Nation Building: The Catalytic Role of Sports

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Abstract

Classifying countries into developed, underdeveloped or developing nations is a function defined by the status of nation building parameters like general security, social capital and social stability, as well as economic viability and political harmony. As a top national agenda, nations across the world have prioritized nation building through coordinated activities executed through specific agencies and other force majeure. Though sports when ill-conducted can lead to pockets of hooliganism, a sport event organized in the most modest conventional manner becomes an effective mechanism for social, cultural, economic and political development as it has the capacity to bring people together and educate their social capital, prevent crimes and conflicts, promote social and political security, attract economic and infrastructural development and overall, advance peace. Despite the proven ability of sports to foster nation building, sport development in most countries remains marginalized and challenged. This paper is an attempt to articulate the catalytic role of sports in nation building. The paper also examines the rationale for nation building, attributes of sports in nation building, demonstrated capacity of sports in nation building and the challenges facing sports in nation building.

Keywords: Sports, Peace-building, Nation building, Security, National development

Introduction

Every sovereign nation today had at a time in history engaged in small-or large-scale independence struggle for the primary purpose of the citizens associating with a particular territory that is sufficiently conscious of nation building activities in support of a sense of community and general advancements. At the core of the nation building process is the emphasis on construction or structuring of a national identity using the power of the state (Mylonas, 2017). The central idea of nation building consists in the unification of the people within the state such that the cohesiveness of the people reinforces effort and activities geared at evolving a state that remains overly stable and viable in the long run. Such activities predominantly involve national development efforts. National development as the capacity of a country to raise the standard of living of its residents is the key factor in nation building as it provides individuals with basic life necessities and as well promotes the advancement of the economic, social, environmental and political landscapes at any stage whether during normalcy or conflict and post-conflict peace building era. In primary sense, peacebuilding is all about cultivating relationship among persons, groups, and nations in a manner that transcends ethnic, religious, class, national or racial boundaries through resolving injustice in nonviolent ways and transforming the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict (Krock Institute for International Peace Studies, 2024).

It is no surprise that security tops other nation building agenda in all nations because it is the holistic defence of all state apparatus and citizens contributing to nation building projects,

hence Zeza, Mahdi and Mohsen's (2022) two paradigmatic conceptualization of security as the realism paradigm and the liberal paradigm. Whereas the realism paradigmatic view of security is sorely a situation of freedom from occurrence of religious and ethnic revolutions, terrorism and organized crimes, including global warming, the liberal view generalizes security to getting rid of any form of hazards, in which case a citizen is in no way at risk of whether grief, anxiety, human trafficking or escalated corruption and marginalization. Zaza et al (2022) further observed the Copenhagen theory to have encapsulated security into five dimensions that invariably support nation building identified as socio-cultural security (i.e. treating individuals and groups with regard to their unique needs and differences), economic security(i.e. security of investment, employment and income), military security (i.e. defence of a nation-state from military aggression from state and non-state actors), environmental security (i.e. public safety from natural and human environmental dangers), and political security (i.e. stability of ideologies that give government and states their legitimacy).

Given the premium attention on security and nation building, the traditional practice of most nations has been their reliance on a compressive security where the government builds security architecture and checkmates security risks emanating from both state and non-state actors through a range of measures such as the use of state forces, economic and political diplomacy as well as prioritization of education. However, the contemporary multitudinous psychological trauma, financial doldrums, political uncertainties, and cultural disarray sweeping across nations fly no flag of victory for security and nation building. For this reason, alternative measures for nation building have been a major concern for governments, researchers and theoreticians which have forced many governments and non-governmental organizations into searching for hope through the sports lens.

Prior definition viewed sports as any highly organized and structured physical activity with formal rules, but in the field of peace building, United Nations (UN) in Krafchek (2012) broadened the definitional scope to include activities that foster physical fitness, inclusion, and mental health such as play and other lowly organized recreational activities, casual sports, and indigenous sports. In its capacity as a universal language expressed through movement, sport has then assumed a justifiable catalyst position in nation building. This is so as the era that limited sports to just extrinsic rewards is gone because as of today, sports have practically broken all the heterogeneous barriers that held citizens apart, to harness diversities in political, religious, economic and social systems that brings them together on the same page. In Nigeria, for instance, it goes without saying that except for the Super Eagles, the citizens are not united in any other thing. Even though ill-conducted sporting events can be turbulent, sports targeting peace-building remains an effective mechanism for national development and nation building. Therefore, this paper focuses on the rationale for nation building, attributes and capacities of sports in nation building and the challenges.

Rationale for Nation Building

A collapse of a country's social, economic, and political systems is a critical issue of wide dimension as it signals the failure of such structures intended for security and nation building projects. This simply calls for a rescue through re-building a cohesive nation-state as such that was previously functional has collapsed or been destroyed. As this serves as the general rationale for the re-building exercise, social disharmony and economic meltdown are more of the specific rationale.

