

Potentialities of Recreation in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in Nigeria

*Oliver Igwebuike Abbah and Agnes Okoro

Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

*Correspondence: E-mail: oliver.abbah@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

Recreation serves as an avenue to dissipate tension, bring immediate satisfaction to an individual and promote unity and solidarity among community members. This paper examined the potentialities of recreation in conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria. The paper looked at the causes of conflict and insecurity in Nigeria; and conflict resolution and peace building strategies that can be utilized. The paper is of the opinion that recreation holds the potentialities of aiding resolution of conflicts during negotiation, mediation and diplomacy. The role of recreation in strengthening community ties, crime reduction, promoting social bonding, cultural diversity and harmony were highlighted. The paper is also of the opinion that recreation holds potentialities that needs to be harnessed during peace building processes of reconstruction of people, and places, reconciliation and resolution in order to ensure that obstacles to development and peaceful coexistence of the diverse cultural and ethno religious people in Nigeria can be averted. The paper recommended that governments should through its relevant agencies, ministries and conflict resolution committees ensure that recreational activities and facilities be part of conflict resolution and peace building processes, as this will help to build social cohesion among them.

Key words: Recreation, Insecurity, Conflict resolution, Peace building

Introduction

Nigeria is confronted today with a lot of insecurity issues such as disputes, conflicts, political crisis, kidnapping, herdsmen/farmers clashes, insurgency and militancy. This is as a result of the current escalation of religious, ethnic and cultural conflicts between and among different ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria (Azad, Crawford, & Kaila (2018). These conflicts are having devastating impact and pose a threat to the peace, unity, security and co-existence of Nigeria. A nationwide trend towards sedentary lifestyles seems to be playing a part in such societal concerns

as increased crime and juvenile delinquency. This no doubt contributes immensely to the state of insecurity and ethno-religious conflicts bedeviling the country. To curb these disturbing trends, recreation professionals realize the need to harness recreation resources and benefits to improve mental, physical and societal health. This state of insecurity calls for interventions in order to ensure the continued growth and development of the country, and also prevent the country from possible disintegration. Such interventions could be in the form of engaging community members in recreational activities.

Introduction

The term recreation has been variously defined by scholars. Elendu (2005) defined recreation as physical or mental activities which an individual voluntarily participates in during leisure time because of the enjoyment and satisfaction he or she finds in those activities. In like manner, Ekong, Abbah, Ngwoke and Ejeh (2016) conceptualized recreation as worthwhile leisure activities one engages in based on his or her own volition due to satisfaction and personal fulfillment inherent in the activity. In other words, for an activity to be termed recreational it has to be chosen voluntarily, must be satisfying, and has to be socially acceptable. Recreational activities can be communal or solitary, active or passive, outdoors or indoors, healthy or harmful, and useful for society or detrimental (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003).

Recreation can be divided into two large areas, namely; physical (motional) and intellectual recreation (Kovács, 2004). Tourism (leisure tourism) according to Révész, Müller, Herpai, Boda, and Bíró, (2015) forms an independent, third category, although it is indisputable that some of its parts show up in the activity set of mental and physical recreation (e.g. a museum visit signifies cultural experiences, while adventure tourism also represents intense physical activity, etc.)

All those activities in which physical exercise has an accentuated role are categorized as physical recreation, while activities not involving active physical exercise are not. Révész, Müller, Herpai, Boda, Bíró, (2015) further subdivide physical recreation into: dance and dance type movements, tourism (e. g. aquatic, pedestrian, and bicycle tour), games with motion (tennis, table tennis), recreational sports (e. g. roller skating, skiing) and hobbies with physical strain (e. g. hunting, gardening).

The intellectual recreation activities on the other hand, involve all recreational activities in which the intellectual or emotional functions (possibly manual dexterity) play an important role. These

include education, culture, entertainment-related pastimes, amateur art activities and hobbies involving collection (Révész et al., 2015). Intellectual recreation according to Révész et al. (2015) can also be divided into further categories. These include: activities involving active participation (crosswords, cards), passive activities (watching TV, cinema, listening to music), creative activities (writing poetry, painting, amateur acting) and hobby (collecting various objects)

Conflict

Different people have different goals and interests. The pursuit of these divergent goals and interests always creates the potential for conflict. Conflicts result when two parties reach a point of incompatibility or non-reconciliation (Priscoli, 2003). In the views of Sani (2007) conflict is a social condition which arises where two or more parties pursue goals which are incompatible. According to Adewuyi (2009) conflict is whenever incompatible activities occur. Situations that may lead to conflicts as enumerated by Priscoli (2003) are: jurisdictional ambiguities, functional overlap (turf), competition for scarce resources, differences in organizational status and influence, incompatible objectives and/or methods, differences in behavioral style, differences in information, distortions in communication, unmet expectations, unmet needs or interests, unequal power or authority, misperceptions, historical animosities, and ethnic stereotyping.

