

**COMMERCIALIZATION AND PRIVATIZATION OF SPORTS AS STRATEGIES FOR
ENHANCING SPORTS DEVELOPMENT AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL IN
NIGERIA**

BY

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Abstract

The increasing cost of developing and running sports in Nigeria has challenged the three tiers of government to explore other means of funding sports. The local government is more burdened by its position of being the closest to the people as provision has to be made to meet the sporting demand of the teeming populace in ensuring the overall well-being of members of the community. Paucity of fund as well as huge cost of providing for sports development have combined to force the local governments to look for other sources of financing sports. Commercialisation and privatization are modern day strategies of funding sports development which the local governments can explore to achieve sporting objectives. This paper therefore examined the prospects of these strategies and the various ways they can be deployed by the local government. The paper concluded that commercialisation and privatization, as a strategy, is not a totally bad idea especially if properly executed. Suggestions are made for ensuring citizens have opportunities, through commercialisation and privatization, to participate in wide range of sporting activities and for exposing youths to sports at an early age thus imbibing the culture of recreation early in life.

Keywords: Commercialisation, Local Government, Privatization, Sponsorship, Sports Development,

Introduction

Sports have been acknowledged in Nigeria as a veritable avenue for national cohesion and unity. Within the Nigerian society, sports play many roles which are beneficial not only to individuals but groups. According to Onifade (2001), sports represent social institution that assist the individuals in socialization and integration processes; it fosters unity and promotes vertical and horizontal mobility between groups from different social-economic status. Sports permeate all human endeavours, be it enculturation, adaptation social mobility, economic empowerment and socialization (Fasan, 2006). The role and importance of sports in the growth and development of the nation is equally acknowledged by both the federal and state governments. Today, sport has gone beyond merely recreational and many issues and benefits accrue from modern sport. Such issues and benefits involve national integration, international image, national prestige, social limelight, economic empowerment, and political power and growth (Omidiran, 2001).

The present status attained by Nigeria in sports development is reached through hard and unimaginable means. The federal and state governments in fulfilling the philosophy of the sport development policy of Nigeria have over the years committed huge resources, financial and human, as part of efforts to promote and develop sports in general (Oluwole, 2004). Sports cannot develop fully without the requisite manpower, equipment, facilities, and relevant policy. It is noteworthy that the incredible growth, popularity and development of sports that is visible at the federal and state levels have been fully felt at the local government level. In another way, one can say that there is a low-level sports development at this level of governance. Many local governments across the federation do not have any youth or sports centre not to mention recreational park or stadium.

Present-day realities may have contributed to this; maladministration, lack of will to implement sports development policy and low budgetary allocations. But this low level of sport development has a negative effect on the citizens as they would be denied the opportunity of reaping the full benefits of sports participation (Ofili & Okechukwu, 2010). Yet the sports development policy (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989) recognizes and mandates the local government as the primary provider of sports - related opportunities for the entire citizens and as a way of ensuring overall well-being of individual members and subgroups within our communities.

The local government is the nearest government to the people, bridging the gap between the people and the state government. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria saddles the local government with many responsibilities (Titus, 2002), and in relationship to sports development, the local government serves as the engine room that drives grassroots sports. Kirkpatrick, as cited in Ofili (2010), noted that grassroots sports place emphasis on young individuals wherever they are found as that is the platform on which active sports participation starts. Grassroots is where decisions for sports participation are formed, habits created and loyalties developed. Sports development at the grassroots' level depends on availability of talents within a defined local government area.

Presently in Nigeria, there is no doubt the fact that the local governments do not have enough resources to carry out all these responsibilities; hence some are left unexecuted irrespective of policies mandate. The utter neglect of sports development by local governments across the nation is evident by various low level infrastructural development, poor facilities and unstructured administration of sports (Agbese, 2019; Okere, 2018; Ahovi, 2017). As highlighted by Titus (2002), there is no separate department of sports; rather sports operate under a separate department.

