



## Volleyball for Peace in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Program Design and Transferable Lessons

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### Abstract

Received in Sep.2025 Revised  
from Sep-Nov.2025 Accepted:  
Dec, 2025 Ethiopian Journal of  
Sport Science (EJSS), Volume  
VI, and Issue I, Published by  
Ethiopian Sport Academy 2025

**Keywords:** Africa,  
Comparative Analysis, Peace  
building, Volleyball

*This scoping review, guided by the Arkoses and O'Malley framework, systematically maps volleyball-based Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) initiatives across diverse African contexts. Despite growing recognition of sport's role in peace building, a comprehensive comparative understanding of these programs' designs, implementation strategies, and theoretical underpinnings remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by synthesizing evidence from 11 African nations, including Rwanda, Kenya, and South Sudan. Findings reveal significant similarities across programs, such as volleyball's accessibility and low cost, a strong emphasis on youth and community engagement, and pervasive multi-stakeholder collaborations. Crucially, the review highlights consistent application of psychological frameworks like the Contact Hypothesis, Common In-group Identity Model, and Empowerment Theory. However, substantial differences in program design and objectives emerged, directly shaped by unique socio-political contexts and specific conflict types (e.g., post-genocide reconciliation, IDP integration, gender empowerment). Transferable lessons emphasize the critical importance of context-specific design, robust institutional support, and holistic integration into broader peace building ecosystems. This research offers valuable, evidence-based insights for designing sustainable, context-aware volleyball peace programs, particularly relevant for Ethiopia and other conflict-affected regions, by underscoring the necessity of tailored approaches, strong partnerships, and strategic policy integration for lasting positive change.*



## 1. Background

Sport has long been recognized as a powerful tool for fostering peace, social cohesion, and sustainable development, a capacity formally acknowledged and championed by the United Nations (2003, 2015). Within this expansive Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) framework, initiatives leverage the inherent characteristics of various sports to address pressing societal challenges, including health, education, gender equality, and conflict resolution. Among these, volleyball has emerged as a particularly effective and versatile medium for grassroots peace building, especially in post-conflict and fragile societies (Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016; Kay, 2012). Its low equipment cost, adaptability, simple rules, and non-contact, team-oriented nature make it highly accessible and inclusive. These qualities enable volleyball to create neutral, safe spaces where individuals from diverse backgrounds can interact, collaborate, and build relationships on an equal footing, fostering mutual understanding and trust.

Sudan employed national tournaments to reinforce a collective identity, aligning with the Common In-group Identity Model (Gaertner&Dovidio, 2000; UNDP, 2020). In Kenya, sports programs mitigated inter- and host communities (UNDP, 2022), and Senegal, focusing on girl empowerment and

The African continent presents a critical context for SDP initiatives. Enduring challenges like ethnic divisions, political instability, inter-communal violence, and youth marginalization frequently undermine social cohesion and hinder sustainable development (Lyras& Welty Peachey, 2011; Maguire, 2011). In response, volleyball has been strategically employed to bridge societal divides, promote gender equality, enhance social inclusion, and prevent violent extremism. By offering a structured platform for dialogue and cooperation (Sugden, 2010), volleyball initiatives provide a tangible pathway towards building resilient and peaceful communities.

Numerous African countries have implemented diverse volleyball-based interventions with context-specific objectives. For instance, Rwanda utilized mixed-ethnicity volleyball teams for post-genocide reconciliation, exemplifying the Contact Hypothesis (Crisp & Turner, 2009; Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020). South community tensions and built capacity among women for peace processes (Vital Voices, 2015). Other examples include Nigeria, where volleyball fostered cohesion and healing among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)



life skill development (LKTBF, 2022). These varied applications highlight volleyball's adaptability for diverse peace building goals.

Despite the growing number of such programs and their purported benefits, a critical knowledge gap persists. While individual case studies (Giulianotti et al., 2019; Kidd, 2008) effectively demonstrate localized successes, there remains a lack of comprehensive, systematic, and comparative understanding of their diverse designs, implementation strategies, and underlying theoretical applications across the breadth of varied African contexts. This fragmentation in the existing literature prevents a holistic overview of how volleyball initiatives are strategically adapted to address unique socio-political landscapes and specific forms of conflict, such as post-genocide reconciliation, inter-community tensions, IDP integration, or gender inequality.

