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**(A Multi-disciplinary Publication of the 13th West Africa  
University Games Forum)**



# **INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE 13TH WEST AFRICA UNIVERSITY GAMES (WAUG)**

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**Vol. 1, No 1 (2012)**

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# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE 13TH WEST AFRICA UNIVERSITY GAMES

(A Multi-disciplinary Publication of the 13th West Africa University Games Forum)

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# CONTRIBUTIONS OF SPORTS TO HEALTH AND OVERALL DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDIVIDUAL

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## ABSTRACT

*This study reviewed some of the contributions of sports to health and development. Physical inactivity is an undesirable lifestyle and it is a threat to good, healthy living. Health and quality of life can be maintained and improved upon by regular physical activity. Regular participation in appropriate physical activity and sports by both sexes and all ages serves as a medium through which competition; friendship, tolerance, unity, discipline, endurance and diplomacy are promoted. Sport can serve as an educational platform, a mobilization process, a way to strengthen individuals, communities and a source of joy, inspiration and hope. The author recommends amongst others that, government should organize enlightenment campaign through mass media in order to educate people on benefits inherent in sport participation; every individual should partake in sport activity so as to prevent people's exposure to hypokinetic diseases which are dangerous to health.*

**Keywords:** *Health, Sports, Development, Contribution, Individual*

## Introduction

Globally, sport is considered as a creator of beauty and as an instrument of ethical values that bring about peace, unity and understanding among people of all races, during sports participation which wholly the result of social invention and social heritage (Right to play, 2008). Sports are highly significant in national development through leisure and recreation as they enhance a high degree of productivity and healthful living. Turner (2001), defined health as the quality of life which enables man live most and serve best.

Sports are one of the greatest endeavors in human experience. It is a celebration of physical excellence which involves the ability to sustain and maintain one's physical health in such a situation that one would be able to walk, run, think and move the parts of the body as may be demanded. It is a medium through which competition, friendship, tolerance, unity, discipline, endurance and diplomacy are promoted. Sport as a social event is a civilizing and socializing process of gathering men and women of good will who came together to take part in athletics and sporting events for the purpose of physical, mental, social and political development (Dale and Wayne, 2003). Sport is a social agent which brings people of different ages and religious background together as either producers or consumers (players or spectators). It is a social link among nations of the world. To the

whole world, sport has become an effective instrument of international politics and one of the easiest ways of promoting the image of a nation (Jatau, 2000).

Prentice (1999) stated that, sport has become a unifying factor in the country and it has become an essential ingredient toward nation building. Arnheim and Prentice (2000), noted that, sport has not only been recognized, but also assigned a premier position as one of the greatest instruments of promoting global understanding and fostering peace and unity among the nations of the world.

## Contributions of Sports to Health

The fundamental right to health articulated by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1946 remains integral to development today. This right is strongly reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS), the guiding international development framework adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2000, and the human development index used to measure the progress of all nations against universal human development goals. (WHO's) definition of health as it appeared in the preamble of its constitution in 1946. WHO in 1946 defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, and political belief, economic or social condition"



(WHO, 2006). Healthy human development is a necessary foundation for all development progress. Without healthy populations, the achievement of development objectives will be out of reach. Good health is fundamental to the ability of individuals to realize their full human potential. It is also a crucially important economic asset. Low levels of health impede productively and economic growth, while investment in better health outcomes is generally seen as an investment in economic growth (WHO, 2006).

Today's technological society is one which automation, television and the computer have turned more citizens to desk workers and sedentary spectators. Contrary to this new lifestyle, the human body is by nature, made for work. Atypical Nigerian culture is a hard-working culture. But today's sedentary lifestyle has resulted in a great increase in hyperkinetic diseases like hypertension, high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, obesity and diabetes (Emiola, 2008). Physical inactivity is an undesirable lifestyle and it is a threat to good, healthy living. Health and quality of life can be maintained and improved upon by regular physical activity. The positive effects of exercise on all major symptoms of the body both the long-term and the short-term effect, are no longer secret. However, many of our citizens either through ignorance or their die-hard inactive habit have failed to take advantage of the very inexpensive road to a healthy and fit life provided by exercise (Emiola, 2008).

