

AFRIGO

Encouraging the African Church in world mission

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BRIDGING THE SPORTS
MISSIONARY GAP

THE MISSION FIELD ON THE
FOOTBALL FIELD



SPORTS MINISTRY
A GAME-CHANGER
IN MISSIONS

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AFRIGO is a publication aimed at raising awareness, mobilizing, training, and inspiring churches and individuals in Africa towards global mission.

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A POWERFUL PLATFORM FOR MISSIONS

BY MARVIN ZARE



Khaleel's newfound faith and passion to reach his community hit a major obstacle when his family and neighbours turned against him, seeking his life. Forced to flee, Khaleel found refuge and support among fellow believers. He eventually connected with a young coach in the Horn of Africa who was using sports to transform his community. This coach helped Khaleel access training in Kenya. Equipped with new skills, Khaleel entered a jihadist-controlled area in the Horn of Africa, using sports to establish communities of believers.

Sports have incredible power to transform, inspire, empower, and unite. Nelson Mandela once said, "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to the youth in a language they understand." With 32 Olympic sports and over 8,000 indigenous sports worldwide involving over 5.5 billion people weekly, sports speak a universal language. Khaleel's story is not isolated. Many have used sports to penetrate dark places and it presents an amazing opportunity for African missions. However, the world of sports itself is often overlooked as a mission field.

Sports resonate deeply with us because God created us with talents and relationships to reflect his image (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15, 18). Yet, we often misuse them, seeking love and identity apart from God, leading to brokenness and separation from him (Genesis 3:5, 16, 17-19). In this disordered affection, we turn away from our true Source. Nevertheless, God's steadfast love endures. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we receive new life and a restored relationship with God. This transformation allows us to play with joy and freedom, grounded in his love (Romans 12). Engaging in sports is a celebration of God's creative power and a testament to the intricate design and purpose he instilled in humanity.

The unfinished task of missions faces significant gaps that sports can uniquely fill. Sports as an access ministry reaches unreached groups and nations, engaging people who might otherwise remain inaccessible. By leveraging the universal

appeal of sports, ministries can bridge these gaps, effectively advancing the Great Commission.

Sport is a culturally relevant platform for missions, encompassing the lifestyle of 75 per cent of the world's population. In Africa, the passion for sports is evident in stadiums, fields, and communities, where people gather for games and watch parties. Activities like walking, jogging, going to gyms, and watching games on TV are integral parts of everyday life, making sports a powerful tool for engagement.

God created us to reach the world with the Good News creatively, and sports ministry exemplifies this approach. Sports provide a non-threatening platform that crosses barriers of language, tribe, and religion, offering opportunities to enter restricted territories. Major events like the Africa Cup of Nations and the African Games facilitate connections with athletes and nations. Through sports, we plant churches, make disciples, and transform communities, responding to God's call and harnessing the power of sports to spread the gospel across the continent just like Khaleel is doing.

In this edition of AfriGO, read the stories of two coaches who are using football to disciple young people outside the church and to preach the gospel in a country where conventional evangelism is difficult. For our Called article,

Coach Siyanda shares how he is addressing the problem of fatherlessness in South Africa's suburbs through sports. In Perspective, Ishaya Durkwa delves into the opportunities sports offer for transformation and church planting, and highlights pitfalls to avoid. Enjoy these stories and more, and share this edition of AfriGO with others. Happy reading!

Marvin Zare is a life coach and sports consultant with experience in mission and sports leadership. Actively involved in Kenya's sports movement, he focuses on disciple-making through sports, health and fitness, and supports The World Needs A Father (TWNAF) initiative with his wife, Njoki. They are passionate about family, fatherhood, motherhood, and mission sustainability. Marvin enjoys connecting with people, reading, football, and cycling. They have two daughters. mavobravo@gmail.com.



