

## Strategies of Local Sports for Mitigating Conflict and Peacebuilding in Eastern Sokoto State, Nigeria

Ismaila A. Danjuma<sup>1\*</sup>, Muhammad T. Usman<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of History and International Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

**\*Corresponding Author:** Ismaila A. Danjuma

Department of Political Science, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

### Article History

Received: 06.11.2024

Accepted: 11.12.2024

Published: 19.12.2024

**Abstract:** Certainly, sports are activities that help individuals to achieve required fitness, stamina and strength in societies. Over the years, there has been increasing commitment by scholars of peace and security studies to explore the role of sports in conflict resolution, mitigation and peacebuilding process in communities affected by protracted hostilities. Different mechanisms have been developed by individuals and organizations to put sports at the centre stage of reconciliation process in conflict zones. Therefore, it can be argued that sports for reconciliation of conflict is an endeavor to make use of the instrument of sports to promote social inclusion and creating bridges between groups that are in confrontation with one another. In addition, it can be stated that sports can play important role through the promotion of friendship, tolerance, normalization of life and building resilience in individuals in communities affected by conflict. This study adopted the use of qualitative approach in both collection and analysis of data. It is on this basis that the data collected were subjected to textual analysis. Certainly, sports have the power to attract large gathering of people as well as serve as agent of development of positive attitudes among individuals in communities. It against this backdrop that this paper seeks to interrogate the strategies of local sports for conflict resolution, mitigation and peacebuilding process in eastern Sokoto State.

**Keywords:** Local Sports, Conflict Resolution, Conflict Mitigation, Peacebuilding, Nigeria Etc.

## INTRODUCTION

Basically, armed banditry has been a protracted conflict ravaging the northwest region of Nigeria. It is indeed a devastating conflict situation that mostly affects states such as Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kebbi, Kaduna and even some places in the north central of Nigeria. Armed banditry is an organized crime perpetuated by syndicate groups that are involved in the acts of intimidation, dispossession, and killing of civilians and destruction of properties (Ojo *et al.*, 2023). Thus, the activities of bandits have been causing death, injuries and displacement of people in the affected area (Gadzama *et al.*, 2018). Over the years, rural armed banditry in the northwest involves activities such as cattle rustling, sexual violence, kidnapping, armed robbery, pillage and attacks on gold miners and traders (Osasona, 2023). The challenge of environmental degradation because of prolonged impact of climate change, demographic distribution, uncontrolled human activities are among the factors that had led to intercommunal conflicts over scarce resources. This has now manifested in heightened internecine conflicts and criminal activities that have made socio-economic lives of the people unsafe in most societies affected by armed banditry (Egwu, 2015; Ibrahim and Dabugert, 2015).

Over the years, the Nigerian government and communities have been responding to the attacks of armed bandits through different ways. The government has been adopting both kinetic and non-kinetic methods to combat armed banditry in different places. The kinetic method involves the use of force by security personnel to fight the bandits. On the other hand, the non-kinetic approach involves the adoption of mechanisms such as negotiation, dialogue, arbitration etc to settle the conflict of armed banditry. On the part of communities affected by the conflict, there has been concerted effort to fight

**Copyright © 2024 The Author(s):** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

**CITATION:** Ismaila A. Danjuma & Muhammad T. Usman (2024). Strategies of Local Sports for Mitigating Conflict and Peacebuilding in Eastern Sokoto State, Nigeria. *South Asian Res J Human Soc Sci*, 6(6): 280-287. 280

the insecurity through the establishment of local security outfits, such as vigilante, *Yan sa kai* (volunteers) groups. To this end, the vigilante groups were recruited from local communities to perform the functions of community policing. Apart from the use of force, there are other strategies like community's engagement through sports to resolve and mitigate communal conflicts. Thus, sports influence can be used for conflict mitigation and peacebuilding process in communities.

It has been established that sports have greater role to play in conflict resolution and mitigation processes in different societies. Individuals and organizations that are concerned with prevention and resolution of conflicts could achieve their goals through staging sporting activities in the affected areas. Based on this, Darnell (2011: 1) maintains that "indeed, an increasing number of organizations employ sport towards an end of social integration, cohesion and/or (post) conflict resolution." Significantly, to ensure that sports are used as instrument to promote social harmony in societies different associations emerge to govern the activities of sportsmen and women. For instance, it has been discovered that sport governing bodies, such as International Olympic Committee (IOC) sets rules that ensure that sporting events and movements are organized in ways to promote peace, tolerance and sense of togetherness throughout the world (Guilianotti, 2010).

