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Women and Conflict in the New Information Age:
Virtual Libraries to the Rescue

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ABSTRACT

Peace is more than the absence of war, violence or conflict. The paper looks at feminist theories of peace. Since women and children are the majority persons displayed by war, they have important roles to play, both at national and international levels. Women are "beautiful souls" who love peace, with an innate ability for peace. Africa has suffered more armed conflict in the past decade. From 1960-80 Africa has fought 32 wars. Millions of lives were lost and over a million people are refugees. These conflicts, poverty and diseases have all threatened the stability of the continent.

There are many concepts in peace building, amongst which a major one is creating clearer channels to disseminate information between the common people and policy makers, and this is the role of librarians, especially women librarians. Women

librarians roles include provision and dissemination of useful and accurate information on peace and peace movements including NGOs, IFLA, U.N., women groups, fight for freedom of access to information, improve reading habits of women and children, organizing exhibitions/talks on peace, ensuring life-long education for women and girls, etc. It is submitted that virtual libraries provide a cheap digital bridge between male and female, and other interest groups.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, inter-state and intra-state conflicts often result in wars or large scale violence, involving massive destruction of lives and property as well as disruption of social, political and economic lives of large populations. The 20th Century was especially notable for the number of wars and other violent conflicts that took place, and the scale of destruction and disruptions that these produced. Apart from the First and Second World Wars in which millions died, the world also witnessed several other inter-state wars, mostly in the developing countries. In 1996, according to UN sources, about fifty countries were involved in major crisis. However, while wars between states were few, wars and violence within states were many. The African continent, especially from the 1960s, has continued to witness countless intra-state wars and large-scale violence, from the wars national liberation to wars of secession and civil wars, and sundry use of armed violence to settle internal political scores. Most especially since the Cold War ended in the late 1980s, serial violent conflicts have plagued the African continent, from Liberia to Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, DR Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, to mention a few.

Nigeria in the past four decades has experienced dangerous scenes of incessant dysfunctional conflicts, which have occurred between communities, ethnic groups and religious groups. These conflicts are not confined to any specific geo-political region of the country. Recent examples include the seemingly unceasing riots in Zango Kataf, Tafawa Balewa, Mangus/Bokko, Ife-Modakeke, Igbo Ora, Tiv-Wukan, Warri, the Niger Delta, Abiabo and Oku Iboku and Ugep and her neighbours. Other conflict areas include the religious conflicts in Kaduna, Kano, Sagamu and Aba.(Ubi, 2001). The oldest intra-ethnic conflict in Nigeria, however, is the Ife-Modakeke crisis. It has been going on for more than a century (Albert, 1999). The conflict has become its own raison detre, its own self-empowered, self-fulfilling, as it had since detached from its original cause. (Augsburger, 1992;53).

One distinguishing characteristic of post-Cold War intra-state conflicts is that they are more violent in the scale and intensity of the destructions and disruptions that they cause. Additionally, they are known to specifically target unarmed and defenceless civilian populations. The most vulnerable groups in the population are usually women and children, and they have become the specific targets and victims of extreme brutality and sadism. The world witnessed the horrors of mass violence against women in Liberia, Sierra Leone and DR Congo. Women and children were also victims of the ethnic cleansing in Rwanda in 1994. In these conflicts, women were convenient targets of attacks by the various rebel groups that claimed to be fighting the state. In the Liberian

and Sierra Leonean conflicts especially, violence against women was used as a veritable instrument. As one commentator has remarked, in Sierra Leone, for example, "violence against women was not just incidental to the conflict, but was routinely used as a tool of war." (Binaifer Nowrojee, quoted in *Africa Notes,* Jan/Feb, 2005, p. 1). In actual fact, brutal rape, sexual violence, abduction of women and girls for sexual slavery, amputation of limbs, especially hands, were directed at women as instruments of the war. Massive and extraordinary brutalities are also known to be directed at women in the DR Congo, where even UN peacekeepers have been accused of rape and other forms of sexual violence against the women that they are supposed to be protecting. Similar violence against women, including systematic rape, has also been reported in the Darfur crisis in the Sudan.

