

# Sport and Social Development in Africa: Some Major Human Rights Issues

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The subject of this paper relates to some of the major human rights issues that arise in respect of sport and social development in Africa. As a social scientist, I have to say that disciplines like sociology and anthropology have had some real ambivalence about their possible complicity in directly involving themselves in the structural development of Africa. In the early post-war period, the so-called modernization perspective tended to be the dominant theoretical position within social science. At policy level, the modernization perspective was broadly in line with the position of Western governments. To put it in an overly simplified way, the emphasis was on strongly encouraging the developing world to follow the West in terms of its model of development. Hence, particular Western constitutions were brought into these states. They were also encouraged to industrialize and to urbanize very rapidly (see Rostow, 1960). Western transnational corporations remained the major economic players in these regions. The entire process was underwritten by enormous loans from Western banks and institutions that are now bankrupting many of these nations.

The problems of the Western model - the myths and the realities - were exposed towards the end of the 1960s. Critical social scientists drew attention to the point that the continuing development of the West came at the expense of the developing world - hence, the West ensured that the non-Western world remained 'underdeveloped' (Frank, 1971). Meanwhile, in social science, we had a greater recognition of, and support for, cultural diversity. In relation to sociology and anthropology, for example, this led to greater empathy being extended to societies with non-Western values and beliefs. Latterly, we have seen social theorists grappling with the intractable problems of trying to think about or comprehend the actions and beliefs of people from non-industrial contexts (Lyotard, 1984). One by-product of these critical perspectives

on 'modernization' was a critical stance on cultural transference. In relation to ethics or even human rights, it could have been argued, often in a somewhat crude way, that the West should not seek to transfer its late 20th century, European based values onto a separate cultural context.

Today, something of a middle path needs to be taken, though one that exercises a greater skepticism towards the modernization position. The catastrophes that have struck African states over the past 3-4 decades are certainly rooted in their underdevelopment. But their solution is not served, at the everyday level, by a philosophically-based retreat into cultural relativism, or by an abandonment of the issues of human rights and development.

Instead, we now find ourselves at a juncture where we can make real progress in conjoining human rights and the question of development. As André Frankovits (1998) has made clear in his manual, *The Rights Way to Development*, 'development and human rights are not two separate spheres ... but rather, development is a subset of human rights. Moreover, the right to development and economic, social and cultural rights have universal legitimacy.' Development, then, must not be at the expense of basic human rights.

Now, in the context of this conference, we turn to look at the role of sport, and there would initially seem to be three inter-related ways in which sport relates to development and human rights:

1. We can identify the right to sport as a basic human right in and of itself. And, this is certainly recognized by the most influential NGOs (non-governmental organisations) - for example, according to Article 1 of UNESCO's international charter: 'The right to physical education and sport is fundamental for everybody'.

2. We can identify how sporting organisations serve to promote basic human rights through competition. And, again, this would seem to be contained within the charters of most sporting organisations. For example, and most obviously, we can look at the Olympian ideal:

'The goal of Olympism is to place everywhere sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity'. (*The Olympic Charter, Fundamental Principles*, Paragraph 3).

3. Beyond these legal and discursive connections, we can look at the deeper political and historical associations that exist between sports, the development process and human rights in the developing world.

And, to examine some of these latter themes, I'll consider some of the development and human rights issues that emerge generally in the African context.

Now, we have to begin by recognising that the arrival of modern sports in Africa was heavily rooted in a colonial agenda (Baker & Mangan, 1987). Membership of sports clubs would be screened along racial lines, as well as those of class and gender. Sports like rugby union and cricket were particularly favoured by the colonial classes, and employed to reinforce rigid social distinctions. The white populations' almost complete control of resources served to minimize the rights of non-whites in terms of sporting practice. For example, in South Africa, at the height of apartheid, it was common to find up to 100 black sports teams competing to play on a single sports field (Kidd, 1988).

Additionally, we have to recognise that historically, sports have been ideological vehicles for promoting the world-view of powerful elites. In Africa, the colonials found that teaching rugby, cricket or other sports to the black African population would be a useful way of passing their time, but also encourage a

sense of cultural dependency among locals on the Europeans, and instill particular values regarding team-work, obedience to one's master, self-sacrifice, and so on.

The colonial army and other members of what might be termed the white working class played an important role in spreading some sports rather than others throughout the black population. In southern Africa at least, soccer was more favoured and so its diffusion was more readily achieved. Additionally, the game was less obviously bound up in the cultural values of the colonizers. It did not necessarily carry the same kind of class imprimatur as, for example, did cricket. Consequently, in the words of Ali Mazrui, the noted African social scientist, the game was seen as 'culture neutral' (Giulianotti, 1999).

