



Focus on Community Peacebuilding Practices

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Playing for Peace: Reuniting Communities through Sports

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About this Publication

This publication, *Focus on Community Peacebuilding Practices*, published by Heal Zimbabwe Trust is informed by the imperative need to bridge the knowledge gap between local community level practices and experiences and national to global level efforts contributing towards building sustainable peace. This is achieved by sharing knowledge, practical experiences and creative ideas on community level peacebuilding, violence prevention and conflict transformation processes. The publication also provides comprehensive insights on empirical grassroots peacebuilding methodologies while reflecting on diverse best practices, healing and reconciliation processes.

Heal Zimbabwe Trust

Established in 2009 in response to the Global Political Agreement, which birthed an inclusive government, which advocated for depolarization and reconciliation at the national level, Heal Zimbabwe sought to translate the national level consensus to sustainable social cohesion at the lowest level of communities by placing special emphasis on the use of local knowledge peacebuilding systems and expertise. We envision a, 'socially cohesive nation that enjoys tolerance, peace, and prosperity at all tiers of the society'. Our mission is to 'promote tolerance, peace and inclusive prosperity hinged on the observance of socio-economic and political rights of Zimbabwean citizens. Since establishment in 2010, Heal Zimbabwe continues working on human rights protection, implemented peace-building interventions and supported victims and survivors of diverse forms of conflict and violence. The organization's work prides in bottom-up development strategies

Introduction

Using sports in peacebuilding is a positive practice that has great impact and is scalable beyond imagination. Heal Zimbabwe Trust (HZT) uses sporting activities to promote social cohesion, reduce political polarisation and social tension among youths. The **Youth Sports for Peace Initiative** is a neutral, tolerance and trust building platform for communities divided by structural and systemic violence, which manifests itself as political violence during political processes. The practice has managed to strengthen and rebuild inter-personal and inter-group relations, hence the need to replicate it in other communities for the purpose of building and deepening social cohesion and peaceful co-existence. Heal Zimbabwe has and continue to implement these activities through the local "infrastructure for peace" which are community level structures created by, and working with, the organization to organize activities and ensure local community ownership and sustainability. These are Community Peace Clubs, Women safe spaces for reconciliation, human rights monitors and Community Based Organizations in

Zimbabwe's rural communities most susceptible to manipulation due to poverty thereby prone to social, economic and politically motivated violence. Gokwe, Tsholotsho, Mbire, Rushinga, Mutoko, Makoni, Mutasa, Buhera, Chipinge, Zaka, Gutu, Mazowe, Murehwa, and Bikita. In this article HZT, therefore, details the practice of using sports as a tool for community cohesion building with a view to inform broader peace building practices.

Playing for Peace Philosophy

The philosophy behind the initiative is that sport is not strictly limited to the arena of play as many people may conceive, but is actually a social phenomenon that has the ability to bring diversity to unity. Sports by their nature are able to create advocacy and neutral environments that promote positive dialogue, mutual understanding and shared learning opportunities. Sports for peace in this context was therefore understood as non-partisan independent initiative, that offers a neutral space to foster a spirit of fair play, a sense of community and the elimination of prejudice. It seeks to expand civic space in a constrained and polarised political environment This is precisely what Heal Zimbabwe Trust envisioned in the target communities whose social fabric was ravaged by socio-cultural, economic and political conflicts.



Figure 1: Chief Nechevava congratulating the winning teams

Zimbabwe has for the past two decades been experiencing serious economic challenges that have resulted in high unemployment among the youth. Youth constitute about 56% of the total population

thus, out of the 14 million (approximate), there are more than six million young Zimbabweans who are roaming the streets of towns and villages.¹ Hoare and Gell (2011) noted that throughout the developing world youths disproportionately carry the highest burden of poverty and unemployment.² In fact, in sub-Saharan Africa, about 60% of the unemployed are youth and the situation is no different for Zimbabwe with the Zimbabwe Poverty Assessment study (1995) revealing that the youth have the highest unemployment rate among all the age groups in the labour force in Zimbabwe.³ The majority of youths are motivated to engage in violent activities and acts of criminality by a host of factors, chief amongst them, lack of employment opportunities and poverty. This clearly explains why youth become so vulnerable to abuse whenever there are elections in Zimbabwe.

