

Empowering the youth in sporting activities

Christopher N. Ekong
and
Ettah B. Essien

1. Introduction

Real empowerment, as posited by Malan and Breitenbach (2001), is the sense of efficacy that occurs when people realize that they can solve the problems they face and have the right to contest unjust conditions. Nevertheless, this will occur when people gain skills and feel more confident. Sports, according to Hess *et al* (1992:64), are physical leisure activities, which serve as a source of entertainment and an expression of cultural values and themes. Sports are not spontaneous expressions of human impulse but rather they are a form of structured social behaviour/activities with values, norms, statues, and roles.

In light of the above expressions, empowering the youth in sporting activities, therefore, implies exposing, encouraging and supporting the youth to acquire the sense of adequacy, which is consequent upon acquiring skills and feeling more confident (by moving to the values, norms, statues, and roles of the sporting activities) so as to be able to respond, in a healthy and disciplined way, to the increased societal demand (civil, social, political, economic, etc.) placed on them, and to make positive adjustments where and when necessary.

Admittedly, sports hold a prominent place in the global setting of today involving people (great and small) from across the spectrum of the world. The profile of sports has grown to involve over two-thirds of the world population, and huge sums of money are being spent on sports-related activities, facilities and equipment. And, (as a result) quite recently, sports have grown to become a viable employer of labour locally and the internationally as well as an institutionalized field of academic endeavour. Sports have, equally, constituted a sector or sub-sector in most economies of the world, including Nigeria. To

this end, sports activities are bound to have impacts on the national economy.

It may be of interest to note that of millions of people that admire, and participate in sports and sports-related activities, the youth constitute more than 75 per cent. This overbearing percentage places a mark of importance on the youth and their relationship to sports and allied activities. Sports have shown considerable bearings on the cultural realities of the peoples of the world. With the primary goal of entertaining and expressing cultural values, and the secondary goal of enhancing national pride and pump through successful sportings in international competitions, sports, which are mostly youth-driven, have become commercialized (Hess *et al*, 1992:65); closely related to educational system (Hart- Nibbrig and Cottingham, 1986); and highly associated with drugs, violence and immorality (Smith, 1983).

Within this sphere is the argument that about 87.36 million (60 per cent) of Nigerians are youth, and they constitute a large part of the potential labour supply, and economically active segment of the nation's population; and more than 75 per cent of admirers of, and participants in, sports (in Nigeria) are the youth. The overbearing percentage, therefore, makes it imperative to probe into the available and possible opportunities inherent in sporting activities with a view to encouraging youth empowerment. The rest of this chapter is structured as follows: Following the introduction is section 2, which presents the theoretical framework and conceptual issues. Section 3 attempts to highlight the current state of sports empowerment in Nigeria, while section 4 suggests the way forward. Concluding remarks are offered in section 5.

2. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Issues

Theoretical framework.

Sports have their roots from cultural specialization; and specialization has an important benefit of increased productivity. Sports sector, like many other sectors, places its products (skilled and specialized participants) on international market through (international competitions). Our framework is premised on the principle of comparative advantage, which gives insight into international specialization. The principle of comparative advantage is David Ricardo's.

For illustration, let us assume there are two countries, X and Y, and two commodities, A and B, and one factor of production, labour.

Table 1: Comparative Advantage between Countries X and Y.

Country	Unit of Labour Required to Produce	
	1 Unit of A	1 Unit of B
X	60	30
Y	15	15

Table I shows that for country X to produce a unit of commodity A and a unit of commodity B, it needs 60 and 30 units of labour respectively. And for country Y to produce a unit of commodity A and a unit of Commodity B, it requires 15 and 15 units of labour respectively. In terms of labour cost, Y has absolute advantage in producing commodities A and B. It takes fewer units of labour to produce either product in Y than it does in X.

