

Chapter 18

Information Dynamics, Library Information Resources and Conflict Resolution and Management

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Introduction

Conflict resolution and management refer to the processes and strategies aimed at addressing, mitigating, and ultimately resolving disputes or conflicts between individuals, groups, or nations. Conflict can arise in various contexts—interpersonal, organizational, political, or international—and can stem from differences in interests, values, beliefs, or needs. Effective conflict resolution requires understanding the root causes, facilitating communication between parties, and seeking mutually beneficial outcomes. Conflict management, on the other hand, focuses on controlling and mitigating the negative impacts of conflict. While conflict resolution seeks to eliminate the conflict entirely, management strategies aim to minimize the harmful effects, ensuring that conflicts do not escalate to a point where they become destructive or unmanageable. Both conflict resolution and management involve negotiation, mediation, and sometimes legal frameworks to address and resolve issues (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009).

The availability of accurate and timely information plays a critical role in conflict resolution and management processes. Information enables the parties involved to understand the context, underlying issues, and possible solutions related to conflict resolution and management (Aleinikov, Maltseva, Kurochkin, & Koulakova, 2017). It empowers mediators, negotiators, and policymakers to make informed decisions and avoid miscommunication or misunderstandings, which can often worsen conflicts. In conflict resolution, “information” refers to knowledge and data relevant to the conflict and the parties involved. This can include factual data, historical records, legal documents, research findings, news reports, and cultural insights that help understand the conflict's different perspectives and nature.

Accurate and timely information is essential for conflict resolution to understand the conflict as it helps the conflicting parties and third-party mediators thoroughly comprehend the root causes, motivations, and stakes of the conflict (NOUN, 2009). This deep understanding enables the development of more tailored and effective solutions based on credible information. With this, trust is built between conflicting parties guiding against rumours, or suspicions that may exacerbate tensions (Kuusik, 2010). Besides, factual information facilitates better

communication by enabling all parties to speak from a common knowledge base. Information is also key for assessing the effectiveness of conflict resolution initiatives. Without accurate data, it is difficult to evaluate whether a resolution or management strategy is working or needs adjustment.

Against this backdrop, this chapter explores the vital role that information and library resources play in conflict resolution and management. Information has long been recognised as a key element in resolving conflicts, but the contribution of libraries as information centres is often overlooked. The chapter focused on how libraries provide access to various types of information (e.g., legal documents, historical records, scholarly articles, and digital databases) that are essential for conflict resolution. By focusing on the intersection of information, library resources, and conflict resolution and management, this chapter aims to highlight the indispensable role of libraries in fostering peace and mitigating conflicts. It provided practical insights for conflict resolution and management practitioners, librarians, and policymakers on how to better leverage information to resolve disputes and manage conflicts more effectively.

Library Information Resources: Definition and Importance

Library information resources refer to the vast array of materials, both physical and digital, that libraries offer to their users for the purpose of research, education, and knowledge dissemination. These resources include, but are not limited to, books, journals, magazines, databases, digital archives, audio-visual materials, and online resources such as e-books and e-journals. They also encompass access to special collections, government documents, maps, multimedia, and datasets, as well as tools for managing and organizing information. With the rise of digital technologies, libraries now provide electronic databases, institutional repositories, and cloud-based resources, making information access faster and more efficient (Lankes, 2011).

In the modern age, library information resources are essential for several reasons:

Accessibility and Inclusivity: Libraries serve as open access hubs where people of all backgrounds can obtain information that may otherwise be restricted or expensive.

Trustworthiness and Credibility: Library resources are typically curated, ensuring that users have access to credible and reliable information.

Support for Research and Education: Libraries play a vital role in academic and scientific research by offering access to comprehensive resources that drive knowledge creation and innovation.

Preservation of Knowledge: Libraries are responsible for the long-term preservation of documents, ensuring that valuable historical, cultural, and scientific information is not lost.

Digital Transformation: Modern libraries embrace technological advances to provide access to e-resources, global databases, and online information-sharing platforms. This transition has expanded the role of libraries as digital knowledge centres (Lankes, 2011).

