

# Leisure Facility Sponsorship: An Invaluable Source of Funds for Leisure-Time Physical Activity Programme Enhancement in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The love and affection of Nigerians toward leisure activities is very wholesome. It is part of the cultural heritage that has been passed from generation to generation and it will continue. The upsurge in the numbers of people longing to participate in leisure activities, coupled with the government privatization policy that has removed all subsidies to parastatals and agencies has put more pressure on leisure managers to look for alternative ways for funding leisure programmes. At the heart of these alternatives is sponsorship. It appears leisure managers in Nigeria have made little progress in the area of celebrity endorsement and event sponsorship but there is no record of a single naming right deal. This may be that they do not understand the way facility sponsorship works. The purpose of this study is to present facility sponsorship as an instrument that can raise fund for leisure programme development in Nigeria

**1.0 INTRODUCTION:** Leisure has been viewed differently by many authors. It has been defined at various occasions as time, activities, a state of mind and as the opposite of work. On June 1, 1970 sixteen (16) agencies operating internationally in the field of play, recreation and tourism met in Geneva to develop a Charter for Leisure. The Charter described leisure as that period of time at the complete disposal of an individual, after he has completed his work and fulfilled his other obligations. Omoruan (1996) study viewed leisure as the time available to an individual when the disciplines of work, sleep and other basic requirements have been met.

From the above perspectives one can conclude that leisure is a spare – time. But it will be unwise to believe that leisure is simply ‘free time’. These ‘free time’ according to Triggs (1996) are occupied with activities which are wide – ranging. Thus, to fully understand the meaning of leisure, it appears one should take into account both the time and activity dimension. This brings us to the issue of recreation and tourism. According to Murphy (1985) recreation and tourism are part of the same continuum. While recreation are leisure activities carried out within one vicinity, tourism are leisure activities involved in, in the course of travel (Triggs, 1996; Omoruan, 1996; Edington, 1980)

Observations have shown that Nigerians are involved in both active and passive leisure activities. They involve in leisure activities that required physical or mental exertion such as soccer, basketball, swimming, squash, tennis, traditional wrestling, hunting, fishing etc. Also common among them are high-impact activities that involves almost no physical exertion but do require a substantial mental effort such as playing draught, chess ‘Ayo’ (wary) sculpture, painting, art, craft etc. However many people are involved in passive activities. These activities do not exerts any significant physical or mental energy. They include activities such as going to the cinema, watching television or gambling. Though some experts discouraged these type of leisure activities on the grounds that they do not provide benefits offered by active leisure (Ojeme, Iyawe, Oshodin, 2000).

Nigeria is highly endowed in man-made and natural resources. Despite these resources, the growth of leisure industry has been very slow, because of lack of funds. In the past, the establishment and management of leisure facilities in Nigeria is viewed as public function and it has been the sole responsibility of the government to provide the much needed funds for the construction and management (Adiat, 1999). This was supported by Ikeji (2003) who observed that 95% of leisure facilities in Nigeria are owned and managed by the government. However, Adiat, (1999) reported that the slide in the fortune of the national economy, moreso, the provision of infrastructural amenities and the care for the general well-being of the citizenry, coupled with the challenges of restructuring the economy is making government funding of leisure properties increasingly unrealistic. According to him, this is because the policy of the government in the management of the nations’ economy is placing more emphasis on the privatization of public companies, parastatals, and the removed of all government subsidies.

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The world is in the 'era' of limit according to Kraus and Curtis (1990). This is why the urgent need for alternative ways of funding leisure facilities and programmes in Nigeria is not only becoming obvious but pressing. Therefore, leisure managers need to possess accurate and comprehensive understanding of the total fundraising processes and all that it entails. It is only by having such an understanding the leisure organization can meet the financial challenges that they would face now and in the future. Fasan (2004) noted that maximizing revenue from sponsorship has been identified as a suitable means of keeping pace with the escalating cost of managing leisure programmes in Nigeria.

There have been calls for research into the field of sport marketing within the sport management paradigm in Nigeria. It appears that most of the studies that have so far been carried out are majorly in the area of leisure marketing concept, market segmentation and some traditional sport marketing mix. There is need to blaze the trail in the study of sponsorship management in Nigeria because of its obvious advantage. That makes this study very timely.

## 2.0 Facility Sponsorship

In the past, corporations provided financial assistance for leisure events in form of athletic programmes for philanthropic purpose, but today's corporate interests are strictly promotionally-motivated and this is best achieved through sponsorship (Hoeck, Hoeck Knop and Taks 2004). Cheng (1997) commented that sponsorship is not a philanthropic gesture as many people in Nigeria might think, but a business relationship through which support is offered in return for right and for association. It is a commercial partnership between a corporate body and leisure property wherein each agrees to assist one another in satisfying their needs and achieving their objectives by exchanging the sponsor's cash or in-kind investment and the property's exploitable commercial potentials.

It appears the inability of a corporate organization to communicate with a wide range of hitherto unreachable public has seen to the proliferation of corporate sponsorship of leisure properties. Studies have agreed that there are three major platforms for sponsorship-leisure celebrity, facility, otherwise known as naming rights and finally leisure event. Each of these platforms is selected in reference to corporate objectives of sponsors.