What has become the incontestable character of contemporary intra-state violence is that women are the victims although not necessarily the targets of conflicts. In every violent conflict situation, it is the women that have to bear the major brunt. While able-bodied men go to fight, it is the women that are left behind, unprotected, and are saddled with taking care of the aged and the children in the homestead. They are invariably vulnerable to violent attacks and raids, disease, epidemic, hunger and starvation, slow death, violent death, disruption of their lives, and internal displacement. Women and children often constitute the largest number of people who are internally displaced in their own countries and refugees in neighbouring states. For example, most of those displaced from the Darfur region and who are currently taking refuge in neighbouring Chad Republic are women and children.

Arising from the above, the time has therefore come for women to be actively involved and integrated into conflict prevention, conflict management and peace-making efforts at national, regional and international levels. It goes without saying that nothing concrete and reasonable would be accomplished in peace-making for as long as women who are the objects and victims of intra-state conflicts and violence are severely excluded from participation in the decision making processes about peace and good governance that can ensure lasting and durable peace. This is why virtual libraries and, especially, women librarians, have a great role to play in the modern information age. They can bring their knowledge and professional expertise to bear in this regard.

This paper discusses the new feminist approach to peace movements, past roles of women in peace keeping, interrogates the role that virtual libraries and women librarians can play in the maintenance and sustenance of peace, prevention of violence and protection of women who are the most vulnerable victims of contemporary violence.

FEMINIST THEORIES OF PEACE

The role of women in the peace movement
The newest approach to peace building places much emphasis on gender uniqueness in the process of conflict resolution (Mbagwu 2001). The majority of persons displaced by war are women and so it is now understood that they could play an important role in

efforts to resolve conflicts. Sylvester (1995) described Athenian women as "beautiful souls" loving peace. This is in agreement with feminist theory which argues that women are inherently peaceful, capable of preaching, teaching and preserving peace. Ferris (1992) reviews Bridgit BrockUtne's study which concludes that there is an innate ability in women that makes them prefer non violent actions. Babbit and Pearson-D'Estree (1996) observed that conflict resolution workshops with just women came out with more constructive discussions than groups with mixed gender. There is a relative notion that women are very trustworthy, dependable, and exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity. Women are dedicated, reliable and committed to family and national aspirations and goals. Women, the life givers of the world, therefore have a stake in the world pursuit of peace since they exhibit a high level of perseverance, patience and tolerance in achieving set objectives. Surprisingly, women have not walked away unconcerned either because of anger or fear, they have been proactive in the resolution of conflicts, but their roles have before now not been given deserved prominence and recognition.

In Mali, Liberia, Nigeria and indeed other parts of the world, women have demonstrated peacefully as mothers to condemn the killings of their husbands and children. But to the dismay of the peace process, women have not been included at all the levels of peace making. They are excluded and marginalized, their efforts are rendered invisible. Feminist theories believe that women should be involved in peace building at high decision making level as they are more sympathetic to peace. Certainly women are generally more naturally disposed than men to caring for the underprivileged in the family and in the society. The popular saying that 'when you train a man you have trained one person but when you train a woman you have trained a nation' comes to mind. A woman of peace will train her family and in turn we will have a peaceful nation. Conflict resolution programs must be developed to empower people to anticipated or stop conflicts themselves. Research into and historical analysis of the African traditional society have shown that if women do not have a voice or say in matters involving peace, there will be no sustainable cross – gender resolutions of the problem of war.

