Kicking around in Liberia. From rehabilitation of child soldiers to community development: the story of the Millennium Stars.

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Abstract

Football is increasingly put forward as a solution to Africa’s problems. The recent growth of the Sport, Development and Peace (SDP) sector in the last 20 to 30 years has begun to make use of the possibilities presented by football to deal with Africa’s social problems, notably in regard to peace-building and reconciliation.

However, the sector has not matched its enthusiasm for football-based SDP projects with action to analyse impact of such projects. It has become accepted that football is good for peace-building, with little empirical evidence offered to prove it.

Millennium Stars FC is a grassroots football team from Liberia, West Africa, who have been together for 15 years. They were promoted as an example of how to solve the problems for child combatants during the Liberian civil war up to 1996, and taken to the UK for a once-in-a-lifetime three-week tour. Now the team is training young payers using their own lives as an example.

While football can be seen as a solution to conflict, Millennium Stars are aiming to use it as a way to tackle endemic extreme poverty. This stage of their career has been more difficult as they have been largely without outside support.

The case study I present of Millennium Stars adds depth to the studies of football as a peace-building tool, but also asks questions about football as a tool for tackling poverty.

In the conclusion, I suggest that SDP projects like the Millennium Stars need to be supported because they address the real long-term grassroots issues.
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Abbreviations

BUSA  Bosco United Sports Association
CAFOD  Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
DBH  Don Bosco Homes
DDR  Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
FIFA  Federation Internationale de Football Association
      (International Federation of Association Football)
INPFL  Independent National Patriotic Front for Liberia
LFA  Liberian Football Association
MYSA  Mathare Youth Sports Association
NPFL  National Patriotic Front for Liberia
NGO  non-governmental organisation
OECD  Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
S&D  Sport and Development
SDP  Sport, Development and Peace
ULIMO  United Liberation Movement for Liberia
ULIMO-J  United Liberation Movement for Liberia, Roosevelt Johnson faction
ULIMO-K  United Liberation Movement for Liberia, Alhaji Kromah faction
Figure 1: Millennium Stars in 2010. (Left to right) Moses Barcon, Nusee Cooper, Prince Momo, Abraham Clarke, Teku Nahn, Kunta Varney, Christian Neh
Chapter One

1.1: Introduction:

“When everyone unites, anything is possible.” In the 2010 film Africa United, football and the teamwork it engenders become the symbol of a world where everything goes right.¹

The avowedly feelgood film², especially when compared with other recent films about Africa such as Lord of War and Blood Diamond, portrayed an Africa where football is the solution to all the continent’s problems. Ethnic conflict, child soldiers, poverty, AIDS, child sex workers and lack of education are all dealt with by five kids who bond during a 3,000-mile trek from Rwanda to South Africa so that one – a talented footballer – can take part in and showcase his ball skills at the opening ceremony of the World Cup.

In 2010, the world’s soccer governing body FIFA made a strong link between football and development in Africa through its flagship event, the FIFA World Cup in South Africa. The tournament would not only help the development of the game in Africa, but would also benefit the people of Africa through associated charity activities and campaigns: “When South Africa became the first African country to win the rights to host the competition in 2005, FIFA made a commitment that the tournament would not only benefit football but would leave a lasting legacy for the hosts as well as fellow African countries. Amongst those [benefits] have been the ‘Win in Africa with Africa’ project, FIFA’s Football for Hope campaign aiming to build 20 Centres of Hope across the African continent and the Goal project [which campaigns for education].”³

The aim of this investigation is to look at the possibilities of football for reconciliation, but also as a means of individual and community development in Africa. One shortcoming of studies of sport

¹ Cinematic trailer: http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi2728200473/
² Official website: http://www.africaunitedmovie.com/
and development projects has been a lack of deep analysis. I hope to add depth with a case study over 15 years of Millennium Stars FC, a grassroots football club set up in Liberia in 1997, and still running in the present day.

Millennium Stars began in Gbangaye Town, a slum in Monrovia, as little more than a regular kick-about for young teenagers living locally with nothing to do after the end of the war. In 1999, however, they toured the UK, in a project devised by local non-governmental organisation (NGO) Don Bosco Homes and UK NGO CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development) to draw attention to the plight of child soldiers in Liberia and highlight the potential for unification that football brought.