This fragmented understanding of existing volleyball-based SDP initiatives poses several significant challenges for effectively leveraging sport for peace. First, practitioners and policymakers lack a consolidated resource that are genuinely aligned with local needs, thereby maximizing impact and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Therefore, this study aims to address this critical gap by systematically mapping and synthesizing the existing evidence on volleyball-based peace building initiatives

detailing which specific design elements, delivery mechanisms, and theoretical approaches are most effectively applied in particular contexts to achieve targeted peace building outcomes. This critical gap limits their ability to make evidence-based decisions. Second, for the broader Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) field, the absence of systematic comparative analysis makes it difficult to discern universal transferable lessons, identify context-specific best practices, or understand the precise conditions under which certain volleyball-based interventions are most successful (Giulianotti et al., 2019; Kidd, 2008). This hinders effective program learning and the meaningful adaptation of successful models to new settings, such as Ethiopia, which, like many African nations, faces complex peace building challenges and could benefit from informed SDP interventions. Finally, for governments, international organizations, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a fragmented understanding of what works, where, and why, impedes their ability to strategically partner, allocate resources efficiently, and invest in initiatives across diverse African countries. Specifically, this study aims to:

- Compare the similarities and differences in volleyball program designs between post-conflict and socially fragmented African contexts.



- Extract transferable lessons from implementation successes and challenges to inform future initiatives.

By achieving these objectives, this research seeks to identify key patterns, variations, and crucial insights regarding the design, implementation, and theoretical underpinnings of these programs. Ultimately, this will contribute to a more nuanced, evidence-based, and contextually informed approach to leveraging sport for sustainable peace and development on the African continent

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This analysis is grounded in the overarching Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) framework, which posits that sport serves as a of mixed-ethnicity volleyball teams in Rwanda, bringing together Hutu and Tutsi individuals, serves as a practical example of this hypothesis in action.

Secondly, the Common In-group Identity Model explores how individuals derive a sense of identity from their membership in various social groups and the subsequent implications for intergroup behavior (Gaertner&Dovidio, 2000). Within the context of SDP initiatives, efforts often aim to cultivate a superordinate group identity, such as the promotion of national unity in South Sudan, through shared sporting experiences that can potentially diminish the salience of more divisive social

valuable catalyst for achieving development and peace outcomes by fostering social inclusion, reconciliation, and the adoption of positive values (UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace, 2003). Three complementary theoretical mechanisms, illustrated in Figure 1, specifically explain volleyball's peace building potential: the Contact Hypothesis, the Common In-group Identity Model, and Empowerment Theory.

Firstly, the Contact Hypothesis suggests that positive intergroup relations can be fostered and prejudice reduced when individuals from different groups interact under appropriate conditions, characterized by equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities (Crisp & Turner, 2009). The implementation identities.

