Chapter 17

Communicating Peace through Sports: What Works and What Doesn’t Work in Peace Races

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ABSTRACT

As a growing field, sports for peace have attracted optimists, pessimists and skeptics in the process fanning an efficacy debate. As a contribution to this debate, this chapter rather than directly get into the ongoing discourse, will instead, attempt to provide a sneak preview of the effectiveness of the Peace Race, a sports for peace intervention organized among Pastoralists in Kenya and Uganda. The chapter begins with setting up the context by tracing the practice of sports for peace, its development and making a mention of the schools of thought on the efficacy of sports for peace. It then proceeds to examining the efficacy of the Peace Race by focusing on its successes and challenges, exploring utility of Peace Race in the conflict cycle and the place of celebrities in peacebuilding. The chapter ends with suggestions on improvement on the efficacy of peace races and focus areas of research.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict continues to be one of the major challenges in human relationships, yet it is considered a catalyst for social change. Because of its omnipresence in society, conflict has inspired many conflict theories and interventions to explain its nature and to alleviate this ever-present challenge to humanity. Many theories have also been advanced to explain dynamics of conflict, conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation, and provide solutions to the challenges of conflict and development affecting society. Many interventions such as disarmament, global and regional peace agreements and protocols, charters, peace journalism, peace education initiatives, international justice institutions and sports for peace (and development) have grown out of the persistence of conflict.
Communicating Peace through Sports

Although sports for peace is not very new, its promotion by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has given it an increased impetus and the diffusion of this peace intervention has been evident across the globe. In East Africa, most of the sports for peace initiatives have been on ad hoc and sporadic basis with a few that are more regular, planned and institutionalized. This chapter covers background to sports for peace. It provides a brief historical overview of the sports for peace as a conflict intervention as well as touch on debates around efficacy of sports for peace intervention. The second part will pay attention to the efficacy of Peace Race, a peace run organized every November and May/June in Kapenguria (Kenya) and Moroto (Uganda) respectively. The third part offers suggestions on what can be done to improve on the efficacy of sports for peace with particular focus on Peace Races.

BACKGROUND TO SPORTS FOR PEACE

History of Sports for Peace as Conflict Intervention

The contemporary theory and practice of sports for peace and development draws its inspiration from the Greeks’ innovative approach of use of sports in reduction of violence and advancing peace, the “Olympic Truce”, considered to have been used for the first time in the 776 BC in the Greeks’ context (Briggs, McCarthy & Zorbas, 2004). Within this period, there was an increased rivalry among Kings in the Greek Cities, and it was within this rivalry that saw some cities in Greece embroiled in wars with some gaining and others weakening and ceding ground in the conflict. One instrumental personality in the history of Olympic Truce is King Ifitos (Iphitos) of Elis, who upon assessing and seeing the likelihood of fall of his Kingdom sought direction from oracle of Delphi, the then think tank of ancient Greece, on a mechanism for managing the conflict in order to prevent his kingdom from imminent fall. King Ifitos was then advised to break the conflict cycle every four years by replacing wars with friendly athletic competition.

From the advice, King Ifitos took a diplomatic initiative of visiting and persuading king Lycougos (Sparta) and Cleosthenes (Pisa), both of who agreed to his truce (“ekecheiria”) proposal leading to perhaps the first recorded sports for peace games in the Olympia. The truce period was 14 days: war was stopped seven days before games until seven days after the games to allow sportsmen, other actors (artistes, judges) and fans into the Olympia and return back to their homes in peace. This innovative approach to conflict and violence gained respect and lived for 1,200 years of the ancient Greek history.

With the historical lessons from ekecheiria, the modern Olympic games was revived in 1894, upon establishment of International Olympic Committee whose core mandate was to promote use of sport for peaceful development of mankind and for preservation of human dignity. Following the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 in Athens, the utility of sports as a significant instrument in peace and development process indicate a steady growth in use of sport for improving human conditions. Efforts towards promoting use of sports (essentializing) and institutionalizing use of sport for peace picked some momentum from early 1990s (Briggs, McCarthy & Zorbas, 2004; SDP IWG, 2008).

The Efficacy Debate: Do Sports for Peace Work?

The debate on whether sports for peace are effective conflict intervention has been going on for a while now. There exist three groups: the optimists who believe it works; the skeptics who hold that there are no
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