From 2000 to 2003, Millennium Stars struggled to build on the attention and investment they received and hoped to receive as a result of the tour, until war erupted again and drove them apart. They re-started the club in late 2004, not just to play in the national Liberia leagues, but also with an aim to pass on their learning to younger players. In 2008-09, they were involved in plans for a second trip to the UK, with original members bringing their own youth team, but the project was scrapped because of the global recession. Their continuing efforts to run a grassroots soccer academy were highlighted by visits from Adrian Chiles and a BBC crew filming for Sport Relief in 2008, and by Paul Robson, son of Sir Bobby Robson⁴, in 2010, when Millennium Stars were one of the teams to benefit from huge donations of football shirts to mark the passing of Sir Bobby.

I will ask two questions in this study, based on the two distinct eras in Millennium Stars FC history: The first is: *What was football’s role in peace-building in an immediate post-war context?*

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⁴ Sir Robert William “Bobby” Robson was a well-known English football player and manager. He played nearly 600 matches and scored more than 100 goals, and later managed Ipswich Town, Barcelona, Newcastle United and England, among others. He died on July 31, 2009, aged 76.
Although with hindsight, it can be seen that there were several false starts in the peace process during this period rather than actual peace, at the time it was believed that war was finished in 1997.

Secondly: What is football’s role in promoting peace and development in a long-term context?
The second question is more about the relationship between extreme poverty and conflict – if one leads to the other, is it enough just to reconcile the soldiers? What, if anything, can be done to promote change through sport? What are the opportunities for education – and social education – as well as building long-term social capital, and providing opportunities for livelihoods?

The structure I intend to use will cover two main areas. The first will be an examination of the background and context to the history of Millennium Stars. This will consist of a review of the emerging Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) sector, and the role of sport in general and football in particular, in Africa and in Liberia; a look at existing some examples particularly in peace-building and a contrast with MYSA (Mathare Youth Sports Association) – a grassroots football and community development project in Kenya – and a description of the role of SDP projects in development education.

Secondly, I will present a case study of the Millennium Stars FC and their context. It will begin with a summation of the historical context of the country of Liberia from the 1820s to the present, focussing particularly on the civil unrest of December 1989 to August 2003 and the transitional period from 2003 to the present. Then I will describe the Millennium Stars story from 1996 to the present, followed by an analysis of their role in the context of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes for child soldiers in Liberia, the role of Millennium Stars academy in the context of African soccer schools and discussions around using football for economic development. The section will end with a comparison between theories of the functions of sport, the
symbolic concept of sport to the individual and sport’s uses to bring about social change with an interview conducted with one senior Millennium Stars member.

The case study is derived from personal knowledge of the team and its history from 1997 to the present day; a written history and background and overview of significant events in their story, written by player/organiser Christian Neh in 2009; formal interviews with members of the team about their experiences and about the significance of their time with Millennium Stars that I conducted in January 2008 and in August 2011. I will focus on material gathered from four individuals – Christian Neh, Prince Momo, Nusee Cooper and Abraham Clarke – all members of Millennium Stars since 1997, participants in the UK Tour in 1999, and organising new Millennium Stars since 2004.

I also have access to interviews conducted with Millennium Stars in 1999, shortly before their UK tour. This is unpublished material and focuses heavily on the experiences of various team members as soldiers and victims of the war in Liberia from 1989 to 1996. Some of this interview material contains sensitive information relating to several boys’ experiences as child soldiers. As these interviews were conducted when the subjects were children, that 14 years have passed since the recordings were made and that the circumstances of the individual and the context of the country have vastly changed, I think it is important the subjects of those interviews remain anonymous.

I also have a variety of cuttings and published materials from the time of the 1999 UK Tour, from various sources including national UK newspapers and the internet, and from publicity around the 2008 and 2010 visits by Adrian Chiles and Paul Robson.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Christian Neh, Brief History of Millennium Stars (unpublished 2009)
My analysis of the case study of Millennium Stars, will focus on three perspectives in the study of sport, as identified by Grant Jarvie in *Sport, Culture and Society*. 6

The first deals with the functions of football – what was Millennium Stars for? The second deals with the symbolic interaction of individuals with their sport – What does or did football mean to them? The final part deals with historical sociology – What change was attempted, by whom and how, within what historical context, and what succeeded or failed?