More recently, the European Commission released its white paper on sport, explicitly referencing the role of sport in advancing public health, stating that: "as a tool for health-enhancing physical activity, the sport movement has a greater influence than any other social movement. Sport is attractive to people and has a positive image. However, the recognized potential of the sport movement to foster health-enhancing physical activity often remains under-utilized and need to be developed." Sport's unique and universal power to attract, motivate and inspire makes it a highly effective tool for engaging and empowering individuals, communities and even countries to take action to improve their health. Sport can also be a powerful means of mobilizing more resources in the global fight against disease, but this potential is only just beginning to be realized. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), experience and scientific evidence show that regular participation in appropriate physical activity and sport provides people of both sexes and all ages and conditions, including persons with disabilities, with a wide

range of physical, social and mental health benefits (Right to play, 2008).

### **Sport and Social Connection**

Kelly (2007) opined that, sport can bring people together, expand and strengthen social ties and networks, link people to resources and provide them with a sense of belonging. These social relationships are a fundamental determinant of health but are often lacking for people who are marginalized by poverty, disease, discrimination or conflict. Sport can also be used to reduce the social stigma experienced by marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, people with HIV and AIDS, and former child combatants. By engaging these individuals in sport activities with other community members, sport creates a shared space and experience that helps break down negative perceptions and enables people to focus on what they have in common. This is an important step in enhancing these individuals' self-concept and emotional health.

### **Sports and healthy lifestyle**

WHO (2003) pointed out that, sport can be an effective way to reach out to people, especially youth, and to encourage healthy life style behaviors that will help protect them against HIV and other diseases. Sport can be used to empower children and youth by conveying appropriate prevention messages, teaching the skills necessary to establish and sustain healthy behavior patterns and increasing their resilience in the face of life challenges. Prominent athletes and local coaches can be powerful role models in this respect, exerting a strong positive influence on the children and youth they reach. Research has shown that regular interaction with a caring, non-related adult can help to protect youth against risk factors that might otherwise negatively influence their health and their future. This is particularly important in communities where war, disease, or the need for parents to leave to find work, have left few positive adult role models in place. Caring, well-trained coaches can help fill a critical gap in this respect.

Frances, Eleanor and Linda (1999), opined that, well-designed sport programs that educate, support and empower youth can encourage positive behaviour change by enhancing self-perception, imparting self-esteem, and promoting more conscious care and respect among youths for their own bodies. These critical dimensions of properly designed sport programs with Health Education components can help reduce the vulnerability of young people to substance abuse,



premature, unprotected, or unwanted sexual activity, and the transmission of infectious disease through these activities.

### **Sports and Prevention of Non-communicable or Chronic Diseases**

Globally, the most prevalent non-communicable or chronic diseases include heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes. These and other chronic diseases are the major cause of death (60%) and disability worldwide, taking the lives of over 35 million people in 2005, the total number of people dying from chronic diseases is double that of all infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (Zakus, Daniel and Nielemoni, 2007).

Williams (2006) opined that, developing countries have relatively limited resources to devote to healthcare for people with chronic disease; prevention is the most cost-effective and sustainable way to address this health challenge. Contrary to the perception that chronic diseases primarily affect high-income countries, 80% of chronic disease death occurs in low and middle income countries. The global increase in chronic disease is driven largely by globalization, urbanization and the rapid aging of populations. These determinants contribute to the three primary risk factors common to most chronic disease, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and tobacco use. These risk factors are the same around the world and they are modifiable. The WHO estimates that 80% of all cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, and 40% of all cancer cases can be prevented by eliminating these risk factors. Physical inactivity is the most common of all cardiovascular risk factors across countries. After tobacco use, inactivity is the greatest contributor to mortality and morbidity from all causes. Sport can play a critical role in slowing the spread of chronic diseases, reducing their social and economic burden, and saving lives while physical activity includes a broader range of activities than sport alone (people can be physically active at work or engaged in domestic task at home), direct participation in sport is one of the most enjoyable and therefore powerful means of motivating and mobilizing people to become physically active. Active play and sports can have a positive impact on other major health risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, tobacco use and stress. The benefits of physical activity in relation to non-communicable disease are irrefutable and it also