Beautiful Feet at a sports camp

THE MISSION FIELD ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD

BY KATE AZUMAH

ABI'S STORY, GHANA

Abigail Mensah (Abi) did not play football, but she loved the game and keenly followed happenings in the sport's world. She loved Jesus and knew the Lord wanted her to reach out to youth outside the church, but she didn't know how.

"The burden was so strong, I nursed it in prayer for six years until I found a brochure advertising a training on "whole life coaching." I had never heard about sports ministry, but the information leapt out to me. I thought, "This is it!" Despite being a mother to four young boys, Abi attended the training, and what she received in one hour was enough to set her off.

A team is born

After her training, Abi asked someone to invite his unchurched friends to a football park one Saturday. Twenty-eight boys gathered, marking the beginning of her football team, Beautiful Feet. "Our number doubled the following week, and kept increasing up to over a hundred. We had those who didn't belong to any team, those who

trained with other teams, and those who had been kicked out of teams. Handling them was tough. I cried to God for help."

A professional coach assisted Abi for a while and left. Another "Christian" coach only taught her boys dubious means of tackling opponents. Abi discerned that God wanted her to coach the team herself. "I began to study coaching online. Since I already knew the game, I'd teach what was in my mind to my seven-year-old son and he would then demonstrate the drills on the field."

"We began with prayer, did warm-ups and drills, and played a game. During downtime I'd share the Bible lesson. We showed a lot of love and interest in their lives beyond the field; so, they brought their friends." Abi's husband and other sports ministry experts got involved. She also attended more trainings and became known as "Coach Abi."

Discipleship and growth

"We discovered that 15 minutes of Bible lessons on the field was not enough, so we began a midweek Bible study. They had so many questions, our scheduled one hour ran into two hours on some days.

By this time, our numbers had reduced, sometimes to just 18 on the field. We were heartbroken, but we perceived the Lord wanted us to go deeper with a few."

The next phase of growth happened through camps. "Many of our boys were first-generation Christians from underprivileged homes. The camps provided a different atmosphere. We invited father figures to speak to them, noticed those who were growing, and began training them as leaders. Soon, we were having multiple camps for different purposes."

Eventually, Abi and her family moved to another part of town and more boys gathered in her house—the ball at home had attracted them. Another Beautiful Feet started, and instead of driving them all the way to church, she started church at home. "The boys were more comfortable here than at my affluent church. We worship simply and discover God's Word together."

Influence and multiplication

"Some of our boys carried back home what they learned, and initiated prayer times with their families. Others are

discipling four to five young people on their own. Our midweek Bible study now happens in five home cells, with about 15 people in each meeting.”

Beautiful Feet went on sports missions and started new stations. Sixty to 70 players now meet weekly in four locations. They have also helped other people to establish a total of eight stations in northern Ghana for disciple-making through football. Now, Abi takes a backseat when she visits her teams. She has raised enough leaders to run things.

JUNIOR'S STORY, SENEGAL

Football was Junior Kaki's life and passion. He had played for many local teams and had dreams of becoming an international player. At a Youth For Christ camp outside Dakar one day, the camp director asked him to coordinate a sports outreach. Junior organized a football team from the camp, and they went out to play with non-Christians. They shared the gospel with the other team, and invited them to the camp where they had a good interaction with the mostly Muslim players.

Upon returning to Dakar, Junior kept thinking about how football had opened a door for the gospel, and this inspired him to form a team with players from different churches. He wanted his team to play with non-Christians as a means of sharing the gospel with them.

Faith meets football

Junior had attended church with his family in the Central African Republic as a child, but he did not give his life to Christ. He later joined some friends who were a negative influence, and to remedy the situation, he was sent to his father in Senegal. His father taught him about Jesus and Junior's life turned around after his mother gave him a gospel tract with the image of two Christians—one who controlled his own life, and the other who let the Lord

**The ball at home
had attracted
them.**

PRAY FOR:

- God's provision for sports ministries around the world.
- God's transforming work in the lives of sports people.



Junior Kaki's football team

direct his life.

