

STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING SPORT IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Sport is a human activity that contributes immensely to the welfare of participants and the society as a whole. It is appreciated across people of varying cultures, races, age, gender, colour and religion. It is recognized as a facet of socio-cultural, political and economic development. However, in spite of the level of recognition that sport enjoys in Kenya, minimal achievements have been made by her sportsmen and sportswomen in the major sports disciplines in the world. The limelight that the country enjoyed on the international scene in the 1960s and 1970s due to her athletes' commendable performances in the middle and long distance races has been gradually on a nose-dive. Athletes from other countries such as Morocco and Ethiopia have become constant challengers to the Kenyans. The national soccer team, Harambee Stars, has never qualified for the Olympics has never stretched beyond the preliminary round of the games. The country's performance in international competitions in events like boxing, wrestling, hockey, basketball, swimming, gymnastics and the so-called minor sports at all levels has been dismal. It is in the light of this that the present paper delves into presenting managerial and technical strategies that are crucial to the development of sport in Kenya.

Key Words: *Sport, Athletes, International competition (s)*

INTRODUCTION

Sporting activities attract billions of participants and spectators all over the world (Reilly, 1996; Skogvang et al., 2000). This is because sports make substantial contribution to the socio-economic, political and cultural development of a country (McPherson et al., 1989; Mwisukha et al., 2003). Success in sport by a country, for instance, generates feelings of national pride and superiority. It helps in bringing about a sense of national identity and in popularizing the name of the country. Mass sport is important in enhancing the health of the general public, thereby, making them more productive and at the same time, reducing expenditure on healthcare. It pulls people together and hence, provides opportunity for socialization and national integration (Coakley, 1990). Many countries of the world have therefore, taken keen interest in developing sport so as to enable people enjoy the inherent benefits of the activity. This phenomenon has made sport become a highly competitive activity. Consequently, most of the countries have

continuously put in place strategies of promoting and developing sports. Kenya, for instance, needs concrete and firm managerial and technical strategies to enable her achieve remarkable success in sports.

Sport is one of the most popular activities in Kenya. It is embraced due to its contribution towards social, cultural, economic and political development of the country (Mwisukha et al., 2003). As such, the government has put in place management and administrative structures to oversee the running and development of sporting activities in the country through the ministry in charge of sports. Currently, the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services is charged with the responsibility of sports policy formulation and facilitation. In addition, the Kenya National Sports Council, which was established through the Societies Act CAP 108 in 1966, is the umbrella organisation that coordinates the activities of all the national sports federations and organizations, and also acts as an advisory body to the government on

matters of sports. In spite of the existence and operations of these management and administrative structures, the sports scene in Kenya continues to face a myriad of problems and challenges. For instance, according to Munayi (2000) little has been heard from Kenya National Sports Council over the years and the body seems to have settled to particularly resolving and managing conflicts in the various sports federations with little success, and at the expense of sports development. The government department of sports is on the other hand managed by a substantial number of personnel who have no specific training in matters of sports (Munayi, 2000). The other problems and challenges that face sports development in Kenya are enumerated below:

- (i) The country has not been able to host or made a bid to host the major international sports competitions such as the World Cup, Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games or the World Athletics Championships.
- (ii) Kenya's performance in some of the major international sports competitions has been dismal. Though soccer is the country's most popular sport, the national soccer team has never qualified for the soccer World Cup. The glory that the country enjoyed in the 1960s and 1970s as Africa's Champion in track events has been taking a nose-dive over the years. The country faces stiff challenges from the other African countries such as Ethiopia, Morocco and Nigeria.
- (iii) The country's performance in the field events has been extremely unimpressive. No single Kenyan athlete has ever won a medal in the field events at the World Championships and at the Olympic Games.
- (iv) Women's sports participation and performance has not been commendable. There is gender imbalance in women's sports participation, performance and leadership (Simiyu *et al.*, 2003).
- (v) The country has got very limited number of developed stadia and

other sports facilities: there are only two stadia of international standard in the country.

