



**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Sports as a Tool for Promoting Peace and Good Governance**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Sport is a growing part of every man and woman's heritage from nature and its absence can never be compensated for. Sport over the years has become a growing social and economic phenomenon which makes an important contribution to the universe toward achieving solidarity and prosperity. Today, sport is used as a powerful instrument for peace among individuals, groups and various countries of the world Nigeria inclusive. Therefore, this paper examines the use of sport as a tool for promoting peace and governance. However, the paper established among other things: the concept of sport, sport and peace and peace timeline since World War II, unique attributions of sport to peace and development, nature of sport vis-à-vis peace and development. It was recommended that sport-based programmes should be considered as a means of establishing and re-establishing relationships either among ethnic or political groups emphasizing sportsmanship spirit.*

**Key words:** Sports, Promoting Peace, Good Governance

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**INTRODUCTION**

Sports are indisputably the most leisure activities in the world, not only for children and youth but for men and women as players, coaches, leaders, administrators and spectators. Despite that the intrinsic values and inherent qualities in sports and play lie entirely on how the participation in sporting activities are experienced and perceived, play is a natural part of people's physical, mental and social development and growth.

According to Robert (2005) the popularity of sports and games among children and youth and the widespread acceptance of sports and games from parents' side, make sports a low entry point for social change. Hence for persons who are skeptical about peace and social cohesion, sport could be a low entry point.

Pelle (2003) argued that not only has sports been recognized as a powerful apparatus, in promoting peace but the fundamental values of sports and play have been acknowledged as very important elements in the building of a strong civil society and state. More than a conflict transforming tool, sports have been granted the potential as a conflict-prevention measure, helping to forestall processes that generate aggression, hatred and fear if the spirit of sportsmanship is embraced.

In ancient Greece, the practice of '*ekecheiria*' sought to facilitate the safe passage of athletes and travelers who were heading to the Olympic Games. The idea of the Olympic truce was subsequently developed by the modern Olympic movement and by the United Nation which since 1993 has passed resolutions that call for world peace during this mega event. During the First World War an informal Christmas truce between British and German forces occurred in 1914; part of the mythology surrounding this occasion points towards rival troops playing football. Hence, sport events such as the Olympic Games have long been overlain with ideologies of internationalism and universalism.

It is worthy to note that since early 1990s, the world has witnessed the growing institutionalized use of sports as an interventionist tool for promoting peace, conflict resolution and development. This does not mean that sport brings absolute peace rather it highlights the emergence of a distinctive and expanding use of sport for alternative purposes different from ordinary play.

Today in Nigeria, the only peaceful and united moment always shared by all Nigerian is when Nigeria Super Eagle is in sport contest with other nations of the world. At that moment the most utmost concern is always that Nigeria wins putting aside sentiments interms of political affiliations and ethnic background.

### **CONCEPT OF SPORT**

The definitions of the term 'sport' vary. In a development context it usually involves a broad and inclusive spectrum of activities suitable to people of all ages and abilities with an emphasis on the position values of sport. United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on sport for Development and Peace (2003) defined sport, for the purpose of development as all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games.

Sports is an activity or experience that gives enjoyment of recreation past-time diversion which require rigorous bodily exertion and is carried out according to some traditional forms or set of rules whether out door or indoor (Aminu and Tanglang, 1998). Sports can also be described as a highly organized physical activity regulated by accepted rules and regulation which sometimes requires maximum physical and mental exertion. Morakinyo (2000) indicated that sport is a social phenomenon that has grown from its humble beginning of being an entertainment and recreation past-time to becoming a viable and prominent business phenomenon that could no more be ignored in the social, political and economic environment of any nation.

While Watt (2004) submitted that sports mean all forms of physical activities which through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical activity, fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels. In a nutshell, sports can be described as those physical activities engaged in during recreation or competitions which have direct effect on the mental, emotional, organic and social development of an individual.