“Instantly, I knew which Christian I was. I yielded my life to the Lord, and desired to see young people follow Jesus. Since God didn't give me the opportunity to play internationally, I channeled my gift into becoming a coach.”

A better way

“In majority Muslim Senegal, preaching the gospel in conventional ways is difficult, but sport is a big thing and offers many opportunities to do this effectively. Before we start any match with non-Christians, I announce our reason for playing. I tell them that we have found love, joy, and peace in

Jesus and we want to share this with them because we love them. After the match, we give an exhortation and invite them to accept Jesus.”

“Playing sport helps us to develop relationships with others and to demonstrate Christlike character. Being down-to-earth and showing an interest in their lives opens them up to relate with us. When the young people have a problem, they come to me and I also visit their families. We connect those who accept Christ to churches and follow up on them.”

“It's encouraging to see the transformation in the lives of the non-Christians. We were travelling to play a tournament in another town when our

car broke down. One Muslim player asked us to pray to Jesus before continuing our journey. In Senegal, when teams win matches, they give glory to the marabouts, but in our matches, the young people give the glory to God. Some of those we reached out to are now influential people, but they keep in touch with us because they appreciate our investment in their lives.”

Despite these testimonies, Junior laments that in Francophone Africa, the Church doesn't see the importance of sports ministry.

Sports for the unreached

Abi shares, “Sport is a great tool any missionary can use to reach the unreached or people from other religions. The ball is a natural mobilizer and connector. You can easily play with a Muslim even if you're a pastor. Disciple-making is about relationships. Start by sharing God's Word in the form of a story. Sport is a retainer and they will keep coming. The Word of God will bring the transformation as you water it with prayer. God will draw some of them to you, so you go deeper with them. You're discipling them even before they make a decision for Christ.”

A family of people are doing sports ministry worldwide, and are happy to assist any missionary who wants to change the game on the mission field with the ball ... or some other form of sport or play. Contact Coach Abi at abigailmensah@gmail.com. Read more here: <https://bit.ly/MissionFootball>

THE 13TH AFRICAN GAMES

FOR THE GOSPEL



Visit to Ghanaian athletes in camp

In the vibrant and diverse landscape of Africa, sports hold a unique and powerful place. Recognizing this potential, the Ghana Sports Movement (GSM) and the Bible Society of Ghana launched the Much More Than Gold (MMTG) outreach initiative around the 13th African Games held in Accra, Ghana in March 2024. The outreach was inspired by the Games' potential to rally together the Body of Christ in Ghana for impactful ministry.

Mobilization and funding

Preparations began in December 2023 with a vision-casting gathering of church leaders and representatives from Christian groups. Afterwards, volunteers were mobilized through WhatsApp messages, letters, announcements, and visits to churches. Over 500 people enlisted, and the planning team organized online and in-person trainings at different locations to equip them for the outreach activities. Sponsorship letters were also delivered to churches and organizations.

Churches contributed money and offered their premises and logistics for meetings. Companies donated food and pharmaceutical items. Scripture Union and the Bible Society supplied Bibles and devotionals for distribution and one woman provided branded T-shirts for volunteers. Other individuals gave various amounts, and some offered their expertise in media, photography, and catering at no cost. Michael Armah,

a member of the planning team, shares that prior to the outreach, no money was available, but by stepping out in faith with prayer, diligence, and hard work, God provided abundantly.

Prayer and chaplaincy

Members of the GSM met online to pray thrice weekly for the outreach, and others went on prayer walks at the official venues for the Games. Volunteers also participated in an in-person prayer festival.

Before the competition began, the planning team organized church leaders to visit the Ghanaian athletes in camp to donate Bibles, devotionals, water, and fruits. They arranged for the athletes to fellowship with partnering churches and 70 athletes gave their lives to Christ.

A two-day sports chaplaincy training was also organized to equip participants in effective ways to provide spiritual support to athletes, coaches, and officials.

