

**INTEGRATION OF MILLENNIUM
DEVELOPMENT GOALS INTO
PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
THE PERCEPTION OF NIGERIAN
UNIVERSITY LECTURERS**

**L.O. Amusa, A.L. Toriola, Danladi I. Musa
and V.K. Moselakgomo**

L.O. Amusa, DPE (Exercise and Sport Science)
*University of Venda, Thohoyandou,
South Africa*

A.L. Toriola, PhD (Exercise Physiology)
*Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria,
South Africa*

E mail: toriolaal@tut.ac.za

Danladi I. Musa, PhD (Exercise Physiology)
Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria

V.K. Moselakgomo, BA (Kinesiology)
*Lephutha Leadership Training and Development
Institute, Marble Hall, South Africa*

ABSTRACT

In 2002 the United Nations (UN) convened an Inter Agency Task Force on sport for development and peace with the aim of reviewing activities concerning sport in the UN system and designing strategies to promote more systematic and coherent use of sport in facilitating development and peace activities, especially at the community level. The UN also emphasised the potential role of sport in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Recommendations at several international events, e.g. MINEPS III (Berlin, Germany in 1999) and the International Conference on Sport and Development (Maggingen, Switzerland in 2003), with a follow up conference in Maggingen, Switzerland, 2005; have consistently implicated physical education as the right vehicle through which sport can be effectively utilized as a tool to promote development and peace, particularly at the community level such as in *plus sport* activities. However, recent trends suggest that a gap exists between the expectations of the UN in terms of sustainable human development and how graduates of physical education and sports studies in universities are prepared to meet these new challenges. This hypothesis was tested in 11 Nigerian universities specifically to analyse the lecturers' views concerning the need and feasibility to teach contemporary physical education courses within the context of human development. The findings were analysed qualitatively and conclusions drawn based on its implications for achieving the MDGs in African countries.

Key words: Development through sport, feasibility, millennium development goals, physical education, policy trajectory, sport plus.

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, the former Secretary General of the United Nations Organization (UN), Mr. Kofi Anan, convened an Inter-Agency Task Force on sport for development and peace. The main aim of the task force was to review activities concerning sport in the UN system (UN, 2003). The task force was also set-up to design strategies to promote more systematic and coherent use of sport in facilitating development and peace activities, especially at the community level and to generate support for such activities among governments and sport-related organizations. The formation of the task force was based on the realization of the potential role that sport can play in the achievement of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The task force, which comprises a number of international organizations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nation's High Commission for Refugees (UNCHR) and United Nation's AIDS Agency (UNAIDS), has organised a series of international conferences, round tables and activities including:

MINEPS III The UNESCO meeting of ministers for physical education and sport held in Berlin, Germany in 1999. A follow up conference was organized in 2005 in Magglingen, Switzerland.

International conference on sport and development held in Magglingen, Switzerland in 2003.

The International round table conference on sport for development and peace which was staged as part of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games programme, and

The UN's declaration of 2005 as the International Year of Sports and Physical Education.

Recommendations at these events and at many other international meetings have consistently implicated physical education as the right vehicle through which sport can be effectively utilized as a tool to promote development and peace

around the world, particularly at the community level.

According to the UN, sport activities can provide a window of opportunities through which development and peace initiatives can be effectively implemented. There have been a number of positive indicators in the form of good practices around the world to demonstrate this potential. The standpoint of the UN is that peace should not only be regarded as the absence of war or conflict, but should also be defined in a broader context encompassing the absence of oppression or discrimination, racism, poverty, disease and gender-related inequalities, inequality among nations, and respect for human right and democratic principles (UN, 2004, 2005). Of critical importance is the role of sport in providing opportunities for easing conflict in war thorn areas, alleviating poverty, rehabilitating at-risk or delinquent youth, easing the plight of refugees and combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Activities designed to achieve these goals are referred to as *plus sport* activities (Auweele et al., 2006), a concept which refers to the use of sports as a vehicle for the promotion of peace and development

initiatives over and above the normal function of sport as in entertainment, competition and fitness development. This concept illustrates the UN's standpoint as articulated in the following statement:

“Sport directly contributes to the pursuit of the Millennium Goals. It is an innovative and effective tool to assist existing efforts to achieve specific targets such as those concerning education, gender equality, HIV/AIDS and the reduction of major diseases. More broadly, well-designed sports programmes are also a cost-effective way to contribute significantly to health, education, development and peace and a powerful medium through which to mobilize societies as well as communicate key messages. As one of the richest and most developed aspects of civil society, and as a powerful international network of private sector actors and organizations, sport opens new avenues for creative partnerships through which to achieve the United Nations development goals” (UN, 2003, p.5).