The Role of Information in Conflict Resolution

Information as a Tool for Understanding Conflict: Understanding the root causes of conflict is crucial in any conflict resolution process, and information plays a central role in this understanding. Conflicts are often complex, with historical, social, economic, and political layers that need to be analysed to develop an effective resolution strategy. Access to comprehensive information allows conflict analysts, mediators, and stakeholders to delve into the origins of the conflict and identify the underlying issues that fuel it. For example, historical documents may reveal longstanding grievances between groups, while economic data can show disparities in resource allocation that contribute to tensions (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2016).

Information for Decision-Making: Quality information is crucial for decision-making during conflicts, as it guides the choices of both conflict parties and mediators. In the words of Kuusik (2010), lack of information can, at any stage of a conflict, make people desperate, restless and easy to manipulate, well as the ability to make informed decisions strengthens societies and fosters economic growth, democratic structures and the positive outlook on the future. Information helps decision-makers understand the potential consequences of their actions and assess the risks and benefits of different strategies.

For instance, in international conflicts, diplomats and negotiators rely on accurate information about political and military conditions, economic sanctions, or international law to make informed decisions that could prevent escalation. Mediators require information to propose realistic and feasible solutions that take into account the interests of all parties involved (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). For example, the peace talks following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda were informed by extensive research on ethnic tensions, historical conflicts, and demographic data, which allowed mediators to propose solutions based on Rwanda's unique context (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000).

Furthermore, information plays a key role in monitoring and evaluating the progress of peace agreements or conflict management efforts. Stakeholders use data to measure the success of peace initiatives, such as the reduction of violence or the level of trust rebuilt between parties. Decision-makers then adjust their strategies based on these evaluations, ensuring that the conflict resolution process remains effective and responsive to the changing situation.

Types of Information in Conflict Resolution

Various types of information are vital for conflict resolution, each serving a specific role in helping to address different aspects of the conflict. The following types of information are particularly important:

Legal Information: In many conflicts, legal information is essential for understanding the rights and responsibilities of the parties involved, as well as the frameworks within which negotiations take place. International law, treaties, human rights legislation, and court decisions can all influence how conflicts are managed and resolved. For instance, the Geneva Conventions provide legal standards for the treatment of civilians and combatants during armed conflict, forming the basis for many peace agreements (Cassese, 2005).

Historical Information: Conflicts are often deeply rooted in historical grievances. Access to historical records allows mediators and stakeholders to understand the events that have led to the current conflict. For example, knowledge of colonial boundaries and ethnic divisions is crucial in resolving conflicts in post-colonial states. Historical information also helps dispel myths or distorted narratives that may perpetuate conflict (Hampson, 1996).

Cultural Information: Cultural factors, including religious beliefs, customs, and societal norms, can significantly impact conflict dynamics. Cultural understanding helps mediators navigate sensitive issues and propose solutions that are culturally appropriate. In Afghanistan, for example, conflict resolution strategies that align with local customs and religious practices have been more successful than those imposed externally without regard to cultural differences (Zartman & Touval, 2007).

Economic Information: Many conflicts are driven or exacerbated by economic disparities, resource competition, or poverty. Economic data, including information on resource distribution, income inequality, and access to basic services, can reveal the structural issues underlying a conflict. Addressing these economic inequalities is often key to achieving lasting peace (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004).

Political Information: Political contexts are also essential for understanding power struggles and governance issues that may fuel conflict. Information on government structures, political alliances, and international relations can guide negotiations and influence peacebuilding processes (Fisher, Kelman & Nan, 2013).

Challenges in Accessing Information for Conflict Resolution

Despite the critical role of information in conflict resolution, there are significant challenges in accessing relevant data, particularly in conflict zones or

authoritarian regimes. Several barriers to obtaining information during conflicts include censorship, bias, and a lack of infrastructure.

Censorship and Information Control: In many conflict situations, particularly in authoritarian regimes, access to information is tightly controlled. Governments may restrict media coverage, block access to the internet, or disseminate propaganda to shape public perceptions of the conflict. This makes it difficult for mediators and stakeholders to obtain unbiased, factual information. For instance, during the Syrian Civil War, the regime's tight control over information and the presence of multiple conflicting narratives made it challenging for the international community to gain a clear understanding of the conflict's dynamics (Lynch, 2016).