Let us now look at the internal cost ratios (relative costs) of each country. In X, 2 Units of B can be produced with the same number of units of labour that are required to produce a unit of A. In Y same unit of labour is required for the production of same (1) unit of the commodities. This means that, to get one more unit of B, in Y, one (1) unit of A must be sacrificed. However, in X the opportunity cost of a unit of B is only $\frac{1}{2}$ or 0.5 of A. On the other hand, the opportunity cost of B is relatively high in Y (1 unit of A), while in X, it is relatively low ($\frac{1}{2}$ unit of A).

Although country Y has an absolute advantage in both commodities A and B, its absolute advantage is greater in A than B because $60/15 > 30/15$ (or $4 > 2$). Country Y can out produce X by 4 to 1 in the production of A but only 2 to 1 in the production of B. Country X has an absolute disadvantage in the production of both A and B, but it is at a lesser absolute disadvantage in the production of B than of A as $30/15 < 60/15$ (or $2 < 4$). However, a lesser absolute disadvantage can be interpreted to mean a comparative advantage. Thus, country X has a comparative advantage in the production of B, and should specialize in it.

According to the principle of comparative advantage, a country should specialize in the production of goods and/or services that are relatively cheaper compared with other goods and / or services

it can produce in terms of the resources cost per unit of output.

Conceptual issues.

The concepts of youth, empowerment, and sports will be considered in this section.

Youth: There exists a myriad of definitions of the concept of youth. Such definitions reflect disciplinary inclinations and cultural colourations. Thus, to psychologists, a youth is a person sandwiched between childhood and agedhood (Baltes, 1982). To Ibibio social anthropologists, with bias for tourism and adventurism, a sojourner (or a stranger) is a youth, hence the saying: "aka obio owo edi eyenowong". To economists, a youth is an active person, usually between ages 18 and 65 years, in the society with tangible contributions to the productive capacity of the economy.

Be that as it may, a prima facie conception of the term 'youth' suggests reference to young people whose age brackets are not definite. For instance, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 1997) views the youth as a segment of the population that comprises young people of ages 18 to 35 years. But Malan and Breitenbach (2001) opine that youths are young people of ages 14 to 35 years. The disparity is ever-growing. Suffice it, then, to operationalize here that the youths are a vulnerable group of a nation's population, whose physique is athletics-enhancing due to high rate of energy storage in them. They form the bulk of global population.

Empowerment: To empower is to render able, often, by giving power, strength, financial and moral supports, etc. Simply, empowerment is providing all the 'necessaries' that one needs to render one competent. One of the major problems faced by the youth in Nigeria is the inability and incompetence to establish a sustainable livelihood. Youth empowerment therefore is informed by youth's socio-economic decadence: alienation, unemployment, suppression, illiteracy, incompetence, servitude, powerlessness, unskillfulness, poverty, etc. Youth empowerment, therefore, should involve training, educating, supporting (financially and morally), skilling, encouraging and assimilating the youth into the scheme of events to help them have self-worth, to render them competent, and to enable them to have control over different forms of socio-economic challenges.

Youth empowerment, in recent times, has gained international concern due to the plight of the youth worldwide. International Youth Development Organizations (IYDOs), for sometime now, have ranked

'youth empowerment' amongst their pressing objectives. This has stirred several international organizations to concern themselves with seeking to empower the youth. Amongst such organisations are: The United Nations (UN), International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth (UNWPAY), etc. For instance, UNCED (1992) informed that:

Numerous actions and recommendations with the international community have been proposed to ensure that youth are provided a secure and healthy future, including an environment of equality, improved standards of living and access to education and employment.

In the same vein, UNWPAY (1997) urged that:

Every state (country) should provide its young people (youth) with opportunities for obtaining education, for acquiring skills, and for participating fully in all aspects of the society, with a view to, *inter alia*, acquiring self-sufficient lives (Malan and Breitenbach, 2001).

