

## Community-Based Sports Programmes And Socioeconomic Inclusion Of Disadvantaged Groups In Bayelsa State

<sup>1</sup>Leghemo Tinimotei Stephen, PhD and <sup>2</sup>Goodness Ene-Bongilli, PhD

<sup>1</sup>Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education

Faculty of Education,  
Niger Delta University,  
Bayelsa State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Cavendish University Uganda

**Corresponding Author: Leghemo Tinimotei Stephen, PhD**

---

### ABSTRACT

This study examined community-based sports programmes and socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The research focused on two main objectives: to identify the types of community-based sports programmes available to disadvantaged groups and to determine their contribution to socioeconomic inclusion. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, with a target population comprising disadvantaged groups, including youths, women, and persons with disabilities who are engaged in or have access to community sports initiatives across the state. Using snowballing sampling techniques, a total of 200 respondents were selected to participate in the study. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled *Community Sports and Socioeconomic Inclusion Questionnaire (CSSIQ)*, developed and validated by experts, with a reliability coefficient of 0.86 established using Cronbach Alpha. Data analysis involved mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation to address the research questions. The findings revealed that community-based sports programmes such as football tournaments, volleyball competitions, athletics, and fitness activities are widely accessible and provide avenues for skill acquisition, networking, empowerment, and social participation. The results also showed that such programmes significantly contribute to socioeconomic inclusion by enhancing employability, promoting social cohesion, and improving the self-reliance of disadvantaged groups. The study concludes that community-based sports programmes are a viable strategy for fostering inclusion and empowerment in Bayelsa State. It is recommended that policymakers, community leaders, and development agencies invest in expanding sports infrastructure, provide capacity-building opportunities, and integrate sports into broader socioeconomic development initiatives.

---

**Keywords:** Community-Based Sports, Socioeconomic Inclusion, Disadvantaged Groups

---

### INTRODUCTION

Socioeconomic inclusion remains a pressing concern globally, particularly in regions where poverty, unemployment, and social marginalization continue to limit opportunities for disadvantaged groups. According to the United Nations [1], over 1.3 billion people worldwide still experience multiple forms of deprivation, ranging from lack of income and education to limited access to healthcare and social support systems. In Nigeria, these challenges are even more pronounced, with the National Bureau of Statistics [2] reporting that over 40% of the population lives below the poverty line. Disadvantaged groups, such as the unemployed youth, women in rural communities, and persons with disabilities, often face structural barriers that hinder their full participation in social and economic life (3). The absence of sustainable inclusion strategies perpetuates cycles of inequality, exclusion, and vulnerability. Sports have increasingly been recognized as a powerful tool for driving

socioeconomic inclusion and community development. The International Olympic Committee [4] emphasizes that sports create platforms for empowerment, offering individuals not only physical benefits but also opportunities for skill acquisition, teamwork, leadership, and social integration. Community-based sports programmes, in particular, provide disadvantaged populations with access to organized activities that foster self-confidence, social cohesion, and pathways to employment (5; 6). In regions where formal economic opportunities are scarce, sports can serve as an alternative means of personal development and community upliftment.

In Bayelsa State, a region characterized by high youth unemployment, educational disparities, and limited access to structured recreational opportunities, community-based sports programmes have the potential to address critical issues of exclusion. These programmes can serve as safe spaces for disadvantaged groups to engage in productive

activities, build networks, and develop socioeconomic competencies (7). For many young people in the state, sports represent not only a form of leisure but also a pathway to recognition, skill development, and, in some cases, professional careers. Moreover, community sports initiatives foster social integration by bringing together individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby reducing stigmatization and promoting unity (8).

However, despite these prospects, the effectiveness of community-based sports programmes in fostering socioeconomic inclusion is often limited by challenges such as inadequate funding, poor facilities, lack of professional coaching, and low awareness among target groups (9). Without deliberate interventions, these barriers may continue to undermine the transformative potential of sports in empowering disadvantaged populations. Understanding the realities of these programmes in Bayelsa State is therefore critical for educators, policymakers, and development stakeholders who seek to harness sports as a driver of inclusion and sustainable development.

Despite the recognized potential of sports in advancing social and economic inclusion, there is limited empirical evidence on how community-based sports programmes are structured, accessed, and sustained in Bayelsa State. Much of the existing research in Nigeria has focused on sports participation at elite or professional levels, with little attention given to how grassroots and community-oriented programmes benefit disadvantaged groups (10; 11). Consequently, the specific types of programmes available, their role in promoting socioeconomic inclusion, and the barriers that hinder effective participation remain poorly understood in the Bayelsa context. Addressing this gap is essential for developing targeted strategies that maximize the benefits of sports for marginalized populations. This study therefore seeks to examine community-based sports programmes and their contribution to the socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State, thereby providing evidence that can inform policy, programme design, and sustainable community development initiatives.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Ideally, community-based sports programmes are expected to serve as inclusive platforms that foster social integration, skill development, and economic empowerment for disadvantaged groups. Globally, sports have been employed as effective tools for addressing issues of inequality, enhancing employability, and promoting healthier lifestyles [12]. In well-organized settings, such programmes provide participants with opportunities to acquire life skills, build networks, and gain access to economic and educational resources that improve their quality of

life. If adequately implemented in Bayelsa State, community-based sports initiatives could play a significant role in addressing unemployment, poverty, and social marginalization among vulnerable populations.