### **NATURE OF SPORTS VIS-À-VIS PEACE**

The nature of sport does not encourage peaceful coexistence because of its competitive nature and complete exertion of energy and power to win a prize open to other contestants which promotes clash of interest. Before now, there had been sport outing leading to conflicts. Globally, many sporting contests have ended up in fiasco or pandemonium due to the activities of sport hooliganisms

According to Pitz (1982), some headiness reports about sporting events in the newspapers have proved sports to be destructive element as indicated in the print media with the headiness such as: "violence at the bell", "victory and death from the Amponle", "Brutality of the combat game", "handball with punch of karate" "Rangers F.C demolished 3SC" "football in Germany is becoming more and more brutal". The above occurred because contestants did not consider the sportsmanship nature of sports but viewed sport as an act of war fare involving shooting and killing without the use guns and swords.

Sports does not primarily aim to prevent conflicts, on the contrary, it initiates conflicts. All sports are based on healthy competition against opponents trying to reach a similar goal. Hence, it facilitates constructive conflict in a peaceful form accepting the fact that there have to be a winner and loser. A balanced level of conflict is not only healthy, but also needed in order for us to craft change and development. Conflict is always difficult and often with a positive solution. This supports why professional athletes embrace each other after a heated contest proving that the end result of sport competition is to create peaceful coexistence.

### **SPORTS AND PEACE TIMELINE SINCE WORLD WAR II**

There is no doubt that sport has historically played an important and diverse role in virtually every society. However, formal recognition of the value of sport with regard to development and peace is far more recent. The timeline below indicates the advancement of sport for development and peace from the post-world war II period to the present demonstrating growing international momentum in sport development potential:-

1978	Sport and physical education recognized as a fundamental human right
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1979	Right of women and girls to participate in sport affirmed
1989	Every child's right to play becomes a human right
1991	The unique role of sport in eliminating poverty and promoting development is acknowledged by the common wealth heads of government
1993	UN General Assembly revives the tradition of the Olympic Truce
2001	The UN inter-Agency Task Force on sport for Development and Peace confirms sport as a tool for development and peace
2003	UN Secretary General appoint a special Adviser on sport for Development and Peace
	First magglingen conference on sport for Development and peace brings together policy makers affirming their commitment to SDP
	First International Next step conference brings together SDP experts and practitioners
	First UN General Assembly Resolution on SDP
2004	SDP IWG established
	European commission launcher European year of Education through sport (EYES)
2005	UN proclaims International Year Sport and Physical Education
	EU recognizes the role of sport to attain the MDGs
	World summit expresses its support to SDP
2006	UN Secretary-General sets out the UN Action Plan on SDP
	African Union launches the International Year of African Football
	SDP IWP launches its preliminary report sport for development and peace; from practice to policy
2007	First African convention recognizes the power of sport to contribute to Education
	EU white paper on sport acknowledges the increasing social and economic role of sport
2008	Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities enters into force, reinforcing the right of people with disabilities to participate with others in sports on equal basis
	SDP IWA releases its final report harnessing the power of sport for development and peace; recommendations to Government

Adapted from "Justice of a Lawless World" (IRIN, 2006)

### UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES OF SPORTS TO PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Hayes and Shidder (2003) were of the opinion that building peace covers a wide range of activities packaged to construct the social, economic and legal fabric of any society following a conflict. Just like many NGO's are active in different sectors trying to build a stronger society on fragile peace accords, sport possesses unique attributes that enables it to bring particular value to development and to peace processes. These attributes include:

#### 1. Sport's Universal Popularity:

People are attracted to sport more than any other activity as participants, spectators, or volunteers. This popularity transcends national cultural, socio-economic and political boundaries and can be invoked with access in virtually any community in the world. Sports popularity derives in large part from the fact that when done rightly, it is fun and enjoyable for everyone. In context where people are faced with difficult and unrelenting challenges in their day-to-day lives the value of this dimension of sport should not be underestimated.

#### 2. Sport's ability to connect people and communities:

Sport as a social connector has an inherent social process of bringing together players, teams, coaches, volunteers and spectators. This connection creates horizontal webs of relationship at the community level and vertical links to national governments, sport federations and international organizations for funding and other forms of support. These connections serve as source of social networking helping to combat exclusion and fostering community capacity to work collectively to

realize opportunities and address challenges as well as establishing a shared bond that contribute positively to social cohesion.

### **3. Sport as a Communication Platform:**

Over the years, sport has emerged as global mass entertainment and has become one of the most powerful and far-reaching communications platforms in the world. Because global sport events offer the capacity to reach vast numbers of people worldwide, they are effective platforms for public education and social mobilization. By implication, high-performance athletes have become global celebrities in their own right, enabling them to serve as powerful ambassadors, spoke people and role-models for development and peace initiatives.

