

Sports in Economic Development

Research shows that sports investment in developing countries is much less than in developed countries, as sports development is usually not a top priority in the national budget or in the education system of most developing countries. Studies which focused on developing countries highlighted the underdevelopment of sport, and moreover, identify that sports attract a low level of investment. Sports are often treated as recreation or leisure time activities, and hence the treatment and attention that is subsequently accorded them.

What is peculiar in some instances is the fact that corporate entities see their involvement in sports as a mere marketing and promotional ploy. Generally, the support bears a relation to the projection of a social consciousness. The tokenism therefore does little to promote and move sporting activities beyond the realm of amateurism to that of professionalism. It is at the professional level that sporting activities take on the face of big business activity. The investment generates substantial revenue and creates a variety of business linkages. At the core of professional sports is the employment of people. The various organized sporting disciplines enable other sectors of the economy to benefit substantially through the production and offering of a range of goods and services.

In an article written by Gwen Burrow under the caption 'Not just a game: The Impact of Sports on the US Economy', the point was made that the sports industry as a whole brings roughly \$14.3 billion in earnings a year, and accounts for approximately 456,000 jobs with an average salary of \$39,000 per job. ' In 2014, the European Commission in addressing Sport as a growth engine for EU economy, commented that "Overall the sports sector accounts for 2% of the EU global GDP, while the total employment generated by sports activities is 7.3 million-equivalent to 3.5% of the total EU employment. Despite these impressive figures, the economic impact of the sport-related industries is often underestimated."

This information strongly suggests that sports have an economic value. It clearly is a medium for providing quality jobs, sustaining employment levels and uplifting the social

standing of workers. It is definitely one way of enabling poor persons with talents, skills and an entrepreneurship spirit, to rise from a level of poverty. The investment in sports therefore becomes a must.

Players, officials, coaches, equipment suppliers, medical/health personnel and services, catering services, merchandisers', marketers, public relations personnel, facilities management and sports administrators, are only but a few on a long list of persons who become employed within the sporting industry. The need for hotel and other forms of accommodation, along with the required ground transportation, lend to the increasing level of economic activity. The possibilities seem endless. It is for this reason that sports tourism must be taken seriously and given the attention it deserves.

Putting this all into perspective, the message that emanates is that there is the potential for growth to be achieved, should there be a concerted effort made at developing sports as part of the economic activity of any nation. It is for the powers that be to face the challenges head in order to make this happen. In moving forward, a good starting point would be to find ways of helping outstanding national athletes to develop their sports training as a means to pursuing professional sport careers. In short the developing of sport career pathways must now become a viable option.