

THE IMPACT OF COVID – 19 PANDEMIC ON SPORT DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD



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Abstract

This paper discussed the impact of COVID – 19 pandemic on sport development in Nigeria, proffering the way forward. Coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SAR – CoV – 2), which emerged in Wuhum, China and spread around the world. This paper also defined sport development as the promotion of sport activities for the community, and it is the intentional use of sport as a tool to bring about positive change on the lives of the people and community. Those involved in sports development are, teachers, PE staff, coaches, facility managers, community outreach and youth workers. Others are health specialists, policy makers, sport development officers. Sports development in Nigeria is a continuous improvement of the sports structure, performances and programmes in order to create a condition which is conducive to physical fitness for all the effective functioning of self actualization. In order to get a working document relating to sports development in Nigeria, the National Sport Policy of Nigeria of 2009 objectives were highlighted. The impact of COVID – 19 pandemic in Nigeria includes; postponement of the 20th National Sports Festival, closure of stadiums, fall in sales of sports equipment vendors, reduced fitness status of athletes, sickness and death, and travelling restrictions. Others are poverty unnecessary spending, loss of jobs and contacts, using stadiums as isolation centers, and closure of public and private institutions among others.

Introduction

Many of the major human infectious diseases, including some now confined to human and absent from animals are ‘new’ ones that arose only after the origins of agriculture. Where did they come from? Why are they overwhelmingly of old world origin. The most important infectious diseases of modern food – producing human populations also include diseases that could have emerged only within the past 11,000 years, following the rise of agriculture (Wolfe, Dunovan & Diamond, 2013). A tentative earlier formulation noted that major infectious disease of temperate zones seems to have arisen overwhelmingly in the old world (Africa, Asia and Europe), often from diseases of old world domestic animals (Diamond & Panosian, 2006).

Historians increasingly recognize that infectious diseases have had major effects on the course of history; for example, on the European conquest of Native Americans and pacific Islands, the inability of European to conquer the old world

tropics for many centuries, the failure of Napoleon's invasion of Russia, and the failure of the French attempt to complete construction of a Panama Canal. Evolutionary biologists realize that infectious diseases, as a leading cause of human morbidity and mortality, have exerted important selective forces on our genomes (Diamond & Panosian, 2006).

In the realm of infectious diseases, a pandemic is the worst case scenario. When an epidemic spread beyond a country's borders, that's when the disease officially becomes a pandemic. Communicable diseases existed during humankind's hunter – gatherer days, but the shift to agrarian life 10,000 years ago created communities that made epidemics more possible. Malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, influenza, smallpox and others just appeared during this period (Cartwright, 2014). Several pandemic disease have plagued mankind over time, and some of them include: Athens (450 BC), Antonine Plague (165 A.D), Cyprian Plague (165 A.D). Others are Leprosy (11th Century), The Black Death (13 – 50). The Columbian Exchange (1492), The Great Plague of London (1665), First Cholera Pandemic (1817). Also inclusive are; The Third Plague Pandemic (1855), Fiji Measles Pandemic (1875), Russian Flu (1889), Spanish Flu (1918), Asian Flu (1957), HIV/AIDS (1981), SARS (2003), and COVID – 19 (2019) (History.Com.Editors).

COVID – 19 is caused by a novel coronavirus – a new corona virus strain that has not been previously found in people. Symptoms include respiratory problems, fever and cough, and can lead to pneumonia and death. Like SARS, it's spread through droplets from sneezes. The first reported case in China appeared November 17, 2019, in the Hubei Province, but went unrecognized (History.Com.Editors). On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced that the COVID-19 virus was officially a pandemic after barreling through 114 countries in three months and affecting over 118,000 people, and the spread was still on going. Recently in mid September, 2020, there are 27,486,960 cases and 911,877 deaths (Wikipedia, 2020).