And this points us towards a kind of hidden debate that occurs within the social sciences regarding sports and modernisation. Some historians and critical sociologists emphasize the ideological line that I sketched out a moment ago: that, while the Olympian values of sport seem laudable enough, when they come to be practiced, they simply serve Western imperial interests (Hargreaves, 1984). On the other hand, some anthropologists, such as Roberto Da Matta, argue that sport does represent a modernizing force, in more positive ways. In their view, sport contains universalistic, egalitarian and meritocratic principles that provide a strong affirmation of the viability of modern development (see Helal, 1994).

Again, I think we need to take a careful line between the two here. In the post-war and post-colonial milieux, we find that the constitutions of the most settled African states may be democratic and relatively uncontested. Nevertheless, from the most pessimistic vantage-point, a new set of imperial forces may be identified, in the shape of Western transnational corporations and business enterprises.

And sport is no exception here. Contemporary sports institutions are transnational corporations; they operate on a global scale in much the same way as General Motors, BHP or Coca-Cola. And, we continue to see the

more damaging influences of these enterprises within the developing world.

Most obviously, we can describe as imperial, the way in which Western enterprises exploit the rich sporting resources of the developing world. Alan Klein (1991) draws especial attention to this in Latin America, and suggests that baseball clubs from the USA and Japan are able to purchase and refine the rich reserves of human talent for a mere fraction of the labour costs that would be incurred in the USA.

John Bale (1991), in his analysis of American college athletics, makes the same point with regard to the employment of African athletes, to preserve the good sporting name of these educational institutions.

And, perhaps most seriously, there is the case of player exploitation in soccer, especially in West Africa. One Italian football agent based in Africa opened up his own youth team, with a view towards selling on the best young players to top European sides. The Italian football authorities later denounced his terms and conditions, as leaving his young players in a state of 'slavery' (Broere & Van Der Drift, 1997).

Moreover, there are obviously other circumstances in which the local sports-related experience with Western transnational corporations is less than emancipatory. One thinks here, for example, of the production of sports-related products in the developing world that then go on sale in the West. The most extreme instance of this inequality has been the production of footballs by child labourers in rural Pakistan (Marcus & Husselbee, 1997). Less extreme cases perhaps relate to the construction of factories in Africa and Indo-China by the major sports manufacturers, the very low wages that are paid, and the dependency culture that is effectively fostered within the developing community towards the transnational company.

In a more routine way, we see that the sportification of African society may, as elsewhere, be a further vehicle for cultural Westernization. For example, this is perhaps apparent in the close nexus of the marketing of sports with transnational companies. While we find that sport aid is provided to the developing

world, often the source of this aid will be a transnational company which is in league with a major sports body. Consequently, a donation to a small sports enterprise through FIFA and MacDonalDs becomes a positive marketing vehicle for the latter company in establishing both a foothold in the developing world, and in confirming the symbolic centrality of the company with progressive, sporting participation. And this, of course, leads us into a wider debate on the role and prevalence of Western transnational companies in the sustainable development of the developing world.

However, to repeat the key point, the right to development and general human rights go together - meaning here, that the 'sportification' of Africa can indeed be a positive rather than negative component in establishing peaceful and viable social relationships. And this is most obvious in circumstances where military conflicts have produced social breakdown.

Now, the relationship between sport and conflict resolution is a complex one and needs some extended consideration. We do need to exercise some historical and political caution when drawing a nexus between sport and conflict resolution. Certainly, we can appreciate the various constitutional rules and articles of association at sports organisations like the IOC and FIFA - which emphasize tolerance and understanding towards one's opponents, senses of brotherhood and sisterhood, the priority of playing and competing over winning or losing. All of these values are in keeping with the wider values of NGOs and democratic societies, with regard to guaranteeing individual freedoms and, more specifically, to confirming the right of people to obtain proper physical exercise and sporting experiences.

Yet, on the other hand, we cannot essentialize or mythologize the nature of sporting contests, by ignoring their real nature. Many sports are the focus of intense rivalries and conflicting identities. Indeed, if we look at how social identities are constructed, we can understand sport's centrality. The social identity of people is rooted in a twin process, of identifying themselves within a community, and also, as a consequence, by identifying themselves against other peoples and other communities. Within

the specific sporting associations, we certainly find the embodiment of specific communities; yet, when it comes to competition, we also find that these contests become dramas, as people define themselves against their opponents, against 'the other' (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2000).