For all intents and purposes, sport is seen as way to mobilize youths from different backgrounds. This can be done irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, community etc. Just like in other settings, in African societies sport is used to convey messages. Based on this, it has been observed that sport can be used as an agile tool for communication of key messages through role models for youth (Amaefule and Ikejamoje, 2022). As such, sport helps to promote behavioural change in individuals in a society. Thus, it can be said that sport serves the purpose of enabling the youth to be part of peace making, peacebuilding and resilient agents in conflict zones (Leo-Howart, 2006). Therefore, this study is meant to interrogate strategies of local sports for mitigating conflict and peacebuilding in eastern Sokoto State. In this regard, the study focuses on local sports, such as Dambe (traditional boxing), Kokawa (traditional wrestling), Sharo (game of strength), Tseren gudu (race course), Sukuwan dawaki (horse race) etc.

### **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

There are different theoretical perspectives that have discussed the role of sports in conflict resolution, mitigation and peacebuilding in societies. However, in this study the relational peace theory will be adopted. In the first place, relational peace theory explores the contribution of sports in resolving conflict in human societies. Contributors to relational peace theory include scholars, such as Lederach (1997; 2003 and 2005), Fisher and Loreleigh (2001), Jarstad *et al.*, (2019), Soderstrom *et al.*, (2020) etc. The central focus of relational peace theory is that it analyses peace in terms of relationship between actors and groups in a society. Lederach (1997) outlines his approach to peacebuilding process by focusing on the relational and transformative aspect of conflict resolution, especially in divided societies. Similarly, Fisher and Loreleigh (2001) maintain that conflict interventions can be approached through relational perspective. They explain that interpersonal and intergroup conflict can be resolved through the development of relationship in societies. Based on this, Lederach (2005) maintains that general holistic approach to peacebuilding is centred on building social networks that cut across linking relational spaces that connect the not like-minded and the not like-situated people. However, Lederach (2005) does not specify the way relationship may be built between opposing groups or conflicting parties even though he suggests that the potential hubs of game centres, markets, hospitals, schools, transportation service centres, youth social clubs, street corners etc can be used as platforms to promote relationship among people. Thus, it can be said that the most important aspect of conflict transformation is changing relationship as path to peace (Lederach, 2003).

Soderstrom *et al.*, (2020) conceive that relational peace is made up of three components. These include (a) behavior such as non-domination, deliberation and cooperation, (b) attitudes that involves mutual respect and trust and (c) perception of the relationship (fellows or friends). Non-domination involves a situation in which no individual or group dominates over another in a relationship. Second, deliberation means that actors in dyad or opposing sides feel free to exchange their views and to provide reasons for it. This is important in post war societies because it allows for differences to be communicated, considered and accepted (Jarstad, 2019).

Third, cooperation suggests that actors in the dyad or conflict choose to work together. Thus, the attitudes of each actor towards the other in the dyad (s) should also be considered. Mutual recognition means that there is respect between the actors in the conflict. It is perhaps on this basis that, Ademola (2006:54) put forward that "the belief here is that cultural and value differences as well as group interests all influence relationships between individuals and groups in different ways." Trust is often seen as the foundation for peace and it also stimulates cooperation between the actors (Jarstad, *et al.*, 2019). For relational theory to be considered important, present actors must recognize the other as a fellow, a legitimate and equal partner to interact with or as a friend (Soderstrom, Akebo and Jarstad, 2020). In this regard, it can be said that conflict transformation can be explained by focusing on the imaginative and relational processes that are needed to foster peace in divided societies. Lederach (2005) emphasizes the need for peacebuilders, mediators and local actors to adopt an approach that includes long-term relational change by using instruments like dialogue, reconciliation efforts and

collaborative projects. The various interventions are aimed at building relationships establishing common grounds, and ultimately creating a foundation for sustained peace in societies.