Multifaceted evangelism

Within the Games communities, volunteers distributed sports-themed gospel tracts, displayed evangelistic placards, engaged in evangelism with motorists, vendors, and households, and did a medical outreach. At the opening and closing ceremonies, they evangelized around the stadium through creative arts and free face painting. KidsGames, an evangelistic play event, was also

organized for children in Somanya and Jamestown, reaching 1,600 and 1,000 kids respectively.

Unique opportunities

The African Games provided a platform for the Church to reach a diverse audience with over 150,000 gospel tracts distributed. Believers and leaders from different churches worked together with many witnessing first-hand the power of sports for the Great Commission. To crown the outreach, a thanksgiving event was held with citations and souvenirs presented to partners, volunteers, and sponsors. For churches and groups looking to leverage major sports events for the Great Commission, Michael says:

1. Plan and mobilize well in advance.
2. Collaborate with various churches and groups to maximize impact.
3. Use creative and engaging methods to reach different audiences.
4. Constitute a team which, aided by the Holy Spirit, creatively leads the outreach efforts.

Instead of seeing sports as a carnal entity, the Church must see it as a redemptive tool which brings the Church up-close to the people for whom Jesus died. Sports remain a game-changer in missions and we must utilize the opportunities they offer to bring many to faith in Christ Jesus. Read more here: <https://bit.ly/MAfricanGamesMMTG>

CALLED: SIYANDA LANDZELA



MAKING DISCIPLES AMONG THE FATHERLESS

AS TOLD TO NENKINAN NEHEMIAH DESHI

Fatherlessness is rampant in the Cape Town suburbs, with roots in the colonial era when many Xhosa fathers left their wives and children to work in the mines. Though those days are gone, absentee fathers have become a generational trend.

My name is Siyanda Landzela. I am Xhosa by tribe from Cape Town, South Africa. I work with a ministry called Ambassadors Football. We partner with organizations and ministries in Cape Town, and we use football to address the issue of fatherlessness in the slums. The kids I work with are both Xhosa and Coloureds. Among the Coloureds, though the fathers are physically present, their sons have no emotional connections to them.

I didn't know my father and I always longed for him. Being raised by a single mom affected me, but as a teenager, I found football. My coach was sometimes late to practice. I wanted to be a leader so I began to lead the team on the days he was late. My coach saw it and affirmed me. He told me he saw "a leader," "a coach," and "someone who can change a generation." I was 15 years old and this was in 2005. I tried to pursue education but didn't succeed much. In 2017, I reconnected with my coach, and he recommended me for a faith-based leadership school called East Mountain. They taught us about God, leadership, and finding our identity in him. I met many mentors and fathers. I had a lot of emotional wounds, but I gained some clarity there.

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- God's protection over Siyanda and his team.
- The Lord's work of healing in the hearts of the boys Siyanda is coaching.
- Godly father figures for the world's fatherless children.

In 2021, my father-figure coach recommended me for an international leadership school where I learned about sports ministry and discipleship. At that conference, God called me to address fatherlessness through football. I joined Ambassadors Football in 2022 and I was trained to coach boys. Now, I coach a team called "The Future Stars."

The team comprises both black and coloured children from two communities: Capricorn which is predominantly Xhosa, and Overcome which is predominantly Coloured. In between these communities is the field where we train. Two vices accompanying fatherlessness are gangs and violence. There is a loss of identity and anger, and shootouts often occur between contesting sides. Sometimes training there is risky. We have U-12, U-14, and U-18 divisions in Future Stars, and some older boys above 18. They are at the risk of joining gangs at that age, but we turn them to the Lord. We practice on Mondays and Fridays, and on Wednesdays, we have Discovery Bible Study (DBS) and mentorship.

We start football teams with one to five guys. The players from the same community bring their younger brothers and friends. We also scout boys playing on the streets. I currently work with 56 boys across three teams. As a coach, I am a father figure to the boys. Coaching allows me to affect their lives physically and emotionally. I affirm, correct, and guide them. We have come to understand the role of a father and how we can practice that on the field. A father's key role is to provide security for his kids. And safety and security are not only physical but emotional.

