



Sport as Soft Power: Ethiopia's Sports Diplomacy in Foreign Policy, Regional Strategy, and National Branding

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Abstract

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Sport is becoming more visible in Ethiopia in terms of foreign policy and national branding and in terms of international interaction. Although Ethiopia has in the past undertaken influence via diplomatic activism, peacekeeping, and multilateral leadership, the nation has also managed to create a distinct kind of soft power based on athletics, football, and its Olympic heritage. The paper will also apply the soft-power, public diplomacy, and nation-branding theory to understand how Ethiopia is using sport to influence perceptions about the country, optimize bilateral relations, develop regional unity, and build national identity. Relying upon primary sources, such as Ethiopian government policy statements, Ethiopian Athletics Federation (EAF) and Ethiopian Olympic Committee (EOC) reports, African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 frameworks, archival Olympic statistics, media interviews, and athlete speeches, this article presents the most detailed evaluation up to this point of Ethiopia sport diplomacy architecture. The results indicate that the athletics-based Ethiopian soft power is still visible and with unexploited potentials globally; football diplomacy has the potential but underused capacity regionally; athlete-diaspora networks have the capacity and shaped politics; and the lack of institutions to coordinate actions constrains the ability to engage. The paper puts forward a national sport diplomacy plan that is focused on athlete ambassadorship, inter-ministerial coordination, regional leadership, and strategic branding. It concludes that under the condition of systematic introduction into the Ethiopian foreign policy, sport can help strengthen the country in the global community, help build a peace in the region, and demonstrate the influence of Ethiopia in the African multilateral systems



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1. Introduction

Sport has become one of the most vibrant, but least researched aspects of modern diplomacy. Governments all over the globe are increasingly using sport as a foreign policy tool to express identity, build relationships, raise national image, and mobilize the global audience (Grix and Brannagan, 2016). To Ethiopia, a nation with a history of diplomatic relations, the leading role in African multilateralism, and seat of the African Union (AU), sport is an exceptionally effective instrument of soft power. It is the tradition of long-distance running in Ethiopia, its Olympic heritage, and its recent orientation towards investment in football that create a special pool of symbolic capital, capable of political boundaries and hearing all over the world.

The success of Ethiopia in athletics particularly in marathon and long distance running is known throughout the world. *bebe Bikila*, *Mamo Wolde*, *Haile Gebrselassie*, *Derartu Tulu*, *Kenenisa Bekele*, *Tirunesh Dibaba*, and *Letesenbet Gidey* are household names just like other athlete who have propelled Ethiopia far beyond the reach of traditional means of statecraft. Their victories become the tales of self-perseverance, self-modesty, self-control and patriotism. What is more significant is that such athletes are non-formal ambassadors who carry the Ethiopian cultural identity, values and ambition to the foreign audience. However, even with the notable success in sports in this country, sport diplomacy is still not officially defined in the Ethiopian foreign policy framework. There is no specific sport

diplomacy unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the coordination of sport federations with diplomatic missions is not as high as possible, and the opportunities of sport as a strategic asset are not fully used. The governmental documents, including the Tourism Sector Strategy of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT) (2020) recognize the branding position of sport without operationalizing the policy framework of sport diplomacy.

In the meantime, Agenda 2063 developed by the African Union recognizes sport as one of the tools of African identity, peacebuilding, and the integration of the continent (African Union, 2015). The geographical status of Ethiopia as the central hub in the AU provides excellent but currently unutilized prospects to spearhead sport diplomacy in the continent. This article will fill this significant gap whereby it will undertake an in-depth analysis of the sport diplomacy situation in Ethiopia. It examines how Ethiopian sport has developed as soft power over time, evaluates the institutional arrangement under which sport diplomacy is created, and looks at the contribution to Ethiopian external relations by athletics, football, and diaspora athlete. It further examines regional politics, especially the relations that Ethiopia has had with IGAD, CECAFA and the AU frameworks, and assesses the possibilities and challenges of institutionalizing sport in foreign policy.

