

THE ROLE OF SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN CURBING CULTISM AMONG YOUTHS IN EDO STATE

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Abstract

The youth are seen as the life wire of a nation since the future development of the nation depends on them. This crucial role of the youth in Edo State is threatened by the increasing rate of youth involvement in cultism. This situation then demands an urgent solution as many lives are lost on daily basis. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to discuss how the active participation of the youths in sporting activities can help in curbing the issue of cultism, producing strong, disciplined, and responsible youth capable of ensuring societal development and shunning all means of hooligans. The paper attempts to conceptualize youth; it also elucidates the need for youth's participation in sporting activities. It finally discusses the issue of sporting programmes for youth development and curbing cultism. Suggestions have also been offered in order to ensure that the sport programme or activities are properly planned in a way that the purpose desired can be achieved.

Keywords: *Cultism, Youths, Sports*

Introduction

Edo state is a state in the south-south region of Nigeria with a population of about three million, where most youths are vulnerable to the act of cultism. In Nigeria, the youths are generally referred to as the leaders of tomorrow. They are also seen as the life wire of the nation. This is because

the future of the nation depends on them. Youths in Edo State are expected to take over from the adults as they bow out in the management of affairs of the state. It is remarkable that for the state to develop and change for good, it must evolve changes that involve the youth as a whole.

The development of the youths is, therefore, imperative in empowering and equipping them for the task of the future leadership of the state and the country in general. This means that youths who lack courage, stamina and skills are dangers to the community, the state and the nation at large. Hence, the youths are encouraged to develop strength, endurance, ability and skills needed to withstand the rigors of adult life through sports. Nevertheless, the cases of youth involvement in the act of cultism in Edo state are increasing every day. This therefore poses a very serious problem to the future development of the state. Many lives are lost on daily basis, some youths have left the community because of the fear of been hurt or killed by other members, some have left their work, school, future dreams in order for them to be safe. This situation, therefore, demands an urgent solution in building a virile personality trait in our youths for national development. This state of affairs is, therefore, a development that calls for serious and urgent concern, hence this present paper. In making its contributions, this paper seeks to examine the concept of youths, cultism and its causes among youths, the need for youth participation and the benefit in sporting activities in curbing youth involvement in cultism.

The Concept of Youths

The concept of "Youth" has been the subject of different interpretations. In other words, it is often looked at from different perspectives. Hence, Konopka cited in Uzor (2010), notes that youth is an alternative word to scientifically oriented adolescent and the common terms of teen

and teenager. All over the world, the word youth is often used interchangeably with related concepts such as adolescent, teenager, young person, as if they are synonymous. However, differentiated, the Webster's New World dictionary refers to youth as the time of life when one is young, especially (a) the period between childhood and maturity and (b), the early period of existence, growth or development. A youth, therefore, connotes a young person. One who is either in his early adulthood or middle adulthood or matured person. The variations in its usage show that youth covers a wide range of ages ranging from 15 to about 45 years. The Nigerian national youth policy (2009) defines youth as between 18 to 35 years. .

Concepts of Cultism

According to Adebayo (2019), cultism is a system or practice of a cult. Cult is a group of people with a religious philosophical or cultural identity sometimes viewed as a sect, often existing on the margins of society or exploitative towards its members. In the neighborhood, cultism is called Secret Cult where people come together to pledge their allegiance under an oath and have social bond of commitment and dedication for the good of the organisation. Members of this organisation carry out their meeting in the odd hours of the day when most people are not aware of it and most times far away from residential areas where people will not have access to them.

History of Cultism in Nigeria

According to Olaniyi (2017), the history of cultism can be traced back to 1952 when the Nobel Laureate Winner, Professor Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka and six

others formed the 'Pirate Confraternity' (a.k.a Sea Dogs). At that time, various schools of thought were developed, surrounding the actual aim and objective of founding the cult group. The pioneer and its members said it is a platform for the fight of human right and justice (activism) and it is void of evil. After some years, various other cult groups emerged such as Black Axe, Jezebel Daughters, Black Eye, Black Beret, Black Bra, Supreme Eiyee, Vikings, Aro Mates, Buccaneers amongst others whose activities suggest nothing but evil in the society. These cults groups share some features in common which are initiation of new members, ritual practices, oaths taking, and inscription of marks on their bodies, use of sign, symbols and colour. Their activities involved frequent violent clash among different cults groups which always lead to death or end in casualties, constant abuse of drugs, armed robbery, sexual assault, vandalisation, forceful intimidation of lecturers, community members, examination malpractices, harassment and bullying of others, assassination to mention but a few. Cultism is so rampant in schools all over the world, it is known to be at its peak in tertiary institutions but it is no more news that it has expanded its territories to secondary schools, primary schools and also the community members who are traders, craft men, business men and so on. As a matter of fact, innocent youths are being lured into the act and all other social vices.