In political activism, youths are mostly engaged to lead campaigning processes, which in most cases do not involve explaining policies to the electorate, but intimidating opponents and prospective voters. They are manipulated through a few pieces of silver and a few mugs of opaque and cheap beer. They are then made to rove around constituencies disrupting meetings of rival parties and intimidating rival parties. Innocent community members are terrorized and suspected rival party sympathizers are brutalized, and killed while the general citizens are forced people to buy political party membership cards. In 2009 alone Heal Zimbabwe through the memorialisation program provided descent burials and memorials for 353 people killed during the election run-off period. To correct the past violent episodes of intolerance, polarisation as well as suppress recurrence of violence in the future Heal Zimbabwe, therefore, created platforms for youth to meet and discuss ways through which communities can peacefully coexist regardless of their diverse political, social and economic affiliation.

¹ Situation of Youth (SoY) (2003) The Situation of Youth in SADC. YDN S.A

² Hoare, J and Gell, F (2011), Youth and Participation in Leadership, Oxfam, Britain

³ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public_227249.pdf

Nadaph (2015) acknowledges that several organizations the world over, such as Generations for Peace, Peace and Sport, and Peace Players International, have successfully used sport as a vehicle for conflict resolution efforts at both the grassroots and nation state levels.⁴ The practice of sports for peace is, therefore, a very recognised instrument for promoting peace as it disregards geographical borders, social class as well as political affiliation. Sport is a powerful tool to strengthen social ties and networks, and to promote ideals of peace, fraternity, solidarity, non-violence, tolerance and justice. Tackling problems in post conflict situations can be eased as sport can bring people together.

In choosing sports as an avenue that can be navigated for peace building in polarised communities, Heal Zimbabwe was partially motivated by the United Nations' Security Council's resolution 2250. On the 9th of December 2015, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a groundbreaking resolution on Youth, Peace and Security, which recognizes that "young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security."⁵ This resolution was to be achieved through 5 key pillars for action which are essentially participation, protection, prevention, partnerships and disengagement and reintegration. In line with the UNSCR 2250, HZT acknowledges the important role youth can play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and as a key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peacekeeping and peace building efforts as also reaffirmed by UNSCR 2282 (2016).⁶

Heal Zimbabwe's Playing for Peace Success

HZT chose Sports for Peace in order to catch youth in their favorite spheres. In fact, the organisation based its envisaged theory of change on the fact that when utilized in a very appropriate and somehow professional manner, sporting activities (for peace

building) in highly polarised communities has the ability to enhance self-esteem and self-confidence. Sports can also promote responsible behaviour among the youth. It is also likely that by taking part in sport, the unemployed youth would learn to manage victory as well as defeat. Youth acquire life skills that help them deal with challenging situations and improve their long-term prospects. They are therefore empowered to make meaningful decisions concerning problem solving in their communities. In essence, youth will be able to say no to abuse by cunning politicians that thrive on violence as a means to winning elections. Nadaph (2015) further asserts that sports not only create an awareness of the vulnerability experienced by young people, but also have an empowerment effect. They develop skills and knowledge necessary for young people to have more control of their lives and to function as responsible members of their communities⁷.

The initiative targets youth particularly in rural areas that are invariably abused by politicians to perpetrate violence in their localities. The targeting of youths was partly inspired by the Youth Bulge Theory, which claims that if youths are hungry and denied access to basic needs they become hostile and are bound to engage in illegal activities. The theory also claims that the presence of idle and unemployed young people in the developing world is emerging as a catalyst for internal violence.⁸ Zimbabwean youth particularly in the rural areas are politically polarised and vulnerable to abuse hence HZT target them as a way to provide an alternative activity occupying them in a more meaningful, positive and developmental manner.