Whilst it can be argued that the UN agenda on sport for development and peace are mere rhetorics that may not be achievable within the boarder context of the 2015 target set for achievement of the MDGs, it is pertinent to examine the extent to which such statements at the international level could translate to practical realities at regional and community levels. These recent developments and expectations from the international community have far

reaching implications for development of physical education curriculum in higher educational institutions. For physical education and sport to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development learning experiences and resources needed to achieve this aim should be developed. In this context, it is important to draw a distinction between two contrasting terms that are often confusing when interpreted literally; i.e. sport for development or development through sport and sport development. Whilst the former two terms can be used interchangeably as reflecting the role of sport in facilitating human development when viewed from a broader context as defined by the UN for example, the latter describes the planned processes and activities, e.g. through sport science targeted at achieving excellence in sport (Magurie, 2006). Therefore, in this study, the concept of development through sport or sports for development i.e. *plus sport* rather than sport development is emphasized. Interestingly, the development issues that are central to the UN's MDGs, such as civil strife, human right violations, poverty, gender inequality, HIV/AIDS and the reduction of major diseases are probably more

pertinent to African countries than other regions of the world. It is therefore critical that the training we give our students in physical education more directly address these global concerns.

At the International Conference on Sport and Development (2006) organized by the University of the Western Cape, South Africa from 9-12 April, a number of presenters highlighted the urgent need to develop learning resources in this area as part of the physical education curriculum. This view was popularly shared by participants who acknowledged the lack of emphasis on development in contemporary school physical education programme. In addition to addressing the MDGs more effectively such inclusion will help to develop the relevant attitudes, knowledge and skills in learners and consequently provide sound professional basis for more informed judgment in designing and implementing sustainable sport-related development initiatives.

Issues concerning sport for development and peace are relatively new in physical education and research evidence on the impact and sustainability of initiatives in this area is very scarce. Recent publications in this area have stressed the

need for more emphasis on development issues (e.g. Auweele et al., 2006). Many programmes in physical education and sport studies in African countries are however, focused on addressing traditional career needs in the broad sub-disciplines of sport science, sports coaching, health education, sport management, recreation and leisure management, and rehabilitation (Amusa & Toriola, 2003). Curriculum offerings regarding sustainable development and peace have rarely been included in physical education programmes. Additionally, previous attempts to address the UN's MDGs through physical education and sports in many countries have been carried out on adhoc and fragmented bases.

In contemporary physical education and school sports programmes, for example, concepts concerning HIV/AIDS are either taught as part of courses in health education or life skills or through role modeling strategies in which outstanding sports personalities take messages concerning prevention of the pandemic to children and youth in various settings.

However, many questions remain unanswered, e.g. how can one reliably measure the impact of such initiatives? How can sport programmes be effectively designed to directly address development issues? What items of knowledge in other disciplines, such as anthropology, social-psychology, political science, international relations, management and indeed religion and culture are needed to complement physical education and sport studies in achieving this goal? Probably, a multidimensional but integrated curriculum would be a more viable option.

A number of 'positive' initiatives which have also been implemented mainly by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (e.g. Mthare Youth Sports Programme in Kenya) are often criticized as unsustainable and fraudulent. This is partly due to the fact that many people who embark on such initiative are not well trained to face its challenges. Some NGOs soon fade out after a few years of their establishment or do not present properly audited accounts. These trends therefore, suggest that a gap exists between the expectations of the UN in terms of sustainable development on one hand and how graduates of physical

education and sports studies in universities are prepared to meet these contemporary needs on the other.

Therefore, this study was primarily designed to investigate the extent to which lecturers in Nigeria believe that concepts on the MDGs should be integrated into the physical education programme. A secondary purpose of the research was to determine from the lecturers' perspective, the potential constraints to implementing initiatives aimed at revising existing physical education programmes or designing new ones to accommodate the MDGs. Nigeria has had a long tradition of teaching physical education; the curriculum of which was initially based on the British 1933 syllabus but has since been significantly revised in the last twenty years. Physical education is widely taught at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels in the country and is compulsory in the junior secondary schools. In Nigeria sport is managed at the policy development level by the Ministry of Sports and Social Development, while the National Sports Commission (NSC) implements sports promotion and development initiatives at the operational level.

