
SPORT FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

Young Peacemakers in the Kakuma Refugee Camp and Mathare Slums in Kenya

6th PlaytheGame World Communication Conference on Sport and Society
Coventry, United Kingdom, June 8-12, 2009



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This report briefly describes two case studies on how, by "Giving youth a sporting chance" which is the motto of the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), it is also possible - as John Lennon famously wrote and sang - to "Give peace a chance". Both case studies focus on the work of the MYSA youth in the Kakuma refugee camp in northwestern Kenya and in the Mathare area in Nairobi, one of Africa's largest and poorest slums. Based on the two case studies as well as similar examples highlighted in United Nations and other reports over the last decade, it concludes that no other social activity has the same potential and power as ethnically-diverse team sports for kids in reducing ethnic prejudices and tensions, promoting reconciliation and maintaining peace.

Peace, justice and sport

One commentator with a sense of humour described peace as "the empty white space between the chapters in history books". But the 17th century Dutch philosopher and pantheist Baruch Spinoza bluntly asserted that "peace is *not* an absence of war". Instead, Spinoza emphasized that peace "is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence and justice".¹

Spinoza's final focus on justice is critical. Over a century earlier, German theologian and reformer Martin Luther examined the critical link between peace and justice and concluded that "peace was not made for the sake of justice but justice for the sake of peace".²

Over four centuries later, in 1971 the American philosopher John Rawls published his pioneering re-thinking of *The Theory of Justice*. While confirming that the first principle of justice required equality in basic rights and duties, Rawls insisted the second principle of justice is that "social and economic inequalities are *only* just if they result in compensating benefits for everyone *and in particular for the least advantaged members of society*".³

Fifteen year later, Rawl's second principle of justice was concisely re-stated by another American philosopher, young Calvin in the globally syndicated *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoon strip.

In the first frame, as his father reads a book, Calvin confronts him with a universal declaration that every parent has heard many times: "Why can't I stay up late? You guys can!". In the second frame, Calvin protests loudly that "It's not fair!". In the third frame, Calvin's father solemnly shares his worldly wisdom and proclaims that "The world isn't fair, Calvin".

In the last frame, Calvin marches off indignantly while stating on behalf of billions of people on our planet that "*I know. But why isn't it ever unfair in my favour?*"⁴ Calvin said what Spinoza, Luther and Rawls all meant. As long as our unfair world is *not* unfair in favour of the poor majority of people and countries, then peace will remain elusive.

¹ Spinoza, Baruch, 1670, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

² Luther, Martin, 1530, *On Marriage*.

³ Rawls, John, 1971, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press.

⁴ Watterson, Bill, 1996, *Calvin and Hobbes*, International Herald Tribune, May 6, 1996.



This report briefly describes two case studies on how, by "Giving youth a sporting chance" which is the motto of the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), it is also possible - as John Lennon famously wrote and sang - to "Give peace a chance".

Both case studies focus on the work of the MYSA youth in the huge Kakuma refugee camp in north-western Kenya and in the Mathare area in Nairobi, one of Africa's largest and poorest slums. Both examples demonstrate in two quite different situations the crucial role played by youth and sport in reducing communal tensions and contributing to peace and reconciliation.

Young peacemakers in the Kakuma refugee camp

It was at night. I heard people chanting war songs. They were from my community. I recognized the dialect. I only remember fleeing the camp with my family as all hell broke loose. There was fighting and screaming everywhere. I didn't see much. It was very dark. But I was shocked at what I saw the next day.

That was the traumatic reaction of Ismael Lazarus, a Sudanese exile in the Kakuma refugee camp, as quoted by a Kenyan journalist in his news report on "The day hell descended on a refugee camp".⁵ That experience demonstrated yet again that the violence which Ismael and the over 70,000 other refugees had tried to escape too often still followed them even into the camp.