Historical view of the role of women
It is necessary to situate this discuss in the historical African context of great women. Oral tradition had it that Nigerian women were very visible in the political history and decision-making processes of the traditional societies in Nigeria, like the Bini, Hausas and Yoruba. Some notable examples of great women include princess lnikpi of Igala-land; Moremi of Ife; Efusetan Aniwura of Ibadan; Madam Tinubu of Lagos; Queen Amina of Zaria; and Queen Kambasa of Ijaw. Also there were title holders such as palace women and leaders of women in many pre-colonial Nigerian societies who shared power on an equal footing with men. These women were part of the government with a hierarchy of their own and their contributions were crucial to the well-being of their societies. In some areas of pre-colonial Nigeria, the influence of women was so much that they had a parallel structure which functioned alongside that of the male ruler and his chiefs. During the invasion of Ife and Igala-land during which people were killed

by the invaders, great women such as Pincess Inikpi of Igalaland and Moremi of Ife paid the supreme sacrifice with their lives and saved the people from the carnage. Also in Zaria, Queen Amina, was reputed to be a formidable woman who personally led "her army to the battle field" and succeeded in saving her area from extermination. Queen Kambasa of Ijaw and Queen Owari of Ilesa have the same attributes of greatness.

It would appear most regrettably that the advent of colonial rule eroded the influence of women as Nigerian traditional societies lost their autonomy to the British. Women chiefs of all categories lost their power base and ceased to have recognition and input in the decision-making process. The colonial masters also placed undue emphasis on male education. However, in the 1920s, Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-kuti, Lady Oyinkan Abayomi, Margaret Ekpo, Alhaja Humani Alaga and others who were of different professions but educated women, had vigorous campaigns on right of girls to education. Girls' schools were opened and women gained suffrage and even took part in the talk that led to Nigeria's independence in 1960. Lady Oyinkan Abayomi it was who after World War II, founded the women's party and campaigned for the expansion of opportunities for women. Earlier in 1929, in the Eastern part of Nigeria; the famous "Aba Riots", was precipitated by the anticipated taxation of women as an integrated part of the indirect rule project of British colonialism in Nigeria (Afigbo, 1966; Journal of African Society, 1930).

In Yoruba land, women were indeed very powerful and relevant to peace making. Women like Madam Tinubu, who later became the Iyalode of Egba land and Iyalode Efunsetan of Ibadan, made history because they were able to assert themselves and had their point of view respected. Also Egba women revolted between 1941 and 1947, when they staged a succession of civil disobedience, demonstrations and insurrections against colonial exploitation, taxation, market closures and commodity delays. They kidnapped colonial officials and their local agents, and even dethroned the traditional ruler, the Alake.

In the 1980's there were two major uprising of women, in 1984 by Ogharefe women of the Ethiope Local government and in 1986 by Ekpan women in the Okpe council area. The two protests were against a US oil corporation, Pan-Ocean. Turner and Oshare (1994) believed that these protests prove that oil-based capitalism "not only break up women's social order but also created or strengthened the conditions for resistance". The 1984 protest was particularly a success because according to them the women mobilized en masse and used a rare display of collective nudity as a weapon of protest "threw off their clothes and with this curse won their demands" (Turner and Oshare, 1994, p.123: Lynne, 1990). These recent conflicts spurred on by oil-based development were related to how the expansion of capitalism marginalized and disempowered women in peripheral social formations. The uprisings are products of capitalist development just as much as is women's marginalization." (P.126).The protests also continued to the 1990s and 2000. These are few examples of bold steps taken by women to have their views reflected in the way and manner the society is governed.

Curiously, it is note worthy that in the period since 1960, only a very few percentage of women have been elected to decision-making positions during the first, second or third republics, even though there appears to have greater awareness of the role of women in peace and conflict resolution.

