



A Review of Sports as a Uniting Tool: Uganda Armed Forces and the Civilians

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Abstract

This paper examines measures taken by the government, sports administrators, federations, and officials to bridge any gap between the armed forces and civilians through sports. It will also contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of sports and it avails ideas which may be useful in formulating policies by the government, National Council of Sports, and the commander in chief charge of sports in the army. The study will provide documentation in the area of equity in sports that may help researchers establish facts about sports and social being in the community. The information obtained may help acknowledge every person's right to participate in sports and provide the rationale for awarding special opportunities to the underprivileged in sports.

Subject Areas

Sports Science

Keywords

Ugandan Sports, Sports for Unity, Sports for Development, Army Sports

1. Introduction

It is evident from various studies that a social disparity exists between the army and civilians in sports worldwide. Yet, every person should be able to participate in sports as it is associated with both good health and long life. The International Olympic Committee reported that sports belong to all human beings and that it is important to men and women as it provide opportunities to learn and experience success, teamwork, and moments of excellence [1]. In addition, the Committee highlights sport as a medium of communication and emancipation. It helps build participants physical and psychological well-being and awareness. [1] adds that participation in sports is a human right acquired at birth to practice

sport since it teaches respect for rules, tolerance, and solidarity; helps to develop the body and spirit; and gives joy and pride. The Brighton Declaration of 1994 recognized the value of sport, that when practiced fairly and equitably, it enriches society and friendship between nations, and provides a wide range of benefits to individuals [2].

The Brighton Declaration further stated that participation in sports is a cultural activity, which, if practiced equitably, can offer an opportunity for self-expression, personal achievement, and good health. Therefore, a sporting culture must be developed to close the big gap between men and women [2].

Regular participation improves the quality of life, lowers the risk of disease, and offers numerous psychological and social benefits [3]. Participation in sports can prevent non-communicable diseases which account for over 60% of global deaths, and cardiovascular diseases which account for half of all deaths among women over 50 in developing countries. Participation in sports helps reduce the effects of osteoporosis, it also aids in preventing type-2 diabetes, hypertension, and arthritis. Active involvement in sports helps to manage weight and contributes to forming and maintaining healthy bones, muscles, and joints [3].

Generally, this paper examines measures taken by the government, sports administrators, federations, and officials to bridge any gap between the armed forces and civilians through the idea of sport for development and peace initiatives [3]. This study will be used to fuel more investigations towards the current sports activities, and even help in the creation of new strategies that are needed to promote a better, safer, and healthier future for all Ugandans through sports.

2. Steps to Reduce the Social Gap through the Use of Sports

Some challenges need to be tackled despite the passion and excellence shown by Uganda's athletes. There is still a need for better management and governance of sports, such as limited funding, and insufficient infrastructure, and a need for better governance. But there are also opportunities for growth and improvement in these challenges. The potential of sport as a tool for social development and economic growth is increasingly being recognized by the government, in partnership with private sector partners. Investments in sports infrastructure and the development of talent are on the rise, as is cooperation with International Organizations to enhance sports programs [4]. The purpose of the Sports for Peace initiative is therefore to take advantage of sport's power in promoting social equity and peaceful development.

3. Building Relationships

Sport works primarily by bridging relationships across social, economic, and cultural divides within society, and by building a sense of shared identity and fellowship among groups that might otherwise be inclined to treat each other with distrust, hostility, or violence. One peace researcher views relationship-building as the central component of peace-building and highlights the importance of in-

terventions that explicitly focus on strategic networking to build relationships. Ideally, peace-building establishes a web of relationships that can sustain local damage without losing the whole. This means that relationships are not all linked to, or dependent on, a single individual or a small number of individuals. This includes horizontal connections at the community level across groups and institutions, as well as vertical links to influential leaders and decision-makers outside the community. NGOs are well-positioned to facilitate the process of relationship-building by bringing people together and engaging them in dialogue and programs that cross diverse boundaries. When properly supported, sports programs can play a contributing role in this process, creating more opportunities for social contact. Establishing community sports organizations and the participation of community sports volunteers generates social ties and community infrastructure that help to build peace and stability [3].