For the major sporting organisations, the claim that 'sport stops war' would certainly enhance the international and market appeal of sports. One could point also at some extra-ordinary examples: for example, in the case of soccer, at the famous football matches that were played between British and German soldiers during the First World War; or when Pele's visit to Africa led to a lull in the civil war in Nigeria in 1969 (Murray, 1995). But, of course, we may also point to the counter-evidence: most violently, with the case of the soccer war in Central America, which produced 6,000 dead after a match between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969; and also with the genocidal conflict in the former Yugoslavia - which began in earnest, it seems, after a riot at a football match involving fans, players, club officials and the security forces from the rival communities (Giulianotti, 1999).

Nevertheless, sport can provide a setting in which conflicts may be dramatized and metaphorically expressed, rather than all-too-really played out on the battle-field. The rules of the game, and the prevailing ethics of the game, provide the rival sides with a common framework, and critical reference points, through which they may interact in a meaningful manner. Otherwise stated, if the rival sides can distill and dramatize their conflict through the theatre of sport and through a conflict on the pitch, then we do have some possible reflection of more orderly and stable relations between the two sides. Additionally, for the casualties of war, sport can take on a therapeutic function; it can enhance some rule-governed behaviour, and the rehabilitation of those traumatized by war.

And, there is some fieldwork that is emerging from Africa which helps to sustain this point. For example, it has been speculated by anthropologists like Paul Richards, that soccer and other sports may play a really positive role in areas of military conflict. From his research in Sierra Leone, Richards (1997) found that

obviously, for the vast majority of young people, the way towards self-improvement, towards social mobility and towards establishing greater social status, was closed off in mainstream society. In short, Richards argues, the patronage culture of West Africa tended to prevent ordinary young people from climbing the social ladder through education, career promotion or within most public or private institutions. Instead, young people could turn to two practices to show off their personal skills on a more 'level playing field'. And those practices were: soldiering in one of the various military or guerrilla groups, or playing football. In military situations, young people were given the tag of 'commander for the day' and allowed to show their prowess in fighting - the most skillful were obvious, they survived. In sports, there lay an alternative, where the penalties for defeat were less severe, but where skill, merit and a bit of luck were also key factors in determining success or failure. Richards, quite understandably, argues that the most important thing is to nourish the underlying belief that sport can provide this level playing field. The most important way in which this can be done, is to ensure that the referees are seen as above reproach by the opposing sides - to guarantee that they are not biased. And, the training of referees and other sports officials would be a useful, practical way of doing that.

Now, this kind of research does point to ways in which sporting organisations and Western aid agencies can come together to advance the cause of human rights and development in Africa. The Aid agencies do seem to believe that sport has a real role to play:

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, 'Sports and recreation are vital for all children. For a refugee child they are irreplaceable in helping rebuild a destroyed world' (IOC, 1999a).

According to the Red Cross in Indo-China, 'Sport transforms men and women by endowing them with strength, endurance, vivacity and courage. Every school, every group of pupils living in a given region must create its own climate of well-being and joie de vivre ... All these activities provide a background against which young people can learn to live healthy lives and promote among

the population the desire to establish a new culture' (ICRC, 1999).

And, in recent years, we have seen a real expansion in this kind of work, and it is useful to summarise here some of that endeavour:

1. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has become heavily involved in linking sport to its campaign to ban anti-personnel mines. In the UK, this has resulted in sports athletes like Sally Gunnell becoming strong advocates of the campaign. At a more global level, the French soccer star and celebrity David Ginola has been enlisted for the campaign. More institutionally, the European Football Union (UEFA) has joined up, and is contributing 1 million Swiss francs to aid the rehabilitation of landmine victims. UEFA also provided the ICRC with airtime to disseminate its message during the European Champions League.
2. UNICEF were one of a number of NGO's that helped to set up the so-called 'Spirit of Soccer' campaign in Bosnia during and after the civil war in the former Yugoslavia. The project involved football matches being organised by a former professional football player from England, followed by an educational class on landmines and other safety issues within the war-torn zone.
3. UNICEF are also talking with organisations such as FIFA, the world football governing body, and the ICC, which controls international cricket, with a view towards forming a partnership.
4. The charity ActionAid in 1998 set up a 'One World One Goal' campaign. The campaign sought to 'bring people together' through employing the world medium of football in 'small initiatives', such as staging football matches between rival communities, or organising clubs to promote a peaceful environment. While the campaign emphasized its work in Africa and Latin America, it also included work in some projects in the inner-cities of the UK (ActionAid, 1998).

