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Master's Thesis of Global Sport Management

Grassroots Sport Development Outcomes with Rural Gambian Youth

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이 논문은 문화체육관광부와 국민체육진흥공단 지원을 받아 수행된 연구임
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Grassroots Sport Development Outcomes with Rural Gambian Youth

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Abstract

Grassroots Sport Development Outcomes with Rural Gambian Youth

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This study seeks to explore two distinct but complementary fields of thoughts — Grassroots Sport and Youth Development. The research identifies the links between grassroots sport development and how it affects youths in rural Gambia. In considering three important variables: 1) the perception of rural Gambian youth on grassroots sports development, 2) Identify its roles in youth development and, 3) Critically examine the roles it plays in establishing a structured pattern of youth development. This study was accomplished through reviewing extant literature on grassroots sports development and conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews of 13 youths of The Gambia for the purpose of data triangulation and analysis.

The results and findings obtained from this study have shown to what extent community grassroots sport development programs have impacted the lives of Gambian youth. The program, the study finds, has had many positive impact on the participants who still live to get the benefits from the initiative in other alternative careers.

Keywords: Grassroots sport programs, positive youth development, The Gambia, character concepts, rural youth development

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List of Abbreviations

GBOS - Gambia Bureau of Statistics

UNDP - United Nations Development Program

FIFA - Federation of International Football Associations

MOYS - Ministry of Youth and Sports

MoFEA - Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs

GFF - The Gambia Football Federation

GNOC - Gambia National Olympic Committee

NSA - National Sport Associations

NSC - National Sports Council

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WHO - World Health Organization

UNSDG - United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

FINA - Federation Internationale de Natation

PYD - Positive Youth Development

SFD - Sport for Development

NBR - North Bank Region

CRR - Central River Region

LRR - Lower River Region

URR - Upper River Region

NCD - Non-Communicable Disease

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

AFCON - African Cup of Nations

MA - Member Association

GNOSC - Gambia National Sport and Olympic Committee

IOC - International Olympic Committee

NOC - National Olympic Committees

MOBSE - Ministry of Basic & Secondary Education

MoHERST - Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science & Technology

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

This research draws on the nature, scope and dynamics of grassroots sport development in rural Gambia and its correlation with youth development. The attempt to understand grassroots sport development in the context of youth development is carefully chosen and significant for a case study of The Gambia; youths are the mainstay of The Gambia's population and economy (GBOS, 2015) as they constitute over 60% of The Gambia's population and economic activities.

Additionally, a focus on grassroots sport development and how it can positively affect the lives and wellbeing of the youths in The Gambia is significant in that sports, especially football, is fast becoming an economic enterprise among Gambian youths although the overall sector's contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product remains a grey area in literature. The significance of sports to Gambia's poverty alleviation campaign cannot be overemphasized. But even at the sight of this glaring fact, there still exist a significant gap between the populations needs and the development interventions (Dey, 1982). This critical gap between the populations needs and its development interventions is further demonstrated by the low level of productivity and the general drop in terms of the entrepreneurship and the

performance amongst the sports-skilled youth. In its 2015 Human Development Reports, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) ranked The Gambia at 172 out of 187, representing a low human development ranking. This is another indicator that there is a need for a critical post-mortem into the Gambia's development programs, most importantly those interventions geared towards the enhancement of community involvement (UNDP, 2015).

Furthermore, cognizant of sports, particularly football, being a crucial component of The Gambia's poverty alleviation program, the Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA) injected around 7 million US Dollars, for the period 2019-2022 (FIFA, 2019) to support football development and several stakeholders are being mobilized to promote community participation in sports development. A critical inquiry into the links between grassroots sports and youth development is, therefore, essential to provide deeper understanding of the prospects and challenges of grassroots sport development in The Gambia; enrich the planning and implementation of grassroots sport development for greater output and to provide new possibilities for future sport development policy research and planning with the last policy expiring in 2018 with no successor available to date.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Historically, The Gambia has a long record of grassroots sport development using school sports to unveil and nurture raw talents. However, despite the good success at the youth level, The Gambia is yet to make any celebration of note at international sports level. It is yet to win an Olympic medal, for example. The country also lacks a clearly defined sports strategy that will target community participation and overall improvement. Such glaring problems are exacerbated by acute underfunding compared to other sectors. An attempt to engender a paradigm shift through discourse analysis is therefore relevant and essential.

Physical activity in itself is not given any importance with the World Health Organization estimating that the probability of dying between 30 and 70 years from the four main non-communicable diseases is in The Gambia stands at 19%. A large chunk of 22% of this is attributed to low physical activity (WHO Steps, 2020).

Also, a recent report in the British Journal of Medicine found that 1 in every 10 Gambians is obese, more than twice the levels that were reported in Malawi, Eritrea and Mozambique. Any attempt to establish the real picture of the prevalence of obesity in The Gambia (Cham et al., 2020), cannot lose sight

of the double burden of non-communicable and communicable diseases posing serious challenges to both families and the government. The study found a high prevalence rate of hypertension in the country, particularly among the adult rural population, thus posing grave implications for the development concerns of a country that has poor economic and health infrastructures.

Thus, this research is done with the intention of examining the outcomes of grassroots sport programs amongst rural Gambian youth. Because there is no preceding study on the area of sport itself in The Gambia, it is hope that the results found will help the country in the development of policy initiatives that can be transformed into a national blueprint for sustainable youth and sport development.

1.3 Significance of the study

The success of Gambia at youth football level between 2003 and 2011 was supposed to be the springboard for sustainable sport development in the country. Thus, the study will attempt to assess the impact of grassroots sport development initiatives in rural Gambia. The research, using existing literature concerning the study, will attempt to highlight the potential benefits that sport has to contribute to the socio-economic development of the country

and how Gambians can see sports beyond its current context to becoming the major contributor to youth development and fixing the unemployment gap with proper investment.

Based on the review of the literature, it will give the readers an idea of what really is being done in other places and how we can emulate those countries to ensure positive youth development through sports.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The primary focus of this research is to critically explore the effects of grassroots sport on youth development in The Gambia. It also seeks to analyze the perception of youths on grassroots sport development and improvements in their lives. The overall objectives of this research therefore are to:

- Identify the roles of grassroots sport in youth development
- Explore the perspectives and experiences of youths in grassroots sports development
- Critically examine the role grassroots sports play in establishing a structured pattern of development in rural communities

1.5 Research Questions

In order to accomplish the above objectives, this research would be guided by the following key questions:

- i. What roles do grassroots sports development programs play in the lives of rural Gambian youths?**
- ii. What are the rural Gambian youths' perception of grassroots sports development programs?**
- iii. How does grassroots sport activities impact Positive Youth Development in rural Gambian communities?**

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the theoretical foundations that were laid for this thesis and its analysis. The chapter comprises of a very wide-ranging analysis of a well specialized and practical studies that were conducted on youth and sport development. It offers a definition of both youth and sport development and also evaluates the argument for and against these two critical development processes. It further offers a definition of both sport development and youth development.

The chapter did not only offer an extensive review of literature on the researched subject but it also put forward a case that will ensure future practical study on youth development and sport development with a view to bring the relationship between the two into academic writing. The final part of this chapter deals with a general analysis of critical sport and youth development works and their findings as well as an attempt to bridge the existing gap in the literature to justify the study.

2.2 Understanding Grassroots Sport Development

Chiduo (2012) described grassroots sports as a sport program that is meant to see through young people's participation beyond their adulthood

from their childhood days. Grassroots sport, especially as a form of school sports, he added, serves as a source of numerous opportunities and exposure for several people across the length and breadth of a country, most importantly the young people, as well as serving as a catalyst for making a sporting nation possible, because it is at the grassroots where the raw talents are found and nurtured to become potential local and international stars.

Hill & Christine Green (2008) said grassroots sport, otherwise children sport programs, are deliberately designed to ensure a variety of opportunities in terms of their skill acquisition, satisfaction, participation and enjoyment. Therefore, they added, children should be involved in the entire duration of the program in order to be able to make the best out of what sport provides. Grassroots sport development provides numerous opportunities and exposure for participants, as the performance of young Hungarian athletes showed when the country finished third on the overall medal at the 17th FINA World Championship in 2017 that ran concurrently with the 14th Summer European Youth Olympic Festival in another city called Győr. The performance of its junior swimmers, who won 16 medals on their own, with the most talented youngsters amongst that group that participated in the event were again given the chance to participate at the world championship in Budapest in the senior category where they finished in medal winning

positions or received points to become the most successful in their age group, thus bringing not only personal development, but sporting excellence to Hungary (Nagy et al., 2018).

Sotiriadou & Shilbury (2009) also wrote that major youth competitions offer youths the opportunity to transition from pre to elite athletes. Thus, they added, it is therefore very vital to expose young athletes to pre-elite athletic experiences. They further emphasized the importance of pre-elite events as a catalyst to sport development. The authors attributed participants' satisfaction in the Commonwealth Youth Games to their exposures in both cultural and social experiences; and as a consequence the participants wanted to remain in high performance sports.

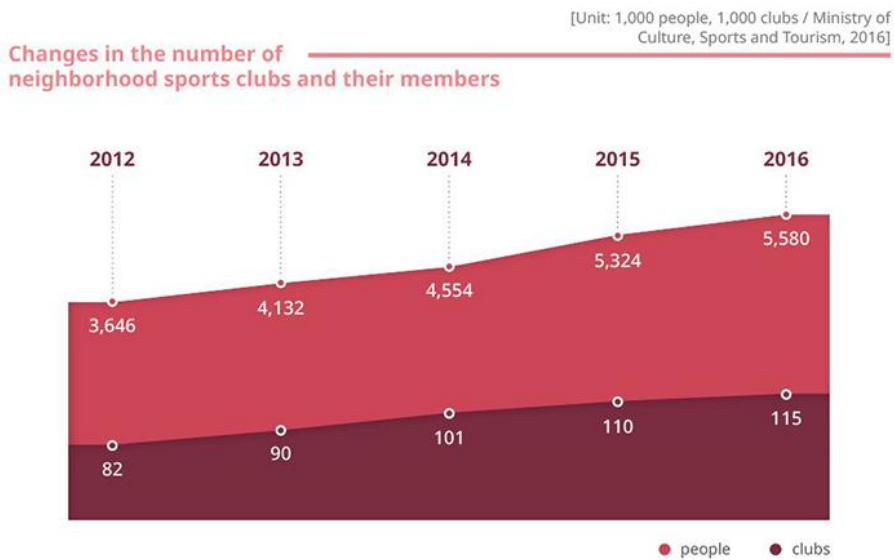


Figure 1. Changes in the number of neighborhood sports clubs and their members in Korea 2012-2016 (Korea Ministry of Youth, Sport & Culture, 2016)

Bowers & Green (2013) emphasized the significance of youth-sport development literature by conceptualizing sport participation. They described it as the combination of various settings, and underscored the worth of comprehending the experiences of playing sports in various settings and the impact that it has on the general connotation basis of sports participation. Hapeta et al. (2019) pointed out that with grassroots sport development, many people can make meaningful impact in their communities because it will expose them to living by and connecting with the principles, practices and

indigenous values. However, Marsters & Tiatia-Seath (2019), said grassroots sport development programs that see the athletes living far away from their communities, as in the case of young Pacific elite athletes, can have negative consequences on their health. They argued that while getting enrolled in such a program must be cherished as an achievement, it can also pose a lot of complex challenges for an elite youth athlete eyeing a career in professional sport. These challenges include having to deal with independence and freedom, establishing new relations, financial decision makings and contractual commitments with all the on-field pressures attributed to it can have an impact on their mental well-being and emotions, thus leading to depression.