Understanding the role of women
It is important to deeply understand the dynamics of women's peaceful engagements, even though most of such interventions as earlier discussed appear to stem from protests or tendencies to resistance. Indeed, conventional wisdom has tended to undervalue women's contributions, assuming that they are non-political citizens, and that their preoccupation is primarily with domestic issues. Ukeje (2004) examined the non-violent protests by women from different ethnic groups in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria in 2002. He reported that the women occupied the major oil platforms in the area, protesting. These protests were embarked upon after a series of failed attempts by their men. Their grievances relate to ecological degradation, especially as it affects two subsistence activities, farming and fishing, and to lack of employment opportunities for local people as oil companies are accused of preferring non-natives in their recruitment. They also address lack of basic social infrastructure and economic development opportunities at the grassroots, non-compensation for land use, corporate insensitivity on the part of the multinational oil companies, divide and rule tactics employed by oil companies in oil-producing communities, sexual harassment of local women by oil workers, as well as epidemics related to oil exploration " (p.606). Furthermore, Ukeje was of the view that the discourse on communities' responses to the crisis in the Niger Delta, have not articulated how the conflicts affected women, and the specific ways in which women struggle to improve the environment in which they carry out their productive activities.

Recently, a state of emergency was imposed in Plateau State of Nigeria and the women took to the streets to protest (Home of peace and Tourism, May 2005). It is worth mentioning that these women protests were not violent but effective and point to how the intellect and energy of women can be harnessed for peace in Africa.

ACTION PLAN FOR PEACE IN AFRICA

African nations and feminism
There is no doubt that conflicts have deterred the development of Africa. Conflict resolution within the African continent can therefore not be left alone in the hands the international community. The problems need to be tackled from within by the African initiatives such as the New Partnership for African's Development (NEPAD). The government must recognize the roles of female gender and encourage them to participate actively in politics and peace movements. Nie (1972) defines political participation as those legal activities by private citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and / or the actions they take. Feminism has pioneered a modern definition, which affects not only the actions and decisions of governments, state forces and elected representatives, but also political

interactions in societies, communities and our homes. Feminist studies have pointed out the various misunderstanding of women's participation contained within conventional literature. The old style of politics which is male dominated and excludes women participation is giving way to a new one that gives equal opportunity to all.

African government should put in place conflict management processes and techniques by creating enabling institutional framework for managing conflicts within their environments. Peace is a pre-requisite for a purposeful development and as such, it is a viable goal for any good government. Governments should be encouraged to evolve institutionalized provisions for peace, in a women inclusive manner.

Kofi Annah said in Benin, December 2000 that no country can truly develop, so long as its people are excluded from power. No state can truly be called democratic if it offers its people no escape from poverty. Violence brings poverty. So, African nations must practice true democracy. One of the tools that would help women move up is education therefore, the education of women should be invested in as a long term conflict mechanism strategy. Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving equality, development and peace. African women should be given the opportunity to address and deal not only with their own issues, but with issues of state, with issues of war and peace, with issues of their communities. In Africa, long-term development cannot be realized without sustainable peace; and peace cannot be attained without the active participation of women. Africa must realize that the world is at the stage of "Peace, Gender and Development. If "war is a man's affair", it must certainly be reaffirmed that "peace is surely a woman's affair".

Indirectly women are being mobilized in many African countries with the aim of promoting the peace process in conflicts, they have used different strategies in order to reinforce the abilities of existing structure to rehabilitate, reconstruct and reconcile; and protect refugees and displaced women. They have used education and health programs, taught peace through education, human rights and the knowledge of law. It is necessary for the government to evaluate the deeds of women's movements for peace in Africa in order to ensure that they form pressure groups to make themselves heard. Every culture has its own diplomacy. Every culture has mechanisms that keep people living side by side without violence. In the armed conflict areas, such as Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan, women's movement for peace have been known to make spirited efforts at reconciling warring factions. In Liberia, women had no chance to take part in negotiations and in meetings held by the different parties, but all the women's associations and groups were mobilized and have succeeded in making declarations to the United Nations, the OAU and ECOWAS (Diop, 1997). Women have equally organized peace marches, as earlier mentioned and printed posters and brochures with slogans on disarmament and peace. The organization Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace has organized different meetings with the aim of restoring dialogue between Sudanese women of the North and South all these efforts must be properly recognized by the government.