The first part of the Millennium Stars case study will look at the functions of football as outlined by Jarvie 7 - socio-emotional, socialisation, integrative, political and social mobility – and examine how they have been relevant to the history of Millennium Stars. Some of the emphasis will have changed or transformed as the team has progressed, so for example, where ‘integration’ was verbalised as a key function initially in the context of warring factions and to a lesser extent tribes, its role later is a lesser one; while socialisation – the inculcation of a particular Millennium Stars worldview and way of behaviour – and the function of football for social mobility have, though present initially, come to have more emphasis in the latter period.

Part two of the analysis of the case study focuses on the perceptions of those involved in the team about what they are doing and what it means to them. Jarvie calls this “symbolic interactionism” 8 meaning football 9 as a symbol, and the interaction of individuals with it. He identifies this as “… a fluid process of interaction between self and society. … an athlete’s career and the extent to which sport contributes to personal identity or feelings of loss or achievement … an

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7 Jarvie, *Sport, Culture and Society* p23
8 Jarvie, *Sport, Culture and Society*, p24
9 Jarvie talks about sport in general, but I have substituted the word football to be more specific in this case, and also because the functions are even more applicable to football
understanding of the self in relation to other humans ... how status is negotiated or loss of status is dealt with.”

This second section aims to show the way football has been central to the lives of the members of the Millennium Stars, but also how their perceptions of its role and purpose in their lives has changed in the 14 years they have been members of the club.

Their own feelings of discouragement and/or achievement are tied to their perceptions of success or failure in terms of Millennium Stars and their roles within it as players, coaches, and organisers. The group that went to UK in 1999 comprises some who dropped out soon afterwards, some who dropped out several years afterwards and some who have kept going to the present day.

Finally, as Jarvie states, “while it is important to explain and understand sport in society, the more important intellectual and practical questions emanate from questions relating to social change,”¹⁰ so in this section I will look at the ways Millennium Stars have sought to act or campaign for change; how their activities and example have contributed to accruing social capital and how they could do this further.

It is also illuminating to consider the symbolic role of George Weah, Liberia’s most famous citizen, who – while the Liberia war was at its height in the mid-1990s – was thought by many the world’s best footballer, and later crowned African Player of the Century¹¹, and who is the only player in history to be voted African, European and World Player of the Year simultaneously (in 1995).¹² Later he was the self-appointed player-manager of the national soccer team, Lone Star, and provided kit and transport from his own pocket. Later still he ran for President of Liberia in 2005 and is

¹⁰ Jarvie, Sport, Culture and Society, P36
¹¹ George Manneh Oppong Weah http://www.liberiansoccer.com/George%20Weah.htm
¹² George Manneh Oppong Weah http://www.liberiansoccer.com/George%20Weah.htm
campaigning for the Vice Presidency in the next election in October 2011. What were or are the expectations placed on him? How did his example help or hinder reconciliation or long-term development?

This dissertation is guided by Jarvie’s explanation of the role sport plays in creating cultural and national identities to show the role football played in the national psyche of Liberians as demonstrated by members of Millennium Stars, as they sought to envision a new Liberia focussed on football success. As Jarvie says: “Sport often provides a uniquely effective medium for inculcating national feelings; it provides a form of symbolic action which states the case for the nation itself.”

By documenting the history of Millennium Stars and by investigating their own perceptions of themselves and their activities during that history, I hope to shed light on what part they have played – either with success or failure – in affecting social change. Millennium Stars FC seems to have the potential to be both an end in itself – as a means of democratising Liberian football and making it a better way for young players to come through to strengthen the national team – but more importantly a means to an end – reintegrating child soldiers, building social capital and strengthening civil society to help democratic Liberia re-build, grow, and develop: how football has been their way of playing a part in the imaginative creation of a new Liberia. (building community/civil society/social capital)

1.3 Interview Methodology

The information gathered in this research from Millennium Stars members is from their lived and personal experiences over the last 15 years, from 1997 to 2011, and will look at their own

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15 Jarvie, Sport, Nationalism and Cultural Identity, p74
16 Jarvie: Jarvie, Sport, Culture and Society, p328
perceptions of any changes, positive or negative. Three sets of interviews (1997, 2008, and 2011) have been transcribed by the author. Interviews, carried out by the author from 2008 and 2011 are with the same subjects so that data gathered from them can be compared over time.

The 1999 interviews exist on two one-hour unedited pieces of film transferred digitally to computer using the software Windows Movie Maker. The 2008 interviews also consist of two one-hour unedited pieces of films transferred digitally to computer using the software Windows Movie Maker. The 2011 interviews were conducted via Skype – audio only – and recorded directly onto a PC using the software programme Audacity.