- (vi) Persistent wrangles in the national sports federations have been common phenomena. The wrangles have not created a conducive environment for the development of sports.
- (vii) A substantial number of outstanding Kenyan athletes and runners have been relocating to other foreign countries and even changing their citizenship. This is an indicator that the sporting environment in Kenya is not favourable for quite a number of athletes.
- (viii) Complaints about inadequate or lack of funding for national teams have not been uncommon. Lack of adequate funds by various national sports federations has been an impediment to the national teams' international exposure in terms of participating in build-up competitions.
- (ix) There have been frequent complaints of bias and unfairness in the procedures used to select national teams to represent the country in international competitions.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the need for the creation of a conducive environment for the promotion of sports in Kenya is imperative. This responsibility lies squarely with the ministry incharge of sports, the various sports federations and organizations, the corporate sector and all other stakeholders in matters of sports. The managerial and technical strategies that are therefore crucial to the development of sports in the country are presented below.

Formulation and Implementation of a National Sports Policy

There is need to formulate a national sports policy that will be used to guide the development of sports in the country. At the moment, such a policy does not exist in spite of the efforts that the government has made for a long time towards this direction. Shehu (1995) contends that countries that have produced sports policy such as Nigeria,

South Africa and Zimbabwe seem to have made a major impact in various sports across board.

Professional Management of Sports

A professional approach in the management of sports in the country is another important factor that will contribute to the development of sports. Sports have become highly competitive and it is important that they are managed by people who have the necessary expertise in the field (Beashel & Taylor, 1992). The various sports federations, organizations and the government department of sports should be run by professionals. This implies that the appointment of government sports managers should be based on their professional qualifications. The constitutions of the various sports federations and organizations need to be reviewed so as to make provisions for the election of sports officials who have relevant training in the technical and or managerial areas of sports.

Training of Sports Personnel

The country needs a sound and well-established programme for the training of the necessary manpower in sports (Chom, 2003). This will alleviate the shortage of manpower that is experienced in the running of the various sports programmes. The reliance on the services of foreigners in the training of sports personnel such as coaches and sports managers is not only expensive but also denies the local people the opportunities of providing the necessary leadership in sports. Just as professional areas such as teaching and medicine have institutions where the professionals are trained, there is need to establish a national training institute or academy to coordinate the training of coaches, sports referees, sport administrators and managers, sports psychologists, sports medicine personnel, sports nutritionists, physiotherapists and masseurs. Any such institution of training should be affiliated to the various international sports federations and organizations so that their training programmes are legitimized and recognized across the world (Reilly, 1996).

Funding of Sports Programmes

Availability of finances for the running, development and promotion of sports is

arguably regarded as the most important ingredients of sporting success (Baumann, 2003). There is no doubt that adequate funding is essential to the provision of players with first class sports services, facilities, equipment, technical and management personnel, technical development and the necessary external exposure (Baumann, 2003). Hence, various ways and means of raising adequate funds to meet the cost of running sports activities must be explored. Since the government is a major stakeholder in the facilitation and provision of sports services, it should make adequate provisions for sports funds in the annual national budgets. Corporate sponsorships also constitute a major source of funds for sports activities (Beashel & Taylor, 1992; Smith, 2000). The fact that sports events attract many enthusiasts make it possible for commercial organizations to use them in advertisements of their goods and services. The colossal sums of money injected by the commercial organizations into such advertisements in turn becomes available for the development of sports. Other avenues through which sports organizations can raise funds for sports activities include use of raffles and fund-raising drives. To ensure proper utilization of available funds for sports development, the government, which is the custodian of public funds, should put in place transparent financial monitoring and auditing machineries so that the funds are not embezzled or misappropriated.

Talent Identification and Development

Kenya needs to put in place suitable and effective procedures for sports talent identification and development. Such sports talent can easily be identified amongst the youth. Sports federations and technical personnel in sports need therefore, to set up Youth Centres (or Centres of Sports Excellence) where sports talent among the young persons can be identified and nurtured. Such centers of sports excellence can be set up in institutions of learning or as sections within the various national sports federations, which should be run under the guidance of technically qualified coaches. The Youth Centres will serve as reservoirs from which athletes can be selected for international competitions.

