

Towards Sustainable Sports Development in Nigerian Universities

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.8.12.2018.p8446

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.8.12.2018.p8446>

Abstract The paper is a review on efforts needed to reposition University sports in Nigeria. If sports in Nigerian Universities will meet the global best practice, then attempts must be made upgrade sport facilities in Nigerian Universities. Provide coaches with the requisite training and certification. The Nigerian University Games Association being the umbrella organisation for University sports must organize sports in division level. The greatest challenge for sports growth which has to do with sponsorship and branding has to be pursued with utmost vigor and determination. Private and corporate organisation must come to the aid of University Sports by carrying out their corporate social responsibility through building of sports facilities.

Keywords Repositioning sports, Sustainability, University sports

1. Introduction

Sustainability is a concept that has become ubiquitous in sports development policy and practice. It is clear from literature that research on sport and sustainability is limited and lacks theoretical underpinning. In this regard, most literature on sustainability focuses on four major areas; individual, community, institutional and organisational sustainability (Lindsey, 2008; Fyall & Jago, 2010; & Smith, 2010). To better understand the purpose of sports within the context of University education, it is expedient to appreciate the immeasurable role of University education as an institution promoting sport. Sports development is regarded as the gradual increase, and advancement of sports from the cradle strata to a higher level with due cognizance and consideration of the indices that enhance the realization and actualization of sport in every society (Yazid, 2014). Apparently, these indices include among other things, infrastructure, personnel, funding, sport policy, viable sports programmes including competitions. Sport remains a veritable tool that unites the people of every nation; it brings people together no matter their socio-economic status, educational status, religious belief and gender. It has inherent values of enhancing physical, mental, social and psychological well-being of individuals besides the economy value derivable from its participation (Hamafyelto, 2006). In

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Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/sports>

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this regard, the fourteenth objective of the National Policy of Sports (2009) seeks to address the inclusion of sports in all the strata of our educational curriculum including the universities.

It is a well-known fact that Federal Government of Nigeria regards education as an instrument for effecting national development. This confirms why Nigerian universities are best regarded as citadel of knowledge and or centre of excellence in domain of human learning and holistic development. As such universities provide avenues for youth to acquire knowledge, lifesaving skills and productive life. To this end, university therefore design programmes to include curricula and extra-curricular activities integrated to meet the developmental goals harped in the national policy of education (NPE, 2014).

Universities world over are noted for producing the best and high profile athletes that bring honour to their nations. While other nations make best use of their universities to distinguish themselves in sports, Nigeria universities are yet to imbibe the global trend of engaging the students' body actively. Nigeria flag was hoisted at the 1983 Summer

Universiade, also known as World University Games in Edmonton, Canada when five U. S. based student-athletes won gold medals for the nation. Sunday Uti (400m), Yusuf Ali (long jump), Ajayi Agbgbaku (triple jump), Innocent Egbunike (200m), and Chidi Imo (100m) (Ighadiuno, 2005). If Nigeria universities will ever win at the World University Games (FISU) it must rely on students studying outside the country. This is because they have better training facilities, trainers and proper incentives and motivation. Obviously, universities remain the leading way to Olympic honour. But it appears Nigerian universities do not take pride in making their students stand out tall among their peers by reading and sporting. It is amazing that of the five hundred and fifty (550) Team USA Olympians for Rio 2016, four hundred and thirty (430) were college athletes (Swain, 2016). It remains a fact that the concern of Nigeria universities is about knowledge-based education rather than all-inclusive education which is a major factor militating against the desired growth and development of sports in our universities. This is most unfortunate and lamentable because by this thinking university sport that is in perilous state would continue to have decrease in number of students engaging in sports.

Although sport is one of the many activities of any Nigeria universities, it remains obviously the least in the priority list of any Nigeria University Governing Council or indeed the top management of any university. That makes sport a mere frill or appendage. To change this ugly trend, the future of Nigeria university sports begins now particularly with the fabulous decisions that this summit will take on university education in Nigeria. This paper addresses the means by which university sports can be retooled, repositioned and rehabilitated to return the nation to its past glory.

