

University Sports and Regional Integration in East Africa

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Abstract

There has been an upsurge of violent conflicts in some countries within the East African region; namely, Burundi, Tanzania, Somalia, Uganda, South Sudan, and Kenya. Within this context, the theme on sports for peace and regional integration has emerged and received support from not only governments but also international organizations and other stakeholders that are interested in peace-building. To promote peace, universities have put emphasis on developing peace-based syllabus and curricula. It was in light of this situation that this paper sought to review studies on sports activities in universities as a foundation of peace and regional integration in East Africa. The study found that more than 96 percent of university students acknowledged sports as a reliable instrument for enhancing peace because sports is a universal language that is understood by all. It was also revealed that a majority of respondents agreed that the level of awareness on sports activities plays an important role in determining the success of university sports as a tool for promoting regional integration. The paper concluded that the positive role of university sports will be felt if university managements institute the necessary infrastructure and create awareness on the importance of sports in promoting regional integration.

Keywords: East Africa, peace, reconciliation, regional integration, university sports

Introduction

Sports refer to any form of physical activity that contributes to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction (Botes & Pelsner, 2005). There exists a variety of sport activities in the world today. Some are classified as indoor and outdoor sports whereas others are classified as winter and summer sports. Most of these sports are unique to specific geographical regions and subsequently are only popular within those areas. However, some sports have worldwide popularity and have been utilized as instruments of promoting peace and national, regional or international integration. These include football and athletics.

Sports diplomacy has been in existence for decades. However, many countries are hesitant to acknowledge its crucial function in foreign relations (Danyel, 2014). Although many countries participate in international sports, empirical evidence on influence on regional integration has been minimal (Murray, 2011). The impact of sports on international consciousness came of age after the World War I era when it caught the attention of politicians and governments as a channel through which international relations could be conducted (Eden, 2013). Regardless of this analysis, few studies have focused on the positive role that university sports play in regional integration in East Africa, hence justifying the current study.

The idea of using sports as a tool for building peace and unity continues to gain relevance as peace building organizations devise new and innovative ways of bringing unity. It includes diverse stakeholders, with grassroots insight from multilateral and non-governmental organizations and endorsement from the United Nations. The number of such programmes has increased significantly since the United Nations International Year of Sport for Physical

Education in 2005. However, this proliferation has not resulted in substantial academic pursuits on the topic, hence justifying the current study which sought to explore how sports can be used as a tool for regional integration in East Africa.

African countries have witnessed war and internal or external conflicts in recent times. Consider examples from the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sierra Leone crisis, the xenophobic attacks in South Africa, the Togo conflicts of 2005, the 1994 Rwandan crisis, the Guinea crisis of 2009 among others. On a grand scale, Africa represents 88 percent of global conflict-related death toll (Virgil, 2008). Narrowing down to East Africa, violent conflicts have been experienced in not only Kenya, but also in the neighbouring countries such as Burundi, Somalia, Uganda and South Sudan. These occurrences justify the need for scholars to further probe the role that university sports can play in minimizing such conflicts and promote regional integration.

Danyel (2014) and Murray (2011) concur that sports can promote community identity, coherence and integration. Students that are involved in sports are more likely to play an active role in their community. Such roles that promote peace and regional integration include: being company brand ambassadors; representing countries in professional athletics; founding international sports academies; and acting as referees in international sports events. On the same tenor, universities are charged with the responsibility of disseminating knowledge to produce skilled manpower that is more enlightened and capable of thinking rationally and making wise decisions. Within the context of peace education, they have made an emphasis on peace-based curriculums. However, a review of current literature revealed that few studies have been done to unearth the role of university sports in regional integration. It was against this background that this paper sought to examine the role of university sports in fostering regional integration in East Africa.

Main Perspective

States continue to devise new ways like use of sports as a tool of soft power to legitimize their superiority peacefully. It is for this reason that sports can be considered as one of the most exciting modern phenomena that seeks to promote international consciousness. For instance, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is one international organization that brings together all professional sports and states in one venue at one point. It is for this reason that the IOC is the most competitive in international arena for states to acquire prestige and build their image. Moreover, the Olympic Charter avers that at the heart of the modern Olympic movement is a desire to contribute to building a peaceful and better world (Eden, 2013). Sports have become an instrument of identity for countries. Sports is a political and diplomatic arena where politics parodies sports and vice versa. This means that sports as diplomacy can be used as a tool for solving confrontations when relations between two nations are poor or if relations start to improve, sports can accelerate diplomatic momentum (Harvey, 2010). Although these literatures shed some light on the role of sports, they generalize the issue without narrowing down to university sports as agents of regional integration; a gap addressed by the current paper.

