

CONTRIBUTIONS OF SPORTS TOWARDS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

After the attainment of independence from colonial rule in 1963, the priority issues on which the post-colonial Kenya Government focused its attention was eradication of poverty, improvement of healthcare facilities and expansion of education. National development plans in the first decade therefore addressed these three main issues. At that time, sport did not feature as a facet to development. Though people participated in sports, this was to a less extent and was generally regarded as pastime activity. In addition, sports were regarded as an activity for children in schools.

In the 1960's, some athletes who excelled in major international competitions provided the impetus for increased interest and participation in sports by Kenyans from all walks of life. Consequently, many sports federations and organization to manage and administer various sports disciplines were formed and registered by the Government.

At this moment in the history of Kenya, there has been tremendous development of sports. Its popularity has stemmed from the understanding of the Government and the people of Kenya of the role of sports as a vehicle for national development. Indeed, the contribution of sports towards social, economic, cultural and political development of Kenya has been immense. Unfortunately, there has been no documentation of the important role of sports in Kenya's development. The present paper therefore presents an overview of the status of sports in Kenya, the achievements attained and an elaboration on tangible contributions that sports has made towards the development of the nation. It is hoped that the information will provide some ideas and lessons that could benefit other countries of the world in their efforts to develop mass sport.

KEY WORDS: *Sport, National Development, Post-colonial, Social Development.*

INTRODUCTION

Before the establishment of colonial (British) rule in Kenya in the middle of the 19th Century, the indigenous people participated in a wide range of physical activities, which were part of their daily routine of life (Wamukoya, 1993). The

traditional society had numerous games, dances and initiation rituals couched in physical prowess. Rituals to mark the beginning of the planting, harvesting, hunting, rain or circumcision seasons were usually accompanied by dancing and singing. Competitive games and activities

in wrestling, running, throwing, climbing, and mock fights were also common among herds boys while looking after domestic animals (Mazrui; 1986, Wamukoya, 1993). While emphasizing on the fact that Kenya's indigenous people engaged in a wide range of traditional sports, Stuart (1993) summarizes it thus:

"Sport has always been part of life in Africa, but in the past people played different games and took part in different sports. Young people wrestled or fought friendly stick fights. Young herd boys rode races on their animals. Those who lived near water enjoyed swimming and canoe racing. Dancing was always popular, and some children even rode toboggans. Those who were successful in traditional sport had high status. Then as now, the winners were admired and respected". (pp 77)

Most of the modern games in their present form were introduced into Kenya by the British colonialists in the first half of the 20th century. The colonialists emphasized on the inclusion of Physical Education in the School Curriculum and sports as an extra curricular activity (Nteere, 1982). There is also evidence that colonialists made some contribution towards the establishment and development of sporting facilities for the general public as a means of creating a healthy society (Krotee et al., 1988). The main problems that faced sports at that time included lack of knowledgeable personnel in Physical Education and Sport, coupled with the fact that the sports were conducted along racial lines (Mazrui, 1986).

Soon after the attainment of independence from the British colonial rule in 1963, sports was not included as a priority issue on the development agenda of the post-colonial government. The priority issues then were eradication of poverty, improvement of healthcare facilities and expansion of education. National Development Plans in the first decade therefore, addressed these three main issues. Although Physical Education was

still retained in the school curriculum, sports in general did not feature as a facet to development.

Though people participated in sports, this was to a less extent, and was generally regarded as a pastime activity and also as an activity for children. Most of the out-of-school sporting activities were run by the local authorities and voluntary sporting clubs and organizations which facilitated the participation of a few of Kenya's sportsmen and women in some of the major international sports events such as the Olympic Games, All-Africa Games and Commonwealth Games.