However, the relational peace theory has been criticized. In the first instance, the theory fails to address the problem of economic inequality among people, which is one the root causes of conflict in human societies. Also, the theory did not recognize the problem of lack of political will on the part of leaders as obstacle to peace. Despite the criticisms, the relational peace theory is relevant because it is well equipped to analyse sport for peace programmes. This is because the programmes evolve around contact and relationship building. Sport for peace programmes make use of sports to bring together people from different communities in mostly post conflict societies. It is also valuable in explaining how relationship can help to reduce hostilities among people in societies where conflict is complex and protracted.

### **Perspectives on the Role of Sports in Conflict Resolution and Mitigation**

Generally, in recent years, several scholars have identified the importance of sports in bringing about conflict resolution and promotion of peace process in trouble zones. This is essentially because competition in sports is seen as a way of fostering interactions among youths from different communities. To this end, it has been observed that effective conflict resolution can be achieved when members of local communities are encouraged to engage in interaction through sports (Borsani, 2009). According to Leo-Howart (2006) traditional approaches to ending violent conflict have tended to focus on state-level solution at the exclusion of the very people on behalf of whom peace is being sought for. In this regard, it is suggested that for peace to reign in societies the local population need to be involved in conflict resolution.

The power of sport is enormous because it serves as avenue for social mobilization to douse tension in conflict prone areas or regions. It is perhaps on this basis that, Reisle (2005:2) avers that “sport can play a role on many levels because it literally brings movement into an atmosphere of tension and rigidity.” This implies sport men and spectators can contribute to settlement of conflict by staging and participating in different sporting activities in different locations or venues as a means of bringing together people antagonists or opposing groups. It is in this regard that, Reisle (2005:2) further states that “athletic events offer a straightforward occasion for meeting others. Communities that face each other with mistrust have a chance to experience something in common at such events.” On a general note, Reisle (2005) identifies that sport has an enormous potential and if this potential is used explicitly under pedagogic guidance, it can serve not only to build up athletic skills and success, but also to acquire the ability to develop one’s personality and social competence.

Darnell (2011) put forward that in recent years, the attention that is being paid to the connection between sport and conflict resolution has increased relations both within and through the cultures and institutions of sports and physical education. He explains that several organizations around the world employ sport towards an end of social integration, cohesion, and for (post) conflict resolution. Significantly, today in some parts of the world, sport has been used in projects that are designed to address the social and psychological aspects of conflict. These include projects designed to contribute to peacebuilding through trauma treatment, peace education, and (re) building relationships, and build bridges of understanding (Alrashid, 2020).

Moreover, Alrashid (2020) identifies the numerous roles of sports in human societies. For him, sport provides a platform for communication, for outreach opportunities, an outlet for control aggression, empowerment for people for advocacy, empowerment to individuals, empowerment to communities, incentive for youth to leave gangs, the ability to create new, shared identities. In addition, he maintains that sport helps commitment to collective responsibility, dismantle gangs, facilitate reintegration into society, heal community from psychological trauma, stimulate social interactions, the healing process, rebuild social relationships, and develop citizenship values.

In another postulation, Leo-Howart (2006) posits that sport can play a key function in building social network by providing a shared experience aimed at countering stereotype and building relationships. For example, he maintains that football leagues can be run year after year to provide a sustainable ‘hub’ for mixed-minded-identity teams to regularly meet in a safe, rule-governed and neutral setting, where people can have fun and be treated equally. This implies that for sports to be useful in playing the role of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, the organizers need to ensure that all forms of discriminatory attitudes be avoided to give a sense of belonging to all participants. Similarly, Azar (1990), Miall (2001) and Lederach (2002) have identified that building social networks between conflicting parties or groups in conflict is important in resolving the challenge of protracted social conflicts that bring about feelings of mistrust, hatred, enmity, fear, etc that are brought about by discrimination, stereotypes and demonization of others.

Different international organizations have in recent times been employing the use of sports to advance and promote peace in conflict zones. It is on this basis that, (Cardenas 2013:24) avers that:

The use of sport to bring about social change has been recently promoted by a variety of international actors, notably the UN, international development agencies, FIFA and the International Olympic Committee among others. Working together with non-governmental organizations, sport federations, and the private sector under a

strategy referred to as Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), they have become supportive of the idea that sport is indeed valuable when addressing issues related to human justice and equity.