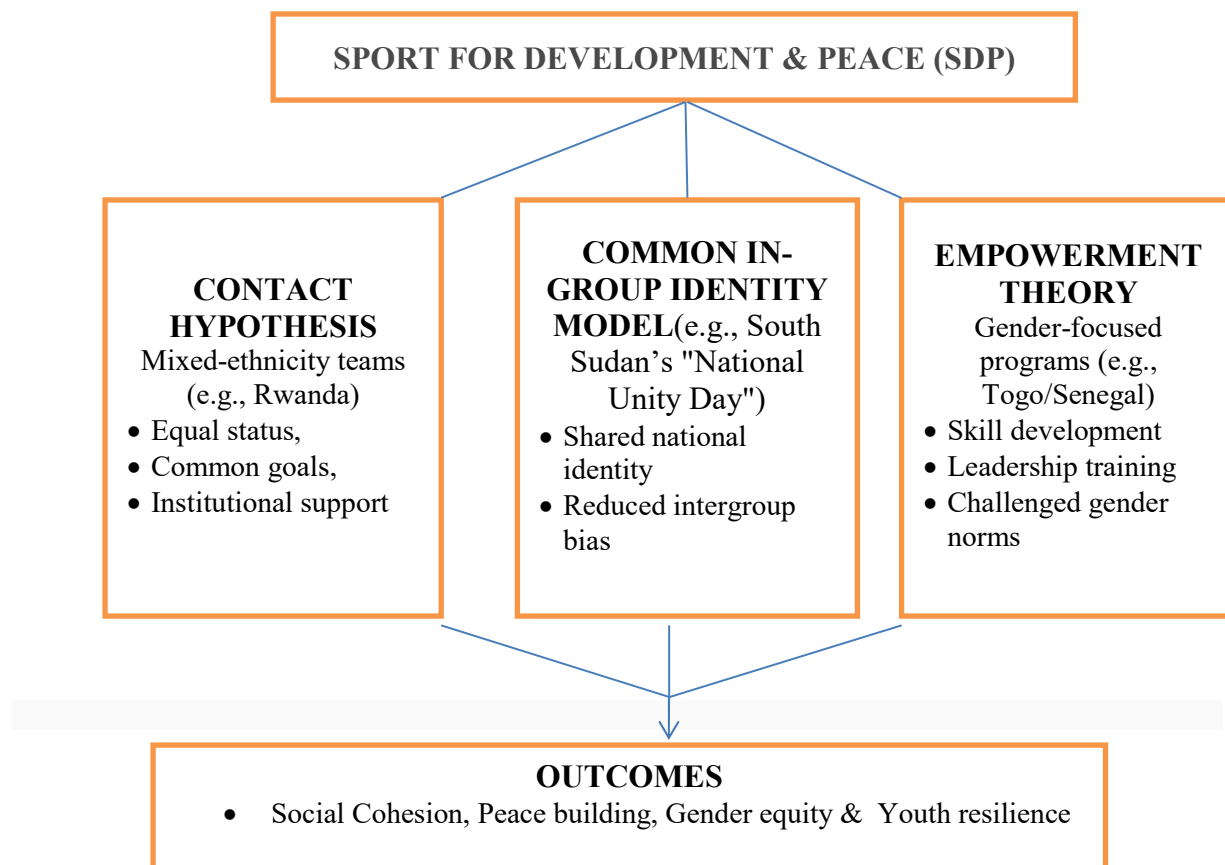


Fig 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Thirdly, Empowerment Theory focuses on the process through which individuals gain greater control over their own lives and circumstances (Zimmerman, 2000). Volleyball programs specifically designed for girls and women in their participation and agency.

When strategically implemented through these theoretical lenses, volleyball initiatives yield multidimensional outcomes: social cohesion through intergroup bonding, sustainable peace building via conflict transformation, gender equity through expanded participation, and youth resilience against extremist recruitment. The interplay of these mechanisms explains

countries like Togo and Senegal align with this theoretical framework by providing opportunities for skill development, fostering leadership qualities, and challenging prevailing gender norms that may limit why volleyball with its inherent qualities of accessibility, minimal equipment requirements, and emphasis on teamwork—proves particularly effective compared to more resource-intensive or confrontational sports.

### 3. Materials and Methods

This review adhered to the Arksey and O'Malley framework, the foundational methodological structure for scoping studies

**Citedas:** Demissie Gashu Walle(2025):Volleyball for Peace in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Program Design and Transferable Lessons: *Ethiopian Journal of Sport Science (EJSS) V.6 page 22-41*



(Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), while incorporating subsequent clarifications and enhancements (Colquhoun et al., 2014). The six stages guided our process: (1) identifying the research question; (2) identifying relevant studies; (3) study selection; (4) charting the data; (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results; and (6) the optional consultation stage.

## 2.1. Identifying Relevant Studies

This review followed a pre-planned, unpublished protocol. To identify relevant studies, comprehensive database searches were conducted on May 12, 2025, in Web of Science and Scopus. These searches targeted existing literature, reports, and documented case studies on volleyball and Sport for

Study Limitations: This review acknowledges potential publication bias, as successful projects are more likely to be published and thus included. Furthermore, only papers published in English were included.

## 2.2. Study Selection

The selection of cases was purposive, focusing on African countries with documented volleyball-based interventions for peace building and social cohesion. This strategic approach aimed to represent a range of socio-political contexts and primary objectives, directly addressing the study's first objective regarding design comparison.

Inclusion criteria required programs to

Development and Peace (SDP) initiatives in African countries.

Additionally, organizational reports from various bodies were reviewed, including publications from the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and international cooperation agencies. The review also incorporated documented case studies, comprising detailed accounts of specific programs found in grey literature or specialized reports.

The search strategy involved using keywords such as "volleyball," "sport for development and peace," "peace building," "social cohesion," "conflict resolution," and "Africa" across titles, abstracts, and keywords. Searches were not initially limited by publication date.

be:Active volleyball initiatives in African nations, Specifically aimed at peace building, social cohesion, conflict resolution, or related social development goals, Supported by sufficient publicly accessible data (including general application of theories, publications, and organizational reports) detailing program design, implementation, target groups, and reported outcomes, Operating within one of the identified socio-political contexts: post-conflict, socially fragmented (but politically stable), or focused on specific social issues like gender empowerment.

Exclusion criteria prevented the selection of nations or programs where:Volleyball initiatives primarily focused on elite sports





development without an explicit peace building or social cohesion mandate, Programs lacked sufficient documentation for detailed comparative analysis, and Interventions had ceased operations prior to sufficient impact documentation for analysis.

Based on these criteria, 11 references were ultimately included. The selected countries represent distinct contexts, encompassing: Post-conflict nations: Rwanda (for post-genocide reconciliation), South Sudan (for nation-building in a post-conflict setting), Liberia, and Sierra Leone (for post-conflict

### 2.3. Charting the Data

Once the final publications for inclusion were selected, a qualitative approach was taken for Stage 4, commencing with thematic coding. This was an iterative process of identifying trends and differences across the selected publications. The initial round focused on readily obtainable data from the publications.