The main thesis of the paper is that Ethiopia already has a good base of sport-based soft power but most of this potential is not utilized



due to a lack of strategic institutionalization and coherent national branding. The discussion shows that Ethiopia can increase its international presence through a careful approach to the inclusion of sport into its foreign policy, greater regional integration, and the exploitation of the global popularity of its athletes.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this work is based on three theoretical perspectives, the soft power, public diplomacy, and nation branding. All these structures combined offer a strong basis in the interpretation of the role of sport as a diplomatic instrument and as a source of projecting national identity and influence.

2.1 Soft Power Theory

The concept of soft power, to influence other people to choose one way or another, without using coercion power but employing attraction power is the main conceptual base of this study elaborated upon by Joseph Nye (2004). The idea of soft power is based on the cultural resources, political ideals and the reputability of a country in the international relations. Sport as a globally oriented and culturally emotionally-appealing element is a powerful source of soft power. The continued athletic success of Ethiopia especially in long distance running is the manifestation of soft power. With the worldwide recognition of its sportsmen like Abebe Bikila, Haile Gebrselassie, and Tirunesh Dibaba, Ethiopia has developed the global image that is not dependent on the material or military strength of the nation. This is the use of intangible resources of power, which are prestige, admiration and international recognition with the view of influencing

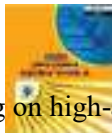
perceptions and gaining cooperation as described by Nye (2004). Through endurance running, Ethiopia is resilient, hard-working, and excellent, thus creating diplomatic strengths and goodwill with the country at the international front (Gebremariam, 2019).

2.2 Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy focuses on how governments and non-state actors directly communicate and interact with foreign publics to influence the way they are perceived and impact the policy consequences (Grix and Brannagan, 2016). Sport holds a key place in the modern public diplomacy, as it is mass media and can cross cultural and linguistic borders. The role of the Ethiopian athletes especially those who are internationally known is as cultural diplomats, the story tellers of their national identity, principles and societal ideals that cannot be conveyed by diplomacy alone. Tales of survival, commitment, and success cut across all continents and create favor in Ethiopia. These effects can be further enhanced through the introduction of organized athlete ambassador programs, strategic partnerships, and international sporting events, which will institutionalize sport as the instrument of the foreign policy (Cooper, 2019).

2.3 Nation Branding

Nation branding is the process of countries consciously trying to influence their outward image to lure tourists, foreign investment and international aid. Nation branding is especially well served by sport due to the uniform, emotionally eliciting, and internationally recognizable image (Anholt, 2007). The international identity of Ethiopia, which is closely related to long distance running, the



training on high-altitude, coffee culture and the ancient civilization of the country, can serve as a base in which a national brand is cohesive. In case sport success is included in a larger nation-branding program, Ethiopia can position itself as a nation of persistence, great spirit and creativity. In practice, sports become a symbolic tool of conducting the national narrative, solidifying soft power, and promoting the cultural hegemony. (Benouzekri, M., 2024)

3. Historical Evolution of Sports Diplomacy in Ethiopia

In order to realize the modern sport diplomacy of Ethiopia, it is necessary to review the historical narrative of sport in the politics and diplomatic history of the country. The nationalism, modern state-building, and projection of identity by use of sport have been the characteristics of sport in Ethiopia and changing according to the sequence of political regimes.

3.1 Imperial Era: The Birth of Sport as National Identity

Sport started to obtain a diplomatic meaning as a priceless national pride and modernity during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974). Ethiopia was a major indicator of international presence on the Olympic movement. These incidents included the incident when Abebe Bikila took up the marathon in the 1960 Olympics in Rome on his bare feet and was awarded a gold medal in the Olympic Games becoming the first African of sub-Saharan origin to get an Olympic medal. This was a more symbolic win: it disproved the stereotypes about the sporting abilities of the Africans, portrayed the message of the cultural

power of Ethiopia, and exposed the independence of the nation to the rest of the world in history (Marcus, 2014).

The application of the sporting activities as a cultural mediator between Ethiopia and other continents can be exemplified by Haile Selassie who was able to leverage sporting success to enhance the diplomatic ties with Japan, Italy, the United States, and some European states (Marcus, 2014). Athletics therefore became a part and parcel of national identity, prestige and early exercises of soft-power projection.