5. The world football governing body, FIFA, has set up a new development programme, entitled appropriately enough, GOAL (FIFA, 1999). The aim is to identify and help to rectify some of the specific problems faced by the individual member associations. Within the context of Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, it is to be expected that many of these problems will relate to health, educational and other human rights issues - and that FIFA's football-centred aid will assist in addressing some of these problems.
6. FIFA are also working with their nominated children's charity, 'SOS Kinderdorf', at a global level. The children's villages in South Africa, Mozambique and the Gambia are among those that are particularly well patronised by national associations.
7. For their part, the IOC (the International Olympic Committee) have entered a collaborative arrangement with the UNHCR (that is, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). The collaboration goes back to 1995, and has provided basic infrastructural and equipment support for children living in refugee camps. One of the biggest camps has been in Kenya, and housed up to 50,000 people; an official documentary on their work shows the IOC and the UNHCR helping to link people together through sport (IOC, 1999b). The IOC have also been involved in campaigns to distribute special sports kits throughout refugee camps - particularly those in Tanzania, Guinea, and Sudan. The IOC has also been involved in specific sport aid projects in Burundi, Rwanda and Madagascar.

The IOC's development work is organised through the Department of Humanitarian and Youth Affairs, which has organised new projects in Somalia and in Yemen.

This leads me on to look at some issues and problems that may emerge in the new millennium, as sports and everyday human rights come together.

First of all, we may note that the focus of modern sports is increasingly on young people's active participation. Not only is this emphasis on youth reflective of the demands of elite-level sport, at which young people predominate; it is also exaggerated by the increasingly strong preoccupation of our consumer-centred culture with images of youth and youthfulness. And modern sports are, of course, very much wrapped up in this new cultural industry. Hence, we find that visibly older people become somewhat incongruous in sports participation. It is to be hoped that sports-related development in Africa does not by-pass the older generations. In many circumstances, the divisions between the generations are already stark enough. The consequences of massive HIV infections in central and southern Africa are highly damaging here. A middle generation of peoples, aged between 20 and 45, has been most painfully exposed to HIV infection, resulting in the catastrophic loss of parental figures throughout entire communities. Instead, the parental role must be performed by grand-parents, and so any kind of recreation must be encouraged to reduce the domestic burdens. Sports-centred work must seek to bridge this division, not reinforce it.

Second, there are many, particularly complex problems surrounding the sport and development question for just over half of the given population in a given society. Specifically, I am talking here about the various political, cultural and human rights issues surrounding the participation of women in sports.

At the grassroots levels, there may be strong cultural mores that dissuade or prevent women from actively participating in sports. In Zanzibar, for example, we find the case of the 'Women's Fighters' soccer team which is required to play in the hijab and whose players are beaten on occasion by their disgraced male relatives (Giulianotti, 1999).

The various NGOs that operate in Africa have something of a delicate issue to resolve here. On one hand, they may certainly view the promotion of women in the cultural sphere as part of the human rights dimension. And there is, of course, plenty of evidence that would seem to confirm this. There are far more

limited personal opportunities that are available to women; there are often oppressive domestic labour experiences that confront women; and, in terms of sexual exploitation, there are greater health dangers suffered by young women with regard to sexually transmitted diseases, notably HIV/AIDS. Meanwhile, at home, the Western NGO may make, as one of its aid policies, specific stipulations on the involvement of women, as a reflection of anti-sex discrimination practices that exist in the West more generally.

On the other hand, the involvement of the NGO in promoting the social position of women may well result in their alienating the prevailing regimes in these countries. To the state, development work may be acceptable and welcome, so long as it does not extend beyond economic modernization and into the realms of social policy. A further problem for the NGOs relates to the differences that need to be recognised between strategies for utilising male and female sport. Male sport stars are at the centre of the NGO campaigns. For female sport, this is rather more difficult, mainly because there are so few female sporting icons who are recognisable on a global level. Sports such as tennis and athletics, to some extent, provide women of such status, but these sports lack the enormous international appeal of, for example, soccer or basketball.

