

# Sports and Development in Malawi

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*This essay examines alternative strategies available to developing countries in the face of structural barriers impeding conventional economic growth. One of these avenues is through sport. The exploitation of sport for purposes of development are turned on their head by the efforts of the author to inculcate a sense of civic duty in return for sporting opportunities above and beyond what could normally be expected. Through the enticement of sporting equipment not readily available, the author has made an attempt to impede the spread of HIV/AIDS through Malawi. Conversely, through notions of a social conscience, various international contacts of the author have been persuaded to aid his fight. These mutually reinforcing behaviours have spread hope to the region, and are serving as a model for similar programmes in places such as Mexico. Special attention is also paid to the careful considerations relating to the often sensitive political situation in Malawi, and the pitfalls attached to a civic organization navigating that terrain.*

## Introduction

The dominant view of development has, traditionally, been presented in terms of economic programmes. These reflect advances in the improvement of basic amenities in the lives of the people as well as provision of means for the attainment of those luxuries that contribute towards the improvement of the quality of life. While economic development may dwell on attraction of increased investments, production and marketing of material goods, the development of the infrastructure requisite for trade, both nationally and internationally, contributing to a healthy balance of payments, the programme of national development normally includes more. National development includes determination of the means by which the society regenerates itself, improves the production capabilities of the populace through the education and improved health of its youth, the diversification of its economic base, improved agricultural methods to guarantee food security, technological innovation and its integration into the cultural heritage of the people, adaptation of cultural practices to altered circumstances or

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change, et cetera. Thus, the programme of national development encompasses more than just improved living conditions.

This is significant because in the third world countries the idea of development tends to be driven by efforts to attain and adapt the achievements of the more developed countries, comprising what used to be known as the first or second world. The efforts to emulate the developed countries has, not entirely unexpectedly, been beset by difficulties leading to frustrations and, unfortunately, insurmountable national debt to international financial lending institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank. The debts incurred with those institutions have, ordinarily, been in addition to debts from individual developed nations under 'bilateral agreements'. Normally, loans secured under such bilateral agreements have included conditions that, effectively, contribute directly to the improvement of the quality of life in the lending nations. For instance, capital for the development of specific projects, such as the construction of a rail line, or of a factory, may be accompanied with the requirement that the raw material either be supplied by the borrowing country, not always possible, or be secured from the lending nation. This reduces the loan to a means to making the receiving country a client to companies in the lending country, effectively guaranteeing employment of the workforce in those companies, improving further the lending country's development. Additionally, the conditions that the lending institutions, specifically the IMF and the World Bank, have normally stipulated to ensure that the debts incurred are serviced, known as 'structural adjustment programs', have resulted in further erosion of the whole agenda of development, as third world governments have been forced into currency devaluation, elimination of government subsidies for the very programmes calculated to improve the lives of the people, and the forced adoption of a market economy of the developed world. The difficulties for the third world nations emanate from the fact that the economic and political bases that stimulated development in the developed nations are incommensurate with the conditions in the 'developing' countries. Worse, international aid has contributed as much to some aspects of development as it has to the further under-development of third world countries.[1]

Inevitably, the poor nations sometimes begin to seek alternative strategies to development or to re-define the concept of development. This amounts to relativization of the idea of development so that the notion captures what should count as improved conditions in the welfare of the populace relative to prevailing conditions and available resources. For instance, when the first president of Malawi, the late Hastings Kamuzu Banda, decided to move the country's administrative capital from the city of Zomba in the south, to Lilongwe in the centre, he made it explicit that he would strive for something that was 'simple but dignified'. In other words, it was not to be a replica of the capital city of some developed nation.

Development in Africa has also been adversely affected by other factors. These include chronic famine and the emergence of HIV/AIDS. The pandemic has had a devastating effect on the economic performance of African countries in that it has decimated the able-bodied and economically active and productive segment of society. The loss of youth has not only translated into economic stagnation but, given

the identification of the pandemic with sexual activity, it has contributed to curtailment of the means of procreation and regeneration of society. This has forced a review of the notion of national development. Under the circumstances, development has come to include not just the education of the youth but, rather, efforts to save them, restore their health and, given the scarcity of financial resources, determine ways in which the youth can be encouraged to channel their energy and vigour to the development of the country and its admittedly modified notion of development. It is the aforementioned conditions that have, in recent times, exploited the youth's love of sports as a means to development. We turn to this aspect in the next section.

### **Soccer in Malawi**

It is something of a truism at this juncture that soccer is the most popular sport in Africa. Indeed, its popularity is attested by the inordinate amount of meagre resources allocated to it in most countries, far outstripping other sporting activities. The national soccer leagues, affiliated to the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) through a local national Football Association, are probably the most organized of all sporting activities at the national level. The soccer clubs participating in the national leagues provide more than mere entertainment. Giulianotti and Armstrong note that 'there is obviously more to the game than a collection of naked facts regarding teams, results, and championships'. [2] Soccer provides one dimension of identity or of political activism, as evidenced in recent efforts to promote peace in Mexico with the Zapatistas, or to stamp out racism in and through sports. In fact, recently, on 29 November 2005, a team comprising Palestinians and Israelis, organized by the Foundation of Shimon Peres, played a 'match for peace' against the leading Spanish club of FC Barcelona, soon after the crowning of Ronaldinho, a player for FC Barcelona, as the Ballon D'Or star (Europe's best player of the year). Soccer has also been featured in the promotion or restoration of international understanding or relations, as when Team USA, the men's national soccer team of the United States, hosted the national team of Iran in Oakland, California, in 2001. The contest assumed greater significance in light of the nadir reached in Iran/USA relations after the taking of American hostages in Iran in 1979, later released in 1980.