2.3 Sport for development

Anderson-Butcher et al. (2014) in addressing an underrepresentation of Sport for Development research in Brazil concluded that despite an alternative offered to football through rugby, the authorities, without any clear monitoring and evaluation, maintained a dominant narrative of sport as a social transformation.

As Hill & Christine Green (2008) noted, there is more work that is required to be able to give a clear understanding on how a particular team pattern is designed and how those patterns affect the attitudes, motivation and

behavior of the players. And Vanteemar S. Sreeraj et al. (2019) agreed that further studies must be conducted on the development of sport and youth development programs through a situational analysis and to understand the context as well as its long-term results on the performance of the participants and other facets of their life development. However, as Bowers & Green (2013) noted, sport managers will face numerous challenges to incorporate sport development models into unstructured settings despite glaring evidence to suggest that it has an impact on their sport experience.

Whitley (2015) argued that even though there are nearly 600 registered sport-for-development organizations globally with the various international sport for development platforms, a growing body of conceptual and empirical scholarship as well as the ongoing support from policymakers, the field is still perceived as an emerging area. Thus, he concluded, part of the challenge associated with the lack of addressing the issue beyond the micro-level has its roots from the idealistic claims from several policymakers and practitioners that continue to portray sport as a simple fix for a complex problem.

An Integrated Literature Review by Rowe et al. (2013) on sport and youth development stated that unlike high-income countries, only a few numbers of studies on the topic was conducted by authors from low and

middle-income countries. The researchers attributed the massive gap to two things, namely; lacked of qualified researchers in these countries or inadequate opportunities for local researchers to lead or cooperate in research projects. The authors hastened to raise concerns that the trend is a cause of worrying concern and thus deserves more attention and future scholarly investigation. The review showed that 92% of the literature considered were from North America, Europe and Australia with Africa amounting to a meager 5% of the contributors, which are mainly from South Africa. The Asia, Latin America and Pacific Islands were hardly represented. This is even more mind-blowing when considering the fact that more than 20% of the SFD studies were actually conducted in the regions least represented, (9% both in Africa & Asia and 3% in Latin America). This is not without noting that over half of the SFD projects worldwide are implemented in the aforesaid three regions. Putting those findings into context and the fact that there are hundreds of SFD projects in Latin America, Asia and Africa, it was therefore important for the need to expand beyond program implementation and management with special emphasis made to capacity building from an academic research point of view. This is so because those programs do not benefit from any kind of research engagement or academic support. Thus, in order to ensure that they improve their skills and access to research

opportunities and publications in peer-review academic journals, the authors urged for special focus on integration and collaboration with academics in low- and middle-income countries (Rowe et al., 2013).

Hill & Christine Green (2008), argued that at the core of public policy, particularly supporting school sports, should be the assumed benefits of sport for youth. Bowers & Green (2013) said without mentioning its meaningful experiences that result from participation, youth-sport participation is often framed in terms of its purported development outcomes. Agans & Geldhof (2012), concluded that participating in diverse patterns of sport for male and female youth athletes has proven overtime that there are different outcomes for high school graders that provide distinctive prospects for youth.

2.4 Perspectives of Sport and Positive Youth Development

Agnew et al. (2019), described life skill development in sport as an increasing phenomenon. The authors contended that the concept has the potential to ensure positive outcomes when young people are nurtured through a deliberately designed curriculum and purposeful teaching strategies. Anderson-Butcher et al. (2014), said it is of critical importance to make the best use of youth participation in community sport programs, most importantly those youths who are vulnerable and or marginalized, which can pose a challenge to them accessing such youth development opportunities

through sport. Hill & Christine Green (2008), added that there are various positive outcomes that can come through grassroots sport aside from the healthy lifestyle that is most attributed to sport participation. Lorenz (2018), argued for the need to provide a new strategy to support those youths that are at-risk as well as to rehabilitate young offenders without the easy route of sending them to correctional institutes. This, he added, would require new interventions that are aimed at reducing negative behavior and reoffending.

Bowers & Green (2013), said the unique thing about how children derive meaning from unstructured and organized settings is that such settings consistently offer them the opportunity to show a strong sense of maturity and perspective which in turn has a positive impact on their thoughts about the overall impact of sport development in their lives.

A study on Indian nursing students' attitudes toward mental illness and persons with mental illness in 2019 established that young athletes said they feel there is a strong need to ensure that they are trained on new ways that would help them to maintain their level of motivation, self-esteem, be able to manage disappointments as well as anger management and to be able to deal with the stress they go through as a result of injuries (Vanteemar S. Sreeraj et al., 2019). The importance of such training cannot be emphasized, especially considering the fact that increased media reporting and recent

studies across Australia have established that young Pacific male athletes suffer from depression, thus leading to adverse mental health-related events and in worse case scenarios suicide. Although it isn't clear how these young group get exposed to such emotions and mental wellbeing, a study by Marsters & Tiatia-Seath (2019), said the perception of the 20 young Pacific rugby league program in Auckland, New Zealand, who are between the ages of 16 and 24 and took part in the study, is that it is a culmination of several factors that are related to each other. These, they added, include family support, reciprocating family support, athletic performance, living a 'well-balanced' life, and personal developments away from sport. At the core of sustaining the mental wellbeing for these young boys are to ensure the maintenance of a positive social relations and a well-balanced athletic identity.

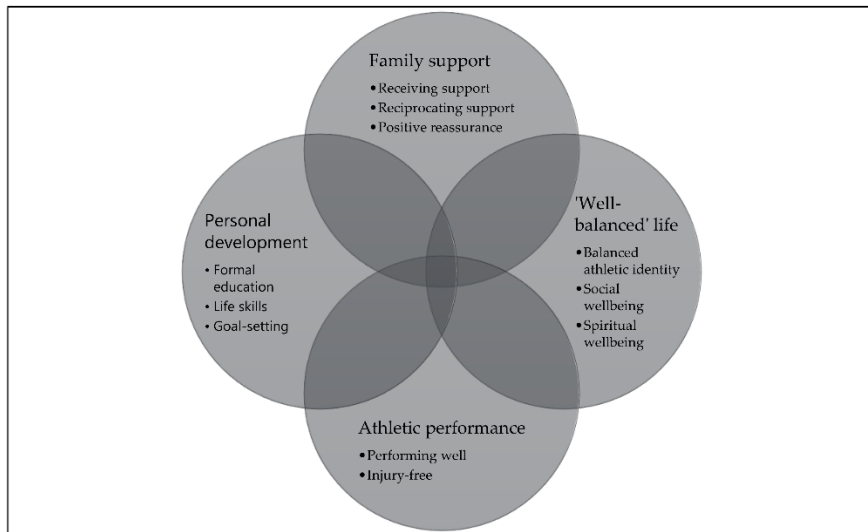


Figure 2. Factors perceived to be the most beneficial to mental wellbeing of young Pacific athletes rugby league program in Auckland, New Zealand (Masters & Tiatia-Seath, 2019)

Bowers & Green (2013) said playing sports in both an organized and an unstructured environment for the youth is such that the experience of one has a great influence on the other. They said in the city of Riggins, Idaho County, United States, a person can only get to understand the experience of one by understanding the experience of the other. In fact, as Hill & Christine Green (2008), stated, one of the things that children learn is that to be part of a team means that they have to support each other.

Anderson-Butcher et al. (2014) in examining the impact of a community sport youth program meant for youth from disadvantaged

conditions aimed at promoting their social capability developments, empirical findings were shown to have offered supporting evidence to the role of strategically designed community development program through sport in promoting Positive Youth Development (PYD) results. This was more evident in those youth who entered the program as a result of their greater need for social development.

Evidence is able to prove that youth-sport is of critical importance to the economic impact of communities as well as filling the gap created in communities that are affected by seasonal tourism (Hill & Christine Green, 2008). Lorenz (2018), said of critical importance to youth development is a healthy parent and child relationship, which he noted is often lacking for most at-risk youth. He added that combat sports academies and martial arts offer these youths at risk the opportunity to get exposed to community interactions and adult-child relationships.

Vanteemar S. Sreeraj et al. (2019), advanced that designing training programs that include psychological inputs in areas that the young athletes in India perceived is of critical importance as it will not only have a positive outcome on their performance levels on sportsmen and women but to a large extent it has the likelihood of ensuring positive youth development and the promotion of their mental health. Hill & Christine Green (2008), said that

even though a specific program component has a correlation to precise outcomes, one program element is essential to ensure all potential benefits. He concluded most youth-sport programs aren't designed to ensure maximum participation, contending that to obtain benefits, children must, therefore, participate.

2.5 Grassroots Sport and Youth Development: Theoretical Perspectives

There are many studies on grassroots and youth development with various emphasizes that youth involved in grassroots sport as a form of youth development are faced with serious challenges that could serve as a deterrent to their progress. Such challenges, as Vanteemar S. Sreeraj et al. (2019) stated, involve both perceived and real burdens to perform and ensure rigorous training drills. They contended that empirical evidence from global literatures have shown effective presence of psychological mechanisms in the training of sportsmen and women. Bowers & Green (2013), said even though there is evidence that a qualitative variance exists in the experiences created by organized and unstructured sport development settings, the most striking point to surface from their study about reconstructing the community-based youth sport experience: How children derive meaning from unstructured and organized settings; is the extent to which the 'psychological integration' contributes to the general sense of sport participation between the various

settings. They concluded that, instead of creating limited, distinct experiences in sporting sense, taking part in organized and unstructured settings literally merge to form the life-world of those participants in ways that it modifies the complete sense of taking part in sports for those boys that participated in their study.

However, Lorenz (2018), was less pessimistic when he said that integrating these youths at risk into combat sports and martial arts academies indicates a reason for optimism to be an effective practice. But Misener (2020), was quick to stress parents as the most critical stakeholders within the youth-sport setting, and noted that the former's own health can be taken for granted as a result of the extent at which they go in terms of commitment to support the sport development of their children. Bowers & Green (2013), said the main obstacle to ensuring a real community-based youth-sport development program originates from the application of tasking sport to achieve a lot with too little influence or disparity in participants' experience.

Hill & Christine Green (2008), argued that youth-sport is mostly considered as a source of enjoyment for children but was quick to point out that the sector's position in society goes beyond the enjoyment the participants derive from it. Rather, he added, in recent times, youth-sport participation has proven and justified to ensure its transmission of messages

related to health and motivate the lifestyle pattern of children. And Bowers & Green (2013), buttressed that notion by pointing out that the correlation that arises from such views has substantial inferences that encourages a sport development paradigm in which participating in sport in numerous surroundings is conceptualized as complimentary rather than be seen as a counterproductive measure.

2.6 Themes of Analysis and Theoretical Frameworks

A study by Maniam that focused on the effects of parental support upon their children's sports participation shows that there are a lot of positive attributes that can come from children-parent relationship through sports participation. The study investigated on student's co-curricular activities in the school and outside of it with regard to their participation in sports. The study found out that parents were mainly supportive of their children's participation in sports as a result of the child's enjoyment and opportunity to keep fit and healthy as well as serving as an avenue for their children to make new friends, socialize and encourage future participation. The study also found that, because they were actively involved in sports and physical activities, some category of parents were more likely to support their children's sporting ambitions. Most of the parents that took part in the study indicated that their relationships with their children blossomed through sports,

further emphasizing the positive impacts of sport participation in improving parent-children relationships, Maniam (2017).

On the basis of fundamental social, cultural and educational values, sport as a human activity has the potential to make, involvement in social life, integration and tolerance acceptable of divergence while adhering to the rules (Menéndez-Ferreira et al., 2016).