2. Challenges of University Sports in Nigeria

With the overarching goals of the universities providing quality education, there has been emphasis on structures that promote learning and teaching at the disadvantage of sports infrastructure. The basic cog in the wheel of progress of university sports in Nigeria are therefore the sports infrastructure, finance, personnel, sport programmes, tight university calendar, lack of sponsorship for athletic prowess for example, accommodation for student-athletes, scholarships for academic, sport tours and medical care. It may be observed that most of the university sport facilities were developed at the inception of the university or when a major sport event was hosted, for example, NUGA, FASU, and WAUG etc. If such facilities are visited today, we would find that the facilities condition indexes have worsened due to lack of maintenance or they are nonexistent, obsolete, insufficient, or substandard. Ojeme (2009) observed that sport facilities in Nigerian Universities are rickety perhaps with exception to few listed universities; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Portharcut,

University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Benin, University of Lagos and lately Bayero University Kano, university of Technology Akure and University of Ilorin. Going by the history of these universities it will be noted that they had at one time or another hosted the NUGA, FASU or WAUG. University of Maiduguri due to poor funding only benefited from the hosting with an Olympic size swimming Pool and an indoor hall.

Funding is a critical challenge bedeviling sports development in Nigerian Universities. The beleaguered sport Directors and coaches are faced with paucity of funds to run sport programmes. Universities do not have any budget other than the games fees/levies paid by students' not more than one thousand naira in some instances and as low as five hundred naira in some cases. There is anecdotal evidence supporting the cut in participation of students in some sports due to lack of funds by universities in competitions. In these cases, the Universities send students in sports not requiring large number of contingents (football, volleyball, and basketball) but sport where fewer student-athletes are required for example, tennis, table tennis, and athletics. There are seventy-nine universities (79) currently on the list of Nigerian University Games Association (NUGA). When all these universities pay their dues it amounts to 7.9 million per annum. This amount falls below the budget of NUGA for any meaningful preparation for the series of activities required on or before selection, camping, travels and competition for example, FISU. In 2013 World University Games, NUGA budgeted N80 million to enable it take Nigeria student-athletes to Kazan, Russia. This was never achieved due to lack of funds (Akalonu, May, 17, 2013). In 2015, NUGA budgeted N200 million to participate in Gwangju, South Korea with five sports. It was able to participate in four sports due to the benevolence of the ACVNU that approved that the airfare of student-athletes from each university should be borne by the universities of each athlete. One of the registered sports, judo could not feature in the games due to the delay in the response of some of our universities and as a result we also arrived late and could not participate in table tennis and badminton due to late entries. The feeling of the student-athletes could better be imagined as they were not there for jamboree.

Perhaps by adding up all other challenges university sports face, what finally cramps sports development in Nigerian university include the tight university calendar where students have chucked lecture time tables and no spare time for sports. The Nation (2015) reported a situation where students began boycotting sports in University of Nigeria Nsukka due to crowded lecture timetable.

3. Promoting Policy Adherence

Adhering to national policies and rules is one key antecedent of successful coordination and functioning within an organisation. The perpetual lackadaisical posture in implementing sport policies in Nigeria has continued to rub the institution of its development. Ojeme (1992) in

Aibueku and Ogbouma (2014) posited that sports development in Nigeria has been hampered for a long time due to lack of comprehensive policy document that will set to maximize the gains of sports on a sustainable basis. As a result, the sector has not been properly midwived leading to abortive consequences and hemorrhage of implementation framework. While acknowledging the hiccups in policy formulation, it may be observed that often no follow-through action that aids in translating successful implementation of these policies. For instance, the National Policy of Sports in Nigeria (2009) chapter 4.6 focused attention on sport in Education. The chapter was emphatic that sports is an integral part of formal system of education, as such it stipulates that all schools shall establish structured sporting programmes which covers every student except those exempted on medical grounds. There are universities in Nigeria that deliberately encroached into their sport grounds to build lecture halls or offices. The policy also stipulates in 4.6.3 that no student shall suffer any penalty or discrimination for participating in sports. Many students had feared lecturers' penalty by boycotting sports on Wednesday lecture-free day provided by the Federal Government for institutions of higher learning (The Nation, 2015). Most importantly, the policy reiterated that all university students shall offer minimum of 4 credit unit courses in sports. The aim was to enhance physical fitness and wellbeing among students as well as fish out sport talented students. This policy has not found place in our Nigerian universities till date.