Bias and Propaganda: Even when information is available, it may be biased or influenced by the perspectives of the parties involved. Conflict actors often use information strategically to influence public opinion or gain international support. Propaganda and disinformation campaigns can distort the truth and complicate efforts to understand the conflict accurately. In the case of the Ukraine crisis, both Russia and Ukraine have used information warfare to shape narratives in the media, creating significant challenges for objective conflict analysis (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013).

Lack of Infrastructure: In many conflict zones, the infrastructure necessary for gathering and disseminating information is severely damaged. Libraries, archives, and communication networks may be destroyed or inaccessible, making it difficult for researchers, mediators, and policymakers to access critical data. The destruction of infrastructure during the civil war in Yemen, for example, has made it extremely challenging for international organizations to gather reliable information on the humanitarian crisis (Schmitz, 2020).

Digital Divide: In some cases, a lack of access to digital technologies exacerbates the challenge of obtaining information. Rural and underdeveloped areas, which are often the hardest hit by conflict, may lack the internet access or digital literacy needed to benefit from global information resources. This digital divide limits the ability of conflict-affected populations to communicate their needs and access solutions that could support peacebuilding efforts (Chigona et al., 2009).

The Role of Library Information Resources in Conflict Resolution and Management

Libraries play a critical role in **information storage and dissemination**, which directly impacts the field of conflict resolution and management. In conflict scenarios, access to accurate, credible, and historical information is essential for stakeholders to make informed decisions, understand the roots of conflicts, and negotiate peace.

Information Storage and Archiving: Libraries are responsible for storing vital information, including historical records, legal documents, treaties, and cultural artefacts. These materials are indispensable when resolving conflicts that have deep historical roots. For example, during peace negotiations, access to accurate historical records ensures that all parties involved understand the context of the conflict and the grievances of the opposing sides. Without these archives, essential pieces of history may be overlooked, leading to incomplete or biased conflict resolution processes (Willet, 2014).

In conflict resolution, libraries serve as repositories of institutional memory, holding documents that allow for a clearer understanding of the origins, development, and progression of conflicts. They store records of peace treaties, legal precedents, and resolutions from international organizations, such as the United Nations. This information enables policymakers, mediators, and researchers to review past efforts at conflict resolution and assess what strategies were effective or ineffective.

Information Dissemination and Accessibility: Equally important is the library's role in disseminating information to stakeholders involved in conflict management. Libraries provide platforms for accessing a wide range of academic journals, reports, books, and databases that are critical for conflict analysis and peacebuilding efforts. For example, digital libraries offer open access to global knowledge, which is vital in situations where access to physical libraries is limited due to conflict or geographical barriers.

Furthermore, libraries facilitate access to culturally relevant information, which is essential in peacebuilding processes that respect the unique values and traditions of communities involved in the conflict. This kind of information helps mediators and policymakers propose culturally sensitive solutions that have a greater chance of being accepted by local populations (Manguel, 2015). In addition, libraries now often serve as information hubs during crises, providing access to communication technologies and online databases in areas affected by conflict or disaster, where other forms of information dissemination may be compromised.

Supporting Decision-Making and Policy Formation: Library resources, particularly those that focus on international law, human rights, and governance, are critical in helping mediators and negotiators make well-informed decisions. By providing access to treaties, case studies, and legal frameworks, libraries contribute to the development of solutions that are legally sound and sustainable. Moreover, by offering access to empirical research on previous conflict resolution efforts, libraries allow policymakers to learn from past conflicts, identify best practices, and avoid repeating mistakes (Kofi, 2017).

Case Studies: Successful Use of Library Information Resources in Conflict Resolution

The Rwandan Genocide (1994)

Following the Rwandan genocide in 1994, libraries and archives played an instrumental role in documenting the atrocities and facilitating post-conflict resolution. Access to legal documents and international law records was crucial for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which prosecuted those responsible for the genocide. Libraries in Rwanda also helped support reconciliation efforts by providing access to oral histories, testimonies, and peacebuilding literature that informed the process of national healing and reconciliation (Clark, 2010).