It is important for coaches to focus on the physiological characteristics of young players since neither physical nor physiological and anthropometric differences can serve as a definitive differentiating factor in deciding who is a successful or non-successful player. There are significant differences among the age groups in perceived motivation and coping skills, that notwithstanding, since older players are more akin to performing under pressure because of their ego-oriented nature, younger players showed a combination of higher-level task, ego and coach ability levels. Thus, when dealing with motivation, coping and perceived motivation, football coaches are advised to focus more on age differences than positions (Csáki et al., 2017).

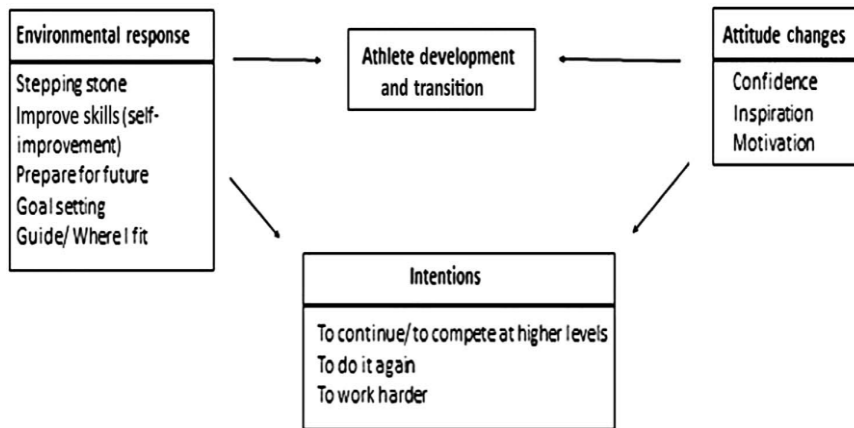


Figure 3. Influence on the future of athletes' attitudes and environmental experiences for the Commonwealth Games 2018 on the Gold Coast, Australia (MacIntosh & Sotiriadou, 2020)

2.7 Conclusion and Important Takeaways

The literature chapter explores the anthropocentric view for two different, but interconnected forms of thought: sport development & youth development. Even though the literature is a great constraint on The Gambia, there is enough literature across the globe to conclude that the two can go in tandem in ensuring meaningful development for a youthful population like The Gambia. However, in order for Gambia to ensure that there is meaningful youth development through sports, the country must hatch mechanisms that will target at significantly increasing number of participants in public sports as Kiraly & Galk suggested for Hungary to emulate the United Kingdom model since there is no evidence to suggest a direct link between youth-sport development and elite sports in the Gambian context. As the case with the

UK, they added, following a poor showing at the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games, it was as a result of the fallout from that event that the British devised a strategy to invest in both youth and sports participation and elite sports in tandem. The 2002 report indicated that while 72% of the British population participated occasionally, rarely or not at all in sports, just a meager 18% participated in it intensively and only 18% participating regularly. As a result, it was considered generally by Britons that in order to improve a sporting culture amongst its citizens, it was necessary to ensure the increase of the number of participants in sports and physical activities as a start and the results were a great finish in Beijing in 2008 (Kiraly & Gál, 2011).

With a recent study by Cham et. al (2020) stating that 1 in every 10 Gambian is obese, there couldn't be a better opportunity to ensure the development of our future leaders through sport and physical activity promotion. As Rowe et al. (2013) stated, sport development should be directed towards making best use of the value of community participation for health and social benefits as obesity and inactivity was on the rise. The research, that was aimed at identifying opportunities and collaboration to address the current disconnect between physical inactivity and sport management research, the study found out that sport management literature was predominantly focused on using sport as a form of entertainment with

spectatorship outcomes where one of the commonly used setting for research inquiry have to do with professional codes. Organizational issues that are related to participation in sport and recreation were given less focus (Rowe et al., 2013). Thus, with the high rate prevalence of obesity posing the double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases on the Gambian people (Cham et. al., 2020), obesity is indeed a threat to the development of any society with its numerous negative outcomes which include diabetes, heart disease, cancer, death and functional impairment. While the major causes of obesity are multifactorial, non-modifiable factors that can be termed as individual-level contributors are genetics and family history while dietary intake, and physical activity as well as socio-economic circumstances like poverty are regarded as the modifiable behaviors (Gray et al., 2018). The case of The Gambia is similar to that of Nigeria where to continue enjoying sports for non-champions, there isn't any consideration given to where and how to achieve that goal. As in both West African countries, it is an established fact that most participants dropped out of competitive sports by the time they hit 19 years of age (Chiduo, 2012).

But as Agans & Geldhof (2012), cautioned, future research is required to find a correlation between athletic participation through the personal, relational development systems to be able to ensure a clear distinction to gain

a more nuanced standpoint on the relationship between the characteristics of participation and the characteristics of their contexts.

Chapter 3: Method

3.1 Introduction

This particular chapter explains the structured procedure and approaches that were undertaken in conducting this study. The first part of the chapter outlines the research whereas the second part points out the methods and procedures that were used; rationale behind it and what each of the approaches and instruments measure. This is followed by the data collection, interview protocols or techniques, analysis of the data and the steps that were taken to ensure that the research abides by the ethical compliance standards at all times.

3.2: Qualitative Research Approach

The methodology used in this research is qualitative where in-depth interviews were conducted through email exchanges to allow for an in-depth analysis of the outcomes of grassroots sport development programs with rural Gambian youth. The researcher will seek answers for a series of questions from respondents who have been exposed to the program and have expert knowledge in grassroots sport at various facets of Gambia's national development.

3.3 Research Procedure

The four general elements of a research are theoretical perspective, methodology, methods and epistemology. As stated by Crotty (1998), these elements are complimentary and therefore reinforces each other.

Epistemology as a form of philosophy deals with the knowledgeability as a source of research and it solicits answers to questions on the what and who of a social behavior. To be precise, epistemology is more concerned about the likelihoods, the origins, sources and limitations of data in a study. Thus, it deals with what is proven to be true. On the other hand, theoretical perspectives give a clear, orderly and logical description of a social phenomenon (Epistemology Research, 2020).

For the purpose of this study, the epistemology is considered as a construct while the theoretical perspective is regarded as an interpretivism. Constructionism perceives the world as being constructed by people, partly through social interactions. Constructionism generally applies qualitative research methods to investigate some issues and events. While on the other hand, interpretivism integrates human interest into a study (Epistemology Research, 2020). The benefactors of grassroots sport development in the

communities are usually the youth who have their perspectives about the impact of sports on their lives and livelihoods.

The impact of grassroots sport development on the lives and livelihoods of rural Gambian youth is the primary focus of this particular research. The type of research questions primarily determines the research strategy, the actual behavioral events that the investigator has over the events, and do not focus on historical phenomena, but rather on the contemporary (Yin, 2009). A research question essentially looks out for answers to the 'where', 'what', 'who', 'why' and 'how' (Birmingham, 2003). Thus, there is no gainsaying that a case study is indeed very pertinent for this particular research because it attempts to get answers for the 'why' and 'what' of a phenomenon, which is the impact of grassroots sport development (social and psychological) on the lives and livelihoods of youth in rural communities in The Gambia. In the same vein, Birmingham (2003), stated that a case study ensures that there is both explanation and exploration of a social phenomenon.

Consequently, it is practical for this particular research since it will ensure that explanation and exploration of a social phenomenon; grassroots sport development in shaping the lives and of youth in rural Gambia.

3.4 Methods, Data Collection and Interview Techniques

Authors prefer different terminologies to the other and sometimes it can be a bit confusing. Constructionism and phenomenology is one such term. However, it is worth noting that both terms are another forms that are used to describe another form of qualitative research. Thus, this research would be guided by phenomenology and discourse analysis as its methodologies. Whereas phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced as the people involved, discourse analysis is a method that is used to study a written or spoken language in relation to its social context, thus seeking to understand how a language is used in a real life context (Bhattacharjee, 2012). In order to ensure that the objectives of this research are met, data collection was done through both secondary and primary sources. However, different data collection mechanisms were applied to ensure that there is both validity and triangulation so as to enhance reliability and accuracy (Yin, 2009; Berg, 2001). As a result of the aforesaid arguments, this research was able to make the use of semi-structured interviews and the secondary data. Below is the explanation of the processes in detail.

3.5: Secondary Data

Specialized studies on grassroots sport development and its linkages to youth and community development were used to collect secondary data.

This data was analyzed to ensure an understanding of the depth of the studies on the subject matter as well as identifying the research gaps that this particular study can be able to fill. Various sources were used to obtain this secondary data and this includes journal articles like books, sports related websites such as IOC, FIFA, country reports, particularly those published by FIFA, and sport project documents which were obtained from The Gambia Football Federation (GFF).

3.6 Primary Data

This research also used the collection of primary data and the processes used in it are explained as follows:

3.6.1 Semi Structured Interviews

The primary tool used as the main source of information for this research is done through semi structured interviews. Even though it is not fully structured, a semi structured interview involves the use of open-ended questions that gives the respondents the opportunity to freely express their views but at the same time ensures the researcher to be in control of the research process (Berg, 2001). An interview guide was developed and used during the process so as to ensure that the researcher would direct the interviews accordingly as well as enables the research not to deviate from the

research problem. The aforesaid guide is divided into four sections/categories. Section one asks the interviewees to state the kind of sports activities they are involved in; how they came to be involved in that sporting activity and for how long they have been involved in it.

The second part explores benefits associated with an involvement in a sporting activity and asks respondents to share their opinions on how the sport have contributed to their lives in terms of their physical health and overall well-being. The third section is concerned with the perception of the youth on social and psychological sports development in their communities in terms of grassroots sport development programs that helps in discovering talents and nurturing them to becoming successful and enterprising sport actors.

The fourth section dwells on how grassroots sport activities impact Positive Youth Development (PYD). The respondents are also asked to share their knowledge and practical experiences in engaging in a sport-related activity. Sports development and sports as a catalyst for community development are also some of the issues that are explored.

The development of the interview guide went through various stages. The initial stage is the careful, coherent and structured development of the guide which is followed by the second stage. This second stage of the

development of the guide is to ensure that the various sections that are contained in the said guide is easy to interpret by the respondents with the view to ensuring that respondents will be able to give the right responses during the interview process. Birmingham (2003), in order to certify the content of an interview, it is very important to conduct a pilot interview, which will help to eliminate vague questions and as well generate a meaningful feedback on the flow and the structure of the envisioned interview. Consequently, the pilot interview was conducted on four respondents that were randomly selected from Serrekunda, Kanifing Municipality via a recorded telephone interview. The rationale behind selecting Serrekunda for the piloting of this interview is because it has a homogeneous characteristic with the communities that this research targets.

Table 1. The chronological order in the timeframe of the thesis process

Activities	Month	Month	Month	Month	Month	Month
Thesis Draft	March					
Draft Defense		August				

Data Collection			September			
Data Analysis				October		
Finalizing of Thesis					November	
Final Thesis Defense						December

3.7 Selection of Participants

The unit of analysis is people who have connections from rural Gambia and are direct beneficiaries of grassroots sport programs. The study covers all four rural Administrative Regions of The Gambia (North Bank Region –NBR; Lower River Region –LRR; Central River Region –CRR; and Upper River Region –URR). The research recruited a total of sixteen participants but three decided to pull out in the process and in the end a total of thirteen participants were interviewed. The interview questions are shared with Gambians who have participated in at least one form of sport for a period

of time during their formative years. To avoid potential bias, the reports produced by those who are working for National Sports Associations (NSA), are excluded from this research.

3.8 Demographics of the Research Participants

The data was collected through individual interviews with the participants. The ages of the participants range from 23 to 35. Eight of the thirteen participants have all attained a minimum of a bachelor's degree while the remaining five have also attended tertiary education after secondary school. To ensure gender balance in the collection of the data, six women participated and seven men.