Sports play an important role in shaping a country's idea of identity locally, regionally and internationally. Harvey (2010) avers that sports is one of the most significant moulders of national unity and collective identity. Eden (2013) emphasized this clearly by stating that sports in modern societies is a means by which nation-states socialize their citizens, transmit symbolic codes of the dominant culture and induce citizens towards conformity with beliefs and values that prevail in the wider society. This means that sports create a platform for states to come together peacefully and also challenge each other fairly and peacefully. Nauright (2013) argues that in this increasingly unified yet divided world, sports mega-events, particularly the Olympic

Games and the soccer World Cup have become focal points that have symbolic value well beyond the results on the arena of sporting competition.

According to Borsani (2009), the use of sports to promote peace is extremely effective in programmes at the community level because they involve those affected by conflict and social tension directly. Sports programmes provide structure in an unstructured and destabilizing environment and serve as a means to channel energies away from self-destruction. They help build the individual skills and values necessary to avoid conflicts and preserve peace. Various groups benefit particularly from sports for-peace programmes. However, Borsani focused on community sports, unlike the current study which focused on university sports.

Most of the skills and values learned through sports are similar to those that are taught in peace education to resolve and prevent conflicts. Well-crafted sports activities teach respect, honesty, communication, cooperation, empathy, and how and why to adhere to rules. Sports are a powerful way of communicating these values, especially to young people, in a way that is fun and participatory (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). The current study brings new knowledge by providing new insights from East Africa.

Team sports by their very nature require a lot of cooperation and collaboration among members of a team. Athletes in a team must communicate effectively with each other in order to achieve good results. This creates a spirit of co-operation among team members. Generally, team players tend to be less selfish, are more tolerant towards other people and are more likely to adopt a pacifist approach to resolving disputes in society. In fact, according to Amara (2008), sports enable athletes, especially the youth to find avenues for their violent energies and emotions that could prove detrimental to society if allowed to go undirected. However, this literature is very general and does not pay attention to university sports, a gap addressed by the current conceptual paper.

Sports may be used to promote peace and friendship. Peace and friendship seem to be the themes of many existing sports festivals even if particular sport events have not explicitly dubbed as such. Therefore, all modern sporting activities, including games and festivals fundamentally and implicitly promote friendship. At the end of a game, athletes from both the victorious and the vanquished sides could be publicly seen shaking hands, exchanging shirts, hugging each other or consoling one another. This happens even at the end of martial sports such as boxing and wrestling. Such gestures epitomize empathy, tolerance, acceptance and love, which all constitute a good recipe for peace (Augustine, 2003). A major gap in this literature is that it does not particularize university sports in the East African context; a gap that justified the current study.

Borsani (2009) studied sports, peace and reconciliation in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. The study found that the new self-help youth sports and community development programmes in the Kakuma refugee camp succeeded in breaking down barriers and prejudices between people of different nationalities, ethnic groups, genders, refugees, and Kenyan youth in the nearby town. An evaluation report in mid-2000 concluded that the new programme played a role in changing the mentality of the society. According to community leaders and police officers, the project had a positive influence on the Kakuma society, especially on the young people in the camp and in Kakuma town. Sports kept the youth busy and less bored. People knew each other from the sports field and they also learnt to respect each other and to solve problems amicably than by fighting. Although Borsani (2009) provides insights on the topic, the study did not narrow down to university sports; a gap that was addressed by the current study.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized classical liberal theory whose contemporary followers include: Ronald Dworkin (1931-2013), Richard Rorty (1931-2007), John Rawls (1921-2002), Amartya Sen

(1933-present), Hernando De Soto Polar (1941-present) and Francis Fukuyama (1952-present) (Moravcsik, 2003). The theory views university sports as a tool that students can use to build social networks for mutual benefit. Through tournaments and competitions, university sportspersons could build friendships, associations and sports clubs which foster regional integration and peace. Students from different nationalities can invite each other for sports activities outside their countries of origin. The liberal image of international relations is a large, seemingly all-inclusive tent; not just states, but also international and non-governmental organizations and the often cross-cutting networks that connect them. According to Harvey (2010), classical liberalism re-affirms the attempt of institutions to understand politics for the sake of designing institutions that promote cooperation, welfare, and human rights.

Classical liberal theorists such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Jeremy Bentham (1747-1832), and Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) foresaw that the creation of international institutions would be beneficial for states to improve trust among them and promote cooperation and peace (Moravcsik, 2003). The annual East Africa university sports events, for instance, are possible due to regional bodies which engage states as actors. University sports involve states coming together in their regions under regional organizations such as Eastern Africa University Sports Federation (EAUSF) or international associations like Federation of Africa University Sports (FASU).