Social Disharmony: For sheer reasons based on heterogeneity, most nations have not been able to share common social, political, religious and economic ideology; a situation that informed the notion that some nations are mere geographical expression. Thus, there has been

rancorous co-habitation in form of ethnic uprising, political marginalization, and agitation, religious discordance and intolerance, communal clashes, and persistent ecological degradation here and there. This is a view shared by Flowler (2017) though with reference to Nigeria as a country possessing distinct national boundaries and national sovereignty, but has a somewhat nebulous national identity as she lacks the vital critical mass in fundamental nation building tools that can be relied on for securing success and vitality as a supposedly homogenous entity. A major concern is where many people have questioned whether the Nigerian civil war that ended in 1970 and the "No Victor, No Vanquish" reintegration slogan were actually true as the present-day ethnic marginalization, and cleansing as well as separatist agitations that originally prompted the war suggest the opposite.

Again, on record, according to Sodipo (2013), "Nigeria is a country that has had fair share of violent conflicts with over one hundred documented conflicts of varying degrees occurring since independence on October 1, 1960". These according to Sodipo are majorly orchestrated by the emergence of insurgency, banditry and farmer-herders' clashes in several cities, notably the bombings and arsons across the Northern states of Borno, Yobe, Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Niger, Bauchi, and Abuja, which necessitated the state of emergency declared by President Goodluck Jonathan in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States in March, 2013 as various communities lived in fear of conflict, violence, loss of lives and properties as well as kidnapping for ransom. This is a case for serious nation building through alternative means as the arm confrontation with insurgents and juntas seems to be dysfunctional and abortive.

Economic Meltdown: Notice has also been taken of the economic meltdown with special reference to the dwindling gross domestic products (GDP), unstable state of labour market, and skyrocketed living costs (inflation). On the issue of GDP with special reference to Nigeria, the new normal is that the oil sector alone as the major feeder of the country's economy according to Kale (2016) continues to experience contracted GDP as a result of oil crash and low production output due to militant activities in the Niger Delta regions. The multiplier effects of this on labour market and living costs are equally embarrassing.

As UN (2023) observed, many developed economies with the exception of the UK, has since early 2021 experienced a continuing decline in employment rates. Though employment had proved a difficult statistic to interpreted in Nigeria, Udo (2016) reported that unemployment rocked Nigeria highest in the first quarter of 2016 with the rate rising to 12.1% and that between December, 2015 and March, 2016, the population of unemployed Nigerians increased by 518,000 to over 1.45 million. In the 4th quarter of 2020 according to Lain and Pape (2023), Nigerian's unemployment rate stood at 33.3% and that as recently as the 4th quarter of 2022, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported unemployment rate of 5.3% and 4.1% at the first quarter of 2023 based on the new Nigerian Labour Force Survey. Limited opportunities rate across gender also occur in private businesses and companies but the COVID-19 of 2020 widened the gap more in the employment rates of men and women in most countries across the world including developed economies. This is as UN (2023) observed that the impact was much more detrimental for women than for men as a result of increased childcare responsibilities for women and the total lockdown on education, hospitality and travel that predominantly employed women.

Living cost equally reduced abysmally with the increasing unemployment rates among developed and developing economies as the growth in normal wages in 2022 and in the first half of 2023 in most countries was lagging behind the accelerated consumer inflation (UN, 2023). In the organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries the mitigating factors such as fiscal transfers and subsidies to cushion the effects of the escalated contraction of disposable incomes of households in those countries were palliatives

of no substantial effect as discernable in the UN report of workers' dissatisfaction expressed through labour strike by automobile workers in the US automotive companies. This is like the recent strike actions staged by Labour Union and Organized Labour Congress in Nigeria to register their grievances against low living wages and high rates of inflation in a country where one dollar exchanges for over a thousand naira. The challenges and hostilities due to the heterogeneity of citizens expressed in form of persistent insecurity, conflicts, wars and economic contraction across the world suggest that all is not well with most countries even with governments' mitigating measures and other force majeure in place. Sport is one social tool believed to be catalyst for all dimensions of nation building processes but has not been well articulated and given adequate consideration as corroborated by Boit (2000) who posed how ironic it is when countries do not give much credence to sport yet, if every citizen were to be all round healthy through sports programmes, there could be social cohesion, workable political diplomacy, economic production and hence vibrant economy.