Youth empowerment, according to the International Institute for Sustainable Development-IISD (1994), and the United Nations ESCAP (1997), as contained in Malan and Breitenbach (Ibid), is a necessary tool vigorous enough to enable the youth to break the socio-economic fetters, and get fully and more confidently involved in socio-economic and political activities in their respective societies.

Sports: Sports can be viewed in two perspectives: the narrow and the broad perspectives. In a narrow perspective, sports are physical activities done for exercise and pleasure according to fixed rules (Advanced Oxford Dictionary, 2000). In a broad perspective, sports can be seen from a standpoint of leisure, exercise, entertainment, competition, commercialization and industrialization (Hess, *et al*,

1992: 64). The broad perspective is consequent on the proliferation of sports activities in the second half of the 20th century, and modern global sociol-economic and technological developments, which have extended the objectives of sports beyond mere physical exercise and entertainment. Among the modern sports activities are: football, basketball, lawn-tennis, handball, volleyball, table tennis, wrestling, boxing, athletics; swimming, badminton, cycling, chess and monopoly, judo, kungfu, karate, golf, drought, squash, archery, weightlifting, hiking, car racing, mountaineering, etc.

Sports and the society.

Worthy of note is the relationship between sports and social institutions such as family, education, economy, polity and religion. For instance, from the stand point of the family, one may notice an attempt at sportsmen and women's tendency for heredity assumptions (that is, where parents and siblings tend to thrive in certain sports). In such cases, it is usually said, "it is from blood", which, in Ibibio, means, 'oto iyib' or 'it is family's specialization by heredity', which means, in Ibibio, 'mkpo ufok'.

Also, education being the key to unlocking the locked potentials, imaginations, thoughts, and dreams in people's minds and hearts (Brown, 2004), tends to have a close relationship with sports. Thus, Hart-Nibbrig and Cottingham (1986) assert that "sports are also closely related to the educational system". This relationship is evident in the first ever Pepsi-Cola football competition for universities in Nigeria, and the erstwhile Chronicle cup competition for secondary schools in the former Cross River State, alongside Schools Sports and Nigerian University Games (NUGA). By this relationship, many sportsmen and women of international repute have been raised for the nation.

The various legislations and policies that have focused on sports speak volumes of the relationship between sports and the political institution. For instance, the disagreement between Nigeria (under Sani Abacha) and South Africa on some economic and political matters stopped Nigeria from defending the African Nations Cup in South Africa in 1996. Even the naming of sports stadia after former heads of state, governors, and some prominent citizens (such as U. J. Stadium Calabar, Cross River State, Sani Abacha Stadium Kano, Nnamdi Azikiwe Stadium Enugu, Abubaka Tafewa Balewa Stadium, Bauchi, MKO Abiola Stadium Abeokuta), and the political decisions to hold (or not to hold) international sports festivals, all point to the relationship

between sports and the polity.

Being a belief system based on the concept of divine force guiding destiny and directed towards the supernatural, religion inevitably plays a role in sports. For instance, the football industry in Scotland is pitched on religion between the Catholics and the Protestants where the two greatest teams Glasgow Rangers and Celtic are Catholics and Protestant-based, respectively. It is also common to witness teams and individual players pray before engaging in competitions.

From the standpoint of economics, sports have become part of the economy (productive activities) of nearly all the countries of the World. Countries, firms, organizations and individuals spend heavily on sports. Nations of the world promise successful athletes huge monetary values; and spend even more in the construction and acquisition of sports facilities. For instance, Nigeria, in hosting COJA 2003 All Africa Games, spent N38 billion just to build Abuja International Stadium, while the total cost of hosting the said games was about N100 billion. Similarly, Akwa Ibom State signed a N1 billion contract for the construction of Nwaniba golf course (Pioneer, July 1, 2004). In the same vein, Philadelphia 76ers, a basketball club, offered Allen Iverson \$76.7 million contract, just for four years (Punch, September 26, 2003). The volumes of money expended on boxing, football, basketball, golf, etc. very simply justify the incorporation of sports into the economy.

