Chapter 5: Sport for peace: Opportunities and challenges

Florence Gitau
Moi University, Nairobi, Kenya

&

Samuel Kochomay
Daystar University, Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract

Sport has gained prominence in peacebuilding practice worldwide. From ancient Greece to contemporary societies, experience has shown that sport has power and potential as a tool for facilitating peace processes. In recent times, with UN promotion of the Olympic Truce, governmental and nongovernmental organizations in East Africa have picked up and used sport to promote peace and development. This chapter reviews the practice of sport for peace in the East African Region. The chapter highlights sport for peace practices, examines the successes and challenges, and suggests ways for increasing the net gain of sport in assisting peace building processes.

Keywords: sport, peace building, sport for peace

Introduction

There is a lot of enthusiasm among peace actors to fully harness the power of sport. Being “a language every one of us can speak” (Moon, 2010, p. 1), sport unites people of all social classes, cultures and religions in a positive and educational way (HWC, 2009, September 3, p. 1). This gives sport a special place in contemporary society. Though many sport for peace practices have been largely used at the reconciliation stage in the conflict cycle, sport can be used as either a stop-gap measure, a long term strategy, or both. Sport is in itself neutral. Its success or failure depends on how it is applied. This chapter starts with the historical background to sport for peace, and then provides an overview of sport for peace practices with mention of cases from the world over, Africa and finally East Africa. In examining the practice of this concept in East Africa, this chapter provides an overview of sports for peace practices in Rwanda, Kenya and gives a closer look at the Tegla Loroupe Peace Races as a case study for examining the effects of sport for peace, its management, its successes and the challenges that these processes face. This chapter suggests ways in which sport for peace can be improved.

In this article, peace building encompasses long-term focused pre-conflict, during conflict and post-conflict interventions and processes. This chapter adopts the Right to Play (2101) definition of sport which states that “sport is 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.” Sport for peace will refer to sport organized to facilitate the peace process.