Throughout the data collection process, specific attention was paid to obtaining detailed accounts of program design, implementation strategies, identified target groups, and documented outcomes (e.g., Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020; Kida &Kimokoti, 2025; Loveday&Rivett, 2019). The aim was to achieve saturation within each case, ensuring a rich and thorough understanding of the interventions under examination.

reintegration and governance), Socially fragmented yet politically stable countries: Kenya (addressing inter-community tensions), Countries focusing on specific social issues: Senegal (for gender empowerment).

This diverse selection enabled a comprehensive comparative analysis of how different national contexts influence the design, implementation, and outcomes of volleyball for peace initiatives. A proportion of the references were cross-checked by a second reviewer for consistency.

### 2.4. Collating, Summarizing, and Reporting Results

The collected data underwent a rigorous thematic comparative analysis, guided by the overarching Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) framework. This systematic analysis involved five distinct stages to comprehensively understand volleyball's role in peace building across diverse African nations:

Firstly, Country-Specific Profiling commenced by creating a detailed profile for each selected nation's volleyball for peace initiative. This involved systematically extracting information on their primary objectives, general approach, and specific implementation strategies (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020).

Secondly, the Identification of Similarities stage focused on cross-case comparisons. This aimed to pinpoint common themes and shared



characteristics in volleyball's use for peace building, such as its accessibility as a tool, a strong emphasis on youth and community engagement, the prevalence of multi-stakeholder collaboration, and the implicit or explicit emphasis on core values like teamwork and respect.

Thirdly, the Identification of Differences groups, levels of intervention (community-based vs. national), distinct implementation strategies, differences in scale, and the Fourthly, Theoretical Lens Application involved consistently interpreting the comparative insights from both similarities and differences through the specific lenses of the Contact Hypothesis, Common In-group Identity Model, and Empowerment Theory. This crucial step allowed for a deeper theoretical understanding of how these concepts manifested in different contexts and contributed to the observed outcomes.

Lastly, the Extraction of Transferable Lessons directly addressed the study's second objective. This final stage systematically identified potential lessons and best practices. This was based on comprehensive comparative insights into both implementation successes and identified challenges, focusing on how these lessons could inform the design of

directly addressed the first objective of the study. This stage applied a comparative lens to highlight divergent aspects across the initiatives. It involved examining variations in primary objectives across different socio-political contexts (e.g., post-conflict vs. socially fragmented), specific target

diverse nature of underlying conflicts being addressed.

contextually grounded, theoretically informed, and sustainable volleyball peace programs across Africa (Sherry et al., 2015). This systematic and multi-staged approach facilitated a robust comparative understanding of volleyball's multifaceted role in peace building across the continent.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the study's key findings regarding the similarities and differences in volleyball program designs across diverse African contexts. Drawing from documented case studies synthesized in Table 1, we delineate commonalities in approach and crucial divergences shaped by unique socio-political realities.





Table 1 Summary of Volleyball Based Peace building Initiatives across African

Country	Objective	Approach	Strategy	Source(s)
Rwanda	promote unity, reconciliation, and conflict resolution in post-genocide Rwanda	implementation of diverse sport programs including volleyball	international organizations, Government and non-[governmental Support	Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana , 2020;
Kenya	Capacity building, Unite women in peace processes, particularly in post-election violence	Volleyball as a tool to i critical discussions on sexual and reproductive health, conflict resolution,	encourages community members to overcome barriers like ethnicity, and gender.	(Vital Voices, 2015)
Nigeria	cohesion and reconciliation, healing from trauma, alleviating stress, building trust, and promoting peace	Using volleyball to bring together	Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host women and girls. UNICEF,	United nation development program (UNDP, 2022).
Liberia	promote a more prosperous, and peaceful society	Nationwide "Sport for Peace Programmed" with volleyball	Youth and community leaders from all 15 counties.	(IOC, 2007)
Senegal	empowering girls, Enhance life skills, Personal development	volleyball drills, games, and coaching	thematic, progressive curriculum over five days	LKTBF. (2022)
Sierra Leone	Life skills, including self-confidence, teamwork, inclusion, discipline, respect,	Enjoy volleyball games and other sport UNHCR.	Youth children, involve volunteer from Australia, Europe, and North America	Fontanini, 2003).
South Africa	Education and athletic goals, providing part-time salaries, athletic development.	Trains children annually in volleyball coaching, mentoring	Underprivileged children and youth, School and university scholarships	(Yebo Volleyball, n.d.).
Namibia	prevent violence, promote health, social cohesion and advance gender equality	GIZ-supported national program (Volleyball4Life)	Children and young people learn life values,	(GIZ. n.d.).
South Sudan	foster peace and promote interaction among diverse populations, emphasizing fair play and sportsmanship	Annual National Unity Day (NUD) volleyball sport festival,	Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports (MOCYS) in partnership with (JICA), (UNDP), (UNMISS), (SDC),	(UNDP, 2020)
Tunisia	fostering socialization in peace and respect, and enhancing local resilience against violent extremism	Utilizes weekly socio-sport days, which run for five months.	WAHDA project (NOVACT, ACCD-funded) partners with University of Barcelona and Tunisian	(OPEV, 2021).
Chad	Provide psychosocial support, facilitate conflict resolution, and promote peace building..	create dedicated spaces for sporting events like volleyball	Capacity Building, Community Engagement, Gender Inclusion, Educational Integration	Jesuit Refugee Service USA. (n.d.).