The interviews give qualitative results. This is appropriate in this study as it allows for the chance the participant may make an unusual or surprising connection or perception. The aim has been to enter the participants’ world and look at it from their perspective. It assumes that individuals are capable of understanding their own lives and circumstances and reflecting on them.

Similar lines of questioning are present on the occasions of all three interviews: What is the purpose of Millennium Stars? What is the benefit of Millennium Stars? What is your goal through Millennium Stars? What difference has Millennium Stars made? This will provide some indicators of trends and patterns.

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17 Carried out by Tim Hetherington on behalf of CAFOD
Figure 2: Young Millennium Stars versus Unity FC, 2010
Chapter 2

2.1 Sport, Development and Peace (SDP)

Football is the global game\(^\text{19}\) – a force that connects diverse peoples and cultures across the globe, as purveyors, practitioners and consumers of a single globalized entity. It is not one homogeneous entity however; football is a key example of what Robertson has defined as ‘glocalisation’\(^\text{20}\) – the interplay of the global and the local: football is governed by an international body, FIFA\(^\text{21}\), with globally accepted rules and more members than the United Nations\(^\text{22}\) – FIFA has 208 member countries\(^\text{23}\), the UN has 193\(^\text{24}\) – and yet, football is characterized by its distinct local variations; individual continents, countries and teams have developed and maintained recognizably distinct styles.

Football has also been associated with both the global good and the global ill: fair play, human development, international communication, social equality and business on one hand; on the other hooliganism, ethnic/regional/tribal tension and unfettered capitalism. Sport and football particularly have grown as a development tool and an instrument of global civil society in the last 20 to 25 years, particularly in terms of peace-building, and academics are beginning to gather detailed information from a variety of project sources about the sport and development sector. This research is situated within the ongoing studies of that developing sector.

2.2 Sport and peace-building – the rise of a sector

In 2005, the UN’s International Year of Sport and Physical Education incorporated sport into their global policies and projects, recognizing the reach of sport and its potential in many areas,


\(^{20}\) Giulianotti & Robertson, *Globalization & Football*, p32

\(^{21}\) Federation Internationale de Football Association, or the International Federation of Association Football

\(^{22}\) Giulianotti & Robertson, *Globalization & Football* Prologue

\(^{23}\) Figures as of 2008. Not counting an unknown number of non-recognised states, stateless peoples, ethnic minorities, micro-nations and others who are not affiliated with FIFA, yet still play representative matches.

including peace-building.\textsuperscript{25} The UN hoped for international NGOs and sporting bodies to take up the cause and spread information and interest in subsequent years. As a result, various organisations and coalitions have grown up around the use of sport and football in particular for social development and peace-building – Homeless World Cup, streetfootballworld, Football for Development and Right to Play, as well as the International Platform for Sport and Development (Sportanddev.org) – and Giulianotti (2009, 2010, 2011)\textsuperscript{26} has done extensive work to map out the rise of the sector. Where the international platform – sportanddev.org – terms the sector S&D (Sport and Development), Giulianotti calls it SDP (Sport, Development and Peace).\textsuperscript{27} The sector is in the process of gathering existing information and establishing communication and networks, at the same time as moving to improve monitoring and evaluation. It is young and vigorous, while appearing slightly lightweight in academic terms.

Giulianotti describes the SDP sector as a relatively new phenomenon, and, sets out some of the characteristics and limitations of the sector as a whole – scarce analysis of impact, concentration on peacemaking over other social justice issues, a tendency towards hierarchical and unbalanced power structures on a North-South axis.

Building up from a variety of sport and development ‘one-offs’ in the 90s that aimed to address specific issues in particular contexts, he says, with “relatively little focus on sustainability, monitoring and evaluation of work, international coordination, or knowledge transfer,”\textsuperscript{28} the SDP sector began to develop more rigorous frameworks of target-setting and evaluation in the aftermath