Role of the International community

The road to peace should be out of concerted effort and concern of all. Third parties serve as mediators with various strategies towards maintenance of peace. Since the World War 1, statesmen have been engaged in initiating peace settlements and establishing international system for the maintenance of peace and security. The outcome of these endeavours was conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles, the establishment of the League of Nations and now the United Nations' Organisation whose aims and objectives are fully set out in the Preamble to its Charter, thus:

> **'We the people of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, and for these ends to practice tolerance and live-together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security…' (p.1)**

The General Assembly of the United Nations declared the year 1975 as the International Year of the Women with a three field objective: equality, development and peace. The conference on women in Beijing in 1995 was also the demonstration of mobilization for the struggle for equality, development and peace. The remarkable thing in Beijing was the handing over of the flame of peace, symbolizing the daily struggles of women in Africa to promote the settlement of conflicts, appeasement, peace building and the sustainable existence. The United Nation declared the year 2000 as the International Year of the culture of peace, 2001 – 2010 as the International Decade for a culture of peace and Non-violence for the children of the world. Governments, local organizations and individuals all over the world are using these years to probe deeply into the nature and practice of a peace culture. It also declared 21 September annually as International Day of Peace. In the words of Kofi Annan "The future of the world belongs to women". For the first time in history, at the United Nation in Geneva, women gathered for 5 days in October 2002 to talk about new initiatives aimed at promoting world peace, and eliminating the causes that led to conflict.

In spite of the efforts by UN to deal successfully with many serious issues confronting it, international conflicts have nevertheless persisted and many remained unresolved and a plethora of more complex conflicts keep occurring globally. With provision of Article 52 of the United Nations Charter allowing "regional organizations to make arrangements for settlements of their disputes" many of such regional and sub-regional bodies have not relented in their endeavours on peace-keeping and peace making. We have seen such efforts being demonstrated by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now called African Union (AU); the Organisation of American States (OAS); the League of Arab States; Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the European

Union, among others. Individual member states have made efforts to complement the global efforts towards peace making and peace building.

It must be pointed out that while national interests and other factors militate against the success of the United Nations in its attempts to maintain international peace and security through peacekeeping, it has made obvious success in many ways. This fact explains why during its 40th anniversary, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to the peacekeeping forces of the United Nations. In realizing their work, the military wing is usually assisted by negotiators and other civilians who employ diplomatic options in form of peace-talks, meetings, conferences, negotiations, third parties, NGOs, regional and other groupings in an attempt to break the deadlocks.

The role of Regional Institutions
OAU, Feminine non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Economic Commission of Africa (ECA), the United Nations, have dedicated themselves to the promotion of the African woman and her participation in decision-making, among others for the establishment of peace, resolution of conflicts and national reconciliation. This is what synergy Africa is involved in carrying out. This International NGO, formed by Africans based in Geneva, aims at reinforcing the abilities of NGOs and other African institutions for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa. It formed "Women – Africa – Solidarity" (WAS). WAS is for the strengthening of abilities through the techniques of training and political negotiations. The training is particularly for the channeling of resources and the strengthening of skills in the woman. Holding of seminars and conferences for the exchange of experiences, to sensitize public opinion, and inform the media, among other strategies (Asian Africa Intelligence Wire Oct., 2004). African Strategic Peace and Research Group and others are also involved in peace movements. All these are note worthy but they must ensure appropriate follow up to ensure compliance, and make conscious efforts to continue to make their activities available on-line. They have to support African countries as they continue to strive to make Internet connectivity in the continent. The need for all these activities to get to the women, both educated and illiterate cannot be over emphasized. Also, these agents have to involve the local women in any area they are working so as to carry them along.