In late 1999, after hearing on their radios that SPLA soldiers from Ekitoria region had reportedly raided their home area, the Dinka and other smaller Sudanese communities in the camp retaliated by burning and looting the thatched homes of refugees from Ekitoria. Armed with guns and other crude weapons, that outburst of inter-ethnic violence left six dead and over 30 injured.⁶

Summary background on the Kakuma refugee camp

As some summary background, the Kakuma refugee camp was established in 1992 under the management of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in cooperation with the World Lutheran Federation (WLF). By 1999 the camp was home to over 70,000 refugees. Nearly 70% of the refugees were from southern Sudan. The remaining 30% were from seven other countries: Somalia, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Eritrea. The different nationalities as well as the different clans among the southern Sudanese, largely lived together in their own distinct parts of the camp.

Over two-thirds of the 70,000 refugees were youth under 25 years old. Nearly one of three were unaccompanied minors. In the early 1990s the camp managers initiated a basic sports programme for the parentless kids and other youth. By 1998 there were 200 teams playing football, basketball and volleyball. However, those teams were largely ethnically-based teams and, as there were no organized leagues, less than a third of the teams actually played frequent matches. Although there were over 20,000 girls under 25 years old in the camp, there were no organized sports activities for them.⁷

Start of the new sport and development programme

At the request of the UNHCR and WLF and with the financial support of the Dutch government through the Netherlands National Olympic Committee/National Sports Federation and Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB), in early 1999 some MYSA youth leaders and two Dutch volunteers

⁵ Saronge, Joseph, 2000, 4.

⁶ Ibid, 54

⁷ Kessels, 2000, 15.

went to the camp to help start new self-help youth sports and community development programmes similar to those pioneered by MYSA over the previous decade in the Mathare slums. As an indication of the priority MYSA attached to this new initiative, the MYSA Executive Council appointed a founding member of MYSA who was also a previous top striker for Mathare United FC and a former MYSA Director, 26-year old Peter Serry⁸, who moved to the camp to launch and head the new programme.

By mid-2000, only 18 months later, there were over 12,000 youth playing on 940 basketball, football, netball and volleyball teams, including over 1,800 girls on 184 teams. Also included for the first time were sports activities in the primary and secondary schools in the camp as well as the neighbouring town of Kakuma and also for over 400 disabled youth who played volleyball, wheelchair basketball, table tennis, darts and other more sedentary games such as dominoes and chess.

Breaking ethnic barriers

The first major challenge and key aim of the new Kakuma sports programme was to break through the ethnic barriers which divided the camp and dominated the previous sports activities. Despite resistance by some elders in a few ethnic groups, that was achieved by dividing the camp into eight zones which cut across the different nationalities and ethnic areas plus Kakuma town as a ninth zone.

Each zone had its own ethnically diverse Sports Council and also appointed ethnically diverse representatives to the overall Supreme Sports Council. The Technical Committees for each sport also consisted of representatives of the different ethnic groups. All teams in the under-16 years and older age categories had to be multi-ethnic but, for reasons of language and transportation, exceptions to this requirement were allowed for the under 14 years and younger teams.

Breaking gender barriers

A second major challenge was to break through the gender barriers as there was initially a lot of cultural resistance to allowing girls to participate in sports activities, including objections to allowing girls to wear the usual playing uniforms for matches. Consequently, in some sports the girls wore trousers rather than shorts.⁹ But even the girls themselves did not believe they could play a traditional boys sport like football until a team of top MYSA girls football players were flown to the camp, formed mix teams of both MYSA and Kakuma camp girls and then played a special tournament together.

There was also some reluctance from the some boys and parents even to allow girls in the sports programme committees. However, that was also a basic requirement from the outset of the new sports programme. For example, in the nine zones at least three of the eleven members of each Sports Council had to be girls. On the overall Supreme Sports Council, at least one girl also had to be included among the three representatives from each of the nine zones.¹⁰

Breaking the dependency syndrome

A third major challenge was breaking through the dependency syndrome which is easy to adopt when you have spent a decade or more of your life as a dependent refugee living in a camp in a foreign country. But the founding principle of MYSA was also applied from the beginning of the new sports programme: that "if you do something, then MYSA does something; but if you do nothing then MYSA does nothing".