Causes of Cultism among the Youth

In our present day, Cultism among youths has now become a thing to brag for among

counterparts, seeing others who do not belong to one group or the other been inferior or can be classified as a '*ju*'. In Nigeria at large, cultism among the youth is caused by different factors and the most common causes are as follows:

1. **Quest for power or social identity:** The major cause of cultism is the quest for power and social identity among colleagues in school. Many students become members of the cults because of their quest for power and authority. This is mostly common among those with the aim of fighting for their rights and other people's rights. Whereas, some others join cultism because they want to belong to a class or lifestyles higher to those of their peers. They desire to gain popularity, respect and admiration from opposite sex in an attempt to be called "big boy or "mean chick" in the school environment. In Nigerian universities and communities, the main reason why people become cultists is to fight those who oppress them, wicked lecturers, school authorities and torment from other cult members.
2. **Poor Parental Training:** The present day parenthood suffers a bridge of communication and intimacy with their wards (children) and this has led a lot of youths to cultism because most parents fail to inculcate norm, moral, value and discipline to their wards. Parents of this generation are too busy to have time for their

children, thereby exposing them to be vulnerable.

3. **Peer Pressure/Peer Group Influence:** This is one of the major causes of cultism. This is often seen in the universities and secondary schools where students relate with one another. To many youths, joining a secret cult was never their intention at a particular period of time, but due to the negative influence of friends, they ended up becoming cult members. Influence goes a long way in changing people's mindset, their behaviour and their ways of life. At the long run, addiction is inevitable to the likes of drug abuse, clubbing and gambling which are very difficult to break away from. Some youths that were forced to join cult groups find it difficult to break away because of death threat from such groups.
4. **Revenge:** So many youths are into cultism because of seeking revenge from someone in the past that offends them. Some victims of harassment, assault, rape, bullying, painful past and the likes see cultism as the only avenue for seeking revenge.
5. **Emotional Instability:** Many youths facing emotional instability which could be as a result of sickness or disease, demanding situations, joblessness, depression and melancholy seek solace in cultism with the intention of finding permanent solution to the problem with the new circle of

friends.

6. **Loneliness:** Just like depression finds solace in adventure, so also loneliness can take succor in the company of friends. Friends have great influence over each other just like influencing among peers. Unfortunately, most youths that are victims of such circumstance, end up finding themselves in the company of cult members as friends who do not just offer them friendship but also lure them into cultism.
7. **Use of Cultists by Politicians:** The use of cultists as thugs in the Nigerian politics is becoming alarming. Most cult groups in Nigeria do not operate without having sponsors that are politicians directly or indirectly. Most cult groups in the communities are financed by the politicians who are their patrons. These youths are used by the politicians, especially, during election period for assassination of their political opponents, snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation of electorates, or intimidation of electoral officers and so on. This gives members of the cult groups confidence to perpetrate their evil deeds.
8. **Drug Abuse:** The influence of drugs on youths makes them throw away their conscience to the wind. Drug users have clique of friends they move who are likely into one cult group or the other.
9. **Search for Protection:** Youths seek protection for the fear of the

unknown. They join a cult group believing that they are their brother's keepers. Youths, therefore, join cult groups for protection from harm or any form of harassment or intimidation. The sense of security offered to the members gives them boldness and confidence against any threat in any form.

The Need for Youths' Participation in Sporting Activities

The need for youths to be actively involved in sporting activities cannot be over emphasized. The benefits derivable from active participation in sports by individuals have been well and dully documented in the literature. In specific terms, the need to involve the youths in sports is traceable to the following:

- Participation in sports, leads to increase in glucose which makes the muscle cells more permeable to glucose, thereby lowering blood glucose level responsible for diabetes. This in the long run promotes healthy lifestyles.
 - Sporting activities help the youth to increase serum high density lipoproteins, decrease triglycerides level and reduce total body fat that can cause obesity (Okoedion and Igbudu, 2010). This no doubt will help the youths develop stamina, strength, ability needed to stand rigours of life.
 - Sporting activities also have the advantage of helping the youth reduce incidence of coronary heart
- diseases by increasing the pumping rate of blood from the heart through the vessels and thereby preventing blockage or clotting of the arteries. In other words, it can help to increase secretion and which will in turn enable them to remain strong, active, fit as well as improve their quality and productivity.
- Regular sporting activities can keep the youths busy and gainfully engaged. This has the advantage of taking them away from getting involved in the act of cultism, therefore, channeling their energies into productive activities. Idleness has been largely responsible for the increasing rate or incidence of youth's involvement in the act of cultism as illustrated in the adage that says "The idle mind is the devil's workshop." Through sports, they are able to properly channel their energies and thinking for the betterment of the society, state and the country at large.
 - Participation in sporting activity is more cost effective and substantive way of curbing youth's restiveness resulting to cultism. It is capable of promoting social cohesions, unity, cooperation, social integration, peace and harmony which are ingredients for social, economic and political development of any nation.
 - Participation in sporting activities does provide monetary incentives for the youths. This therefore,

helps in eradicating poverty and also making the youth fully engaged.