There is another initiative at partnering academic institutions with communities to forge peace. In Ile-Ife, Nigeria for example, we have Partnership of the Academy and Community (PACT-OAU), which is an alliance committed to community transformation, poverty alleviation and social justice. It is in partnership with Alliance for Community Transformation Inc (ACT) based in the United States. The very interesting thing about PACT-OAU is that it is virtually a women organization, as the arrow heads are all women. This reinforces the earlier submission that women have a soft sport for peace and initiatives to foster and strengthen it. Also there is the OAU Peace Corps, which is dedicated to the promotion of peace through youth mobilization and enlightenment activities. A lot of young women are also in membership of this

organization. Both organizations have impacted significantly on peace in Ile-Ife, especially after the communal crisis which erupted again in 1997-1998.

THE MODERN LIBRARY

Libraries and ICT

A library is concerned with the collection, processing, storage and dissemination of recorded information for the purpose of reading, study and consultation. To attain this goal the library performs many activities. It is no news that modern technologies have greatly impacted on these traditional roles. There could be no doubting the immense impact of the recent advances in electronic and computer technologies in the librarian's delivery of information service. Information and Communication Technologies, ICT, have radically transformed most of the services provided by a library. It has made the organization of information very efficient, the delivery of basic information very effective and the dissemination of information to users easier. With users using library resources from remote locations, traditional desks have also had to change the way they serve library users. Researchers no longer want to stop work and 'travel' to the library to utilize reference services. The virtual reference service includes the use of e-mail and creation of portals. E-mails are now used to communicate with users in place of face-to-face inquiries. E-Mail is now combined with web-browser and chat technologies in real-time to allow users to access reference desk services through a computer connection in much the same way as users would traditionally interact with a reference librarian. Library users through this medium send their queries to the reference librarian who in turn replies after carrying out the necessary search.

The process of creating a Portal is also in the pattern of the traditional library reference service which is to identify relevant web resources in a particular subject area, create a folder for them, and make them available whenever required. This way, time is saved for many clients who would otherwise have browsed endlessly searching for relevant resources. Thus a librarian does more of the web surfing and goes through all the pains of tracking down relevant sites on behalf of his clients (Akintunde, 2002). For a librarian to perform this task he or she must necessarily have 'navigational' skills and the library must provide the access to the millions of web resources by taking responsibility of the librarian's Internet registration and access fees. A Portal allows "its users to customize info resources by selecting and viewing only those they find useful" (Zemon, 2001:710). Portals also create helps to keep information providers focused because customization of identified sites/databases enables both providers and users to operate within some knowledge boundaries instead of getting engulfed by the maze of data on the World Wide Web or the global information super highway.

Use of the Internet and e-mail has become means of political response to activities in many parts of the globe now. As a vast source of information, ICTs constitute a powerful learning tool; and they offer a direct and more inexpensive means of communication for women's organizations and enable them to share knowledge on a quick and collective basis. The new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have great potential to benefit women worldwide, as access to information is now faster.

Global access to information continues to increase and expand, creating new opportunities and challenges for the participation of women in mainstream activities for women's equality and for the dissemination of information about women's issues in developed and developing countries. The 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, stressed the importance of this new technology to promote greater communication by women.

The Internet, as the global virtual library, has created a new mass information army for peace. Collins (200 p 228), argued that for feminist research to have an impact beyond interpreting the world, consideration of issues about generating ideas for intervention and engagement is required. Information is power and with the advent of the Internet no one should be left out. However, access to these new technologies is restricted, and ensuring that the policies that guide their use are gender-responsive remains a challenge. Low levels of literacy, limited technological access, know-how and the often inadequate infrastructure and high cost of connectivity in developing nations, prevent many women from taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by ICTs. African women are interested in the new technology.

