



CASTLE THINK PIECE

COVID-19: OPPORTUNITY TO THRIVE:

SPORTS AND RECREATION

Presented by

MR. FRED BARUNGI

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Every sector without exception has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Sports and Recreation industry has not been spared with major events being variously cancelled, played without audiences or deferred with uncertainty. The impact has been felt on globally as well as domestically. The most prominent sporting event so far affected is the 2020 Tokyo Olympics which was deferred to July 2021.

In Uganda, as at September 2020, sports is still effectively under lockdown. This has had a devastating impact on associations, clubs, sports personnel, sports academies, fans and enterprises involved in the sports value chain. Prominent among these are recreational outfits (e.g. gymnasiums). Games such as soccer have been played without audiences, athletics meetings have been put on hold and overall, the activity channels for contact sports have been closed.

Community and family based sports and recreation have been limited to the confines of the physical environment and therefore highly curtailed. Children have been at home for over 5 months, and those in the urban areas are living a sedentary life focusing on online classes and watching TV, while adults have lost access to the benefits of gymnasia. The negative effects of such inactivity if prolonged include a “conducive” environment for non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

The above situation has not however spelt total gloom and doom, with positive episodes such as Ugandan athletes still participating and excelling in global events (Joshua Cheptegei broke the 5,000m world record in Monaco in August 2020, while Jacob Kiplimo set a new record for Uganda by winning the Wanda Diamond League 3000m race in September 2020).

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Classification

Broadly sports can be divided into two categories:-

- a. **Recreation sports** – This covers competitive sports used for personal fitness, fun and health including Physical Education, Health and Fitness programmes in gymnasiums and sports clubs as well as other activities like walking, cycling, mountain climbing, etc.
- b. **Elite sports** - This covers professional sports and involves identifying talent and nurturing it to the highest level. The elite pathway normally starts at school level with inter school competitions and sports academies and goes through to amateur, semi professional and professional clubs (local and



international) climaxing with national team appearances (caps) at international events like the FIFA World Cup and Olympics.

- c. A relatively new concept of **Sports for Development (S4D)** has recently emerged where sports is used as a platform to deliver a social goal under the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

2.2 Governance

2.2.1 Ministry of Education and Sports

Sports in Uganda is managed by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) under the Department for Physical Education and Sports (PES). MOES mainly focuses on developing and promoting elite sports as is reflected by the budget allocation to sports facilities (stadia), educational institutions, sports competitions and the National Council of Sports (NCS) activities (soccer and athletics taking 90%).

The mandate of PES Department is to develop, and coordinate all physical education and sports activities in the country. The department has a policy document with clearly laid out roles and key functions. The department has clear plans for capacity building for PES teachers, equipping sports schools, developing a PES website for e-learning, develop a national sports data bank, rehabilitate regional stadia among others. However, budget allocation to this PES sub sector does not enable effective implementation of the policy provisions. In addition, the Department is very small with only 9 members of staff to handle PES for the whole country. These include a Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner, Senior Education officer, Education Officer, Personal secretary and four support staff. This poses a great challenge to development of sports in the country.

The MOES is also mandated to promote physical education (PE), which is a foundation for all sports and is supposed to be mandatory in weekly programs of all schools. However, it is estimated that less than 10% of schools actually conduct PE classes.

2.2.2 National Council of Sports

The National Council of Sports (NCS) supports the MOES, which is among other things charged with the development, promotion and control of sports activities on behalf of Government. The National Council of Sports was set up as a statutory organ whose establishment, status and powers are enshrined under the NCS Act of 1964. Its role is to develop, promote and control sports activities on behalf of the Government, under the Ministry of Education and Sports. The NCS, which is linked to the Supreme Council for Sports in Africa (SCSA) and other relevant sports organizations, serves as the regular and apex organisation that coordinates



all sports activities in the country, in conjunction with National Sports Associations/Federations. The NCS mandate involves developing and promoting all forms of sports, facilitate cooperation among various national sports associations, approve national and international sports competitions and plan the general policy of sports promotion. It currently manages 48 sports associations in Uganda.