Curbing Cultism through Youth Sports Programmes in Edo State

Sporting programmes in Edo State has been fully internalized, revisit and established. The present administration in Edo State led by Governor Godwin Obaseki and his Deputy Comrade Philip Shaibu has really invested much in sport in the past 2 years and encouraging youth's participation and through this; the Bendel Insurance Football club was re-inaugurated after many years of abandonment. The foundation for this was laid by the inclusion of Physical Education at all levels of the education system following the promulgation of the National Policy on Education in 1977 and first revised in 1981. The promulgation and establishment of the sporting programme policy was accentuated by the world wide recognition of its role in preparing individuals to meet society's vigorous demand according to Mgbor and Ogbonna (2010) citing Schewer (2003).

Sporting programmes or activities are expected to provide avenues through which individuals or persons, regardless of age, gender, race, cultural background or ability, can acquire the necessary physical skills, mental development and social attitudes and orientations needed to attain optimal potentials in life. For instance, in the course of participation in sport, the youths are given orientation on the need to take seriously the task they are

involved in. This kind of orientation creates the understanding for hard work, seriousness, focus and enthusiasm. Besides, the task (sport programme) enables them burn out excess fat in their body, reduce weight which promote mental alertness and physical fitness. In this way, life surviving potentials are developed in the youths. It can also afford the individual youth the opportunity to develop the appropriate skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to live and maintain healthy lifestyles.

Furthermore, social, political and economic benefits have been ascribed to effective participation in sporting activities by individuals. In the sphere of social benefits, it affords the youths the opportunity of relating with other ethnic groups. They are able to build a harmonious relationship among themselves. The social interaction and network of the youths increases. This can lead to further benefit translating into more permanent relation. In this case, sport activities can serve as a 'pool of mating'. This means that two people can get to know themselves through such contacts and many. Politically, the youths can learn, more about political issues in the course of their interaction. During leisure or rest time, especially where they have to stay in the camp or hotel, they use such times to discuss other issues other than sports. One of such issues could be politics during which a number of revelations are made, information and clarification provided on certain political issues. Apart, from broadening their knowledge

politically, it can serve as a platform nurturing one's political interest.

Economically, through sporting activity, an athlete can gain information on better employment prospect also which he/she can explore for better living condition. Many athletes or sports men and women have had opportunities for better employments in the course of participating in one sporting activities or the other. Besides, some have also been able to secure jobs for their close acquaintances or relations as a result of their involvement in sports. Involvement in sports enables one to meet people who are well to do and captains of industries and renowned personalities. An athlete that can distinguish himself or herself, endears himself or herself to people. Such a person can explore the situation to generate employment for people. In addition, marketing of sporting equipment and other regalia promote their business and boost their sales by using renowned athletes for the advertisement of their products and goods. This helps to increase the income accruing to them, thereby raising their level of economic solvency. It is also considered a veritable instrument for improving the quality and productivity of the labour force. This is achieved by helping the worker to maintain healthy lifestyle or becoming healthy. If an individual is healthy, he will be able to go to work all the time and put his best at work. One thing that has greatly limited man work hour during his productive years, is illhealth. By helping the youth to

maintain good health, it increases the available hour for work and also raise the quality of work and the level of productivity of the individual. The situation makes the youths to be fully engaged and dedicated to work, thereby avoiding the temptation of getting involved in deviant behaviour. For these reasons, it was stated that it is an avenue for employment generation, creation of productive economic activities and fostering a peaceful environment (Ozathor, 2003).

Besides, sporting programmes or activities are regarded as a medium through which society can attain its political and socio-economic goals. There is no gainsaying the fact that games or sports can help enhance socialization of the Nigerian youths through comradeship and group interaction, cooperation, healthy competition or rivalry service to others among others. More importantly, it enables youths to release energy: by keeping them busy thereby, reducing the tendency for delinquency as they are positively engaged in sporting events or activity.

On the other hand, it is certain that youths or individuals during sporting activities can imbibe certain socially approved or desirable habits and virtues such as honesty, empathy and consideration for others (Okunbor and Awosika 2001). In this regard, people involved in sports are expected to be honest. Where a player has not done well or has done something that impacted negatively on his group performance, he/she is expected to be

honest enough to take responsibility and ask for forgiveness. When something happens to any sport person, other members in his group are expected to be empathic and identify with their member in that predicament. People are encouraged during sports activities to consider others, be empathic by always putting themselves in the position of others. In this way, people learn to live together as one and avoid doing the issue of delinquency.