The few Kenyan athletes who excelled in major international competitions in the 1960s provided the impetus for increased interest and participation in sports. The few heroes became role models for a majority of Kenyans. Consequently, many Sports Clubs, Federations and Organizations to manage and administer various sports disciplines were formed and registered by the Government. The Government, for instance, created the Kenya National Sports Council in 1966 through an Act of Parliament, and later, a full-fledged Department of Sports in the Government in 1989 to oversee sports matters in the country.

Over the years, there have been tremendous developments of sports in Kenya. The popularity has stemmed from the understanding of the Government and the people of Kenya of the role of sports as a vehicle for national development. Indeed, the contribution of sports towards social, economic, cultural and political development of Kenya has been immense. Unfortunately, there has been no published study highlighting this important role of sport in Kenya's development and the tangible contributions that sport has made towards the development of the country. It is

hoped that other than enlightening the people of Kenya on the positive relationship between sports and national development, the paper will also provide some ideas and lessons that could benefit other countries in their efforts to develop sports.

ORGANIZATION OF SPORTS IN KENYA

The structure of sports organization in Kenya stretches from the grassroots (village) to the national level (Tirop, 1999). Most of the various sports disciplines have clubs and National Federations, which coordinate their activities. The Kenya National Sports Council is the umbrella for all the sports federations whose main responsibility is to oversee and coordinate the activities of the federations. The Department of Sports plays the main role of formulating and ensuring implementation of the national policy on Sports. Members of the public are also at liberty to form and register their own sports clubs, most of which affiliate to their respective national sports federations and organizations. The national sports federations organize their respective activities at national level while their branches and sub-branches do the same at the provincial and district levels, respectively (Asembo, 2003; Njororai, 2003).

In general, sports in Kenya is a household activity that cuts across the spectrum of the population. Opportunities are available for those who wish to participate in sports. The government, local authorities, institutions of learning, private institutions and firms have developed facilities for various sports activities.

CONTRIBUTION OF SPORTS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sport has contributed significantly to the development of Kenya, though it is not possible to exhaustively quantify all the

aspects of the development (Tirop, 1999). Sport has effectively served as a catalyst to develop in the social, economic, political, educational and health aspects of the country. According to Mahlmann, Asembo and Korir, (1993). Kenya's second National Development Plan (1970-1974) emphasized the values of participation in sports as: physical fitness, good health, nation building, cooperation, capacity for excellence and positive image abroad.

SPORTS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

There is no doubt that sport has contributed immensely towards economic development of Kenya. The fact that sport is one of the biggest economic industries in the country is not a subject of debate. Like other commodities, sport has been a commodity that is produced, marketed and sold to the public (McPherson, Curtis & Loy, 1989).

Due to the popularity of sport in Kenya, many commercial organizations in the country have been keen on advertising and marketing their goods and services through sporting activities. The commercial organizations spent millions of shillings through advertisements and sponsorships of sport events, thereby enabling them to maximize profits through increased sales of their products and services.

Over the years, sport has opened up employment opportunities in Kenya's private and public sectors for various cadres of sports personnel. Indeed, according to Achola and Njororai, (1999), sports provide an outlet for economic survival for a participant in terms of getting a job or even earning a living directly from match allowances. Many Kenyan professional sportsmen and sportswomen have continued to earn their livelihood from their pursuit of sport as

their sole career within and outside the country. The Ministry in charge of sports has over two hundred personnel employed in various capacities, most of whom include directors of sports, sports officers, stadium managers and their support personnel who perform office chores (Njiru & Nyagah, 1988). The Ministry responsible for Education has provision for the positions of Inspectors of Schools from the grassroots, District, Provincial and National levels, most of whom are deployed to coordinate extramural sporting activities in institutions of learning. Sports and Games tutors are employed in the Universities to coordinate sporting activities in the Universities. The Kenya Institute of Education, which is responsible for the development of school curricular for schools and Teacher Training Colleges has a panel of physical educators and sports personnel who develop physical education curricular. The Kenya Army, Police, Prisons, National Youth Service, etc. give immense recognition to sports talent and achievement, and hence, use it as one of the criteria for recruitment of officers into their ranks. Several government parastatals that are actively involved in sporting activities have fairly well established sports facilities and organization in which many people are employed as sports and Recreational Managers, coaches, and trainers. Outstanding of these include the Kenya Power Lighting Company, Kenya Pipeline Company, Kenya Ports Authority, National Cereals and Produce Board, Coffee Board of Kenya, Kenya Sugar Authority, Kenya Posts and Telecommunications, National Sports Organizations and so on. The production of sporting goods has been a rapidly growing industry in Kenya. Much of the sports wear and equipment that are manufactured in Kenya are marketed and sold within and outside the

