THE ROLE OF SPORTS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
OF AFRICAN STATES

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the role of sports in economic development of African states. Potentials of sports is highlighted and discussed by its economic weight, resulting from activities such as manufacture of sporting goods, job creation, employment training, sports infrastructure and hosting rights of sports events in African states. It is recommended that African countries should incorporate sports and physical activity into the development policies as well as the development agenda of national and international development agencies, with particular emphasis on young people, among others.

Key words: Sports and Economic Development

The emergence of economic recession particularly in the 21st century has brought about retrogressive average annual percentage growth of GDP in most advanced and industrialized nations, such as the United States of America, Soviet Union, Great Britain, Australia and France, among others, causing devastating socio-economic problems in these countries and by extension the third world countries. Statistics has shown that the incidence of poverty in Africa using the US 1 dollar per day increased from 28.1 percent to 54.4 percent (Igbuzor, 2006:2). Igbuzor (2006:2)
reported that the average annual percentage growth of GDP of Nigeria was 2.4 percent, Ghana had 4.3 percent and Egypt had 4.6 percent between 1990 and 2000.

Concerned with the global economic recession vis-a–viz its attending consequences, several concrete steps have been taken in recent years in support of the use of sports for socio-economic development among the United Nations System. The International Conference of Ministers and Senior officials responsible for Physical Education and Sports(MINEPS III); the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) meeting of Ministers for Physical Education and Sports in 1999; the World Health Assembly Resolution (WHA) 5523 in 2002, concerning WHO’s global strategy on diet, physical activity and health.

With these several concrete efforts made so far the role of sports in economic development is yet to be fully realized most especially in African countries. The use of sports in Africa remains out-side the mainstream of thinking. While, sport and play are repeatedly acknowledged as a human right, they are not always seen as a priority and have even been called the ‘forgotten right’. Sport is seen as a by-product of development, not as an engine (United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2003:2). Sport is far more than a luxury or a form of entertainment. Access to and participation in sports is a human right and essential for individuals of all ages to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. Sport is a force which provides employment opportunities for economic development of individuals and consequently a nation at large.

An attempt is made in this paper to discuss why sports must play a stronger role in the economic development agenda of African States. By demonstrating the contributions sport can make when it is utilized as a coordinated and strategic way. This paper challenges the African countries to integrate sports in their economic development plans.

Scope of Sport

Incorporated into the definition of ‘sport’, according to the United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace (2003:2) are all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. These, include play, recreation, organized casual or competitive sport, and indigenous sports or games. Play, especially among children, is any physical activity that is fun and participatory. It is often unstructured, and free from adult direction. Recreation is more organized than play and generally entails physically active leisure activities. Sport is more organized games and involves rules, customs and sometimes competition. Importantly, play, physical recreation and sport are all free chosen activities undertaken for pleasure.
The concept of ‘‘sport for all’’ is central to this understanding of sport. ‘‘Sport for all’’ aims maximise access to and participation in appropriate forms of physical activity. Emphasis is placed on participation and the inclusion of all groups in society, regardless of gender, age, ability, or race.

**Sports and Economic Development**

Sport in ancient period played a very significant role in the development of societies. The ancient country of Greece recognized the role of sport and physical activity in the development of their citizens to defend their state. In modern times, there has never been an area of human endeavour that attracted so much attention as the field of sports. Sport has become one of the most effective public relation assets, which countries use to develop both the individual and the society at large (Barrow, 1977:152). Similarly, Coakley, (2004:165) posited that sport and other societal products such as education, politics, culture and economic among others are powerful instrument for individuals and nations development. According to the United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace (2003:3) sport is essential to human development which leads to economic development of any society. The economic potential of sport is highlighted by its economic weight in areas such as the manufacture of sporting goods, sport events, sport-related services and the media. Globally, the sport sector is valued at USD 36 billion and is predicted to expand by 3 percent to 5 percent per year. In the United Kingdom, for example, the value-added of sports activities is estimated to be 1.7 percent of GDP, with sport-related turnover comparable to that of automotive and food industries. The sport sector has the potential for improving and expanding human resource capacity which can generate sustainable economic development of nations.

The Euro-American countries such as the United States of America, Germany, Australia, Great Britain and France, among others, acknowledged the significant values of sport and physical activity thereby formulating national policy for sports and creating the enabling environment for its full implementation (Abeku, 2011:3). Similarly, the fastest growing economy of the ‘‘Asian Tigers’’ such as China, Japan, South Korea, and India is as a result of their recognition of the values of sport and physical activity in fostering and sustaining a healthy population through widespread participation which brings about development of citizens and their nations at large (Abeku, 2007:76).