Four of the participants, after hanging their boots, are now working in sport administration in The Gambia with three at the level of National Sports Associations and one at community level. Another four of the participants are practicing sport journalism with two as coaches at community level training both boys and girls through grassroots sport initiatives. The final three participants are active athletes with two playing in the national women's league of The Gambia and the third participant currently playing for a university team in the Arab world. All 13 respondents have gone through some form of grassroots sport program during their formative years. Only two of the participants spent less than 10 years in sport while nine were involved

in sport between 10 to 20 years. The remaining two have a 22 and 25-year experience in sport at various levels.

Table 2. The background and demographic information of the participants

Variables	Categories in Variables	No. of respondents (n= 13)
Sex of Respondents	Male	Seven
	Female	Six
Age of participants (years)	Less than pre equal to 20	None
	21 to 30	Seven
	31 to 35	Six
Marital Status	Single	Seven
	Married	Five
	Divorced	None
	Widow	None

Level of Education	No Formal Education	None
	Primary Education	All
	Secondary Education	All
	Tertiary Education	Five
	University Education	Eight
Sports Experience (years)	Less than or Equal to 5	None
	6 to 15	Five
	16 to 20	Six
	21 and more	Two

3.9 Ethical Standards

Berg (2001); Bhattacharjee, (2012), both described ethical standards as the systematic steps that are taken to ensure that the rights of the researched population are protected. Thus, the below table, Table 3, explains the steps

that were taken to ensure that ethical standards are observed throughout the course of this research.

Table 3. Steps taken to ensure that ethical standards are observed

The ethical standards observed	The steps taken to ensure that ethical codes are implemented
Anonymity and confidentiality of the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The respondents are identified based on code names. Any bio data or information that may compromise their identity are also removed. - The results of the research are reported and aggregated anonymously.
Ensuring that there is no harm to respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The respondents are first and clearly explained to the main purpose of this research before they give their consent to participate. They are also ensured that they are free to withdraw, from the research, at any point.
Avoiding undue intrusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The researcher makes sure that the interviews are not unnecessarily long so as

	not to unduly interfere with the other activities of the respondents. - All the interviews were conducted online.
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3.10 Data Analysis - Qualitative Research Strategies

Analysis of a data using the qualitative research approach do not only give the researcher more substance to his study, it also ensures that the researcher gets more information of the study. Qualitative research methods are more concerned about unlocking and ensuring a clear understanding of the research problem through a more multifaceted manner than a generalized manner; i.e. the outcomes of the questionnaires. Thus, this methodology was used to ensure a clear understanding and more information about what people perceive, experience and what they know.

The research was done through individual interviews where the questions were sent via email to the participants which they answered and sent back to the research. Data analysis and transcription was done by ensuring that all the answers were transcribed and given codes. After this process, the transcribed interviews were sent back to the respondents to ensure that the data represents what they truly answered.

3.10.1 Peer Debriefing

For the purpose of peer debriefing, throughout the process of the research, I've discussed and exchanged ideas with two senior colleagues who are doctoral students in The Gambia and the United States respectively. The duo has extensive knowledge in qualitative research methods and are currently doing their doctoral researches using the method.

3.10.2 Data Triangulation:

For the purpose of data triangulation, data collection was conducted through various means which include journal and newspaper articles, analyses of country reports, and interviews. Data triangulation helps to eliminate bias in the research and ensures that the credibility of the participants' responses is not in doubt.

The individual interview. They involve journalists, administrators, coaches and current athletes and the interview questions are as follows:

Table 4. Individual interview questions

RQ1:	Roles of grassroots sport development programs on the lives of rural youth
1.	What sport activity are you involved in and how did you come to be involved it?

2.	What do you consider to be the significance of grassroots sport participation in the lives of rural youths?
3.	What are the most important benefits of grassroots sport participation for the physical well-being and health of rural youths?
4.	What are the other important benefits of grassroots sport participation in the lives of rural youths?
RQ2:	Perceptions of rural youth on grassroots sport programs
5.	In what ways does grassroots sport programs affect one's relationships with others?
6.	In your opinion, can grassroots sport programs instill discipline and social responsibility in participants? How
7.	In your view, can grassroots sport programs affects one's moral values? Explain
RQ3:	Impacts of grassroots sports programs on Positive Youth Development
8.	In what ways does participation in grassroots sport development impact the self-confidence of rural society's most vulnerable youths?

9.	To what extend do you think grassroots sport participation can contribute to building the character(s) of young people in rural communities?
10.	In what ways can participation in grassroots sport programs improve the competence and decision making skills of rural youths?

Chapter 4: Results and Findings

4.1 Introduction

The primary focus of this research is to critically explore the effects of grassroots sport on youth development in The Gambia. It also seeks to analyze the perception of youths on grassroots sport development and improvements

in their lives with the objective to identify the roles of grassroots sport in youth development and critically examine the role grassroots sports play in establishing a structured pattern of development in rural communities. Thus, the chapter discusses the findings of the study to the following three research questions:

- What roles do grassroots sports development programs play in the lives of rural youths?
- What are the participants' perception of grassroots sports development programs?
- How do grassroots sports activities impact Positive Youth Development in rural communities?

As indicated in the previous chapter, the interpretation of the data collected will take the form of a descriptive analysis. Thus, this chapter deals with the presentation of the data, and the interpretation of the results of the findings. The interviews were conducted individually through a semi-structured format and are interpreted in the form of a qualitative research approach.

4.2 Research Findings

The findings of this research are presented in three categories as follows: Roles of grassroots sport development programs on the lives of rural

youth; perceptions of positive youth development programs; and impacts of sports activities on positive youth development programs. The three categories are each analyzed under different themes that have been uncovered by the research.

4.3 Roles of grassroots sport development programs on the lives of rural youth

Grassroots sport development programs, the study found, have positively affected the lives of rural Gambian youth in six different aspects and are thus analyzed under those six themes. These include: skills development, scholarship opportunities, community relations, positive health, social cohesion, and teamwork & tolerance.

4.3.1 Skills development

The significance of grassroots sport development programs, according to the study, has ensured the participants are given the opportunity to discover, nurture and develop new life skills. One of the participants, namely Participant -4, who had participated in football while growing up and is today a respectable author and journalist, said: *It allows for skills development, scouting and potential nurturing of talent at the grassroots level and their smooth transitioning to the highest level. Additionally, their participation can help contribute to investment in rural sporting infrastructure.*

The participants also said that grassroots sport development programs have allowed them, while growing up as rural youths, to challenge themselves and set goals, because according to them goal-setting is one of the most challenging mechanisms that affects their lives in such communities. It has also offered them good mentorship which is also another crucial factor in ensuring that they are able to achieve those goals they set for themselves.

Participant -3 further stated: *Grassroots sport teaches young people to live a healthy life at an early stage and help promote active participation in recreational activities, and promotion of skills development that lead to job creation.*

Ten out of the thirteen participants also stated that grassroots sport participation has helped them develop a career path in sports, either by becoming a professional athlete in different sports or landing a job in sports administration.

For example, in my case, grassroots sport participation made me develop a great passion for football. I became a very talented footballer and even though I couldn't realize my dreams of becoming a professional footballer, the skills that I've learnt has made me to live a livelihood on sport up until today. (Participant -13)

Some added that because of their deeper connection with sports, it has helped in the acquisition of skills development like journalism where they earn their living today.

Because of the deeper passion I built from my grassroots sport participation days, I've acquired a lifetime skill from it because it has helped me to still follow my passion in sport by venturing into sports journalism and today I have risen to become the Head of the Sport Department in my institution. (Participant -2)

The study also showed that for most Gambians, grassroots sport is synonymous with football because it offers the easiest route for them to practice a sporting discipline compared to individual sports that may be expensive for them to purchase equipment for. It was observed that ten out of the thirteen participants have only participated in football while growing up and it is only three that said they have practiced other sports like athletics, basketball, volleyball, softball and tennis and even at that they ended up deciding to pursue a career in football. And the program has thus contributed to some of the participants to nurture their talents to become professional sportsmen and women where they reached the pinnacle by representing the various Gambia national football teams.

The government should take school sports more seriously by engaging both the communities and schools where the physical education teachers will also be introduced to the new trends in athlete development. The government and its partners in the private sector should be able to provide opportunities of access to sport and quality to life for the citizen. (Participant -9).

4.3.2 Scholarship and educational opportunities

The program has also served as an opportunity for many rural youths who possess sporting talents to be admitted and awarded scholarships to study at some of the best urban schools throughout their secondary education. This, they added, is very significant in the sense that education is still very expensive back home and all children aren't offered the equal amount of opportunities to study at the institutions of their choices.

Mainly due to the exorbitant fees some of the private schools' charge, while there isn't proper investment in the public schools that largely waive tuition fees for students and as a consequent the standard and quality of education is poor there. But due to a scholarship I was offered by one of the best schools in urban Gambia due to my sport skills, I was able to learn at the school of my choice like others. (Participant -1)

Participant 7 went through grassroots sports program and is one of the most educated sportsperson in the country who later played as a professional footballer for many years at a top-flight football team in Europe and the Gambia national team. He is a local sport administrator back home after retiring.

Grassroots sport in the rural communities has brought about the many advantages for rural youths. The most important in my view being the feeling of belonging to the national sporting fraternity of The Gambia. Many rural youths are taking advantage of grassroots sport to attain scholarship opportunities to study at institutions that their parents couldn't afford for them. (Participant -7).

Another participant added that grassroots sport participation has put some vulnerable youth at advantageous positions that they might otherwise never got.

It has improved my confidence and belief in choosing sports as a career choice. But the most important for me is, grassroots sport has given me the opportunity to earn scholarships to further their education which puts them at an advantageous position which would have otherwise been non-existent. (Participant -11)

4.3.3 Improved community relations

Another positive role that participation in grassroots sport programs have had on the lives of rural people, the research found out, is that it has helped significantly in building positive community social relationships and solidified it between both the participants and communities and this has been of mutual benefit to such communities. It is also observed that it has ensured participants play vital roles in development initiatives in their local communities by uniting their people and deeply instilling positive community values in them.

Grassroots sport is very vital because it serves as a source of solidifying community relations amongst young people in rural communities. It also encourages greater participation of youth in showcasing their talents. It's quite crucial, because it opens up opportunities for one to know a lot about the kids in the community. (Participant -8).

Participant 9 went further: *It gives great recognition to those involved in it. And it strengthens the community relations and positively impacts the social character of those involved in it.*

4.3.4 Positive health benefits

The significance of grassroots sport participation, the study further observed, is numerous and key amongst them is ensuring positive health of the rural youth who in some cases became role models for their peers and communities. The study found that it helped increase physical activity, thus contributing to positive community engagement and boosts healthy lifestyle especially against non-communicable diseases.

As a rural youth, grassroots sport participation played a fundamental role in my life in the sense that not only did it help me to stay fit and healthy, it also helped me to develop individual sporting talents and the opportunity to meet new friends from different backgrounds that also enhances my self-growth in terms of tolerance and adaptability. (Participant -12)

More participants agreed even further in terms of a healthy lifestyle that participants in grassroots sport activities have helped them lived, thus helping them avoid metabolic diseases.

They said a healthy body reaps a healthy mind; so as a rural youth participating in grassroots sports at a tender age helped sharpen my brains. It has also improved my physical and mental health. As rural

youths, we had almost a year round calendar of evening footballs.

(Participant -1)

Other participants added that because they hardly miss a chance of not being on the pitch for one reason or the other, they were able to stay fit and healthy, which they noted is very important since healthcare is not available, and where it is, it's generally unaffordable for many a rural Gambian.

