society among the needs of the people.

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<sup>i</sup> **Dr. Innocent Chima** Mmejim is a lecturer in the Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Education Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. He can be reached via email at [profinno97@gmail.com](mailto:profinno97@gmail.com)

<sup>ii</sup> **Bassey Onyemaechi Umahi** is of the Jesuit Memorial College Library, Mbodo, Aluu, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. He can be reached via email at [umahigov@gmail.com](mailto:umahigov@gmail.com).