

The Need for Safety and Security in Sports Events in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is a nation that loves sport. Sport events can bring millions of Nigerians together to celebrate their passion, talent and identity. Sport events can also contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of the country. However, sport events can also expose the country to various threats and challenges that can undermine the safety and security of the sport venues, participants and spectators. Nigeria has experienced several cases of violence, crime, terrorism, stampede and disaster that have affected sport events and venues in the past. These cases have resulted in death, injury, damage, fear and insecurity among the public. Therefore, it is vital that the government takes sport safety and security serious in Nigeria. This paper presents a review of extant literature on issues of sport safety and security in Nigeria and the reasons why sport safety and security are important issues for the government to address, the challenges and gaps that exist in the current situation, and the measures and recommendations that can be taken to improve the sport safety and security in Nigeria.

Keywords: Sport Event, safety and security, Stadium Management, Sport Facility

Introduction

Safety and security are the most important considerations for the operation of a stadium. Warranting the safety and well-being of all spectators, players, officials and staff should always have overriding priority. In some contexts, the terms “safety” and “security” are used interchangeably; however, they each have a distinct meaning. In the context of stadium operations, and in particular safety and security operations, it is important to understand the differences between the two.

Safety means being protected from all aspects that can cause harm, be they accidental or intentional. It relates to the protection of people from being injured or facing a risk to their health and well-being during sports events. Safety concerns the physical infrastructure of the stadium, the operation of the stadium, the mitigation of any potential hazards, and the behaviour of the crowd inside and outside

the stadium.

Security means the protection of the stadium building, stadium staff, players, match officials and spectators from external threats and misbehaviour. Security therefore focuses on identifying these risk factors and putting measures in place to deter, prevent and sanction any such incidents. Terrorism is an extreme example of an external and intentional threat to the stadium building and people. The third element in an integrated safety and security approach is service, which comprises all measures designed to make football and other sport events enjoyable and welcoming for all. Safety and security are in principle a frontline (customer-facing) service, and often stewards and security personnel are the first or only members of staff with whom spectators will interact. It follows that service should be the visible element of the integrated safety, security and service approach.(FIFA 2022)

Security is described by several authors in different ways; Ekenado (2010) for instance, defined security as state of being free from danger, leading to loss of life or damage to property. Wolfers (1962), perceived security from a National security point of view and that it is the absence of threats to acquired values, and in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked. Similarly, Waldron (2006) also believes security comprises protection against harm to one's basic mode of life and economic values, as well as reasonable protection against fear and terror, and the presence of a positive assurance that these values will continue to be maintained into the future. Hence, the common belief of these authors is that security is the act or process of ensuring a state of being free from danger or threat to lives and properties. Everyone involved in football from fans to officials and players should be able to enjoy the game in a safe and secure environment. (CAF, 2019)

Sports facility safety and security is the act or process of ensuring that a sports facility is free from threat or danger capable of leading to loss of lives and/or properties of sports producers and consumers including sports facility itself emanating from using or being in or around a sports facility. It is the responsibility of the stadium manager in collaboration with other security providers to ensure proper management of the factors that determine sports ground safety. Football being one of the most crowd-pulling International sports, has become a target for hooligans and rioters because of the wide audience it enjoys through media coverage, hence, the indispensable nature of safety and security in and around a football stadium cannot be overemphasized. Safety and security are the most important aspects in the planning, design, construction, running and management of any stadium (UEFA 2011). The level of attendance or spectatorship to on-field football matches at the stadium is greatly dependent on safety and security provisions made by sports organizers; people are likely to want to know the security arrangements and assurance of

the sports venue safety before they can attend sporting events. Every stadium is to establish a stadium safety and security management team, comprising the Stadium Security Officer and the Police Commander who controls the police resources in and around the stadium. Additional members should also include the fire and medical services, the stadium. The security operatives are quick to fire tear gas to disperse fans in an attempt to “control” crowd behaviour. This usually makes the spectators scamper for safety and injure themselves in the process, and in some extreme cases lose their lives during the stampede authority and any other key stakeholder.

Three Major Stadium Disasters in Nigeria

1. In March 2016, a major disaster was avoided as an estimated 40,000 supporters packed into the Ahmadu Bello Stadium in Kaduna to watch Nigeria’s 1-1 draw with Egypt in a crucial 2017 Africa Cup of Nations qualifier. The stadium had a listed capacity of only 16,000 and some fans scaled fences and climbed up floodlights to get in. Supporters flooded into the Ahmadu Bello Stadium in Kaduna to watch Nigeria’s 1-1 draw with Egypt. Supporters even sat on the roof of a house to watch the African Cup of Nations qualification match between Egypt and Nigeria.
2. In April 2002, at least 11 people were killed and more than 50 injured in a stampede at the National Stadium in Lagos after Nigeria’s 1-0 win over Zimbabwe in a World Cup qualifier. The stampede occurred when fans tried to leave the stadium through a narrow exit gate that was locked. Some of the victims were crushed against metal barriers.
3. In October 1989, at least eight people died and more than 100 were injured in a stampede at the National Stadium in Lagos during a World Cup qualifier between Nigeria and Angola. The stampede was triggered by a power outage that plunged the stadium into darkness. Some fans panicked and rushed to the exits, while others tried to force their way into the stadium. These disasters were as a result of poor safety and security measures put in place by the organizers.