Unless there is some sort of intervention, this situation may grow to the point that the parties come to see each other as adversaries, even as “the enemy” (Priscoli, 2003). Various characteristics of conflict have been identified by scholars. Adewuyi (2009) identified characteristics of conflict to include: it is a complex multi-dimensional construct encompassing different aspects of individual and group behaviours; there exist two issues or views or motives of individuals or groups or parties; and it can be resolved partially or totally.

Conflicts are inevitable in all communities and nations. Though inevitable, it does not have to be allowed to end in polarization. If well handled, conflict can be healthy. According to Priscoli (2003) among the positive things conflicts can bring about are: to identify problems that need to be solved; bring about change, permitting adjustments to be made without threatening the stability of the relationship; change the way we think about things, preventing “group-think” and helping to clarify our purpose: what is important to the organization or us.

When a conflict is not well managed it may become violent. Unresolved conflict, however, can result in the breakdown or disintegration of a group. The issue therefore is how the conflict is managed or resolved.

Causes of Conflicts in Nigeria

The nature of conflict in Nigeria is complex. It is faced by various devastating political and socio-economic conditions. With about 250 multicultural ethnic nationalities, Nigeria is plagued by religious, ethnic, communal and resource conflict (Iduh, 2011). The diverse religion, ethnicity and tribes make conflict inevitable in Nigeria. Nigeria has since independence experienced different types of violent conflicts that have negatively impacted on the country's population across the six geopolitical zones. These have undermined peace and security thereby causing harm, displacement and even death. According to Oshita (2017), apart from violent community conflicts, the insurgency caused by the Boko Haram extremist Islamic sect in northern Nigeria; the militancy in the Niger Delta region; the increasing incidences of farmers-herders' violent clashes; the spate of kidnappings and violent robberies, there are also incidences of cultism and separatist agitations that have often turned violent. Oshita (2017) further stated that these conflicts, no doubt, portend harmful consequences for the country's cultural and social values; ethnic cohesion; social integration, stability and sustainable development.

Conflicts do not occur in a vacuum. Certain factors and conditions give rise to conflicts. One of such factors in Nigeria is the scramble for resources. Resource based conflicts are mainly caused by environmental resource scarcity-induced movement. This has occurred in the form of farmers and herders clashes and the clamor for resource control by the oil rich states. Causes of conflicts between the herders and the farmers are the blockage of water points leading to freshwater scarcity, burning of rangelands, cattle theft, inadequate animal health care and disease control, overgrazing of fallow lands, defecation on roads and streams by cattle, and ethnic stereotyping (Azad, Crawford, & Kaila, 2018).

Oil-related Conflicts give rise to militancy and Cultism. Most of the oil producing communities is faced with the problem of cultism. The violent activities of these cult groups include among others kidnapping and destruction of oil installations. Such communities are considered unsafe and oil workers flee such communities. Acts that are also perpetrated include illegal oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism.

Indigene-settler conflict is another often cause of conflict in Nigeria. This factor oscillates between the resource and value-based contexts of conflicts. They constitute resource-based conflicts because divisive narratives of indigene-settler dichotomies have often translated to favourite campaign rhymes used by politicians in many cases of seeking for votes or when mobilizing for specific selfish interests for which no rational or logical arguments can be adduced.

Land and boundary conflicts within and between states are also common in the Nigeria. Many communities have been embroiled in protracted conflicts within a state, some of which have defied litigation even by the highest court of the land. Such issue often slows down progress at the communal level and sometimes frustrates the provision of social amenities to such communities. This is so because, sometimes, governments prefer not to trigger conflicts or create a feeling that it favours one community against or over the other (Oshita, 2017).

Inter-gang violence often breaks out leading to lose of lives. Its impact on personal and communal security stares all in the face. The non-provision of alternative sources of livelihoods could lead to gagsterism among young men and women. This is because, over time, joblessness might serve as a “push” factor, pushing the dispossessed to join such criminal gangs, also thereby worsening public peace and security circumstances (Oshita, 2017).

Another cause of conflict and insecurity in Nigeria is insurgency. This has created an atmosphere of fear, despair and material lack for the displaced and those still in the states in Nigeria. The impact of insurgency on all aspects of human security, that is, economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, social and political security, are apparent in Nigeria.

