



## **How Sports Can Build Peace in Troubled Communities**

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Sports is beneficial to all.

The definition of sports usually refers to the activities that foster physical fitness and mental health and is suitable to people of all ages and abilities. This physical fitness and mental health can be achieved when we participate in the various sectors of sports. Competitive sports involve values - teamwork, fairness, discipline, and respect for the opponent.

The contribution of sports in peace building in troubled communities cannot be over emphasized at the community level. At the community level sports has the unique power to attract, mobilize and create an atmosphere where people can come together and work together towards the same goal and show respect to one another. Sports can contribute to development, create jobs, support the economy and promote gender equality.

The UN General Secretary, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, said that, "Sports has become a world language, a common denominator that breaks down all the walls, all the barriers. It is a worldwide industry whose practices can have a widespread impact. Most of it all, it is a powerful tool for progress and development".

Some communities in some countries have been experiencing conflicts since they gained independence, and these particular conflicts have not been resolved; even politicians and diplomats find it difficult to solve these conflicts. Such conflicts usually arise due to discrimination, intolerance, tribalism etc. And when these conflicts occur many lives are lost, property destroyed, and there is the retardation of growth and development. However, through sporting activities all these conflicts can be reduced to help build peaceful communities. Sports can be a powerful tool for building peace. A Nigerian organisation, Peace Initiative (pin) is using sports to teach young people tolerance, co-operation and respect.

Sporting activities like football can serve as a weapon to replace the various weapons like the AK47 guns which are used in killing during conflict times. Some countries have accepted sporting activities as a cultural symbol which is used in bringing individuals of that particular community or country together. For example, a study on the case of football in Liberia, a West African country with its own dreadful story of civil war, shows that football is considered as a "neutral" pursuit - a common cultural property unspoiled by war". During the civil conflicts, football tournaments were considered the only occasions that produced a sense of national unity.

Globally, it is known that the general public, armed forces and all lovers of peace are putting measures in place to help build peace in troubled communities but are finding it difficult to rebuild

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the bridge of peace. So the question is: how can sports succeed when all the above-mentioned have failed in their area of specialization? The answer is simple: generally, sports displays factors that can serve as building blocks in building the much needed peace.

Let's take an example with one of the factors that cause troubles in community and how sports can help build peace – racial discrimination. Racial discrimination refers to the situation where a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation because of their race, colour, or ethnic origin.

Apart from racial discrimination, tribalism is recognized as one of the factors that brews trouble in communities and distracts peace. Tribalism is known as the possession of a strong ethnic identity or cultural belief that separates group from the members of another group. Tribalism is a very major problem in Africa. It is causing Africa not to develop. In the 2007 political elections, approximately one thousand three hundred (1300) innocent lives were lost in Kenya because of tribalism. Tribal issues are one of the issues that are difficult to solve in most countries. It is an issue that serves as a burden for most governments. Sports can be used as a tool to reduce the rate of tribalism in our communities. For instance, people of different ethnic groups have been studied to have the passion for football games. So taking football into consideration, tournaments can be organised for two ethnic groups. For example, in the upper eastern part of Ghana there are many tribal problems. Among the many conflicting tribes are the Mamprusis and the Kusasis. Football tournaments can be organised for these two tribes to play in their municipal town and during these games players from both sides of the tribal divide can be placed on the same team and spectators can put out their differences and come together to support their teams. After the game, people can be lectured on peace quotes and messages from famous people and messages on the effects of tribalism can be delivered out. At the end, through sports, people, especially the youth, would have picked up some values of sportsmanship, teamwork, respect and communication skills needed to reduce tension and prevent conflict.

The commonwealth games which is about to be held in Scotland can serve as one of the ways through which respect for human rights can be promoted to help build peace in troubled nations.

In conclusion, sport has been recognised as a powerful tool for preventing conflicts and promoting peaceful co-existence in the society. Sports can also serve as a conflict prevention measure, helping to forestall the process that leads to the generation of aggression, hatred and fear which are the key ingredients of conflicts. In the light of the above, sporting activities like football, hockey ball, volley ball and among others can be used to help build peace in troubled communities.

We have one country and one peace. If we lose this peace, we have nowhere to run to so let us all maintain the peace we have to build a peaceful country for the next generation to come.

This essay is dedicated to communities and countries currently facing issues such as racial discrimination, tribalism and many other problems which lead to retardation of progress and development of their various communities and countries. I am Mildred from Ghana, West Africa and I believe that sport can be a key to building peace in troubled communities of our world.