Conflicts Resolutions: The Role of Women Librarians in Collaboration with Women NGOs in Nigeria

H.C. Pisagih\(^1\), Rhoda Y. Degri\(^2\), Madalla Ajemasu\(^3\), Abdulazis Sule Muhammad\(^4\)

\(^1\)Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, Nigeria
\(^2\)Muhammadu Wabi Library, Federal Polytechnic Library, Bauchi, Bauchi State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

There has been the proliferation of women associations and organizations in Nigeria, these Associations and Organizations perform various functions towards solving socio-economic and political challenges faced by the country, Nigeria. This paper discusses the emerging roles of women Librarians and women NGOs in providing information for peace building activities during and after elections in Nigeria, Ways to Improve Women’s Involvement in Peace and Conflict Resolutions. It further suggests among other things that, if women in Nigeria are given the enabling environment and funds, they can provide humanitarian aid and empowerment refugees and displaced persons to rehabilitate them for proper integration in the society.

**Keywords:** Conflicts; Conflict resolutions; Librarians; NGOs

1. INTRODUCTION

Information is power says Aguolu&Aguolu (2002) and its dissemination is vital in prevention of conflicts, it is also important in conflicts, and during post conflict situations. Accurate information plays a very important role in rumors control and can correct
misinformation, simply disseminated should be able to rebut misinformation. Information disseminated should be accurate, timely, and relevant to the needs of the people.

No establishment be it the public or private sector of the economy can function effectively without information. Information is a conveyor, a change agent, a reinforcement of ideas and opinions. Its availability in the society fosters meaningful social awareness cohesion and integration for more productive public life. Similarly, Dike (2010), maintained that the position of nation’s power and influence increasingly depend on their access to and ability to use information. A nation’s development is hinged on the progress and productivity of the citizenry.

Thus, it is mandatory that the citizens of a nation are well informed of their rights, obligations and privileges so as to maintain peace and settle disputes amicably. To be able to judge a country whether it is a first, second, third or fourth world depends on how that country emphasizes the use of information. Nations that have access to information and are informative have the most economic political power and prestige. Omekwu (2003), opines that information reduces uncertainty, while improving the accuracy of decision. Its absence means policy mistakes, educational disputes, slower productivity growth which affects the quantity of success and effectiveness of public policy. Lack of information and unclear information hinder development and agitate violence especially in relatively new democratic governments such as the case in Nigeria.

The traditional perception of women and men and of the relations between them is beginning to occupy the center stage. Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

An appraisal of Nigeria’s political history validates the persistence of conflict, with statistics revealing that women and children make up close to 80% of the victims of these conflicts. Despite the fact that women have played traditional roles in resolving conflict within their families, social groups and immediate environment they are rarely consulted or included in formal peace building processes initiated to address these myriad of conflicts. Women contributions to peace building have gone largely underutilized because many men assumed that women lack appropriate skills for peace interventions and are not well informed about conflicts to fully engage with men at negotiating tables.

Pre-conflict peace building interventions aim to prevent the start of violent conflict. These strategies involve a variety of actors and sectors in order to transform the conflict. Even though, the definition of peace building includes pre-conflict interventions; in practice most peace building interventions are post-conflict. However, many peace building scholars advocated an increased focus on pre-conflict peace building in the future. In terms of conflict resolution, it takes two or more persons to agree and resolve whatever misunderstanding that could bridge the peace of a community or a nation. Human society is made up of people with diverse interest and dispositions, thus, the will of choice of which political party you may wish to associate with. In our society today, difference in political associations has caused the loss of many lives and properties worth millions of naira. These war turned zones most times affect mainly women and children as their men go all out to face their opponents. Hence, these questions keep re-occurring.
What is exactly the role of women in conflict resolution and peace building? How can we involve women more in peace building processes? What can be done to enhance women’s role in contributing to peace processes?

2. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT AND PEACE RESOLUTION

In Nigeria, women in an effort to participate in conflict and peace resolution, organized interfaith activities in Kaduna. One of their activities includes interfaith dialogue. Also, a book about conflict and peace resolution was launched in July 5th 2011 at the Women’s Multipurpose Centre, Kaduna. This is because women realize the importance of their participation in peace building in their country. Other activities includes joint press conference and visits to the camps of displaced people in different towns in the state. After successfully implementing the some of these activities they organized a sensitization seminar which was attended by policy makers and representatives of various civil society organizations in the state and beyond. The main focus of the seminar was to bring to limelight the “Role of Women in Peace Building”.

Reasons why women should be involved in peace building is because they have unique understanding of community needs. For instance, sometime back, Nigerian women in Maiduguri matched out on the 17th demanding the release of their husbands who were detained because of Boko Haram issues. Women in their homes have the political will to stop their husbands and sons in participating in conflicts. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Bauchi state integrate peace and conflict resolution in their activities with women groups in order to educate them on the need to be up-and—doing in the pursuit of peace in their communities.

Women can therefore help trace the root causes of conflicts. Peace building as presented by Maiese (2003) “is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effect of conflict through reconciliation, institution building and political as well as economic transformation.