This ensures we keep our fitness, both of the mind and body, and stay healthy throughout the year. With poor and unaffordable healthcare delivery systems in Gambia, most especially rural Gambia, active participation in sports helps strengthen the health and wellbeing of rural youth. (Participant 4)

The participants also said that sports help improve the function of the brain as well as reduce stress and other physiological issues usually associated with children because there is always a physical and mental practice on a daily basis. It also improves one's intelligence, the study found.

Physically, it keeps you strong and fit. This augurs well for one's general wellbeing given the importance of a sound body to a sound mind. It offers sport education and endurance building during the process. It prepares the mindset to be proactive and responsive to

stimulus. This also helps in building the bones and muscles ahead of future challenges. (Participant -10)

The study also found out that participation in grassroots sport development initiatives have helped boost the immune systems of the respondents and thus contributed to their general health like blood circulation, heart and pulmonary functions as well as prevent them from developing respiratory diseases that have been the biggest causes of death in The Gambia for the past two decades (WHO Steps, 2017).

Grassroots sport is associated with helping people to stay fit and can help prevent non-communicable diseases like obesity which according to a recent study is on the high in The Gambia and to make matters worse we are seen to be tolerant to it by perceiving obesity and overweight as a sign of an uplift in status. (Participant - 13).

Others noted that participation in sports has helped others suffering from non-communicable diseases to manage and live with it for a very long time. This is important, they noted, because many young people are now diagnosed with these NCDs at a very young age because it is in their genetics.

Thus, participation in sport helps those who have already suffered from these NCD health complications to control or slow its progress and negative consequences. This is very pivotal, especially at a time when NCDs is on the high in The Gambia and we are not equipped with the proper medical infrastructure to deal with them. (Participant -11).

The participants also noted that since sports have the potential to open up health opportunities to many people, steps must be taken to encourage more participation at all levels.

4.3.5 Social cohesion

Another positive outcome from grassroots sport participation that this research observed is that it brought about social cohesion and unity amongst the youth as well as respect and friendly relationships. The study was able to observe this unity exists between people from different religions, tribes and culture.

Participant 4 emphasized: *Sport participation is important especially at a time when Gambians are seriously divided on tribal lines and is affecting our political and national development. For the most part, rural sports offer an opportunity for networking among diverse communities.*

The research was also able to establish that because Gambia has a unique football structure that encourages rural communities, districts and regions to stage various competitions, through these competitions, diverse ethnic communities interact and share best practices, promote social cohesion and unity among the rural communities, thus fostering collective approach to sustainable development.

Grassroots sport initiatives improve social cohesion in the sense that it promotes socialization, encourages tolerance and teaches leadership as you have to deal with heterogeneous mass of people. Their participation and eventual success serves as an incentive for others living in rural communities. Such successes will spur on other rural youth to compete with the best from urban settlements.
(Participant -10)

It was further observed in the research that due to its diversity in nature, grassroots sport participation has helped in easily breaking gender stereotypes, social and tribal barriers in many communities. All thirteen participants said participation of rural young people in sports fosters unity, love and trust amongst youth regardless of any forms of difference and it also made them to compete at the same level like the urban people, ensuring that they too are part of the race to ensure a meaningful development in their lives.

Grassroots sport, especially at club level, plays an important role in the communities as it brings people from local communities together and give young people the opportunity to meet new friends from different backgrounds, as well as giving the opportunity for parents to meet with other parents for the first time. (Participant -3)

These relations, the research observed, has transcended beyond sports participation and has turned out to be a lifelong bond between them. Participant 6 further stated that sport clubs provide adults with the chance to share their talents and learn new skills in terms of coaching, administration, mentorship, sponsorship and marketing etc, the research observes.

4.3.6 Teamwork and tolerance

Through grassroots sport participation, the research observed that athletes learn the importance of teamwork and leadership which are very important life skills, especially in workplaces where we come across people from diverse backgrounds with different attitudes that aren't our making. Thus the youth-sports, the research further showed, serves as fun to increase the child's physical activity level and develop these important life skills to deal with any difficult situation which would in turn have a positive bearing on their mental wellbeing and psychological health.

Participant 11 elucidated: *Youth who participate in sports have higher self-esteem, strong connections with their schools and communities, better peer relationships and fewer negative behavioral problems and are more likely to exhibit teamwork and tolerance.*

Other participants made similar points:

Self-belief, and self-confidence can be built or boosted from participating in grassroots sport, team work and working in a group to achieve a common goal. Friendships are forged between youths of different backgrounds and inferiority complexes are lessened or eradicated in some instances. (Participant -8)

Sports participation promotes a sense of belonging in participants' lives, and bring them together as one community in participating in different grassroots sport games. It helps them to develop tolerance and teamwork as well as perform well in school, improves their focus and a more positive body image. (Participant -10)

This teamwork and tolerance, the respondents said, help the rural youth to realize their potentials, especially in the alternative career opportunities they may want to venture into later in life as well as helping their overall individual development. The research also found out that another positive role of grassroots sport development programs is that it helps the participants to

have self-discipline by ensuring that they always apply the spirit of self-organization, and encourages community members to contribute meaningfully to the development of their communities by assuming responsibilities and taking actions for their communities.

It has helped me to develop a lot of patience, perseverance and tolerance and I was also able to learn to celebrate victory with respect and accept defeat in good faith. The competitive nature of sports has made me to develop a never die attitude and to never give up in life and that I should set my goals and keep pushing for them because eventually I will always triumph. So it has benefited me positively and this is very important for a society like ours because Gambians in nature aren't known for their tolerance and patience.
(Participant -13)

The study also found that grassroots sport participation has helped in improving the rural youths' social interactions as well as build friendships and relationships beyond the sporting arena. It has also helped in settling disputes amongst peers and even rival rural communities.

This teamwork and patience has made me to become a good role model in my community and help boost the health status of my peers because exercise is directly linked to health benefits. It has also

exposed me to meet new friends, and travel to different places and those acquaintances are looking up to me to learn to exhibit tolerance, stay healthy and fit at all times. (Participant -12)

4.4 Perceptions of rural youth on grassroots sport programs

The perceptions of the participants about positive youth development programs through grassroots sport development initiatives, the study indicated, is analyzed under four different themes. These themes are: building reciprocal high quality relations; compassion & empathy; place for social responsibility; and place for moral reasoning.

4.4.1 Reciprocal high-quality relations

The youth believed that grassroots sport programs served as a safe space for them where they interact with their peers and program leaders who they see as parent figures. They said in most cases, these feelings are reciprocated thus leading to making new friends as well as high-quality social relations and partnerships.

Grassroots sport development programs offer participants the opportunity to affect others through their actions and it also ensures we are there for each other through thick and thin by talking to each other and serve as each other's comforter and keeper, especially during difficult moments. (Participant -4)

Participant 9 further expounded: *It makes one to anticipate that the relationships forged during these days will transcend beyond the program because then you have knowledge about how to maintain these friends while also making new ones.*

4.4.2 Compassion and empathy

The youth said the program ensured they are taught the character concepts thus leading to a change in behavior where they would develop compassion and empathy for each other. This is because it plays into their thinking and as a result they feel one another's perspectives by being more compassionate.

The program has ensured that we act as one group having gone through many ups and downs together, and this has affected the way we relate to each other after some time by observing through our own behaviors that we are more empathetic than usual and this has affected the lives of others around us too. (Participant -5)

Some participants even went further to state that because they were being exposed to the character concepts as a youth, sports was able to help them relate to their peers just few weeks into the program.

I used to care less about how others felt and what they said and always thought they were responsible for their own predicaments.

But then after a moment, I saw that I'm more of a listener and would all of a sudden care about what my peers said and how they feel.
(Participant -3)

The study also found out that the compassion and empathy developed by the participants after being exposed to character concepts has helped in the way they relate to not only their teammates but also social associates whom they have come across outside of sport.

Through compassion, I've realized that it has affected the way I relate to people from diverse settings now and I've developed closer bonds as a result based on mutual trust, respect, care and understanding. This is a very positive takeaway for me from the grassroots sport programs during my youth days. (Participant -2)

The participants further perceived that because participating in sport programs had already developed in them empathy, this helped them to become good leaders, a better thinker and problem solver, especially if they were chosen as the captain in of their team, they became more responsible, caring, compassionate and a team player.

Participant 12 stated: *As a captain, you have to be considerate and be a role model for your teammates by being patient and tolerant, which are*

good attributes in early childhood development and you need compassion and empathy to do that.

4.4.3 Place for social responsibility

There are several individual dispositions in perceiving social responsibility and the quality of our relationships enable multiple aspects of it. Social responsibility decisions consist of various facets and one amongst them is ethics (Thornton, 2015). Ethical responsibility is of paramount importance in every aspect of social development because it gives us the ability to recognize, interpret and act upon multiple standards and values within a given context or field.

Since rural Gambian youth said amongst the roles of grassroots sport development programs is to prepare them for responsibilities even in the corporate world, there are three fundamental trends that are related to ethics and social responsibility in the corporate world of philanthropy. They are: strategic changes in corporate philanthropy, a new social contract between employers and employees, and the growth of global ethics and corporate social responsibility (OpenStax, 2020).

A qualitative research study by Thornton and Byrd (2013), was able to establish that social responsibility decisions are influenced by our relations because they are linked to several traits. These traits were conscientiousness,

especially in the sense of being responsible and self-efficacy. The researchers said they used positive and negative emotional attractors to assess relationship quality instead of intentional change theory. And as a result, the perceptions of both management and non-management individuals assessed was able to show that conscientiousness and general self-efficacy on social responsibility was mediated by relationship quality (Thornton & Byrd, 2013).

Thus, since the aforesaid research was able to establish that our relationships have a link with ethical responsibility, the participants, my own study noted, being exposed to grassroots sport development programs has served as a place to learn and improve on their social responsibilities, especially in the aspects of their relationships.

This has led to a change in thoughts, behavior and perceptions about things around us unlike before we enrolled in the program. I became socially responsible, where I'm more caring and respectful to my peers, friends, and program leaders and this has led to improvements in the relationships with my peers that I've built over the years as well as more trust and confidence from their coaches.

(Participant -10)

However, the participants added, because of the new character concepts that they learn through grassroots sport programs, this has made

them to reevaluate and see life from a totally different perspective, meaning they had to cut off all ties with some of their old peers that had served as bad influences to them. The participants said they met new people who they were able to hang out with more frequently, ensuring a feel-good factor and a positive energy unlike in the midst of those friends they abandoned because they were only interested in negative vices which had saved them from becoming a liability to the societies.

I used to be a very shy boy who is so reserved and hardly do I share my sensitive things with anyone, not even my parents and this is entirely their fault because they were never closed to me as a child; so I thought. But the program enlightened me to the extent I became socially responsible and better relations with them. (Participant - 13)

Some participants, the research showed, became socially responsible which has helped in their child-parent relations. For some of the participants who had a decent upbringing because their parents could afford a good life for them, they noted before they enrolled in the program had very distant relations with their parents, who thought they were okay because the parents bought expensive gifts and took them to the best schools in town.

My parents thought I was okay but I thought they cared less about me and my feelings. However, just my first day into a football academy set-up, I saw my teammates coming to me for a chat and as time goes on they are always there to ensure I feel comfortable and a sense of belonging within the group which gave me a lot of self-confidence that I lacked, and helped me to learn to be socially responsible. (Participant -2)

The research further found out that because these boys and girls had their teammates believed and trust in them, within no time, they were able to reciprocate this which was able to take them out of their comfort zones where they were able to discuss the things that were affecting them as children and helped them overcome these inhibitions and insecurities.