There are also politically motivated conflicts in Nigeria. These are generally explainable within the context of the enduring wider social structure, the historical trajectory and political economy of Nigeria. Politically motivated conflicts are most times propagated by politicians; political thugs and hired spokespersons. The fight for supremacy, perceived marginalization, and social exclusion of some groups and sections of the populace within a given ethnic group are factors that come to play.

Ethno-religious conflict is another major cause of conflict in Nigeria. Nigeria as a nation has large numbers of Muslims and Christians. Various Nigerian cities host large numbers of non-indigene population of different ethnic and religious backgrounds that have settled for

generations. Most of these settled non indigene population have fully indigenized and as such are claiming citizenship of those cities. The fight for supremacy by religious leaders; and the bane of provocative preaching, fanaticism, and the perpetration of hate speeches on radio stations and the social media inter- and intra-sect leadership tussles, etc

Youth Restiveness is also a source of conflict in Nigeria. This results from unemployment, frustration and exclusion which manifests through various anti-social acts, such as, electoral violence, land and boundary dispute, chieftaincy and leadership tussles, farmers-herders conflict, and involvement in other acts of criminality (Oshita, 2017).

Violent agitations for self-Determination and Civil Protests have often led to conflict. Self-determination agitations are products of unfavourable perceptions and the feelings of resentment against unpopular government policies and practices. Oftentimes, the objective circumstances of segments of the Nigerian population, including Feelings of alienation, marginalization and general development neglect are active triggers of self-determination agitations and endemic civil protests. This have typically impeded governance process and the delivery of public services; caused the disruption of school programmes etc.

Conflict Resolution

Resolution is a broad term and may have different meanings when used in different fields. The word resolution has been variously defined. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2020) it is the process of solving or ending a problem or disagreement. In other words it is the process of ending a conflict. Conflict resolution is a social situation where the armed conflicting parties in a voluntary agreement resolve to live peacefully with and/or dissolve their basic incompatibilities and henceforth cease to use arms against one another (Wallenstein, 2015). In like manner Shonk (2009) defined conflict resolution as the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute (Shonk, 2019). The term conflict resolution may also be used interchangeably with dispute resolution, which is a situation where arbitration and litigation processes are critically involved. The conflicting parties' concerned in this definition are formally or informally organized groups engaged in intrastate or interstate conflict (Allansson, 2019; Wallenstein, 2015). 'Basic incompatibility' refers to a severe disagreement between at least two sides where their demands cannot be met by the same resources at the same time (Wallenstein, 2015). The concept of conflict resolution can be

thought to encompass the use of non-violent resistance measures by conflicted parties in an attempt to promote effective resolution (Adam & Garton, 2009).

Various strategies have been used by experts to handle conflicts. These include: avoiding, defeating, compromising, accommodating, and collaborating. Ultimately a wide range of methods and procedures for addressing conflict exist, including negotiation, mediation, mediation-arbitration, diplomacy, and creative peace building (Allanson, 2019).

Peace Building

One fundamental aspiration and primary goal of global community is the presence of peace within and among nations. The term peace is primarily concerned with creating and maintaining a just order in society and the resolution of conflicts by non-violent means (Best, 2007). The millennium declaration adopted by the United Nations (2000) clearly articulated the need for international commitment to peace and conflict resolution. As such, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on the right to peace, affirming peace as a human right. The UN appealed to all states and international organizations to do their utmost to assist in implementing the right of people to peace through the adoption of appropriate measures at both the national and the international level (United Nations, 1984). These declarations underlie the understanding by the UN that peace, essential to human security and well-being, and in addition, is a necessary condition for social, cultural, economic and political development. This therefore necessitates peace building in any society.

Peace-building is a fragile and unpredictable process. According to Albert (2001), peace building is an art of repairing relationships, institutions and social facilities and putting in place schemes that can help the disputing communities to be united once again. Peace building involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). In other words, it consists of a wide range of activities associated with capacity building, reconciliation, and societal transformation. Peace building is a long-term process, which occurs after violent conflict has subsided or ended. It is that peace process that follows exhaustion of peacemaking and peacekeeping.

Peace building constitutes all the processes needed to demobilize and disarm combatants in order to foster reconciliation and healing to prevent conflicts from flaring up again. Peace

building goes beyond separating the disputants or settle their dispute but also builds opportunities–base that heals the wounds (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). Once peace has been achieved, effective processes are needed to demobilize and disarm combatants and to foster reconciliation and healing in order to prevent conflicts from flaring up again. This is most importantly, where recreation has a lot of role to play for continued peace and harmony to reign. These processes are an integral aspect of a broader range of activities referred to as peace-building.

