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SPORTS AS A NATIONS TOOL FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION, CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Globally, it is the chief function of every government to provide socio-economic environment-cum-means that its citizens would engage in, in order to live good standard of life. However, the political leaders particularly in the third world countries, Nigeria inclusive, designed socio-economic and political structures that promote and protect them and the affluents in the society; a situation which landed the masses in poverty. The issues of integrity, fairness, honesty, accountability, exemplary character among others, are thrown to the winds by these leaders. The leadership style is characterised with acquisition of wealth at the expense of the common man in poverty. Consequently, through secondary source of data, the paper surveys the possibilities of sports as a nations tool for poverty alleviation, character building, leadership and national development in Nigeria. Through this investigation, the paper established the possibility of using sports as tool to achieve the aforesaid areas of development, and equally made recommendations.

Introduction

Sports is regarded by many as a game for entertainment of sports lovers to while away time. Currently, sports has out grown that notion and potentials of just a game for entertainment. Sports is full of other potentials that can be used to turn misfortune of individuals, groups or

states/countries.

Countries all over the world, particularly those in the third world countries, which Nigeria is inclusive, face problem of poverty, leadership and other related problems that affect national development. There is need to proffer solution to these prevailing problems. In an attempt to proffer solution(s), this paper sets to expose the potential of sports as a tool for solution to the aforementioned problems, through observation and secondary methods of data collection.

Explanatory Concept of Sports

Sports is a socio-economic activity that enhance ones physical fitness and socio-economic status. Babatunde and Onwuama (2006) stated that sports as a creative channel enhances quality of life in form of life booster, progressive life well/being, health discovery and rehabilitation as well as youth development instrument.

Describing sports as a unifying factor, Boye (2008) noted that there is scarcely any social activity around the universe that is capable of bringing people of all races, irrespective of their religious and political afflictions together as sports. Sports is not just a game but also a socio-economic activity that can earn someone a living, if well organised and managed by concerned government and non/governmental organisations.

Conceptual Understanding of Poverty and Poverty Alleviation

Scholars have different views of poverty due to its multi-dimensional nature, therefore, it has many definitions. Poverty is a situation in which a member of society is unable to afford the basic necessities of life, from which man could

make life more comfortable and meaningful for himself. Desai (1992) viewed poverty as a condition in which an individual lacks the prerequisite resources for performing a minimum number of activities such as freedom of speech, opportunities to acquire knowledge and secure a job, and to stay healthy and even remain alive.

Scarpitti (1989) noted that poverty is the fault of a social system whose institutions do not work equally well for all members. He went further to say that the core barriers to eradicating poverty are economic, political and social structures designed by the privileged to protect the position of the affluent. George (2011) submitted that poverty is a dynamic process of socio-economic and political deprivation, which manifests in lack of access to basic necessities of life.

In all, poverty can be seen as having not to satisfy the basic needs of life due to non-availability or denial of socio-economic opportunities to earn a good living. Therefore, poverty alleviation is a strategy through which poverty can be reduced or eliminated to make people live more comfortably, happily and meaningfully in their environment.

Sports as a Tool for Poverty Alleviation

Poverty is a threat to human survival in a society. Many Nigerians, particularly the youth, have not been able to engage in meaningful activities to improve their status in the country due to lack of job opportunities. The nature of poverty and its scourge on man globally, caused the need to alleviate poverty. Hence, United Nations declared 1996 as the international year for the eradication of poverty (Owasa, 2000).

The centrality to poverty alleviation

strategy/programme is human development. Development is a process of enlarging people's choices and increasing the opportunities available to all members of a society. The chief cause of poverty is unemployment/joblessness. In an attempt to eliminate poverty in Nigeria, president Goodluck Jonathan inaugurated the national job board in year 2014 to create three million jobs in twelve months (Naomiuzor and Amodu, 2014). Sports is job opportunities and can be used to alleviate poverty in Nigeria as well as other poor nations.

Giovanni (1999) posited that the world of sports is becoming a place for big economic boom where sponsorship and promotion of products are being exploited by companies. Sports is capable of alleviating poverty on thousands of Nigerians particularly the youths to get them off the streets across the educated and uneducated in Nigeria. Sports provide job opportunities in the following areas: stadia, transportation, food vendor, marketing, hotel business, mass media, manufacturing sport-wears.

- Sports provide job opportunities through built **stadia** in different locations of a society. This is because these stadia are managed by employed stewards. For example, the stadium built by governor Akpobio of Akwa Ibom State commissioned in October, 2014 would not manage itself but by the employed personnel.
- **Through transportation:** Usually, there are greater movement of fans from one spot of sports event to another within the host community/country. The job-seekers can be engaged by being transporters. Transport gives rise to employment opportunities and generates revenue.
- **Through mass media:** Sports is capable of creating job opportunities through the press. There are

different sports newspapers and television sports programmes which people are being engaged as sports analysts, reporters etc

- **Through manufacturing sport-wears:** Sports wears can be manufacture locally in Nigeria. These companies would employ job-seekers through job opportunities it will create.

The afore-discussed are areas which sports can alleviate poverty through creation of job/employment opportunities in Nigeria, if government create enabling environment through participatory approach. The adoption of this approach will encourage the non-governmental organisations to partner with government to develop sports to an appreciable standard that would cause the boom of the aforementioned areas in Nigeria.

