

Historical Analysis of Nigeria's Sports Development Policy

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Abstract - This paper examined the historical antecedence of policy formulation as an index of Nigeria's Sports Development initiative, wherein a historical analysis of policy development in sports was undertaken. It identified lack of coverage of all issues concerning sports as the major bane of the current sport development policy and advocated an urgent review of the policy to bring it in line with the velocity of sports development in Nigeria. Generally, recommendations were put forth for the over all improvement of the existing situation.

Keywords: Historical Analysis, Sports Development, Policy formulation

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a matter of historical fact that sports development in Nigeria has been hampered for a long time due to lack of a comprehensive policy document that will set to maximize the gains of sports on a sustainable basis (Ojeme, 1992). This position is further consolidated by the observation that in the absence of a comprehensive National policy and implementation strategies, conceptual confusion, discordant management strategies, and uncoordinated practices have been noticed in the Nigerian sports sector. Added to the fore going is the fact that colonial physical education and sports activities were mostly characterized by their ad-hoc nature since physical education and by extension sports were not regarded as subjects in the curriculum of institutions. It was reported that physical education and sports activities were mainly used for leisure time pursuits (Ajisafe, 1977; Uti 1978; Ojeme, 1986; Aibueku, 2002).

Colonial physical education and sports in Nigeria were closely linked with military formations in the country. Another area where sporting activities were noticed in the colonial era was in the quarters of the colonial civil servants who participated in such sporting activities mainly for leisure. It could therefore be deduced that the slow march of sports towards having a codified policy could be attributed to the leisure based philosophy of participation. It was when competitions came in and it became clear, the latitude which can be gained in victory that various nations particularly Nigeria started thinking of any enduring sports policy.

The march towards the formulation of a sports development policy in Nigeria started when sports was brought more into focus and under government direct control at the ministerial level with the attainment of independence. The post civil war values of sports mostly in its ability to forge national unity and enhance patriotic spirit led to the upgrading of the National Sports council in the early 1970s to the National Sports Commission with some measure of executive

responsibilities for sports management, development, and organization throughout the country (Omo-Osagie, 1987). Furthermore, with the creation of the 12 states structure for the country state sports councils were also established with replicated responsibilities at the state level. Aibueku, (2002) opines that the presence of the American Peace corps volunteers in most of the nation's educational institutions witnessed the introduction of basketball and volleyball thereby expanding the scope of the sports sector of the economy.

Successive governments in Nigeria have tried to maintain the status of sports while some have taken bold steps to bring about changes in the system. One of such changes was the establishment of the National Institute for Sports (NIS) a tertiary institution for training coaches for the various sports in the country.

One of the most effective facilitators of the policy formulation drive was the recognition which was gained by physical education as in the early 1970s as an academic discipline with a distinct body of knowledge and research challenges. This landmark recognition led to the emergence of physical and health education departments in several institutions of higher learning in the country. The direct consequence of the foregoing was the emergence of a corps of professional physical educators which led to the consequent consolidation of our professional association, NAPER-S.D. Fatile, (1987) reports that physical educators are expected to subscribe and respect NAPER-SD's findings and opinions on issues that affect the discipline.

As if the foregoing were not enough factors to bring about a codified policy, government started investing huge sums into the organization of sports festivals, schools sports, increased funding of sports events, as well as engaging in capital intensive construction of sports facilities like stadia, gymnasium, swimming pools, courts for the various ball and racket games (Aibueku, 2002).

In spite of the foregoing efforts it has been observed that sports development in Nigeria seems to have fallen short of expectation because of the clear lack or absence of a well defined policy as well as guidelines for its implementation. Ojeme (1992) in his analysis of the sports delivery system in Nigeria came to the conclusion that the system could be best be described as haphazard.

II. POLICY FORMULATION AND SPORTS

The argument of this paper is that policy formulation is not new in the Nigeria sports delivery system. What has been lacking is the comprehensive nature of the policy such that all aspects of the sports sub sector will be adequately covered. For instance earlier policies in the area of sports tended to be very

specific as the regulations establishing the various sports federations and the instruments establishing the various institutional games associations such as NUGA, NIPOGA, NETEGA, NSSF, etc. furthermore, the regulation establishing the Nigerian Olympic Committee (NOC) are only spelt out in separate documents.

In the realm of behaviour change and sports development, policies have also tended to be specific. For instance, the 1934 curriculum of physical education saw the discipline as physical training a connotation suggestive of an exclusive exercise reserved only for those who show signs of high motor educability.

It is on record that the National policy on education has had far reaching implications for the development of physical education and sports in Nigeria. As far back as the landmark 1969 curriculum conference where a strong presentation was made for the inclusion of physical education and sports in the curriculum things changed for the better both for the discipline as well as for the practice of sports in Nigeria. The education policy tended to recognize early enough that physical education and sports like education are for the youths almost exclusively, consequently, efforts are to be geared towards ensuring that the nations youths reap the full benefits of a sports related cultural milieu. It is however being observed that given the recent forward and backward movement experienced in the series of revisions which the policy has had, the discipline has lost some grounds in that its status has been reduced in the scheme by making it an elective subject currently in the senior secondary school curriculum. This coupled with the low supply of qualified manpower is hampering the growth of the discipline today.