Peace building is a purely post conflict activity. It has evolved to include four main types of activities taking place before and after peace accords are in place. These include: providing security; building the socio-economic foundations for long-term peace; establishing the political framework for long-term peace; and fostering reconciliation, healing and justice (Smith, 2004). These activities reflect the fact that, with the emergence of intra-state conflicts, the focus of peace-building efforts has moved beyond traditional state-centred diplomacy to include the building and maintenance of relationships at all societal levels. However, Galtung (1998) stated that the holistic process of peace building involves three key factors: reconstruction of people and places after violence, reconciliation of the parties in conflict; and resolution of animosities.

The Potentials of Recreation in Peace Building

It is pertinent to state that recreation can contribute to broader and more comprehensive efforts in peace building and conflict resolutions. The purpose of recreation in peace building is to harness the ability of recreation in ensuring wide range of activities associated with capacity building, reconciliation, and societal transformation after conflict.

The role of recreation in reconstruction of people and places after violence.

Reconstruction enables the post conflict society to have ‘another opportunity’ through rebuilding of social infrastructures that were destroyed as a result of the bloody conflict (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). Lack of essential social amenities can regenerate a conflict situation and a lot of efforts should be geared towards creating a lively post conflict society. During reconstruction process, recreational activities can be harnessed to get people involved in on-going reconstruction programmes. Communal creative activities like painting, arts and craft and social recreation can be harnessed in reconstruction process during peace building. Such activities are capable of facilitating the building of relationships and social inclusion. In reconstruction process, Kuvalsand (2005) stated that recreational sports for peace

programmes can facilitate the reconstruction of physical structures that were damaged during conflict in order to enable people to meet and socialize. Outdoor recreation increases participants' political involvement in environmental issues. When people participate in outdoor recreation, they become appreciative of the natural environment and the benefits they derive from it. This participation often leads to investments of time and money in the protection, conservation and maintenance of parks and open spaces.

The role of recreation during reconciliation of the parties in conflict.

Reconciliation creates an avenue for the old combatants and displaced population to express their pains and agony, address the root causes of the conflict in the promotion of mutual cooperation through justice, truth, mercy and forgiveness (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). Reconciliation remains a difficult task in peace building because (in most cases) the parties will need to see some prospects in the whole reconciliatory exercise before they consent. The reconciliation process involves building positive relationship between warring parties. This stage of peace building requires activities that will counter the social and politically tensed environment prevailing among the victims and perpetrators of conflict. In this regard, Lederach (2005) emphasizes the importance of being imaginative in developing reconciliation methods. In other words a positive environment is needed for reconciliation to take effect. Recreational activities like recreational sports, dance and exchange of visitations can contribute in no small measure to building a positive and enabling environment for reconciliation process to take place. For instance, a British University programme tagged "Football for Peace" is a recreational sport activity held annually in Northern Israel since 2001 (Savir, 2008). Moreover, recreation can help to promote social bonding among the community members. When community members participate together in leisure activities bonding can occur, and the related benefits can include community satisfaction, interaction and stability.

The role of recreation during resolution of animosities.

Resolution of animosity involves rehabilitation efforts. Rehabilitation process affords the ex-combatants, the displaced population and refugees' opportunities of demobilization and reintegration through provision of some strategic peace building measures like employment opportunities, creativity and vocational skill development, trauma-healing advice and support among others (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). The resolution process demands that warring members have to cope with stressful situations and pressure tactics. These are qualities

that demand endurance and flexibility on the part of both the mediators and the warring parties. Recreation has the potential of building in the people endurance and flexibility needed to cope with stress and pressure. It is also capable of providing an environment for social network among the warring parties. This was the case in the use of value-based football coaching to facilitate peaceful integration among Jewish and Arab societies (Liebmann & Rookwood, 2007).

Potentialities of Recreation in Conflict Resolution

The aim of recreation in conflict resolution and peace building are to harness the ability of recreation to support conflict resolution activities. Hence, the potentials of recreation in conflict resolution are numerous.

Recreation strengthens communities and creates a livelier community atmosphere.

One of the potentials of recreation is that it provides opportunity for strengthening and maintaining a healthy community. Recreation brings neighbors together, encourages safer, cleaner neighborhoods and creates a livelier community atmosphere. Parks and recreational facilities also help improve a community's image, socioeconomic status and enhance the area's desirability (California State Parks, 2005). Buttressing this, Trust for Public Land (1994) reported that Seventy-seven percent of Los Angeles citizens, who were surveyed in 1993 after the riots, listed improved parks and recreation facilities as "absolutely critical" or "important" to the restoration of their community.