There are also sports councils in the 36 states of the federation and the federal capital territory, Abuja, who cooperate with the NSC to promote sports at the grassroots level. A number of the key players in Nigerian sports administration at both operational and managerial levels are physical education graduates. There other private initiatives in the country, especially by non-governmental organisations and philanthropists such as Football College of Generationnext and Search and Groom which are aimed at using sports as a vehicle for development.

As the most populous African nation with an estimated 140million people, Nigeria is a potentially rich country having over 40 billion American dollars in foreign reserve. However, after 46 years of independence from England, the country has continued to face considerable health and socioeconomic challenges such as rampant poverty and unemployment, repressive military regimes and high rates of HIV/AIDS infection; all of which are counterproductive to sustainable development. It is therefore apt to investigate development issues within the context of physical education in Nigeria.

This study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

Analyse the views of Nigerian university lecturers concerning the significance and need to teach concepts on sports and development which address the UN's MDGs in contemporary physical education programme. More specifically, the issues concern the following: gender equality, HIV/AIDS, human rights issues, volunteerism, peace building, citizenship, social mobilization, bridging ethnic, language and cultural divides, environmental conservation, poverty alleviation and social responsibility.

Examine the physical education lecturers' opinion regarding the feasibility of teaching development through sports as a specialization in contemporary physical education programme.

METHODS

Research design

A survey design was used for data collection. This included questionnaire administration and structured interviews.

Target sample

The population of the study comprised all 15 Nigerian universities offering physical education at the undergraduate level. Of these, the information obtained from a target sample of 11 universities was included in the analysis. Specifically, they were Lagos State University, University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, University of Calabar, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Ilorin, University of Maiduguri, Bayero University, Kano, University of Benin, Benue State University, Makurdi and University of Calabar. The physical education coordinators in the various departments at these universities provided information for the study. They had considerable experience in programme development and implementation; and had been teaching at the university level for at least five years.

Data collection procedure and analysis

Data were collected and analysed using qualitative research techniques. Telephonic interviews were undertaken when it was not feasible to conduct face-to-face interviews with the respondents. A 21-item questionnaire which contained both open- and close-ended items was

designed to evaluate the lecturers' views on the relevance of incorporating concepts on the MDGs in physical education. Specifically, the questionnaire covered the following areas: Awareness of the UN's MDGs, whether sport and development should be a specialization in physical education and present a viable career option for graduates in the field, availability of expertise in the area of sport and development, how learners' skills in sport and development should be assessed and the adequacy of teaching and learning resources for sport and development. Other areas covered included critical constraints to teaching sport and development in physical education, preferred teaching methods for teaching concepts in sports and development, suggested statutory time allocation for teaching sport and development concepts, the importance of sport and development compared to other traditional courses in physical education, like sports science, sports management and biomechanics, the perceived role of experiential learning or practical attachment in teaching sport and development as a physical education course and policy trajectory, i.e. the extent to which policies designed at the inter-governmental level, such as the

MDGs, is implemented at the community level.

Before the actual study was conducted, a pilot test was undertaken to validate the research instruments. The questionnaire and interview guide were content validated through a peer review process by specialists in curriculum development and qualitative research at Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa. Expert comments received were subsequently used to modify the initial draft of the questionnaire before actual data collection. Significantly positive test-retest reliability coefficients (Pearson's correlation) were obtained for the questionnaire at an interval of two weeks (i.e. 0.87-0.95; $p < 0.0001$).

The interview guide included items meant to confirm the consistency of responses provided in the completed questionnaires. It contained the following issues: the needs which guide physical education programme development and revision, modality for incorporating the MDGs into existing physical education programme, how perceived constraints to sport and development in physical education can be averted, how the outcomes of teaching sport and development should be

evaluated, the importance of ethics in teaching sports and development and issues concerning policy trajectory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presented in this section of the report are the contextualized responses of the Nigerian physical education lecturers to the questionnaires and interviews. All the universities which participated in this study offered physical education at the Bachelor's degree level. Only four of the 11 coordinators admitted knowing about the MDGs and the potential role of physical education and schools sport in achieving them. The lecturers were unanimous in their opinion that sport and development should form a specialization in physical education because it has the potential to create a viable career opportunity for university graduates. They were also keen to introduce new concepts related to the MDGs in existing physical education programmes if given the opportunity. The lecturers were however, divided in their opinion concerning whether or not their departments had the necessary expertise to effectively teach concepts in sport and development.