Attributes and Capacities of Sports for Nation Building
Granted that sport is not the only tool routing for nation building, many advocates contend that sport possesses well enough attributes and capacities above other measures for strengthening development and peace-building efforts. According to Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) in Cardenas (2013), sports provide a space where individuals converge to improve their social skills, strengthen cultural values and adapt to rules. As a universal event, sport is generally present in virtually every society. Its wide practice, in particular, soccer being the lord of sports, has been estimated by the Federation International Football Association (FIFA) to be played by 205 million people (FIFA in Cardenas, 2013). The versatility of sport is as critical as its popularity. In history, traditional sports such as hunting, and archery had always flourished as part of our culture curriculum and the introduction of the western types only helped in popularizing them the more. Again, sports are gifted to intrinsic values such as teamwork, fairness, discipline, and respect for opponent and the rule of the game which are understood all over the world as building blocks for the advancement of solidarity and social cohesion. With these values and its capacity to reach a vast number of people, sport can be seen as an agent of change, and an effective platform for public education, social mobility and a contributor to other sundry nation development indices.
Another good fit of sport as a catalyst for nation building is its ability to connect people. Though Boit (2000) averred that apart from religion, sport is the only forum that brings people together for a common good, Sofi in Unogwu and Mbadi-Oli (2022) affirmed that no social activity except sport brings people together in a phenomenally large number and with so much passion and enjoyment. In this sense, it may not attract many or any critics against the fact that sport is the only event that brings together the largest known human crowd at a time as it has become one activity that has arrested the primary attention of all, given that it has not only broad range of activities that accommodate many different nationalities and cultures, but in addition, guarantees participation either as spectator or athlete in fulfillment of the fundamental and legitimate right of all humans. Such a gathering of massive sport enthusiasts is an opportunity for every class of individual to collaborate with one another and experience intergenerational dialogue which helps in building communities. Such collaborative ability is never an end but a means to others in particular, conflict prevention.
Sport is a bridge-builder not only because it can pull together people of cultural and ethnic differences, political divides, and heterogeneous social class but also because it can play a critical role in preventing conflicts, crimes, and violent behaviours in the first place. The rhetoric of the ages had been that an idle mind is the devil's workshop which justifies the fact

that sport, when well structured, becomes an effective instrument against crimes, conflicts and violent behaviours. This assertion has the theoretical backing of the popular catharsis theory as well as the ammonic theory of crime prevention. Whereas catharsis theory contends that venting one's anger will produce a positive improvement in one's psychological state, ammonic theory posits that juvenile delinquency occurs because the juveniles do not have the means to make themselves happy. The captivating inherent nature of sport as a social agent that has great appeal to the wider society then justifies the catalyst position of sport in nation building. This therefore underscores Sofi's (2019) affirmation that the practice of sport is instrumental in presenting conflict and promoting long lasting peace and development. Educating people against crime and conflict, however, remains a further necessary step which through sporting activities is also feasible.

Sport scientists and other sports apologists are constantly aware of the status of sport in educating people about personal values and virtues through its unique language, signs, and rules. These personal virtues are the social capital of an individual primarily conceived as the resources, favour or information that result from one's sheer personal connection and interactions with co-actors in an activity guided by well established rules and regulations. Aside providing enabling environment that stimulates positive physical, mental and cognitive development, sport can serve as a unique classroom where participants learn and imbibe social capital or pro-social skills such as teamwork, leadership, cooperation, sportsmanship, tolerance, perseverance, fair play, determination, respect for opponents and rules, resilience, equity and solidarity, dialogue and conflict-resolution skills. As these skills are most likely to be later transferred and applied in other areas of life including peace-building, sport can then be a powerful lever for nation building. A blend of these skills and protection of individuals even in abnormal social contexts makes for continuity of inter and intra national development efforts.

Sport also has a proven ability to offer social protection against adversities. In explicit social uncertainties like conflicts, sport mediates and initiates dialogue between hostile communities through sports events thereby supporting and protecting communities whether as a collective or vulnerable individuals. Even in extreme conditions such as during pandemic era, sport can be a dependable instrument for creating awareness of diseases such as HIV (AIDS) and as well, create other protective platforms as alternative measures for executing nation building projects. In fact, it has been observed that youth, especially those who are no longer in formal school system, vulnerable to joining gangs, and who are isolated from other forms of engagement are protected through the development of contacts and networks created by sports events (Sofi, 2019). In this way, communities are built in a manner that has a nation building undertone. However, it is tantamount to short circuited protection should sport only offer safety on individual basis without recourse to the entire national political security.

Just as sport maintains internal consistency of a society through supporting and protecting individuals, it can be an effective instrument for bonding people and blending differences across the globe through what is referred to as political diplomacy. Boycotting some important games is a political weapon and a justifiable mechanism for formulating satisfactory foreign policy that make for peaceful co-habitation in human ecosystem. Sport athletes do not just belong to their home teams but also to foreign teams and through such, sports events can be used to communicate a key message on a country's distinct political ideology or regime to other countries. In such climate, sport becomes a useful tool for harnessing diversities that may exist in a political system for sustainable socio-economic and political development. This aligns with Efebeh's (2020) assertion that sport is globally recognized as having the ability to foster friendship and peaceful co-existence among people

across such different barriers as skin colours, country of origin, religion, gender, as well as social strata. Even when countries survive conflicts due to a failure of political diplomacy, it is still expected that further efforts at solidifying their relationship through reintegration processes be promoted.