brings economic benefits to individual and society through reduction in healthcare cost and increase productivity.

### **Sports and Prevention of Infectious Diseases**

Despite medical advance in prevention and treatment, infectious diseases remain a pressing health challenge in developing nations. As well, the advent of multi-drug resistant strains of infectious pathogens (such as staphylococcus, tuberculosis, pneumonia and others) has created a resurgent health challenge for developed countries. Infectious diseases present an ongoing challenge to development efforts, afflicting children and young adults, causing several illnesses, depleting scarce healthcare resources, and undermining productivity and economic growth while sports represents a new and emerging approach to combating infectious disease, its popularity is spreading rapidly as new initiatives spring up around the globe (Zakus *et al*, 2007).

WHO (2006) observed that, sport serves as communication platform and its particular appeal to children and youth make it an ideal vehicle to inform, educate and mobilize populations, to fight disease. Sport also possesses an unsurpassed ability to reach broad sectors of populations including marginalized groups which are difficult to reach by other means. High performance sport event have the ability to attract huge audiences. In 2002, more than one billion people worldwide were transfixed by a live broadcast of the final match of the FIFA World Cup between Brazil and Germany, the largest audience for a single event at that point in time. Because of their global celebrity, high performance athletes also wield enormous influence. The potential health impact of involving such athletes is perhaps best illustrated by the case of "Earvin magic Johnson", one of the world's top basketball players and a hero to millions of youth worldwide. Johnson told a news conference in Los Angeles that he had HIV and he was withdrawing from active sport. Johnson's announcement was a milestone in the fight against HIV/AIDS because it was the first time a sport superstar admitted openly to having HIV. The effects of Johnson's announcement had helped to challenge the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS which can feed discrimination and impede prevention efforts. Johnson's announcement increased awareness and accurate knowledge of HIV, number of people getting tested for HIV also increased and this had changed peoples' perceptions around AIDS risks.



### Sports and mental health

Mental health is defined by World Health Organization (WHO) as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to her or his community. Mental, neurological and behavioral disorders are common to all countries and cause immense suffering. In 2002, the WHO estimated that globally, 154 million people suffered from depression, 25 million from schizophrenia, 91 million from alcohol use disorders, and 15 million from drug use disorders. A more recent, WHO report shows that, 24 million people suffer from Alzheimer's disease and other dementias (WHO, 2007). Emiola (2008) pointed out that, long-term exposure to stress could lead to the shrinking of the part of the brain involved in some types of memory and learning. This could lead to a mental problem called Alzheimer's disease which is a primary degenerative disorder that may arise as a result of stress. Emiola (2008) further submitted that, exercise, mental or physical, is known to thicken the neural-pathways through repetition of movements or thoughts (rehearsal), resulting in faster and more permanent learning. The brain is sharper and the individual is less forgetful. Exercise also improves our reaction time and self-image.