3.2 The Derg Era: Sport within Socialist Internationalism

Within the context of the Derg regime (1974-1991), there was an overall high level of integration between sport and socialist ideology on one hand, as well as the strategic international relations of Ethiopia on the other. Ethiopia had long contact with the socialist nations such as Soviet Union, East Germany, Bulgaria and Cuba in training courses, infrastructure development and sport science (Wolde-Medhin, 1991). Some of the notable diplomatic roles were attendance to socialist sports festivals, technical contacts with coaches of Eastern Europe and the promotion of sport as a beacon of socialist modernization. Nevertheless, despite the political turmoil, Ethiopia had competitive athletics and produced world-competitive runners that made the country better known, and reflected the persistence of the athletic soft power of Ethiopia at this time.

3.3 Post-1991 Ethiopia: Athletic Dominance and Nation Branding

Since the ousting of the Derg regime, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic



Front (EPRDF) government (1991/2018) has been an active participant in national identity and international branding promoting sport as a part of national identity. Athletics became one of the most important tourist promotion tools as Ethiopia has a high training ground due to its high altitude and national attainments in times of economic reform and growth. Sport personalities like Haile Gebrselassie and Derartu Tulu became world icons. The 1992 Olympic Gold medal of Derartu Tulu who became the first African woman to win the gold medal, enhanced the international image of gender progressive sporting performance of Ethiopia and enhanced the symbolic power of the country in international sports diplomacy (Adjaye, 2010). Sport in this era became less a sign of national pride and a more cohesive diplomatic tool, connecting the sporting achievements of Ethiopia to much larger aspirations of soft power, public diplomacy, and nation branding.

3.4 Contemporary Developments

The sport diplomacy in Ethiopia has been undergoing an extreme growth in the 21st century, being mostly non-institutionalized and sectorally disjointed. There are a number of modern forces that can demonstrate how sport, foreign policy, and soft power interface.

To begin with, there is an increment in foreign investment in Ethiopian sport infrastructure. The construction of stadiums, sport academies, football fields and athletics facilities have been funded by countries like China, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates as part of larger diplomatic and economic relationships. The participation of China is a result of its broader Africa presence and the Belt and Road

Initiative, where sport facilities are used to improve people-to-people relationships and increase positive views towards China throughout the continent (Li, 2018; Niu, 2020). The infrastructure diplomacy can be exemplified by Chinese-funded projects such as stadium renovations and athletics support, which are proof of how such soft-power tool operates (Bräutigam, 2019). Turkey has also increased cultural and development relations by investing in youth sport and football relationships and sport schools, becoming a new participant in African soft-power relations (Aydin and Çolakoğlu, 2021). All these developments point to the fact that there is a transition between the traditional development aid to strategic sport-based diplomacy by outsiders.

Second, Ethiopian athlete ambassadorship has gained more and more power in determining the global presence of the country. The emergence of celebrity diplomacy is manifested in participation in international projects related to the United Nations, UNICEF, UNESCO, and international NGOs by world-renowned athletes like Haile Gebrselassie, Tirunesh Dibaba, and Feyisa Lilesa (Cooper, 2019; Chappelet, 2021). The participation of athletes in campaigns related to climate change, children rights, protection of refugees and the health of the people proves that people with international prominence can increase the normative power of Ethiopia. Their involvement correlates with academic conclusions that elite athletes demonstrate more often than not to be soft-power actors in foreign affairs (Grix & Brannagan, 2016).

Third, there has been increased regional sport



involvement in Ethiopia via the Council of East and Central Africa Football Associations (CECAFA), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU). CECAFA tournaments have led to the formation of regional identities and people to people interactions at the East African region (Darby, 2013). The youth and sport-for-peace programs of IGAD have incorporated sport in the programs of conflict prevention and regional diplomacy (IGAD, 2021). On the continental level, the presence of Ethiopia in the Agenda 2063 of the African Union, as well as the African Union Sport Council, puts sport in the context of integration, peace and cultural diplomacy (African Union Commission, 2015). These activities can be seen as the acknowledgment of sport as the instrument of cooperation in a region and soft-power projection.