Sport can put in a strong reintegration effort even in post-conflict matters. This manifests in its ability to reunite individuals and communities that had in the past experienced hostilities against each other and in the process, heal remnant emotional and psychological wounds. Over decades, sport has been idealized to heal wounds, mend fences, and rise above emotional differences among cultures and nations (Sofi, 2019). By this, sport becomes a lever for social reintegration and is agent for delivering communities, in particular, conflict-affected ones. This, in part, explains why Boit (2000) maintained that through sports, International Olympic Committee and the International Sports Federations could succeed in social reintegration process where the United Nations has failed to promote world peace. This reintegration process creates a sense of belonging and as well, supports meaningful inclusion and community-based orientation of young men and women directly involved in armed-conflict (Sofi, 2019). The support base for this claim is that regardless of many athletes who are extrinsically motivated, there are millions others whose motivation in sport is not to bring home medals but just to intrinsically bring peace. Often, sport uses two-way approaches to realizing the reintegration objective, to wit; acting as solo activity and acting in conjunction with other peace-building initiatives.

Granted that many of the necessary core character building values for nation building can be imbibed through effective and structured sports programmes, an added unique attribute to that is the malleability of sports to other development initiatives in a manner suggesting such adjunct position to add more life and vibrancy to the nation building project. Such projects and initiatives use sport to achieve specific development and peace objectives. The rise of such sport-based development and peace-building projects has proven capable of promoting a country's security, economy and largely dissolving ethnic uprisings that might have otherwise escalated. Some of the sports programmes target environmental development.

The focus of these initiatives on improving the general social ecology of a country further provides another unique attribute of sport for national advancement by way of promoting environment preservation and education since sport had been noted as a tool for education and capacity building. In its effort at promoting individuals high physical status, sport also educate them about environment preservation and healthful living, and in recent times, sport-based initiatives towards that has been in rise. The two objectives therefore become intertwined and their realization becomes such that any sport and sport-based initiative targeted at positive health standard is parenthetically tailored towards a clean environment. In corroborating to this, Sofi (2019) noted that sport-based public health awareness campaigns can promote awareness towards climate protection and stimulate enhanced community response for local environment preservation. Obviously, environment status is predicated on the economic status of any nation for which reason, many countries have keyed into sport as a tool for economic stability.

Unequivocally, just as economic development is an indispensable nation building index, so is the critical position of sport in economic development of any nation. In modern times, Krafchek (2012) asserted that sports have gone beyond the level of recreation and entertainment of both participants and fans to one very big money-spinning industry across the world as they now have the capacity to contribute meaningfully to the economic development of society. Sport is such a silver bullet necessary for economic boom of any country because of its ability in promoting physical and psychological health of individuals.

In this way, sporting activities have received wide endorsement as a free high-ranking force for raising people's physical and health status needed for higher economic productivity and greater national development. Such high health status leads to a more economic viability because it heightens the capacity for a workforce that is more productive and at less risk for diseases especially non-communicable ones such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes caused majorly by sedentary lifestyle. This is the motivation for better attendance to work, job satisfaction and achievement of the workforce. This may have informed Boit's (2000) flashback reminder that we are descendants of hunters and gatherers of food and that since creation of mankind, the human life has been characterized by numerous physical activities as opposed to the contemporary sedentary lifestyle witnessed across the globe. Overall, the attributes and capabilities of sport for nation building as expressed above, can further be demonstrated practically and explicitly.

Demonstrated Capability of Sports in Nation Building
Sport may not be "the be all and end all" in nation building process but the world has continued to take notice of several instances where sport has taken the lead in all the nation building efforts. Such practical instances are where sport had connected or mobilized people for nation building, prevented crimes and conflicts, built social capital and political security, created partnership with other pro-nation building initiatives, preserved environment and promoted national development.