country. The sports products have therefore, been an important element in creation of employment opportunities for local people and trade between Kenya and other countries. Many job seekers eventually secure employment opportunities in the sport goods manufacturing firms and others end up as salesmen in the many sport shops in various urban centers of the country. Sports houses such as Nairobi Sports House, Olympic Sports Centre, etc. are prominent outlets employing a number of people.

Kenya, being a developing country requires the necessary infrastructure to accelerate her development process. Sport has effectively catalyzed the development of a number of infrastructure in the various corners of the country. Each of the eight provinces has a stadium whose development has encompassed the development of related infrastructure. Roads, telephone lines, power lines, hotels, health centers, police posts, shops and water supply facilities have been developed to serve the stadia and people living within the environs.

The building and maintenance of various facilities for competitive and recreational sports has constituted a large industry that employs architects, engineers, managers and labourers (McPherson, Curtis and Loy, 1989). In recognition of the need for people to engage in recreational activities after routine work, for instance, many private and public commercial organizations have set up recreational facilities such as stadia, swimming pools, tennis courts and fitness facilities to cater for their employees' sporting and recreational needs. Quite a significant number of people are employed in the sports and recreational facilities to carry out maintenance and sports/recreational-related work.

Sport has also played a role in the promotion of the tourist industry in Kenya. Since the country has had the chances of hosting major international sport events, many visitors have had the opportunity to tour the country. The hosting of the 4th All-Africa Games in Nairobi in 1987, for instance, was a major milestone in attracting tourists to the country. The commendable performance of Kenya's middle and distance athletes in international competitions over the years has contributed immensely towards the influx of foreigners to the country whose main aim has been to intermingle with the athletes heroes, compete alongside them and or learn from them. According to McPherson, Curtis and Loy (1989), the influx of such visitors stimulates the local economy, particularly for hotels, bars and restaurants, taxis and other retail businesses. Visitors stimulate the economy through a multiplier effect as well, that is, for every new dollar spent by a visitor, a certain percentage of that dollar is spent four to six times in the community by local employers and employees.

Due to the large following that sport enjoys in Kenya, many wealthy individuals and commercial organizations have been keen on identifying with it so as to enhance their popularity and maximize their profits respectively. Wealthy and influential people have supported and patronaged talented sportsmen and sportswomen, and sponsored various sporting activities as a way of getting recognized and gaining popularity among their communities. Such support has enabled many of Kenya's athletes to advance their prowess and consequently win medals and recognition for the country. Sponsorships from commercial organizations like the Kenya Breweries Limited, Oserian Fastac, Nzoia Sugar Company and many others, have not only assisted in

promoting sport in the country but also alleviated poverty among a few sports personnel in the country. The sports personnel have therefore, been empowered to contribute to the development of the country in their own various ways (Tirop, 1999).

SPORTS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

As observed by Mazrui (1986), sport has made an indelible mark as a tool of socialization and reflection of the culture of the people. This observation is indeed a true reflection of the social development that sport has brought to Kenya. Sport is recognized as a symbol of national unity in the country. Since Kenya has a total of 42 ethnic groups, as well as people of diverse religions and racial backgrounds, sport has rightly acted as a tool for integration and co-existence of the people (Njiru & Nyagah, 1988). Whenever local teams compete against foreign ones, Kenyans, regardless of ethnic, racial and religions differences, come together in solidarity to support their teams. Such solidarity is good as it enables people to work harmoniously towards common goals. It brings about understanding among the people and appreciation of one other, thereby creating opportunity for them to pull together in matters of development (Tirop, 1999; Turner et. al., 1992).