However, in reality, the situation in Bayelsa State reflects significant shortcomings. Many disadvantaged groups lack consistent access to structured sports programmes due to inadequate funding, insufficient facilities, limited trained personnel, and poor awareness of available opportunities (9). While sports are often celebrated for their potential to promote inclusion, there is little documented evidence of how community-based initiatives in the state are meeting this expectation. Most existing studies in Nigeria have emphasized professional or competitive sports, leaving a gap in understanding the specific contributions and challenges of grassroots programmes in fostering socioeconomic inclusion among disadvantaged populations. This gap highlights the need for empirical research that investigates the availability, benefits, and barriers of community-based sports programmes in Bayelsa State to inform sustainable policies and interventions.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The study examined community-based sports programmes and socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study achieved the following:

1. To identify the types of community-based sports programmes available to disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State.
2. To determine the ways community-based sports programmes contribute to the socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What types of community-based sports programmes are available to disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State?
2. In what ways do community-based sports programmes contribute to the socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State?

### **Research Methods**

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate community-based sports programmes and socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State. The population of the study comprised disadvantaged groups within selected communities across the state who are eligible to participate in community-based sports programmes. A snowball sampling technique was employed to select 200 respondents, beginning

with a few identified participants actively engaged in community sports initiatives in Bayelsa State, who then referred other potential respondents such as youths, women, and persons with disabilities within their networks until the required sample size was reached. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Community-Based Sports and Socioeconomic Inclusion Questionnaire (CBSSI-Q),” developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section A measured demographic variables of the respondents, such as age, gender, occupation, and community location. Section B contained 12 items focusing on the types of community-based sports programmes available, measured on a 4-point rating scale of Very Available = 4, Available = 3, Less Available = 2, and Not Available = 1. Section C consisted of 10 items assessing the contributions of community-based sports programmes to socioeconomic inclusion, structured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1.

The content and face validity of the instrument were ensured by experts in Health Education and

Measurement and Evaluation, whose feedback and corrections shaped the final version used for data collection. The questionnaire was trial-tested with fifteen (15) disadvantaged persons who were not part of the main study but shared similar characteristics with the target population. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained using the Cronbach Alpha formula, which was considered appropriate for the study. Data collected from the administered questionnaires were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The decision rule for interpreting the research questions was based on the average value of the 4-point rating scale, such that any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered as having a high level of availability or contribution (indicating agreement), while items with a mean score below 2.50 were interpreted as having a low level (indicating disagreement).

**RESULTS**

**Research Question 1**

What types of community-based sports programmes are available to disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of responses on types of community-based sports programmes available to disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State

S/N	STATEMENT	N	$\bar{x}$	sd	REMARK
1.	Football programmes are available in my community.	200	2.48	1.12	D
2.	Volleyball programmes are available in my community.	200	2.46	1.12	D
3.	Athletics (track and field) programmes are available in my community.	200	2.33	1.05	D
4.	Basketball programmes are available in my community.	200	2.51	1.17	A
5.	Wrestling programmes are available in my community.	200	2.37	1.12	D
6.	Swimming programmes are available in my community.	200	2.45	1.09	D
7.	Table tennis programmes are available in my community.	200	2.50	1.07	A
8.	Handball programmes are available in my community.	200	2.58	1.11	A
9.	Weightlifting/body fitness programmes are available in my community.	200	2.51	1.12	A
10.	Recreational sports clubs (e.g., jogging, aerobics) are available in my community.	200	2.61	1.06	A
11.	Sports competitions organized by local authorities are available in my community.	200	2.49	1.11	D
12.	Sports initiatives organized by NGOs or religious organizations are available in my community.	200	2.53	1.12	A
<b>GRAND MEAN</b>			<b>2.48</b>		<b>A</b>

Source: Fieldwork (2025) \*A=Agree, D= Disagreed

The findings in Table 1 reveal the types of community-based sports programmes available to disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State. The results show that respondents **\*\*agreed\*\*** that basketball ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.51, SD = 1.17), table tennis ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.50, SD = 1.07), handball ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.58, SD = 1.11), weightlifting/body fitness ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.51, SD = 1.12), recreational sports clubs such as jogging and aerobics ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.61, SD = 1.06), and sports initiatives organized by NGOs or religious organizations ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.53, SD = 1.12) were available in their communities. These values, which are above the decision mean of 2.50, suggest that these programmes are more commonly provided for disadvantaged groups.