By this arrangement, sports development has suffered seriously under the local governments' excuse that there is no fund to prosecute sports development. The main role of the local government in facilitating mass participation in sports has thus been abandoned.

The main purpose of this paper is therefore to examine and review how commercialization and privatization of sports can serve as means of enhancing mass participation in sports at the local government level.

Philosophy and Goals of Sports Development

Sport is a highly formalized and organized physical activity of high intensity regulated by accepted rules and regulations which requires maximum physical and/or mental exertion. It is a form of structured social behavior with values, norms statutes and roles (Oloruntoba, 2002, as cited in Atolagbe, 2010). The competitive nature and physical dimension in sport makes it to assume different definitions under some conditions. However, the position of this paper is to view sports in a more operational manner located on a continuum between play and work. The specification of sports as physical helps to include wide-ranging activities as sports.

The philosophy guiding the sport development programme of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the overall well-being of individual members and subgroups within our community. The welfare of each human person is bound-up inextricably with that of his family and kingship group, of its local community as well as the wider national community. Sports development according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (1989) is the process of continuous improvement of the sport structure, institutions and programmes in order to create a societal condition conducive to physical

fitness for all, effective functioning and self-actualization. The goals of the sports development policy include the following:

1. the continuous development of the quality of life of the entire citizens of the country as groups and as individuals;
2. the promotion and continuous improvement of initiatives and programmes aimed at improving the aged, children, youth rural population and women;
3. the anticipation, control and minimization of social problem;
4. arousing sports consciousness in all and sundry an encouraging mass participation in sports as a means (ensuring physically fit and mentally alert citizenry irrespective of age, sex, occupation and status.

The philosophy of the sports development flows from the realization that the welfare and capacity of the nation depends very much on the contributions of the people as individuals, and that the individual's capacity and motivation to make necessary contribution depend among other things on the extent to which the society has prepared them for this role. An individual can only contribute what he has learnt. Sport is therefore a veritable instrument for reflection and transmitting these values.

The Role of the Local Government in Sports Development

The local government is the third tier of government. It is the government that is closest to the people and through which governance is gauged by the people. Having so many responsibilities to cater for her citizens, the local government has the unique role developing sports among her citizens. According to Ahovi (2017), youth and sports development at the local government level carries triple advantage of human capital development, economic enhancement and peace

consolidation in the larger state. As acknowledged in the 1989 sports development policy, local government not only provides some basic sporting facilities the community level, it also ensures mass participation. According to Adebayo (2019) and Onifade (2002), the objective of sports development at the grassroots level is not competition per se, but rather, the provision of opportunities for more individuals irrespective of age, sex or status, to participate sporting activities.

Mass participation, if well organized, planned and implement can lead to a resounding success in sports development. This in turn could translate into making substantial impact in competitive sports Thus sports development at this level is meant to serve as a factory where future sports talents can be discovered. For talents to be discovered, the local government is expected to create awareness and make conscious efforts in promoting sports such that many citizens at the community level would show interest and have equal opportunities for sports participation (Ebu, 2018; Okere, 2018). Through awareness, participation is enhanced and a broad base is provided for mass participation for both competitive sports and recreation. This effort enhances the saying "catch the young" since the youths are exposed to sports participation early life (Why govt must develop, 2017).

Part of efforts at promoting mass participation and awareness are the provision, maintenance and supervision of sports facility as well as the upgrading of existing ones and keeping them in good condition. All of these require substantial amount of money, and it is out of this concern that the proposal of commercialization and privatization is considered.

Commercialization and Privatization of Sports and Mass Participation

The basic concept of commercialization refers to managing a sport corporation or venture for the purpose of making it more viable through the process of generating funds. The funds are for the sustenance of such venture by making its services available to the public (Aniki, 2018). Privatization on the other hand is the participation of the public in the running and management of public company with a view to removing the entire or partial control, government control or involvement in such company (Onifade, 2010). While the primary objective of privatization is to increase private interest in the running of public corporation, that of commercialization is to make money. Running sports as commercial venture is diametrically opposed to running sports for recreational purposes.