#### 4.1. Similarities in Program Design and Implementation

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of how 11 African nations have strategically employed volleyball for peace building and social cohesion. Several consistent patterns emerged across these initiatives.

Across all examined nations, volleyball consistently served as an accessible and cost-effective tool for peace building. Its low equipment and minimal infrastructure needs facilitated widespread implementation in diverse, resource-limited areas, such as rural communities and IDP camps, thereby allowing for wider participation (e.g., as evidenced by programs in Nigeria with IDPs, and South Africa reaching underprivileged children). This inherent accessibility made volleyball programs, utilized across countries like Rwanda, Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, effective in bridging social divides by creating neutral environments for interaction without immediate pressure (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020). The shared experience of team sports encouraged communication, built trust, and fostered a collective identity that transcended existing differences (NURC, 2015), aligning with how sports offer structured interaction and common goals that naturally promote cooperation (Crisp & Turner, 2009).

A strong emphasis on youth and community

engagement was a universal feature across these initiatives, recognizing young people as crucial agents for change and conflict prevention. Programs in Rwanda and Kenya, for instance, strategically involved young people to help prevent the recurrence of intergenerational tensions (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020; Vital Voices, 2015). Nigeria's initiatives specifically used volleyball to bring together Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host women and girls (UNDP, 2022), while Liberia's "Sport for Peace Programme" targeted youth and community leaders across all 15 counties (IOC, 2007). Senegal's focus on empowering girls (LKTBF, 2022) and South Africa's programs for underprivileged children and youth (Yebo Volleyball, n.d.) further underscore this vital role in shaping future societies and building enduring peace by instilling positive values and bridging divides.

Furthermore, multi-stakeholder collaboration was consistently prevalent, amplifying the impact of these sports-based peace building initiatives. Governments, international organizations, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) partnered to ensure institutional backing, expand program reach, and facilitate the scaling of initiatives. Examples include the Rwandan government's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) partnering with local NGOs (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020;



NURC, 2015), Nigeria's programs involving UNICEF and UNDP (UNDP, 2022), and South Sudan's Annual National Unity Day (NUD) supported by the Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports (MOCYS) in partnership with JICA, UNDP, UNMISS, and SDC (UNDP, 2020). International partnerships, such as GIZ supporting Namibia's Volleyball4Life program (GIZ, n.d.) and the WAHDA project in Tunisia involving NOVACT, ACCD, University of Barcelona, and Tunisian partners (OPEV, 2021), provided crucial funding, technical knowledge, and legitimacy, helping local successes evolve into national programs. This collaborative approach aligns with broader peace building frameworks like the Contact Hypothesis (Crisp & Turner, 2009) and the Common In-group Identity Model (Gaertner&Dovidio, 2000).

The success of these sports initiatives also draws heavily from established psychological frameworks. The Contact Hypothesis (Crisp & Turner, 2009) informs programs in Rwanda, Kenya, and Nigeria, where structured intergroup cooperation in volleyball teams helps reduce prejudice by bringing together diverse populations like post-genocide communities, women from different ethnic backgrounds, or IDPs and host communities (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020; Vital Voices, 2015; UNDP, 2022). South Sudan's National Unity Day festival employs the Common In-group Identity Model (Gaertner&Dovidio, 2000), using national

sports events to promote unifying identities that supersede tribal affiliations (UNDP, 2020). Meanwhile, Senegal and Namibia apply Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000) through volleyball programs that challenge gender norms by building women's and young people's leadership skills and self-confidence (LKTBf, 2022; GIZ, n.d.).