Connectivity to remote areas for women to use is a potential for empowering them. The educated ones can only get access in libraries and offices as most homes cannot afford connectivity. Though cyber cafes provide avenues for surfing the Internet, many women do not find it convenient to use, since it entails leaving the home. There are no affordable technologies capable of reaching the remote and poor communities of developing countries. So librarians must ensure connectivity and free or subsidized access, and ensure that local government libraries (public libraries) in all local governments are connected. Also there is need to encourage distance learning, so that women can still take care of their families and get formal lifelong education. In this age of ICT, it is expedient for librarians to have international connections, which will provide access to on-line sources. There are many women websites on women studies and several others that provide information for women. This will make access to information on peace and wars available to women.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN LIBRARIANS AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PEACE EFFORTS

Living in an atmosphere of peace and good will and enlisted in the work of spreading enlightenment, librarians could be said to take peace for granted. Libraries are noiseless places and since war and conflicts are associated with noise, libraries are adversely affected. Since this is so, are librarians to fold their hands and watch, or do they have roles to play in the world peace movement? Traditionally, a Librarian is constantly confronted with demands for the purchase of books, magazines and pamphlets, and making them available to users. They do not want to be seen as being political and taking sides. Librarians by training are neutral, presenting materials on both sides of any issues. In conflict situations the main guiding principle of purchase of materials is that of interested neutrality. The library stands only to enlighten the community it serves by presenting them with actual facts for them to be able to make good conclusions that will foster peace.

In war situations in enlightened societies, use of libraries increase as users flock to libraries to find information to guide them. Information that can promote peace, unity, progress, peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationship among all the communities must therefore be available in libraries. Librarians therefore in promoting access to these information act as agents of the promotion of communal peace and reconciliation. In addition to reports from daily news and newspapers, users want to read books, journal articles and surf the Internet too. We must also realize that whenever there are wars and conflicts new literatures are created, and libraries have to strive to collect and make such information available. Special attention could be given to them and in this present age of Internet, libraries could carry out relevant searches and compile and package them together and make available to users. In doing this as earlier mentioned neutrality must be ensured to give amplest opportunity for the forming of independent judgments by users. If well done, the library will in no small way be involved in contributing to world peace and help in building the reading culture of users as knowledge debunks myths about other people and can humanize other cultures.

Librarians are also interested in peace and should promote it as a matter of self-preservation; it will doubtless suffer most from the enforced austere economics resulting from war preparations. A lot of government money which could have been spent on library development gets diverted to prosecuting the war. So 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. Female librarians of today want to see the scope of the library enlarged instead of having it kept to its present narrow limits. The International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) have been involved in peace movements by facilitating seminars especially at international levels, calling on governments to address the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor, and has been on the vanguard of unrestricted access to information by all.

Librarians might well let it be known to the local peace societies that they would welcome lectures and debates on the peace question in their libraries. These lectures need not be directly under library auspices, but might be under the patronage of the peace societies. While public libraries in developed countries are now generally becoming a feature in the social and civic center movement by which buildings are being used for public lectures, meetings and debates, this is not so much so in Nigeria, though things seem to be changing now. The use will create opportunities for the popularization of knowledge of the peace movement and for library co-operation. Librarians need the partnership, having been too much on the lonely side. A lot of information is generated by research institutions, universities, NGOs in Africa, on women issues, but they are not being passed on to the women at large.

In Africa, women continue to bear the brunt of poverty, they are discriminated against in employment, usually engaged in lower paying jobs, lack access to information and technology, the political environment does not favour women because of thuggery, intimidation and high costs. Thus women's participation in politics is negligible and they are not given equal opportunities in peace keeping as earlier mentioned, even though they suffer most during war times. Women are discriminated against by political

party structures, selection and nomination processes. No doubt therefore that in relation to political participation, women have special information needs. Information is a major tool that can redeem African women of their political subjugation. Librarians must realize this and hence make conscious efforts to meet these needs.