The student welfare Division of the Nigerian Universities Commission has four critical areas including sports development with some of the following objectives:

- Ensuring the contribution of games to the social, cultural and economic regeneration of our university communities.
- Ensuring the availability and monitoring of sporting facilities in the Universities.
- Enhance suitable collaboration between the commission and the Federal Ministry of Sports and other sporting Federation e.g., NFF, NFL, AFN, NHF.
- Ensure the organization of periodic collegial games to ensure maximum use of sporting facilities.
- Ensuring continuous improvement in student Welfare Programmes being rendered in the Universities and identifying areas that require intervention (NUC Student support services, 2016).

The NUC Executive Secretary was quoted as saying that universities neglected the development of sports as part of extra curricula activities for three decades. This assertion was credited to Prof. Julius A. Okogie when declaring open the National conference on sports development in the Nigerian Universities. It was noted that part of NUC's mandate is to give necessary support to undergraduate students to fully realise their potentials (Hassan, July,31, 2008). Going by this strong position of the NUC one would have expected that sports will be given proper attention by having its accreditation separately. Surprisingly, there has never been a time NUC embarked on sports facilities

accreditation because government hardly give universities funds to develop sport facilities. All programme accreditation never include extra-curricular activities. The NUC's students support objectives are succinctly clear on the area of collaboration with the commission, Federal Ministry of Sports and other sport federations. This is a far cry from the reality of things on ground.

4. Opportunities for University Sports

Sport is viewed as an important means of drawing attention to universities. For example, ABU Zaria has been known in sport circle for its strength in basketball and other sports in Nigeria. So is the university of Portharcut for swimming and judo, Bayero university has taken lead now in taekwondo etc. It is indeed the primary responsibility of the universities to provide opportunities for all-round development of the students by means of curricular and extra-curricular activities. Apart from the personal gains of sports to athletes in terms of physical, mental, social and economic benefits, students are bound to contribute their quarter to national development by representing the nation in international competitions. One of the objectives of NUGA is the development of sports facilities by the host university. The sport facilities and equipment of few of the universities that ever hosted NUGA, FASU, FISU championship, and WAUG have not remained the same since they hosted the games. These universities are today noted as good in terms of sports facilities. They also have been able to host other sporting activities on their facilities. Youth athletics meet just ended in university of Ilorin. The meet was organized by the Grassroots Sports Development Department of the Federal Ministry of Sports. The University of Portharcut has Hi- Performance Centre equal to none in Nigeria. With ever increasing focus on achieving results, the Hi-performance centre focuses on enhancing sports performance. Many athletic preparations for national athletes do take place there. Students who win medals at NUGA competitions often go home with cash awards in some universities while other universities translate it to scholarships.

College athletics provide incredible job opportunities for people seeking career in sports for example, sports facilities and equipment developers, coaches, exercise physiologists and physiotherapists, sports doctors, sport psychologists, sport managers, administrators, sport journalism, sport goods companies, sport engineering, sport scholarships, sport volunteers, health, marketers, and many others (University of Birmingham, 2011).

5. Reflection of FISU Philosophy in Nigeria University Sports

University according to Joseph (2012) is an assemblage of health and intelligent youths, who learn easily the techniques of sports, when motivated well they are ready to give in their best. One thing that gladdened the heart of

parents at every university convocation are the words that their children and wards were found worthy in character and learning. The university is a place where character is molded. Sports greatly contribute to character building as an adjunct of national education strategy for holistic development of the individual. The sport arbiters are ready to sanction erring sport men or women. The acclaimed sportsman spirit dictum

is well sounded by sport handlers frequently. That does not mean that there are no athletes with bad character.

The International Universities Sport Federation (FISU) founded in 1949 has its philosophy thus:

FISU was formed within university institutions in order to promote sports values and encourage sports practice in harmony with and complementary to the university spirit. Promoting sports values means encouraging friendship, fraternity, fair-play, perseverance, integrity, cooperation and application amongst students, who one day will have responsibilities and even key positions in politics, the economy, culture and industry. FISU also brings together the university community in a broader sense, necessarily transcending the conflicts which divide countries and people, to achieve harmony between academic excellence and top-level sport, or competition and leisure sport. The world university sports movement also aims to become a powerful channel of communication for bringing together the various communities, the rich diversity of which is all too often a source of conflict today. This philosophy necessarily implies that FISU not only has an international dimension, but is also independent and free, regardless of the source of financial and technical support from its institutional, academic, and financial or media partners (www.fisu.net/FISU-today).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a non-profit association which regulates athletes of 1,281 institutions in America and Canada. Student-athletes' success on the field, in the classroom and for life is at the heart of its mission. Therefore the organisation distributes more than 2.7 billion dollars in scholarships each year along with access to medical care, academic support services and first class training opportunities (www.ncaa.org).