Zakus *et al* (2007) explained that, people with mental health disorders often experience social isolation, poor quality of life and increased mortality. These disorders are also the cause of enormous economic and social costs. In emergencies (war, genocide, terrorism, disaster and population displacement), the number of people with mental disorders is estimated to increase 6%-11%. Beyond mental disorders, people in emergency situations also often experience psychosocial problems that cannot be quantified. Many humanitarian agencies now assert that, well-designed sport programs can address such problems. Sports have long been known to produce beneficial effects on mental health, enhance self-esteem, help to manage stress and anxiety, and alleviate depression. In patients with psychiatric disorders, physical exercise has been shown to diminish clinical symptoms, especially for depression. More recently, breakthrough research has shown that exercise may also improve brain functions such as memory and learning and reduce the risk of cognitive loss through Alzheimer's and small strokes. Sport is also increasingly being used as a tool to reduce trauma in post-conflict and post-disaster settings.

### Contribution of Sports to Peace and Development

Participation in sports all over the world has taken a new motive and those who are involved in it have different motives. The motive of the early man for participation in physical activities was mainly for survival. But today, participation in physical activities and sports are meant not only for survival which is mainly biological in nature, but for other motives which are social, psychological, financial, intellectual, moral and spiritual (Dale and Wayne, 2003).

Sport for development and peace refers to the international use of sport, physical activity and play to attain specific development and peace objectives, including, most notably, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Successful sport for development and peace programs work to realize the rights of all members of society to participate in sport and leisure activities, in 1948, the United Nation Universal Declaration of Human Right asserted that all persons have the right to rest and leisure. In 2003, the United Nation inter-Agency task force on sport for development and peace define sport, for the purposes of development, "all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sports, and indigenous sports and games". Sport represents a significant source of potential for enhancing and even accelerating development and peace efforts worldwide, particularly those related to attaining to the MDGs. Sport's attributes make it a valuable component of broader, holistic approaches in reaching the eight MDG bench marks with targets aimed at:

- (1) Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger
- (2) Achieving universal primary education
- (3) promoting gender equality and empowering women
- (4) Reducing child mortality
- (5) improving maternal health
- (6) combating HIV/ AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- (7) Ensuring environmental sustainability and
- (8) Developing a global partnership for development (United Nation, 2000).

The concept of sport for development and peace is rooted in the recognition that sport possesses unique attributes that enable it to contribute to development and peace processes. These attributes include:

### Sport's Universal Popularity

When sports came into existence many centuries ago, little did the world realize that it will develop to become a socio-economic, political,



cultural and religions' instrument through which many nations would seek to govern the world. Sports have so much developed to the extent that, it has become a phenomenon to be reckoned with in national and international setting. Series of international sporting activities and championship have witnessed increased number of participating and participation countries from one competition to another (Adesoye, Ogunsanwo and Ibiloye, 2006). People are attracted to sport than to any other activity as participants, spectators, or volunteers. This popularity transcends national, cultural, socio-economic and political boundaries and can be invoked with success in virtually any community in the world. Sport's popularity derives in large part from the fact that, when done right, it is fun and enjoyable for everyone, participants and spectators alike. In contexts where people are faced with difficulty and unrelenting challenges in their day-to-day lives, the value of this dimension of sport should not be underestimated (Umar, 2006).

### **Sport's Ability to Connect People and Communities**

Sporting events tend to bring different people with different cultures and works of life together. Umar (2006) stipulated that, mere contact with sporting events has a contagious fascination even among the most improbable participants and spectators. That a richly diverse group of spectators — doctors, lawyers, merchants, and women become an ordinary devoted gathering with nothing in common, except sport.

Sport's value as a social connector is one of most powerful development attributes. Sport is an inherently social process bringing together players, teams, coaches, volunteers and spectators. Sport creates extensive horizontal webs of relationships at the community level, and vertical link to national governments, sport federations, and international organizations for funding and other forms of support. These community sport networks, when inclusive, are an important source of social networking, helping to combat exclusion and fostering community capacity to work collectively to realize opportunities and address challenges. If the population involved is broadly inclusive, sport's connecting dimension can help to unify people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, establishing a shared bond that contributes positively to social cohesion. For this reason, sport has long been used as a means to promote national unity and harmony within and across nations (Right to Play, 2008).

