Case Study: Nigeria

SPORTS AND CHILD & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

INTRODUCTION

Sport in Nigeria has grown from a humble beginning as an entertainment and recreational past time to a prominent phenomenon whose influence is felt in all facets of lives of the citizenry.

Nigerians are sports loving people with very high appetite for winning. Success at competitions creates a euphoric atmosphere with an injection of vibrancy and pride in the citizens. Conversely, poor performance by Nigerian athletes at international competitions results in a lingering sourness and a contagious sadness that envelope everybody with negative effect on their health, psyche and activities. Sport is therefore as important to Nigerians as the basic necessities of life, like food, clothing and shelter. Consequently, sport has become an important aspect of the Nigerian culture due to its popularity amongst the citizenry.

The Nigeria State recognizes the power of sports and had used it to pursue its foreign policy and diplomatic agenda as well as foster national unity and socio-cultural integration. Examples are:

- The boycott of the 1978 Commonwealth Games by Nigeria in protest against the apartheid regime in South Africa.
- The hosting of the 1973 All Africa Games after the Nigerian civil war to demonstrate to the world that Nigeria is united, safe and secure.
- The introduction of the National Sports Festival in 1973 as a means of fostering unity and cultural integration after the Nigerian civil war.

Sports has therefore contributed to the oneness of the geographical entity called Nigeria and has equally brought about our binding spirit. In sports, Nigerians are detribalized.
The Federal Ministry of Youth Development was created in the year 2007, with the mandate to promote the physical, mental and socio-economic development of the Nigerian youth through the advancement of and protection of their rights within the Nigerian State, the advancement of their welfare and provision of opportunities for their self actualization.

The vision is to empower the Nigerian youth to become self reliant and socially responsible citizens, while the mission is to provide a sustainable framework for integrated planning and collaboration amongst Stakeholders for the development of policies programmes, laws and other initiatives that will promote and enhance the development of the Nigerian youth and the protection of their interests.

CHALLENGES OF NIGERIAN CHILD AND YOUTH

The Nigerian child and youth are faced with numerous challenges. As the most populous country in sub-saharan Africa, close to 35 percent of children and youths in the continent are Nigerians this makes the situation precarious and worrisome.

These challenges include:

- inaccessibility to functional education
- general poor quality of education,
- lack of access to qualitative health services
- ravaging HIV/AIDs and other diseases,
- deep involvement in criminal activities,
- high level of joblessness and underemployment,
- increasing drug addiction,
- degraded moral values and general disconnection from the mainstream of the society.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN NIGERIA

In recognition of the enormity of the problems facing the Nigerian nation, the present administration introduced the Seven Point Agenda to holistically address the challenges of development facing the nation. While the Government is addressing the problems of youth development at a multi-sectoral level, the Ministry of Youth Development has rolled out several projects, programmes and activities revolving around the Seven Point Agenda with substantial progress already recorded.

Prior to 2007, the youth sector was not given the priority attention it deserved. However, since inception of the Ministry, various programmes have been rolled out with a view to addressing youth issues. For instance:

a) eight (8) Youth Development Centres, with modern sporting facilities have been completed and they are now fully operational.

b) additional six (6) prototype centres in the six 6) geo-political zones of the country are under construction.
These centres are expected to provide all-year round youth development programmes with a view to building the capacities of the Nigerian youth in such areas as sports, technical and vocational skills, entrepreneurship, recreational activities etc. All the centres are equipped with modern sporting facilities for Football, Table Tennis, Basketball, Volleyball, Handball as well as Gymnasium, Sports Halls etc.

NATIONAL POLICY ON SPORTS AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Considering the role of sport in the all round development of the child and youths, Nigeria Government recently came up with a policy aimed at ensuring that:

i. Sport is offered as a compulsory subject at the Nursery, Primary and Secondary School levels of the formal education system.

ii. All primary and secondary schools have playgrounds for sports as a condition for approval for their establishment.

iii. No pupil (s) or student (s) (including those in tertiary institutions) suffers any penalty or discrimination for participating in sports.

iv. All schools establish a structured sporting programme, which covers every student except those exempted on medical grounds.

v. Any student studying in any Higher Institution of learning offers a minimum of a 4-credit unit course in Sports.

The Federal Government is committed to the proper implementation of the above that will enable the youths have the full benefit of the core values of sports, which include

- Fair play
- Discipline
- Cooperation
- Friendship
- Physical fitness and good health
- enhancement of education, etc
- * Social justice
- * Self-discovery
- * Leadership
- * Peace
- * gender equality

To actualize these values of sports and utilize them as powerful tools for youth empowerment and economic development, efforts are been made to:

a. encourage mass participation in sports and exercise as a means of enhancing health, fitness and minimizing anti-social behaviour;

b. promote sport as a means of generating employment and creation of wealth;

c. develop sports for enhancement of youth empowerment / employment;

d. provide opportunities for the physically challenged persons to participate in sports of their choice;

e. ensure availability of sporting facilities in schools, communities and mass housing arena;
f. promote schools, collegiate and institutional sports;

The desire of the Federal Government of Nigeria is to put in place sports competition programmes at the National, State and Local Government levels that will enhance mass participation in sports among the youths and facilitate identification of young and budding talented athletes. This will also give the children and the youths of Nigeria a sense of belonging, sense of direction to have the full values of sports.