Five of the boys we trained and disciplined from a young age are now coaches with Ambassadors Football. I want to see the generational curse of fatherlessness broken. I pray to see gang fights displaced by brotherly love. I hope to see families made whole.

PRAYER AS ACCESS FOR WOMEN IN SPORTS MINISTRY

By Njoki Zare and African Women in Sport



Celia Asila shares God's Word with women after a basketball training session.

At the end of practice, fellow female football players gathered around me. I had sensed God call me to ask, “Would anyone like prayer?” It was a simple invitation. Many of these ladies were high school dropouts struggling in poverty and young motherhood, while chasing dreams of a better life through the sport. God created a doorway to the hearts of 30 broken young women and their small families through that after-practice prayer session. Through consistent football practices, I was able to integrate my life with theirs in home visits, times of prayer, and slowly sowing seed for the Kingdom.

Women are making disciples in the world of sport, fitness, and play using the disciple-making model founded on prayer. From this foundation, opportunities of access, finding a person of peace, discovering the Bible, and equipping others to multiply can emerge. Prayer is the bedrock of this transformation.

Professional basketballer Celia Asila has seen God's hand in women's sports ministry. She shares: “A revival for praying for sports people with a

team of committed women has been happening and has resulted in stronger relationships among the women. Through this platform we have had opportunities to do ministry in schools together and also minister to athletes. As a result, we have witnessed God bringing some girls into the Kingdom. I personally have grown in the area of leadership and continue to trust God for his guidance.”

Lydia Aswani received a vision for how to reach the youth in her community after a time of prayer. The Lord placed a jump rope in her hands and since then, this has birthed an entire ministry that is now heading towards 500 children in her area. Women in leadership have been integral. Lydia shares: “There has been tremendous change, transformation, and soul-winning through women's sports ministry. We've seen God elevating women in the world of sports in spaces where they are leading, they're heard, they're included in decision-making and in pointing others to Christ. God has continued to bless and multiply the number of women involved in sports ministry which has led to many young

sports men and women athletes making a decision to follow Christ.”

Table tennis player Valerie Amele attests to the power of prayer in sports ministry as a member of intercessory teams praying daily in country rotations. She says: “God is really at work, because at the height of COVID, a community of 14 French-speaking countries was born. Also, a French translation team has finally been birthed after many years of struggling to access resources in English. We also celebrate God because families are now using Discovery Bible Study in their households. Mothers are doing Bible studies with their children and their spouses and we have testimonies that households are finding peace and being transformed. On Saturdays, mothers go out to play sports because they've understood that sport is powerful not just for physical fulfilment, but to pass on the message of love to a family, to a mother, to a brother, to a sister. We celebrate what God is continually doing among women.”

To access resources to make disciples in the world of sport, play, health and fitness, e-gaming, and more, log onto <https://www.readyssetgo.tools/en>.

SPORTS CHAPLAINCY: BRIDGING THE SPORTS MISSIONARY GAP

By Silas A. Ngong

Sports Chaplaincy is the provision of spiritual care to believers and non-believers in the sports world. By integrating faith with sports, sports chaplaincy can bridge missionary gaps on the African continent. The Church has done little or nothing to reach out to sports people, often demonizing and scorning them, forgetting that Jesus died for them too.

Sports chaplaincy integrates biblical principles into sports to help athletes, coaches, and officials find deeper meaning, purpose, and resilience. Scripture offers timeless lessons on faith, teamwork, perseverance, humility, and sportsmanship for personal growth and ethical decision-making. Many sports men and women have come to Christ and have matured in their faith through sports chaplaincy services. Through sports chaplaincy, challenges like poverty, disease, political instability, and social unrest can be addressed. Sports bring hope, camaraderie, unity, and purpose to communities. Sports chaplaincy can also foster cross-cultural understanding and unity in a continent divided by religious, ethnic, and political differences.

