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Sports And Exercise: A Panacea In Curbing Youth Restiveness In Nigeria

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Abstract

Youth restiveness in Nigeria as a whole has been a prominent issue in recent times. There has been an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness, including things like hostages, kidnapping of prominent citizens, like the one that happen recently in the city of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria, where a lecturer and others were taken hostage and the present kidnapping issue in Abuja-Kaduna road is a thing of concern as well as oil bunkering in Niger Delta region, arms insurgence, cultism etc. Nevertheless, youth restiveness is not a recent phenomenon. Various forms of youth restiveness that are politically, economically or religiously motivated have existed for a long time. It is asserted that young people all over the world are a vital and important segment of the society in which they live. A disciplined, focused, and law-abiding youth can create a bright future for any nation. Conversely, a lawless, indulgent and violence youth is a great threat to a national peace and security. Sports play a vital and crucial role in inculcating positive values, attitudes and behaviours that promote harmonious relationship and interaction among the youths. Therefore, this paper examines the role of sports as a panacea in controlling youth restiveness in our societies.

Introduction

It is often said that sport has an inherent ability to bring people together, in particular the youth and yet until recently, the tremendous potential of sport to achieve youth development objectives had largely been underutilized. By its very nature, sport encourages participation bridging national, ethnic, social and religious divides. It is precisely for this reason that sport, when used as a tool for development, can serve as an impetus for social transformation and change! Young people are the innovators, creators, builders and leaders of the future. But they can transform the future only if they have the necessary skills, health, and decision-making opportunities in life (Adamu, 2013).

Iheazamazu (2011), defined youth as people aged 18-35. They constitute about 40 percent of the more than estimated160 millions of Nigerians. The total population of youth between 10 and 24 in Nigeria was 45.4 million in 2006 and may increase to 73.1 million in 2022 (Nigeria Population Commission, 2006).

Elegbeleye (2015) defined youth restiveness as "a sustained protestation embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths". It is marked by violence and disruption of lawful activities. It is impatient of control, restraint, or delay as persons restless and uneasy. Youth restiveness and social vices are apparently becoming a threat to the realisation of our individual potentials in our various communities and state in Nigeria. Youth restiveness is a despicable act being perpetrated by a significant proportion of our youths in our various communities. As the name implies, it is a combination of actions, conducts or acts that constitute unwholesome socially unacceptable activities engaged by the youths in any community (George, 2016).

Youth restiveness is a phenomenon which in practice, leads to breakdown of law and order, economic misfortune due to disruption of economic activities, increasing crime rate, intra-ethnic hostilities, harassment of prospective developers and other sundry criminal tendencies. It is often opined that an "idle mind is the devil's workshop". True to this fact, youths who are not employed or engaged in every legal means, often resort to vices which are capable of disrupting the social order of the society (Onyekpe, 2017).

There is enough animosity and separation in the world that if there wasn't any sport to lighten things up, to bring people together through healthy competition, this world would be a very sad, boring, hopeless and dark place (Mark, 2014). Sports should be accessible to everyone that wants to participate, play or watch. It should not discriminate, not set any prejudicial requirements around status, wealth or race, other than having the heart and passion to play. Sport is seen as an activity involving physical exertion and skills in which an individual or team competes against another or others to win laurels or for entertainment. The etymology of the word "sport" comes from the old French "desport", meaning leisure. The oldest definition in the English language dates from around 1300 B.C and it means "anything humans find amusing or entertaining" (Wikipedia, 2016).

In practical terms, "sport" has been operationally defined by its social interpretation as well as its strong association with physical exertion and performance measures. The contribution sport can make toward curbing youth restiveness and peace-building efforts has generally been considered at the grassroots and state level. At the grassroots or community level, sport can be seen to provide a useful way of creating an environment in which people can come together to work towards the same goal, show respect for others and share space and equipment.

Sports, whether live, competitive, recreational or league-based allows people to escape the reality of life, responsibilities, errands and mundane tasks for a few minutes, couple of hours or for a few weeks depending on how long a tournament might be. It allows politically tensed situations, cultural differences and inequality to be put aside for the sake of world tournament that unite over sports such as the FIFA World Cup, FIBA, the Olympic Games, Common Wealth Games, All Africa Games, Africa Cup of Nation, French Open Tennis or NBA playoffs etc.