4. Connecting Individuals in the Communities

Community sports programs can provide shared experiences between people that “re-humanize” opposing groups in the eyes of their enemies. By sharing sports experiences, sports participants from conflicting groups increasingly grow to feel that they are alike, rather than different. This shared “ritual identity,” or sense of belonging to the same group based on a shared ritual experience, helps to erase the dehumanizing effects of persistent negative characterizations of opposing groups. Sport can serve as a tool to advance demobilization and disarmament efforts and to support the often difficult reintegration of ex-combatants, particularly former child combatants, into their communities. Regular sports activities can also help to address war-related trauma and promote healing by providing safe spaces for activities that enable victims of war to regain a sense of security and normalcy. Within safe spaces, victims can build positive relationships and, in the case of those newly disabled, rebuild a sense of confidence in their abilities.

Through its nearly universal reach and popularity, sport also offers an important means of reaching out to and engaging socially excluded groups. In these cases, sports programs are often the initial “hook” that opens the door to other opportunities to connect people to a wider range of services and supports that can assist them [3].

5. Using Sport as a Communications Platform

The profile and influence of elite athletes and sporting events can shine a light on the structural causes of social exclusion and help to promote solutions. The global popularity of elite sports makes it an ideal and extremely powerful mass communication platform that can be used to promote a culture of peace. Celebrity athletes, in particular, can be extremely influential as role models and spokespeople for peace and serve, at times, as intermediaries between hostile nations, creating openings for dialogue. While these moments generally occur

spontaneously at the international level, the same effect can be generated at the local level through carefully designed programs that work in a sustained way to build bridges between antagonistic groups. For example, the International platform on sport and development recently recruited 9 World-Famous Athletes who signed up for peace from different countries and in different sports [5].

6. Creating a Space for Dialogue

Elite sport has been used to open the door to peaceful dialogue and to defuse political tensions between nations. The famous “ping pong diplomacy” between the People’s Republic of China and the United States was launched in 1971 when an American national table tennis player missed his bus after practice and was invited onto the Chinese team’s bus. One of the Chinese players offered a silkscreen portrait to his American counterpart in greeting. The American later presented the Chinese player with a T-shirt containing the peace symbol and the words “Let it be”.

The media attention that followed this incident led to an invitation for an American government delegation to visit China. More recently, the term “cricket diplomacy” has been used to describe the improvement of relations between India and Pakistan resulting from an informal invitation from Prime Minister Singh to General Musharraf to watch an international cricket match between the two nations. Sport, at the elite or community level, is increasingly being used in a wide variety of ways to promote social inclusion, prevent conflict, and build peace in developed and developing countries. Whether the aim is to promote peace at the elite or community level, it is important to consider the limitations that may be involved.

7. Global Trends towards Equity in Sports

Sport’s power and importance as a tool for preventing conflict and building peace is reflected in a range of international agreements, strategies, and instruments. In 1993, the United Nations restored the ancient tradition of the Olympic Truce, under which athletes from warring nations are granted safe passage to participate in the Olympic Games. Since 1993, before every Olympics, the Olympic Truce has been reaffirmed by the United Nations General Assembly through a symbolic Resolution entitled Building a Peaceful and Better World through Sport and the Olympic Ideal. More recently, the Olympic Truce has been intended to include the Paralympic Games as well.

The truce begins seven days before the start of each Olympic/Paralympic Games and continues until seven days after the closing ceremony, reminding the world that sport offers an opportunity to bridge even the bitterest political divides.

Over the past few years, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted a series of resolutions on Sport for Development and Peace. The most recent, Resolution 61/10, 14 invites Member States, the United Nations system (including the governing bodies of United Nations agencies), sport-related organizations,

the media, civil society, and the private sector to collaborate to promote greater awareness and action to foster peace. Building on the spirit of the UN General Assembly resolutions, in 2007 the International Olympic Committee, the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa, and the African Union issued the Brazzaville Declaration, proposing to join their efforts with those of governments, NGOs, and private partners to create a fund for sports for peace initiatives. These international frameworks reflect a growing awareness of sport's potential to help prevent conflict and build peace. To be effective, sports for peace initiatives must be carefully designed with specific conflict prevention or peace-building goals in mind. These initiatives should only be undertaken after a rigorous assessment of the context and dynamics involved to minimize the risk that they will inflame the tensions they are intended to address. Widespread programmatic sports for peace initiatives, however, are relatively new and there is little scientific research that documents their impact. In such cases, programmatic examples provide useful evidence of sport's impact in the area of peace-building.