As a result of the program, I was able to reevaluate myself and realized that my problems weren't entirely the fault of my parents but my insecurities had also contributed and today I'm a very confident man and I was able to improve my relationship with my parents, thus making me socially responsible (Participant -8).

The participants also stated that through this program, they were taught to never blame anyone for their misfortunes but must take responsibility especially group responsibilities and thus when they lose, they

lose as a team and vice versa when they win. The research was also able to note that as a result, the friends that they had made through the years, and coming from different backgrounds, to share the same aspirations together, it taught them that no matter where they come from or what their economic backgrounds are, everyone wants to belong and yearns to be accepted.

Participant 9 further stressed: *This in many ways, has made me to be a team player, even helping to develop new friendships with other nationalities, whom I would not have come across without my involvement in grassroots sport games.*

They believed, however, that they found it difficult to build relations with others who do not reciprocate the respect, care and trust for them and those people who aren't ready to take responsibilities for their own actions.

4.4.4 Place for moral reasoning

The study was also able to note that as a result of the character concepts that were developed and implemented by these grassroots sport programs, the participants were able to discover the ability to reason morally by distinguishing between what is right and wrong, thus making them better persons. This moral reasoning, the participants believed, was able to ensure a high sense of moral judgment, thus leading to a positive atmosphere around them, ensuring a highly positive environment.

I used to make remarks about beautiful women whenever they passed without realizing that those comments were sexist, disrespectful, and above all morally wrong because it was hurting them. One day, I thought I was commending the beauty of a lady who was passing by while we were having one of our training sessions and my coach heard this. The lady was uncomfortable with such remarks but I cared less because I thought I did nothing wrong. So the coach immediately blew his whistle to halt play to address me, stating in no uncertain terms that such behavior wouldn't be accepted from anyone. This is what thought me moral reasoning. (Participant -6)

The study found out that participant 6 wasn't the only person to fall foul of such as others were equally guilty of it but because they were scolded by the program leaders that a repeat of such would mean immediate dismissal from the academy, even though initially they thought the program leaders were very harsh on them, because they were addressed in the open and in the presence of teammates and this affected their performance that day but after some time, they saw the positive from it and moved on.

I made a sexist remark in one of the sessions and even though I was addressed in the presence of my teammates, the coach called me into his office and explained the rationale behind it; he wanted to send a

strong message to every member of the team and deter others from ever attempting it again. He also gave me very encouraging advices which was able to make me feel good. (Participant -10)

And because of the strong character, the self-confidence and high self-esteem that I also learnt from the academy, the study found out, they were able to learn good moral values whenever they were apprehended by the program leaders for making wrong comments about others.

Participant 5 further commented: *I will never associate with anyone making rude and derogatory comments about others no matter what because it is not morally right. I learnt this through the program.*

The participants also believed that this improved high moral reasoning earned them great respect within the community, because they were able to help in transforming themselves and many young people as well through continuous counseling and was able to prevent many of them from getting involved in immoral social activities. They added that it has also created room for improvement as they were able to learn a very valuable skill, which in turn psychologically prepared them to tackle challenges that the real world was throwing at them at present.

4.5 Impacts of grassroots sports programs on Positive Youth Development

The impacts of sports activities on positive youth development programs through grassroots sport development initiatives, the study showed, is analyzed under four different themes. These themes are: intra-personal improvements; boosting self-confidence; & resilience; positive character building; and competence & decision making skills.

4.5.1 Intra-personal improvements

The participants believed that they were able to improve on their intra-personal skills as a result of the high self-esteem, and the open mindedness they were exposed to in the program. They became independent-minded, thus, in control of their own thinking and the ability to make their own decisions and mistakes because it gave them the opportunity to learn from them.

Participant 3 stated: *It has helped in my intra-personal development and today I'm able to manage my feelings, emotions, improved my self-confidence, discipline and am also able to motivate myself even at very difficult times. Today I'm more patient.*

Because they were now in a position to understand their feelings and put their emotions in check, the study found out, the participants were able to

understand their own good intentions and support pro-social behaviors by helping, sharing, donating and cooperating and sometimes even volunteering to help each other at their farms during the raining season. This, they believed, was able to make them understand their own values, thus ensuring improved social interactions.

All along I used to think that I was a bad person since that was what society made me perceive myself because they said I was very mean and rude to my peers and elders. It is kind of true though but through grassroots sport programs I was able to develop my intra-personal skills and understand that I was in fact a good child but I just didn't understand how to deal with people and that is because maybe I lacked sensitivity by saying how I saw and felt things. (Participant - 4)

Other participants noted that because of grassroots sport programs, they were able to improve on their sensitivity and learn how to deal with others, especially where it has to deal with emotional feelings, thus leading to change in themselves and their relationships with the community people.

After sometime, I realized that I'm able to care and do things that would benefit the group instead of those egoistic tendencies I used

to have. I begin to care, share and cooperate with my peers and it has turned me into a better person and as a result. (Participant -1).

Participant 7 attested to how it helped him to influence others. *I was also able to influence old and new friends that I made along the line to be empathetic. I could not have learnt these valuable pro-social behaviors anywhere outside of sport.*

4.5.2 Resilience

The study was also able to show that grassroots sport development initiatives were able to help these rural youths to become resilient after learning about the youth development character concepts that instilled in them the ability to bounce back even in the face of adversity. They were able to change the way they think and perceive issues and how they think about others who may not be in a similar fortunate situation like them, thus leading to immediate change.

As a rural youth who has lived in both developing and developed countries, grassroots sport development activities contributed massively in my self-growth. Being very young and alone in a gulf country, it was challenging, but when I started participating in sports games with different nationalities, it helped me to improve my

self-confidence and thus becoming resilient. It also enhanced my football skills and brought out the best in me. (Participant -8)

The participants further believed that it was able to ensure that they were empowered to set their own goals that are clearly defined and as specific as possible to give them a clear direction as to how they could pursue those goals to ensure their achievability. This contributed significantly in preparing them to showcase their ability at a tender age by ensuring self-development.

The character concepts were able to expose me to new initiatives like resilience and that has empowered me with new skills and the confidence that I was lacking, thus serving as a motivation to grow beyond my age to ensure a better future for not myself alone but those people around me as well. (Participant -6)

Participant 11 pointed out that: *It has contributed to my social and personal development and many other youths by providing us with the resilience, socio-emotional development, identify work, character building, moral development, including the expression values and sportsmanship.*

4.5.3 Boosts self-confidence

The study further found out that because participation in grassroots sports development activities has a positive impact on the development of the youth since it boosts their confidence, this has helped the person's growth

later in life. It also gives the most vulnerable youths in society to try something else and has helped many of them to become successful athletes to the level of becoming professionals and change-makers in society, thus transforming the lives of many of them.

Participant 4 further stated: *Participation in grassroots sport has boosted our confidence and encouraged us to engage in something useful and meaningful as well as reduces bad social vices like criminality and drug abuse amongst us.*

The participants further stressed that sports activities helped restore their sense of belonging and importance, and this helped them to realize their potentials and worth irrespective of how others might perceive them. This, they added, is because participating in sports activities make one to believe that he or she is impacting positively on the future of a society and this comes in the form of the appreciation given to one by virtue of their talent and performances, especially persons from less privileged backgrounds. It enables athletes from that level to come out of their shells, compete, learn and appreciate one another.

Participation in grassroots sport had a great impact in the lives of many youngsters. It helps to boost the confidence and self-esteem of rural young people. Some would feel shy and uncomfortable at the

beginning but with time they will accept the challenges and overcome those barriers and challenges to become stronger personalities. (Participant -5)

Because sports provide a level playing field for the participants where talent and hard work rate above economic and social status, the participants said society's most vulnerable youths gain confidence and self-esteem, thus making it possible for those vulnerable youth to stand a fighting chance for better and more prosperous lives.

Participant 7 pointed out that: *Participation in grassroots sport has enhanced my self-confidence and helped me to develop new skills as one of most vulnerable youth to be able to interact with new people with different goals in life and aided my growth.*

These qualities, the study further established, has positively aided the growth of the participants because it makes them achieve a sense of accomplishment. The study further noted that participation in grassroots sport teaches them morality, integrity and ambition.

It has impacted and instilled in me self-confidence and other peers from diverse backgrounds in many ways. These includes believe in ourselves; putting in mind that someone believes in us, and makes us think positively of

ourselves at all times. It makes you to be consistent in terms of your performance, stays in control and gives you the believe that you can break many barriers. (Participant -3)

The participants also believed that sports participation is as important as the academic education sector if you put the right people in the right places. They added that because it teaches you team work, honestly, trust, and friendship, if one has all these qualities from his/her grassroots stage, he or she will build the self-confidence and self-esteem required in ensuring positive youth development.

Participant 9 said: *Playing with other youths, sharing and being coached and inspired by people you sometimes look up to has boosted my confidence and gave me the courage required to overcome challenges and tackle any obstacles in life.*

4.5.4 Positive character building

Participants also said sport participation ensures people develop attitudes of personal responsibility, build the spirit of team work, and ensures personal discipline are entrenched to becoming a cornerstone of one's actions and deeds, as well as promote discipline among youths. Thus, because there aren't many activities in the day-to-day life of a rural child, as a consequence, instead of engaging in bad things, sport has helped to engage them in

something meaningful and molded many into becoming productive youths in society.

Grassroots sport participation has offered us a great opportunity to change as young people and helped us teach peers good morals and principles that has made them to distinguish greatly between what is right and wrong at an early stage. The ones with a good character are always taken for reference. (Participant -13)

The study further illustrated that this has made others always wanting to emulate and to a large extent it had worked greatly in their development, thus, saving them from being regarded as failures and burdens on society. The peer to peer learning and interactions from participation in sporting activities also contributed to building positive characters in them.

With good guidance and coaching, grassroots sports, football in particular, is an effective tool to positively build the characters of youngsters because in our communities, the child who seems to participate more in sports is considered to be a special person and most of us ended up becoming agents of change and community leaders. (Participant – 12)

Grassroots sports participation, the participants believed, also helped them build their characters in psychological aspects and helped them develop

a positive attitude, respect for the opponents, develop a killer instinct, determination, perseverance, endurance and focus, thus aiding them to be in control of the situation by knowing their own strengths, abilities and weaknesses.

Participant -7 stated that to a great extent, leadership characteristics are discovered from such programs. *Youths, particularly the less fortunate, are able to discover their personal qualities and weaknesses which serves them in making better life choices as adults.*

Others like Participant 2 agreed: *Sports helps an individual much more than in the physical aspects alone. It helps them build character, teaches and develops strategic thinking, leadership skills and goals and many more. As known to many, rural youths are deprived of a lot of opportunities; their participation in grassroots sport allows them to showcase their skills and talents with the help of peers and good mentors. (Participant – 2)*

The study further noted that it has changed the lives of the participants forever and help them achieve their dream goals. This is so because if youth are in the hands of the right people with the right attitudes, sport can be a positive character building experience.

Grassroots sport participation provides one of the best opportunities for children to come in contact with rules and social values. Its defines the need to get along well with others and be accepted as part of a group or team. This has contributed to shaping my own character and many of my peers. (Participant -10)

One classical example of grassroots sport programs contributing to building the character of young people, the study found, is that it develops self-respect in the participant which is key to respecting other people and be able to know and understand their feelings. Coaches and trainers impact discipline and values in young people and just like schools do, sports instill a lot of discipline in the practitioner, the participants added.

It also encourages us to be courageous and be confident at all times, work together as one family. Social interaction is also highly encouraged and because since our teams comprised of a combination of various tribes and cultures, it has helped to aid our integration. It also discourages gender inequality, the participants said. (Participant -4)

4.5.5 Competence and decision making skills

The study also showed that sports activities not only fosters skills development, builds confidence and self-esteem, but it also inculcates in

youths the desire for excellence and results, thus contributing to increased competence even in their day-to-day activities outside of sports. The study also found that sport participation requires good decision making and there is little margin for error thus they would develop these principles in them and ensure that they minimize mistakes in their sport and other aspects of life.