In the opinion of Irwin, Sutton and McCarthy, (2002) leisure celebrity-endorser can provide testimonial for products or services particularly when the product has contributed to the endorsers success in his/her career. This is true in the case of Mikel Obi of Chelsea Football Club of England. It has been reported that the telecommunication giant, Globacom based in Nigeria paid this young lad 20 million Naira (equivalent of 2 million dollars) to endorse its products and services. On the international scene, it is estimated that Michael Jordan earned over 40 million dollars a year and Shaquille O'Neal 12 million dollars through sponsorship opportunities. (Irwin et al, 2001). In the area of event sponsorship, companies like Cadbury Nigeria PLC, Lever Brothers, Shell Petroleum, Coca-cola, Pepsi –Cola just to mention few, are sponsoring leisure events to enhance sales and alter or reinforce public opinion about their company's products and services (Olufemi 2006).

Leisure facility sponsorship or naming rights is the notion of embedding a corporation name into the facility's name in exchange for valuable items. The corporate world is aware that sport has the capacity to reach wide audience, thus believing that any company or product that affiliate with it will get to the heart of the people because of its capacity to generate emotions which sponsors normally key into to sell their product(s). Research has proved that leisure facility that host events that attract public attention and with good media coverage will help leverage company image and enhance product sales. Irwin et al (2002) observed that today most of the recreation structures built in United States and Canada that house or attract major events bear a corporate Moniker.

McCarthy and Irwin, (1998) testified that naming rights is not a new concept in the world. They reported that the first facility sponsorship agreement where the name of facility was changed to that of corporate sponsor occurred in nineteen eighty seven as a result of the great Western Bank purchasing the naming rights of the Los Angeles Forum, it became the western forum. Since this occurrence, naming rights deals has continued to blossom globally and this has been very common in the airline, telecommunication, computer, automobile, consumer products, financial services and beverage industries. Very recently, report indicated that the Titan Stadium in Nashville USA-known as the Coliseum since 2002 will soon become the LP Stadium a contract deal of \$3 million per year. Rich Frost, the CEO of LP said the company is happy to align with a great organization – the Tennessee Titan –as well as the NFL. He further remarked that LP brand will gain exposure and growth through the alliance. It has also been reported that the NFL sponsor pay around \$5 a year on naming right. For instance, the University of Phoenix pays \$150 million over 20 years for the Arizona Cardinals' Stadium

Having said this, it is observed that facility sponsorship or naming right is non-existence in Nigeria. Naming facility in Nigeria, is purely a political issue rather than a business issue. All leisure facilities Nigeria are named after geographical location (Erin-Oke Water Falls, Erin-Oke; Ikogosi Warm Spring, Ikogosi; Yankari Game Reserves Yankari; Aba Township Stadium, Aba; Akure Township Stadium Akure; Jos Township

Stadium ,Jos etc ) ,While others are named after significant individuals (General Abacha Stadium , Kano and Chief M.K.O Abiola). Leisure facility sponsorship is a unique marketing strategy. It is unique in the sense that venues are few and therefore cannot be imitated or duplicated by competitors. In addition, it is cost effective than other forms of sponsorship because of its supplemental business opportunities (McCarthy and Irwin,1998). They further revealed that it can build community goodwill account for sponsor.

**2.1 Baseline Requirements for Securing Leisure Facility sponsorship:** To ensure successful leisure facility sponsorship deal, leisure manager must ensure that facility meets certain baseline criteria. Adapting Miciah and Shanaklin, (1994) concept of successful selection of endorser is very appropriate. These baseline requirements is represented by an acronym known as FRED: Familiarity, Relevance, Esteem and Differentiation

**2.1.1 Familiarity:** This is the first essential component of effective naming rights. It implies that leisure facility must be popular, accessible and likeable by the intended audience (Pennman 1997). Also, recognition of such facility as a centre of excellence and as rally point for target markets is very vital. For instance, to many generations of British Soccer fans, the Wembley Stadium in London represents all that is good about English Soccer. Thus, any corporation that wants to enhance its image in Britain must key into such emotional tie for product enhancement and sales (Irwin et al, 2002)

**2.1.1 Relevant:** Leisure has become part of culture in many societies of the world. Therefore, facility to be well positioned for naming right deal it must hosts traditional event in such community or within the target audience. For instance, Nike will find it easy to achieve its corporate objectives by buying naming rights of a Stadium that host Premiership in London or Laliga in Spain. On the other hand, baseball facility will be difficult to sell in Nigeria because it is not a traditional sport in the country.

**2.1.2 Esteem:** This can be referred to as what Irwin, Sutton and McCarthy (2002) described as *atmospheric* which is the intentional control and structuring of marketing – based environmental cues. In other words, it means designing of buying and consuming environments in a manner calculated to produce specific cognitive or emotional effects on the target market. A positive atmospheric condition will provide a controllable consumption incentive that can overcome a weak core product thereby motivating clients.