Like MYSA, the new Kakuma Sports Association and programme was *not* done *for* the youth but was done *with* and largely *by* the youth in the camp and nearby Kakuma town. In the new sports programme and structure there were only two paid coordinators in each of the nine zones. All except three of the paid staff were refugees. In addition there were over 600 volunteer youth leaders, coach-

⁸ Among other later achievements, Peter studied at the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB) Academy where he earned a UEFA-B coaching license, became a top instructor for the joint KNVB/MYSA sport and development courses in Africa and Asia, set up the Kenya Institute for Soccer Education (KISE), became the new CEO of Premier League club, Tusker FC, and in 2008 helped lead the hugely successful 2010 FIFA World Cup/African Cup of Nations campaign as the Team Manager of the Kenyan Harambee Stars national team. Tragically, Peter was among the over 30 Kenyans who died in the devastating fire in a large supermarket in downtown Nairobi in February 2009 and is greatly missed by his family and many friends in and outside MYSA and Kenya.

⁹ Kakuma Sports Programme Manager Peter Serry noted that "We've also succeeded in getting the girls involved in the programme. In the beginning we had problems because they couldn't be seen in certain clothing. And often the games began just at the moment they had to collect water. We've taken both things into account are more and more girls teams are now being set up.", Broere, Marc, 2001, 150.

¹⁰ Kessels, 2000, 18-19.

es, trainers and referees who were all refugees from all the different countries and ethnic groups. During the first 18 months, those volunteers received special training in a series of over 20 workshops in the different sports and functions lasting 1-2 weeks each.

The first external evaluation in mid-2000 concluded that "a strong organizational structure for the sports programme has been established, people have been trained according to their tasks and functions in the system and decentralization of responsibilities and tasks did take place. An administrative system and computer database are in place to register information. Training of sports facilitators is ongoing and has to continue as the programme is still expanding and the level of play is increasing."¹¹ In sum, within 18 months one of the major objectives had already been achieved as the new sports programme was largely owned, staffed, led and managed by the young refugees themselves.

Linking sport with community and environmental improvements

Another challenge in breaking the dependency syndrome was to implement another MYSA principle that "if you get something from the community than you must put something back into the community". As in the Mathare slums a decade earlier, that was achieved by linking all sports activities and teams to new community and environmental improvement projects in the camp and nearby Kakuma town.

Some of the new community service activities were directly linked to the sports programme (e.g. washing and repairing sports uniforms and equipment, clearing rubbish and bushes on and near sports fields, etc). But more importantly, the community service included a new Youth for Environment Programme which, with the support of the German Technical Cooperation Programme (GTZ), focused on involving all teams in the creation of new "green belts" in the area, including the building of small dams to provide water for tree-planting projects in and around the camp, as well as the clearing of garbage throughout the camp and parts of the nearby town.¹²

Over 150 members of sports teams received special training for organizing and implementing the community service activities. Like in MYSA, the community service activities were fully integrated with the sports leagues. The community and environmental improvement activities were included in the same schedule as the match fixtures and all teams received extra points in the league standings for completing their community service projects.

Tackling social and health threats to youth

A fifth challenge, as in the Mathare slums, was to link the sports activities to social and health risks facing the young refugees and especially to new initiatives on reproductive health issues such as family planning plus AIDS awareness and prevention. Initially, over 30 supervisors and volunteers were trained as a core group of peer educators and leaders for the new information and awareness campaigns on these issues. The first group were all males but the training later extended to include female peer educators and leaders as well. The programme also included the distribution of free condoms.¹³

Integrating the disabled in the sports activities

A sixth challenge was to integrate youth with physical and mental disabilities into the sports activities as they had been neglected and largely ignored previously. New sports activities, facilities and equipment such as crutches and wheelchairs were included in the programme from the beginning.