8. Current Sports Status in the Armed Forces

According to Uganda's Constitution of 1995 with Amendments through 2017, the provision of sport and recreation is one of the main mechanisms for protecting and promoting fundamental and other human rights and freedoms. Thus, this should be one of the key responsibilities of the state or government [6]. The state has tried to implement most of the ideas reviewed in this paper to eliminate the social gap between the armed forces and the civilians through sports in many ways.

There has been the creation of many different types of sports in different sections of the armed forces (Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), Uganda Police Force, and Uganda Prisons). This has led to the formation of many different teams within the armed forces which compete in the same competition with the civilians.

UPDF active teams include:

UPDF Athletics Club, UPDF Simba Football Club in Bombo, UPDF Gadafi Football Club in Jinja, UPDF Basketball Club, UPDF Handball Club, UPDF Netball Club, UPDF Volleyball Club, UPDF Boxing Club.

The Uganda Police Force team includes:

Police FC, Police Volleyball Club, Police Handball Club, Police Netball Club, Police and Police Athletics Club.

Uganda Prisons teams include:

Prisons Football Club (Maroons FC), Prison Handball Club, Prisons Volleyball Club, Prisons Netball Club, Prisons Athletics Club, and Prisons Boxing Club.

All these sports clubs formed by armed forces are affiliates in their respective national federations and compete actively in the national leagues at different levels daily year in and out. As a result, a strong relationship, unity and National

Pride, health and well-being, empowerment of youth, gender empowerment, economic opportunities, and cultural exchange and diplomacy have been created between the armed forces and the civilians through sports. Furthermore, so many talents have been produced by the armed forces teams that have represented Uganda at national and international levels; in the 1968 Olympics Bantamweight boxer Eridad Mukwanga of Prisons won Uganda's first-ever Olympic medal at the Mexico City Games, Steven Cheptegei from Police is a Current World Record holder—5000 m, 10,000 m with 1× Olympic champion and 3× World champion, among other athletics in other sports who represented the nation on different levels.

The sports activities in the armed forces have created employment opportunities for civilians as players, coaches, and physiotherapists among others, and it has been a smooth way for those who wish to join the armed forces without going through long queues in case they are willing to go through a special of the armed forces. The inter-force games within the armed forces have also been seen to unite the different units of the armed forces, the game has also been a source of income to the civilians who act as officials in different games.

There has been a spirit of sportsmanship developed through sports as the armed forces share the sports facilities with the civilian teams. A case in point is Bombo Army is sharing the football stadium with Sports Club Villa and Ndejje University, and Kampala City Council FC is sharing a football stadium with Police FC to host their home games during the Uganda Premier games.

A closing speech made by the Director of Sports in Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces, Colonel John Mark Ssemanda after a shooting range competition that was held at the Police Shooting Grounds, Kigo, Wakiso district, urged the security forces to embrace sports as a networking tool to foster harmony, cooperation and unity [7].

9. Conclusion

This paper examined the measures taken by the state, National Council of Sports, Federations, and other officials to bridge any gap between the armed forces and civilians through sports. The review has elaborated on how the government has utilized sports for development and peace initiatives to promote unity within the country through sports. Finally, Sports have provided useful insight to the community that sport is an excellent instrument for the development of the community, to create unity and equality, National Pride, health and well-being, empowerment of youth, gender empowerment, economic opportunities, and cultural exchange and diplomacy among people, and stimulate growth in various ways. Sport has a strong cultural and social attachment that goes beyond competition. Athletes and fans are beginning to make progress in contributing to the country's continued growth and development, as the state continues its investment in sports. A study by [8], reported sports participation in teams supports social behaviours and creates social identity and a sense of belonging

among team members, which sometimes also extends to non-members. The study continues to highlight the potential of sport to improve cooperation between people and to improve the efficiency of society. To ensure a bright future for Uganda's society and culture, sports will continue to be an important tool for bringing unity, healthy living, and encouraging people.

10. Limitations

The authors encountered several limitations in the review of the article; there was insufficient time for the researcher to gather sufficient resources to carry out the review. Second, the lack of relevant studies in this area limited its scope and thorough analysis.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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