Connecting people: A lucid proof of sport as a leading social platform for connecting and gathering together large crowd populated by individuals of different nationalities and identities can practically be seen through the lens of stadium capacities, head count of people in attendance and ticket sales during major sporting events like the FIFA Games, Commonwealth Games, World Cup Championships, African Cup of Nations among others. A rundown of the stadiums and their capabilities in Africa alone as of 2023 by Galal (2023) shows that the FNB otherwise known as the Soccer City in Johannesburg (South Africa) was the largest in the continent with the capacity to hold over 94,700 fans at a time. Following Soccer City Stadium were the Borg El Arab Stadium in Alexandria (Egypt) and Stade des Martyrs de la Pentecote (Demonstrate Republic of Congo) with the capacity to hold 90,000 and 80,000 spectators respectively. Others in descending order were the Cairo International Stadium (Egypt) having a capacity to contain 74,100 fans, the July 5 Stadium in Algeria, accommodating 64,000 fans; the Ellis Park Stadium in South Africa, 62,567 fans; the Nigeria Abuja Stadium, 60,649 fans; the Tunisian Stade Olympique de Rades, 60,000 fans; the Stade Municipal de Kinlele (Republic of Congo), 60,000 fans; and Ethiopian Bahir Dar Stadium, 60,000 fans.
On the Olympic Games scene alone, particularly the London 2012 games, as many as 180,000 spectators were present at the East London Olympic Park each day just as 164 countries, 4,302 athletes in 503 of 20 sporting events featured in the 2012 summer Paralympics being the 14th games international multi-sport parasport event ever organized by the international Paralympics committee (Summer Paralympics, 2012). The number of tickets sold from 2000 to 2016 summer Olympic games had also been phenomenally high as the figures according Richter (2020) stood at 6.7 million in the 2000 Sydney Olympics; 3.6 million, in the Athens 2004 Olympics; 6.5 million, in the Beijing 2008 games; 8.2 million, in the London games; and 6.2 million, in the Rio de Janeiro games. Aside physical contacts, the much more number of spectators that are interconnected through the contemporary media technology can easier be imagined than quoted. Connecting people together as the primary

function of sport serves as the base for further practical evidence in its nation building functions such as prevention of conflicts.

Preventing Conflicts, Crimes, and Violent Behaviours: Over history, sport has demonstrated ability to avert conflicts and downplay criminal activities and violent behaviours as can be attested to by sports people who had explicitly worked in a conflict-resolving manner using sport as bridge-building activity to provide alternatives to violence and destructive conflicts. This is not new as it started as far back as 9th century B.C in Ancient Greece with the establishment of an Olympic Truce which according to International Olympic Committee in Cardenas (2013) guaranteed all shades of participants from warring Peloponnesian city-states free and safe access to and fro the venue for the celebration of the Olympic games. Similar scenario was witnessed during the First World War when in 1914 the famous Christmas Truce involved not only exchange of gifts but playing of football to stop hostilities between the German and English troops which as well helped the rival troops evaluate the potential of sport as an agent of transformation (Woodhouse, 2010). The Sierra Leonean experience is not an exception. During their civil war, a football festival was staged in the Bo region to provide sense of normality during the imbroglio. This is as Van der Niet (2010) reported that aside the match literally stopping the war, although temporarily, it provided a safe space for conflicting sides as the military, civilians and the fighting groups engaged in the festival in a manner that presented the military with a new way to create positive relationship with civilian population in conflict zones. A show of this level of understanding in conflict and war zones is partially due to the educable social capital of the citizens through sport.

Building Social Capital: As social capital reflects the psychic connection between people leading to a series of behavioural outcomes, athletes and fans acquire it through indirect, but most often, direct engagement in sports. This is evidenced by research reports of Furukawa (2022) and Djobora, Borukova and Kirilova (2020) indicting higher level of social capital among athletes of various abilities. Furukawa's study on the "National Solidarity Day" sport event in the crisis-stricken city of South Sudan found that the runners who participated in the event had more social capital and solidarity than others. Specific social capital such as health awareness, self-esteem self-efficacy, self-confidence, general positive attitude through sports has also been affirmed. The Djobara et al study explored the extent of contribution of inclusive Basketball programme for the building of social capital and concluded that specific social skill, trust, and communication as the leading social capital of disabled athletes improved as well as the able-bodied students' attitudes and relationships. Sports and social capital have equally acted as a protective blanket for people in countries where conflicts and wars have persisted.

Protecting People: Sports and sport-based initiatives have been used to communicate key messages aimed at protecting people. This was demonstrated in Columbia where according to Sofi (2019) the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) through "Sport for Protection" initiative improved protection outcomes such as social inclusion, social cohesion, psychological wellbeing, social connectedness and collective safety in 2021. In August, the same year, through the support of UNHCR, six refugee Paralympics were opportune to participate in the Tokyo Olympic which served as a very high platform to spread the message of protection and hope through inclusion. Similarly, the use of Mathare Youth Sport Association, which is a youth soccer programme to offer protection and raise hope to the lives of multitude of destitute children in the slums of Nairobi was also phenomenal as it was

a breakthrough in the protection of youths against rampant drug abuse, crimes and school dropout. Instances have occurred where such protection extended to political security.