Finally, the design and delivery of these volleyball programs consistently exhibited an implicit or explicit emphasis on core values conducive to both success in sport and positive social interactions. These values typically included teamwork, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and shared goals; respect, encouraging mutual understanding and tolerance among participants; discipline, instilling structure and adherence to rules; and fair play, promoting ethical conduct and integrity. The internalization of these values through sport can have a positive spillover effect, contributing to more constructive and cooperative behaviors within communities (Sugden, 2006), as seen in the objectives of programs in Sierra Leone (Fontanini, 2003) and South Sudan (UNDP, 2020).

The findings of this study reveal both consistent patterns and notable divergences in the application of volleyball for peace building across African nations. Consistent with prior research on Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) (e.g., UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace, 2003; Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016), volleyball's



accessibility, low cost, and inherent emphasis on teamwork make it a universally effective tool for fostering interaction and collective identity. The pervasive focus on youth and community engagement and the reliance on multi-stakeholder collaboration are well-documented aspects of successful SDP initiatives, and our findings strongly corroborate their importance across varied African settings. The implicit and explicit promotion of core values like respect and fair play further aligns with established principles of character development through sport (Sugden, 2006).

#### **4.2. Differences in Program Design and Implementation**

Despite these observed commonalities, significant divergences in program design and implementation were also evident, largely shaped by each nation's unique socio-political context and the nature of its underlying conflicts. These differences manifested across several critical dimensions.

Primary objectives varied widely: from direct post-genocide reconciliation in Rwanda (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020) and nation-building in South Sudan through fostering interaction among diverse populations (UNDP, 2020), to inter-community tension mitigation and capacity building for women in Kenya (Vital Voices, 2015). Nigeria focused on cohesion and healing trauma for IDPs and host communities (UNDP, 2022), while Chad aimed to provide

psychosocial support and facilitate conflict resolution for refugees (Jesuit Refugee Service USA, n.d.). Conversely, Senegal specifically prioritized gender empowerment and enhancing life skills for girls (LKTBF, 2022), and Namibia focused on violence prevention and health promotion (GIZ, n.d.). Liberia and Sierra Leone uniquely employed sports within broader post-war societal rebuilding efforts, including promoting a peaceful society and teaching life skills (IOC, 2007; Fontanini, 2003). This underscores that while a common thread of achieving positive social outcomes exists, the specific, pressing challenges within each national context distinctly shaped the primary objectives of these volleyball initiatives.

Consequently, programs targeted varied specific groups beyond a general youth focus, demonstrating a granular understanding of particular social divisions. In Rwanda, this involved deliberately creating mixed-ethnicity volleyball teams to foster direct interaction between Hutu and Tutsi communities (NURC, 2015; Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020). Similarly, programs in Senegal were specifically designed to involve girls, aiming to address gender disparities and enhance their broader societal roles (LKTBF, 2022). Other initiatives focused on IDPs and host women/girls in Nigeria (UNDP, 2022), youth and community leaders in Liberia (IOC, 2007), underprivileged children and youth in South Africa (Yebo Volleyball, n.d.), and diverse populations in South Sudan (UNDP, 2020).



Chad specifically targeted refugees (Jesuit Refugee Service USA, n.d.). These varied targeting methods reflect a clear alignment with the specific social divisions or inequalities each program aimed to resolve.

The level of intervention also varied considerably, ranging from localized community-based projects, as seen with Kenya's approach to uniting women in peace processes (Vital Voices, 2015) and Senegal's thematic curriculum over five days (LKTBF, 2022), to nationally integrated programs. In contrast, Rwanda's government-backed reconciliation efforts and South Sudan's annual National Unity Day festivals adopted a broader, national-level approach (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020; UNDP, 2020). Some nations, like Namibia, employed cross-cutting strategies that blended multiple objectives (e.g., violence prevention, health, gender equality) indicating a more complex integration of sports within their social development frameworks (GIZ, n.d.). These differing intervention levels naturally led to distinct implementation strategies. While Rwanda and Kenya utilized structured intergroup sports teams for direct contact, Nigeria focused on bringing together specific groups (IDPs/host women) through volleyball (UNDP, 2022). Large-scale national events were key for promoting interaction in South Sudan (UNDP, 2020), whereas female leadership development through volleyball drills was central in Senegal (LKTBF, 2022). Liberia integrated a nationwide "Sport for

Peace Programme" (IOC, 2007).

Finally, differences in scale and integration into national strategies were pronounced. Some initiatives remained localized, addressing specific community needs, while others, like South Sudan's "National Unity Day," represented a more nationally integrated approach, explicitly leveraging sport as part of a broader nation-building agenda (UNDP, 2020). The level of governmental support and the mainstreaming of sport within national policy frameworks significantly influenced the potential scale and long-term sustainability of these initiatives. This overall diversity in approach underscores that the fundamental nature of the underlying conflict and social division—whether ethnic conflict, post-war reintegration, gender inequality, or violent extremism prevention—necessitated highly tailored approaches sensitive to each country's specific historical, social, and political dynamics.