Women in Nigeria have as far back as 1920s been involved in solving crises in their home towns. Such include the Aba women’s war of 1929, the Egba women’s movement of the early 1920 to the 1950, the Ogharefe Women Uprising of 1984 and many others in 1990 and beyond. These are situations when Nigerian Women mobilized and exercised their collective power to resolve conflict and build peace. Idris and Habu (2012), noted that these women commanded important position in conflict resolution and rituals and it is argued that if given the chance they can do the same to the greater glory of peace and tranquility in our modern society. Consequently, Nigerian women are resources of peace building and conflict resolution in the country today, their roles as in peace building and conflict resolution cannot be overemphasized.

Conflict resolution has to do with settlement of conflict that may have already taken shape. This can be by reconciliation or alienation. Conflicts should be resolved before they get to the destruction phase. Conflict resolution performs healing functions in societies. Women who are always at the receiving end should therefore be involved in this process to help bring healing in their homes and to avoid reoccurrence in future. Peters (2006) opines that conflict management is how to control or manage an existing conflict so that it does not escalate, thereby leading to chaos, crisis and war.
However, conflict management is different from peace building, which aims to prevent conflicts from even arising in the first place by engaging individuals, groups, parties and stakeholders in processes that enhance peaceful co-existence outside conflict situations, which women groups are stakeholders.

Women in indigenous societies have traditional peace making and peace building roles as they are involved in mediating and preventing conflicts within and between societies. Women’s peace agency in these societies are reinforced by perceptions which stereotype women as natural peace makers, as being more specific than men and often symbolized as paragons of morality, sacredness, goodness and tenderness. Thus in most indigenous societies, virtues of patience, tolerance, humility and subtle persuasiveness were seen as essentially female attributes which were reinforced through socialization patterns that promote women primarily as child-bearers good wives, care givers, arbitrators of conflict and peace promoters in the family and community (UNESCO 2003). In the same vein, Ntahobari and Ndayiziga (2003) said in traditional Burundian society, women were considered to be bridge-builders and symbols of unity between different families, class, communities and ethnic groups through the institution of marriage. Awe (1977) states that women were expected to embody such virtues as compassion, patience, discretion, gentleness, modesty and self-control which though they were considered inherent in womanhood required reinforcement through upbringing, so that women could fulfill their role as peacemakers. Women have some moral authority that can be used to mediate in disagreements between men by advising their husbands to toe the line of peace, knowing that the consequences of violent conflict would especially be borne by them (the women). Women can however disseminate information to indigenous people during conflicts. Most conflicts are caused by lack of credible information and as such leads to communication breakdown, confusion, suspicion and even conflicts.

Conflict resolution is a range of processes aimed at alleviating or eliminating sources of conflict. The term “conflict resolution” can be used interchangeably with “dispute resolution”. This process of conflict resolution can include but not limited to negotiation, mediation and diplomacy. Women librarians in their various state of engagement can be tools of change as they employ the tools of using information to bring about peace in Nigeria. As individuals of a group, they will look for ways to resolve thorny issues to make life easier and more tolerable.

Conflict resolution will provide a healing function in communities and societies. As women librarians, they can be mediators in negotiating and changing the focus away from the event of the past into the reality of the present and towards the needs of the future. Peace is the presence of justice and not the absence of war. It is therefore truism that peace is not just the absence of war but prevention is more effective than resolution. Bature (2014) women are always the main victims of conflicts, they are often powerless to prevent conflicts, excluded from the negotiations when it comes to their resolution and confined to a marginal role in the post conflict reconstruction and conciliation efforts. The general exclusion of women from decision-making positions prior to during and following violent conflicts reinforces their victimization. Women can play an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and appreciate the positive contribution women can make in post-conflict reconstruction and peace consolidation. Empowering women in conflict situations would keep help prevent gender-based violence such as the abominable crime of rape, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery and others.

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Women NGOs in the states who are into programmes with women groups need to integrate their programmes with information packages that will help these women know the bases of conflict resolutions. Being women themselves they are the right people who can understand the needs of these women better.

3. THE ROLE OF WOMEN LIBRARIANS IN SUSTAINING PEACE EFFORTS

Librarians are custodians of information resources, so they are the right people to help the women NGOs on the type of information to disseminate to these women groups. With Nigerian elections around the corner, women groups need to have the correct information for their voting rights and the post-election violence that normally follow during/after elections.

The role of women librarians in providing materials on peace and conflict resolution makes them as agents of promoting communal peace and reconciliation. The users in looking for update on happenings will like to read books, journals articles and surf the net. These women groups may not have the knowledge or skills to seek information some of them may not be educated enough to go seeking for informational sources. The women librarian’s duty here is to interpret these information sources in simple language that can be understood by these women groups. In collaboration with the women NGOs they can be part of the programmes of these women groups where they will educate them on issues at hand.

Librarians are peaceful people and are interested in ensuring peace at all times. Library budgets suffer in the wake of violence because monies meant for library development are diverted to fighting wars and managing crisis and tagged as “security vote”. Thus Bukky (2005) opined that librarians should see war not as a controversial question into which they do not want to dabble but rather as a question of fundamental ethics. Worthy of note is the role that the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) has been in the forefront advocating for world peace by facilitating seminars and workshops. IFLA has also been advocating the bridging of the digital divide, thus calling on governments to address the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor countries. IFLA has therefore been a vanguard of free access to information. Thus, this cause can be fully advanced by women librarians. Hence, the need for them (women librarians) to work hand in hand with NGOs in provision of vital information to these women groups.