Political Security: Political challenges had invited sport to address issues related to domination, independence, apartheid and other forms of political incursions. Sport has successfully addressed these issues in many countries through sport diplomacy that involved the use of sport in influencing diplomatic, social and political relations among nations. Celebrated cases of this according to Sofi (2019) involved the US, China, Canada, and Taiwan on various occasions. According to Reza, Mahdi and Mohensa (20220 the United State's acceptance of China's most favourite Pingpong game in 1971 was not only a clear message of the political independence of the two countries but further led to the beginning of a diplomatic relation that eventually ended two decades of unfriendly relationship between the two nations. Again, countries like Canada and Taiwan expressed dissatisfaction with the branding of 1976 Montreal summer Olympics as People's Republic of China Games to a point that Taiwan boycotted the game rather than participating using both the flag and anthem of the People's Republic of China until 1984 when it returned under the name "Chinese Taipei". Similarly, Iran boycotted both 1980 Mosco Olympics and the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics in protest for her goal of neither East nor West doctrines (Feizabadi, Delgado, Khabiri, Sajjadi & Alidoust, 2015). The impact of sport in the political independence of Algeria and South Africa further authenticates the ability of sport in political security and nation building. While the formation of the Algerian Football and the recall of professional Algerian's France players by the Algerian National Liberation Front in the wake of Algerian's war of independence with France was a prelude to the country's independence in 1962, South African's isolation from Olympic Games succeeded in whistling down the apartheid regime in South Africa and as well in bringing about a major overhaul in the country's social structure (Gershon, 2022). Sport has equally produced athletes who have successfully performed in national leadership positions like George Weah who as the President of Liberia transformed the trajectory of the country's governance. By extension, sport has also proven ability to heal postwar scars.

Reintegrating People: Notwithstanding the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria, for instance, sport was one event that brought the citizens to a common table and in one bonded spirit before, during and after wars and armed-conflicts. According to Sofi (2019), after the Nigerian avoidable civil war, reconciliatory football matches were organized to promote the then "No Victor, No Vanquished" ideology that sued for peace and unity. Sport had equally proved its mettle in reconciling differences created by conflict and wars between the then Israel and Palestinians living in Gaza, West Bank and other refugee camps in the region (Dart, 2019), as well as in the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union (Dimeo, 2012). Overall, Hassan (2016) after examining sporting events under attack from 1992 Olympics to the massive bombings of 2003, concluded that sport is a reliable tool for the three areas of security, counter-terrorism and social freedom. More assuring are the open pronouncements of Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympics in 1984 and that of Nelson Mandela, an anti-apartheid activist in the 200 Laureus World Sport Award which shinned much more light on sport as a bridge and peacebuilder. According to Gadais (2020), while Coubertin was quoted as saying that he remained convinced that sport is one of the most forceful elements of peace and that he was confident in its future actions, Nelson Mandela noted that sport has the power to change the world, inspire, and unite the people in a way that little else does. Moreover, as strong motivating testaments as these could be, sport had equally made landmark contributions in environmental issues.

Preserving Environment: Formal involvement of sport in environmental issues started in 1994 when the International Olympic Committee officially declared that improved and developed environment is one of the requirements for granting Olympics hosting rights to countries. Other major events that followed in the early 2000s according to Salehnia and Bakhtyari in Zeza et al (2022) were the evaluation of the performance of sport managers and manufacturers on environment dimensions such as air pollution, noise pollution, light pollution, traffic, greenhouse emissions and electrical appliances, as well as studies on the ozone layer due to the use of cooling equipment, the use of chemicals and pesticides on lawns, pools and on excessive water consumption. In practical terms, the use of sport in environment preservation has been demonstrated (Soderman, Komatov & Liu, in Boit, 2000). According to Soderman et al, the 2006 FIFA World Cup became the first competition in Germany to design the green target in four areas that included water, waste, energy and transportation in order that environmental damage during the tournament be minimized. This is just as Boit (2000) reported that youth sport programme at the community level had been impactful in environment preservation especially in countries with expansive slums such as Nairobi where all the players of the Mathare United Football, a youth soccer programme, were required to do 80 hours per week of garbage clean up in the slums as part of the Mathare Youth Sport Association's golden environmental objectives. Economic development as a critical issue in nation building has equally been addressed through sports.

Developing Economy: Sport has continued to define the economic development of various countries through the manufacture of sporting goods, direct and indirect employment, personal income for young sports men and women, hosting of sports activities and the engagement of sports in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Sport industries involved in manufacturing sporting goods such as balls, wears, bats, tables, nets, and other merchandise have been instrumental in generating millions of dollar yearly for the companies and their employees. This is a claim substantiated by Head in Efebeh (2020) who noted that "Sports equipment manufacturing is an estimated $13.5 billion industry that is continually growing worldwide". A further economic impact of sports is felt in the direct and indirect employment for people in formal and informal sectors of the economy such as match viewing centers as well as those in betting businesses. In addition to the employment opportunities, income generated through payment for watching live foreign matches, selling of franchise of local and foreign league football idols to local fans, and taxes from the businesses at all levels of the government have strengthened countries economic base in several ways.

