



P-ISSN: 2394-1685  
E-ISSN: 2394-1693  
Impact Factor (ISRA): 5.38  
IJPESH 2016; 3(5): 371-373  
© 2016 IJPESH  
www.kheljournal.com  
Received: 01-07-2016  
Accepted: 02-08-2016

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# International Journal of Physical Education, Sports and Health

## Role of sports in development and maintenance of peace among African countries

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### Abstract

Sports serve as safety valve or avenue to dissipate excess, tension and possible expression of hostility in the society, and this gives those who are involved an opportunity to thereafter behave well. This paper examined the role of sport in development and maintenance of peace among African countries. The paper looked at the benefits of sports as a tool in the cessation of hostilities, to encourage reconciliation between conflicting nations and also help to bring support and benefits of physical activity to victims of conflict. The paper is of the opinion that sports serve as a catalyst for development and maintenance of peace in the society, thus bringing about desirable social change. The paper postulated that sport can be used as a tool to encourage school attendance, improve people's health, create jobs, support the economy, reduce gender inequality and raise environmental awareness. The paper also identified insufficient physical activity as one of the main causes of death in the world, it is a major predisposing factor to hypokinetic diseases such as heart diseases cancer, asthma, diabetes and osteoporosis. The paper concluded that these health problems that stand as obstacles to development and peace in a society can be prevented through a programme that promote healthy diets, sports and physical activity participation. It therefore recommended that, governments through their agencies and ministries and various NGOs should use sport as a common ground to promote peace, health, development and reconciliation in conflict-prone areas of the continent.

**Keywords:** Sports, development, peace, conflict, economy

### 1. Introduction

Sport is as old as human existence. It is a common knowledge that individuals and groups of people are brought together and merged through sport in that it serves as a cohesive agent to bring about national awareness, unity and development. Sport is a household affair of every nation throughout the world. This is because its influence cuts across all facets of our national life. Many sports persons and sports organizations have sought to intervene in situations of political and military conflict (Klein, 2003) [3].

The facts that a lot of people spend precious hours and hard-earned resources on sports and have used sports in resolving conflicts has made it imperative to take a critical look at the role of sport in development and maintenance of peace among African countries. The intervention strategies ranging from the declaration of truce at the time the Summer Olympic and winter Olympic Games by the International Olympic Committee and United Nations, the educational exchange programmes conducted for Jewish and Arab children in Israel by groups such as Football 4 Peace, to the coaching development programme conducted by Fight To Play in refugee camps in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, have gone a long way to accelerate the development and peace in the continent and the world at large (Asagba, 2001) [1]. There is enough evidence that these programmes are highly valued by those who enjoy them. The irony is that majority of these efforts are directed at able-bodied adolescents boys and young men (Suarau 2000) [8]. The absence of girls, women and persons with disabilities is striking particularly when they bear the brunt of ravages of war and conflict. There is clear evidence that very few of these programmes have been critically monitored and evaluated (Onifade 2001) [7]. But existing literature has largely been written without making reference to the large body of literature on peace keeping and peace-building.

However, many of the sport-for-peace programs, do work in ways that literature on peace building suggests can be effective, especially those that really focus on relationship building after conflict.

### 1.2 Sport as a Tool for Development of a Nation

International Sports Federation, National Olympic committee, and the international Paralympic Committee have been in the forefront in the crusade to further promote and use of Sport as an effective tool for development in many different ways. The most important contribution of Sport is that it brings about social change (Jarvie and Maquire 1994) <sup>[4]</sup>. Though Sport itself cannot move a country out of poverty, it can however, contribute to bringing about social change. Sports can trigger mutual respect and understanding among athletes and among supporters. Through role models, sports can promote leadership and reach out to youth. Adding an educational message to sports or sporting events can raise awareness on societal issues, such as HIV/AIDS. Sports attracts people that do not respond to mainstream institutions (Oduyale, 2001). In other words, sport can reach a much larger audience.