Through such sports as football, people of all walks of life in South America, Europe, Africa and Asia can come together to enjoy and play a match of football at their local pitch, soccer field or an empty parking lot or space in their village. Football is considered to be the "poor man's sports" since all is required is a football, and a space to play, which can have as little as 6 (3 on 3) people playing or as many as 22 people (11s) playing for 20 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes or 90 minutes. Football allows people to escape the pressures of life, work and the challenges of reality so that they can come together and unite, regardless of colour, creed, religion or political standing (Afuekwe, 2019). There is such an amazing atmosphere of unity at such big world sporting events as the FIFA World Cup or Africa Cup of Nation tournaments, especially in the opening ceremonies or at the start of each match when the two teams enter the field with the little children, holding their hands before the respective national anthems are sung. Also, the feeling of comradely when fans get together at the local pub, raise their flags in the outdoor bars, or on the streets to get behind their teams, the pride they feel when supporting their team in such a spectacular event. As long there is no violence, hooliganism or verbal abuse between the rival team fans, this sport and any other sport actually help to curb youth restiveness, promotes unity and peace across countries and continents.

> "Sports has the ability to address youth restiveness, brings unity and peace to communities, state, nations, to a world that has been divided and separated by religious system, political beliefs, unemployment and cultural differences. Through world sports, we can unite as one spirit that we are" (Wikipedia, 2016).

Relevance of Youth to the Society

Youth occupy a prominent place in any society. Apart from being the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they outnumber the middle-aged and the aged. Beside numerical superiority, youth have energy and ideas that are society's great potentials. National Youth Development Policy (2011) asserts that;

> "Youth are the foundation of a society, their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation defined the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation founds her motivation, on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured" (Wikipedia, 2016).

The statement above acknowledges the role of the youth in the peace and security of a nation. As the most active segment of any society, youth are the major determiners of peace and stability of a nation, (Ozohu-Sulaiman, 2016). Conversely, the degree of disorderliness and instability in the society is also determined in part by youth.

Peace is a precursor of development. The absence of peace means that no meaningful development can take place. The National Youth Policy (2011) affirms that the extent of the youth's "responsible conduct and roles in the society is positively correlated with the development of their country". The chairman, National Population Commission (NPC) of Nigeria, Chief Eze Duruiheoma opined at a press conference, marking this year's World Population Day in Akure, Nigeria, the Ondo State capital; that "investing in young people" by saying, it is time all concerned stakeholders ensured safe, successful and healthy passage from adolescence into adulthood which he said was the right of every child. This can be fulfilled if families and societies make sustained investments and generally provide opportunities aimed at ensuring that youths progressively develop the knowledge, skills, resilience needed for a healthy, productive and fulfilling life (Martin, 2023).

Youths are central to the development agenda. Safeguarding their rights and investing in their future by providing quality education, decent employment, effective livelihood skills, access to sexual reproductive health and compressive sexuality education which emphasizes gender and power which are essential to their development and that of their families, communities and country. In any society, the youth play an important role in nation building and economic development (Adike & Eme, 2015). They are the future leaders and the ones who will shape the future of the country. The government and private sector organizations need to create more opportunities for the youth to be involved in nation building and economic development. The role of the youth in nation building is to provide fresh perspectives and energy to help drive economic development and social progress. As the future leaders of the country, they have a responsibility to contribute to making society better for everyone (Adamu, 2013).

In practical terms, this means getting involved in activities that create positive change. This can involve volunteering, campaigning or raising awareness on issues affecting the community, starting businesses or working on projects that improve infrastructure and services, and generally being active citizens who care about improving the lives of those around them. The youth is the backbone of any nation. They are the future leaders, entrepreneurs, and employees

who will drive economic growth and development. The role of the youth in economic development is therefore crucial (African Union, 2016).
There are a number of ways in which the youth can contribute to economic development. Firstly, they can start their own businesses and create jobs for themselves and others. Secondly, they can work hard to get good grades and secure high-paying jobs in order to contribute to the economy through taxes and spending. Thirdly, they can volunteer their time and skills to help out in their communities (Adamu, 2013).