Qualities of a chaplain

A successful sports chaplain is a person with good character, competence, a sense of calling, a deep faith in the Bible, and a genuine commitment and passion to serve others. Understanding the world of sports, building rapport, and offering emotional support are crucial. Effective communication,



Silas (left) with Linda, a sports disciple and gold medalist at the Francophone Games in DRC in 2023. On the right is Linda's coach, also a sports chaplain.

active listening, and compassion are essential qualities as well.

Starting a sports chaplaincy programme involves a well-planned approach. Key steps are:

1. Assess the needs of the local sports community by engaging with athletes, coaches, and organizations.
2. Build partnerships with local churches, faith-based organizations, and sports governing bodies.
3. Recruit and train dedicated chaplains with the necessary skills and knowledge in biblical principles, counselling, and sports.
4. Develop a chaplaincy programme that caters to the holistic needs of athletes and coaches.
5. Establish a visible presence in the local sports community and be

available as a trusted resource.

6. Monitor and evaluate the programme's impact for continuous improvement.

Athletes in Action (AIA) is an influential sports chaplaincy organization. AIA chaplains offer spiritual guidance, emotional support, and practical resources to athletes and teams, helping them navigate the unique challenges of the sports world. AIA's initiatives in sports chaplaincy training, coaching, Bible studies, and outreach events, have touched lives across Africa. AIA can help to launch this service in any country. Visit <https://athletesinaction.org/insport>

Silas A. Ngong is a global sports chaplaincy leader and an Olympic Games chaplain with Athletes In Action.

SPORTS MINISTRY STRATEGIES

ReadySetGO (RSG) refers to the strategies used by the Sports Movement to make disciples. RSG creates a platform for raising leaders to engage unreached people and communities using sport and play. The Sports Movement also focuses on untouched areas in the sports world by raising sports ministry leaders across different sporting disciplines.

“Ready” is the process of gathering people to share the vision of disciple-

making. **“Set”** prepares everyone to become a disciple-maker. **“GO”** gives the practical strategies for making disciples among different groups as follows:

GO Sport: For elite sports people, officials, sports governing bodies, etc.

GO Play: Uses thousands of unorganized sports and games to reach young people and develop them as leaders.

Health and Fitness: For those practising health and fitness.

All Abilities Sports: For the disabled and special needs persons.

Action Sports: For extreme sports people such as skateboarders.

E-gaming: For those who play electronic games.

The RSG website has thousands of free resources for vision casting, training, and practical disciple-making. Find the resources here: <https://www.readysetgo.tools/en>

GO! NEWS OF AFRICA'S MOBILIZING CHURCH

ENGAGE WEST AFRICA PROGRAMME INAUGURATED

By Daniel Salamu, SIM WAMO Director

The newly rolled-out Engage West Africa (EWA) training programme by SIM is designed to empower participants to leverage their skills and passions to spread the gospel in critical areas. It combines decades of missions experience and education with the wisdom gained about the unique context of the African sending Church in a comprehensive curriculum to help participants to discover their life objectives, discern God's plan for their lives, and seize missional opportunities.

The inaugural event was held at the Miango Rest Home in Nigeria, and gathered 110 participants including SIM leaders from Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, and Ethiopia, as well as office staff and missionary hopefuls. The EWA programme emphasizes partnerships for missions, and encourages participants to network and foster collaborations with like-minded people and



organizations to amplify missions impact among unreached people groups.

The programme also curates opportunities for mentorship, internships, and various specialized trainings for those who participate. Seven mentorship groups currently meet fortnightly, with the goal to deepen participants' spiritual growth, enhance their missional skills, and provide personalized guidance as they prepare to engage in cross-cultural missions. Visit www.simwamo16.org to explore upcoming EWA training opportunities. Read more here: <https://afrigo.org/articles/engage-west-africa/>

MISSION CAMPAIGN NETWORK

Mission Campaign Network (MCN) is an African mission mobilizing the Church in Kenya and Rwanda for world missions. Their mobilization tools include the Kairos Course, Perspectives, Compass Study, and Empowered to Influence. Their online courses, began in 2020, have reached over 300 participants in Cameroon, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, UK, Sweden, South Africa, and Ghana.