Given the ethnic heterogeneity that characterizes African countries, sometimes leading to civil or internal strife, national soccer teams participating in international tournaments have achieved more in fostering national identity, albeit temporarily, than political efforts may achieve. In some cases, such as in the Olympics or the World Cup tournaments, African teams that qualify effectively unite the continent. For instance, Giulianotti and Armstrong observe that '[W]hen Nigeria defeated Argentina to win the football (or soccer) tournament at the 1996 Olympic Games, that victory was no single victory for one nation over another. For most Africans with an interest in football, Nigeria's triumph was a continental rather than a national success.' [3] It has even been claimed that fútbol unites Latin America. As McDaniel-Keith points out:

Football is a sport with more geo-political significance than most of us imagine. Since the Argentina-England war over the Falkland Islands and Argentina's World Cup win over England in 1986, meetings of the two teams have been referred to as 'blood matches'. The fact that these are football teams, not armies, is often lost in the bloody shuffle. The team becomes the country.

Football defeats can crush a country's hopes and self-image. When Argentina's economy crashed in 2001, many observers hoped that a win in the 2002 World Cup could restore national pride and dignity. When their team was eliminated in the first round, it was insult on top of injury: the two blows – economic and athletic – were inextricably linked in the national imagination.[4]

Part of the appeal of soccer is that, relative to other sporting activities, it is cheap. The basic equipment required is a ball, and this could be made of rags or plastic paper tied up, if a regulation ball cannot be secured. It also provides a means of socialization into cooperative ventures through participation in a team sport. The dynamics of such team sport include learning to cooperate with others and work together to achieve a special goal, viz., winning the game or overcoming the opposing team in concert. In addition, there is the development of individual skills and the improvement of motor skills, coordination of perceptual and motor skills, and improvement of personal physical health. The logic of attainment of defined and definable goals through cooperative work in a team is central to the exploitation of the sport to achieve ends other than the immediate ones of overcoming the opposing teams. Specifically, the ends could be redefined such that they include contribution to national development, appropriately determined, and the sport becomes a means to the achievement of those ends. Naturally, the redirection of the sport to serve as means to ends that are nebulous and removed from the immediate concerns of game results requires some incentives, as well as directors who determine the ends for which the sport can serve as the means. Indeed political candidates in some third world countries, for instance, in Malawi, have routinely exploited soccer during campaign seasons in order to woo votes. They supply soccer balls to youths, especially in impoverished rural areas, to gain popularity. In any case, part of the rationale behind the exploitation of sports, specifically soccer, in the service of national development in the east African nation of Malawi derives from the redefinition of the goals for which the sport is a means, and satisfaction of the requisite incentives to gain the support of the youth involved.

### **The Youth and National Development in Malawi**

Besides the existence of the Ministry of Education, many African countries reflect their concern for, or interest in, youth involvement in national development through the creation of a Ministry of Youth and Sports. Sometimes 'culture' is included in that ministry when it is not part of the ministry of education. In general, the activities of such a Ministry rarely affect the majority of the youth who, in general, reside in rural areas. Low on the list of immediate needs, the budget for such a ministry cannot compete with that of health, agriculture or defence. Effectively, the Ministry has little more than token value. The youth cannot hope to be assisted in essential ways from the

ministry, a fact that is aggravated by the fact that sporting activities in rural areas lack organization, sponsorship or even basic facilities. In Malawi, although other sporting activities get some support through the terms of reference of the Malawi National Council of Sports, the focus on sports remains largely on soccer. There, the attention goes to the teams (or clubs, to use the term most common in Europe) that participate in the national league. A number of those clubs have sponsorship. It is in the effort to provide the needed assistance to the sidelined youth and to motivate them to focus on more than the sporting activity that other youth development programmes have evolved. A specific example can be gleaned from ongoing activities in Malawi, to which I now turn.

In July 2002, I spent a few days in Ndirande, near the city of Blantyre in Malawi, waiting to return to my professional duties in the United States. Ndirande is a bustling ‘township’ that grew as people who moved into the Blantyre area seeking employment, continued to put up ‘temporary’ shacks et cetera. Englund provides an apt characterization of Ndirande. He notes that ‘Ndirande, “the Soweto of Malawi”, [is] a densely populated and predominantly poor township where migrants from all the districts of Malawi began to outnumber local villagers from the 1940s onwards’.[5] The current image of Ndirande remains far from attractive, as some accounts make evident. Thus, writing in *The Malawi News* of 27 September–3 October 2003, the Sports Reporter Pilirani Kachinziri, describes Ndirande in the following unflattering terms:

Blantyre’s sprawling slum of Ndirande is believed to be a den of criminals, drug traffickers and prostitutes.

A bare 10-minute drive from city centre, this stretch of shanty township has most of its buildings made of card boards, corrugated iron sheets, mud and grass.[6]

It was in these surroundings that one afternoon, while waiting for my host to return from work, I spotted 10-year-old boys playing soccer in a small clearing by the roadside edge of a corn field with part of the uncultivated section serving as a make-shift trash dump. They were kicking a ball of wrapped plastic sheets. Lacking other pressing demands, and as a licensed referee of the United States Soccer Federation, I decided to pass the time with the kids. My offer to referee them was met with incredulity, but the sight of a regulation ball that I offered to lend them transformed their disbelief into joy. The dynamics of the game immediately altered and there was heightened interest of the on-lookers. Indeed, even a kids’ game using a ball of plastic wrappers, played on an afternoon of a workday, could still command an audience.

At the end, one of the spectators, a teenager who introduced himself as Rafiki Makata, approached me for assistance in obtaining a soccer ball. He and other teenagers from the area played recreationally, but they lacked the most essential piece of equipment, a ball.