Nevertheless, there are still considerable problems. The sport diplomacy in Ethiopia is not adequately coordinated by the institution, has no policy of sport diplomacy, and the stakeholders are found to be disjointed in relation to the ministries and federations. According to scholarly commentators, successful sport diplomacy needs to have clear mandate and interagency coordination among foreign affairs, sport bodies and cultural establishments (Murray and Pigman, 2014; Jackson and Haigh, 2021). Such structures are not available in Ethiopia, which limits the on conventional diplomacy (Grix and Houlihan, 2014; Murray and Pigman, 2014). The athletics in Ethiopia, thus, have become an extremely important platform, where the country develops world goodwill, fosters

possibility of using sport strategically to serve foreign policy goals. Also, lack of money, research capability and ad hoc implementation of the programs all weaken long term planning. All in all, the current trends demonstrate increased opportunities and structural gaps. Athletic reputation is a well-known global brand further enhanced by foreign investment and regional sport diplomacy platforms and this is the source of significant soft-power potential in Ethiopia. However, unless institutionalized and strategically aligned, these trends can be seen as single initiatives instead of creating a unified sport diplomacy system.

4. Athletics Diplomacy: Global Soft Power of Ethiopia.

Athletics is the strongest and longest-lasting soft power of Ethiopia, which serves as a cultural resource to provide a better general exposure to the country and carves its foreign policies. The internationally recognized performance of Ethiopia in long distance running has made the athletes become powerful ambassadors whose performance promotes positive images of the country in terms of national identity, resilience, and cultural uniqueness. According to the scholars, sport, and especially athletics, serves as a very specific form of soft power by creating admiration, emotional bonds and shaping perceptions about a country in ways that are not based

relations and strengthens its position in the world society.

4.1 Athletic Success as Global Cultural Capital

Ethiopia has an exceptional performance in the



global athletics and this has given the country what Bourdieu describes as cultural capital, the ability to gain prestige internationally which is symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1986). The overwhelming majority of Olympic medals won by Ethiopia are through long-distance races including the 5,000m, 10,000m and marathon races (data provided by the Ethiopian Olympic Committee, 2023). This result makes Ethiopia one of the top countries in the world in terms of athletics per capita and gross domestic product, and the country is the hub of the long-distance running profession (International Olympic Committee, 2023). The continuous success of Ethiopian athletes in a number of decades has established a unique international image that comes to mind when the matter concerns stamina, training, and innate ability. This identity serves as an effective soft-power resource, receiving world-wide praise, and strengthening the positive impression of Ethiopia even at the time when the country faced political or economic instabilities (Gebremariam, 2019). A brief history of the country in terms of its medal collection, which is being discussed in Table 1, can be viewed as a tangible sport success as well as a tool of diplomacy which helps Ethiopia to participate in international organizations.

4.2 Athlete Ambassadors and Global Influence

The Elite Ethiopian athletes are the de facto diplomats who through their visibility, credibility, and moral authority influence the world through defining global narratives about Ethiopia. Haile Gebrselassie, a very familiar athlete in the world has particularly been a significant advocate on the global system.

Being a part of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Advocacy Group, he collaborated with the world leaders on the topics of poverty decrease, education, and sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). His visits to heads of state, involvement in international forums, and investment in the business, tourism, and sport industries of Ethiopia as a philanthropist can show how individual athletes can take national influence beyond official diplomacy (Cooper, 2019). In the same manner, African women won a gold medal at the 1992 Olympics and her name, Derartu Tulu, became known by the whole world as a symbol of empowerment of African women and equality of the sexes. The global media was full and her victory was celebrated around the globe and it helped in strengthening the ethical position of Ethiopia in the global gender discourse (Adjaye, 2010). With their regular victory in the global events, Kenenisa Bekele and Tirunesh Dibaba have helped Ethiopia to cement the image of athletic superiority, consolidating the opinion of the world of Ethiopia as a formidable powerhouse in the field of endurance running. Personal success of sports people, according to scholars, is able to make a nation more human, which in turn creates diplomatic goodwill that is difficult to gain by the traditional state actors (Chappelet, 2021; Grix and Brannagan, 2016). In the case of Ethiopia, it is especially strong because its sport stars often represent the stories of hardships, modesty and global triumph.