Sports have also been used as the dragnet for economic and infrastructural development of countries through drawing financial assistance and support from different big organizations such as the FIFA, the International Olympic Commission, EU, and the UN especially for countries hosting mega sporting events. A celebrated instance of this was witnessed when France hosted the 1988 FIFA World Cup that attracted a much significant impact in direct and indirect employment opportunity (Giraud in Efebeh, 2020). This partially explains why sport has been considered to be a leading component of the emerging "fourth pillar of development aid (Develtere & Bruga in Efebeh, 2020). The indispensability of sport as a cost-effective instrument to meet several development process and peace-building challenges had been recognized by the UN which officially incorporated it into its various agencies targeted at achieving the MDGs and subsequently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Even though sport has proved an effective weapon for all sorts of battle for national and international unity, economic viability and political stability, sport development in most countries remains one most marginalized and challenged nation building tool.

Challenges Facing Sports in Nation Building

From mere paper sports policy to general negligence, poor quality of sport personnel, sports programmes, funding, facilities, sponsorship and cases of corruption, political interference and ethnicism, are the challenges contributing to the weakening of the strength and potentialities of sports in nation building process.

Sports Policy: Sports policy defines the action plan or the blueprint for the development of sports. With such guidelines, a country becomes definitive during her strive for optimal sports development, be able to gauge her sport might against other nations of the world, and as well, situates herself among the respected countries in the sports world. Regrettably, in most developing countries, such policy gets no meaningful recognition than a mere paper tiger as its rhetoric translate to no practical reality and implementation. Funny enough, in the case of Nigeria, according to Eze (2023), there are not even any of such policies specified for both players and the coaches which its absence offers no opportunity to even measure the strength of our sports against others. This, in part, shows our level of apathy and negligence of sports.

Poor Quality of Sport Personnel: The expected nation building role of sport practically comes to a manifest when the sports management team comprising the coach, sport psychologists, sociologist, nutritionist, physician, and others have the requisite professional training capable of offering the required technical, tactical, motivational and legal support to sports programmes. Total or partial lack of such expertise is a challenge very visible to those who watch and study the dynamics of sports. The failure of many sports teams has been traced to poor philosophy and incompetence of coaches who failed to design quality technical and tactical training programmes for players, and who are totally oblivious of psycho-dynamics of sports. Former super eagles coach, Adegboye Onigbinde, bemoaned such a situation where Nigerian's failure in continental competitions is as a result of inadequate coaching programme, and which can only be reversed when the Nigerian Football Federation and other stakeholders in football realize the importance of comprehensive grooming and training of coaches (Monye, 2023).

Poor Sports Programme: Sustainable sports programme is not just one that has professionals in its management board but one that progresses on a long-range incremental strategy continuum. This is why nations with serious sport development agenda develop a long range unbroken training stages that are handled by different people and the trainees graduating from bottom to top stages under strict professional guidance. For example, in the case of football, the stages range from school sports to the junior team and finally to the senior or national team. Though in Nigeria, such groups exist but as Eze (2023) observed, we do not have any development strategy for them such that talents either get lost outrightly along the line or through talent-drain by joining other countries where their proven abilities are showcased and appropriately tapped. This according to Eze is a regrettable issue that has dealt with Nigeria as many of her players are now playing for other countries while she cannot even qualify for some major world cup championships.

Poor Funding: The symbiotic relationship that exists between sport and nation building often breaks down when governments fail in their finance and funding obligations or responsibilities for sports because it directly incapacitates sports in giving back to the society the sports expected nation building out comes. Funding is a strong factor that brings success to sports because as an area of higher expense, many sport activities such as recruitment, procurements, construction works, transportation and welfare of athletes require a huge sum

of money. The same is true for the coaches whose underfunding motivation has caused a serious lag in sports development just at the lack of fund does not support keeping sports abreast of the supersonic advancement in the contemporary sports technology and digitalization. As still observed by Eze (2023) since 2017, Nigeria has not featured in any swimming competitions as a result of poor funding.

Poor Facilities: Lack of infrastructure and resources is a major challenge facing sports industry in promoting national unity and integration in developing countries like Nigeria and others. This is because many sporting facilities in the countries where even available are in a state of despair. At both the school and national levels, the experience is same. In terms of infrastructure, some basic facilities, in particular, swimming facilities are lacking at school levels which have placed swimming activities in a position that is as good as dead and leaving so many talents wasted. In some instances, where some of the facilities exist, maintenance problems come up as some administrators temporarily "forget" their signatures when it comes to signing approvals for release of funds for the maintenance of these sports materials. In other cases, when the materials are both available and maintained, the problem of security presents fresh challenge because of lack of security men or lost through organized looting.