Development of Sports Facilities

The extent to which sports facilities are provided in a country is a determining factor of the potential of success in sports (Clerk & Madden, 1995). Adequate facilities are required in terms of numbers, quality and size to enable people participate in sporting activities in large numbers. A country can only bid for the hosting of major international competitions such as the soccer World Cup, Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games if it has quality and adequate number of facilities for such events. However, Njororai *et al* (2005) have reported the inadequacy of sports facilities such as stadia, gymnasiums and swimming pools in Kenya. The government therefore, should not only make budgetary provisions for the development of modern facilities but also seek for the involvement of the country's development partners in the improvement and development of the sports facilities. Just as the case obtains in countries that are known for success in sports such as Britain, United States of America, Germany and many others, the corporate sector should be involved in the development of the required facilities.

Streamlining Selection Procedures for Athletes and Teams

The controversies that commonly arise over the selection of athletes and teams for international assignments can be minimized if the national sports federations can formulate sound criteria, procedures and formats for such selections. Arising from the relatively high competitive level of sports in the world, it is imperative that procedures and modes applied in the selection of competition teams are carefully examined. The selection processes of sports teams and individuals are technical in nature, requiring the involvement and efforts of suitably qualified technical personnel: coaches, trainer, sports psychologists and sports managers (Cox, 1994). Physical, physiological, psycho-social, historical and technical/tactical factors should be considered in the selection of sports competitors (Mwisukha *et al.*, 2003).

Sports Professionalism

The national sports federations in Kenya should seriously consider introducing and nurturing professionalism in sports. Many

countries in the developed world have made a tremendous shift from sports amateurism to professionalism (Beashel & Taylor, 1992). Kenyan athletes need to be accorded opportunities to earn their living from their pursuit of competitive sports. This is the only way through which sportsmen and sportswomen can commit most of their time and energies on activities to achieve success rather than abandoning them to pursue other income-generating activities.

Diversification of Sporting Activities

The main objective of every athlete and country that take part in the major international competitions such as the Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games, Soccer World Cup and others is to win so as to earn medals, honour and other benefits enjoyed by the winners. Consequently, the interest of countries in entering as many athletes in as many sports disciplines as possible has been on the increase. There is need therefore, for Kenya to diversify into the so-called minor sports as to increase the chances of winning many medals in the various international competitions. The many other sports disciplines in which the country has the potential to excel include yachting, archery, shooting, weightlifting, wrestling and most of the martial arts.

Motivation of Athletes

The morale of sportsmen and sportswomen can be enhanced if they are suitably and adequately rewarded whenever they register victories in competitions. This makes it necessary for the various sports federations, government and corporate sector to establish specific ways of providing incentives to athletes who excel in international competitions. Such provision of incentives will not only motivate athletes to strive for exemplary performance but also discourage the best local athletes from seeking foreign citizenship in countries where their athletic achievements are adequately rewarded. Both material and non-material incentives are necessary.

Role of Mass Media

The mass media has a fundamental role to play in the development of sports (Munayi, 2003). It is an important tool for passing information, bringing talent into the limelight and creating sports heroes.

Appearance of an athlete in the mass media may accord him/her credibility and a sense of achievement. Through the mass media, the potential of sportsmen and sportswomen can be marketed. The various sports federations, organizations and the ministry in charge of sports therefore, need to cultivate a close and conducive working relationship with the mass media for the promotion of sports. The sports management agencies should involve the mass media in educating people about sports, providing adequate and fair coverage of sports functions and personalities.

Conclusion

The formulation and implementation of various strategies for the development of sports require joint involvement of all stakeholders in matters of sports in Kenya. There is need for the country to keep pace with the ever changing and challenging sports scene. This is only possible with regular review of policies, practices and procedures that are crucial to the development of sports.

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