⁴ Imran Nadaph, 2015, Why Sport for Development is an Effective Tool in Tackling Youth Development Issues,

⁵ <https://www.youth4peace.info/UNSCR2250/Introduction>

⁶ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>

⁷ Imran Nadaph, 2015, Why Sport for Development is an Effective Tool in Tackling Youth Development Issues,

⁸ Lionel Beehner (2007), The Effects of 'Youth Bulge' on Civil Conflicts



Figure 2: Youth teams from Buhera in action

Central to the successful implementation of the sports for peace were Heal Zimbabwe Trust's partners including Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and community peace clubs. The peace clubs were responsible for the organisation of the peace games in their communities. Community peace clubs were utilised because they have the convening authority to organise such activities. They are also known to be peace champions in their communities and above all, they mobilise participants across the political divide. CBOs are resident in the target communities, hence they are able to mobilise community members to participate in the initiative. Community peace clubs partnered various stakeholders including the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, Rural District Councils, Ministries of Education, Art, Sport and Culture, Zimbabwe Republic Police, Members of Parliament and political parties in general. The community peace structures deliberately engaged and worked with youth officers and or the sports and recreation commission representatives to identify the teams that would participate in the games, starting at the ward level. Youth officers were engaged because they have authority to organise sporting activities in the communities. The teams were ward-based and were made up of youths from different political parties. The youths were targeted or identified through community champions or opinion makers and also use of social youth clubs that already exist in many of the communities. This was done for HZT to gel in smoothly into the already existing social systems in the communities. Duty bearers were consulted before the games were organised to get their permission and support. They were also the ones

targeted to address the participants on the importance of peace and reconciliation. The idea was to bring them together and create a platform for youths to appreciate each other and also initiate dialogue.

HZT conducted the sports tournaments under the banner of its National Peace Campaign for peaceful 2018 elections running under the theme **#13MillionVoicesForPeace**. Through the Youth for Peace Initiative, HZT managed to reach out to an estimated 15000 people between 2014 and 2018 and youths accounted for about 75% of the participants. This fit was achieved through 30 Sports for Peace platforms conducted in the 15 districts. The sports for peace tournaments were graced by various community leaders who took turns during the proceedings to castigate all forms of violence. Members of Parliament, councillors, Senators, District Administrators, traditional leaders all attended to preach the message of peace in the highly polarised communities. An estimated 9000 peace pledges were signed at the sports for peace tournaments. During the sports for peace tournaments, HZT distributed pamphlets with information on the right to vote, freedom of assembly and association. Paraphernalia from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission was also distributed to the participants as a way of complementing HZT's information and education material.

In Gokwe South, HZT partnered the Sports and Recreation commission and held 2 tournaments in Mutimutema and Svisvi areas. The Sports Commission managed to work with the winning teams in mainstreaming peace building and they carried out 5 more tournaments in different areas that include Mapfungautsi, Nemangwe and Gokwe centre. More than 5000 community members were reached and the message of peace and reconciliation was therefore preached to all those that attended.



Figure 3: Youth teams pledge for peace before a peace tournament

The Rushinga sport from peace tournament was outstanding in many ways including a massive attendance of more than 2000 people. This was very impressive given the high levels of political polarisation in the district. Community leaders engaged in the sports tournaments included 7 legislators, 168 traditional leaders, 18 councillors and 64 police officers. Dignitaries took turns to castigate violence of whatever nature and encouraged community members particularly the youths to tolerate diversity in political affiliation

In Buhera South the Sports for Peace Tournament held on 24 June 2017 at Nechavava Secondary School, in Bedza ward 16, brought together community leaders including Headman Nechavava, 25 village heads, the local councillor and 20 WADCO members who graced the occasion. “I am happy that the youths participated in the sports tournament, I encourage you the youths not to be used by politicians to beat up your parents and engaging in violent activities. You must be peace ambassadors not peace destroyers,” said Headman Nechavava during his address to the participants at the sports for peace tournament.