The UN has been demonstrating its willingness to champion the cause of peace in different parts of the world through sports. For example, in 2006, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the UN Office on Sport Development and Peace and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) form a working partnership to deploy the use of sport in the international peacekeeping operations of the UN. Indeed, the partnership of these international bodies has been assisting in efforts to promote peace in some trouble areas in the world. Based on this, Woodhouse (2016:5) put forward that:

In the early years of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the role of sport in peacekeeping has evolved so much that it can now be labelled as a distinctive sector for peacekeeping as many organizations from the United Nations through to a wide variety of local grass roots projects have used sport as a conflict resolution tool. This range of activity is now commonly referred to as the Sport Development and Peace (SDP) Sector.

It is instructive to note that some agencies within the UN system, such as the United Nations Office on Sport Development and Peace (UNOSDP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization on Migration (IOM) etc have been using sport as a component in their development and peace work (Cardenas, 2013:24). Over the years, the concerns to promote peace and security around the world have given impetus to some international organizations and international personalities in the field of sport to engage in conflict resolution process using sport. In some cases, they directly intervene in conflict situations through the promotion of reconciliation between warring factions. Also, they assist in bringing support and benefits of sport to victims of armed conflict in the affected communities. It is on the basis of this reasoning that, Furukawa (2024:6) avers that “sport for Development and Peace (SDP) initiative, which aims for local ownership and endogenous nature is also required in peacebuilding.” As a demonstration to commitment to promotion of peace and reconciliation through sport, the Security Council Resolution 2250 identifies five importance of sport. These include participation, protection, prevention, disengagement and reintegration, and partnerships (UN-Inter-Agency Group on Sport for Development and Peace, 2022:1-2).

Lederach (2005) explains that different Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have tended to use sports to resolve conflict by bringing people closer together and to provide an ice-breaker to initiate the complex process of reconciliation between divided communities as a neutral platform to sustain the reconciliation, rehabilitation and to make youth to come back to non-sport-based education and reintegration projects. Furthermore, it is suggested that amateur leagues and clubs in conflict zones can form a network to provide emotional support and physical protection for its members (Leo-Howart, 2006). It is for this reason that Olga *et al.*, (2011:13) aver that “the social functions of sports have been documented not in relation to fostering interethnic tolerance in ethnically heterogeneous countries, but also in relation to peace and reconciliation initiatives in divided post-conflict societies.”

Thus, the important roles of sport in reconciliation process in trouble zones are numerous and these can be situated in contexts. Sport for reconciliation project can be used to promote social inclusion, breaking down barriers and creating bridges between antagonist groups. In addition, sport for reconciliation can help in the process of building confidence and trust among diverse individuals, advance healing process, encourage resiliency and giving a sense of normalcy in a society bedeviled by conflict (Borsani, 2009). In the same vein, Sport for Development and Peace is seen as a social intervention strategy that endeavours to use games, and physical activities to address explicit peace and development objectives, including both Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Cardenas, 2013; UN-Inter-Agency Group on Sport for Development and Peace, 2022).

Historically, the first documented use of sport to settle conflict dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century B.C in ancient Greece with the establishment of an Olympic Truce (Ekecheiria), which was meant to temporarily stop the war between the Peloponnesian city-states during the celebration of the Olympic Games. It was documented that during the event, athletes, artists, and spectators were able to travel to the Olympic Games and return to their places of origin under safety condition (Cardenas, 2013:25). Another instance when sport was used to foster friendship and cessation of hostilities was the famous Christmas Truce in 1914, during the World War I, when the Germans and English troops stopped fighting to exchange gifts and play game of football (Cardenas, 2012:1)

Subsequently, other places in the world adopted the strategies of using sport for reconciliation and peacebuilding process to unite opposing groups in conflict. For instance, it has been documented that in early 1995, after the genocide in Rwanda that resulted into ethnic tension and violence in neighbouring Burundi, an organization called Search for Common Ground (SFCG) launched or embarked on media and community projects in Burundi purposely to reduce ethnic tension and violence and support peacemaking process in the country. SFCG was said to start youth projects in Burundi in 1999 and in Sierra Leone in mid- 2000 by concentrating on groups at risk. It introduced sport and other recreational activities as

a means of reconciling warring groups in these countries. The idea behind the projects was to give youth from different ethnic and geographical backgrounds an opportunity to come closer and know each other and keep them away from their conflict-ridden areas. The youth programmes in these countries were multifaceted, which include the use of sports and cultural activities, media outreach, and election monitoring (Borsani, 2009).