The difficult issues for some of these states to resolve concern the social values and internationalist potential of elite-level sport. In the developing world, as elsewhere, sporting successes can represent an important, symbolic affirmation of the incumbent political regime. In Australia, as in Angola: winning at sport helps the political class to appear as the patrons of success. For many states in Africa, a quick entry to sporting success may be had through an emphasis on sporting activities that are out with male professional sports. For example, in soccer, it is far easier for Nigeria or Cameroon or Ghana to make real, sudden headway in international competition in the women's game or in youth soccer, rather than in the men's game. This kind of success can give these nations a real political 'foot-in-the-door' within the soccer world, and provide a good basis for the attempt to host these kinds of matches. Yet, this does open up some potential problems regarding the difference in state acceptance or

general cultural support for women's football at the elite level and at the everyday, grassroots level.

Third, we have to resolve the relationship between two rights: on one hand, the right to access to sport as opposed to open discrimination, and on the other hand the right to cultural autonomy and diversity. In Africa, as I've noted, sport was a particularly powerful vehicle for cementing fundamental social inequalities along 'racialised' lines. In the post-colonial and post-apartheid world, fundamental inequalities still remain in terms of material wealth and cultural freedom. Sports continue to tell this tale, with regard to the distribution of membership inside sporting associations, and at the elite level, in terms of who does and does not represent the new nation. Now, as we have seen in South Africa, active steps have been made to try to ensure that in sports like rugby union and cricket, the representation of non-white players is reflected in the national sides. The cricket teams in Zimbabwe and, to a lesser extent, Kenya, have these problems as well.

And yet, we must also note that a strong degree of choice may also have underpinned the movement of the black majorities of these nations into other sports, out with the old colonial and Commonwealth sports of rugby and cricket. We can certainly see this in the case of South Africa, where the local, national and cultural identities of black communities are much more heavily tied in with the global sport of soccer, as opposed to cricket and rugby. In part, this division also has a strongly geographical aspect to it, with these latter sports being played in some parts of South Africa rather than others. But there is also a component here that relates to cultural autonomy and diversity on the part of urban black populations.

Now certainly, we can only commend the political strategy of the post-apartheid South African state, which seeks to provide a more level playing field for non-white athletes and spectators, and which also seeks to break up the role that sport such as rugby continues to play in preserving the more racist and xenophobic culture within white South African society. But, some academic commentators on South Africa are also coming to consider the

possibility that some kind of cultural difference in sports participation is no bad thing, at least in the medium term, so long as it is rooted in the expression of cultural identity and autonomy, rather than social exclusion (Nauright, 1998). Certainly, for the next generation or so in South Africa, the association of sports like cricket and especially rugby with white domination is deeply engrained and difficult to shake. Additionally, there is something that is at least symbolically symmetrical in the way that the new South Africa might shake off the most negative vestiges of colonialism - apartheid - by shedding the Commonwealth sports in favour of global sports like soccer or athletics.

Finally, in the longer-term, the most important function of football and other sports in Africa must relate to their potential as media for communicating between cultures. Specifically, the global adulation that is given over to sports stars, and the constant media coverage of elite athletes, must provide us with a bridge of mediation between the developing world and the developed world. The successes of African athletes on the international stage provide immense educational opportunities, for explaining the often dreadful regional and national backgrounds of these elite performers. In this sense, the mass media and the NGOs have a real responsibility here too. They have to avoid reifying the athlete's celebrity status. Currently, the campaigns are very much centred around using sports celebrities to spread the word. Ideally, the sports celebrity will be from the developing area, but will be very well known to a Western audience - for example, the soccer player George Weah, whose work on behalf of the people of Liberia has been truly exceptional.

In the longer term, the media and the NGOs need to move away from repeating the cult of celebrity, and thus to avoid the possibility that the tragedies of the athlete's homeland become part of a marketing melodrama. Instead, the emphasis needs to stay on the social context from which the athlete emerges - the military conflicts and civil wars, the famine, the mass migration of refugees, the human disaster of HIV infection and so on.

It is, of course, absurd to think that sports participation could have a direct impact upon

these catastrophes. All of these problems are rooted in the extra-ordinarily deep, and widening, divisions between the developed and developing worlds, in economic and political terms. For NGOs in the shape of charities, it does seem that this message is inescapable. As ActionAid (1998) state in their One World One Goal campaign, contemporary struggles are a reaction against material and fundamental forms of deprivation - water, land, housing, basic education, and so on. Only 'integrated' campaigns will prove effective, with sport playing a part.

The popularity of sport - in both the donor and receiver countries - is undeniable, and its centrality to the popular culture of both kinds of society is there for all to see. In short, organised sport provides us with development and human rights opportunities that are too good to miss.

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