For example, within 18 months over 400 disabled youth, including 51 females, participated in over 300 official matches in different sports every month in addition to their training sessions and friendly matches. To ensure their views and interests would continue to be respected, representatives of the disabled boys and girls were also added to overall Supreme Sports Council.

The evaluation in mid-2000 concluded that "the sports programme is much appreciated by the disabled. They are excited about the fact that they are given the same opportunities as the non-disabled people. They regard sport as very important as it makes them focus on what they are still able to do and on improving this ability It changes the view of the disabled about themselves and by the outside world of the disabled. It makes them happy and proud."¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid, 2000, 23.

¹² Ibid, 26-27.

¹³ Ibid, 27.

¹⁴ Ibid, 19-21.

Sport, peace and reconciliation in the Kakuma refugee camp

In only 18 months, the new self-help youth sport and community development programme in the Kakuma refugee camp and town succeeded in breaking down barriers and prejudices between the different nationalities and ethnic groups, between boys and girls, between the disabled and non-disabled youth and between the refugees and Kenyan youth in the nearby town.

An evaluation report in mid-2000 concluded that the new programme "played a role in changing the mentality of society members. According to many people, including the UNHCR head of sub-office, the community leaders and police officers, the project has a very positive influence on the Kakuma society, especially on the young people in the camp and in Kakuma town. Sport keeps the youth busy so they are less bored and have less time for wantonness ... It is obvious there are less tensions since the programme started. And if problems occur, they will be solved in a less violent way. People know each other from the sports field and, secondly, they have learned to respect each other and to solve problems other than by fighting ... as people are brought together and get familiar, there is more understanding for each others problems."¹⁵

The evaluation also reported that the UNHCR head of the Kakuma refugee camp "stated that he considers the programme as the most cost-effective project in the camp. With a relatively modest budget the impact is enormous in the sense that there is less violence and destruction, this less protection and restoration is needed. The programme makes people aware of their responsibilities and opportunities. The community service done by sports volunteers such as the cleaning of living areas and tree planting would otherwise be very costly or not done. There is also some income generating for the population as part of the sports materials are locally produced."¹⁶

A later and separate evaluation concluded that "multi-tribal and multi-national teams are competing in the Kakuma Sports Association leagues. Before teams were competing on tribal and national lines. Sport has helped to reduce crowd and opponent violence during matches. It has provided a unifying forum. The Kakuma all-star team is also a multi-national team. The local Turkana Community and the refugees also now interact freely. The supreme Sports Council is multi-national with members elected from all the nationalities living in Kakuma The stepping up of sports activities in the camp has kept a lot of youths very active helping to reduce the tension in the camp. Given stable conditions, sports has gone a long way in promoting peace and harmony in the camp."¹⁷

The Kakuma sports programme also helped raise the self-esteem and confidence of many young refugees. For example, David Bai, a 23-year old Sudanese who had been a refugee half his life and had not seen his family since he was 8 years old, was the best volleyballer in the camp and was also a top leader, referee and coach for six volleyball teams and twelve football teams. David spoke for many when he said "I've become an important person in the camp. I notice that I am respected by everyone. If you have been a refugee for as long as I have and you're apart from your family, that respect is incredibly important."¹⁸

Peter Serry, the MYSA leader and overall head of the new Kakuma sport and community development programme, added one of the more compelling anecdotes on its immediate impact and early success: "The most important thing is that the tensions in the camp have lessened. People have something good to do since we set up these sporting activities. From four o'clock in the afternoon you hear match whistles going off across the camp. The atmosphere has become more lively and pleasant. The director of the camp recently said jokingly to me "If there's ever an uprising against the UN personnel, the sports development workers would be spared".¹⁹

The importance of sport in promoting peace and also helping achieve the Millennium Development Goals is highlighted in the 2003 report of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force of Sport for Development and Peace. "The chief finding" of the Task Force was that "well-designed sport-based initiatives are practical and cost-effective tools to achieve objectives in development and peace". The Task Force then concluded and recommended that "sport is a powerful vehicle that should be increasingly considered by the United Nations as complementary to existing activities."²⁰

The validity of that conclusion and recommendation is certainly demonstrated and reinforced by the achievements of the Kakuma sport and community development programme as well as in many other

¹⁵ Ibid, 31.