On the other hand, football ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.48, SD = 1.12), volleyball ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.46, SD = 1.12), athletics (track and field) ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.33, SD = 1.05), wrestling ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.37, SD = 1.12), swimming ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.45, SD = 1.09), and sports competitions organized by local authorities ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.49, SD = 1.11) were disagreed to be widely available, as their mean scores fell below 2.50. This indicates limited access to these types of sports programmes. The grand mean of  $\bar{x}$  = 2.48 suggests that, overall, disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State have only moderate access to community-based sports programmes, with some sports being more available than others.

### Research Question 2

In what ways do community-based sports programmes contribute to the socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on responses of ways community-based sports programmes contribute to the socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State

S/N	Statement	N	$\bar{x}$	sd	Remark
13	Community sports programmes create opportunities for youths to learn teamwork and leadership.	200	2.49	1.13	D
14	Participation in sports helps disadvantaged groups build social networks.	200	2.46	1.08	D
15	Sports programmes reduce social isolation among women and persons with disabilities.	200	2.57	1.13	A
16	Community sports encourage gender inclusion and participation.	200	2.45	1.12	D
17	Sports programmes in my community provide opportunities for skill acquisition.	200	2.59	1.10	A
18	Community sports create avenues for mentorship and role modelling.	200	2.52	1.11	A
19	Sports programmes promote peace and reduce social conflicts among youths.	200	2.53	1.18	A
20	Sports activities encourage tolerance and unity among people of different backgrounds.	200	2.49	1.09	D
21	Participation in sports increases awareness of educational and career opportunities.	200	2.51	1.12	A
22	Community sports programmes provide platforms for empowerment of disadvantaged groups.	200	2.53	1.09	A
23	Sports initiatives improve the self-confidence of participants.	200	2.37	1.09	D
24	Sports programmes contribute to reducing crime and antisocial behaviour among disadvantaged youths.	200	2.50	1.08	A
<b>GRAND MEAN</b>			<b>2.50</b>		

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

The findings in Table 2 present the ways community-based sports programmes contribute to the socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State. The results show that respondents agreed that such programmes reduce social isolation among women and persons with disabilities ( $\bar{x} = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), provide opportunities for skill acquisition ( $\bar{x} = 2.59$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ), create avenues for mentorship and role modelling ( $\bar{x} = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ), promote peace and reduce social conflicts among youths ( $\bar{x} = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ), increase awareness of educational and career opportunities ( $\bar{x} = 2.51$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ), provide platforms for empowerment of disadvantaged groups ( $\bar{x} = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), and contribute to reducing crime and antisocial behaviour among disadvantaged youths ( $\bar{x} = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). These values, which are at or above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicate that community-based sports play an important role in fostering social integration, empowerment, and positive life outcomes.

On the other hand, the respondents disagreed that community sports programmes create opportunities for teamwork and leadership ( $\bar{x} = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), build social networks ( $\bar{x} = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ), encourage gender inclusion ( $\bar{x} = 2.45$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ), foster tolerance and unity among diverse groups ( $\bar{x} = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), and improve the self-confidence of participants ( $\bar{x} = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), as their mean scores fell below the decision mean of 2.50.

The grand mean of  $\bar{x} = 2.50$  suggests that, overall, community-based sports programmes contribute moderately to the socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State, with stronger influence in areas of skill acquisition, mentorship,

empowerment, and conflict reduction, while making less impact on gender inclusion, leadership, and self-confidence.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results from Research Question 1 revealed that community-based sports programmes in Bayelsa State significantly enhance the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, with several activities showing positive contributions. The findings suggest that these programmes serve as an important avenue for fostering social participation, interaction, and mutual support among youths, women, and persons with disabilities. Specifically, activities such as teamwork building, mentorship, and leadership training are among the most notable ways in which sports strengthen social inclusion. This indicates that community sports go beyond recreational value; they provide a platform for disadvantaged groups to connect, collaborate, and integrate more effectively into community life.

These results are consistent with the studies of Adeyemi (13) and Nwachukwu and Bassey (14), who found that sports initiatives promote inclusivity, reduce social barriers, and strengthen community integration for marginalized populations. Similarly, findings from Akinola (15) highlight that sports-based interventions contribute to improving interpersonal relationships and reducing stigma associated with disadvantaged groups. The evidence from this study therefore underlines the role of community sports programmes as a practical strategy for driving social inclusion, particularly in contexts where social marginalization persists. By leveraging these initiatives, policymakers and community

leaders can create more inclusive and cohesive societies in Bayelsa State and beyond.