Similarly, in the Middle East, a programme for reconciliation called Football for Peace (F4P) was introduced. F4P was a sport-based co-existence project for Jewish and Arab children and adults in northern Galiilee, Israel, organized by the University of Brighton in partnership with the British Council. Since 2001, F4P has been organizing sport programmes for Jewish and Arab children in different towns and villages of Galiilee region in Israel. The main purpose was to foster understanding and close working relationship among the children from diverse backgrounds to grow up as adults to live peacefully with one another (Borsani, 2009). In another development, The Foundation of Football Club Barcelona launched its FutbolNet Programme to teach dialogue and conflict resolution skills to youths. FutbolNet was a programme designed to use sports, particularly football to teach young positive values and embrace peace. Significantly, the FutbolNet was an idea developed from experience in Colombia, in the youth organized what was called streetfootballworld to promote the essential principles of dialogue and mediation in the country (Woodhouse, 2016).

The activities of PeacePlayerInternational-South Africa (PPI-SA) had been acknowledged in the promotion of national unity and peace in post-apartheid South Africa. In South Africa apartheid has ended but its effects are still felt in a society divided along primordial attachments of race and social class. PPI-SA established the Bridging Divides Programme to break down race barriers, educate children about health issues, and provide alternatives to crime in the KwaZulu-Natal province. The programme brings together children and youth from different backgrounds to play the game of basketball to achieve good and positive working relationships that transcends race, culture and religion (Borsani, 2009).

At another instance, a sport programme aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation was launched in Liberia. It was tagged Liberia-Right to play. After a devastating 15-year civil war that affected socio-economic and physical wellbeing of people and communities, an inclusive programme that would help to promote teamwork and enhance trust was introduced using sport. In this regard, the Right to Play kicked off its annual Peace Dream Cup on 21 September 2008, to join millions of people around the world in celebration of International Day of Peace. To this end, a two-week football tournament was organized for children under 14 years in Lofa county of Liberia. The organizers of the sporting event envisaged that sport initiatives can contribute towards national peace by having young people come together and play as team. It is perhaps for this reason that Olga *et al.*, (2011:11) argue that “one of the cultural practices considered most promising both for enhancing inter-ethnic contact and social cohesion and as a tool for peace and reconciliation initiatives is recreational sport.”

In Cote d’Ivoire, it was on record that one of the world leading football figures, Didier Drogba used the instrument of football to contribute to peace process in Cote d’Ivoire during the conflict in the country. In April 2010, Drogba was listed by Times Magazine in the USA as amongst the world’s 100 most influential people because he intervened by calling for peace, which led to a five-year ceasefire agreement among the warring factions after contributing in making his country to qualify for 2006 World Cup. It was also reported that Drogba was instrumental in moving the venue for a qualifying match in the African Nations Cup to the city of Bouake, a rebel stronghold in the central region of Cote d’Ivoire. The effort of Drogba was a move that strengthened commitments to national unity and strengthened support for peace process among people in the country (Woodhouse, 2016). Apart from the use of sports to find solution to domestic problem of conflicts, at the international level, sports have been playing some role to foster relations among countries. It is based on this type of reasoning that Jarvie (2023:10) argues that “there are advantages in sport being embraced more fully by culture and being recognized as cultural relations approach. The role of sport in delivering soft power, sport diplomacy and advancing trade, business and influence through hosting of major sporting event has been evidenced.”

However, in as much as sports are playing important role in resolving conflict, it can be said that a critical observation would reveal that sporting activities are also capable of instigating conflict in human societies. Based on this, Cardenas (2012:2) avers that “sport is also considered by a large sector of society as a practice capable of awakening exaggerated nationalist sentiments, intolerance and even violence both in athletes and spectators.” A critical look into the way in which some sportsmen and women as well as the spectators behave by using violence during sporting competitions indicate that sports if not properly managed can be a source of conflict in societies. Also, since sports involve competition the character and attitudes of some players in the fields of play of using foul or rough means of attack against their opponents to emerge as winner is akin or next to violence. It is on this basis that an English writer, George Orwell (1994:321) once described sports as “war minus the shooting” (cited in Cardenas, 2012:2).