¹⁶ Ibid, 31-32.

¹⁷ Lindoe, 2001, 58.

¹⁸ Broere, 2001, 151.

¹⁹ Ibid, 150.

²⁰ Sport for Development and Peace: Toward Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, Report of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force of Sport for Development and Peace, August 2003, Executive Summary, v.

similar projects since then in refugee camps and in post-civil war and even post-disaster situations around the world.²¹

Following the refugees home

Many of those who benefited and excelled in the sport and community development training programmes in the Kakuma camp were refugees from southern Sudan. As an extension of that programme in the camp, it was agreed that when they returned home, they would provide a nucleus and network of trained expertise for starting similar self-help youth sports and community development projects in southern Sudan. It was also agreed that MYSA would try to help them get the funding needed to start and expand such projects when they returned home.

In 2005, after the successful peace talks and signing of eight protocols earlier that year, MYSA started a pilot project in the town of Rumbek in southern Sudan which was then the administrative capital. Some of the key youth leaders involved in the Kakuma sport and development programme were from Rumbek and they as well as SPLM leaders wanted to test the MYSA approach in a pilot project which could then be adapted and expanded to other communities in southern Sudan.

Another reason for focusing on Rumbek was that it was "at the centre of the Child Soldiers Demobilisation Programme in 2001 that saw over 3,000 children demobilized and placed in a child care centre in Rumbek for orientation and reintegration into civil society. The child soldiers underwent a programme aimed at reintegrating them into civil society through education, psycho-social support and vocational training."²² Those youth were part of defending their communities in southern Sudan and deserved the chance to help re-build them. That project in Rumbek is still continuing.

Young peacemakers in the Mathare slums

The Mathare and neighbouring areas constitute one of the largest and poorest slums in Africa and are home for well over half a million people from different ethnic groups. From the outset in 1987, the MYSA leaders, committees, teams and staff have always been ethnically neutral and been composed of youth from all ethnic groups.

Today MYSA is likely the largest self-help youth sports and community development organization in the world. MYSA now has over 21,000 boys and girls actively participating in its over 120 leagues in 16 zones as well as its linked slum garbage/environmental cleanup, AIDS prevention, drama, music, dance, photography, jailed kids, slum libraries and study halls, leadership awards and other community service activities.

The MYSA leaders are elected by the youth from the zonal right up to the top decision-making body, the Executive Council. On the Executive Council, the average age of the elected member is 17-years old and the oldest member is 21 years old. Of the several hundred elected leaders and decision-makers in the 16 zonal committees and overall Sports, Community Service and Executive Councils, 49.3% are girls.

That governance structure is the main reason why MYSA has been so successful over the last two decades. MYSA is really owned and run by the youth themselves and conforms to the classic democratic prescription for good governance "of the people, by the people and for the people". But in the case of MYSA "the people" are the youth in the Mathare and neighbouring slums.²³

During the first two decades of MYSA's existence, it was a source of comfort and pride that when there were periodic outbreaks of inter-ethnic violence in other slums and areas in the country, that inter-ethnic violence did not occur in the slum areas where MYSA was working. Sadly, that illusion of inter-ethnic harmony and peace in the Mathare slums was tragically shattered twice, first with the Mungiki vs Taliban clashes in the Mathare slums in early November 2006 and again during the post-election violence which erupted throughout the country in January 2008.

²¹ See the 2005 Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) report on "Sport for Peace and Development" and the 2006 United Nations report on "Sport for a Better World".

²² Sudan Transition and Recovery Database (STARBASE): Rumbek County, UN Office of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sudan, March 2004, 4.