Sport can be an effective stimulus for economic development especially at the local level. The linkages between the different elements of sports sector are highly effective when harnessed locally because of the economies of scale. Individually, each of the various sectors of the sports economic can create activity, job, and wealth. When several are combined together into a single strategy it is possible to achieve additional
economic gains because of the synergies that result. The local economic potential to sport is further enhanced when supported by national ‘‘sport for all’’ strategies. By encouraging sport and sport-based economic activities, it is possible to initiate a ‘‘virtuous circle’’ in which new forms of activity are generated, requiring additional goods and services, creating jobs and contributing to economic development (United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2003:3 ).

**Strategies on Sport for Economic Development**

The role of sport in economic development cannot be over-emphasized. The following strategies can be employed in using sport by African countries to attain sustainable economic development. The strategies include: manufacture of sporting goods, sport and job creation, sport infrastructure provision and utilization, sport and employment training and sport and hosting rights.

**Manufacture of Sporting Goods**

There is high demand for sporting goods in Africa as large population of African youth participate in different sporting activities without proper and adequate sporting goods. Despite the presence of local raw materials and manpower in Africa, sporting goods are not manufactured on a large scale in Africa. Most of the sporting goods are manufactured and imported from developed countries and such sporting goods prohibitively expensive and unsuited to tough playing conditions provides opportunities for local small-and medium-sized enterprises to use existing skills and facilities to produce specialized sporting equipment at price that is locally affordable.

**Sport and Job Creation**

Sport is an effective tool for job creation. By developing new activities based on sport or by more effectively using existing sports facilities, sport and community-based programmes can create jobs, particularly for young people, and especially where unmet demand is identified. Different sport talents abound in different countries of Africa. For example, Kenya and Ethiopia in East Africa are endowed with great potentials in long distance in athletics; Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d’ Ivoire, among others in West Africa are endowed with abundant talents in Soccer, Boxing, Weight lifting, and sprint races in athletics; Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, among others in North Africa are richly endowed with talents in Wrestling, Marshal arts, Table tennis, Badminton and Hockey; and South Africa is blessed with talents in Swimming, Archery, and Gymnastics. These talents can be developed through participation in local sport competitions so that the individuals can graduates from amateurism to professionalism.

**Sport and Employment Training**

Sport-related initiatives can improve the capacity of the labour force. Beyond the increased productivity generated by having a physically active workforce. Sport is a
valuable employment training tool. Sport teaches skills such as the value of effort and how to work as a team, thus improving employability. This is especially effective when forced on young people and marginalized groups.

**Sport Infrastructure Provision and Utilization**

The construction or rehabilitation of sports infrastructure can stimulate economic development, whether they are large facilities or small projects, such as levelling a space to make it safe and suitable for playing. Therefore, open spaces and the development of sports infrastructure is an important matter in urban planning. The economic benefits of developing infrastructure include employment and investment during construction, as well as ongoing employment to manage the facility and the activities within it. Once constructed, some sports facilities can be used for multiple purposes, including by schools, and community groups for cultural, social and other activities.

**Hosting Rights of Sports Events**

Studies on a number of local sports events shows that they have the capacity to attract large numbers of people, initially from the local and surrounding areas where sports events take place and progressively from further away (http://www.sportanddev.org/en/, 2013). Local industries and a local sport sector may emerge should the events generate enough interest as to attract people willing to attend the event and purchase products and services associated with the event. At the local level, a ‘‘virtuous cycle’’ can be created, in which sports related services are provided, creating jobs and opportunities to upgrade skills and produce further services and products-a positive spill-over effect from local sports events.

At the international level, hosting of sports events has economic beneficial effect on hosting countries. Countries hosting sports events receive large attendance of sports tourists from different parts of the world. The large attendance boost commercial activities of host countries as hospitality services such as hotel accommodation, transportation and cafeteria services, among others records significant patronage. Therefore, African countries must realise the potentials of hosting sport events to promote sustainable economic development.

**Conclusion**

The benefits of sports are not only enjoyed by individuals who participate in, but also their societies in general. Sport-from play and physical activity to organized and competitive sport is a powerful and cost-effective way to support development objectives. Strategies such as manufacture of sporting goods, sports and job creation, sports infrastructure provision and utilization, sports and employment training and
hosting right of sports events have beneficial economic effects for sustainable economic development for African countries.

**Recommendations**

Based on the discussion raised in this paper the following recommendations are made.

1. African countries should incorporate sport and physical activity into the development policies as well as the development agenda of national and international development agencies, with particular emphasis on young people.

2. Governments of African countries and the African Union Agencies should include the opportunity of participating in sports as an objective as well as a means to achieve economic development objectives.

3. Sport-related initiatives should be introduced into the programmes of African Union Agencies where appropriate and according to locally assessed economic development needs can be achieved.

4. Governments of African countries should identify and make available resources for sport initiatives, which maximise participation in and access to sport for all within their own countries.

5. African Union should include private sector partners, sports organizations and civil society to generate in-kind and financial support for sport.

**References**