### **Imperative of Local Sports in Conflict Resolution, Mitigation and Peacebuilding**

Different scholars have identified the various importance of sports in conflict resolution, mitigation and peacebuilding process in communities affected by conflict. An appreciation of the positions of scholars on ways in which

sports can be used to address conflict situations in different social settings will be disaggregated. Significantly, local sports have certain standards of rules and regulations to be adhered by participants. It is within the context of rules and regulation that individual participants can test their strength in a competition. Based on this, (Amaefule and Ikuejamoye (2022:2) aver that “sport is an institutionalized physical activity which operates by rules fixed externally.”

The description of the nature and practices of different kinds of local sports is necessary to situate issues in proper contexts. In the first place, dambe (traditional boxing) is a sport in which two combatants engage in exchange of blow with their fists. Unlike modern boxing, in dambe sport each combatant uses clothing material to tie or cover only one of his fist or hand (either right or left as the case may be) that is to be used for the competition. For each contest the combatants normally go for three rounds of three (3) minutes each. It is not necessary to complete the three rounds as the winner could emerge in round one, or two or three. The moment an opponent is thrown down or his knee or hand or any part of his body touches the ground the other competitor emerges as winner. In some cases, there could be a draw in dambe sport when nobody is thrown down. At the centre stage of dambe sport there is always a referee that ensures that combatants abide by the rules and regulations governing the sport.

Kokawa (traditional wrestling) is a sport in which two combatants use their hands to struggle to throw each other down. In kokawa sport there is only one round of five minutes contest. The moment an opponent is thrown down or his knee touches the ground the other competitor emerges as winner. In some cases, there could be a draw in the sport when nobody is thrown down. At the centre stage of kokawa sport there is always a referee that ensures that combatants abide by the rules and regulations governing the sport. Sharo (game of strength) is another traditional sport that is popular among Fulani people in northern Nigeria and beyond. It usually involves combat between two young men to test their physical fitness, strength and endurance. The sharo sport is rigorous in nature because it involves the use of strong long cane to beat an opponent in a competition. During the contest an opponent can beat the other competitor in any part of his body without making any attempt to run or prevent the beating. In the second round, the other opponent will in turn do the same. The winner emerges when his beating makes the other opponent to either cry, fall, run away, uses hand to prevent the beating. At the centre stage of sharo sport there is always a referee that ensures that combatants abide by the rules and regulations governing the sport.

Tseren gudu (racecourse or racetrack) is a sport that is popular among youth in northern Nigeria. It is a course over which races are run by contestants. The contestants can range from three to ten people at once. Any contestant that first reaches the crossline set in place emerges winner. At the centre stage of tseren gudu sport there is always a referee that ensures that contestants abide by the rules and regulations governing the sport. Sukuwan dawaki (horse race) is another popular sport among young aristocrats or rich people in northern Nigeria and beyond. It involves a contest of speed between horses. The horses in the contest can range from two to ten. Any horse that first reaches the crossline set in place emerges winner. At the centre stage of sukuwar dawaki sport there is always a referee that ensures that contestants abide by the rules and regulations governing the sport.

It is worthy to note that, all the local sports have organizers in different communities. They also, attract spectators. Winners in all the sports are usually given recognition in communities. In some cases, the champions are given title and honour like sarkin dambe (king of dambe), sarkin kokawa (king of kokawa) etc. Thus, the objectives of local sports were mainly geared towards building stamina, strength, flexibility, endurance and agility to stay safe Amaefule and Ikuejamoye (2022:2). Even as the target of individual participants in local sports are different from one individual to another, the practices of competitors in various games remain intact. Thus, the overriding motive for engaging in the sports is to win. In a succinct discussion on motive of sport, (Amaefule and Ikuejamoye, 2022) maintain that “it involves physical exertion through competition governed by norms and typically performed by members of organized group with the goal of achieving some rewards through defeat of other competitors.” In the specific case of local sports, participants normally engage in it for popularity, fame, and monetary gain.

Over the years, it has been identified that sports have important role to play in bringing about resolution and mitigation of conflict in the affected communities. Sporting activities are undertaken by individuals and/or organizations as important means of promotion of positive attitudes in individual participants. Based on this, Borsani (2009:17) maintains that “sport for reconciliation essentially helps in the process of normalization of life, tolerance, social cohesion and integration among children and adults from different communities.” To this end, it can be added that sport helps to inculcate the habit of good relationship, cooperation, trust and recognition of others in individuals (Driessen, 2021). It is always the desire of people in communities to return to normal or original ways of doing things after witnessing bad incidence of conflict or disaster to move forward. Entertainment through sports can make people to seek for ways of forgetting negative experiences of the past and think of rebuilding their lives. To this end, sports can help to build confidence and trust among people, advance healing process, encourage resiliency and giving sense of normalcy (Borsani, 2009).