²³ "Bob Munro may have kicked off MYSA but much of the organization has long outgrown him. It now has hundreds of leaders, most of whom came up the ranks of MYSA, first as players on youth teams then on scholarships for helping to organize tournaments. It has just opened a brand new training centre for its teams on the edge of Mathare. It has offices, meetings halls, a video production studio, a weight room and fitness centre." Hill, Declan, 2008, 309.

(a) Mungiki vs Taliban clashes in the Mathare slums

The first outbreak of violence was in early November 2006 and was initiated by two ethnically-based gangs, the Mungiki consisting of Kikuyus, and the Taliban consisting of Luos, who started fighting over territory and the right to collect protection and other fees from the poor families and small businesses in the Mathare slums.²⁴

As the inter-gang clashes escalated with serious injuries and deaths on both sides, Mungiki members were also accused of the gruesome murders of two policemen. In retaliation, the police flooded into the Mathare slums and killed 22 youths who allegedly were Mungiki members.²⁵ Two days later, another major police operation was carried out and 11 more allegedly Mungiki members were killed.²⁶

As the death toll and looting and burning of homes and small businesses escalated, that triggered an exodus of thousands from the Mathare slums consisting largely of innocent mothers and their children.²⁷ Some found refuge with family or friends in other slum areas. But several hundred of the poorest families had no option except to flee and camp on small pieces of open ground outside the nearby Chief's Camp and the Kenyan Air Force base near the MYSA Eastleigh Zone office.

In most cases the displaced mothers and children only had the clothes they fled in and lacked shelter, blankets and food. As these were reported largely as local clashes between two rival gangs against each other and the police, the innocent women and children forced to camp in the few open spaces were largely ignored by the United Nations and other humanitarian aid agencies except for UN/Habitat which stepped in a few days later and provided financial support for the Mathare youth efforts.

Response of the MYSA leaders and youth

In one of my proudest moments in MYSA over the last two decades, the day after those women and children started camping near the MYSA Eastleigh Zone office, the MYSA Executive Council met, assessed the crisis situation and decided to take the funds allocated for celebrating MYSA's 20th Birthday the following month and instead use that money to provide tents, food, clothing and blankets for the displaced families. All other MYSA activities were also suspended so the over 60 MYSA staff members could focus entirely on helping the displaced and traumatized families.

Over the next two weeks, MYSA worked in close cooperation with the staff of the Jamii Bora Trust, a major micro-finance organization which also had thousands of affected family members in the Mathare slums, were able to assist over 8,000 people, including 6,662 children. In addition to providing tents, food, clothing and blankets, the MYSA staff also organized special sports activities for the children, not only because the kids needed some healthy activities and distractions from their plight but also because their mothers needed to search for new housing and make other arrangements for their future.

Over the next few weeks the violence decreased, some semblance of law and order returned and the families gradually moved back into the slums. Normal MYSA activities also gradually resumed. However, the brilliant cartoonist for the *Daily Nation*, Gado, published an editorial cartoon with the caption "The situation in Mathare is back to normal". In his cartoon, some women are standing beside their shacks in the slums as one says "Yes, back to normal unemployment, poverty, diseases, hunger..."²⁸

Was this truly an inter-ethnic clash in the Mathare slums?

Was this truly an inter-ethnic clash in the Mathare slums? One editorial commentator made the following observations:

"As is usual in Kenya. The tribal card is used to explain all the catastrophes that beset this nation. Politicians and media analysts have consistently been blaming ethnic differences between the Mungiki - a quasi-religious sect comprising dispossessed youth from the Kikuyu tribe - and the Taliban, a self-styled vigilante gang made up mostly of youth from the Luo tribe - as one of the main reasons for the violence that erupted in Nairobi's Mathare slum last week. Even the New York Times claimed that "like so many of Africa's conflicts, this one has an ethnic dimension.