The youth has always been a driving force behind economic development, and this will continue to be the case in the future. So, it is important that we invest in our young people and provide them with opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed. The contribution of the youth in social development cannot be overemphasized. It is said that the youth are the leaders of tomorrow but the youth can also be the leaders of today (Adamu, 2013). The youth have always been at the forefront of social change and development. They have always been at the vanguard of movements for democracy, human rights, and social justice. The role of young people in social change is not limited to protests and politics. Young people are also increasingly playing important roles in civil society organizations and social enterprises that are working to create positive change in their communities. These organizations are often led by young people and are focused on issues that are important to young people, such as education, employment, and civic engagement. The involvement of young people in social change is essential to creating a better future for all of us (Ademiluka, 2019).

The Significance of Youth in Peace and Security

The Significance of Youth in Peace and Security. In today's world, the role of youth in peace and security has become more important than ever. With the increase in global conflicts and the rise of terrorism, young people have a unique perspective and skillset that can be used to build peace and promote security (Martin, 2023).

Youth are often on the frontlines of conflict, whether it is through their involvement in militant groups or as refugees who have been displaced by violence. They also play an important role in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. As such, they have a valuable contribution to make in terms of finding solutions to conflict and promoting peace and security (Martin, 2023).

There are many programs and initiatives that aim to engage youth in peacebuilding efforts. These include education programs that teach young people about conflict resolution, human rights, and democracy; mentorship programs that pair them with older peacemakers; and leadership training programs that help them develop the skills they need to be effective change-makers.

By supporting youth-led initiatives like these, we can empower young people to create positive change in their communities and help build a more peaceful world for all (Martin, 2023).

Causes of Youths Restiveness in Nigeria

A study carried out by Elegbeye (2015) identified six major factors responsible for youth restiveness including; the peer-motivated excitement of being a student, the jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, and perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation.

Another study carried out in the Niger Delta region by Ofem and Ajayi (2018), identified a lack of humanitarian and social welfare, lack of good governance, corrupt practices of government officials, inadequate training programs, unemployment, inadequate recreational facilities, lack of quality education, and so on, as the reasons for incessant youth restiveness. This implies that a catalog of closely related factors is responsible for youth restiveness. These are briefly discussed below;

1. **Bad governance:** Good governance is required for the growth and development of any nation. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, bad governance is more common than good, resulting in disjointed development. The World Bank (2012) identified the main characteristics of bad governance to include;
   a. Failure to properly distinguish between what is public and what is private, leading to private appropriation of otherwise public resources;
   b. Inability to establish a predictable framework for law and government behaviour in a manner conducive to development, or arbitrariness in the application of laws and rules;
   c. Excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirements, and so forth which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rest-seeking.

   These and more are the features of most administrations in Nigeria. For instance, Onyekpe (2017), observed that successive administrations in Nigeria have not allocated much to the needs of the youth, and, worse still, the meager allocation are often diverted by government officials to their private accounts and projects. Thus, youth are restive and agitated when they perceive that resources meant for them are being wasted by those in authority.

2. **Unemployment factors:** Unemployment is a hydra-headed monster which exists among the youth in all developing countries, not only in Nigeria. Experts believe that the number of jobless youths is twice as high as official estimate, for example, on Sunday being 12th of June, 2016, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched a programme called N-power to train 500,000 teachers, just within 36 hours, 400,000 individuals applied and 1.5 million accessed the website. Ozohu-Suleiman (2016), noted that Nigerian youths are trapped by unemployment. Zakaria (2016), also believed that the rising tide of unemployment and the fear of a bleak future among the youth in African countries have made them vulnerable to the manipulations of agents' provocatives. These include aggrieved politicians, religious demagogues and greedy multinationals that employ these youths to achieve their selfish and nerferous ambitions. Zakaria (2016) strongly believed that the absence of job opportunities in developing countries is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequences.