### **Mtaya Football League in Nkhotakota**

My initial response to the request was decidedly negative. At that time I was involved in assisting the youth in Nkhotakota, my district of origin. Located along the central

shores of Lake Malawi, Nkhotakota's claim to fame is that it is one of the places where in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an era characterized by Arab slave trade in Malawi, slaves were collected for transportation by boat north to Tanzania and the Arabian Peninsula. Eventually, as the British sought to end slavery and establish colonial rule, it is the place where 'a deal was struck between the British and the local slave-trade agent Jumbe, to desist from further slave-trade. A treaty was signed between Jumbe and Sir Harry Johnson in 1889. The tree under which the treaty was brokered remains as an historical monument, a few yards away from the main center of Anglican missionary activity in Nkhotakota.'<sup>[7]</sup>

While passing by the village school of Chombo in 1997 I was treated to the sight of children having classes in the open, under trees. This was a consequence of lack of physical structures to hold classes in. Subsequently, I was appealed to for a soccer ball because the school, of which I am an alumnus, did not have a soccer ball. Eventually, I donated two balls only to find myself appealed to further for soccer outfits. The potential of converting me into the supplier of soccer equipment and more, through exploitation of the image of 'the local boy who made it good in California', was plainly evident. It was a ploy that, to all intents and purposes, was destined to make for a dependency relationship where the hardships of the school would be exploited to gain assistance, eventually to degenerate into the appearance of entitlement. I surmised that it would not be an apt means of aiding either the school or the local community. Rather, it was going to foster the illusion that there is a benefactor who will remedy the woes of the school and the community through the happenstance of being a local boy resident and working in the United States. Encouraging such an illusion would be a disservice to the community. In trying to determine ways of making a positive impact in the community, I resolved to make donations of sports equipment contingent on the recipients' willingness to contribute to their local communities through engaging in community service. These would include helping the elderly in their agricultural work to improve chances of increased food security, contributing to the maintenance of the health care facilities or clinics, of places of worship, clearing the cemeteries, increased commitment to their educational programmes, et cetera. In order to ensure that the conditions attached to the assistance did not undermine the authority of the school's principal, the project was conducted outside of the strictures of school administration. I organized youth soccer teams in the villages.

In 1999 I purchased two sets of soccer jerseys and shorts, and soccer balls. These were given to two teams. One, Kapanga Blades, was based in my village of Chombo, while the other, Chalunda Chizito Chiefs, was based some 50 km north, at Liwaladzi Health Center. This location was the residence of my aunt, Mrs Lilian Bai, and her husband, Mr Joseph Bai. The youth readily consented to focus on community service. Following on a suggestion made by Nancy Kendall, then a graduate student at Stanford University in California, focusing on public health issues in Malawi, I resolved to include heightened awareness of HIV/AIDS as part of the project.

The two teams that were organized in Nkhotakota would have constituted the extent of my involvement in youth development or my contribution to the local community. Alterations to the plan were a consequence of unforeseen subsequent developments. As

a faculty member of the Berkeley campus of the University of California, my regular pursuits of teaching and research had distracted me from sports. However, in 1998 I got involved in soccer in my residential city of San Pablo, as a coach for Under 7 boys in the San Pablo United Youth Soccer Club. In the fall semester of 1999, subsequent to the donation of soccer gear to the teams in Malawi, I met Kim Brown, then a student in my Swahili class. She played for the campus women's team. When she learned about my efforts to engage the youth in Malawi in projects that would contribute to their local communities, she deemed it a worthwhile project and proceeded to discuss the matter with the Head Coach of Women's soccer, Kevin Boyd, and the assistant coach, Jennifer Thomas. They immediately noted a way to dispose of their unused or no longer useful equipment by donating it to an apparently good cause. The project immediately received support through donations of jerseys, shorts, shin-guards, balls, et cetera. In 2000, I increased the number of teams to four, the additions being the Yamikani Eagles in my home village, and the Ng'ombe Chargers at Liwaladzi. Further, I encouraged the youth to form a village league, the Mtaya Football League, through which the idea of community service and increased awareness of HIV/AIDS would be spread. Each team participating in the league and securing assistance through it would be required to engage in community service and contribute towards heeding warnings about HIV/AIDS. The contribution of the University of California at Berkeley (Cal) equipment made for increased involvement with the youth in Malawi and the project had decidedly taken on a life of its own. It also began to attract unwanted and unwarranted attention and concerns from political aspirants or incumbents. This called for the inclusion of explicit statements about the non-partisan and a-political nature of the programme.

Besides the contribution from Cal soccer, other soccer clubs in the East Bay and North Bay of the San Francisco Bay area also made contributions when the news spread. Donations of jerseys and cleats came from the San Pablo United Youth Soccer Club, El Cerrito Youth Soccer Club, Real Marin Soccer Club, et cetera. The youth interest grew as participation in the league and the call to community service were viewed as means to receiving soccer equipment. Of course a central aspect of all this was to contribute to improvement in the youth's physical health, in their technical skills in soccer playing, and in the provision of entertainment in areas still lacking basic amenities such as running water or electricity, which hampers delivery of entertainment provided by the electronic media. Further, traditional modes of entertainment, such as traditional dances, are seasonal.

Mtaya Football League was intended to be an effort at grass-roots level in a rural community to motivate the youth to engage in community service and heed warnings about HIV/AIDS. The teams participating in it were spread over a stretch of 50 kilometres. Using local rivers as convenient boundaries, the league was located in Nkhotakota district in the area bounded to the south by Kaombe River and to the north by Dwangwa River. It comprised two zones, one demarcated by Kaombe River to the south and Bua River to the north, and the other by Bua River to the south and Dwangwa River to the north. To promote interaction, each zone had an all-star or select team. The two teams, Mtaya Astros for the Kaombe-Bua zone, and Mtaya

Mavericks for the Bua-Dwangwa zone, would have periodic contests, providing occasion for the two communities to interact. The first contest was held in 2001 for which I served as the referee. A trophy that I had purchased in Mexico was presented to the winning team which was, on that occasion, the Mtaya Mavericks.

The contest provided a unique opportunity to reiterate the goals and objectives of the league. These included promotion of awareness among the youth of the AIDS pandemic and reinforcement of preventive measures, such as abstinence or the proper use of condoms; the use of sports as a means to encourage the youth to focus on education for self-empowerment, as well as their physical and mental development; and, to promote discipline and heighten a sense of responsibility among the youth.

It was also stressed that the league would remain a strictly non-political organization and would strive to maintain neutrality with regard to religious affiliation. In fact, emphasis was placed on promotion of tolerance with regard to political orientation or religious affiliation, and the youth were encouraged to be of service to their various places of worship, that included both churches and mosques.