During the period of March up till May, 2020, major cities and countries over the world were shut down, with only people on emergencies and essential services granted movement. International and national flights were highly restricted and banned. In Nigeria workers were asked to work from home and inter-state boarders were closed. Sports in its entirety was also banned, with competitions, and training stopped. This led to serious loss of revenue from gate takings, loss of revenue from sports related industries and competition glee. In view of the hardship and other related negative consequences of coronavirus, this paper seeks to review the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on sports development in Nigeria and proffer the way forward.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 by (SARS – CoV – 2), which emerged in Wuhan, China and spread around the world.

Genomic analysis revealed that SARS-CoV-2 is phylogenetically related to severe acute respiratory syndrome – like (SARS – like) bat virus, therefore bats could be the possible primary reservoir (Sheereen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir & Siddique, 2020).

Coronavirus belong to the coronaviridae family in the Nidovirales order. Corona represent crown – like spikes on the outer surface of the virus; thus it was named a coronavirus. Corona viruses are minute in size (65 – 125nm in diameter) and contain a single-stranded RNA as a nucleic material, size ranging from 26 – 32kbs in length. These viruses were thought to infect only animals until the world witnessed a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak caused by SARS – CoV, 2002 in Quandong, China (Zhong, Zheng, Li, Poon, Xie & Chan, 2003).

SARS – CoV – 2 is not the first coronavirus to cause outbreaks of respiratory infection in humans. Six others have been identified so far, all believed to have originated in animals (Anderson, Rambaut & Garry, 2020, Corman and Drosten, 2018). The four corona virus that are new endermic in humans cause 10 – 15% of common colds mostly peaking between December and April in temperate climates. NL63 and 229E probably came from bats; OC43 and HKUI seem to have originated in rodents. Two non – endermic coronaviruses have caused serious disease. SARS – CoV was the first to be recognized in November 2002 in China (Chaplin, 2020).

Like SARS-CoV, the SARS-CoV-2 virus responsible for COVID-19 can survive in aerosols for hours and on surfaces including stainless steels, plastic cardboards for days, although washing with soap or detergent will destroy the virus. It can be asymptomatic incubation phase, and for up to two weeks after the onset of symptoms. Each person infected passes the virus on to an average of three others. The incubation period is about 5 – 6 days (range 1 – 14 days). Clinical presentation varies from asymptomatic, subclinical infection and mild illness to severe or partial illness; deterioration can occur rapidly. Viral load is up to 60 times greater in people with severe symptoms compared with mild cases. Death is due to pneumonia and possibly hyperinflammation associated with cytokine storm syndrome (Doremalen, Bushmaker, & Morris, 2020, Rothe, 2020).

Nigeria as a nation though was not anticipating any major health problem had her own share of the pandemic, when her first confirmed case was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive to the virus. On 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen (en-m-wikipedia.org). As at the time of writing this paper, the sampled cases in Nigeria is 440,248, while confirmed cases is 56,177 and 44,088 patients were discharged, while the confirmed fatalities is 1,078.

Sport Development

Sport development is the promotion of sports activities for the community. Sport development is the intentional use of sport as a tool to bring about positive change in the lives of people and communities (sported.org.uk). Sport and development

refers to the use of sport as a tool for development and peace (www.sportanddev.org). Development – through sport identifies objectives first and then identifies how well planned sport – based activities can contribute to these. It acknowledges that sport is one of a number of approaches in one of a number to contribute to development objectives (www.sportanddev.org).

Successful sports development depends largely on effective partnership and networking with a wide range of community groups, service providers, facility operators, national governing bodies, local authorities and voluntary groups (teaching.shu.ac.uk).

Mission Statement: According to teaching.shu.ac.uk the mission of sport development are as follows:

- ❖ To develop and promote sport and leisure opportunities for local residents and workforce from foundation to excellence.
- ❖ Removing barriers to participation, promoting personal, social and community development.
- ❖ The sport development movement started in the early 1980's.

Those Involved in Sport Development: Those involved are as follows: teachers, PE staff, coaches, facility managers, community outreach and youth workers, others are health specialists, policy makers and sport development officers.