African women need information that will eradicate the stereotype belief that women are non-political citizens whose place is in no other place than the kitchen. They must be well informed that they have a role to play particularly at decision making on issues that concern their communities, their welfare and on leadership. Libraries can therefore plan programmes of enlightenment on effects of war and gains of peace and the roles women are expected to play in community rights action. They must know that if they keep quiet that they would bear the brunt of the aftermath. Information needs of women during conflict times must be met also because they are usually less informed at this time. To do this librarians must take time to harness all sources of information and be well informed both about the role of women in their local environment and internationally. Wars usually start with mismanagement of a local conflict or even a minor incident. So, librarians as information managers must provide access to necessary information on local disputes in their respective regions, analyze such information and make recommendations to necessary bodies including governments on ways and means of resolving such issues using ICT in order to assist in preventing them from developing into conflicts.

Librarians could partner with NGOs, International bodies, like United Nations to organize workshops to train women in political skills at the national and local levels. These workshops should be made affordable to the women through sponsorships by donors and philanthropists. At the local level, the grassroots women should be aimed at, by making presentations in local languages. These workshops could be planned to mark important dates like the International Women's Day, World Peace Day, to create awareness.

Bibliographic sources of information on women should be acquired and made available. Librarians should come up with bibliographies on women studies to improve access to traditional and non-traditional sources. The establishment of women information centres is to be encouraged. A good example is the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) which was established in 1987, as a pioneer effort at the systematic collection of materials on women's studies. WORDOC is a special library set up to cater for the information and research needs of scholars in the study of gender. It disseminates information by preparing accessions lists, compilation of bibliographies; display of current periodicals; selective dissemination of information (SDI) and related activities. It also organizes public lectures for women, sometimes in local languages to reach the grassroots women. Information is transmitted via a variety of channels such as newspapers, mail, magazines, pamphlets, books, electronic and telecommunication media of television, radio and telephone.

Life long education is one of the cardinal roles of librarians. Libraries are at the forefront of learning, particularly, life long learning. This involves making the library relevant to every member of the community, both young and old. African librarians do not seem to be impacting on their communities. Sadly, African women both educated

and illiterate are not library users. Women librarians have an enormous challenge to reverse this trend. They have to be innovative and proactive. In modern parlance, the world is now considered to be a global village. In the African setting, the concept of a village is that of a community closely knit together in virtually every ramification– socially, emotionally, economically, morally etc. In the African village, everyone knows when a stranger comes in as news spread fast. A woman librarian, bearing this in mind, should make sure that women are exposed to latest news. War scenes can be shown. "Librarians for peace" is an ad hoc group of librarians mainly Americans using the internet to organize and lobby against armed conflict where it is considered unnecessary. Africa women librarians too need to be vocal.

The librarian can promote the work of many organizations involved in peace efforts. Information is important for world peace, it creates sensitivity and awareness. Information that can promote peace, unity and progress – peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationship among all communities must be made available. While African librarians download information for women in the developing countries from developed countries they must also find a way of putting on the Internet results from local researchers for the developed world to access also. The problem of creating globally relevant local contents on the internet needs to be addressed urgently. Also, librarians have a central role in society as cultural and education institutions, and as agents for promoting literacy. IFLA considers books and libraries, as well as the promotion of the reading habit, essential for better international understanding and as such they are a fundamental precondition for peace, human rights, literacy, intellectual freedom and a better environment for people.

CONCLUSION

If peace as defined by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is the *"presence of Justice not the absence of War"* then positive peace deals with proper justice, not justice delayed, denied, nor intermittent, but sustainable justices. Achieving this kind of peace makes it mandatory for participation of all concerned – women, men and children, as conflict management involves the process of utilizing all available resources, including in particular information, to transform conflict to a functional level at which parties concerned can relate at an acceptable level (Abdulrahman, 2001). In this paper, it has been advocated that African governments and NGOs have to ensure access to current information by African women through the provision of functional libraries and Internet facilities for them to be properly informed and participate in global discussion and for them to be empowered. Issues of sexual stereotypes and cost of Internet connectivity need to be addressed. Peace dividends must necessarily include good life for the rural people. That is, improved wellbeing and fulfilled livelihood for women, men and children.

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