### **On AIDS and Development in Malawi**

The incorporation of AIDS awareness or education into the project is more than a matter of mere convenience or pandering to current interests or politically appealing issues. The pandemic has not merely been a calamity that has claimed lives but, as a consequence, it has had disastrous effects on development in African countries. The first publicized cases of AIDS may have been in California, initially identified with the gay community, but the disease has had its major impact in the countries of the sub-Saharan region of Africa. In those countries it is 'those people who have been groomed to lead the nation into the future who are dying at the highest rates. In South Africa's Natal Province, which suffers one of the highest AIDS rates anywhere, the epidemic has led to a self-perpetuating public health nightmare.'<sup>[8]</sup> The public health nightmare indicated here is one that has profoundly affected economic development and complicated in non-trivial ways strategies or content of national development. Economically, the decimation of the most productive segment of the population, teachers, police, medical personnel, the civil service, the military, et cetera, has translated into scarcity of work-force, resulting in deterrence of investment as apprehension grows concerning the rate of returns from the investment. In addition, industrial productivity has been adversely impacted by the preponderance of funerals, always disrupting normal duties or work routine. Further, the decimation of the able-bodied segment of the society has resulted in altered and highly skewed demographics where the countries seem to, noticeably, comprise the very old and the very young. This raises important issues about the education and training of those children, besides the more immediate issue of caring for them. The lack of personnel available to transmit skills and values, to provide care, or guarantee a future for the nation can only be viewed as constituting a tragedy. When compounded with chronic famine and scarcity of nutrition, and an international community whose response to such problems in fringe countries like Malawi is niggardly, one would be

excused for expressing despair or growing despondence about the future of Malawi or Africa in general.

The economic stagnation brought about by the impact of AIDS has also contributed significantly to a negative evaluation of democracy. The shift to democratic practice in many African countries occurred, by sheer coincidence, during the era that AIDS took hold or became noticeable and evident as the greatest health issue of modern times, even viewed as undermining or negatively impacting aspects of national security.[9] The disease of AIDS has simultaneously impacted economic activity, as the able-bodied and productive members of the society have been the primary victims, and affected the government's ability to provide essential services needed for development or improvement of infrastructure as the need to treat and combat the disease has increasingly commanded or influenced budget allocations. For instance, in May 2000, responding to queries about his purported overtures to critics of HIV as a source for AIDS, President Mbeki of South Africa pointed out that there was need for re-evaluation of the approach to AIDS especially in light of the exorbitant prices of the available drugs. In South Africa, AIDS treatment reduced to the requirement that the whole entire budget for the Ministry of Health be devoted entirely to it exclusively. Clearly the issue of the costs associated with AIDS treatment, as well as means of containing the disease and saving the lives of, especially, the youth, have pre-occupied many African countries.[10] The absence of real signs of alleviation of the hardships engendered by the pandemic makes the task urgent. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the spread of the disease is identified with the most intimate of human relations – sex.

Efforts to control the transmission of the disease, ordinarily transmitted through 'vaginal sex',[11] have called for major shifts in both the lifestyles of the population, especially the youth, and cultural perspectives of the African society. Culturally, both in Malawi and other African communities, open and candid discussion of sexual matters is considered taboo. Addressing the issue of AIDS demands a relaxation of that attitude, which will allow for, and accept, discussion of sex in polite parlance. This remains difficult. Mtenje, in his inaugural lecture delivered in 2002 at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, noted ruefully how instructions about the proper use of condoms were explicit in English, not always readily accessible to the majority of Malawians, but were couched in idiomatic and metaphorical language when expressed in the local language of Chichewa. Commenting on the locally publicized messages on HIV/AIDS prevention, he notes that,

The English versions of the messages are direct and clear. They talk about the role of condoms in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. On the contrary, the Chichewa messages, which are intended for the Malawian with average education, are cryptic, vague, un-instructive and misleading at best.[12]

Language is important to national development[13] and more so in the aspect of development that is concerned with saving the youth of the nation. The proper exploitation of language to achieve those goals is essential. Yet under the circumstances, cultural practice appears to constitute a serious barrier to the attainment of those goals. This is

one area where modification of cherished cultural habits as reflected in linguistic practice is warranted.

Further, in Malawi, as elsewhere, there is emphasis placed on procreation. Consequently, the most encouraged methods of controlling the spread of AIDS, namely abstinence or the use of prophylactics, are both viewed as having a negative impact on that goal. Overcoming these obstacles is essential to the preservation of the youth, the resurgence of positive economic activity, and the articulation of a national development programme. And, as indicated, the prevalence of AIDS during the period of transition to democratic practice, loosely translated as the acceptance of multi-party politics, accompanied by privatization and liberalization of the economy, leading to removal of government subsidies and, as has been the general case, to higher levels of unemployment as market forces make themselves felt, has made for a negative evaluation of the benefits of democracy. The success of democratic practice in Malawi is dependent upon positive economic performance. To achieve this, AIDS education, awareness, prevention and cure inevitably constitute necessary conditions. This becomes a pre-requisite to any putative formulation of the agenda of national development.

### **Enter SM Galaxy Football Club in Ndirande**

In 2002, when Rafiki Makata approached me about assisting the youth in Ndirande, the Mtaya Football League in Nkhotakota already had in excess of 16 teams participating in it. Many were still waiting for their turn to receive material support. This was proving difficult because the donations, when obtained, needed to be transported. The most reliable means of getting the material there was simply as my luggage when I visited. Air travel to Malawi from California is not cheap, and paying for excess baggage limits further the amount that can be transported. My reluctance to extend my involvement through assisting the youth of Ndirande, based as they were in the major commercial city of the country, keen to look the part eventually, was not entirely unreasonable or baseless.

It is somewhat ironic that the youth that have turned into a show-case of what can be achieved for the community through sports and youth activity are the ones whose request for assistance had been met initially with rejection. The change of heart occurred on the same day that I had been approached. Ms. Sandra Phiri, my host in Ndirande, was aware of the project in Nkhotakota. She made a suggestion regarding the request from the Ndirande youth, viz., that they should be assisted but held to comparable conditions. Extending the project to Ndirande would not merely contribute toward a restoration of pride and hope among them, but their contribution would be a real boon to the community. Besides, their activities might attract the attention of the local media. That would make for wider publicity of the goals and objectives of the project, potentially acquiring national significance. Her suggestion altered the course of events. The youth were contacted and were given the conditions attached to any assistance that they would receive to promote their participation in soccer. They readily consented.