MCN has a clear training pathway from initial mobilization to in-depth missional discipleship programmes such as the Voice of Truth (a seven-week intensive programme for college students and fresh graduates), short-term mission trips among least-reached peoples and frontier missions, and mobilization internships. MCN's year-long mission school, Angaza, enables college graduates and young church leaders

to have a deeper understanding of God's mission and discern their call to missionary service.

MCN has 15 full-time mobilizers working in three countries, and in conjunction with its sending arm, Gen 12, has sent 26 cross-cultural missionaries to 12 unreached people groups in five countries. For enquiries on courses and programmes call +254 79623371 or visit www.missioncampaignetwork.org

ONLINE CLASS FOR MISSION MOBILIZERS

From 7th May to 9th July, 2024, Mission Enablers held an online class aimed at raising mobilizers to inspire and equip believers and churches to embrace their roles in Christ's Great Commission.

The virtual academy met weekly and covered topics such as: the basic art of mission mobilization, the role of research in missions, the ministry of the Word and prayer, discipleship, fundraising, and impact reporting. Attendees joined from 16 countries across Africa, Europe,

and America, and gave positive feedback on the impact of the training. At the graduation ceremony, some participants shared action plans and ministry ideas they were going to execute immediately after the training.

Mission Enablers is an organization that seeks to see the gospel of Jesus Christ reach the unreached by supporting and advocating missionary work among them. Operating from Nigeria, it has a strong online and on-

ground presence in countries across Africa, South Asia, and North America. For more information, visit their website www.meafrika.org and follow them on social media @missionenablers.



IMPACTING LIVES THROUGH SPORTS MINISTRY

BY ISHAYA INUWA DURKWA

For the past 25 years, I have witnessed first-hand the transformative power of sports for missions. They are a strategic tool for evangelism, discipleship, and church planting leading to changed lives and transformed communities.

Sports ministry is a game-changer in missions today. A trained sports minister can build relationships and evangelize in an unsuspecting way. This approach is effective across cultures, including environments where traditional evangelism is resisted. Many young people worldwide face enormous challenges, such as poverty, conflict, gangs, addiction, abuse, broken relationships, mental illness, and questions about their identity. What can the Church do to help? Through sports ministry, churches and individuals can connect with young people and influence them towards positive transformation.

The role of coaching

A powerful connection exists between coaches and their players, and godly coaches can impact young people for eternity. These coaches walk with young people through life's challenges while teaching them to become mature disciples of Jesus Christ. Sports provide a natural environment for discussing character issues and life lessons such as self-control, respect for authority, honesty, teamwork, and commitment. These conversations often transition to biblical truths that can change lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sports and church planting

Sports aid church planting by serving as a bridge to connect with communities. By organizing sports events, a local church or a missionary with sports ministry training can draw in individuals who might otherwise not attend a traditional church service. Sports ministry initiatives take different forms such as pick-up play, tournaments, competitive games, or league play. A variety of sports are used but the focus remains the same: to make disciples of Jesus Christ among young people, their families, and their communities.

Sports events create opportunities for building relationships, fostering trust, and sharing the gospel in a non-threatening setting. Through sports, churches and missionaries can establish regular, recurring touchpoints with participants, facilitating ongoing discipleship and spiritual growth. Additionally, sports programmes can address issues like youth unemployment and crime, demonstrating the Church's commitment to holistic community development. This integrated approach not only attracts new believers but also helps to plant and grow churches that are deeply rooted in their communities.