Although the liberal theory holds a huge influence in this study, there is a central criticism to the liberal perspective. Sports are naturally competitive and states use it as a form of power since sports and politics are always linked (Eden, 2013). Although the competitions are considered soft power, some states have used international sporting competitions for propaganda. Harvey (2010) avers that both totalitarian and democratic countries have used sports to promote propaganda and nationalism. In this sense, liberalism offers a good framework for explaining important aspects of university sports and regional integration through inter-university sports such as the annual East Africa University Sports. Interaction of students from different nationalities serves as a good avenue for peace and regional integration in Africa and beyond.

Methods

The researcher utilized document analysis to gather secondary data. According to Babbie (2010), document analysis is a method of data collection which involves analysis of content from written documents in order to make certain deductions based on the study parameters. The method is mainly used in qualitative research as a method of qualitative analysis. When using this method, the researcher reveals the document type (reports, records, manuscripts), the kind of document (governmental or institutional), its dates, where written, author and title, the aim of the document, the factual information contained, why the document is a valuable source of information, how the document can be used, and what the document does not answer and could be answered by the author (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This is done in order to validate the documents.

Secondary data from online papers was studied. It referenced reports from previous research at the international, regional, and national levels. A key word search included the following words and phrases: 'sports', 'university sports', 'regional integration', 'peace', 'sport participation', 'East Africa', and 'regional sports'. It followed the eight procedures of document analysis by O'Leary (2014). In the first stage, a list of texts to be explored was created. These were relevant books, theses and journal articles. In the second stage, a consideration on how texts were to be accessed with attention to linguistic and cultural barriers was made. This was followed by an acknowledgement and tackling of inherent biases in the third stage. In the fourth stage, the researcher developed appropriate skills for research. The fifth stage involved an exploration of strategies to ensure credibility of the data. Step six

involved searching specific data as dictated by the objective. In step seven, the researcher made some ethical considerations, especially with regard to handling confidential documents. Finally, in step eight, a backup plan for the entire process was developed to ensure that all data generated was stored safely for easy retrieval.

Apart from the document analysis procedures of O'Leary (2014), the study also utilized Peters (2010) approach of reviewing research texts. The approach enabled the researcher identify the study locale, attributes of samples used, data analysis procedures, and findings of each document accessed. Materials relating to each research question were grouped, re-read and notes taken. Emergent themes were identified in relation to university sports and regional integration. An initial draft was sent out for peer review. Reviewers gave feedback which was used to fine tune the final paper in readiness for publication.

Results and Discussion

Part of the content was obtained from Ndiwa (2016) who studied the role of university sports in promoting regional peace and integration in East Africa. The study used across sectional survey research design. The researcher interviewed 100 students from sampled universities in East Africa, representatives from sports departments, student governing bodies, and sports associations. The research used both primary and secondary data. It incorporated questionnaires, interviews, and observations to collect data. Data was analysed by measures of central tendency and variation. The results were presented in frequency distribution tables, graphs, bar charts, and pie charts. Qualitative data was grouped and reported according to themes.

Generally, Ndiwa (2016) found that a majority of respondents acknowledged sports as a universal language which can be understood by all hence being able to permeate cultural, political, ethnical, religious, racial, economic and tribal boundaries to foster peace and regional integration in East Africa. Specifically, the study found that 56 percent strongly agreed, 40 percent agreed, 3 percent were not sure whereas 1 percent disagreed with this observation. This conforms to Hedstrom and Gould (2004) who argue that sports have been referred to as a universal language common in most cultures and understood by many. All sports have rules of conduct which are respected by all and in case of any faults, the penalties are gladly accepted by the participants.

Views were sought on the extent to which students thought that university sports contributed to peace. Ndiwa (2016) found that 4 percent did not respond, 6 percent not extensive, 9 percent remotely extensive, 35 percent fairly extensive, 38 percent quite extensive, and 8 percent very extensive. Therefore, it can be deduced that a big percentage of students agreed that university sports play a role in peace propagation. Within the East African context, therefore, participation of university students in regional sports provides an avenue of peace building. The social interactions that students make during such competitions build cohesiveness, mutual understanding, and cultural tolerance, which are the key ingredients of regional integration.