I decided to have the team properly constituted and recognized. The team accepted the name of SM Galaxy, partly inspired by the professional soccer team based in Los Angeles, called the L.A. Galaxy, one of the two teams in California that play in Major League Soccer. They were furnished with jerseys that I had purchased in Hong Kong and Mexico during my visits there for teaching duties or conferences, jerseys donated by Cal soccer, and Bay Oaks T-shirts donated by Scott Lambert of Piedmont, California. He became aware of my work in Malawi through an encounter when I refereed for the Bay Oaks tournament. He decided to help.

Coaching the team as well as offering guidance fell to Aubrey Nankhuni. A resident of Ndirande, he had played in the national league, but currently serves as the Assistant Coach of the national league team sponsored by the Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi (Escom). He has not only taken to working with the youth with enthusiasm – highly commendable given that it is purely voluntary – but he has ensured that community service remains top of the youth activities. As anticipated, SM Galaxy caught the attention of the local press, which has publicized their charitable work.

The exploitation of soccer as means to youth development, community service, the fight against HIV/AIDS through heightening awareness about the dangers of unprotected sex, began to boost the profile of the youth playing for SM Galaxy. They acquired the status of catalysts for increased dissemination of the goals of the programme. Greater publicity of the project was to be achieved through meeting yet another request from the team – they wanted to join the Southern Region Football League of Malawi, the southern conference of the national league, managed by the Football Association of Malawi (FAM), the local affiliate of FIFA. My hesitation in consenting to this request was, again, understandable. It was no longer going to be a matter of equipping the youth with material, most of which was donated anyway but, this time, there would be need for capital expenditure to meet registration and operating costs. The reluctance that had underlain my original response to them now seemed to be vindicated. Yet, this was indeed the means by which other youth could get the message and might feel attracted to contribute in comparable ways. Somehow this was indeed a means to the even greater goal of potential nationwide adoption of the ideas behind the project.

Equipped with some of the press reports of the charitable work that SM Galaxy had done, I appealed to colleagues at a Linguistics workshop in Berlin, Germany, in November 2003. The response was generous. Donations that amounted to over 200 Euros, added to my own modest contributions, got SM Galaxy into Division 1 of the league. It was made clear to the team that its participation in the league owed a lot to the assistance from the international community, rendered to cheer them in their exemplary commitment to the objectives of the project. The message was clear that any future assistance from the international community, hence their continued participation in competitive tournaments, would be predicated on their unwavering commitment to community service, to combating HIV/AIDS through observation of the recommended preventive measures, and their contribution to national development.

To facilitate accountability and transparency in financial affairs, I advised the team to appoint a committee of office bearers who would manage the affairs of the club. The team has an administrative structure, and a constitution that mandates the Coach, the

Trustee Member, currently Ms. Sandra Phiri, whose residence also serves as the team's official meeting place, and the treasurer, currently one of the players, Mr. Bright Sissero, to manage the team's finances. The team elected me to serve as Patron. The team was advised to have a bank account that would be operated in a manner consistent with management of an organization's finances. I opened an account for them, in the hope that it would also facilitate future donations, allaying apprehension about misuse of funds if channelled through me or other individuals. Further, I urged the team to secure a mailing address. To that end I paid for a post office box for the team.

It is very likely that the degree of support that the team found itself commanding contributed tremendously to improvement of the team's self-esteem as well as the team's performance in the league. It also underscored for them the importance of keeping their end of the bargain. SM Galaxy has been exemplary in community work. It was a major victory for the team that in its first season in Division 1 of the Southern Region Football League of Malawi the team finished off tied for position 3 in points, but dropped to position 4 on goal differential, with real prospects of promotion to the next division up, the Premier Division. The youth's charitable contributions to society have included visiting the sick – especially the children – at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital in Blantyre City, cutting the grass at, and mopping the floor of, the historical St Michael's Church of the Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) of Blantyre Synod, as well as clearing trash that had piled along the road in their residential area of Ndirande New Lines, an obvious health hazard. During a recent visit in January 2005 the team requested me to donate, on their behalf, two soccer balls to the inmates of Chichiri Prison in the City of Blantyre. All this has captured the interest of the local media. This has provided a major boost to the project as more youth have got interested in participating, obviously with an eye toward securing comparable assistance.

### **Boost from International Interest**

This youth development project, centred around the exploitation of the passion for soccer and sports has, in no small measure, benefited from my occupation as a faculty member of Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley. The occupation and the location have made for a degree of ease in soliciting assistance from Cal soccer programmes. My involvement with the Alameda Contra Costa Youth Soccer League (ACCYSL) of the California Youth Soccer Association, primarily as a soccer referee, has contributed greatly to the formation of networks that have been advantageous to the Malawi Youth Soccer Project. A number of Youth Soccer Leagues and Soccer Clubs in northern California have become aware of the needs of the youth in Malawi and the activities that they are engaged in as a condition for assistance. SM Galaxy has turned out to be the salient feature of the youth programme in Malawi because of the press coverage that the team has had. This is significant because press coverage of sports in Malawi normally focuses on the sponsored teams in the top division of the league, the Super League of Malawi. That is the division that provides the players to the Malawi National Team (called The Flames). Naturally, this is not surprising. Soccer contributes to the international visibility of countries that, otherwise, would remain obscure.

This is comparable to the role that the inter-collegiate athletics programmes play in American academe. As noted by Hannah Perot[14], in the United States sports programmes enhance the prestige of academic institutions besides comprising a significant aspect of the overall education of the youth that includes physical education and the inculcation of such valued qualities as discipline, team spirit, patriotism and physical health that derive from organized sports. In fact, some academic institutions owe their national visibility to their sports programmes without which their profiles might not have extended beyond their local communities.