3. **Poverty:** Poverty connotes inequality and social injustice and this traumatizes the poor. More than 70 percent of people in Nigeria are in abject poverty, living below the poverty line, and one-third survive on less than US$1 dollar a day, (Zakaria, 2016). This figure includes an army of youth to eke out a living by hawking chewing sticks, bottled water, handkerchiefs, belts, etc. The sales-per-day and the profit margin on such goods are so small that they can hardly live above the poverty line. Disillusioned, frustrated and dejected, they seek an opportunity to express their anger against the society. Aworawo, (2020) and Zakaria, (2016) agreed that there is a link between poverty, loss of livelihood, inequality, and youth restiveness as evidenced by the numerous violent protests against the wielders of power in Nigeria.

4. **Inadequate educational opportunities and resources:** Quality education has a direct bearing on national prestige, greatness, and cohesion. The knowledge and skills that young people acquire help determine their degree of patriotism and contribution to national integration and progress. The after-effect of inadequate educational opportunities and resources is that thousands of young Nigerians will now roam the streets in the cities of Nigeria. Worse still, some who struggle to enroll in various educational institutions drop out due to a lack of basic learning facilities. This situation is attributable to the dwindling resources of government at both federal and state levels as a result of an economic meltdown (Ndagana & Ogunrombi, 2016).

5. **Lack of basic amenities:** Most rural communities and urban slums in Nigeria have no access to potable water, health facilities, electricity, communication facilities, industries commercial facilities etc. Behind social unrest and youth restiveness in the country is the agitation for equitable distribution of resources.

6. **Political conditions:** Political conditions that generate youth restiveness are those caused by the government in either its failure to carry out some of its responsibilities to the youth or by engaging these youths in certain political activities that render some of them disabled, motherless, and even loss of their lives. The government's failure to proffer a solution or checkmate this condition can lead to youth restiveness, (Emmanuel, 2012).

Roles of Sports in Curbing Youth Restiveness in Nigeria

Sport is a veritable tool for individual and collective emancipation and advancement. Ajiboye (2014) agreed that sport is necessary for people to be liberated from the shackles of ingnorance, social unrest, and political instability. Social cohension cannot be achieved without timely, accurate and competitive sport.

Sport has been likened to a stimulus that can condition a person's mind for social development. Sport is a change agent, a reinforcer of ideas and opinions. It is the responsibility of teachers to ensure that youth have access to sports that will guide their actions. Sport plays a vital role in wealth generation. People like Nwankwo Kanu, J. J. Okacha, Blessing Okagbare, Joseph

Yobo, Mikel Obi etc, are well known in this country and beyond through sport and have also created an avenue where other Nigerians can be employed in their agencies.

Sport is a critical economic resource in today's world. Sports according to Ukwayi (2014), should be geared towards:

- Creating the awareness that the future belongs to the youth and that it must not be destroyed by them;
- Sensitizing them to the fact that the future and its nature depend on the decisions and choices they make;
- Creating in them sense of history, especially of the noble and heroic contributions of the youth in the past to the development of Nigeria, in comparison with the ignoble role of many youth today;
- Sensitizing them to embrace the rule of law and democratic ideals;
- Liberating them psychologically and mentally from the control of self-seeking business and political elites
- Encouraging them to raise issues relating to unresolved problems of nation building and the problems of neglect of the youth in the development process at every fora;
- Mobilizing them against abuse of the system through sanctions;
- Sensitizing them to seek greater employment and educational opportunities as a means of redirecting their energy and ideas from anti-social activities to creative efforts.

Sports is a veritable tool for re-branding any community or nation's image, boost national unity, serve as a bridge builder as well as foster peaceful co-existence among youth.

Whenever there is a national or international sporting event, youths forget their religion, ethnicity, gender, age, cultural divide and unity as one to support a common goal because sports redefines what we really are or stand for; a "peace loving nation".

It is only through regular practice that the potentials of youths could be exploited to excel in sport. The President, Nigeria Mixed Martial Arts (NMMA), Henry George Feb., 5, 2016 in Lagos opined that youths should strive to engage in meaningful pursuits instead of engaging in wasteful ventures. He added that youths should be guided and given the required support needed to make a living from sport (martial arts) with the skills they possess.

We have nicknamed youths who have strength to build a career out of sport "Agbero", meaning touts, because they use their energy for the wrong activities (Ukwayi, 2014). According to George (2016) youths lack the right information regarding how they can get involved in sport to ensure they make a decent living. According to him, all tiers of government should support young people to take to sport as a veritable tool in reducing youth restiveness and unemployment. With the right support, the attention of youth can be deviated from criminal activities and focused to winning medals with monetary gains and incentives. If, there are

training classes for youths to learn sports across various communities, we will be able to build responsible people who will make a decent living.