Moreover, digital libraries, such as the Genocide Archive of Rwanda, have played a vital role in preserving the memory of the genocide and providing access to educational resources for future generations. This archive holds thousands of testimonies, documents, and photographs that continue to inform conflict resolution studies globally and help prevent future atrocities by teaching the lessons of Rwanda's tragic past.

The Peace Process in Northern Ireland

The Troubles in Northern Ireland, a political and sectarian conflict that lasted from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, was one of the most prolonged and complex conflicts in modern European history. Libraries and information institutions played a key role in the peace process. The Linen Hall Library in Belfast became a significant repository for conflict-related materials, housing a comprehensive collection of newspapers, pamphlets, government reports, and academic research related to the Troubles (McCleery, 2013). These resources provided a foundation for conflict analysts, researchers, and policymakers to access the historical context, social dynamics, and legal precedents necessary for the peace negotiations. During the peace process, materials from libraries were used to inform talks and frame peace agreements, such as the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. By offering access to a wealth of historical, legal, and cultural information, libraries helped mediators and policymakers address the core issues of the conflict and craft a durable peace.

The Syrian Conflict and Refugee Crisis

In the ongoing Syrian conflict, access to library resources has been crucial for both documenting the conflict and supporting displaced communities. Digital libraries and platforms, such as JSTOR and HathiTrust, have provided access to research, legal documents, and international reports that are critical for NGOs, international organizations, and policymakers addressing the conflict and the resulting humanitarian crisis. The role of libraries in refugee camps has been particularly significant. In camps like those in Jordan and Lebanon, mobile

libraries and digital learning platforms have provided Syrian refugees with access to educational resources, allowing children and adults to continue learning despite the disruption caused by the war. These libraries have also offered crucial information on human rights, legal processes for asylum seekers, and healthcare, aiding in conflict management and the well-being of displaced populations (Al Quds College, 2016).

How Libraries Can Innovate in Conflict Resolution

Libraries have always been evolving institutions, and the increasing digitization of information presents new opportunities for innovation in conflict resolution and management. To better serve as key players in peacebuilding and conflict management, libraries can adopt several innovative strategies.

Digital Libraries and Open Access Platforms: One of the most promising innovations for libraries in conflict resolution is the expansion of digital libraries and open access platforms. These platforms can offer global access to information, even in regions affected by conflict, where physical libraries may be destroyed or inaccessible. By digitizing key documents—such as legal treaties, historical records, and scholarly research—libraries can ensure that stakeholders have real-time access to critical resources. For example, the World Digital Library, a project of UNESCO and the Library of Congress, provides open access to cultural and historical documents from around the world. Such platforms could be expanded to include conflict-related materials, making it easier for mediators, researchers, and policy-makers to access the information they need to support peace efforts (Library of Congress, n.d).

Mobile Libraries and Information Services in Conflict Zones: In regions where, physical infrastructure has been damaged or where populations have been displaced by conflict, mobile libraries can provide essential access to information. Mobile libraries can bring books, digital materials, and internet access to refugee camps, conflict zones, or underserved rural areas. These services could provide access to educational materials, human rights information, and legal resources that empower conflict-affected communities to advocate for their rights and rebuild their lives. For instance, mobile libraries have been used successfully in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp (United Nations, nd), providing education and resources to displaced individuals. These models could be replicated in other conflict zones or areas of displacement to ensure that affected populations have access to the information they need to participate in peace processes and recovery efforts.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Conflict Data Analysis. Libraries can incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to analyse large volumes of data related to conflict, such as social media, news reports, academic studies, and government documents. By utilizing AI, libraries can support real-time conflict monitoring and provide early warning systems that identify potential escalations before they occur. AI-powered tools can help policymakers and mediators sift

through vast amounts of data to identify patterns, key stakeholders, and the root causes of conflict. For example, AI-driven predictive analytics could be used to monitor social media for signs of unrest or to analyse peace agreement data to identify the factors that contribute to successful or failed negotiations. Libraries can collaborate with technology firms and conflict resolution experts to build databases and tools that harness the power of AI for peacebuilding (Aleinikov, Maltseva, Kurochkin & Koulakova (2017).