This contradictory response could be attributed to the probability that the lecturers were uncertain about the requirements for specializing in sport and development. When this issue was further clarified during the interviews, it became apparent that many of them were in doubt and conceded that physical education lecturers need to be retrained to effectively handle this emerging specialization. Typical responses in this context were:

“If that is what it involves we need to even re train physical education lecturers to be able to teach both the theory and practical aspects very well” and “okay, I didn’t know that. I think that we need experts in that area.”

Concerning how the concepts and skills on sport and development in physical education should be assessed, the lecturers were consistent in their opinion that this should take the form of formative and summative evaluation in tests, assignments and examinations. Only one of the respondents suggested that the weighting of theory to practical aspects should be 30-70%, since emphasis should be placed more on practical than theory components. Other forms of assessment like portfolio evaluation, project assessment, class presentations and seminars were not

mentioned by the respondents. In terms of didactics, preferred teaching methods in the lecturers’ view included the traditional lecture, practical, internship and demonstration techniques.

It was of interest to this study to find out the potential constraints for incorporating and teaching development concepts in physical education. The lecturers consistently rated teaching and learning resources as the greatest threat to successfully implementing this initiative.

Common responses on this issue were:

“the department may require assistance in developing facilities and new curriculum for the programme”, “facilities, equipment and supplies need to be improved upon in terms of adequacy” and “the resources are outdated and obsolete.”

The lecturers were also asked to suggest the optimum time allocation for teaching development-related concepts in physical education. Their responses varied from 4 to 12 hours per week. Although this may not be realistic given the limited time available to teach other pertinent theory and practical components of physical education and in view of the prescribed maximum workload that students can take, it confirms the lecturers’ enthusiasm and importance attached to sport and

development issues.

When asked to rate the importance of sport and development concepts in comparison to other specializations in physical education, the lecturers consistently agreed that other specialisations in physical education such as sports science and management are perceived as more important and relevant to current career aspirations than development issues. This finding is interesting given the importance attached to the MDGs by the UN. This suggests that decisions taken at intergovernmental level do not often filter through to the grassroots for effective implementation. This issue was also followed up in the interview sessions and it was clarified that the country's representation in many international sport and physical education conferences where policy decisions are taken are usually politicians who care less about disseminating vital information to universities. Universities are important stakeholders in policy implementation because they are suitably positioned to carry out appropriate curriculum revision and feasible implementation strategies in the context of prevailing local socioeconomic and cultural realities, and

diversities. Some of the lecturers remarked as follows:

“the people who represent us at the conferences do not know anything about sports, they are not professionals,” “people are simply hand picked based on their contacts and don't report back after the conferences” and “we don't have information on sports and development. We will appreciate it if you can send us information so that we can discuss it at the national executive meeting of NAPHER SD. Our professional association can then find out from government what they are doing about it.”

The issue of policy trajectory when viewed in the context of implementing policies of the UN on sport and development at community level indicates a migratory shift from the statutory decisions by the UN (UN, 2003). The fact that some of the lecturers did not know about sport and development as well as the implications of the potential role of physical education in realizing the MDGs is a matter of grave concern. Unless deliberate actions are taken to ensure reliable implementation of the UN's agenda at the community level and more specifically at the tertiary institution level, the feasibility of achieving the MDGs among other approved policies of the UN will be significantly jeopardized.

For physical education specialists to adequately meet the challenges posed by the achievement of the MDGs they should be adequately prepared. Learning resources should be developed to equip the students with relevant knowledge and skills to implement sport and development initiatives successfully. Implementation of sport and development programmes should not be based on trial and error. Rather, it should be well planned, sequential and testable in terms of evaluating its impact, i.e. the extent to which defined outcomes have been achieved. Above all, it should be based on a solid foundation of a systematic body of knowledge and proven practice just like other existing physical education specializations.

CONCLUSION

The present findings showed that while Nigerian physical education lecturers emphasized the importance of achieving the MDGs through physical education, they were consistent in their view that more teaching and learning resources would be needed to realize this goal. The lecturers also unanimously admitted that they lacked information on the MDGs and the potential role of physical

education in facilitating the achievement of the goals. This result implicates the existence of a gap between policies designed at inter-governmental levels and its actual implementation at grassroots level. Guidelines to ensure policy implementation at community levels are needed if the achievement of the UN's development goals through sport and physical education would be a reality. Perhaps an initial step could be that the UN formulates such strategies through its agencies, like UNESCO and in collaboration with other organisations such as the International Council for Sports Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE). This would guide the design of new physical education programmes in this emerging specialisation or lead to appropriate revision of existing programmes in schools so that students will be exposed to requisite learning experiences and be adequately prepared to design, and implement MDG-related development projects at community and national levels.

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