There are a number of initiatives undertaken to address diverse socio-economic aspects of our society. Ndiwa (2016) established that 18 percent of the respondents were aware of the existence of peace themed sporting activities in the region while 82 percent were not aware of such activities. This was despite the fact that majority of the respondents had supported the fact that sports is a universal language and that university sports have contributed to promotion of peace. It can be deduced that universities are yet to stand out strongly as peace promoters through the use of sports given the small percentage of respondents who were aware of peace themed sports activities. It can also be concluded that there is a gap in the area of awareness campaigns. The results concur with Broere and Houwen (2001) who aver that in promotion of peace, universities have put more emphasis on developing syllabus based on peace.

Sports require facilities and equipment to facilitate people engaging in them. These include fields, nets, balls, and swimming pools among others, depending on the sport activity. Ndiwa (2016) sought to find out how the availability or unavailability of these facilities influenced the successful use of sports as a tool for promoting integration in the East African region. From the results, 17 percent of respondents thought it did not contribute much, 15 percent indicated a bit much, 27 percent indicated much, 16 percent indicated quite much and 25 percent indicated very much. Therefore, it can be concluded that most respondents thought that availability of sports facilities was an important factor in enhancing the use of university sports as a tool for promoting regional peace. These results concur with Virgil (2008) who identified the widening gap between the poor and the rich as linked to a shortage of physical education and sport for all programs, lack of financing, few sport facilities, and little equipment, all which negatively affect peace initiatives. Financial constraints in university sports can be addressed through a number of ways. These include sourcing sponsors from the co-operate world; developing sports endowment funds in universities; reaching out to philanthropists; and utilizing traditional sports like wrestling which require less resources (Borsani, 2009).

It was established that 6 percent of respondents were of the opinion that not much of information is available to them on awareness of the role of university sports in promoting peace and regional integration. A paltry 18 percent indicated a bit much, 29 percent indicated much, 25 percent indicated quite much and 18 percent indicated very much (Ndiwa, 2016). This shows that a majority of the respondents were of the view that the level of awareness plays a crucial role in determining the success of university sports as a tool for promoting regional integration. Knowledge is power. An informed society is a progressive society. Awareness is important as it informs people of what is happening and what is expected of them. It makes them understand the goals and objectives that are set. Awareness can be done by notices, posters, radio and television announcements or publicity through the media. This will serve the purpose of keeping people abreast on events as they unfold.

East Africa has people from different ethnic backgrounds. These people are characterized with multicultural beliefs and traditions that have shaped their values and behaviours. The work of Ndiwa (2016) focused on the extent to which ethnic factors inhibited the extent to which university sports are used to promote regional integration. In relation to this, 26 percent indicated not much, 24 percent indicated a bit much, 21 percent indicated much, 13 percent indicated quite much, and 16 percent indicated very much. It can therefore be deduced that most respondents were of the opinion that cultural beliefs were not a barrier to utilization of university sports to promote integration.

Financial resources are crucial in running projects and programmes. Ndiwa (2016) unravelled various opinions of respondents on the role that financial resources played in ensuring that university sports are effectively used to promote regional integration in East Africa. The study found that 12 percent indicated not much, 5 percent indicated a bit much, 19 percent indicated much, 19 percent indicated quite much and 45 percent indicated very much. A look at these statistics leads to the conclusion that availability of financial resources plays a major role in the successful utilization of university sports as a tool of promoting regional integration. This is because the logistical operations involved during organization and coordination of sport activities require huge financial resources.

Recently, Busolo (2016) focused on the role of sports diplomacy in African international relations through a case study of Kenya. This study employed both exploratory and descriptive designs. The sample of 30 respondents comprised officials from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and master's students from the Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies, University of Nairobi. Purposive sampling was used. An interview and questionnaires with open and closed

ended questions were used to collect data. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were utilized. The data was reported by way of graphical tabulations, charts and explanations.

One official from the ministry of foreign affairs was interviewed by Busolo (2016) on the question of how sports can be better utilized as a tool of diplomacy in Africa. According to the respondent, African states are renowned for their athletic prowess and this gives Africa a unique identity. To further this, he suggested that Africa should promote their best athletes who are globally recognized to be the region's ambassadors through their participation in sports. They can use their athletic ability to showcase and promote Africa's culture, just as Africa has absorbed the western culture. They can promote African languages abroad during media interviews and this may help in making the Kiswahili language be added to the list of United Nations' official languages. Although these findings reveal much with regard to the topic, they focused on sports in general, instead of university sports, as the case was with the current study.