Digital Preservation of Cultural Heritage: In many conflicts, cultural heritage sites and artefacts are deliberately targeted, leading to the loss of invaluable historical and cultural knowledge. Libraries can play a key role in digitally preserving cultural heritage by creating digital archives of at-risk materials, including historical documents, artefacts, and oral histories. This ensures that even if physical sites are destroyed, the cultural memory is preserved for future generations. For instance, organizations such as CyArk and The Endangered Archives Programme at the British Library have been working to digitally preserve cultural heritage sites in conflict zones like Syria and Iraq. Libraries could expand these efforts by collaborating with local communities and international organizations to create comprehensive digital collections that safeguard cultural knowledge during and after conflicts.

Libraries as Safe Spaces for Dialogue and Peacebuilding: Libraries have the potential to serve as neutral, safe spaces where communities can engage in dialogue and mediation. They can host peacebuilding initiatives, community discussions, and conflict resolution workshops that bring together stakeholders from different sides of a conflict. Libraries can foster a sense of trust and inclusivity, making them ideal places for education, conversation, and reconciliation. For example, libraries in post-conflict regions such as Kosovo have hosted forums where former enemies come together to discuss their shared history and work towards reconciliation. These efforts help to build trust and understanding between communities that have been divided by conflict (Willet, 2014).

Collaboration with Academic Institutions and NGOs: Libraries can expand their influence in conflict resolution by partnering with academic institutions, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that specialise in peacebuilding and conflict management. By working together, libraries can curate specialized collections, provide expert research services, and create public programs focused on educating communities about peace and reconciliation efforts. These partnerships can also help libraries secure funding for projects that support conflict resolution, such as creating archives of peace agreements or developing educational programs on conflict prevention (Pherali & Lewis, 2019)

Challenges and Prospects of Libraries in Conflict Resolution and Management

While libraries play a vital role in conflict resolution and management, they face several challenges that can hinder their effectiveness. However, there are also significant prospects for innovation and growth in this area. This discussion will explore both sides of the equation, followed by a summary and conclusion.

Challenges Faced by Libraries in Conflict Resolution

Limited Access to Information in Conflict Zones: During conflicts, physical infrastructure, including libraries, is often destroyed, making it difficult for people to access critical information. Disruptions in internet and communication services can also limit access to digital resources. In conflict-affected regions like Syria or Afghanistan, many libraries have been damaged or destroyed, leaving the population without access to essential information for managing conflicts or rebuilding communities (UNESCO, 2019).

Censorship and Information Bias: In some conflict scenarios, governments or dominant factions impose strict censorship or control over information to manipulate public opinion or suppress dissent. This limits the ability of libraries to provide impartial and credible resources. For example, during the Rwandan genocide, propaganda played a significant role in fueling the conflict, and accessing unbiased information was difficult for the population (Thompson, 2007). Libraries in conflict or post-conflict regions often face severe budget constraints, limiting their ability to acquire new materials, hire trained staff, or implement new technologies. The lack of financial resources hampers the development of innovative programs that could contribute to peacebuilding. Even in stable countries, public libraries are frequently underfunded, which restricts their capacity to engage with conflict resolution initiatives on a broader scale (IFLA, 2015).

Technological Gaps and Digital Divide: While the rise of digital libraries and online platforms has expanded access to information, many conflict-affected regions suffer from inadequate technological infrastructure. This digital divide limits the ability of libraries to provide resources via the internet or to digitize important collections. In areas with limited internet connectivity, such as rural parts of Africa or Asia, communities may remain disconnected from vital conflict resolution resources available online.

Staff Capacity and Security Concerns: In conflict zones, library staff face personal risks, as libraries can become targets for violence. Additionally, librarians may lack the specialized training needed to curate and provide information related to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Without the appropriate skills in conflict analysis or mediation, libraries might struggle to position themselves as active agents in conflict resolution processes.