2.2.3 The Uganda Olympic Committee

The Uganda Olympic Committee acts as an agent of the International Olympic Committee and Commonwealth Games Federation in Uganda. Its role is to uphold and promote Olympic and Commonwealth ideals and to its affiliates and stakeholders by providing support to organize national teams to participate in Olympic and Commonwealth games.

2.2.4 The Private Sector

The private sector is mainly involved in promoting recreational sports commercially. Various gymnasiums, swimming pools and six-a-side football arenas have come up attracting large numbers of people. However, the country is still very short of well equipped sports facilities for the average Ugandan. Furthermore, there is no national push to encourage the participation of sports amongst the public. As a result, recreational sport is still relatively underdeveloped and underfunded.

2.3 Laws, Policies

The Ministry of Education and sports is responsible for policies and regulation of sports in Uganda. However, most of the MOES policies emphasise education and little attention is paid to sports. The primary legislation that governs sports is the National Council of Sports Act of 1964 and the National Council of Sports Regulations, 2014. The main policy relating to sports is the National Physical Education and Sports Policy whose main goals and objectives are to:

- a. Improve planning, management and administration of physical education and sports in the country;
- b. Improve access to and the quality of physical education and sports in the country; and
- c. Develop a cadre of high performing national athletes on a sustainable basis.



2.4 The History and State of Sports

Ugandans are naturally endowed with key attributes for sporting ability, with the conversion to actual success being premised on training and facilities. From as far back as pre- independence, Ugandans have excelled when they have been given the required support and exposed to the world of international sports. However, despite that early promise, Uganda only earned its first gold medal in 1974 in the 400 meters hurdles won by the late John Akii Bua. Soon after that the national soccer team, the Uganda Cranes, narrowly lost the top African football crown in the 1978 Africa Cup of Nations finals. This golden period of the 1970s where the country invested heavily in sports was followed by almost 2 decades of diminished sporting glory. It was largely only soccer, boxing and cricket in which the country continued to register a modicum of desirable results.

Today, elite sports are on the rise again with a good string of performances in soccer, athletics, netball, rugby, swimming, chess, golf and basketball. In the last 5 years Uganda's accolades have included:

- winning 6 medals at the Commonwealth games;
- breaking world records in 1,500 metres;
- qualifying for the Soccer Africa Cup of Nations twice after over 30 years absence;
- Africa Netball champions for 2 years;
- qualifying for the Netball World cup where the She Gazelles finished 6th;
- representing Africa in Rugby at the Olympic games:
- Rugby Sevens Africa Champions twice:
- featuring in World swimming championships, and
- becoming regional champions in Golf and swimming among others.

All this success can be attributed to some level of stability, good planning and sustained investment in these sports through the associations (financially and organisationally) with most getting fully affiliated to their international bodies. All these associations hold regular national fixtures (competitions at all age levels) even though many of the competitions are limited to Kampala. There have also been some notable developments in the leadership and governance of sports for instance in the NCS Board which is composed of enlightened and seasoned personalities from within the sports fraternity.

That said, a lot more work needs to be done to bring all the associations to the same level as many associations are struggling with governance and operational issues. Furthermore, investment is urgently required in infrastructure. To date Uganda only has one high performance centre (FUFA) with a second one specifically for long distance athletics in Kapchorwa still under construction after



5 years. All the other associations have to rely on goodwill from private service providers to prepare their national teams for international competitions.

Furthermore, many schools, especially the private schools have no space for sports and do not conduct the mandatory weekly physical education sessions. The few government supported schools with facilities have failed to maintain them and are beginning to lose them to unscrupulous businessmen. The culture of sports is not strong with very few people including those in high places appreciating its importance and contribution to development of society. This is a particularly missed opportunity when contrasted with the euphoria for a national identity Ugandans exhibit around national teams or athletes playing in international tournaments.