Figure 4: A women’s winning team posing for a photo with HZT staff in Gokwe South.

Reflections

The Outcomes

HZT noted that the sports for peace initiative played an important role in rebuilding conflict affected societies in Zimbabwe. It was able to transcend cultural, socio-economic and political boundaries in the target communities. Because of the project, youth learnt how to communicate, share feelings, emotions, attitudes, beliefs and values in a manner that is enjoyable. Participants and spectators were united and basic rules and essential values of peaceful coexistence – such as tolerance, team spirit, loyalty and fair play were emphasised. In addition, the sport for peace initiative was instrumental in forming character skills, which are important for the fulfilment of a happy life. By conveying the ethics of sport, the fairness and tolerance that it promotes, foundations for a more peaceful and humane communities that all and sundry enjoy were laid.

Africa’s own peace icon, Nelson Mandela said, *“Sports have the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sports can create hope, where there was once only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial*

barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination. Sports is the game of lovers.⁹

The sports for peace initiative proved to be a unifying initiative that brought together people from various social, political and religious backgrounds. Erstwhile perpetrators and victims of conflict were united and shook hands during the games, playing in the same team to realise how practically they need each other, the importance of teamwork and having shared goals. They would frequently meet in their teams to practice for the tournaments and this created an unmatched opportunity for them to work together and learn to tolerate each other. The games initiated positive dialogue between perpetrators and victims of violence.

The sports for peace activities in the communities also accorded the youth a rare opportunity to learn critical social skills such as conflict management. This surely would go a very long way in aiding community peace building processes. The platforms created healing experiences for the traumatised victims of violence and conflict as they discovered ways through which they can work together with their erstwhile nemeses. Dambo Rovers sports club in Mazowe district was able to unite rival youths from the ruling ZANU PF and the opposition MDC to work together in various projects in the community.

The Challenges

While sport by its nature possesses a number of positive attributes, it has serious limitations that require attention. Kidd and MacDonnell (2007) said that, “sport is full of discrimination; it can be racist, divisive, and can breed intolerance and misunderstanding.¹⁰” This standing was manifested in several instances during the games as tensions broke and tempers flared. The biggest challenge was to control the emotions of the participants and inculcate in them a sense of togetherness and teamwork rather than competition. It was, therefore,

important to water down the sense of competition and cultivate the feeling of unity and peaceful coexistence. It was not easy at times to deal with the intrinsic negative characteristic of sport and its ability to cause segregation, disconnection, and escalation of conflict. It is, therefore, critical to emphasise the real objectives of the initiative before the games start in order to minimise friction between the participating teams.

Initially there was resistance from the perpetrators of violence who were not very comfortable to partake in the events. Engagement efforts and or target lobbying was, however, used to entice buy in. Some duty bearers were also not comfortable to take part as they thought the initiative was political, but upon realisation of the nobleness of the idea there was massive participation and this encouraged more community members to take part.

Conclusion and recommendations

Considering the results that HZT recorded from the use of sports in peace building, there is need for the project to be scaled up in other communities.

Sports proved in various communities to be a significant tool that can be used to achieve sustainable development goals particularly number 16 that speaks about peace, justice and creation of strong institutions. Heal Zimbabwe realised that football and netball can significantly contribute to peace building in the target communities. However, sport cannot be uniformly applied to all communities due to the natural diversity of communities especially in terms of cultures and interests. As a result, creative games or indigenous sport may be preferred in some cases. It is also important to consider the negative aspects of sports particularly the emotions and fanaticism that can result in the development of a new set of conflicts in the communities. There is therefore need for a comprehensive framework of action that minimises the risk of the sports for peace deteriorating into conflict platforms. The intervention was however largely successful in its endeavour to reunite post-conflict communities in Zimbabwe. In fact, in most of these are extremely poor areas lacking social cohesion, sports played a pivotal role as vehicle for

⁹ Nelson Mandela (2011). “Nelson Mandela By Himself: The Authorised Book of Quotations”, p.378, Pan Macmillan

¹⁰ Kidd, B., & MacDonnell, M. (2007). Literature reviews on Sport for Development and Peace: peace, sport and development. (SDP IWG, Ed.)