Challenges Facing Sport Safety and Security in Nigeria

The following are some of the challenges facing sport safety and security in Nigeria:

1. The Lack of Adequate Resources, Infrastructure and Personnel

The lack of adequate resources, infrastructure and personnel to ensure effective protection and prevention of sport-related risks and threats. For example, Nigeria’s security agencies have been largely poor, reactive and uncoordinated in their response to the security challenges affecting the country. There is also a need for more investment in sport facilities, maintenance, equipment and training to enhance the safety and quality of sport events. On 19 April, 2023, it was recorded that the National Stadium in Surulere, Lagos collapsed. Although no casualty was recorded, the stadium of 51 years has not been maintained for over 19 years.

2. The Low Level of Awareness, Education and Compliance with Safety and Security Regulations

The low level of awareness, education and compliance with safety and security regulations and standards among sport stakeholders, such as organizers, officials, athletes and fans. For example, the Confederation of African Football has adopted safety and security regulations that aim to ensure fair play, sportsmanship and solidarity among football teams and fans. However, there is still a gap between the policy and the practice, as some sport events have witnessed cases of violence, hooliganism and corruption.

3. The Poor Spectator behaviour

The poor spectator behavior such as alcohol abuse, fights, vandalism, and property damage, which threatens the safety and security of everyone in the stadium, as well as damage the reputation and image of the sport organizations. A study by Ekenedo (2019) found that security measures were not followed as recommended by FIFA and the green guide during Nigeria Professional Football League Matches, and that there were incidents of violence, assaults, and pandemonium during some matches as earlier stated.

4. The Lack of Technology and Infrastructure That Can Enhance Security and Safety

The lack of technology and infrastructure that can enhance security and safety, such as CCTV systems, electronic ticketing, explosives detection K9 units, mobile communications, social media messaging, and patron screening. These technologies can help prevent and mitigate security incidents, as well as improve customer satisfaction and fan engagement. However, most stadiums in Nigeria do not have access to these technologies, due to factors such as cost, compatibility, reliability, and privacy.

a. The Staffing Shortages of Qualified and Motivated Security Personnel

The staffing shortages of qualified and motivated security personnel, which can affect the quality and effectiveness of security operations. Some of the causes of these shortages are employee absenteeism, and a lack of applicants. Staffing shortages can also affect the morale and motivation of the security personnel. There is need for adequate and qualified security personnel in the country with adequate training on sport safety and security.

The Need for Safety and Security in Sports Events in Nigeria

Considering the various stadium disasters that has occurred in past years as listed above, taking sport security and safety seriously in Nigeria will be of great benefit to the country, as it also reduces death rate of fans and spectators. These following reasons are of great importance:

1. **Terrorism Threats:** Nigeria has faced significant terrorist threats in recent years, such as the activities of Boko Haram and the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). Sporting events

can be attractive targets for terrorist organizations looking to cause mass casualties and generate global attention. Taking sport security seriously is crucial to preventing any potential terrorist attacks.

2. International Reputation: Hosting major sporting events, such as the Olympics or FIFA World Cup, can significantly boost Nigeria's international reputation and attract foreign investment. However, if Nigeria fails to ensure adequate sport security, it can lead to negative publicity and damage its reputation. Nigeria should take sport security seriously to create a safe and secure environment for athletes, officials, and spectators, thereby enhancing its international image.

3. Social Cohesion: Sport plays a vital role in bringing people together and fostering a sense of community and national unity. By ensuring sport security, Nigeria can provide a safe platform for citizens to come together, support their national teams, and celebrate their shared passion for sports. This can contribute to social cohesion and national unity, which are essential for a stable and harmonious society.

4. Economic Benefits: Sporting events generate significant economic benefits, boosting tourism, local businesses, and job creation. However, if security issues arise during these events, it can discourage visitors and tourists, leading to a loss of economic opportunities. Nigeria should focus on sport security to maximize the potential economic benefits associated with hosting various sporting tournaments and events.

5. Athlete Safety: Ensuring the safety of athletes competing in different sports is paramount. Any negligence in sport security could put athletes' lives at risk, leading to serious injuries or fatalities. Nigeria should prioritize athlete safety by implementing robust security measures to protect their well-being and provide them with a safe environment to showcase their skills.