In addition to the above, there must be equilibrium between the leisure facility image and the corporation. It is when facility's perceived image is congruent to corporation's image that naming rights deal can achieve expected result(s). A venue shape (internal and external) can stimulate clients interest. That may explain why facilities such as the Pyramid in Memphis in United States, the Sidney Opera House, the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, and the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans are amazing structures that have become the architectural icons of the communities they serve (Wallace, 2001). The unique shape of the Wembley Stadium in Britain attracted many tourists to and make it a publicity generating mega-sporting events (Irwin et al, 2000). To attract sponsorship deal, leisure managers must adhere to several basic physical design principles which will significantly enhance the exterior and the interior atmospheric conditions of facilities. These principles include furnishing positive cues, reducing or eliminating negative cues. It is important that upon entering a leisure facility, consumer whether novice or veteran, must experience a level of comfort and sense of belonging. First impressions are lasting impression, hence, it is critical for leisure management to use mechanisms that communicate as well as reinforce the anticipated signals.

**2.1.3 Differentiation:** This is the last and the final component of FRED. The facility to be sponsored must host mega events that are nationally televised. For example, Wembley Stadium host the finals of Brinish F.A Cup which is televised internationally. This differentiates it from other venues. If there is no perceived disparity in the event commonly hosted by the venue and the others, the strategy is not worthwhile. That is the reason many leisure managers are attempting to lure families by providing atmospheric elements attractive to children, as well seating and Picnic. The USA Track and field, for instance, implemented the Adidas Youth cheering section in order to attract more Youths to the U.S.A Open Track and Field Championship (Irwin et al, 2002). The introduction of these elements is to create niche for the facility, thereby increasing clients.

**2.2 Problems of Sports Sponsorship Management in Nigeria:** The problems militating against effective sport sponsorship in Nigeria are listed below

- There is lack of National Sport Policy to guide the practice of leisure management in Nigeria.
- There is no Professional preparation in leisure management in Nigeria.
- There is no Professional body regulating the practice of recreation and tourism management in Nigeria.
- There is lack of accountability for Sponsorship money.
- Harsh political climate also contribute to the poor state of sponsorship management in the country.

### 3.0 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. The Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria must enact a National Policy on leisure management. A policy is a road map to show where sport development should go. In the view of Obiyemi

(2004), Policies are guides to action. Thus, an organization that fails to initiate plans and policies on which to follow for productive purpose will not achieve the objective set out to achieve. This is so, because organizational policy is the instrument that will specify the standard to accomplish and the roles of all concerned agencies. In other words, it is the policy that will explain strategies for leisure sponsorship development and management specify goals, and the roles of academic institutions, corporate bodies, leisure management agencies, Professional Association and Sporting bodies. It is the synergy among these establishments that will ensure that leisure sponsorship blossom in Nigeria.

2. There must Professional Preparation in leisure management in Nigeria. The undergraduate P.E Curriculum must change from the teaching – oriented approach. It is obvious that the undergraduate Physical Education curriculum as been practice today in Nigeria cannot produce graduates that can function effectively in Leisure Business. Though there are volumes of academic papers calling for innovation in the undergraduate courses in Physical Education, for the field to remain relevant in today's leisure industry. The fair here is that despite these agitations and calls, there are no observable practical moves to realize this aim.

In fact, it is a general belief that the problem of P.E Professionals in Nigeria is not lack of ideas, which is also confirmed by the volumes of contributions they have made to the body of knowledge in the field internationally, but the translation of these ideas to the physical. Research has shown that for physical education graduates to be able to make informed decisions and function maximally in all areas of leisure management they must be schooled in the following core areas of leisure marketing.

- Concept of Leisure and Marketing.
- Factors that influence Pattern of Leisure
- Strategic Marketing Management
- Market Segmentation.
- Brand Management
- Data-based Marketing and Roles of Research in Leisure Marketing.
- Sales Enhancement Strategies
- Supply and Manufacturing of Media Contact
- Role of Technology in Leisure.
- Risk Management Techniques.

3. The leisure marketing practitioners who are not Physical education graduates should be encouraged to join hands in forming a professional Leisure Marketing Association. This will enhance ethical practice In fact, every community in the world today has various professional association for the promotion and welfare of their members. So, the establishment of a body of knowledge in leisure marketing in Nigeria will ensure capacity building of its members.

4. Leisure marketing practitioners must be more transparent and accountable to their clients.

5. The quality of leisure products in Nigeria must be improved. Research literatures have shown that the presence of leisure celebrity in leisure event without a good product extension via a vibrant information technology system may be counter-productive. In the same manner, a well designed leisure facility with good layout, without good atmospheric in terms of security, good lighting, accessibility etc will impact marketing process negatively. (Irwin et al, 2003). Thus, to present high quality leisure product, there must be competent personnel, standard facility, good information system and effective administrative structure.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

It is clear that leisure facility sponsorship as a source of raising funds has come to stay in Nigeria. It has proved to have the capacity of given individual manager a direct economic advantage, in addition to the promised intangible benefits. The rising cost associated with building, maintaining and operating venues are a significant part of the challenges confronting today's leisure manager (Wallace, 2001). Facility sponsorship has presented an opportunity to alleviate these challenges and enhance the image and reputation of leisure industry in Nigeria.

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