### **Sport's as a Communication Platform**

Over the past few decades, sport has emerged as global mass entertainment, and has become one of the most powerful and far-reaching communication platforms in the world. Because global sport events offer the capacity to reach vast numbers of people worldwide, they are effective platforms for public education and social mobilization. By extension, high-performance athletes have become global celebrities in their own right, enabling them to serve as powerful ambassadors, spokes people and role-models for development and peace initiatives. (Bauzon, 1997)

### **Sports and Economic Development**

Sport for development and peace initiatives can play a powerful role in both preventing and helping to address a broad range of social and economic challenges. They can be a highly effective and low-cost means of reducing the individual and public cost associated with development challenges, cost which can be extremely high in some contexts and can significantly impede development (Right to play, 2008).

It is popular saying that health is wealth; this is true, because only when people are healthy, then they can participate and undertake economic activities, sport is of such activities. Sports generate a lot of money to administrators and athletes/players by rendering the service. Sports in this century have brought recognition, fame, power and huge financial benefits to many individuals, groups, industries and countries (Adesoye *et al*, 2006).

### **Sport's Potential to Empower, Motivate and Inspire**

Sport is inherently about drawing on, developing and showcasing people's strengths and capacities. By shining a light on what people can do, rather than what they cannot do. Sport consistently empowers, motivates and inspires individual and their communities in a way that promotes hope and a positive outlook for the future ingredients that are essential to the success of all development and peace endeavors. For this reason, sport is also an extremely powerful means of promoting physical and mental health. Sport can be used to encourage people of all ages to become more physically active, providing opportunities for enjoyment and personal development, building self-esteem, and fostering



positive social connection with others and all important factors in promoting and maintaining health and well-being (Hardman, 1997).

Okhaku (1996) stated that individual constant engagement in physical training obviously improves their cardiovascular functions. Their respiratory system is better and able to utilize and process oxygen for muscular work. When two individuals, trained and untrained persons exposed to the same amount of muscular work, there is evidence that, trained people will do well than untrained persons. Participating in sporting activities helps the participants to cope with work related stress. Benefits accrue to workers and employers as a result of participating in sporting programmes. Buckley (1997) reported that, an increase in work performance and a better ability to cope with work related stress enhances productivity. Sports act as an antidote to several ailments modern workers contend with.

Dale and Wayne (2003) explained that, physical activity can help reduce healthcare costs and increase productivity. Workplace physical activity programs in the United States have been shown to reduce short-term sick leave from 32%-6%, reduce healthcare cost from 55%-20%, and increase productivity from 2%-52%. In Canada, companies with employee physical activity programs and initiatives have been shown to save 513 US dollars per worker annually through improvements in productivity, turnover; reduced absenteeism and injury.

### Conclusion

Sedentary lifestyle in today's modern society is the greatest contributor to morbidity and mortality of people suffering from hypokinetic disease like hypertension, heart attack, stroke, obesity, diabetes, depression, cancer. Most people are unaware of these diseases until a point where they cause major complications including death. Active play and sports are the least expensive and most effective preventive medicine for combating the increasing worldwide problem of hypokinetic diseases. Sports can play a critical role in preventing infectious diseases, slowing the spread of chronic diseases, reducing their social and economic burden, and saving lives.

Sport and development are natural and complementary processes that can enable government and their partners to build a better world. Although, sport alone cannot resolve complex social and economic challenges, it can

serve as an educational platform, a mobilization process, a way to strengthen individuals and communities, and a source of joy, inspiration and hope.

### Recommendations

- Every individual should partake in sport activity so as to prevent people's exposure to hypokinetic diseases which are dangerous to health.
- Government should organize enlightenment campaign through mass media in order to educate people on benefits inherent in sport participation.
- Every individual should take the benefits in sport participation so as to enable them withstand stress at work, at home and this will increase productivity.
- Sport promotion should be a responsibility of all so as to bring unity and harmony within and across nations.

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