In 2004, I learned that there is, at last, a women's national team in Malawi. The players held some of their training sessions with SM Galaxy. During a visit over the winter break of December 2004 to January 2005 I met the players. The team literally lacked basic facilities, which is comprehensible. Soccer around the world has been a men's sport for a long time, even more so in Africa since its introduction there. The exception has been in the United States, where the women have been central to the current growing popularity of the sport. Naturally, with men's soccer clubs barely surviving despite the heated passion that the sport generates, investment in women's participation requires massive lobbying. However, recent trends to multi-party politics and the accompanying adoption of democratic practice in many African countries,[15] regardless of the actual implementation of ideals of democracy, have made for review of certain practices and re-examination of apparently entrenched beliefs. This has included the issue of gender equality. The women have seized the moment to overhaul the prevailing views relating to gender roles and to push for equality.[16] The advent of women's soccer in Malawi fits into that discourse.

The full integration of women in the political economy and national development clearly enhances democracy. The view of democracy adopted here is the one articulated by Noam Chomsky. In his book, *Deterring Democracy*, Chomsky points out that,

A society is democratic to the extent that its citizenry play a meaningful role in managing public affairs. If their thought is controlled, or their options are narrowly restricted, then evidently they are not playing a meaningful role.[17]

Conceived in these terms, an urgent question for emergent democracies in Africa relates to the role of women in advancing democratic ideals. If the pronouncements that the education and health of the family and, consequently, of the nation, are computed in terms of the investment the nation makes in its women, are to be more than merely politically-correct rhetorical devices, then it argues for the full integration of women into the political and economic arenas. Their inclusion in development through sports is consistent with the pursuit of democracy. Put differently, the full extension to women of educational opportunities, political and economic involvement, and the unconstrained latitude for them to 'play a meaningful role in managing public affairs' should constitute a necessary condition for the growth and maintenance of democratic practice in Africa. This includes participation in the sports arena, definitely one aspect of national development.

Significantly, the gender issues also provide a unique opportunity for the incorporation of women into the programme of community service and in the fight against HIV/

AIDS through sport. The latter cannot be downplayed. As AIDS continues to afflict African countries, there is a view developing among some males that, in order to avoid infection, they should have sex with young girls. The stigma that is associated with having sex with minors is somewhat diminished by the retention in some African cultures, including Malawi[18] of the practice of marrying prepubescent girls. Although the practice may have thrived in European culture in the past[19] it is one that is no longer current in light of the legal characterization of a 'minor' and proscription of sexual intercourse with minors. Whatever the subterfuge, the practice in the modern era is tantamount to further aggravation of a difficult situation. Encouraging participation in organized sports not only contributes towards the improved physical health of the young women, and enhances self-esteem but, as a consequence, it contributes to the avoidance of such victimization. As noted by Ruth Okubo[20] 'athletics is a valuable tool in which to direct and guide children in all aspects of their development'. She notes, further, that this is vindicated by events in the United States where, 30 years ago, there was a 'very high rate of teenage pregnancy'. However, the situation changed radically with the institution of Title IX in 1972. With its institution there was a 'decline in those numbers of teenage pregnancy. By creating opportunity for women to play in sports, that rate of teenage pregnancy has been reduced by about 30%. It has been shown that women playing sports tend to have a higher self-esteem, are less likely to get pregnant and use drugs.' Clearly extending the scope of women's participation in sports, especially the incredibly popular sport of soccer, will pay major dividends in the country's efforts to reclaim a healthy citizenry and plan for the future.

In Malawi, the dire straits of the women's team, worse than the boys, invited an extension to them of the logic employed to exploit soccer for community service and youth development. When I met the women's team I donated a set of Cal jerseys that the Cal women's soccer team had given me, as well as shin-guards provided by the youth of Piedmont Community Church in California. Recently, the women's national team in Malawi has received some recognition and secured modest assistance from the vice-president of the country. This became imperative in light of the team's expected participation in an eight-nation tournament of the Cosafa Castle Cup hosted by Zambia during the month of November 2005. While the problems faced through lack of sponsorship remain acute, as noted by Dorothy Kasito, the chairperson of the Malawi National Women Football Committee, the realization that women's soccer deserves support is now evident and it is beginning to make an impression on society. According to the Malawi paper, *Nation Online* of Wednesday 2 November 2005, the current president of the Football Association of Malawi, Walter Nyamilandu, is quoted as admitting that the women 'deserve to be assisted because women's soccer is growing not only in Malawi but also in the region and it is ideal and better for us to be growing together with the other countries'.

Currently, there is a women's league in Malawi, called Chiukepo Mhango Women Football League, from which players for the national squad will, in future, be identified or selected. This is certainly a step forward despite the reality of the women's league which, like other sports, remains overshadowed by the men's Super League of Malawi. Still, the prospect of travelling to Zambia for the regional tournament encouraged the

vice-president of Malawi, Cassim Chilumpha, to make a financial contribution of approximately \$2,000 and to donate '30 balls, two sets of uniforms, boots, and two first aid kits for the cause'. [21]

Subsequent to a discussion of the issues of language, politics and development in Malawi with some of my students, one student, Anna Key, a goalie of the Cal Women's soccer team, indicated to me her desire to visit Malawi. An undergraduate enrolled in Peace and Conflict Studies, whose experience of Third World conditions did not go beyond images presented through media portrayals, she seemed to have become curious about the role that her sport of soccer was allegedly playing in dealing with societal ills or in enhancing aspects of national development. She was also keen to get affiliated with an orphan care facility and volunteer her services. She travelled during the month of May 2005, and remained there for three weeks.