A majority of the respondents strongly agreed on the significance of Africa participating in international sporting events to advance its continental interests. This opinion was bolstered by those who agreed at 20 percent. The undecided and those who disagreed were only 5 percent. Moreover, 100 percent were in agreement about Africa using sports to increase influence in international relations through sports (Busolo, 2016). This infers that the use of sports in international relations for Africa could be effective for its international relations. Although these findings reveal much with regard to the topic, they focused on sports in general, instead of university sports, as the case was with the current study.

Indeed, 25 percent of respondents agreed that sports diplomacy could be a good tool to bring warring parties together during war. Even though the respondents that strongly agreed were 35 percent, the results showed that 90 percent were in support of using sports diplomacy as a ceasefire tool. However, 40 percent were undecided (Busolo, 2016). In real sense, the long-standing political conflicts between East African countries such as Rwanda and Uganda can be resolved through such initiatives. The use of such peaceful means serves as one of the most effective ways of solving conflicts. Although these findings reveal much with regard to the topic, they focused on sports in general, instead of university sports, as the case was with the current study.

Busolo (2016) found that Africa could use sports diplomacy to build international consciousness and cultural promotion. These opinions got equal participation at 45 percent. Social harmony was lower at 4 percent and using it to build regional competition came at 6 percent. This underscores the need to use sports to fight political intolerance and violent extremism that plague most countries in the region. Moreover, the role of sports diplomacy in attaining Kenya's national interest was unravelled. An official from the ministry said that different sports diplomacy dynamics if implemented well can be a strategic tool in the quest to promote Kenya's interests. These interests as per the foreign policy document are to: protect Kenya's sovereignty and territorial integrity; promote integration; enhance regional peace and security; advance the economic prosperity of Kenya and its people; project Kenya's image and prestige; promote multilateralism; promote the interests of Kenyan Diaspora and partnership with the Kenyans abroad. The respondent said that it is the need to use various aspects of cultural diplomacy such as sports, which led to the public validation of a new post within Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called the cultural desk. He stated that among other functions of the post, it will work hand in hand with Ministry of Sports, Culture and Arts to actualize these sports, culture and arts as diplomacy tools. It will provide a platform abroad for the local Ministry of Sports, Culture and Arts may lack thus elevating and promoting the Kenyan culture.

Busolo (2016) revealed that sportspersons as diplomats promote Kenya as a regional leader. A majority of respondents (55 %) indicated that athletes help promote Kenya. A meagre 5 percent thought that by establishing training centres, it helps promote Kenya. A paltry

10 percent thought that by participating in regional competitions and being associated with regional organizations, they help Kenya's leadership role. From a regional perspective, for instance, this helps explain why the Rwandan government paid a \$39 million sleeve sponsorship with the English Premier League Club Arsenal in a deal christened 'visit Rwanda,' ostensibly to promote the country's tourism sector.

Regional integration includes economic integration. On the question of Kenya's foreign economic relations and sports, respondents stated that Kenya should export athletics vigorously since it is one form of our unique identity globally (Busolo, 2016). If Kenya promoted its athletes, especially those who participate in rugby and athletics and brand them with local brands, new foreign economic doors could be opened. International companies could venture into forming business mergers with Kenya's local businesses, thus raising Kenya's profile economically. This could translate to economic growth for Kenya and eventually trickle down to ordinary citizens in form of jobs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Globalization has played a key role in building national brands in sports for many states. The ability that has been presented by international media in university sports has prompted many states to not only want to host international sport events, but also brand themselves using various sports. Although university sports can be used to demonstrate the superiority of one system (or people) over another, it can also be an avenue to demonstrate similarities and bring countries together, preparing the way for eventual public policy reforms. The liberal image of international relations is a large, seemingly all-inclusive tent; not only for states, but also international and non-governmental organizations and the often cross-cutting networks that connect them. This is confirmed in the pluralistic, modern and dynamic diplomatic environment. University sports offer people and nations a chance to showcase their best in ways other than politics, warfare and global one-upmanship through international sports organizations cutting across networks. As this paper found, university sports are an effective tool for fostering peace and regional integration in East Africa. This is because sports are a universal language that is understood by all and permeates all ethnic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. University sports stand a good chance of promoting peace by offering a platform of exchanging values, sports ideas, best practices, and present opportunities.

From this study, it is recommended that: respective governments of East Africa Community member states embark on elaborate media campaigns to promote university sports in pursuit of regional integration; Governments support sportspersons to build their profile and avoid switching their nationalities due to frustrations; the ministries of sports, culture and arts to promote sports in marginalized areas and also work with relevant ministries to use sports to end regional conflicts; and financial resources and sports infrastructure to be enhanced in public institutions of higher learning to allow more students participate in sports. This could be done by establishing university sports endowment funds and reaching out to philanthropists for funding.

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