These observed variations in program design and primary objectives highlight a critical degree of nuance in the application of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) initiatives, a facet often underexplored in single-case studies (Kidd, 2008; Giulianotti et al., 2019). While studies frequently acknowledge the diverse objectives of SDP (Coalter, 2013), this research systematically delineates how these objectives translate into distinct program designs, target groups, and implementation strategies based on the type of conflict or





social division. For instance, post-conflict settings like Rwanda and South Sudan explicitly designed programs for direct reconciliation and national unity (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020; UNDP, 2020), strongly aligning with the Contact Hypothesis (Crisp & Turner, 2009) and the Common In-group Identity Model (Gaertner&Dovidio, 2000). In contrast, socially fragmented contexts like Kenya and Nigeria, while also utilizing these theories, adapted their approaches to address ongoing inter-community tensions or provide psychosocial support (Vital Voices, 2015; UNDP, 2022). Furthermore, interventions focused on specific social issues, such as gender empowerment in Senegal, demonstrated a distinct application of Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000), a focus that sometimes stands apart from core conflict resolution mandates in other contexts (LKTBF, 2022).

The variations in program design and objectives observed across the cases can be attributed to several interacting factors. The nature of the underlying conflict fundamentally dictates the primary peace building objective and, consequently, the program's design. For instance, the historical depth, intensity, and specific characteristics of a conflict, such as genocide in Rwanda or civil war in South Sudan, necessitate programs prioritizing healing and reintegration, distinct from more localized tension reduction efforts in regions experiencing ongoing social fragmentation (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana,

2020; UNDP, 2020). Secondly, the socio-political context and governance significantly influence program scale and integration. Nations with stronger central government support for reconciliation, exemplified by Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), can implement national-level initiatives, whereas programs in less stable or politically fragmented regions may remain community-based. Thirdly, cultural norms and gender dynamics substantially mediate how programs are designed and received. For example, the focus on female empowerment through volleyball in Senegal directly responds to specific cultural and gender norms prevalent in that society (LKTBF, 2022), which may differ from the primary concerns in post-conflict reintegration efforts. Finally, funding and donor priorities often shape the specific objectives and scale of initiatives. While a common thread of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) exists, the emphasis on reconciliation, preventing violence, or gender empowerment can be influenced by the strategic objectives of international donors and implementing agencies.

#### **4.3. Transferable Lessons and Implications for Practice**

The rich experiences of the 11 African nations reviewed in this study – Rwanda, Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Namibia, South Sudan, Tunisia, and Chad – in utilizing sports, particularly





volleyball, for peace building and social cohesion offer profound and multifaceted insights, underscoring several critical success factors and providing direct implications for future practice.

A primary lesson, and thus a key implication, is the paramount importance of context-specific program design and strategic implementation. Successful sport-based peace building demands careful adaptation to local conflict dynamics, ensuring initiatives are intentionally crafted to create neutral spaces for constructive interaction (e.g., Rwanda's mixed-ethnicity teams, Nigeria's integration of IDPs and host communities, Kenya's focus on uniting women in peace processes). This approach, rooted in principles like the Contact Hypothesis (Crisp & Turner, 2009), effectively bridges divides. Furthermore, volleyball's inherent versatility and accessibility due to its low cost and minimal infrastructure needs make it an exceptionally effective tool for widespread implementation in diverse settings, from rural communities to refugee camps (e.g., Chad's dedicated spaces for sporting events for refugees, South Africa's programs for underprivileged children), thereby broadening the reach of peace building efforts.

These programs consistently highlight the remarkable capacity of sports to foster psychological mechanisms of identity transformation and pro-social behaviors. Initiatives like South Sudan's National Unity Day and Tunisia's WAHDA project (fostering

socialization in peace and respect) illustrate how shared activities can cultivate superordinate identities that transcend conflict divisions, aligning with the Common In-group Identity Model (UNDP, 2020; OPEV, 2021; Gaertner&Dovidio, 2000). The explicit and implicit application of psychological theories, including Empowerment Theory in contexts like Senegal and Namibia (LKTBF, 2022; GIZ, n.d.; Zimmerman, 2000), provides a robust foundation for targeted social change by building leadership skills and self-confidence. This strategic theoretical underpinning ensures program intentionality and maximizes desired outcomes. Consistent across all reviewed cases is the vital focus on youth and other specific vulnerable groups as agents of change. Investing in youth through sport instills positive values, prevents the recurrence of intergenerational tensions, and empowers future peace builders (e.g., Liberia's program for youth and community leaders, Senegal's focus on girls). This underscores the need for programs to integrate meaningful youth leadership and participation opportunities.