Recreation and crime reduction.

Increase in crime has been pointed out as a factor that can trigger conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. Violent crime in both rural and urban areas continues to be a concern to administrators. Fighting crime is therefore a continual battle, especially with the rising population. Well-maintained parks and recreation facilities help reduce crime and juvenile delinquency in a community (California State Parks, 2005). In a study by Department of Parks and Recreation (2003) they reported that over 80% of California mayors and chambers of commerce believe that recreation areas and programs reduce crime and juvenile delinquency in their communities.

Recreation encourages volunteerism.

Participation in recreational activities has been proven to promote volunteerism. Park and recreation agencies rely on volunteers to ensure the delivery of programs and services (California State Parks, 2005). The volunteers lead programmes and serve as coaches, park board members,

and provide labour in virtually every community. According to the California State Park (2005), the dedication and pride that people have for parks and recreation areas leads to increased interest and involvement in other aspects of the community which includes conflict resolution.

Recreation promotes stewardship.

Recreation facilities such as open space and parks are an ideal medium for encouraging and developing stronger stewardship of the land. This is because people who take delight in outdoor recreation become more familiar with natural resources and the environment. This familiarity with natural resources and the environment helps them understand how their personal actions can affect the environment. This can be harnessed in the process of conflict resolution, because one who understands that his/her actions affect the natural environment would not be eager to destroy it. This understanding can also be carried over to resolving conflicts. In line with this view, McDonald and Schreyer (1991) stated that optimal outdoor recreation experiences can result in a state of connectedness with the earth and its creatures, which in turn, can result in a greater sense of appreciation for the environment and the community of life

Recreation promotes social bonds.

Social bonds are promoted during participation in recreational activities by uniting families, building cultural tolerance, and supporting individuals with disabilities and seniors. Recreation provides us with family and community bonds that last a lifetime (California State Park, 2005).

It is generally believe that families that recreate together tend to be closer, more cohesive, and have a greater chance of staying together. By participating in activities together, family members elicit feelings of loyalty, trust, harmony, teamwork and goodwill (California State Park, 2005). This can be harnessed during conflict resolution to promote social bonds among the warring communities. The social bonding so promoted encourages members of the communities to try new behaviors and lifestyle changes that would promote peace among the communities. Therefore, recreation can be used to form bonds and transfer important values to community members.

Recreation builds cultural diversity and harmony.

Nigeria is a richly diverse country, with a lot of ethnic, religious and cultural entities. This creates tensions and challenges within country. This calls for the need for understanding and harmony in all spheres of life. Participation in recreation will help to promotes positive

contact between different ethnic, religious and cultural groups in a non threatening environment. Since recreation provides opportunities for social interaction, this can help to break down the barriers of unfamiliarity, fear and isolation. This is achievable because during recreation, people are less concerned with differences and more concerned with having fun. The strength of a community is increased through recreation activities that allow people to share their cultural and ethnic differences (California State Park, 2005). This can be achieved by visiting historic and cultural sites of other ethnic groups. Cultural resources that can be visited include historic buildings, sites and museums. According to the California State Park, (2005), these historic sites help visitors immerse themselves in other cultures and create places for sharing ethnic food, events, languages and traditions.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the potentialities of recreation in conflict resolution and peace building. The paper has revealed that conflicts and insecurity have characterized and accompanied the existence of the Nigerian nation. Conflict is an inevitable reality of any country, including Nigeria, but it should not be allowed to continue, so that it will not hamper the development and peaceful coexistence of Nigeria as a nation. This therefore necessitates peaceful resolution of conflicts as soon as it arises, to prevent it from escalating. This paper is of the view that recreation has potentials that needs to be harnessed in the process of conflict resolution and peace building. Recreation has the potential of strengthening community relations, crime reduction, social bonding among different ethnic groups, building cultural diversity and harmony among the people of the nation. These among other potentialities are capable of instilling lasting peace among the diverse religious, ethnic and cultural groups in Nigeria. The paper recommends that government should through its relevant agencies, ministries and conflict resolution committees ensure that recreational activities and facilities be part of conflict resolution and peace building processes Nigeria. Secondly, recreation programmes be put in place by government between different ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria as this will help to build social cohesion among them. Also, cultural tourism among the different ethnic groups in Nigeria should be encouraged by the government through the ministry of culture and tourism of the various states of the federation.

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