Sport Development in Nigeria

Sport development is a process of continuous improvement of the sports structures, performances and programmes in order to create a condition which is conducive to physical fitness for all and the effective functioning of self – actualization (Mohammed, 2014). Sport development in Nigeria started during the military era, with the forming of sport associations and building of stadiums for sport participation. Sport world wide have become progressively capital intensive, yet our history show that government has almost single handedly shouldered the responsibility for sport development in Nigeria; especially when it comes to provision of sports facilities, programme, personnel and participation in continental and global competitions (Mohammed, 2014).

The federal government has made tremendous efforts towards the development of sports in the country. In most cases, substantial resources, both humans and materials have been invested in a wide range of activities intended to bring about a strong base for a meaningful development of sport. An objective observation of these efforts reveals that the commendable objectives of the government are yet far from being realized (www.worldresearchlibrary.org).

National Sports Policy of Nigeria

The national sport policy is a detailed document that outlined sport developmental programmes in line with national sport development. This policy seeks to clearly outline the obligation of the stakeholders in sports such that all parties of the three tiers of government will be involved (National Sports Policy of Nigeria ,2009).

The objectives of the policy are as follows:

- a. To develop sports to become an instrument of national unity
- b. Utilize achievements in sport to boast the country's image in the comity of nations.
- c. Develop athletes, coaches, technical officials, sports scientists, sport medicine practitioners and administrators to be among the best in the world.
- d. Attract major international sporting events to Nigeria and expect their benefits for tourism and the economy.
- e. Create enabling environment for sport good manufacturing industries.
- f. Use sport as an avenue to minimize anti-social behavior.
- g. Promote sport as a means to generate employment and create wealth.
- h. To give opportunity to the physically challenged person to participate in sport of their choice.
- i. Encourage private sectors investments in all sectors of sport.
- j. Ensure utilization of Information Technology to collate sport data for effective planning and dissemination of information.
- k. Encourage the provisions of recreational and sporting facilities by the three tiers of government.
- l. Ensure adequate and proper funding of sport at all levels.
- m. Promote school and international sport development and competitions at all tiers of government.
- n. Ensure that sport is an integral part of the curriculum of educational institution at all levels (nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary).
- o. Encourage mass participation in sport and recreation with a view to using exercise for the improvement of the general health and fitness of citizens (National Sports Policy of Nigeria, 2009).

COVID – 19 Pandemic and Sports

The global outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in closure of gyms, stadiums, pools, dance and fitness studios, physiotherapy centers, parks and playgrounds. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the most significant disruption to the worldwide sport calendar since the World War II. Across the world, and to varying degrees sport events have been cancelled or postponed (BBC, 2020, Los Angeles Times, 2020). The 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo were rescheduled to 2021, and spectators have no games to watch, and players no games to play.

Since the onset, the COVID-19 pandemic has spread to almost all countries of the world including Nigeria, so social and physical distancing measures were introduced.

Business, schools and overall social life were shot down and monitored, and sport and outdoors physical activity were curtailed maximally. To safeguard the health of athletes and others involved, most major sporting events at international, regional and national levels were cancelled or postponed, ranging from marathons to football tournaments, athletics championship to basketball games, handball, cricket and all other contact sports (www.un.org).

The global value of the sports industry is estimated at US\$756 billion annually in the face of COVID-19, many millions of jobs are therefore at risk globally, not only for sport professionals, but also for those in related retail and sporting services industries connected with leagues and events, which include travel, tourism, infrastructure, transportation, catering and media broadcasting, among others. Professional athletes are also under pressure to reschedule their training, which trying to stay fit at home (www.un.org).