Participant 3 stated: *It also helps one to improve his/her handling of issues, and dealing with other people. Grassroots sport processes have exposed me to decision making abilities which boosted my competence especially as I'm dealing with bigger roles and commitments now.*

Participating in a grassroots sport program can help improve the competence of players or teams in acquiring important life skills such as communication, collaboration and leadership that can increase their confidence, competence and better quality for them in the labor market. Programs such as education, employment, health, gender equality and peaceful coexistence are improved through sports. (Participant -6).

The participants further stated that participating in organized sporting activities also teaches structure and organization and help youth to improve in social competence, communication skills as well as learning to be positive role players in the grand scheme of things. It also helps them become a better

version of themselves by working together with others, which in return helps prepare them to take up leadership roles in the future especially when the program goes in tandem with youth development programs such as seminars, workshops and other sporting activities.

Sports activities can help in preparing the participants to be more effective and efficient in the execution of their duties, not only in sports participation but other life development activities. However, for this to be achieved, it would require the participation of a coalition of all stakeholders such as officials, coaches, volunteer administrations, and parents who should be committed to the cause to make such meaningful contribution on young people. (Participant – 8)

If all these is achieved, the study further noted, it will prepare rural youths to become strong leaders because sport is about building and shaping the characters of people. However, the participants further stated, there should be proper investment in grassroots sport participation by setting up academies and promote sports in schools with full support from all the stakeholders concerned.

The study also found out that sports encourage competition and competition brings out the best from the persons involved, thus instilling a

winning mindset in an ethical manner that makes one trust him/herself and make them believe that if others can do things, they too can and will do. It also helps inculcate in the participants critical thinking skills and the ability to work together for a better future.

Participation in grassroots sport programs has an impact on the reduction of crimes and provides safe environment for the rural communities. It provides health and physical fitness, including psychological health and well-being of people. It has an impact on education and lifelong learning. It also has a positive economic impact and regeneration of local communities. (Participant -11).

Chapter 5 Discussion & Recommendations

Sports activities and event, a recent study by Sports England concluded, including leadership, volunteering, sports events, facilities, training and sport employment schemes all help to develop the knowledge, skills and productivity of communities and individuals as well as create a string and vibrant neighborhoods where people want to live and invest in businesses, (Sports England, 2019).

Therefore, the aim of this study was to critically explore the effects of grassroots sport programs on rural youth development as well as to identify

its role in youth development; explore the perspectives and experiences of youths in grassroots sports development and to examine the role grassroots sports play in establishing a structured pattern of development in rural communities.

Thus, this chapter deals with the discussion of the findings that the study unearthed, which is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the findings of the three research questions and discusses findings with support on the relevant literature. The second part of the chapter deals with the presentations of the limitations to the study. Lastly, based on the findings and results of this research, the study will attempt to make policy recommendations and suggestions for future studies.

5.1 Understanding the roles of grassroots sport development programs

Grassroots sport is deliberately designed to ensure a variety of opportunities in terms of skill acquisition, satisfaction, participation and enjoyment (Hill & Green, 2008). Grassroots sport programs, the results indicate, has offered rural Gambian youth the opportunity to discover, nurture and develop new life skills. This is very important in the sense that there is high unemployment rate amongst the Gambian youth. Thus, equipping them with a variety of life skills can ensure employment opportunities for them.

The program also offers youths the opportunity to transition from pre to elite athletes, thus serving as the catalyst to sport development (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009). The study demonstrates a correlation with rural Gambian youth with the findings indicating that it has helped them to develop a career path in sports, either by becoming a professional athlete in different sports or a job in sports outside of being an athlete.

The results further indicate that rural Gambian youth who have the sporting talents are able to be admitted and awarded scholarships to study at some of the best urban schools in the country. This may not be synonymous to Gambia alone but the previous literature didn't find this. However, it is very significant in the sense that education is still very expensive in The Gambia and everyone isn't offered the equal amount of opportunities to study at the institutions of their choices due to low standards at public schools coupled with unaffordable high school fees at private schools.

Grassroots sport programs also help in establishing community relations because it exposes youth to live by and connect with others based on principles, practices and indigenous values (Hapeta et al., 2019). This theory demonstrates a correlation with the findings. The program, has played a significant role in building improved & solidified positive community

relationships for both the participants and their communities, leading to great recognition. The importance of such an outcome cannot be overemphasized at a time when Gambia is seriously divided on tribal and regional lines and is affecting every sphere of our national development.

One in every 10 Gambian is obese, with the major causes been to low physical activity and obesity tolerance where most Gambians see overweight as an uplift in status (Cham et al., 2020). It is important to direct efforts at community participation in sport for health and social benefits as obesity and inactivity was on the rise across the globe, (Rowe et al., 2013). Sport goes beyond the enjoyment of youth with its numerous health benefits and the lifestyle pattern changes that it offers to them (Hill & Christine Green, 2008). The findings support this theory where rural Gambian youth said the increased physical activity led to healthy lifestyles and has helped them avoid non-communicable diseases like diabetes, heart, pulmonary, and respiratory diseases, which has been the biggest cause of deaths in The Gambia for the past two decades (WHO Steps, 2017). The results also indicate that those people who are suffering from these NCDs are been able to manage its progress and live with it for a very long time as a result of the increased physical activity.

The data suggests an improved physical, psychological and mental health as well as enjoyment for the youth. This is very important because with poor and unaffordable healthcare delivery in The Gambia, most especially rural Gambia, active participation in sports helps strengthen the health and wellbeing of rural youth at no or little cost to them. It will help change their perception on been overweight which is seen as a sign of an uplift in status, thus making them obesity tolerant. A healthy body will lead to productivity and better efficiency.

Grassroots sport has the potential to ensure integration, involvement in social life, and making participants to be tolerant and acceptance of divergence while adhering to the rules (Menéndez-Ferreira et al., 2016). The study is consistent with this theory with it emerging amongst Gambian youth that the program has led to social cohesion and unity amongst them as well as respect and friendly relationships between those from different religions, tribes and culture. The findings also suggest that the program encourages the culture of tolerance and teaches leadership even outside of sports and because they have to deal with heterogeneous mass of people, it can help in breaking gender stereotypes, social and tribal barriers by fostering unity, love and trust that can transcended beyond sports participation.

Despite an alternative offered to football through rugby, in Brazil, the authorities and the participants are all reliant on football to make a breakthrough in sport, thus, making football at the centre of its grassroots sport participation (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2014). The analysis supports the theory because the findings indicate that most Gambians also take football to be the be-all and end all of grassroots sport because it offers the easiest route for them to practice a sport compared to individual sports like tennis, athletics, and golf, because it may be expensive for them to purchase the equipment. In fact, it is no wonder that 10 out of the 13 participants in this study said they have only participated in football with only 3 playing in other sports.

However, in Brazil, rugby may offer an alternative to football (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2014), whereas in The Gambia, there's none. This is due to limited resources and lack of proper investment. Thus, what the findings indicate is that if youth were offered more opportunities, contrary to public opinion, many would've chosen a different sport to football, thus, a need for Gambia's investment in sports to be across the board.

The results further indicate that the program has led to improved teamwork and tolerance amongst the participants. This has helped in exposing the rural youth to character concepts that helped them to realize their potentials, especially in the alternative career opportunities they've chosen.

Tolerance and teamwork are very important life skills helping in our day-to-day dealings with others, especially in the workplaces where we come across people from diverse backgrounds.

5.2 Participants perceptions of grassroots sport programs

Grassroots sport development programs that see the athletes living far away from their communities, as in the case of young Pacific elite athletes, can be an achievement, but at the same time poses series of challenges, including having to deal with independence, freedom, establishing new relations. And with all the on-field pressures attributed to it, it can have an impact on their mental well-being and emotions, thus leading to depression (Marsters & Tiatia-Seath, 2019). In contrast, the findings indicate that the program serves as a safe space for rural Gambian youth where they interact with their peers and program leaders. This, the findings further suggest, led to reciprocal high quality relations where they became each other's comforter through thick and thin. However, the data also suggests that the youth found it difficult to forge relations with people who refused to reciprocate their trust, kindness respect amongst others. Thus, in comparison, while the previous research establishes that the program is seen as an achievement for the participants, it comes with its serious challenges that could pose a health threat to the participants (Marsters & Tiatia-Seath, 2019). Those challenges

were hardly reportedly other than those that failed to reciprocate their trust. In essence, it is a safe place for rural Gambian youth whose programs are normally based in their own communities.

Playing sports in both an organized and an unstructured environment for the youth is such that the experience of one has a great influence on the other (Bowers & Green, 2013). A person can only get to understand the experience of one by understanding the experience of the other. (Hill & Christine Green, 2008), stated, one of the things that children learn is that to be part of a team means that they have to support each other. In this research, the data suggests that because of the character concepts that the youth were exposed to, it led them to a change in behavior where they would develop compassion and empathy for each other, by empathizing and feeling each other's' perspectives. It has made them to become better listeners and care more about their peers as well as social associates outside of sports. Compassion and empathy are very important character traits that in no small part plays a role in shaping a youth. They are deeply rooted in the Gambian cultural context but when you look at our social media space of recent, you will see people taking joy of the other's misfortune as a result of the toxic environment created by our various differences. Thus, grassroots sport programs have the potential of changing that narrative.

Ethical responsibility is of paramount importance in every aspect of our social development (Thornton, 2015), while of critical importance to youth development through sports is a healthy parent and child relationship, which is often lacking for most at-risk youth (Lorenz, 2018). Many positive attributes can come from children-parent relationship through sports participation with parents noting that their relationships with their children blossomed as a result (Maniam, 2017). The analysis support the theory as rural Gambian youth said the program serves as a place for the participants to learn and improve on their social responsibilities, especially in the aspects of their relationships by being more caring and respectful to their peers, friends, and program leaders. As a consequence, it is apparent that such developments would come at a price and it is no wonder when the youth said they had to reevaluate their lives, meaning they had to cut off all ties with some of their old peers to ensure a feel good factor and a positive energy.

The new-found social responsibility, the data suggests, led to an improved child-parent relation amongst the participants. In rural Gambia, most parents are polygamous in nature and as a result they have several children with the sole aim of ensuring they have enough helping hands in the farms. The many wives, in the case of the fathers, and the numerous children for the mothers' part, makes it difficult for parents to make strong relations

with their children when they are growing up. As a result, because they hardly interact with their children, not knowing theirs and not feeling the emotional support of their parents can lead to the child not having any compassion or empathy for them.

The results also indicate that the program serves as a place for moral reasoning by enabling them to distinguish between what is right and wrong, leading to a high sense of moral judgment and a positive atmosphere. This has earned them great respect within the community, because they were able to help in transforming themselves and many young people as well through continuous counseling.

5.3 Impacts of the program on positive youth development

There is feeling amongst young Indian athletes that there is a strong need to ensure that they are trained on new ways that would help them to maintain their level of motivation, self-esteem, be able to manage disappointments as well as anger management and to be able to deal with the stress they go through as a result of injuries (Vanteemar S. Sreeraj et al., 2019). This is consistent with the findings of my research where the participants suggest that the character concepts they were exposed to have led to intra-personal skills development as a result of high self-esteem, and the open

mindedness they learnt in the program. The data also indicate that the participants became more independent with their thoughts and in control of their own thinking and the ability to make their own decisions and mistakes, controlling their feelings, emotions, discipline, thus leading them to supporting prosocial behaviors. Thus, based on the data, an inference can be drawn that grassroots sport programs indeed offers youth the opportunity to develop their intrapersonal skills.