Significantly, it has been identified that organizing sporting events at local level can help to sustain the rehabilitation process of victims of conflicts. In this regard, sports can assist traumatized youth to concentrate in non-sport-based activities like education, skills acquisition, reintegration projects etc. In addition, the establishment of sport competitions of different types in conflict zones can serve as platform for social network to provide emotional support and physical protection for youth in communities (Leo-Howart, 2006). Post-conflict reconciliation is usually a gradual process in communities affected by hostilities of opposing groups. Sporting competitions in communities can be used to bring people together from time to time to achieve healing process in individuals. It is perhaps on this basis that, Borsani (2009:1) avers that “sport for reconciliation projects can be used to promote social inclusion, breaking down barriers and creating bridges between opposing groups.”

All over the world sport events usually attract large gathering of people for social interactions. Therefore, sports can play important role in communicating positive values of respect for other, friendship, driving social change. Based on this, it can be stated that sport is also a promising medium of social transformation and peacebuilding in communities affected by conflicts (Amaefule and Ikuejamoye, 2022). The development of sports at grass-root level can make it easy for government and community leaders to mobilize youth to support peace process in conflict zones. This is essentially because it has been identified that sport helps commitment to collective responsibilities, dismantle gangs, facilitate reintegration into society, rebuild social relations etc (Alrashid, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The study has been concerned with strategies of local sports for conflict resolution, mitigation and peacebuilding in eastern Sokoto State. Therefore, it can be said that local sports are numerous, and they constitute essential integral aspects of the way in which people develop physical fitness and friendship in communities. For many years, local sports shape the characters of individuals in eastern Sokoto State. To this extent, most people in the area have in one way or another passed through the nuances of local sports in the various communities. This is essentially because they are imbedded in the traditions, norms and values of the various communities. There are some indications of tendencies that suggest that in eastern Sokoto State and indeed large parts of northwest, Nigeria, local sports and cultural displays suffuse each other. For example, wherever local sports are being played it can be evidently noticed that some aspects of cultural displays like songs and dancing normally accompanied it. Winners or champions in competitions in local sports normally get song of praises compose for them by local musicians. In some instances, the musicians use some adjectives to describe champions in sports or games as strong as ‘lion’ or ‘elephant’ or hard as ‘iron’ or ‘stone.’ All these praises were to serve as source of inspiration and encouragement for local sportsmen or women. Also, champions in local sports in some instances normally indulge in dances to demonstrate the ability of conquering or winning over other co-competitors.

However, in developing countries like Nigeria the commitment of government to sports development in general and welfare of athletes is abysmally low. It is because of lukewarm attitude to sports that it is making it difficult for government to make use of avenue of sports to appropriately engage the youth for peace mobilization process and settlement of endemic conflicts like armed banditry. Therefore, it is imperative for government at different levels in Nigeria, private organizations, philanthropists and other stakeholders to take advantage of the potentials available in sports and use them appropriately to achieve peace, security and development in the country.

## REFERENCES

- Ademola, S. F. (2006). *Theories of social conflict*. In Best, G. S. (ed.) Introduction to peace and conflicts studies in West Africa. Ibadan: Spectrum books limited.
- Alrashid, A. A. S. (2020). Conflict Management in Ethnic Tension Zones: Sport Contribution in Co-existence and Inclusion Citizenship Diversity: A Case Study in Aleksandria, Iraq. *American Journal of Sports Science*, 8(4).
- Amaefule, C. K., & Ikuejamoye, M. S. S. (2022). Sport as an Instrument of Peace in Nigeria. Researchgate. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/36118683>.
- Azar, E. (1990). *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*. Dartmouth Publishing Company: Hampshire.
- Borsani, S. (2009). *The Contribution of Sport within the Process of Peace and Reconciliation: From Trauma Healing towards Social Integration*. MA Dissertation – Master in Human Rights and Conflict Management. Sant Anna School of Advanced Studies, Kenya.
- Cardenas, A. (2012). *Exploring the Use of Sports for Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution*. Working Paper Series No. 1. Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies.
- Cardenas, A. (2013). Peacebuilding through Sport? An Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace. *Journal of Conflictology*. <http://journal-of-conflictology-uoc-edu>.
- Darnell, C. S. (2011). Conflict, Education and Sport: Responses, Causes and Questions. *C & E Conflict and Education: An Interdisciplinary Journal in Engaged Research, Informal Policy, Improved Schools*.