Mark, (2014) harped on the inevitability of sporting activities in this country Nigeria as the needed panacea towards, curbing societal ills, especially among youths. He stated this at the tee-off of the 2014 Professor Odusola Ojerinde Memorial Golf Tournament in Otukpo, Benue state, that engaging youths in various sporting activities would curb social vices and make them more fruitful and useful to society. He stated that beyond being a kind of exercise (i.e. sports) for the mental and physical health of the citizenry, he stressed that sports have become a yardstick for measuring the strength of a nation. Sport is now a strong tool for international politics which no nation seeking advancement can afford to ignore (Mark, 2014).

Challenges of Sports in Addressing Youths Restiveness in Nigeria: Sports like every other aspect of organization in Nigeria have faced divers challenges, constraints, or problems in addressing youth's restiveness in Nigeria. Some of such challenges are inadequate funding, mismanagement of funds, lack of integrity, inadequate personnel, and dwindling infrastructural facilities (Echezona, 2017).

Inadequate funding: The financing of sports in Nigeria since the colonial era has been a major Problem because the budget allocation for it was usually small compared to the amount needed to fund it. Government subventions are not enough anymore to run sports successfully. Financing Sports has become a big problem to the agencies responsible for it in Nigeria.

Mismanagement of funds: The issue of embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, wasteful expenses and misrepresentation have over the years culminated major barriers to the development of sports in our societies. The federal government has empowered National Sports Commission (NSC) at the Federal level, sports council at the state level and other sources from the use of sporting facilities by the public, ticket proceeds and gate fee during competitions. However, the issue of unfaithfulness on the part of the collectors and financial managers at all levels has hitherto put sports at a disadvantaged position to develop the society (Echezona, 2017).

Managerial problems: There are certain managerial problems facing the field like misappropriation of organizational goals, partiality towards supporting one programme at the expense of the other or in the disbursement of funds, inability to take prompt and quality decisions, inadequate professional preparations ahead of major sporting event. This area affects the Nigerian youths among others. Most of the sport administrators, managers, coaches, and sport personnel's do not possess adequate skills needed for the performance of the specified assignment and management of sporting facilities (Echezona, 2017).

Inadequate infrastructural facility: Some of the sporting facilities were either not available or dwindling in quality. These have accounted for poor performances in both local and international competitions which can easily pave way for restiveness.

Inadequate training: Necessary workshops and seminar to supply and update global information on sports were either not made provision for, pegged down, placed embargo-on or inadequate. In some cases because of corruption which has eaten deep into the fabrics of the system, funds meant for training were diverted or slashed down.

Low remuneration: Most of the coaches, facilitators, administrators, referees and club members were not properly reinforced with fat salaries and appropriate allowances.
With the above challenges in place, the promotion of our youths through sports to curb restiveness will continue to be limited (Echezona, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is important for the youth of any nation to be involved in its economic development. The role of the youth in nation building is very important. They are the future leaders of the country and it is their responsibility to lead the country towards progress. The youth should be given opportunities to participate in various activities related to economic development so that they can gain experience and knowledge about it.

This paper has attempted to capture the place of sports in curbing youth restiveness in Nigeria. The future belongs to the youth who make productive use of sport and knowledge in general. With adequate exercise or participating in sport during leisure hour to avoid idle talks, because there is an old adage that says "an idle mind is the devil's workshop", Nigerian youth can achieve their potentials and participate actively in local and international affairs in a manner that eschews violence.

To curb youth restiveness, government should;

1. Take to sponsoring of various sports as a means of curbing restiveness and youth unemployment
2. Sports should be made compulsory in the curriculum of schools from elementary to tertiary level of education, so that the nation could develop skillful athletes who would become professionals.
3. Give access to credit sport facilities and equipment and other sport mechanisms to young people.
4. Increase allocations for youth development and youth-related programmes.
5. Use all channels of information to enlighten youth on the adverse effects and acts of rebellion.
6. Partner with multinationals to ensure the development of functional and well-equipped stadia in all sports.

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