In Nigeria we have one hundred and forty-four (144) universities, federal, state and private universities. The universities in terms of sports organisation are on different streams. NUGA on one side and Nigeria Private University Games (NPUGA) on another side. There are indeed internal and external driving forces orchestrating the divorce of these organisations being under one umbrella. Definitely the disadvantages outweigh the advances in every sense of sustainable university sports development. For sustainable sports development in our universities, these umbrella bodies must be on one stream.

6. Global Trend in the Strengthening University Sports

The umbrella bodies for sports organisations in Nigeria, NUGA, NIPOGA, and NACEGA are still at apron strings of their mother institutions. The role of these bodies in unifying students from all geo-political was highlighted by Akinola (2013). Our universities just like the NCAA should go beyond having sports for leisure, fun and recreation. NUGA is considering reorganizing university sports to fall in line with the practice of NCAA where universities are rated as Divisions 1, 2, 3 teams. If this is achieved student-athletes would have opportunity for higher training

facilities, coaches, medical care and scholarships to support their academic pursuit, sport tours and competitions. Sperber (2000) argued that college athletics is financial burden to any college. However, if college athletics is abolished, many unhappy people will be out of money too. Although college athletics is capital intensive, Barr (2016) made expository explanation of how colleges are classified; college athletic programmes are classified according to school's size, budget, sports facilities, comprehensiveness and extent at which it awards scholarships based on athletic ability. When universities are classified as Divisions 1, 2, and 3 their interest in winning will propel them to recruit, train and retrain their coaches and other personnel. This way, universities can hire coaches and cut cost for employing permanent coaches that are not productive. Coaches with the longest winning streaks wanting to build teams in universities for national honour would be attracted.

Involvement of university alumni and fraternities is necessary for identifying students with potential for sports. Student-athletes who demonstrate sport excellence can gain sports scholarships. Although this practice formed the beginning of scholarships award to athletes in the United States, Sperber (2000) contained that due to the increasing growth in student incentives for winning in sport, sport scholarships was introduced in the early 19th century. The introduction of scholarships was viewed with skepticism by many people then but was later endorsed with the establishment of NCAA IN 1953.

With lean financial support by government to sports, if sport scholarships gain policy direction and legislation, university sports will have a big boost in Nigeria.

The private sector participation in sports has been globally acknowledged. Apart from sponsoring competitions for schools, colleges and universities, private sector funded facilities can generate revenue for the company and the university through ticket sells. In addition, there is accountability for customers, competition and contestability, clear performance measures specified and management flexibility (Kahle, 2014).

This therefore calls for independence of these organizing bodies to make them viable and more purpose driven like the NCAA. The three bodies have many things in common as such they should have bigger umbrella body that would manage Collegiate sports. Now that most of the colleges and all the Polytechnics have become degree awarding institutions.

7. Conclusions

The Nigeria University sport is a veritable tool for national development that requires retooling for sustainable growth and development. The objective of sport is to educate the entire individual. When good character is molded, the individual becomes resourceful to the entire society. The Kanu heart foundation is one of the numerous contributions sportsmen and women have ploughed back to a nation. This can hardly be achieved with lame policy implementation that characterized the university system

when it concerns issues of sport. For greater strides to be achieved, the Nigeria University Games Association and other sporting bodies of higher institutions should have independence like the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

8. Recommendations

The following are recommendations for this paper.

1. Universities must invest in sports by building top class sport facilities on their campuses
2. There should be more avenues for driving funds to sponsor sporting activities such as encouraging private sector to invest in university sports
3. The quest for high sport performance can only be achieved with increase in quality of coaching and coaches
4. There is need to merge all the collegiate sports umbrella bodies into one and grant them independence

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