What most people seem to be forgetting is that when you are dirt poor, when you wonder if there will be food on the table tonight, or when you share a tiny 10x10 foot shack with your three sib-

²⁴ Kipkoech Tanui, "Gangs take over but officialdom isn't moved", Standard, November 10, 2006, 12.

²⁵ "Massacre in the slums", front page headline and feature in the Daily Nation, November 6, 2006.

²⁶ "Eleven more killed in hunt for Mungiki", front page headline and feature in the Daily Nation, November 8, 2006.

²⁷ "Thousands flee their homes as slum death toll goes up: Women and children spend night in the cold", front page headline and feature in the Daily Nation, November 9, 2006.

²⁸ Gado, editorial cartoon in the Daily Nation, November 11, 2006, 8.

lings and your parents, tribe is the last thing on your mind."²⁹

In a concluding remark that foreshadowed the next outbreak of violence just over a year later, the commentator added that "in such circumstances it is much easier for a cunning politician or a greedy businessman to make you believe your problems are a result of your genetic makeup or religion, not social injustice."³⁰



What is clear in this first sad outbreak of violence in the Mathare slums in two decades is that it is the innocent and the poorest who suffer first, suffer the most and, as many lost their homes and few possessions, suffer the longest.³¹ But the first and for nearly a week the only ones to respond were also the poorest who were the staff and members of MYSA and the Jamii Bora Trust. The good news is that a few key donors and many individuals, especially friends of MYSA in Norway, donated additional funds so the MYSA youth were still able to celebrate their 20th Birthday in December 2006.

(b) Inter-ethnic post-election violence in early 2008

For the first few months of 2008, in Kenya the whole country was divided and convulsed by inter-ethnic conflict and violence after the disputed presidential elections in late December. Sadly, the Mathare slums were no exception. However, this time the international community and donor focused on the problems and responded from the outset to the shelter, food and other basic needs of the several hundred thousand internally displaced people (IDPs) countrywide, including hundreds of displaced families in the Mathare slums.

Response of the MYSA leaders and youth

As usual, it was the innocent and poorest who suffered first and most. In the TV clips and news photos of the marauding mobs, one stark reality was that they did not include women and children except as victims of the violence. In mid-January 2008 while widespread rioting and inter-ethnic clashes were still rampant, the ethnically diverse MYSA leaders and staff remained united and quietly started organizing regular friendly matches among the youngest kids who, by playing together on the same ethnically diverse teams, sent a clear message of tolerance to their older brothers and fathers.

In addition, the MYSA leaders and staff interviewed the displaced mothers and kids in the IDP camps near the Mathare slums. As the international humanitarian agencies were already catering for their basic shelter, food and health needs, the next but unmet priority of the mothers was ... school shoes and uniforms which had been lost or destroyed during the riots.

²⁹ Rasna Warah, "Want and deprivation know no tribe", Daily Nation, November 14, 2006, 9.

³⁰ Ibid, 9.

³¹ The editorial cartoon was published in the Daily Nation on November 11, 2006.

As their kids could not attend school without them, MYSAs concentrated its limited funds on buying and distributing new school uniforms and shoes for over 200 boys and girls. MYSAs also changed its sports programme plans for 2008 and reallocated its funds to support more inter-zonal friendly matches and sports events in order to promote greater MYSAs-wide solidarity in support of peace and reconciliation.

Sport as part of the healing process for national unity

During the post-election period last year, sport also played a major role in reinforcing the healing process and national unity. In early May 2008 the Kenyan Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport indicated that with the emergency reallocation of government funds to help the hundreds of thousands of displaced people in camps throughout the country, there were no funds for the upcoming campaign starting in late May of the national Harambee Stars for the initial series of qualifying matches for the 2010 FIFA World Cup and African Cup of Nations. Soon afterwards, officials of the Kenya Football Federation (KFF) also announced they lacked the funds needed to support the national team.