Lack of Sponsorship: The potency of sports for nation building continues to dwindle due to lack of sponsorship. The lack of usual cordial relationship between sports and their corporate organizations, wealthy people or philanthropist sponsors bridges the mutual handsome rewards between parties. Sponsorship even at personal levels is gradually going into extinction. This is so as Eze (2023) continued to maintain that football league suffers seriously as there is no adequate money to sponsor many sports talents in so many competitions they are supposed to feature.

Corruption: Corruption as the bane of many societies has likewise infiltrated into the sports landscape. Various corrupt practices ranging from unaccounted match ticket sales to match fixing by some unscrupulous match officials often result in violence and hostilities. These sport-related violence known as sport hooliganism are not new as Cardenas (2013) noted that they were predominant in the football venues in England as far back as in the 70's and 80's. Such isolated cases had resulted to deaths like the Heysel disaster of 1985 in Belgium where as many as ninety football fans died due to a combination of violence and poor stadium maintenance (Hughson & Spaij, 2011). This demarkets sports as an instrument of nation building as it raises the negative perception that sport has an inflated status as a social unifier, that is, nothing more than ninety minutes patriotism (Labuschange, 2018).

Political Interference: Sports administration in most countries of the world is not independent of political influence and interference which every observer sees as an obstacle to smooth sports development. Specifically in Nigeria, Olagboye (2023) reported that such political interference has been a significant challenge as politicians often use sports as a tool for political patronage, leading to sports mismanagement in the country. The worst happens when in such patronage, factional interest ensues resulting in often appointing misfit administrators into the sport positions. Notice has consistently been taken where in Nigeria, successive sport ministers are not persons of sports professional background but of medicine, business or of other professions who hitherto, ironically avoided sports profession at school levels as a course meant for brawlers with no brain. This trend, no doubt, has undermined sports as an instrument of nation building.

Ethnicism and Nepotism: Sport has suffered greatly in multi-ethnic nations with differing distinct religion, culture and political ideology. Like in appointment to high sports positions, national athletes are selected on the basis of ethnicism rather than on merit, leading to situations where talents are left unharnessed because they are not from preferred tribes. Eze (2023) corroborates to this claim in his observation that since Nigeria won the AFCON in 2013, it has not been easy to even get at the quarterfinals of any competition because so many people who are supposed to have retired are still there because of their tribe, citing the inability of Nigeria to qualify in the Quarter World Cup as a recent case. Back home in national competitions, some pockets of sport violence are still experienced along ethnic divisions.

Conclusion

Through whatever lens one may look at sport, it remains a social event adjudged to be a catalyst for nation building process given its inherent dispositions and capacity to gather people of diverse culture and background together, educate their social capital necessary for health, social and economic activities in environments that promise their safety and productivity whether as individuals or as collective. It is just unfortunate that many countries based on self-denial, illusionary and shadowy reasons give minimal attention to sports development by way of providing mere ornamental sports policy, lean budgetary allocation and politicization of sport management portfolios. It is no wonder then that with this position, ugly situations in sports landscape keep rising and hence, the spiraling downward trend in nation building observed in most countries. Although beyond this, the situation seems difficult but not entirely insurmountable as there has been a slowly haste development in sports especially through the emerging peace and development initiatives found worldwide which are continually mindful of sports as the goose that lays the golden eggs in nation building question.

Recommendations

The solutions to the challenges facing the use of sports in nation building are self-suggestive in line with the nature of the challenges as follows:

1. A "catch them young" talent identification strategy is needed by promoting sports at the grassroots level through massive provision of sport training facilities and opportunities so as to encourage early exposure of children to the virtues of sports that promote a sense of community.

2. In order that sport preserves its catalyst status in nation building, there is the need to deemphasize competitive sports in favour of recreational ones that incorporate best values of sport and peace-building principles such as inclusion, cooperation, respect, acceptance and "we-feelings".

3. In order that a sense of inclusion and nation building consciousness be built through mass participation in spots, it is necessary that sports be diversified through promoting various sports that have great appeal to each community, age and gender.
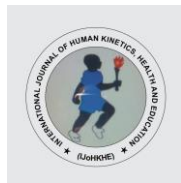
4. For sports to effectively drive nation building processes, there is the need for a redesign of the coach training programme in a way that promotes proficiency both in technical and tactical aspects and as well in peace-building principles.

5. As in other transformative projects, more academic research is needed in sports targeted at development and peace in order that the knowledge of sports role in nation building be not only provided but furthered.

6. Funding and sponsorship of sports by the government, big sports organizations, and wealthy philanthropists is one most important step in sports nation building.

7. Underpinning the role of sport in resolving conflicts in areas already affected by conflicts needs a restructure of sports conduct and rules to where participants negotiate social rules and base victory on observance of such rules rather than on goal points determined by referees.

8. When the emphasis is however on raising a sense of national pride and identity, the government ought to develop and implement strong workable sport policy and sport development strategy, eliminate political interference in sport administration system, increase international exposure of her athletes, and encourage training using modern sports technology, all under international ethical standards.

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