Sports as a Tool for Character Building/Development

Sports as a game can be seen as an agent of socialisation. Some aspects of character and personality are fairly stable and probably influenced by our genes, just as a persons behaviour is influenced by our experience. Sports contribute to the development of social behaviour of participants such as, be obedience to rules, authority, cooperation, honesty, respect for elders and social stability. Coakley (2007) opined among others, that sports is a vehicle through which positive moral character can be developed. Sports include ethnical or moral behaviour in participants because there are rules to be obeyed in sports play. It requires dedication, courage, discipline and perseverance, which every person needs in life to succeed.

Josephson(2007) articulated six points which he called pillars of character building through sports. They are;

Pillar one: Trustworthiness- It includes honesty,

integrity, reliability and loyalty.

Pillar two: Respect – This include civility, courtesy, decency, dignity, tolerance and acceptance.

Pillar three: Responsibility- It includes accountability, pursuit of excellence and self restraint.

Pillar four: Fairness- It includes process, impartiality and equity

Pillar five: Caring- The hearth of ethnics

Pillar six: Citizenship- It includes civic virtues and duties.

Sports as Tool for Leadership Development

Leadership is a plane of a leader. A leader is a person who guides or directs a group. Barbara in Google (2014) while commenting on the debate whether leaders are born or developed, noted that there are characteristics found in a good leader that can be developed or may be naturally part of the personality. Bandura (2007) opined that among others, that sports provides youth the first experience with organised activities, brought them into contact with each other communities and teaches leadership skills.

Barbara identified seven characteristics of a good leader which are concised by the author as follows;

- **Exemplary character**-A good leader needs to be trusted and known to live their lives in honesty and integrity.
- **Enthusiastic/dedication**-A good leader should be dedicated to task/job, which serves as a motivator to his followers towards the required action or course to attain set goals.
- **Confidence**—In order to lead and set direction, a good leader needs to appear confident as a person

and in the leadership role.

- **To function in an uncertainty-** A good leader needs to function in an orderly and purposeful manners in situations of uncertainty. A leader should portray confidence and a positive demeanour.
- **Tolerance-** Good leaders are tolerant of ambiguity and remain calm, composed and steady-fast to the main purpose.
- **Keep main goal in focus-** A good leader is able to keep main goal in focus by thinking analytically. He breaks the goal down into manageable steps and makes progress towards them.
- **Committed to excellence-** A good leader not only maintains high standards but also proactive in raising the bar in order to achieve excellence in all areas.

The afore-discussed characteristics of a good leader of Barbara are found in sports. This is why Fragialli (2001) noted that sports and games help to foster a culture of tolerance, pluralism and respect for others. Sport team or club player or athletes exercise trust, honesty and integrity among themselves in order to overcome their opponents. In order to overcome their opponent, they must be confident and tolerant in uncertain situations, that is, whether they would be defeated by their opponent or not, they are dedicated to play the game because they have integrity to protect as a team or club and committed to pursue of the team excellence.

Sports is a tool a State can use to obtain multiple achievements if recognised with multi-purposes objectives.

Sports as Tool for National Development

In description, Fadeyiye (2005) in Ukadike and

Iwegbu (2010) posited that national development are those positive and meaningful change in the areas of social, economics, political, educational and cultural aspect of life, which usher in progress and enhance better quality of life for overall benefits of a particular people or the entire people of the State. By Fadeiye's description, poverty in someone's life is not a positive and meaningful change/development, since it hinders the quality of life.

Sports is capable of bringing positive and meaningful change in the areas identified by Fadeiye's description. Sports is a socio-economic activity that involves social interaction, relations and provisions of job opportunities. It teaches tolerance, courtesy, decency, dignity, acceptability and responsibility which are absolutely necessary in attainment of political stability of a country. Sports also inculcate civic virtues and duties in participants.

Sports also facilitates national development through the attraction of infrastructural development. Sports attract road, electricity among others to the areas where sports events centres (stadia) are situated. These infrastructural facilities/developments in a country are essential to national development as they facilitate and enhance industrial development of a country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sports is not just for entertainment, it is full of core values that are compatible with the principles that are necessary for character building, leadership and national development as well as alleviating poverty as expositively discussed. Sports is capable and can be used to elevate people from non-physical fitness to fitness, and from poverty to high economic status.

To make sports capable of alleviating poverty through jobs creation, character building, leadership and national

development, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- Government at all levels should promote the development of sports culture in their jurisdiction. This can be done by providing all the necessary sports facilities in schools.
- Government should give matching grant to Nigerian sport clubs to develop themselves and organise leagues and other competitions regularly.
- Government should regard sports as business, which is growth. Sports does not stand still, either succeeding (growing) or failing. By growing large, sports can provide jobs for many jobless people.
- Total Quality Management (TQM) approach should be adopted by National Sports Commission in management of sports in Nigeria. TQM stresses continuous improvement in order to satisfy consumers (sports fans in this regard). Therefore, in applying TQM in sports, sports councils, referees, coaches and National Sports Commission itself among other, should continuously improve themselves to satisfy fans and rate of turnover of fans will attract private investors to invest in sports in Nigeria.

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