Anna Key's trip was opportune. For a start, SM Galaxy members introduced her to the women's team and to the orphanage that had been arranged to host her. She donated Cal soccer equipment to the women's team. The significance of her trip was two-fold. On the one hand, it got the youth of SM Galaxy to realize that their existence, hence their activities, had gained increased familiarity among segments of the international community. Therefore, they needed to sustain their work as proof of the claims made about the role of soccer or sports in youth development as an aspect of a national development programme. On the other hand, the reality of third world conditions that constitute normal living for the people, their efforts to overcome poverty, to fight HIV/AIDS, et cetera, so overwhelmed Anna Key that she returned with a determination to help those orphans in every way possible, help the women's soccer team to the extent possible, and contribute towards heightening awareness about the plight of the less economically fortunate. Further, she resolved to gear her educational career towards attainment of employment that would sustain her efforts to contribute to the improvement of life and conditions in places such as Malawi. She has already indicated her desire to return to Malawi. Her stated goals and objectives got a boost from a reasonably detailed article about her visit that appeared in the 11 October edition of *The Contra Costa Times* newspaper in California, eventually reproduced in other papers of the Alameda Group. This served as a catalyst for at least one charitable organization, Child 2 Child, based in Santa Rosa, California, to approach her to be a spokesperson. Child 2 Child is a non-profit organization whose mission, according to Steven Falk, the founder, is to 'provide simple and direct opportunities that enable children to help other children around the world'. [22] Steven Falk envisions a project called 'Cool to Care' with Anna Key as the spokesperson, spreading the word to her peers.

The visit by Anna Key was followed in the following month of June, by that of a youth group from the Piedmont Community Church (PCC), a visit that put SM Galaxy yet again at the centre of international interest. Piedmont Community Church in Northern California has an active outreach programme that has involved its youth in development projects in, *inter alia*, Mexico. The Church is also involved in development projects in Malawi. These are centred at Kafita CCAP Church. Located in the Kawale area within Lilongwe, Malawi's capital city, Kafita CCAP Church has sister relations with PCC. The latter has been involved in projects at the sister church as well

as at other locations. These include an orphan care facility, The Ministry of Hope located at Mponela, and a hospital at Embangweni in the northern part of Malawi. Following an initial visit to Malawi in 2003 by some members of PCC, led by the pastor Rev. Bill McNabb, two of the delegation, Ms Sara Hirsch and Dr John White, resolved to lead a youth delegation to Malawi as part of the outreach programme. They both had heard about SM Galaxy and had expressed a desire to learn more about the team's activities and meet with the team members. In June 2005, a 16-person delegation from PCC that included 12 youths visited Malawi.

During my December 2004 to January 2005 visit to Malawi, I had been encouraged by friends and family members to consider extending the project to Lilongwe. The location, called Area 49 but popularly referred to as Dubai, was identified as an ideal site for extension of the project. A youth team was organized, to become the focal point of bringing the goals of the project to the capital city. The team accepted the name of Chalunda Earthquakes. Like SM Galaxy, the name was partly inspired by the professional team in Major League Soccer and based in Northern California, the San José Earthquakes, and also in part by the youth team that I have been involved with in San Pablo, called The San Pablo Earthquakes. Equipped partly with soccer jerseys donated by the Stanford University soccer programme, the Chalunda Earthquakes will provide friendly rivalry to SM Galaxy. While the rivalry on the soccer field will be more evident, and the provision of a trophy is bound to add to the excitement, the major idea is to foster rivalry in their contribution to community service, the fight against HIV/AIDS and to national development. The visit of the youth group from PCC provided the occasion for the inaugural contest between SM Galaxy and Chalunda Earthquakes.

The meeting with SM Galaxy made enough of an impression on John White that he decided to contribute to the effort. Approached to serve as a church elder for Chiombamwala Church, a congregation not far from Kafita CCAP Church, he resolved to see the activities of SM Galaxy extended to Chiombamwala. He has expressed interest to have a youth team organized there, to be called Chiombamwala Highlanders, that will be guided by the same principles and ideals of service to church and community, promotion of God's work, awareness of the dangers of HIV/AIDS, et cetera, that have suffused the outlook and ethic of SM Galaxy soccer team.

In September 2005, PCC collected soccer equipment from the Piedmont Soccer Club to send to the youth of Malawi. Covering the PCC collection of soccer equipment for Malawi the local paper *The Piedmont Post* of 7 September 2005, noted that,

Piedmont soccer outreach is joining an enormously successful program originated by Dr Sam Mchombo, born in Malawi and now Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley. Through donations from private sources as well as the university, Dr Mchombo has helped provide uniforms and gear for nine teams in his native country.

What's really innovative is the requirement that each Malawian team receiving donations from the US must commit to significant ongoing community service. So far that has included assistance to the elderly, cleaning areas around their cities, visiting the sick in hospitals, and promoting awareness of the dangers of HIV/AIDS.[23]

The paper also carried a brief account of the game between SM Galaxy and Chalunda Earthquakes, mainly reflecting the impressions of the PCC youth of the conditions they perceived.

### **Soccer and Development in Africa**

Soccer is a very popular sport in Malawi and in Africa in general. In some limited cases it has provided the route out of poverty for those players who, eventually, managed to develop into professional players playing for rich clubs in Europe, the Middle East or Asia. The appeal that soccer has on African society can even be gauged from recent political events. In Liberia the candidacy of George Weah for the presidential election of 2005 derived its credentials from his international image as a soccer player who, in 1995, was voted the Ballon D'Or star. It was significant that as his candidature gained momentum with prospects for ascendancy to the presidency, questions arose concerning the impact that his lack of academic training might have on his duties as head of state and of government. Effectively, his achievements on the soccer field more than made up for any perceived shortcomings in educational qualifications.[24] Soccer seemed to have conferred on George Weah recognition comparable to that derived from wrestling that gave Jesse 'The Body' Ventura the credentials to become Governor of Minnesota or from film acting that gave the late Ronald Reagan the credentials to become Governor of California, eventually President of the United States or Clint Eastwood to become Mayor of Carmel in California.