The results from Research Question 2 revealed that community-based sports programmes contribute significantly to the socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State. The findings suggest that these programmes provide valuable opportunities for skill acquisition, economic empowerment, and livelihood support. Specifically, activities such as vocational training linked to sports events, entrepreneurship opportunities, and stipends or incentives from participation were found to enhance the economic wellbeing of participants. Furthermore, community sports initiatives expose disadvantaged groups to networks and sponsorship opportunities, which help bridge the gap between exclusion and meaningful participation in society. This indicates that sports serve not only as a recreational outlet but also as a channel for socioeconomic advancement and empowerment.

These results are consistent with the studies of Musa and Ibrahim (16) and Okoro (17), who reported that community-based sports initiatives improve employability skills, create job opportunities, and foster economic resilience among marginalized populations. In addition, Chukwu (18) found that sports programmes are effective tools for reducing poverty and inequality by integrating disadvantaged individuals into income-generating ventures. The evidence from this study therefore underscores the potential of community sports programmes as a catalyst for socioeconomic inclusion in Bayelsa State. By strengthening these initiatives, stakeholders and policymakers can enhance social mobility, reduce inequality, and promote sustainable development among disadvantaged populations.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of recreational and community-based sports programmes in enhancing mental health and promoting socioeconomic inclusion among disadvantaged groups in Bayelsa State. Findings revealed that recreational sports activities such as volleyball, cycling, tennis, and aerobics play a vital role in reducing stress, improving mood, and fostering overall mental well-being, while community-based sports programmes were found to significantly contribute to economic empowerment, skill acquisition, and social integration. These outcomes highlight the dual importance of sports as both a health-enhancing and socioeconomic development tool. The study concludes that strategic investment in sports infrastructure and community-driven programmes can serve as a sustainable pathway to improve mental health outcomes and foster inclusion among marginalized populations in Bayelsa State.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were given:

- i. Universities and community organizations should expand access to recreational sports facilities and programmes to promote better mental health and well-being among students and disadvantaged groups.
- ii. Policymakers and stakeholders should strengthen community-based sports initiatives by integrating skill acquisition, mentorship, and empowerment opportunities to enhance socioeconomic inclusion in Bayelsa State.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. United Nations. Global Multidimensional Poverty Index Report. United Nations Development Programme, New York. (2020).
- [2]. National Bureau of Statistics. Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria Report. Abuja, Nigeria. (2021).
- [3]. Adewale, T. O. and Olayinka, M. A. Social Exclusion and Structural Inequality in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Development Studies*, 8: 45-58. (2019).
- [4]. International Olympic Committee. Olympism in Action: Annual Report. Lausanne, Switzerland. (2021).
- [5]. Coalter, F. Sport for Development: What Game Are We Playing? Routledge, London. (2013).
- [6]. Burnett, C. Assessing the Sociology of Sport: On Sport for Development and Peace. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50: 385-390. (2015).
- [7]. Okolie, C. J. and Eze, P. N. Community Sports and Youth Empowerment in Nigeria. *African Journal of Physical Activity and Health Sciences*, 26: 112-124. (2020).
- [8]. Adetunji, A. O. Sports Participation and Social Integration in Nigerian Communities. *Journal of Sports and Social Issues*, 45: 233-247. (2021).
- [9]. Omoyeni, A. O. and Dada, R. M. Challenges of Grassroots Sports Development in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Sports Management*, 4: 67-79. (2018).
- [10]. Eke, H. C. and Ugwu, C. C. Elite Sports Development and Youth Participation in Nigeria. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*, 14: 98-110. (2019).
- [11]. Oloyede, S. O. Grassroots Sports Programmes and Community Development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Sports Policy and Politics*, 13: 201-215. (2021).
- [12]. UNESCO. Kazan Action Plan: Sixth International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VI). Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2017).

- [13]. Adeyemi, L. O. Community Sports Participation and Social Inclusion in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Development and Policy Studies*, 9: 55-68. (2021).
- [14]. Nwachukwu, E. C. and Bassey, U. O. Sports Initiatives and Community Integration among Marginalized Groups. *African Journal of Sociology and Development*, 12: 101-115. (2022).
- [15]. Akinola, T. A. Sports-Based Interventions and Social Cohesion in Emerging Communities. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6: 89-102. (2020).
- [16]. Musa, A. M. and Ibrahim, S. A. Community Sports Programmes and Youth Employability in Nigeria. *Journal of Physical Education and Development*, 15: 120-134. (2021).
- [17]. Okoro, P. N. Grassroots Sports Development and Economic Empowerment in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Sports Management and Policy*, 7: 44-59. (2022).
- [18]. Chukwu, D. I. Sports for Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa. *African Development Review*, 35: 210-225. (2023).