Youth participation in sporting activities is aimed at enhancing social integration. It can discourage social cohesion and promote unity and national awareness. When youths from different ethnic groups come together in a sporting programme, intermarriage and mutual understanding develop thereby promoting national unity. In a way, the youths are able to contribute to national growth and stability. During sports activities, people are encouraged to work as a team in order to achieve their purpose of maiming laurel or prices. The team spirit created promotes unity among the members.

In football, the youths are made to understand that their success depends greatly on their ability to work effectively as a group. This develops in them the sense of oneness and unity. The group sees itself as one body, work cooperatively and collectively to achieve a common goal. This group works for the common good of their country and a sense or feeling of national awareness is also created. This makes the group to want to work hard to do their country proud. In this sense, a

national awareness is created because the members of the group see the situation or exercises as national assignment. To them therefore, it is a means of making their contributions to national growth, stability and development. The involvement of youths in different sporting activities or events allow them to manage their free time without constraints and channel their energies into productive ventures considering the fact that they are the most active segment of any society. Besides, a number of their character traits are also developed. It can ginger in them team spirit as it teaches them to put the interest of the group they represent before one's personal interest. It also serves as a forum for leadership training, respect for authority, loyalty, fair play, impartiality, selflessness, sportsmanship, forbearance as the youths are encouraged to train hard even when they feel like giving up. In the course of participating in sports activities, their thinking, attention and emotions are put into it. They are preoccupied with how to improve themselves and achieve their purpose. Their mind is focused on what they are doing. This enables them direct their energy towards training. When this becomes the case, energies are, therefore, channeled productively.

Furthermore, discipline and loyalty is developed in the youth because they are expected to remain loyal to their team manager or coach as the case may be. There have been instances, where players or an athlete is suspended or given one punishment

or the other as a means of correcting them and to deter others from doing the same. This promotes, discipline and loyalty among them. Even when an individual is losing or have the fear of not winning, they are encouraged in the name of sportsmanship not to be discouraged but remain undaunted and resilient. In group related sports activities, people remain committed to the goals of the group. They see the activities of the group as a course of action to which every member must remain committed. It is this sense of commitment, that gingers in them respect for constituted authority, loyalty, selflessness and forbearance. In the course of their orientation and training sessions, they are given necessary instruction and knowledge that will improve their performance and then chance of winning in any competition or sport event. During their period as active sports persons, they are able to gather the necessary knowledge, skills, values and competence needed to project maximally during sports events or activities or competition. In football for instance, many players who become leaders in the capacity of coaches or team managers had their initial training through this process. It is this training that they later build upon for improved or enhanced performance. This is the sense in which youths are afforded opportunity for leadership training.

Undoubtedly, the overall aim of encouraging youth's involvement in sporting events is to help solve some of

the problems of modern youths (cultism) by engaging them in purposeful physical activities like sports. Their effective or active participation can give them a sense of purpose in the way they spend their free or leisure time. When sport are properly organized and supervised, they can help prevent the act of cultism for the betterment of the larger society.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to look at the place of sports in curbing cultism among youths in Edo state. It has been established that the increasing rate of cultism among the youths in Edo state poses great danger to the development of the potential of the youths in particular, the state and the country in general in view of their future role as leaders. The study found that if sports are properly planned and organized like the NUGA games, it has the potentials of instilling in the youths discipline, strength, stamina, knowledge and skills needed to cope adequately with the rigours of life. More importantly, it can engage the youths to channel their energies into productive venture and take them away from every act of cultism.

Suggestions

In view of the foregoing, we wish to offer the following recommendations:

There is the need to encourage the youths to be actively involved in sporting activities. In this regard, the existing policy on sports participation by youths must be religiously pursued. To this end, the youths should be enlightened on the need to be actively

involved in sporting activities. In this case, the coaches and adult educators who are experts in adult methodology should collaborate to organize enlightenment programmes where the youths can be educated on the benefits of participating in sporting activities or the need to be actively involved in sporting activities. In this way, the interest would be deepened and would be encouraged to patronize sporting activities.

Furthermore, efforts should also be made to ensure that sporting activities become more attractive by providing all the facilities and equipment needed for meaningful training and participation in sports. When there **is** sporting equipment and people can easily access them for training it will help boost their morale and raise the zeal to maximize the opportunities provided for the development of their potentials and abilities. This will further spur them to be regular at training sessions and work hard to develop the knowledge and skills to excel in the games.

Finally, the youths, apart from being given conducive atmospheres to practice and train, must be granted unhindered access to the venue and facilities available for training exercise. However, they must be properly guided on the use of these facilities so as to prevent them from being damaged.

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