6. Fan Experience and Satisfaction: Spectators attending sporting events expect a safe and enjoyable experience. By taking sport security seriously, Nigeria can create a welcoming atmosphere for fans, assuring them that their safety is a top priority. This will encourage a higher turnout for events, enhance spectator experiences, and increase support for local teams and athletes.

7. Deterrence Against Criminal Activities: Sporting events can attract criminals looking to exploit crowded venues or engage in illegal activities like ticket scalping, counterfeiting, or hooliganism. Adequate sport security measures, including strong surveillance systems, well-trained personnel, and effective crowd management protocols, act as a deterrent against criminal activities, contributing to a safer sporting environment.

8. Enhanced Emergency Preparedness: When large-scale sporting events take place, there is always a risk of emergencies like medical incidents, natural disasters, or crowd stampedes. Taking sport security seriously involves improving emergency preparedness, such as having medical facilities, evacuation plans, and communication systems in place, to efficiently respond to any unforeseen situations and minimize harm.

9. Preventing Reputational Damage to Sports Industry: Sports hold an important place in society, representing values such as fair play, teamwork, and dedication. If sport security is compromised, it can cast a shadow on the entire sports industry, eroding trust and negatively impacting the reputation of the sector. Nigeria should prioritize sport security to safeguard the

integrity and positive image of sports.

10. National Pride and Unity: Successful hosting of major sporting events can instill a sense of national pride and unity among citizens. It can unite diverse populations and create a shared sense of identity. Taking sport security seriously is crucial to ensuring that such events are not marred by incidents that can disrupt the positive spirit and unity generated by sports.

11. Protecting the Lives and Property of the Citizens Who Participate in or Attend Sporting Events: Sport venues can be vulnerable to attacks from terrorists, criminals, or violent groups who seek to cause harm or disruption. The government has a responsibility to ensure that adequate security measures are in place to prevent and respond to such threats.

12. Promoting the development and growth of the sport sector in Nigeria. Sport is a vital source of income, employment, and social cohesion for many Nigerians. The government should support the sport industry by providing a safe and conducive environment for its activities. This would also enhance the country's image and reputation as a sport destination.

13. Fostering national unity and peace among the diverse ethnic, religious, and regional groups in Nigeria.

Sport can be a powerful tool for building bridges and resolving conflicts among different communities. The government should encourage and facilitate sport initiatives that promote dialogue, tolerance, and cooperation among Nigerians. However, if there are insecurity in sport event, it will be difficult to achieve this.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sport is a very unique engagement as it attracts people from all walks of life to the stadium. The protection of life and property as well as the various user groups are fundamental in ensuring the smooth organization of sports in Nigeria. Safety and security are essential for the well-being and prosperity of any nation. Nigeria, as a country with immense potential and challenges, needs to take its security seriously to overcome the threats that endanger its people, economy, and stability. The government, the security agencies, the civil society, and the citizens all have a role to play in ensuring that Nigeria is a safe and secure place for everyone. By investing in security, Nigeria can also harness the opportunities that sport and other sectors offer for its development and growth. Therefore, safety and security should be a priority and a responsibility for all Nigerians.

Based on the review and the conclusion made to this study, the following recommendations are made;

1. There is need to have a special unit of security personnel dedicated to sport security and safety operations. There should be such in every state that must be trained in crowd control and management of sport fans. Such people will better appreciate the differences inherent in the passion of supporting one team against another.
2. Adopting and implementing the FIFA Stadium Safety & Security Regulations, which provide a comprehensive framework for ensuring the safety and security of all stakeholders involved in football matches and events. These regulations cover topics such as risk assessment, emergency planning, crowd management, access control, surveillance, communication, incident response, and training.

3. Collaborating with other relevant authorities and agencies, such as law enforcement, fire service, health service, local government, and sports associations, to coordinate and integrate their roles and responsibilities in stadium security and safety. This can help to avoid duplication, confusion, and gaps in the delivery of security and safety services.
4. Investing in technology and infrastructure that can enhance stadium security and safety, such as CCTV systems, electronic ticketing, explosives detection K9 units, mobile communications, social media messaging, and patron screening. These technologies can help to prevent and mitigate security incidents, as well as improve customer satisfaction and fan engagement.
5. Promoting a culture of service among stadium staff, especially those who have a frontline role in security and safety operations. This means ensuring that they are trained, equipped, and motivated to provide a welcoming and enjoyable experience for all spectators, while also being vigilant and prepared to deal with any potential threats or hazards.
6. Educating and engaging with the public and the fans on stadium security and safety issues, such as the rules and regulations of the stadium, the expected standards of behaviour, the emergency procedures, and the reporting mechanisms. This can help to raise awareness, foster trust, and encourage cooperation among all parties involved in stadium even

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