3.0 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SPORTS IN UGANDA

COVID-19 has had very adverse effects on Sports in Uganda and worldwide. The introduction of social distancing as one of the means to reduce the spread of the virus has meant that crowds are not allowed in sports arenas as thus affecting one of the key aspects of sports: the crowds/fans. Even sports which do not draw crowds like chess and other board games have been affected by travel restrictions posed by COVID-19. The Government announced a country-wide lock down in March 2020 in which all sports activities were banned, schools were closed and there was a 7 week ban on transport. This had far-reaching effects, some of which were immediately realized while others will be felt in the long term.

3.1 Gaps Exposed By The Pandemic

The COVID 19 epidemic also exposed gaps in the sports industry. These include lack of **E-Sports** and equipment for home recreation, which would have been a good alternative during the country lock-down. With limited numbers of people owning televisions, e-learning which could have enabled participation in PE was limited.

3.2 Negative Effects

3.2.1 Stopping Of Physical Education

This was an immediate effect of the closure of schools. It was closely followed by a ban on jogging on public roads due to the buildup of crowds. Those who used to go to gyms could not go since they were closed. All school sporting academies are still closed so there is lack of training for a long period which affects development of sports personalities.

3.2.2 Financial Loss And Distress For Sports Associations And Sports People

The prolonged cancellation or postponement of sports competitions is likely to



have a negative effect on cash flows to sports associations and governance bodies, precipitating financial distress. This will also likely affect sponsors, many of who are already grappling with a depressed business environment.

Absence of sporting competitions has already affected the income of sports people and personnel involved in sports including coaches, and support staff who depend on gate and entry fees. The government also made losses because no taxes have been collected from sports activities like games or recreational activities such as sports betting.

3.2.3 Increase in Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs):

Long term effects of the pandemic include prolonged inactivity which could engender conditions for an increase in non-communicable diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease and other associated health challenges. It could also be argued that the positive contribution of sports to mental health, meaningful interactions and relaxation has been curtailed. It is notable that the Police reported an increase in domestic violence during lock down.

3.2.4 Loss Of Talent

If the pandemic is prolonged, it could affect upcoming young sports persons in the pipeline because of the long period without training and participating in sports.

3.2.5 Loss of Accolades

Due to lack of competition, many trophies have been missed at a national and international level.

4.0 OPPORTUNITIES:

4.1 New Business Models and Approaches

There are opportunities to explore new models for business and income generation. This could include emphasis on making a digital shift in advertising, seeking diversification of products and services for endorsement by sports people, activating fan clubs and merchandising opportunities, and migration of paid services by gymnasiums to virtual channels such as Youtube and Zoom, or through home and community visits.

Adapting seating/viewing in stadia within the scope of social distancing, at special rates for those who can afford it, pending the resumption of full scale lifting of restrictions should be considered.



4.2 E-Sports

Development of **E-Sports** in Uganda, and adapting or simplifying it to also cater for community or non-professional games should also now be undertaken.

4.3 Advocacy

Enhancing the practical application of the concept of **Sports and Development**, especially in the COVID-19 context. With the relevant partnerships, sports associations and personalities could be vocal advocates for issues such as COVID-19 safety initiatives, combating gender based violence, education, mental health, physical activity, support for the disabled and other causes. This could be sponsored.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

An overall observation is that the Sports and Recreation sector needs enhanced funding to draw out the country's best potential in sports. This includes and exceeds enhancing the Government's contribution, it calls for creative collaborations with the corporate and non-governmental sectors. The following are suggested recommendations to improve the status of Sports and Recreation in Uganda notwithstanding the disruptions of COVID-19:

5.1 Lifting Ban on Sports

A holistic approach to identify aspects of sports activity where restrictions can be lifted with the observance of pre-agreed SoPs through collaboration between the Sports and Recreation sector and the Government.

5.2 E Sports

More emphasis should be put on **E-Sport** which is a growing trend with potential for commercial success – This can be achieved through:-

- i. Learning from countries such as South Africa that have advanced in the practice of E-Sports
- ii. Educating the public on the approach and the opportunities therein.

5.3 Adopting New Approaches and Business Models

Adopting new business models and benchmarking fund raising methods that have worked for successful associations outside Uganda for the benefit of local sporting associations.