Women librarians can coordinate and collect the vast information being generated by Research Institutions, Universities, NGOs, Faith Based Organization (FBOs) and the civil society especially on women issues. Women librarians ought to disseminate this information to all women all over the country; it is even much easier that there are women groups that they can contact much easily.

Women librarian can act as focal body in organizing peace marches, distribute posters slogans on the need to end the insurgency, strikes, armed robbery, stop violence against women, young men used as thugs to cause destruction during/after elections. A lead could be taken from American Women Group call “Librarians” for peace that lobbies against armed conflict using the internet. Here in Nigeria, because of the level of illiteracy can be innovative using our traditional ways of doing things to achieve similar objectives. Hold rallies, talks, seminars to appeal to youths to drop their arms and embrace peace. Observing what is happening in the North-Eastern states of Nigeria, through the media we see that approximately 80% of refugees and internally displaced people are women and children.
Unless we women rise to salvage our course, we will continue to suffer, that is the reason why women librarians should help their fellow women folk in minimizing violence.

4. COMMUNITY LIBRARY, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Women librarians can introduce what could be a centre where issues on peace and development could be discussed at a Community Development Centre where they design to disseminate critical information, messages and knowledge that make us to have a clear understanding of situations and differences for the purposes of resolving conflicts and promoting peace. The idea is that it will be a collaborative effort between stakeholders like academic institutions, government and private sector libraries, also NGOs, media houses etc. This centre’s services can complement that of the public libraries because of shortage of funds. It will be a good example of Private Public Partnership (PPP) in delivery of information to the public.

In conclusion as women librarians we should be able to sell our services through contributing to information dissemination by joining in the fight against violence by making our library services relevant to all strata of the society both young and old, men and women, most especially the women folk. We must promote literacy by promoting reading habit as a tool of international understanding and a fundamental precondition to peace, human rights, literacy, intellectual freedom and a better environment for people. Since most conflicts are caused by lack of credible information and as such leads to communication breakdown, confusion, suspicion and even conflicts. It is therefore important that women librarians disseminate information to fellow women during conflicts.

Women librarians as custodians of information should therefore get involved with NGOs dealing with women groups in delivering peace messages and methods of solving problems through seminars, talks, peaceful protest to help their fellow women in passing the message of peace to their families.

5. WAYS TO IMPROVE WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS

Based on the above questions, in the year 2000 the United Nations Security Council approved “Resolution 1325” on Women, Peace and Security. It was the first time that this institution had discussed this issue and approved a document dedicated entirely to the link that exists between armed, conflict, peace building and the gender dimension. Resolution ‘1325’ refers to two important issues. On one hand, it acknowledges the specific gender impact of armed conflicts on women and young girls. On the other hand, it alludes to the role women and young girls can play in peace building, understood in its broadest sense. Some of the resolution ‘1325’ includes:

(i) Urges the United Nations Secretary General and member states to guarantee on increase in the representation of women in all spheres of peace building, including the prevention management and resolution of conflict;
(ii) Expresses the will of the Security Council to incorporate the gender perspective into peacekeeping operations;
(iii) Request that states be provided with training materials for increase in the provision of resources for such training;
(iv) Call on all actors involved in peace negotiations to include the gender perspective in peace agreements;
(v) Encourages consideration of the need of women and dependent persons in the processes of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration;
(vi) That UN security Council mission bear in mind the gender dimension and engage in dialogue with local and international women groups and
(vii) The Secretary General carryout a study and report on the impact of conflicts on women and the role of women in peace building.

6. CONCLUSION

Nigeria has witnessed a number of crises during and after elections which have retired peaceful coexistence and development. One of the ways out of this mess is the provision of adequate and accurate information as it is vital in prevention of conflicts, it is also important in conflicts, and during post conflict situations. Accurate information plays a very important role in rumors control and can correct misinformation, simply disseminated should be able to rebut misinformation. Librarians are custodians of information resources, so they are the right people to help the women NGOs on the type of information to disseminate to the general public in other to achieve peace and tranquility.

Recommendations

1. The government should create an enabling environment for women NGOs to function maximally. NGOs should not be seen by government as competitors but rather as partners in development.
2. NGOs usually complain of lack of funds to carry out projects and programmes; donor agencies and international development partners should scale up sponsorships to NGOs so that they would in turn work with the communities and groups affected by conflicts to restore peace.
3. Information disseminated by women Librarians and NGO should be accurate, timely, and relevant to the needs of the people.
4. There should be more enlightenment programmes on the need for peace and security in order to bring about accelerated development in the country.
5. More education opportunity should be provided for women.
6. Training of women in effective judgment and reflective thinking should be among the fundamental objectives in the country.
7. Peace education and character education should be integrated into the school system of our country because they are essential to promoting character virtues such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, patriotism, punctuality etc.
References


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