Grassroots sport programs ensure participants maintain mental wellbeing for a positive social relations and a well-balanced athletic identity (Marsters & Tiatia-Seath, 2019). This is also in consist with the findings with the data suggesting that rural Gambian youth became resilient after learning about the character concepts that instilled in them the ability to bounce back, leading to a change of perception and identity. Thus, in the absence of trained and specialized psychologists to help Gambian youth deal with mental health issues during their formative years, it is important to encourage grassroots sport programs.

The data also indicate that the program has help to boost the confidence and self-esteem of youth, helping in their later growth in life becoming professionals and change makers in society as well as realize their

potentials and worth irrespective of how others might perceive them. The data further supports the theory with regard to vulnerable children as the result suggests that it made vulnerable youth to stand a fighting chance for better and more prosperous lives. Confidence and self-esteem is very vital for everyone, without which one wouldn't be able to know his/her own worth and values. Thus, with the youth noting that the program has the ability to make them appreciate their own worth and value, especially the most vulnerable, its importance cannot be overemphasized.

The findings also indicate that the program has aid the participants in developing attitudes of personal responsibility, build the spirit of team work, and ensures personal discipline are entrenched in them, becoming a cornerstone of their actions and deeds, as well as promote. This is important in the sense that when youth develop a sense of personal responsibility, it will help them in focusing their attention and ability towards setting clearly defined and attainable goals. It will make them to take responsibility for their actions whether successful or not.

The results also indicate that because in sports, there is little margin for error, the program has positively affected their competence and decision-making skills. It also aided their handling of issues, improved communication

skills, leading to effectiveness and efficiency in the execution of their duties. Effectiveness and efficiency are very important life skills and important for growth. This is linked to saving both time and money, which is a recipe for profitability. It can also contribute to better communication, collaboration and the exhibition of leadership that can increase one's confidence and competence.

5.4 Conclusion

To many Gambians, sports in its current context is just a mere leisure where people are frowned upon for deciding a career in. But sports in its proper and wider context goes beyond a regular daily workout routine, hitting the gym for weight loss and practice for fun. Thus, at a time when there is an increasing spate of untimely deaths in The Gambia linked mainly to metabolism syndromes (WHO Steps, 2017) among young people, who are the crème la crème of our country and the increasing difficulty of accessing basic healthcare for the average Gambian, the time couldn't be better for a legislation on sport development.

Three-quarters of the Gambia's population depends on agriculture for its livelihood and in the country's economic overview for 2019, it was found that agriculture provides for about one-third of GDP, making The Gambia

largely reliant on sufficient rainfall. However, the agricultural sector has untapped potential - less than half of the arable land is cultivated and agricultural productivity is low (Theodor, 2019). We have seen situations where insufficient rainfall, which is a consequence of nature, has seriously affected farming seasons in the country and this coupled with the failure to embrace modern technology in farming, it is safe to say that even though the sector would continue to play a pivotal role in the livelihood of many Gambians, the country's hopes of food self-sufficiency is still farfetched.

Recently, the Gabonese national football team arrived in Banjul for a crucial African Cup of Nations qualifier with Gambia and they refused to surrender their Covid19 test results as standard procedure and as well refused to take new tests (GFF, 2020). They were held up at the airport for 6 hours before they would finally be allowed to board the bus to their hotel ahead of the crucial top-of-the-table class few hours later (BBC Sports, 2020). The incident generated a lot of international media attention with the major news outlets just reporting the version posted by Arsenal captain Pierre Emerick Aubameyang to his 10 million Twitter followers. This perceived lack of respect to our country's laws (Kerr-Fatou, 2020), galvanized a divided country with everyone rallying behind the team despite the restrictions that forced the match to be played behind closed doors. Gambia won 2-1 and

returned to the summit of the table and is on the verge of a maiden AFCON qualifications and an entire nation celebrated in joy.

Despite this and many other glaring evidences, participation in sport still takes the back sheet in people's daily scale of preference. There is hardly a drop of sweat for the majority of the population and this has been attributed to the current rise in metabolism diseases (Cham et al., (2020). The current rate of sudden deaths, especially among the youthful population is very alarming, yet there is no effort to dig deep into the matter to unearth the major cause of it and as a result.

5.5 Implications

Based on the findings of the results, it is evident that sport has the potential to make many meaningful changes to the lives and livelihood of Gambians. As well as the health benefit that comes with it, thus saving the country of value resources, it can also serve as the major source of employment in the country. However, The Gambia government's current support to sport development offers little to go home with and urgent action is needed to ensure that sport is placed in its proper context. Thus, in terms of managerial implications of this research, the study has made these recommendations that has the potential in making Gambians to finally see sports beyond its current

context and placing the country in its rightful place in terms of participation and to achieve results with excellence.

1. There can be no meaningful achievement without proper sport infrastructure in place. Since independence from Britain in 1965, there's only one national stadium which do not meet the current international demands of elite sports participation. Sanitary conditions aren't desirable and its proper maintenance is never taken serious. Thus, both the local and central government should commit more into ensuring more sports infrastructure in every nook and cranny of the country.
2. The GFF through the FIFA Forward program for Member Associations (MA) is currently improving on existing facilities and building new ones. That is a good start is only targeting the football facilities and other national sports associations do not have similar opportunities from their international sports federations. but other national sports. Thus, the government can partner with the Federation to provide other sports facilities at these stadiums.
3. Because of the constant conflict of interest and overlapping of duties and responsibilities between the National Sports Council and the GNOC; to merge the two to form a quasi-governmental body that

would be known as The Gambia National Sport and Olympic Committee (GNSOC). However, it is note realizing that this is easier said than done because it would ultimately require the approval from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) so as to ensure its independence from any governmental interference with the supposed merger to be undertaken in accordance with the Olympic Charter. Therefore, it would require a very strong political will from the side of the government, to making this a reality and at the same time to ensure there is transparency, accountability and probity.

4. The proposed merged institutions be tasked with the responsibility of coordinating sports associations and raising funds to ensure our country's participation in all forms of sports within and outside the country. The much needed funds from the government and the support the Olympic Movement is giving to the National Olympic Committees (NOC) would ensure that programs are prioritized under one main agenda, thus creating the environment for our sports to thrive.
5. The government to help create a sport culture and implore on the local councils to complement the central government by building leisure facilities for their people, especially the younger generation. This is

important because when we talk about grassroots sports, it is very pertinent to note that the emphasis should be on the young people, especially those school going children because they are at a stage in their lives where they can acquire and develop the necessary skills to ensure their participation in sports for a very long time and thus have the opportunity to become professional athletes. This is true because as one advances with age in their lives, his or her capacity to endure stress, capacity to work for prolonged hours and building up the physical fitness to be able to compete at a high level declines dramatically.

6. Revise the current physical education program at schools and make it mandatory and ensure its implementation. Create school sports leagues for primary, high schools, college and universities as well as reserve and youth leagues for the various professional sports clubs in the country. However, in order to make all these happen, it would require the Ministry of Basic & Secondary Education (MOBSE), Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MOHERST) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS) to come together to the negotiating table to develop a model and workable curriculum to ensure its smooth implementation.

7. Establish a national sports institute that would offer degree programs for the current and future sports leaders. This will help strengthen the administrative and management capacities of national sports bodies to meet the current demands of global sports administration.
8. Strengthened relationships between the government and the private sector to ensure a public-private partnership by encouraging them to invest in sports. Let the partnership implement sustainable sports programs, enhance publicity & commercialization of sporting activities and encourage grassroots participation to ensure that sport is seen as a means of income generation and meaningful employment.
9. Legislate sports funding to make mandatory 2% allocation of the national budget for sports development. make sure 50% is given to the federated sport organizations through the supposed Gambia National Sports and Olympic Committee (GNSOC) to run their programs; 25% spent on developing sports infrastructure across the country and the remaining 25% given to school sports. If this is done, within few years, every region would have the facilities ready to ensure increased participation in sport and hosting of mega international sport events. The hosting of international sport events would contribute

meaningfully to our economic growth through trade & commerce, tourism, national pride and social integration.

5.6 Limitations

Every study has existing limitations whether reported by the author or not. This is mainly created by some of the constraints that the research encountered during the process either on the research design or the methodology. These factors may normally have an impact on the findings of the study (Wordvice, 2020). This study, it is worth noting that was also faced with some limitations during the process.

The primary limitation of this research is the lack of previous or any existing study related to sports, the topic most especially, in The Gambia. This has created a restriction on the valuable data that would have aided this study by building on from it.

Another limitation is that the study targeted 16 respondents, three of which are current and past elite athletes that have gone through grassroots sport programs and later participated in a mega international sport event like an Olympics. However, because qualitative research is naturally time consuming for both the participant and the researcher, the trio all pulled out

in the end, thus depriving the study the opportunity to present the version of an elite athlete.

The final limitation is that most of the respondents participated in only football with only three of them involved in other sports but not at the same level with football. This has also affected the study in the sense that it deprived it from critically analyzing the impact that grassroots sport programs may have had on the lives of those who must have gone through the program and turned out to be elite athletes in a sport other than football.

However, despite these limitations, the study relied on literature from other parts of the world whose cultural context has some similarities with The Gambia, even if it is not entirely the same. Also, a couple of respondents may not have participated in a mega global sport event but still played at a youth category world cup final in the 2012 Women's U-17 World Cup in Azerbaijan, whereas another respondent played football with some top clubs in central Europe and represented the national football team of The Gambia for many years. And as a result, the study was able to get very relevant and critical information on the outcomes of grassroots sport programs on the lives of rural Gambian youth.

That withstanding, future study is required to target a larger portion of the population and those in the urban areas to determine whether the roles, perceptions and impacts of grassroots sport programs on youth development would give similar results to those from rural Gambia.

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Appendix 1

1. Consent Form

This questionnaire has been developed to collect information in order to assess the outcome of grassroots sport development (social and psychological) on the lives and livelihoods of rural Gambian youth, with a view to ensuring the effectiveness, relevance and adequate integration of sports in national development efforts and identifying appropriate policy recommendations.

The researcher would appreciate your willingness to voluntarily participate in this research. The information collected will not be used in any other way to infringe on the right of the respondent or his or her community. It is only an academic exercise which is a partial fulfillment of a degree. In addition, all the information collected would be kept strictly confidential and your anonymity is equally guaranteed.

2. Interview Questions

SECTION A

General information

- i. Name of Village/Town
- ii. Name of District
- iii. Name of Region
- iv. Name of Respondent
- v. Sex of Respondent
- vi. Type of sports activity involved in
- vii. Length of involvement in the sport activity
- viii. How did you come to be involved in this sport activity?

Interview Questions

SECTION B:

Grassroots Sport Development Roles

1. What do you consider to be the significance of grassroots sport participation in the lives of rural youths?
2. What are the most important benefits of grassroots sport participation for the physical well-being and health of rural youths?

3. What are the other important benefits of grassroots sport participation in the lives of rural youths?

SECTION C:

Perceptions On Grassroots Sport Programs

4. In what ways does grassroots sport programs affect one's relationships with others?
5. In your opinion, can grassroots sport programs instill discipline and social responsibility in participants? How?
6. In your view, can grassroots sport programs affects one's moral values? Explain?

7. SECTION D

Impact On Positive Youth Development

8. In what ways does participation in grassroots sport development impact the self-confidence of rural society's most vulnerable youths?
9. To what extend do you think grassroots sport participation can contribute to building the character(s) of young people in rural communities?
10. In what ways can participation in grassroots sport programs improve the competence of rural youths?