In one of my proudest moments in Kenyan football, I chaired a meeting on May 10th of the 16 Kenyan Premier League clubs who, after only a few minutes of discussion, unanimously agreed that our country needed the national team to play those matches as part of the national healing process. The clubs then also decided unanimously to risk the grants needed to ensure their own financial survival later that year and instead use those funds to finance the national team.

At the start of that campaign, Kenya was ranked 120th in the world. Within a few months, the whole nation was excited as the Harambee Stars kept winning points against higher ranked national teams such as Guinea and Zimbabwe. Kenya then rose a remarkable 52 places in the FIFA World Ranking, achieved the highest ranking worldwide in Kenyan football history (68th) and qualified for the final round for the 2010 FIFA World Cup and African Cup of Nations.

That national Harambee Stars team included 11 former or existing MYSAs/Mathare United players. The national coach, Francis Kimanzi, and the national Team Manager, Peter Serry, were both former top players, leaders, coaches and even overall managers of MYSAs.

Lessons learned

What were some of the lessons learned in these two case studies, especially regarding youth and sport for peace and reconciliation? The lessons confirmed or learned include:

1. That sport provides healthy challenges and lessons for kids which help them cope better with life, even in the tough social, psychological and physical conditions in slums and refugee camps;
2. That sport helps keep kids away from drugs and out of trouble and helps them learn lessons in self-discipline, teamwork and respect for rules which then helps stay them out of trouble;³²
3. That kids are not born with the ethnic, religious, cultural or other prejudices of their parents;
4. That kids playing together, especially in team sports, are largely blind to the ethnic and other prejudices of their parents;
5. That when their kids are playing on the same team, the ethnic and other differences which divide their older siblings and parents become more difficult to sustain and they are less inclined to hate the relatives of the teammates passing the ball to their own kids;
6. That sport provides kids with new and often better role models in the community;
7. That in times of conflict, kids can themselves become the examples and role models in helping reduce ethnic tensions and communal violence;
8. That in times of peace, the participation of kids in team sports is a significant factor in helping maintain peace and prevent new ethnic tensions and communal violence;
9. That the laws of the game, like the rule of law in society, help promote fairplay, justice and peace on and off the field when applied to all equally.³³

³² For example, Mathare Senior Chief Charles Nyambisa stated that "as a result of MYSAs's activities, crime in Mathare reduced tremendously". Chief Nyambisa noted that it also changed the attitudes of those in and outside the slums: "Mathare people and Kenyans now have a changes attitude and belief concerning slums where the majority believed nothing good can come out of Mathare and other slums in the city. This myth has been changed.", Lindoe, Preben, 2001, 97.

³³ For example, see Henley, Robert, 2005, page 22: "Don't change the rules! She [a project field worker] felt this was true as a general statement in using sport with people trying to overcome disaster trauma but found this was

To conclude with a bold statement based on these two case studies on the young peacemakers in the Kakuma refugee camp and Mathare slums as well as similar examples highlighted in United Nations and other reports over the last decade³⁴, *no other social activity has the same potential and power as ethnically-diverse team sports for kids in reducing ethnic prejudices and tensions, promoting reconciliation and maintaining peace.*

After playing with your neighbours on the field, it simply becomes harder for kids to develop or sustain ethnic and other prejudices off the field. It also becomes harder for their parents to sustain their ethnic and other prejudices off the field after cheering their own kids and their ethnically diverse teammates and friends on the field.

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specifically important in her work with street children. She found the street kids [in the Ivory Coast] to be eager for structure and predictability in their lives and that the commonly understood rules in football were of particular benefit, readily accepted as a structure and never challenged."

³⁴ Ibid, page 21: "People are now starting to return to their villages [in the Ivory Coast] but there is great suspicion and fear due to past widespread violence, often between neighbours, along with much theft and destruction of property ... [The researcher] found sports to be a particularly important and useful tool because it gives people from different ethnic backgrounds a reason to gather and meet, as sports provides a safe and neutral ground to participate together. For other examples, see the 2005 Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) report on "Sport for Peace and Development" and the 2006 United Nations report on "Sport for a Better World".