4.3 Athlete Diplomacy as a Bilateral and Multilateral Diplomacy.

Athletics have been used to strategically improve bilateral and multilateral co-operation



in Ethiopia. Sport partnerships, training exchanges and joint development programs have also seen athletics play a diplomatic role between Ethiopia and various foreign partners. As an example, the cooperation with Qatar has been aimed at the high-altitude training, exchange of athletes, cooperation in sport science, which is the general interest of Qatar in long-distance running and sport diplomacy (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018). Trade with China has involved infrastructure investment in stadiums and youth athletics, which is in line with China utilizing sport as a people-to-people instrument of its Africa policy (Li, 2018; Niu, 2020). Ethiopia has been heavily coached and assisted by Japan using their own culture of distance running and well-established international reputation in sport development (Kelly, 2021). Turkey has further increased its participation by sport development programs and training cooperation as an aspect of its cultural diplomacy in Africa which places athletics in its overall ability to engage in culture diplomacy in Africa (Aydın & Çolakoğlu, 2021).

The high-altitude training facilities in Ethiopia, Sululta, Bekoji, and Entoto are considered to be the centers of elite training of the European, Asian and the Middle Eastern athletes, turning into the center of sport tourism and unofficial diplomacy. According to scholars, sport tourism leads to the formation of social networks, a development of intercultural awareness, and national branding (Higham & Hinch, 2018). The case of Ethiopia where international athletes and coaches visit such centers promote diplomatic relations on the grassroots level, with the worldwide promotion

of the discourses about the natural training advantage of Ethiopia strengthening the international attractiveness of the country.

4.4 Athletics-Based National Branding

The fact that Ethiopia is called the Land of Runners has already become a recognizable national brand that is marketable internationally. National branding through athletics can be seen in terms of tourism promotion campaigns, high-altitude marathons, sport apparel collaborations and international awareness of the culture of running in Ethiopia. Athletics imagery and stories have been employed by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ethiopian Athletics Federation to advertise the Ethiopian landscapes, culture, and mountainous areas, boosting the global tourism image of the country (Ethiopian Tourism Organization, 2022). The commercialization of Ethiopian athletic identity with global sportswear companies has also strengthened the links between Ethiopia and long distance superiority (Cornelissen, 2010). Also, marathon and trail-running tourism organized in areas like Oromia and Amhara are open to international participation and serve as sport-tourism circuits with a direct impact of soft diplomacy, establishing the direct international interaction and cultural exchange. National branding theorists believe that sport identities have a strong ability to create certain external meanings about a nation by providing symbolic values and emotional appeal to the nation (Anholt, 2007; Fan, 2010). The fact that Ethiopia has been linked to stamina, inherent abilities, and athletic prowess is a strong branding resource that remains in the mind of the world. Athletics in this regard is not just a



competitive sport but is a diplomatic tool and cultural icon which makes Ethiopia more prominent throughout the world.

5. Football Diplomacy: Regional Influence and Missed Opportunities

Although the Ethiopian sporting successes have earned the nation a reputation outside the borders, the sport of football is a mass-appeal sport with high regional diplomacy that is untapped by the country. In comparison to athletics, Ethiopia has not had a consistent history at the international level as far as football is concerned, which restricts its soft-power influence outside East Africa. However, football serves as an important tool of regional diplomacy, especially in the process of attracting other countries as neighbors and creating people-to-people relations (Darby, 2013). Ethiopia was also one of the founding members of the Confederation of African football (CAF) in 1957 and it won the 1962 Africa cup of nations, highlighting its initial influence in African football politics. These initial successes made Ethiopia a strategist in the continental sphere of sport management and regional politics to enable the nation to impose an informal impact on the development of football in the East African region (Darby, 2013; Alegi, 2010).

In the region, football diplomacy has enabled Ethiopia to interact with other countries, including Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti and Uganda. Trade shows events like the CECAFA tournaments, friendly games, youth development programs, as well as peace-building games have seen football supplement the formal political dialogues by promoting cross-border relationships and social bonds.