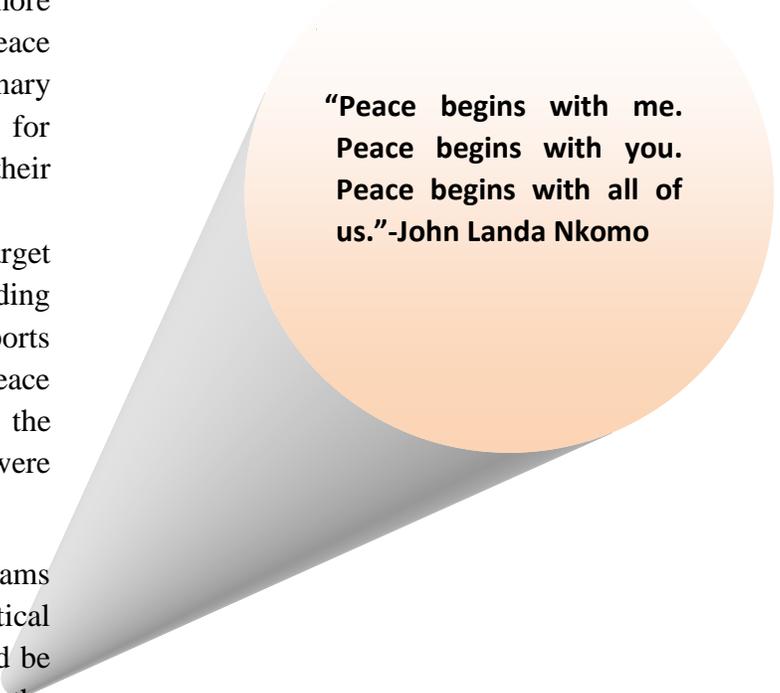
tolerance, respect, sharing and creating citizenship for sustainable peace and development. The following recommendations can be made in respect of the initiative,

Recommendations

- 1) To reap peace dividends through youth inclusion and participation in sports, it is important that policymakers start viewing youth as agents of conflict transformation and sport as an important catalyst by investing in efforts to create more sporting opportunities. The sports for Peace program debunked the perpetrator victim binary and asserted young people as agents for peacebuilding and conflict transformation in their communities
- 2) Basing on the achievements recorded in the target communities, HZT and other peace building organisations needs to consider scaling up sports for peace as a community healing and peace building mechanism. It is important that the initiative is taken to other communities that were also ravaged by political violence.
- 3) In order to implement successful sport programs for development and peace, careful and critical consideration of the utilization of sport should be required and there is need to understand the complexity of the political, historical and cultural contexts of the target communities.
- 4) Sports for peace should not be used as the sole peace building initiative. Instead, sport should be positioned as a highly effective complementary tool in a broader toolkit of peacebuilding practices, and should be applied in a holistic and integrated manner with other interventions and programs to achieve optimal results.
- 5) Whenever such a noble initiative as sports for peace is used for peace building and deepening of social cohesion, it is critical that all the relevant

community stakeholders are engaged to maximise participation and achievement of intended results

- 6) There is also need for community members and groupings to be at the centre of the organisation of the sports for peace activities to allow total ownership and maximum participation. Communities also need to be consulted on the nature of programming.



**“Peace begins with me.
Peace begins with you.
Peace begins with all of
us.”-John Landa Nkomo**

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