- a) Emphasis should be placed on building and monetising fan-base loyalty for instance as has been achieved with fans of the English Premier League (football).



- b) A percentage of betting taxes collected should be ring fenced and spent on development of sports with focus on special projects outside the budget.
- c) Seeking partnerships to enhance funding to the “smaller” associations so that beyond soccer more disciplines can be developed.
- d) Promoting and creating public awareness for all national teams beyond soccer, athletics and to a lesser extent netball which are the known teams. This should be with a view to drumming up a fan base as an incentive for sponsored partnerships.
- e) Ministry of Education needs to go into public private partnerships with developers or sports organisations for ground lease arrangements for community sports.

5.4 Corporate Involvement

Government should explore the feasibility of encouraging more corporate involvement through incentives like tax waivers. The Ministry of Education and Sports should seek public private partnerships with private citizens, developers or sports organisations for ground lease arrangements for community sports to allow areas with limited space to access decent facilities on a regular basis.

5.5 Identifying New Talent

Empowerment of associations to sustain regional links around the country to identify and develop talented sports people at the grassroots level who are far from Kampala which is the epicenter of sporting activity, should be considered.

5.6 Advocacy

A deliberate coordinated effort should be led by the MOES or NCS to address negative or lukewarm perceptions about the sporting industry in order to increase awareness, and appreciation of sports as a national priority. It should be noted that while Ugandans are aware about soccer and athletics there is not much awareness or interest in the rest of the sporting disciplines and how they are governed.

Addressing the varied perceptions and information gaps need to be done so that the opportunities are enhanced for all disciplines to attract fans, partners, sponsors and players.

Elimination of information asymmetry by ensuring that the roles of various stakeholders in sports are clear and transparent through publicly available rules of engagement. It should be noted that over the past several years the sector’s reputation has suffered through controversies that are difficult to decipher in the



public domain because of the apparent disconnect of sports as a governed discipline from public awareness. Stakeholders should be known and held to publicly available codes of conduct to improve trust and perceptions.

5.7 Schools

The new lower secondary schools curriculum should enforce the sports component.

5.8 Emphasis on Health and Fitness

Government should enhance its visibility in encouraging health and fitness through sports and recreation by being more vocal and demonstrative about it, and sending out positive messages on sports. It can also be included on the e-learning programmes currently being televised.

Uganda Land Commission and City and Municipal authorities led by the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) should allocate and gazette specific space as green spaces for free sports.



6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, COVID-19 has negatively affected the Sports and Recreation sector more than any other since it has been locked down for the longest time. It has affected the sports people psychologically, economically, physically and socially. Sports clubs, organisations, and sports fans have also been affected financially. Every individual in the society is affected since the increased level of inactivity posed by the restrictions brought about by the pandemic leads to physical or mental health issues ailments. All these depict the value of sports in the society. On the other hand, this situation provides an opportunity to appreciate the benefits of sports and find new ways of ensuring that sports takes its well deserved place in our lives, since it is now established that COVID-19 will be around for some time. It is also an opportune time to prepare for any future disaster or pandemics so that we are not caught offguard like happened this time.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to the expert contributions from the distinguished paned gathered here.



ABOUT CASTLE

The Centre for Advanced Strategic Leadership (CASTLE) is a non-profit think tank that has been established to provide research and consultancy towards approaches for addressing challenges to Africa's advancement. CASTLE is a product of the Institute for National Transformation (INT), a leadership training institution in Africa, which has since 2005 been developing transformational leaders who are serving society in a variety of sectors. INT is headquartered in Nigeria and operates in Uganda, Kenya, South Africa and Cote d'Ivoire. INT also has training centres in the United Kingdom and the United States of America for reaching out to the African diaspora. CASTLE complements INT by providing a practical platform to offer tailored interventions to specific issues that will be identified across the African continent.

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FOR INFORMATION CONTACT

CASTLE

Krish Mall 1st Floor, Unit 13.
Spring Road Bugolobi,
Kampala Uganda

connect@castlethinktank.org

WWW.CASTLETHINKTANK.ORG