Kenya's sportsmen and sportswomen have played a leading and to some extent, unrivalled role of bringing about popularity and publicity of the country on the international scene. This aspect of development directly reflects the thinking of Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Germany Nazi Party, who had hoped to win popularity and superiority of his party from anticipated victory in the 1936 Olympic Games but the victory was never realized (Tulloh, 1982). The aspect of sport as a tool of bringing about national

popularity and recognition is one aspect of social development which has brought pride and international recognition to Kenya. Indeed, arising from the numerous successes registered by Kenya's sportsmen and sportswomen since 1956, when Kenya participated for the first time in the Olympic Games, the country has received a lot of recognition from other countries of the world (Bhushan, 1988). Indeed Kenya has been described as a "Superpower" in the sporting world based on her athletes' commendable performances in the middle and long distance races (GOK 2003). In addition to this, the ceremonial presentation of medals to Kenya's sportsmen and sportswomen following their victories at international sports events has helped a great in exposing the name of the country to the rest of the world.

Sport has effectively provided an avenue through which the people of Kenya express and preserve their cultural heritage. This phenomenon is rightly emphasized by Mazrui (1986) who observed that sport in African was linked to indigenous culture. The traditional initiation into manhood, for instance, was indistinguishable into warrior status, which is also associated with the masculinity and prowess associated with modern sport. Modern sporting activities such as wrestling, dancing, swimming, track running and horse-racing are considered a preservation and extension of similar indigenous sports which found expression in various forms such as mock-fights, drumming and singing, animal-back riding, hunting and swimming activities in rivers and streams (Stuart, 1993). Modern sport in Kenya is closely associated with traditional beliefs and practices of the indigenous people: traditional dances, songs, warrior or war-like activities, magic and superstitious acts which characterize Africa's culture

are common phenomena, and find expression at sport events in Kenya.

SPORT AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

The relationship between sport and politics has been one of the most enduring and pervasive aspect in Kenya. Just as the governments of the ancient city-states of Greece used sport to enhance the fitness of their citizens for war and to demonstrate their superiority over other city-states as claimed by McPherson, Curtis & Loy, (1989), there has been no much departure from this practice in Kenya. Sport has continued to play an invaluable role of enhancing political tranquility in Kenya. It has been a neutral tool of minimizing political tension and differences, thereby, paving the way for collective effort towards the development of the various sectors of the country. Sport enjoys a great deal of following among people across the political groups, and sports events have served as suitable fora where people of diverse political affiliations converge to share fun. Politicians have also continuously capitalized on the popularity of sport in the country to sell their political and development agenda to their electorates and also stage their political campaigns (Njiru & Nyagah, 1988). Indeed, a substantial number of the most prominent politicians in Kenya are known to have used sport as a springboard into their political careers including Joab Omino, Martin Shikuku, Chris Obure, among others (Njiru & Nyagah, 1988).

The success of Kenya's sportsmen and women in international sports events has earned pride, brought recognition and a sense of identity to the country and its citizens. Tulloh (1982) acknowledges that the success attained by renown Kenyan athletes, for example, Kip Keino, Naphtali Temu and Amos Biwott at the Olympic Games has been a great source

of national feelings of pride, superiority, greatness and conquest. This success has been directly linked with perceived superior political institutions and governance of the country. The hoisting of Kenya's flag following victory at international sports tournaments is conceived as a great symbol of sovereignty of the country. The impressive performance of Kenya's athletes have earned further recognition for the country through the election and appointment of some of the athletes, officials of national sports federations and organizations to key positions of the regional, continental and international sports federations and organizations, including the International Olympic Committee. In addition, the country is frequently accorded the most coveted international recognition and honor of hosting some of the major regional, continental and international sports competitions, arising from her athletes' successes, unwavering support and participation in similar competitions hosted in the other corners of the world.