Challenges and cautions

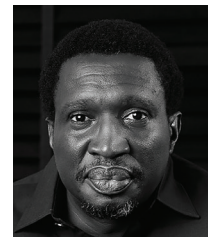
While sports ministry offers numerous benefits, there is the possibility for sports to overshadow the primary purpose of evangelism and discipleship. It is crucial to maintain a clear focus on spiritual goals and not let the competitive aspect

of sports take precedence. Additionally, there might be challenges with securing appropriate facilities, funding, and trained personnel to run effective sports ministry programmes. Another caution is cultural sensitivity; what works in one cultural context may not be suitable in another. Therefore, it is essential to adapt sports ministry approaches to fit local customs and values. Lastly, the risk of burnout among volunteers and staff can be high, so providing support and training is vital to sustaining long-term ministry efforts.

Conclusion

Sports ministry is undeniably a versatile and effective strategy for the Church to reach people and impact their lives and communities. By equipping churches, missionaries, and church planters to use sports, we are witnessing a global movement where the love of Christ is changing lives and transforming communities.

Ishaya Inuwa Durkwa is a passionate advocate for peace and social justice. He served for 13 years as the director for Sports Friends Nigeria, a ministry of the international mission organization, SIM. He is currently the West African Regional Director of Sports Friends.
<https://sports-friends.org>



SPORTS MINISTRY IN NORTH AFRICA

In North Africa, sport is proving a great way to connect to people and enable believers to share their faith with others. In the early 2000s the Church in Egypt hosted KidsGames across the country. These celebrations of sport for children proved immensely popular and were a great opportunity

to bring diverse sections of society together. Other groups have toured countries providing coaching for those from deprived areas and sharing gospel truth as they do so.

Long-term relationships are key to seeing the Kingdom of God grow in this region and sport offers that

opportunity. Professional football clubs have brought on board Christians from other parts of the continent who boldly share their faith as they play. Creative ways to share your faith abound north of the Sahara to those who respond to God's call to go.



PEOPLE GROUP:

THE MAKWE OF TANZANIA AND MOZAMBIQUE

The Makwe of southern Tanzania and northern Mozambique may be the amalgamation of several people groups who migrated out to the coasts of Mozambique and Tanzania during the late 1800s looking for work, but who stayed and formed their own group. They are mainly Muslim, though like many groups, they mix Islam with traditional African beliefs. The local witch doctor assists in curing illnesses and determining guilt whenever there is a death. There is widespread use of charms and amulets, often consisting of Arabic writing on tiny pieces of paper which are rolled up and worn on the body.

The Makwe tend to be strict about participating in Ramadan, but before it begins, they may announce to the *magini* (spirits) that they can go and take a rest. Another

unique practice is the *Dança de diablo* (dance of the devil) which is used to learn what the spirits want. With very low levels of literacy, many follow the imam's teachings blindly.

In 2017, a group began operating near the Makwe calling themselves Ansar al-Sunna (or al-Shabab), proclaiming affiliation with the so-called Islamic State. They burned homes, fields, and buildings with the purported goal of creating a caliphate down the coast. Hundreds of thousands of people, including many Makwe, have been displaced. It seems that few Makwe have joined the movement, but find it difficult to continue their farming and fishing activities. There is a great deal of fear about the future and foreign missionaries are unable to operate, especially after recent increasing attacks.

AT A GLANCE

- About 50,000 Makwe live in Mozambique and 25,000 in Tanzania, and they have 50 per cent linguistic similarities with the Swahili, Mwani, and Yao languages.
- It is very difficult for a Makwe to become a Christian, as it is widely believed that it is not possible to be both a Christian and a Makwe.
- A Makwe man can divorce his wife with just a letter, then take her back again after 30 days, and do this up to three times.

PLEASE PRAY

- That the Makwe will encounter the saving grace of Jesus Christ in a miraculous way, and their leaders will have dreams of Jesus.
- For more workers to go to the Makwe people during these difficult times, and for those who are refugees to meet kind Christians who can introduce them to the Father.
- For those reaching out to the Makwes; that they will not be disheartened by the lack of results, but keep sowing and trust God to change the hearts and minds of the Makwe people.

Sources: DW news, Joshua Project, peoplegroups.com, and André Thiart, missionary to the Makwe.



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