Sustainable impact necessitates robust institutional architecture and long-term commitment, evident in the success of programs like Rwanda's NURC-backed initiatives and South Sudan's multi-partner supported National Unity Day (Shema-Maboko&Nzeyimana, 2020; UNDP, 2020). This highlights the critical role of multi-stakeholder collaboration: robust partnerships among governments, international



organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local communities are essential for ensuring institutional backing, providing crucial funding and technical expertise, and enabling local successes to scale into national programs (e.g., Nigeria's partnership with UNICEF and UNDP, Tunisia's WAHDA project partners). Moreover, the study strongly implies that holistic integration into broader peace building ecosystems is vital; sport alone cannot resolve complex societal problems, but its impact is significantly amplified when complemented by economic interventions, narrative campaigns, and structural reforms (e.g., Liberia's nationwide "Sport for Peace Programme"). This necessitates a more integrated approach to development and peace initiatives. Finally, the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms is underscored, as these are essential for assessing program effectiveness, guiding continuous improvement, and ensuring accountability in the complex domain of peace building.

#### 4.4. Implications for Future Research

While this comparative analysis illustrates significant successes in sports-based peace building, several avenues for future research emerge to deepen understanding and enhance impact. Primarily, there is a strong need for longitudinal impact studies to assess the sustained effects and durability of peace building outcomes over several years, moving beyond immediate post-program evaluations. Such research would allow for tracking shifts

in attitudes, behaviors, and social cohesion over time, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of lasting change (Kidd, 2008).

Future research should also delve deeper into the specific mechanisms of change through which volleyball facilitates positive transformation. This could involve combining quantitative methods to measure shifts in attitudes and behaviors with rich qualitative inquiries exploring participant narratives, observing interactions on and off the court, and analyzing how values learned through sport translate into daily life (Sugden, 2006). Furthermore, investigating the comparative effectiveness of different implementation strategies—such as structured teams versus socio-sport days or national festivals—for addressing distinct types of conflict or targeting specific demographic groups would be invaluable. Additionally, exploring the comparative advantages and disadvantages of other sports in different peace building contexts is warranted.

Given the unique emphasis on gender empowerment in contexts like Senegal and Namibia, research could further explore the nuanced gendered impacts of girls' and women's participation in sports-based peace building across diverse African contexts. This would involve examining how gender norms are both resisted and potentially reinforced through these initiatives (LKTBF, 2022; GIZ, n.d.). It is also crucial to identify and analyze



sustainable funding and operational models that reduce reliance on international donor funding, exploring strategies for local resource mobilization and genuine community ownership to ensure long-term viability.

Finally, deeper analysis is needed on how effectively these sports-based initiatives are integrated into broader formal peace building structures, such as national frameworks, truth and reconciliation commissions, or disarmament processes (e.g., Liberia's program within a nationwide strategy). Research exploring the participant voice and lived experience directly from those involved, including coaches and local community members, would offer richer insights into the realities of peace building through sport and highlight areas for future improvement. Additionally, further investigation into how successful local initiatives are effectively scaled to national levels, and the challenges encountered during this process, would be valuable, examining the role of policy integration and governmental support.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study employed a comparative case study approach to analyze how volleyball program designs differ and share similarities between post-conflict and socially fragmented African contexts, and to extract transferable lessons from their implementation successes and challenges. The findings affirm volleyball's robust potential as an accessible and adaptable tool for peace building and social cohesion

across the continent. The research identified significant similarities in fundamental approaches, including volleyball's inherent versatility, a consistent emphasis on youth and community engagement, and a reliance on multi-stakeholder collaboration. Crucially, however, program designs and objectives were found to diverge significantly based on the specific nature of the underlying conflict or social division, leading to custom-made applications of theoretical frameworks such as the Contact Hypothesis, Common In-group Identity Model, and Empowerment Theory. The key insight is that successful programs are deeply embedded in their local contexts, deliberately designed to address specific challenges, and strategically implemented to foster identity transformation and constructive intergroup relations. The transferable lessons highlight the critical importance of context-specific design, strong institutional support, and holistic integration into broader peace efforts for sustainable impact.

This research offers valuable, evidence-based insights for designing sustainable, context-aware volleyball peace programs, particularly relevant for Ethiopia and other conflict-affected regions. It emphasizes the necessity of tailoring approaches to specific local dynamics, prioritizing youth involvement, building robust multi-stakeholder partnerships, and strategically integrating sports initiatives into broader national peace and development frameworks to achieve lasting positive change.



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**Citedas:** Demissie Gashu Walle(2025):**Volleyball for Peace in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Program Design and Transferable Lessons:** *Ethiopian Journal of Sport Science (EJSS) V.6 page 22-41*



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