CECAFA competitions (especially) offer a coordinated space of interaction between governments, sport federations, athletes and civil society thus enriching regional contacts and increase the presence of Ethiopia in the global diplomacy (Darby & Solberg, 2010). In addition, the ability of football to attract communities and trigger youth participation makes it a peace diplomat in conflict-prone states, particularly in border states of Ethiopia and its neighbors.

This potential notwithstanding, football diplomacy has some severe challenges in the modern context. Poor governance institutions of the Ethiopian Football Federation (Eff), lack of financial investment, inadequate stadium facilities, unreliable national team performance, as well as frequent changes in leadership are the reasons why football is not a viable utilization of soft-power (FIFA, 2022; Alegi, 2010). Such organizational inefficiencies limit how completely Ethiopia can use football to impact the region, international PR as well as cultural interaction. Nevertheless, there are still chances of improving the football diplomacy in Ethiopia. Investments in stadiums like Addis Ababa Stadium and regional facilities, and a partnership with CAF and FIFA, in order to offer youth development programs, can go a long way in enhancing the influence of Ethiopia in the sport diplomacy of East Africa. Organizing CECAFA tournaments and finding ways to incorporate football in peace-building activities are practical ways of using football as a diplomatic resource.

6. Ethiopia's Sport Diplomacy Architecture

The sport diplomacy of Ethiopia functions in an



intricate web of both the state and non-state actors. Nonetheless, it is paralyzed by institutional fragmentation and absence of strategic coordination that would make it work. Through the cultural diplomacy programs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has integrated sport in its cultural diplomacy efforts though it does not have a central unit of sport diplomacy, trained sport attaches and formal policies on arranging athlete ambassadors or working in a systematic relationship with sport federation. Although sport-related events are occasionally held in the embassies, they are not regular and not strategic in terms of being linked to the overall foreign policy (Benouzekri, M. 2024)

Ministry of Culture and Sport (MoCS) takes care of the sport development in the country, federations and the youth programs. However, its foreign involvement is small because of the lack of professional power and the poor coordination between ministries. The non-state actors, specifically Ethiopian Athletics Federation (EAF) are central in promoting soft power of Ethiopia using sport. The EAF handles elite athletes, enables them to take part in the forums of World Athletics, conduct international events, develops athlete branding to enable them to be seen worldwide (Gebremariam, 2019). Similarly, Ethiopian football federation (EFF) also joins CAF, FIFA and CECAFA in making regional diplomacy, but it is spoiled by unstable governance and lack of resources. The role of the primary liaison between the world of sport is played by Ethiopian Olympic Committee (EOC), which is increasingly becoming an agent of Olympic diplomacy, athletes management and

international collaboration programs (IOC, 2023).

Diaspora athletes are important to Ethiopia sport diplomacy as they are cultural representatives, philanthropists and bridges between Ethiopian and international sport communities. There is however, the issue with talent migration in relation to national identity, and the possible diplomatic advantages of the diaspora activity are unexploited. The interviews with the officials of MoFA and MoCS indicate a lack of systemic elements, such as the lack of national sport diplomacy strategy, ineffective coordination of stakeholders, no structured athlete ambassador programs, disjointed branding activities, and overuse of the potential of Ethiopian athletics. The key to the full utilization of the sport diplomacy potential in Ethiopia is the institutionalization of the collaboration of ministries, federations, and diasporas networks.

7. Ethiopian Sport Diplomacy in Action Case Studies.

The symbolic strength of athletics diplomacy was best demonstrated by the 1992 Olympic Games won by Derartu Tulu. Her actions of embracing her South African competitor after she has won a gold medal portrayed Ethiopia as a moral leader in the post-apartheid transition and strengthened African cohesiveness and empowerment of women (Adjaye, 2010). Sport and development interaction is manifested in the UN diplomacy of Haile Gebrselassie. Being the UN MDG Advocacy Group, he could meet the leaders of the world, represent Ethiopia in the global forums and promote sustainable development, which put Ethiopia in the spotlight worldwide due to his international



status (United Nations, 2015). Ethiopia Kenya athletic rivalry is an act of symbolic struggle and cooperation. Anti-doping, research, and training are all joint programs that promote collaboration without diminishing healthy competition and further promoting the sport diplomacy of regions and global awareness (Grix & Brannagan, 2016).