In Nigeria, the story is not quite different from that of other countries in the world, so therefore, the impact of COVID-19 on sports development in Nigeria are as follows:

- **Postponement of the National Sports Festival:** The national sports festival which was scheduled for Friday March 20 to Wednesday April 1, 2020, was postponed by federal government. This has led to lose of millions of naira in every states which had prepared for many months prior to the festival. In Delta State, many of their foreign based athletes were already in Nigeria, before the cancellation of the festival.
- **Closure of Stadiums:** The pandemic made the federal government to close all training venues including stadiums to present clustering and violation of the COVID-19 protocol. Owing to this, athletes were confined indoors without regular and severe training activities.
- **Fall in Sales of Sport Equipment Vendors:** During the closure of stadiums, shops and markets, vendors whose livelihood depends on the sales of sport equipment suffered severe set backs on their financial status, due to lack of sales as at when the closure lasted.
- **Reduced Fitness Status of Athletes:** The stay-at-home order seriously affected the physical and health status of already prepared athletes. Some of the athletes were careless about their fitness status by engaging in activities that are inimical to athletic preparations.
- **Sickness and Deaths:** The COVID-19 unfortunately made many promising athletes and coaches sick and few of them were not so fortunate (Punch, 2020).
- **Travelling Restrictions:** The COVID-19 pandemic unfortunately prevented some athletes who were to travel abroad to secure contracts with foreign clubs and schools scholarship.

- **Poverty and Unnecessary Spending:** The stay-at-home order really created poverty due to hike in prices of goods and services among athletes, coaches as well as other sports practitioners. Palliative measures did not get to majority of the citizen including athletes and coaches.
- **Lost of Contracts and Jobs:** In Nigeria, many athletes and coaches on contract jobs suffered loss of jobs; owing to drastic shortfall in revenue in clubs and sports related establishment due to shut-down order.
- **The Use of Stadiums as Isolation Centers:** In Nigeria, some stadiums were converted to isolation centers for COVID-19 patients, where hospitals filled up.
- **Abandoned Stadium and their Facilities:** During the lock down period, virtually all the stadiums in Nigeria were abandoned and became unkempt with overgrown grasses and pitches, coupled with unswept dirty dusty terrace and offices.
- **Abandoned Facilities in Higher Institutions:** Most of the facilities in our higher institutions of learning were left abandoned during the lock-down period. Reptiles and other crawling creatures took over the football and other pitches, and swimming pools were left unattended to during the lock-down period.
- **Postponement of all Sports Leagues, Championship and Competitions:** Virtually all sports championship all over Nigeria were put on hold, ranging from athletics, football, basketball, volleyball, cricket and handball among others.
- **Closure of Public and Private Primary, Secondary Schools and Higher Institutions:** Sports activities such as training and inter – house sports competitions were put on hold during the lock-down period, even workers in government offices at lower grade level were told to at home.

The Way Forward

The way forward on the impact of COVID-19 on sport development in Nigeria are as follows:

- Federal, State government and non – governmental agencies and organizations should provide sport federation, clubs and organization in the country with guiding related to safety, health and ways to conduct their members in prevention or COVID-19.
- Sports practitioners should assess new ways and innovative solutions to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic in sports world. Protecting both athletes and fans from further spread of COVID-19.
- Federal and State government should collaborate with primary, secondary and higher institutions respectively, health care services and provider as well as

civil society organizations to support physical activity at home during spare time.

- Through its research and policy guidance, federal and state government should support educational instructions, sports associations and sports practitioners to ensure effective recovery and reorientation of research based network process and procedures.
- Government of all tiers should support and promote the development and implementation of national policies and approaches for the best use of sport to advance health and well-being particularly during COVID-19 period.

Summary and Conclusion

Infectious diseases had been plaguing man sense time immemorial with its attending negative consequences which as a result, many individual's lives were cut short. Over down the centuries, certain infectious diseases were widely spread from one country to another with massive deaths and agonies, generating into pandemic cases. When an epidemic spread beyond a country's boarder, it is officially declared as pandemic. The COVID-19 reared its ugly head as one of the disruptive element to sport participation and postponement since World War II. It was first recognize in China in 2019. COVID-19 has made great impact to sports development all over the world and Nigeria, with the Nigeria situation not quite difference from others. The National Sports Policy of Nigeria is a detailed document that outline sports developmental programmes and its objective were highlighted. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in closure of gyms, stadiums, pools, dance and fitness centers as well as all educational institutions, physiotherapy centers, parks and playground, and this seriously affected sports development among other factors.

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