One other phenomenon which has lately coloured sports but much on a negative note is drug. Duping (the abuse of drugs in sports, as it is commonly known) has become a major source of concern to sports administrators worldwide. Youth (who constitute the bulk of sports participants) use drugs in various ways. They sometimes use drugs as therapeutic treatment for ailments, some use drugs for performance continuation purposes, especially if incapacitated by injuries, while some use drugs to enhance their performance (Basse, 2002:22-28). In the same vein, Costello (1988:49) argues that sportsmen and women take drugs for muscle development, and by extension, for the enhancement of power, strength and endurance. The use of drugs in sports activities is not without adverse effects, especially when abused. The abusers are liable to nervous, neurotic, psychopathic as well as sociopathic problems. Mohammed Ali, a one time world heavyweight champion in boxing, and Diego Maradona, the highest goals scorer in 1986 World football competition are

tangible examples, in this regard. Annan (2003:3) laments that “drugs are tearing apart our societies, spawning crime, spreading diseases ... and killing our youth and our future”.

Empowering the youth in sporting activities: any need?

Sports are, in a general sense, as old as human society. Sports in Ancient Greece were regarded as a principal developer of organic and mental compositions of human beings. The “primary objectives (of sports) were to inculcate obedience to authority, the endurance to hardship, and supreme fortitude in battles...” (Willems, 1981). Plato, a renowned Greek philosopher, chronicled that:

Sports are not intended, one to train body, the other, mind, except incidentally, but to ensure a proper harmony between energy and initiative on the one hand and reason on the other, by turning may venture to asset that anyone who can produce the best blend of the physical and intellectual sides of education and apply them to the training of character, is producing harmony in a far more important sense than any musician (Bucher, 1975:45)

“Sports”, according to Jesse F. Williams, “are concerned with education through the physical as well as education of the physical” (Bucher, Ibid). Youth sports, as posited by Hetherington (1922) are concerned with mental, moral, and social contributions to the youth. Stoodley (1947), as contained in Bucher (1975:46), pens five objectives of youth sports activities to include:

- i) Health, Physical and organic development;
- ii) Mental-emotional development;
- iii) Neuromuscular development;
- iv) Social development; and
- v) Intellectual development.

Rosentswieg (1969) adds that “youth sports activities lead to cultural appreciation, democratic values, social competency, self realization, and mental and moral strength”. Generally, as highlighted by the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (AAHPER) (1965), youth involvement in sports activities

will:

- a) help them (youth) to move in a skillful and effective manner in the selected activities in which they choose to engage in the youth sports programme, and also in those situations which they will experience during their life-time;
- b) help to develop an understanding and appreciation of movement in them so that their lives will become more meaningful, purposive and productive;
- c) help to develop in them an understanding and appreciation of certain scientific principles concerned with movement that relate to such factors as time, space force, and mass- energy relationship;
- d) contribute to the development of better interpersonal relationship; and
- e) help to develop the various organic systems of the body so they will respond in a healthful way to the increased demand (civil, social, economic, political etc.) placed on them.

Nevertheless, since sports have a set of rules, a competitive element, and require some form of physical exertion (Blanchard and Cheska, 1984:14), it suggests that sports activities are gender- spaced (Talbot, 1981), as such they have their ills and pluses. Such pluses, in addition to the aforementioned, include: the positive economic multiplier effect through volumes of money involved in sports, the rise to fame and glory (on both the victorious participants' and their communities'/nations' parts), the media attention, and international socialization (between and among individual participants and countries), etc. The ills include, *inter alia*: violence, as many sports men and women lack the spirit of accepting and enduring defeat; the failure stigma (insecure future), as the life span for active participation in sports is short; the tendency to breed wayward youths, as many youths in sports lack adequate educational foundation; more so sports activities today are so much influenced by drugs.