Prospects for Libraries in Conflict Resolution and Management

Despite these challenges, there are numerous prospects for libraries to play an even greater role in conflict resolution and management. Technological advancements, growing recognition of the importance of information access, and new partnerships are opening up possibilities for libraries to become key players in peacebuilding.

Digitisation and Remote Access to Information: With the continuous advancement of digital technologies, libraries have the opportunity to digitize their collections and offer remote access to critical resources. Digital libraries and online archives provide access to legal documents, treaties, and research studies essential for conflict resolution, regardless of the physical condition of local libraries. Projects like the World Digital Library have already demonstrated the power of digitization to preserve and disseminate cultural and historical information globally, even in conflict situations (Lankes, 2011).

Additionally, libraries can utilize mobile technology to provide e-books, legal documents, and educational materials to displaced populations or people in remote conflict areas. Initiatives like mobile libraries equipped with internet connectivity have shown promise in delivering information to refugee camps and conflict zones.

Libraries as Neutral Spaces for Dialogue: Libraries can serve as neutral and safe spaces for community members to engage in dialogue and peacebuilding activities. They can host public discussions, educational programs, and workshops aimed at resolving local conflicts. In post-conflict settings, libraries can help foster reconciliation by providing forums for people from different sides of a conflict to share experiences and work towards healing. Libraries in post-apartheid South Africa, for instance, have hosted truth and reconciliation forums, bringing communities together to reflect on the past and seek common ground (Wilson, 2001).

Collaborations with International Organizations and NGOs: Libraries can build partnerships with international organizations, universities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in conflict resolution. By collaborating with UNESCO, the United Nations, and peacebuilding NGOs, libraries can develop programs tailored to conflict-affected regions. These partnerships can also help libraries secure funding and technical support to expand their capacity for peacebuilding activities.

Training and Capacity Building for Librarians: Investing in the professional development of library staff is essential for maximizing libraries' potential in conflict resolution. Libraries can implement training programs to equip librarians with skills in conflict analysis, mediation, and crisis information management.

Such training would enable librarians to curate relevant materials and act as facilitators of peacebuilding efforts.

Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data Analytics: Artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics offer libraries new tools for conflict prevention and management. By analysing large volumes of data, including social media, academic publications, and conflict reports, libraries can offer insights into emerging conflicts and provide early warnings. AI tools can help identify patterns and key issues, enabling researchers and policymakers to respond to conflicts proactively rather than reactively.

Summary of Discussion

Libraries, with their vast and credible resources, play an essential role in conflict resolution and management by providing access to information, preserving historical records, and fostering dialogue. However, they face numerous challenges, including limited access to information in conflict zones, censorship, insufficient funding, technological gaps, and security concerns for staff. Despite these hurdles, there are promising prospects for libraries to innovate and expand their role in peacebuilding.

Digital transformation offers libraries the potential to digitise collections and provide remote access to essential conflict-related materials, even in regions with damaged physical infrastructure. Libraries can also serve as neutral spaces for peace dialogues, fostering reconciliation among communities affected by conflict. Collaborating with international organizations and training librarians in conflict resolution are additional strategies that can empower libraries to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding efforts. Moreover, the integration of AI and data analytics opens up new avenues for libraries to support conflict prevention by providing early warnings and insights into emerging conflicts.

Conclusion

Libraries, as repositories of knowledge and hubs for information dissemination, have always been fundamental to societal development. In the context of conflict resolution and management, their role becomes even more critical. While they face significant challenges, including funding constraints and technological limitations, the potential for innovation is immense. By embracing digital transformation, fostering collaborations, and expanding their role as neutral spaces for dialogue, libraries can position themselves as vital players in global peacebuilding efforts. With proper investment in technology, staff training, and infrastructure, libraries can not only preserve cultural and historical knowledge but also actively contribute to conflict prevention and resolution. As conflict resolution becomes increasingly data-driven and globalized, the role of libraries will likely expand, making them indispensable in building more peaceful and informed societies.

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