Well-designed, developed and implemented sport policies at the local, national and international levels can contribute to achieving international development goals, including the Millennium Development goals (MDGS). On the practical level, it has been postulated that sport can be used as a tool to encourage school attendance, improve people's health, to create jobs, support the economy, promote gender equality and raise environmental awareness (Oduyale, 2001) <sup>[6]</sup>. On the other hand, research to date has identify insufficient physical activity as one of the main causes death in the world, the fourth to be precise, and leads to hypokinetic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, asthma, diabetes and osteoporosis (Forsberg and Andersen, 2002). Global status report (2010) show that 35% of adult population (20 years and above) is overweight. This report also held women to be at a greater risk. However, these health problems can be prevented through a programme that promotes healthy diets sports and physical activity (Wayne, Dale and Ellen, 2005) <sup>[9]</sup>.

A nation of healthy population will reap economic benefits as medical costs will decrease, and more people will be able to work. At a household level, this means that families will have a more secure stable income which might increase their food intake and improve their children's school attendance. Apart from directly contributing to development, sport also has a much more multiplier effect in society. For sport to stand the test of time for development, issues such as unqualified teachers, trainers, lack of good and accessible sports infrastructures, and the issue of "muscle drain" has to be nipped in the bud. According to Oduyale (2001) <sup>[6]</sup>, Sport and physical education are often perceived as no-educational activities. This issue has to be properly addressed by physical education planners for proper development. Finally, technological innovation, particularly the internet which seems to encourage youth inactivity must be seriously addressed. An active youth pave way for an active nation that will bring prosperity to children yet unborn.

### 1.3 Role of Mega Sporting Events in Peace and Development in Africa

The Olympic Games, All African Games, UEFA, the various FIFA organised football tournaments and the African Cup of Nation football tournament, in peace and development in the world and Africa in particular cannot be overemphasized. These events boost tourism, garner investment from large

cooperations, support investments in small and medium-sized enterprise and stimulates jobs creation and a host of others. For example, the FIFA world cup in South Africa in 2010 turned the country into a unified front. The relationship that was almost marred between Nigeria and South Africa as a result of yellow Fever card incident by South Africa Immigration and the Henry Okah bombing saga did not deter support by South African fans for the Super Eagles when they played in the finals of the Orange Cup of Nations recently concluded in South Africa. All these are tools that can move development and create an atmosphere of peace in the continent.

### 1.4 Sport as a role Model for Peace in the African Continent

The all African Games, the African Cup of Nations football tournament and the modern Olympics Games seems to be able to remove political obstacles that other government policies cannot achieve through the dialogue it creates (Fatile, 1980). Sport has helped facilitate dialogue among conflicting countries, such as the USA and China, Pakistan and India, internal rancour in Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Ivory Coast and a host of others. It has also helped to reconcile soiled diplomatic relations of some African countries, such as Nigeria and South Africa, etc.

One beautiful thing about sport is that it shelves the idea of political ideologies, ethnicity, or religion. It has been suggested that the use of national anthems during mega Games should be discouraged. This is to emphasize that the competition in sport is all about competing athletes, not about competing nations. Particularly, young people can be ambassadors for bringing tolerance and respect for each other, and become catalysts for social change within their communities. It is apparent today that young people are less influenced by ethnic, political or religious differences through social media networks. This has helped in peace and development of the continent.

The high level of crime that characterise the African continent can be overcome through sports for all. The unemployment and poverty, kidnapping, bombing, Bank fraud, internet fraud, and illegal bunkering that has bedevilled the African continent, can be addressed through concrete sport programme that will shape the lives of its citizens and thus bring about the peace and development the continent deserves.

### 2. Conclusions/Recommendations

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the power of sports to promote development and peace in Africa cannot be over stressed. It is therefore recommended that governments at all levels in African should initiate sport programmes that targets children and young people of all abilities, in schools and communities across the continents and promotes the power of high quality and inclusive physical education, sport and play. This will help to contribute to improving national policies in developing countries to provide good quality sports education.

NGO's should build partnership with government to train teachers to deliver good physical education classes, provide teachers that create societal change through sport programme. Government and various NGO's and all stake holders in the crusade to use sport to promote peace and development in African, should use sport as a common ground to promote peace, health, development and reconciliation in conflict-prone areas in the continent.

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