### **4. Cross-cutting nature of Sport:**

Sport possesses an incredible cross-cutting nature of all development and peace tools. It is increasingly being used to promote health, and prevent diseases, strengthen child and youth development and education, foster social inclusion, prevent conflict and build peace, foster gender equity, enhance inclusion of persons with disabilities, promote employment and economic development as well as a veritable tool in promoting political affiliations.

### **5. Its potential to empower, motivate and inspire:**

Sport has consistently shown the ability to empower motivate and inspire individuals and their various communities promoting hope and a positive outlook for the future as well as showcasing peoples' strength and inherent capacities which is an ingredient essential to the success of all development and peace endeavours. Sport has the capacity of promoting physical and mental health. It can be used in all ages to become physically active, providing opportunities for enjoyment and personal development, building self-esteem and fostering positive social connection with others that is essential in peaceful co-existence and nation building.

## **HOW SPORTS CONTRIBUTES TO PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT**

Security wise Giulianotti (2005) posited that sport may help those who have been involved in military conflicts by drawing them out of the routines of violence toward more rule-governed and socially acceptable patterns of behaviour. Considering the case of former child soldiers in West Africa; sports participation may assist in bringing these groups out of a social existence in which violence and terror are a part of day-to-day experience into patterns of social relationship in which personal initiatives and collective endeavour are rewarded in peaceful and socially acceptable ways.

Reconstruction of open sports facilities where people can meet and play has been recognized as an important and early step in normalization process. The concluded 2014 World Cup hosted by Brazil has brought about infrastructural development in the country. Millions of dollars was spent on their transport system as well as facilities that could be used for social or political functions. Physical reconstruction of cities, water provision, electricity were all affected positively as a result of World Cup festival of which the Brazilian government would not have executed considering the time frame involved.

The very process of participating in sport has a personally therapeutic and publicly engaging function with regards to assisting the emotional and social rehabilitation of traumatized individuals. Even though there is limited evidence of the impact sport has to overcome trauma, it is believed that participation in sport can have a positive effect (Wolters, 1998).

Sports are founded upon specific laws that regulate play, thereby ensuring that participants must behave in rule-governed way. Similarly, establishment of sport clubs, teams and league systems based on democratic processes upon clear and agreed rules and regulations of involvement contributes not only to building civil society, but to foster recognition of acts and laws by the participants which bring about peaceful co-existence among individuals and groups.

As established by United Nations (2006), sport is an important pedagogical forum for peace-building and reconciliation. Supporting this, the programmes "building divides" in South Africa used basketball to bring children and communities together. An assessment of the programme

showed that the majority of participants expressed fewer racial stereotypes and less racism compared to children who were not part of the programme. Many participants were in favour of racial integration and further inter-racial socialization than other children. Consequently a study on the role of sport in fostering social integration among different ethnic groups in South African schools showed that several factors contributed to the use of sport being successful in bringing about exchange and building relationships between different groups, including sports non-verbal means of communication, sport as a means to engage in collective experience and establish direct physical contact; and sports ability to transcend class divisions.

### CONCLUSION

For decades sports nature and intrinsic values have been questioned. In 1970's George Orwell stated that serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. Hence it is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard to all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. In other words; it is war minus the shooting. But in the world today sport offers more than a temporary haven for the suspension of conflict, globally sport can solve those problems that politicians and military palpably cannot resolve. Not only has it been recognized as a powerful apparatus for peace and development but a non-negotiable foundation to building strong civil society.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Sports administration should ensure that sports are driven by their developmental objectives and delivered according to the principles of transparency, accountability and sustainability.
2. Since sport is being used as an agent of peace and development, physical education as a subject should be made a compulsory course at all level of education.
3. Sports should not be a business of the Government alone; private sector should be given opportunity to contribute to the development of sport using their wide range of unique managerial, skills, expertise and resources.
4. Government and NGO's should facilitate the development of traditional form of sports so as to use it to achieve peaceful coexistence among various ethnic groups in Nigeria.
5. Sport-based programmes should be considered as a means of establishing and re-establishing relationships either among ethnic or political group emphasizing sportsmanship spirits.

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