Kenya's sportsmen and women destined for international sports assignments have often been described as the country's "good ambassadors" (Mukora, 1998). They "tell" the world about their country through their participation and performance in the international tournaments. They have contributed immensely in selling, and providing publicity to the name of the country on the international scene.

SPORT AND EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

Sport has made tremendous contribution towards the development of education in Kenya. Quite a significant number of Kenya's outstanding sportsmen and women have received scholarships to further their studies as they pursue their sport careers. A number of the athletes

have earned opportunities to study in America such as 1972 800m bronze medallist, Dr. Mike Boit; 1988 800m gold medallist Peter Ereng; 1988 1500m gold medallist Peter Rono, among others, Europe and South Africa (Tirop, 1999). In relation to this aspect of educational development, Tulloh (1982), states thus:

"Success in the Games (Olympics) can be of great help to a person in his education. A lot of the athletes in America, Africa and Australia have received scholarships because of their success in the Games. My friend, Mike Boit (a Kenyan), was offered a scholarship to an American University and has been able to study for a University degree. Because of Mike Boit's achievements, several other Kenyans have gone to American Universities". (P.64)

A number of organizations that work hand in hand with some Kenyan athletes have assisted in funding learning and research institutions in Kenya. A number of sports organizations and individual athletes have also put up private schools which make quality education accessible to many Kenyan youths. Examples of these include the legendary Kenyan athlete, Kipchoge Keino, who operates an ultra-modern institution of learning in Eldoret that caters for many Kenyan youths; the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) which brings together a large number of street and slum children also runs an extensive educational programme. The Moi International Sports Centre which is the largest modern sports facility in the country also accommodates an upcoming National Sports Institute whose conceived mission is to train sports manpower.

Physical Education and Sport is part of the national educational curricular. Through Physical Education and Sport, young people are inducted into leading active and healthy lifestyles. Indeed, the emphasis on Physical Education and Sport for life in schools is one of the most important contributions of the sport sciences to the

future well being of a nation. (Noakes, 2002). Additionally, through Physical Education and Sport in schools, children have an opportunity to develop their personality, talent, mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. (Deventer, 2002).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPORT AND HEALTH IN KENYA

Kenya has been active in developing and expanding sports for all as a major step towards enhancing the health of her citizens. Such efforts have been reflected in the preservation and development of sports facilities in most of the corners of the country to encourage mass sports participation. In addition, the government has provided a conducive environment for the establishment of health and recreation clubs in most of the urban centers in the country. The accessibility to sports and sporting facilities including the health and fitness clubs, for instance, is considered a right, rather than a privilege to every citizen. This phenomenon has definitely contributed to the enhancement of the health and productivity of the population.

Involvement in sporting activities is beneficial in keeping people busy during their leisure times, thereby keeping them away from undesirable activities such as vandalism, social immorality, drug abuse, alcoholism and the like, which are detrimental to national development (Tirop, 1999). Despite the popularity of sports across the country, it is vital to point out that there is still room for improvement. There is need to promote Physical Education and Sport in all institutions of learning as well as mass sports festivals in communities. According to Noakes (2002), "Since governments are beginning to realize that prevention of chronic illness is cheaper than its treatment, there is no better time than the present to activate a new, more strident approach to enhance sport" (P.7)

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is clear that there has been a positive relationship between sports and socio-economic, political and cultural development in Kenya. To keep up the spirit of competitive and recreational sports as a vehicle for national development, all aspects that affect and influence the promotion of sport needs to be adequately addressed. This includes the inevitable need for preservation and development of sports facilities, training of sports manpower and provision of the necessary financial support.

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