Lastly, the involvement of Ethiopia in CECAFA football matches shows the relevance of sport in regional integration, youth involvement and reduction of political tensions. CECAFA is also a vital arena whereby Ethiopia has practiced informal diplomacy and strengthened the relationship between people in East Africa (Darby and Solberg, 2010).

8. Sport Diplomacy in Ethiopia at regional and Continental Levels.

The fact that Ethiopia is the host of the African Union (AU) headquarters provides the country with a symbolic power in influencing the sport policy in the continent. Sport is one of the options that Agenda 2063 considers to be helpful in African identity, peacebuilding, and economic integration, but Ethiopia has not fully utilized this stance advantage (African Union Commission, 2015).

The old Ethiopia-Kenya athletic rivalry contributes to the branding of the two countries internationally in addition to encouraging collaboration in the preparation of Olympians, anti-doping and youth development. Sporting activities tend to act as a dilution process to political conflicts (Grix & Houlihan, 2014). Equally, sport in the intergovernmental authority on development (IGAD) helps to build peace, cross-border relations, and youth participation. Sport-for-peace initiatives

sponsored by the IGAD have enhanced relations along borders, and empowered Ethiopia as a regional actant of diplomacy (IGAD, 2021).

9. Opportunities and Challenges for Ethiopia's Sport Diplomacy

Ethiopia has several prospects of developing sport diplomacy. Its international sports image, elevated training base, diaspora connections, and its leadership capacity with the IGAD, CECAFA, and the headquarters of the African Union have solid backgrounds of strategic soft-power projection (Gebremariam, 2019).

Nevertheless, the nation struggles with major challenges such as poor institutional structures, poor governance by a federation, inadequate infrastructure, poor financial investments and talent drainage. These issues should be addressed in attempts to convert sport success into lasting diplomatic assets.

10. Policy Recommendations

In order to institutionalize and fortify sport diplomacy, Ethiopia needs to focus on six strategic moves:

1. Establish a Sport Diplomacy Unit at MoFA: Align the embassies, federations, and athlete ambassadors to achieve the alignment to the foreign policy goals.
2. Create an Athlete Ambassador Program: Identify top-tier athletes as official cultural ambassadors with definite diplomatic requirements.
3. Invest in Sport Infrastructure: Develop more region training centers, high altitude facilities and stadiums that will be utilized both in elite and grassroots sport diplomacy.



4. Intensify leadership in the Region: Chair the continental youth tournaments, sport-for-peace campaigns and policy frameworks to make Ethiopia stronger diplomatically.
5. Empower Football Diplomacy: Organize CECAFA tournaments, develop relations with CAF and FIFA and integrate football into the overall cultural and peace diplomacy policies.
6. Develop Monitoring and Evaluation Measures: Measure sport diplomacy performance in the domain of tourism, investment, public diplomacy and regional relations to ensure the evidence-based approach and accountability (Murray and Pigman, 2014).

11. Conclusion

Sport is one of the most influential but least used Ethiopian soft power tools. Athletics diplomacy has brought about a globally enviable status of Ethiopian stamina, superiority, and cultural diversity. Football has significant regional and public diplomatic opportunities and potential, but these are

constrained by governance and infrastructure issues. Diaspora athletes spread the Ethiopian transnational identity and cultural visibility. The regional organizations, IGAD, CECAFA, or the AU are the sources that can enable Ethiopia to increase its dominance in sponsoring sport across Africa.

The sport diplomacy in Ethiopia is non formal and fragmented, however. It is less strategic because it does not have a national strategy, inter-ministerial coordination is poor, there is instability in its governance and constrained by infrastructures. By making athletic success institutional, formalizing athlete ambassador programs, investing in infrastructure, and leveraging its status as the head of the African Union, Ethiopia can destroy athletic success and create long, lasting diplomatic resources. Having a long-term view of foreign policy, sport gives Ethiopia a specific avenue of soft power projection, which enhances ties with the region and attracts tourism and investment, not to mention consolidating the nation, which is beneficial to the interests of the country in the international arena.



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