It is a matter of common knowledge that conscious efforts are being made to extricate sports from the discipline. This is being perpetuated by some sports jobbers who at one stage or the other in their lives have had superlative performance, good enough to attract national and state attention. To these uninformed persons, there seems to be no link between the discipline and the practice of sports and so sports policies should not be educationally based. A cursory analysis of sports policies with all its attendant defects will show that there is no way one can separate the discipline from the practice and even in the mad rush to prepare for competitions using the “fire brigade” approach, the schools remain the most fertile grounds to get the materials for use.

The authors believe that it was in response to the above lapses and the consequences occasioned thereof that the Federal Government in 1989 developed a Sports Development policy with the following broad goals.

- i. To promote an awareness of general fitness, health, recreational and leisure activities of the individual Nigerian citizen whatever his age, occupation and status.
- ii. To provide a forum for free and fair competition based on approved regulations among Nigerians of different background and extending this forum to the international level with a view to forging a bond of understanding and friendship among people.

- iii. To encourage traditional sports with a view to upgrading them for competing at national and international levels.
- iv. To provide the nation with the opportunity of measuring its sporting might against that of other nations of the world with a view to establishing a respectable position for Nigeria in the sporting community of the world.
- v. To arrange physical activities programmes for all ages and provide the required manpower and sports facilities
- vi. To encourage various sports institutions, media bodies and houses to design training programmes for sports journalists and to promote sports development at local, national and international levels and evolve a strategy for collecting information, education and communication data and;
- vii. To utilize sports as a means for promoting a sense of patriotism and nationalism as well as enhancing the social well being of the citizenry (SPDN P. 16).

The specific objectives of the 1989 policy are as follows:

- i. To provide opportunities for persons with talents to excel in their chosen sports as a means of self fulfillment and the promotion of national image.
- ii. To continue to invest in amateur sports and take all necessary steps to promote same.
- iii. To promote professionalism and self reliance in sports as a means of achieving perfection in competitive sports nationally and internationally.
- iv. To utilize sports as an economic tool in providing and improving the economic well being of the people and
- v. To utilize sports as a means of solving as much as possible, some of the social ills of the nation like unemployment and in combating other anti social behaviour in the society.

This document represents the first government official policy guidelines directed at systematic sports management in Nigeria. It put sports matters on a firmer foundation coupled with the valuable guidelines of implementation which clearly assigns to all responsibilities towards forging ahead in sports management. It further identifies the roles of specialized agencies and the various tiers of government as well as institutions in the sports development sector of the national economy. The publication of the sports development policy for Nigeria is a clear manifestation of the increasing recognition of sports as a vital social sub sector of the Nigerian economy (Aibueku, 2002). Furthermore, the increasing sophistication and internationalization of sports exploits made the policy documents a sine-qua-non.

III. SPORTS POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: ANY HOPE FOR PROGRESS?

Policy implementation represents the stage of translating policy mandate into action, prescriptions into results and goals into reality (Horn and Meter, 1975). Implementation therefore is very crucial to the success or failures of any policy. It determines whether policies become tangible or concrete. It is the stage where the policy idea may be realized or aborted. It

involves the committal of funds the establishment of structures and methods of hiring of personnel. (Shehu, 1995), Aibueku, (2002), attempted an analysis of the implementation of Nigeria's sports development policy in grassroots institutions in Edo state and found out that of the ten policy variables assessed in the study only a few had witnessed any form of implementation thereby leaving a lot of room for improvement.

From reports of development in the sports sector both from within and outside the country, a comprehensive review of the current sports development policy is advocated to bring the policy in line with current realities.

IV. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper attempted to historically analyse the sport policy formulation exploits in Nigeria with a view to highlighting how these exploits have shaped the over all sports development efforts in the country. It was argued that that policy formulation was not new in Nigeria but that most policies in the area of sports have been so specific and tended not to have fully addressed the issues of sports development.

The 1989 effort, though a step in the right direction, has fallen short of expectation and it is unable to keep pace with the velocity of sports development in Nigeria. It is against this background that the following recommendations are put forth:

1. Government should urgently constitute a review panel for the sports development policy with a clear mandate to clearly articulate all issues in sports for the purpose of including same in the policy.
2. The seeming gap which tends to exist between the discipline and the profession of sports must be bridged immediately. There has to be a flowing relationship between the theory and practice of human movement which sports epitomizes.
3. educational institutions namely basic education, (primary and junior secondary) secondary and tertiary schools should be more focused now in their sports development efforts and
4. there has to be a renewed advocacy for the return of physical education or human kinetics as a core subject in the basic education curriculum while institutions of higher learning should start considering having a general fitness course for all their students on the same status as general studies.

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