Government recognises the important role the private sector has played in the past in the organisation, delivery and funding of sports programmes (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989). It is out of this that government declared in the policy statement to continue to count on the cooperation of organized business sector in its effort to impact on the quality of life of all citizens. Collaborating with the business sector is therefore not out of place. Commercial venture survives on the business acumen of those running it while the later survives on sheer government support and goodwill of individuals and companies who feel it is their social responsibility to provide such avenues and to boost their image.

At the local government level where mass participation in sports is the focus, commercialization and privatization, though negating the principle of equal opportunity, could be adopted at a low level to achieve the purpose of making the facilities available for use. The local government could

thus partially commercialize or privatize sporting programmes for the public to which it has social responsibility. A key word here is caution. The facilities should not be entirely left in the hands of private interests to run. A balance should be struck between providing these facilities and charging a token fee as "usage fee". By this arrangement, the local government can subsidise the amount being charged. The token fee thus collected could be used to maintain the facilities as no amount of money realized will be considered too small for sports development.

Local government agencies could also go into commercial ventures to raise additional money. The ventures could be in form of building guest houses, hotels, bookshops, and consultancy services or sports shops. These facilities could serve as backups to the basic sporting facilities of sports and youth centres, game courts/fields which are not charged for mass sport participation.

Another area where commercialization and privatization could be used as strategies for sports development at the local government level is in the joint ownership of facilities. The government at this level could go into joint business with private interests in the provision of facilities under the build, operate and transfer mode (Aniki, 2018). The government could provide the land and give necessary concessions while the private interest builds the facilities. Fitness centre and amusement/recreational parks could be jointly owned by this arrangement. Fees could be charged for the use especially with the tremendous interest shown in physical fitness by Nigerians from all walks of life. A specific period might be targeted when the government would assume full control.

Partial and discriminatory commercialization could be evolved for certain categories of age as a way of promoting mass participation. In order to help young participants (ages 5-18 years) to

develop and improve their skills, especially during holidays. This category of individuals could use the facilities free of charge while ages above 18 years are charged some fees.

Advantages of Commercialization and Privatization of Sports at the Local Government Level

1. More job opportunities for professionals.
2. Wastage expenses will be minimized.
3. Improvement in the provision of modern facilities.
4. Sports manufacturing companies may be established.
5. Early maturing of athletes into professionalism.
6. Facilitation of long-term planning and execution of programmes

Disadvantages of Commercialization and Privatization of Sports at the Local Government Level

1. Only popular sports may benefit depending on level of patronage.
2. Government might lose its control over sports. Hence it might be difficult to manipulate to enhance nation's image.
3. Very few people may afford to take part in sports.

Conclusion

Commercialization and privatization as a strategy for enhancing sports development at the local government level, is not a totally bad idea. If properly executed, it could go a long way at making facilities available for sports programme. Since the focus of any sports development should be mass participation in sports (sports for all), citizens would have the opportunity to participate in

wide range of sporting activities. Opportunities would also be provided for exposing youths to sports at an early age thus imbibing the culture of recreation early in life. However sports development should be geared towards balancing mass participation and profit orientation.

In addition to the suggestions and challenges raised earlier in this paper, private initiatives should be encouraged to set up recreational facilities at the community level to further enhance sports development through commercialization and privatization of sports at the local government level. Since local governments are the closest to the youths and the citizenry of this country, they should be involved in the provision of basic sporting infrastructures. As stated in the sports development policy, local governments should have a sports department at their headquarters. This should serve as the local sports council. Local government should facilitate partial ownership of sports clubs by the citizens. Partial commercialization and privatization should be employed rather than wholly commercialization and privatization. Youth centres and schools should serve as centres for promoting sports development.

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