

## Empowering Youth through Sport for Development and Peace

by Maulline Gragau



South Africa Rugby team, 1995 Rugby World Cup/Photo Credit: ESPN

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When I think of the power of sport in achieving youth development and peace, the infamous film *Invictus* comes to mind. *Invictus* is a remarkably inspiring true story of how the late former South African President Nelson Mandela joined forces with Francois Pienaar, 1995 South African National Rugby team Captain to unite a country divided along racial and economic lines.

On 24 June 1995, Pienaar led his team, the Springboks, to win their first Rugby World Cup by beating New Zealand, 15-12, in a memorable final played at Ellis Park in Johannesburg. The result was more than a win for South Africa as it unleashed a wave of goodwill and nation-building across the country which a year earlier had celebrated democracy following decades of racial segregation.

It is therefore not surprising to see Pienaar's excitement when 24 years later, the Springboks under the leadership of Siya Kolisi (the Springboks' first black captain) defeated England to win the 2019 Rugby World Cup and lift the Webb Ellis Cup (Rugby Union's coveted prize) once more. His memories of receiving the Webb Ellis Cup from the late President Nelson Mandela, who wore a replica of his green number 6 shirt, came flooding back.



Photo Credit: ESPN

Following South Africa's victory over England, he said:

*"And then I see my number and the [current] South African president wearing the number, which Mr. Mandela wore, and I know that Cyril [Ramaphosa] was very close to Mandela....This is bigger. This is bigger because it is a transformed team, 58 million people watching in South Africa yesterday morning, and all races would have woken up wearing green, which wouldn't have happened in my time".*

The title of the film not only refers to the Roman epithet *Invictus* which in Latin means "unconquered" or "undefeated" but it is also the title of a poem by celebrated British poet William Ernest Henley. The fact that Mandela was able to use his country's staging of the 1995 Rugby World Cup to galvanise an apartheid-torn land is testament to the power of sport.

### **Sport for Peace**

Some time back, the United Nations passed a decision that 2005 would be the Year for Sport and insisted that its members embrace the role of physical education in peace-building and conflict resolution. In response to the UN resolution, International Year of African Football was introduced by the African Union in 2006. Sports diversity was articulated to attract different groups of individuals through a sporting platform, which includes rules that make it easier for bypassing cultural, economic, racial, and religious aspects of difference whilst sensitizing communities. The use of sport to bring about peace in warring areas and communities has recently been promoted with the

collectiveness of international partners such as the UN and FIFA, who work conjunctly with countries football federations, and global companies to form a project known as Sport for Development and Peace (SDP)<sup>1</sup>.

Sports as a means to progress peace is not a novel concept. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century sports was used for peace relations in ancient Greece. This was the earliest recognized utilization of sports in a period of conflict which brought about the first Olympic Games. These allowed different countries to converge and participate and return to their places of origin safely. Football is regarded as the most popular sport and was acknowledged by the world as a source of economic progress and development as well as a vehicle for peace-building and conflict resolution.

UNESCO in its own capacity has indicated that in order to achieve peace and social improvement, it is imperative to distinguish the aspects of the sport analysis<sup>2</sup>. The belief that sport can aid countries to be able to attain its goals while working with initiatives, has led the United Nations to associate and partner with the England Football Association, International Olympic Committee (IOC), and Football governing body FIFA. The European Union has also been an active participant in the promotion of sports among its member states in order to bring about social cohesion. For example, UEFA accepting Kosovo and Gibraltar into their ranks in 2012 and also helping both countries to become FIFA members and take part in 2018 world cup qualifying rounds.

There are numerous reasons as to why sport for peace and development are effective tools for youth development. Most if not all of these reasons are grounded on the fact that sports is universal in nature and appeals to all audiences. Additionally, the fact that sports provides games anchored on rules, fairness and diversity thus ensuring to an extent individuals work together.

### **Sports as a tool for re-integration**

*“Rugby, in particular, caters for all talents – strong guys up front, tall guys, speedy guys. They play together and it makes them a successful team and that is a beautiful story for life and for a country. Everybody needs to work together if you want to be successful. As a country, to be world champion, you all need to work together.”*

*Francois Pineaar*

It is evidently clear that sports provide a framework for teaching people about ways of improving on conflict resolution. Many organizations that advocate for peace are using sports as a partial way to maintain the cooperation past the initial stages to help resolve a conflict by bringing people together and reconciliation between divided communities. While sports does not necessarily solve these conflicts and is in no way a cure for societal problems, it does

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<sup>1</sup> SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP(SDP IWG) (2008).Harnessing the power of sport for development and peace.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO (2009). “Sport for Development & Peace Proceedings”.p. 8

represent a cost-effective medium for post-conflict relief work, peace-building and youth empowerment.

In many countries, fundamental steps have been taken to use football at the grassroots level as a way to engage individuals in conflict resolution and peace-building process. Positive effects have been seen through studies done in various grassroots initiatives that deal with football for peace projects based in Sierra Leone (Education for Peace), Kenya (Mathare Football Club), Liberia (Bosco United Sports Association), Bosnia-Herzegovina (Open Fun Football Schools in the Balkans), (World Vision International Youth Reintegration Training and Israel (Football for Peace). For instance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Open Fun Football Schools have been well employed in uniting different ethnic communities where relationships between age groups have been fostered.

With the foregoing in mind, there is no doubt the important role that sports plays in empowering young people by giving them hope of a better future and fostering peace in divided communities or nations.



The Springboks team Captain, Siya Kolisi, lifting the 2019 Rugby World Cup. Photo Credit: CNBC

*“It’s more than rugby in most countries but in South Africa we are tender. Our country needs to rebuild. To rebuild you need to unite and sport comes along and shows you that” – Francois Pinaar*

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