

ISSUES AILING SPORT IN KENYA

Kenya is seen as an inspiration to the world in sports especially in athletics. Our success in athletics is known world over and it is not surprising that many Kenyans living abroad have been asked if they can 'run' when they announce their Kenyan citizenship.

Kenya was ranked second overall on the medal chart in the last edition of the event two years ago in Durban, South Africa. Apart from athletics, Kenyan sports personalities have made headlines in other sports such as javelin and football for example Denis Oliech and Victor Wanyama. Just a week ago, the national senior athletics team spent another night in Lagos after the organisers of 2018 Africa Athletics Championships failed to provide a chartered flight for them to reach the match venue in Asaba. Despite this, the government did little to intervene and assist the team which has bagged medals despite this challenge.

Despite the abundant talent in Kenya, we have not been able to fully appreciate and tap into sports as a major economic driver. There are several issues ailing Kenyan sport.

According to a Transparency International Report, with global sporting events generating at least \$145 billion (Sh14.5 trillion), corruption is rife in the sports arena. Kenyan sports are not spared from this menace. Corruption has cost so many youths their future and a source of income due to graft. There is a general lack of accountability where Kenyan sports officials have been accused of stealing and/or mismanaged funds as was seen in the Rio Olympics.

Doping has also dogged the sports arena especially in athletics causing some of the leading sportspeople in the country being suspended for doping. This has caused Kenya to be on the World Anti-doping Agency (WADA) watch list which has tarnished the reputation of the country's sportspeople. Further, it has led to the loss of some of the country's leading athletes as a result of these bans and suspensions. It has also painted the Kenyan sportsmen negatively.

The quality of training is also an issue that ails Kenyan sport. This coupled with lack of proper facilities definitely affects the players and outcomes. The stadiums and training facilities are in a poor state or virtually non-existent. Without these facilities, sportspeople have been left to train in makeshift venues/poor facilities and cannot therefore attain the highest level of results as should be. Last September, the country was stripped of the rights to host the 2018 Africa Home Nations Championships by the Confederation of African Football with poor infrastructure cited as the main reason alongside the political uncertainty prevailing in the nation.

at the time owing to disputed elections. The Deputy President, William Ruto then promised nine facilities including Nyayo Stadium in Nairobi would be ready for use in April 2018. This is yet to happen.

At the Sports Tribunal, a good number of disputes referred relate to wrangles between sporting federations and infighting within the leadership. The Kenya Netball Federation is locked in a bitter supremacy battle between incumbent officials and their counterparts from nine branches calling for the heads of the administration with election set for March 24 where embattled Secretary General is keen on defending her seat amid stiff opposition. The Kenya Swimming Federation has also been marred with selection issues to international competitions such as to the 2018 Commonwealth Games. These are just examples of the wrangles happening within the federations.

Funding has also been a major issue in Kenya. Sporting federations and teams have struggled to raise funding for teams for day to day running of the teams. Citizens have been forced to fund raise for their teams on some instances so that they can participate in both local and international competitions. This has left many sportsmen disenfranchised and disappointed altogether.

Moving forward, stakeholders in Kenya need to come up with a solid and long lasting solution to curb these ills and forge a way forward. Sports can be used to curb unemployment amongst the youth and reduce crime and other societal ills such as drug abuse. Further, sports can make a considerable contribution to the economy. It is imperative that the real economic and social value of sports is taken seriously by all stakeholders in Kenya to ensure that Kenyans are the eventual beneficiaries.