The popularity of soccer and the scarcity of financial and material resources in Africa combine to make the sport susceptible to exploitation for the attainment of various goals. The goals can vary widely. Thus, just as soccer can be exploited to secure votes in political campaigns, or unify people, it can equally be used to solidify ethnic rivalries or promote bigotry. The claim that the Malawi Youth Soccer project is geared towards youth development and contributes to national development is coherent only to the extent that the concept of development is made explicit. It was indicated above that the notion of development is one that may have been relativized to countries and prevailing conditions. Under the current circumstances the claim that sports in general, but soccer in particular, is exploited for developmental ends, reduces to the subterfuge of linking soccer to activities in society whose subjective evaluation is positive, and whose overall estimation does not conflict with goals of national development, to the extent that these are clearly articulated. As such, it remains an open question as to whether those activities comprise aspects of national development or whether, by fiat of policy decision, such activities are, at best, indifferent to development programmes of the nation. Nevertheless, it could be argued that, after all, common to all human societies is the need to train children and youth to become responsible adults and citizens. This is achieved primarily through organized instruction, either in the form of apprenticeship or, as is the case in modern times, in the form of elaborate instruction through educational institutions which feed into the economic growth of society. Educational institutions provide most of the trained and skilled workforce required for industry just as some industries have had their genesis in research activities conducted on academic

campuses. The literacy acquired through learning itself feeds into other enterprises and contributes to the political development of the nation.[25]

To the extent that investment into healthy youth impacts the future as those youth gain improved chances of survival and receive the training to assume responsibility for the future political direction and economic advancement of their country, the effort to achieve that through sports can indeed be subsumed under the rubric of national development.

## Conclusion

While the exploitation of soccer in Malawi for community service, to combat HIV/AIDS through increased awareness and education, to contribute to gender equity, et cetera, originated independently, comparable programmes have occurred elsewhere. In Kenya, the Mathare Youth Sports Association had its origins and goals determined in a fashion somewhat parallel to that presented here.[26] As it turns out, the model sketched here about the Malawi Youth Soccer Project is one that has begun to inspire people from, or working in, other African countries. Within Malawi, the project has gained momentum from the activities of the SM Galaxy Coach Aubrey Nankhuni. He has used the team as a launch pad into increased youth activity in other locales within the country. A trip to the United Kingdom in September 2005 to participate in a three-week programme of youth soccer coaches bolstered his resolve to remain involved in youth activities. The programme is steadily assuming a national presence as it begins to spread to other parts of the country with increased diversification of the sports activities encouraged and supported. For instance, the Cal Basketball programme (through the Head Coach of Men's basketball Ben Braun, and Women's basketball) has made donations to contribute to the on-going efforts. This is very welcome and speaks of the degree of confidence generated among members of the larger community with regard to achievement of the goals of youth development through sports.

The ideas have also gained ground among those assisting youth in other countries. For instance, Steve Isaacs of Orinda, California, has got his teenage children and other youth from the area involved in helping the youth in a village in Southern Kenya. Their work received coverage in *The San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper. The youth have been involved in the construction of a school library as well as collection and supply of books to the school, helping the children with school equipment and financial means for education, as well donating soccer gear to the youth of the village where their activities are focused. After reading about my work with the youth in Nkhotakota that appeared in the Berkeley campus paper *The Daily Californian* of 14 February 2001, Steve Isaacs has decided to adopt the idea of linking the assistance to community service and HIV/AIDS awareness among the youth in that Kenyan village. In El Cerrito, California, Ruth Okubo a teacher at Stege Elementary School in Richmond, California, upon being apprised of the project in Malawi, has decided to collaborate with her daughter, Tiffany, a Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroun, to adopt and adapt the programme there. It would appear that whatever notion of youth development or national development is deemed fit, the outlined activities inspired by the exploitation

of the passion for soccer are either a subset of the concept or intersect with it in a very significant way.

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### Notes

- [1] For relevant discussion see Susan George's *A Fate Worse than Debt. The World Financial Crisis and the Poor*, or Jeffrey Sachs' observations on the problems of Bolivia in his recent book *The End of Poverty. Economic Possibilities for Our Time*.
- [2] Guilianotti and Armstrong, 'Drama, Fields and Metaphors: An Introduction to Football in Africa', 1.
- [3] Ibid.
- [4] McDaniel-Keith, 'GOOOAL! Football and Nationalism in Latin America', 1.
- [5] Englund, 'Winning Elections, Losing Legitimacy', 173.
- [6] Pilirani Kachinziri, 'Galaxy Shines Brighter', *The Malawi News*, 27 Sept.–3 Oct. 2003 (Blantyre, Malawi), 19.
- [7] Mchombo, 'Religion and Politics in Malawi', 8.
- [8] Weinstein, 'The Effect of AIDS on Southern Africa', 2
- [9] Mchombo, 'Impact of AIDS on Economic Development in Malawi', *Znet* (2000).
- [10] Mchombo, 'Rounding up Hookers in Malawi', *Znet* (2000).
- [11] This was made explicit in a spring 2001 Jim Lehrer News Hour report by Elizabeth Farnclough on AIDS in Malawi, aired on the Public Broadcasting System television in the United States.

- [12] Mtenje, 'The Role of Language in National Development', 17.
- [13] Mchombo, 'National Identity, Democracy, and the Politics of Language in Malawi and Tanzania.'
- [14] Personal communication.
- [15] Mchombo, 'Democratization in Malawi: Its Roots and Prospects'.
- [16] Brady and Khan, *Letting Girls Play*; Mchombo, 'Women and the Building of Democracy in Africa', *Znet* (1997).
- [17] Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, 6.
- [18] See LaFraniere, 'Forced to Marry Before Puberty, African Girls Pay Lasting Price'.
- [19] In Act I Scene II of William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, Capulet tries to fend off Paris' proposal for Juliet's hand in marriage with the observation that she had not yet 'seen the change of fourteen years'. He persuades Paris to 'let two more summers wither in their pride ere we may think her ripe to be a bride'. To this Paris responds with the observation that 'younger than she are happy mothers made'. Taking Paris' comment literally, it hints at the prevalence in Shakespearean England of 'minors' getting married.
- [20] Personal communication.
- [21] *The Malawi National Newspaper*, 2 Nov. 2005.
- [22] *The Contra Costa Times*, 11 Oct. 2005, B2.
- [23] *The Piedmont Post*, 7 Sept. 2005, 12.
- [24] Although George Weah got the majority vote in the first round of the polling, he did not get enough to be declared the winner. In the run-off election, his opponent, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf won the majority vote, becoming the first elected female president in Africa.
- [25] Mchombo, 'The Role of Media in Fostering Democracy in Southern Africa'.
- [26] Hognestad and Tollisen, 'Playing Against Deprivation: Football and Development in Nairobi, Kenya'.

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