3. The Current State of Sports Empowerment in Nigeria

As already said, empowerment insinuates granting of strength, support, embodiment authority, and availability of opportunities to be competent. A cursory glance at the state of these provisions in Nigeria

at the instance of sports would portray a sordid picture. The lack of sporting equipment and facilities in most areas of sports glaringly attests to this position. Nigeria is deficient in modern stadia with Olympic standard facilities; equally the dearth of trained and skilled personnel is obvious.

Added to this, and very pitiable, is the wretched status of retired former sports stars (idols) who burned out their active days without proper planning for their sun-set days. Such people, who abound, are no encouragements to the youth. Rather, they somewhat cast negative spells on the young ones. For instance, in a recorded interview with one retired sportsman seeking his views on high demands by Nigerian footballers, he posited:

My friend, let these boys be paid their dues. Perhaps, with these, they can plan their future. In my days, I played for fun, and was satisfied with cheering. I enjoyed people's good will then. But now, I am no longer in the market, and one meal a day is hardly secured...if I had known, I would have gone to school then, or may be used my little money for trade.

Lamentations of this nature are commonplace among such people. There has not been an insurance policy in this regard. Also, some sportsmen and women who are students in the universities are discouraged sports wise. For instance, some of them forego their lectures, class work and/or examinations to represent their schools on national and/or international competitions only to come back (sometimes, victorious) without adequate provisions for them to take the missed tests and/or examinations. Sometimes, some of these students have to repeat the course(s). This is also a discouragement-laden experience.

Prevalent and inherent in our sports management is ethnicity, tribalism, nepotism and undue favouritism. These vices practically impede the development of talents and skills in sports as those who should be empowered are dis-empowered while the undeserved are empowered.

We can, therefore, infer that the empowerment-enhancing environment is yet very uncondusive and inadequate; thus, the desire and zeal to gain and develop skills and self-confidence is yet to be well deposited in the youth in the area of sports. Generally, the structures and

management of sports in Nigeria tend to ignore, or at most give less concern to, sustainable development: a development that fulfils the needs of the present without limiting potentials for meeting the needs of the future (WCED, 1987).

4. Empowering the Youth in Sporting Activities: The way forward

To empower the youth adequately, the following are proffered as recommendations:

- i) Since sports are culturally-spaced, it is necessary to embark on academic researches to know the sports that favour Nigeria (with respect to its diverse culture) and embark on same within the confines of the comparative cost advantage.
- ii) A sports-kits-making industry should be established in Nigeria to attend to sports needs of kits and wear.
- iii) Facilities (of standard sizes) like stadia and other sports equipment should be put in place for the youth to capitalise upon and gain/develop their skills and build up self confidence.
- iv) In order to sustain the development of sportsmen and women, there is need to institutionalize some sports programmes. This will offer employment for retired sports stars, and aid their proper management of youths' success in sports, since the span of activism years (in sports) is short.
- v) Retired sportsmen and women should be availed with post-active-days training for eventual employment as sports officers (masters, administrators, coaches, organisers). This is similar to ex-service men employment as security personnel.
- vi) A gradual process of sports activities should be appreciated in the policy-making of governments (local, state and federal), and schools of all levels primary, secondary and tertiary.
- vii) Sportsmen and women should be encouraged in academic studies to positively relate sports to other facets of life.
- viii) Since sports are gender-spaced, attention should be paid to the possibility of stemming the tide of women playing the secondary role as spectators, and encouraging them to be active participants.

- ix) Sentiments such as: ethnicity, tribalism, nepotism, and undue favouritism should be legislatively discouraged.

5. Conclusion

Sports provide learning experiences that socialize the youth into the values of competition and patriotism; and contribute to the adaptive needs of the social system by helping to maintain people's physical well-being. Sports serve as a safety valve for participants and spectators and promote social solidarity.

Sports have metamorphosed from simple cultural entertainment, leisure and exercise activities to a highly competitive sector, and have attracted more than two-thirds of world population as admirers, participants and supporters: the bulk of which are the youth. The need to empower the youth in sporting activities is, therefore, pertinent.

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