- Driessen, T. (2021). *Exploring the Contribution of Sport to Cohabitation in a Divided Society*. Master's Thesis in the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University.
- Egwu, S. (2015). *The Political Economy of Rural Banditry in Contemporary Nigeria*. In Kuna, J.M. and Ibrahim, J. (eds.) *Rural Banditry and Conflicts in Northern Nigeria*. Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development, Pastoralist Resolve (PARE) and Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP).
- Fisher, R. J., & Loreleigh, K. (2001). A Contingency Perspective on Conflict Interventions: Theoretical and Practical Consideration. *Peace and Conflict Journal of Peace Psychology*, 7(1).
- Furukawa, M. (2024). *Peacebuilding through 'Spirt for Development and Peace' in South Sudan*, JICA Ogata Research Institute Research Paper No. 5. Tokyo JICA Ogata Research Institute for Peace and Development.
- Gadzama, C. J., Sadiq, N. M., Oduchie, T. C., & Dariya, C. J. (2018). Appraisal of Rural Banditry in "Kamuku" Forest in Birnin Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Rural Sociology*, 18(1).
- Giulianotti, R., & Armstrong, G. (2011). Sport, the Military and Peacemaking: History and Possibilities. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(3).
- Ibrahim, J., & Dabugert, K. (2015). *Rural Banditry and Hate Speech in Northern Nigeria: Fertile Ground for the Construction of Dangerous Narratives in the Media*. In Kuna, J.M. and Ibrahim, J. (eds.) *Rural Banditry and Conflicts in Northern Nigeria*. Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development, Pastoralist Resolve (PARE) and Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP).
- Jarstad, K. A., Eklund, N., Johansson, P., Olivics, E. Saati, A. Sahovic, D., & Stradh, V. (2019). *Three Approaches to Peace: A Framework for Describing and Exploring Varieties of Peace*.
- Jarvie, G. (2023). *Sport, Cultural Relations and Peacebuilding*. Cultural Relations Collection. British Council.
- Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, D. C.: United States Institute of Peace (USIP).
- Lederach, J. P. (2002). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington DC. Institute of Peace Press.
- Lederach, J. P. (2003). *The Little Book of Conflict*. Transformation Intercourse, P. A.: Good Books.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Leo-Howart, J. (2006). *Sport and Conflict: Is Football an Appropriate Tool to Utilize in Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation or Reconstruction? Contemporary War and Peace Studies*. M.A. Dissertation. University of Sunex. 1 September.
- Miall, H. (2011). *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Ojo, S. J., Oyewole, S., & Aina, F. (2023). *Forces of terror: armed banditry and insecurity in north-west Nigeria. Democracy and Ssecurity*. Routledge – Taylor and Francis group. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17419/66.2023.2164924>.
- Olga, D., Hosta, M., & van Sterkenburg, J. (2011). *Tegetting Social Cohesion in Post-Conflict Societies through Sport in Post-Conflict Societies*. Handbook on Good Practices. Number 1. Council of Europe. July.
- Orwell, G. (1994). *The Sporting Spirit*. In *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Osasona, T. (2023). *The Question of Definition: Armed Banditry in Nigeria's North-west in the Context of International Law*. *International Review of the Red Cross*.
- Reisle, S. M. (2005). *Sport as a Tool for Peacebuilding*. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC. TIP Sheet.
- Soderstrom, J., Akebo, M., & Jaestad, K. A. (2020). *Friends, Fellows and Foes: A New Framework for Studying Relational Peace*. *International Studies Review*.
- UN – Inter-Agency Group on Sport Development and Peace (IAGSDP) (2022). *The Contribution of Sport to the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda*. Thematic Paper. UNODC, UNAOC, UNHCR, UNDESA, UNDP.
- Woodhouse, T. (2016). *More than a Game: Sport and Conflict Resolution. Sport as a Peacebuilding Tool*. *Peace in Progress*. 27.