\textsuperscript{25} A Year for Sport http://www.un.org/sport2005/a_year/s_peace.html
\textsuperscript{26} Richard Giulianotti: Sport peacemaking and conflict resolution: a contextual analysis and modelling of the sport development and peace sector, Sport, Transnational Peacemaking, and Global Civil Society: Exploring the Reflective Discourses of “Sport, Development, and Peace” Project officials; The Sport, Development and Peace Sector: A Model of Four Social Policy Domains
\textsuperscript{27} Giulianotti, R. Sport, peacemaking and conflict analysis and modelling of the sport, development and peace sector. Ethnic and Racial Studies, (2011) Vol 34, No 2, pp 207-228
\textsuperscript{28} Giulianotti, Sport, peacemaking and conflict analysis p 211 – also Armstrong (2007); Lea-Howarth (2006)
of the UN’s International Year of Sport and Physical Education in 2005. Although individual cases covered a broad cross-section of issues, such as “racism, intolerance and prejudice; ... health education and gender equality; and to tackle crime and social exclusion” Giulianotti identifies peace-building as a large strand and concentrates on it. “Largely driven by Global North agencies, much SDP work is conducted in the Global South or regions ravaged by warfare, social breakdown and natural disaster.” There has been a tendency for the sector to demonstrate “asymmetrical power relationships between North and South.”

Giulianotti defines three models of SDP project: technical, dialogical and critical. The first and second are the most commonly found at the moment, where they are largely directed from the outside by international NGOs or institutions or are even as part of corporate social responsibility projects of transnational giants. The technical model of SDP project often uses sport for no other end than as a means of getting people together to practise sport and develop their skills; social cohesion is built on the field of contest, or through interacting together as part of the procedures of a tournament.

Some examples in the dialogical model at least offer the possibility of changing the rules to facilitate the ends – e.g. a goal scored by a girl counts double or no goals count until a girl scores would be a rule-change that would facilitate equality of gender or offer a space for gender questions to be asked. Where the technical model might offer coaching in a sport sponsored by a global drinks manufacturer, the dialogical model is more likely to offer coaching to coaches, who can cascade the learning into their communities, along with any add-ons particular to the social issue being addressed – eg gender imbalance, or ethnic or religious tension.

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30 Giulianotti, Sport, peacemaking and conflict analysis p208
31 Giulianotti, Sport, peacemaking and conflict analysis p209
32 Giulianotti, Sport, peacemaking and conflict analysis p223
The critical model is the least developed, according to Giulianotti, but offers most transformational possibilities, being based in and directed from the grassroots, as well as having less emphasis on the sport’s own ends as an end of the project – i.e. merely creating a team so that it will win, or coaching players only so they will improve in that sport. However, the critical model seems to be vague in detail of real examples, and although written from the point of view of inclusion, seem to still be based on intervention by northern or at least external agencies.

Giulianotti believes that the comparative infancy of the Sport, Development and Peace (SDP) sector means researchers have yet to “produce ... analytical and generalized work” beyond case studies, and his study locates the sector “in political terms, as an increasingly important component of ‘global civil society’.”

With his express focus on peace-building – chosen because of constraints on space, assuredly – Giulianotti loses the opportunity to broaden the analysis to the uses of sport and particularly football for wider social justice issues or to deepen the analysis to ask what sport can do – if anything – to address the causes of conflict – which may be rooted in the imbalances caused by extreme poverty – as well as to patch up its effects. SDP is part of Global Civil Society, he says: “[p]rojects benefit from sport’s immersion within other cultural practices that engender inter-communal contact.” That sport and football on the surface may be of use in tackling the obvious faultlines in broken or divided societies is no longer the debate. What is needed is deeper analysis as to how they may address the

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33 Giulianotti, Sport, peacemaking and conflict analysis p 208
34 Giulianotti, Sport, peacemaking and conflict analysis p 208
35 Definition of Civil Society, London School of Economics: “Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women’s organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_School_of_Economics
36 Giulianotti, Sport, peacemaking and conflict analysis 220
submerged yet entrenched perceptions of injustice and inequality that bring about the tensions between groups in the first place. Giulianotti’s analysis provides a solid starting point to asking critical questions about the sector.

2.3 SDP in practice

The International Platform for Sport and Development (Sportanddev.org) was constituted in Windhoek, Namibia on September 18, 2007. It is a website dedicated entirely to the field of Sport and Development and provides “a hub for sharing knowledge, building good practice, facilitating coordination and fostering partnerships between and within different stakeholders in [SDP].”

Sportanddev.org links practitioners and interested parties around the world through its website and by a regular email to members of the coalition. Joining is voluntary and open to all, but limited by the reach of the worldwide web. The site offers a toolkit on the practical implementation of SDP projects, project reviews supplied by members; and information on SDP’s thematic areas, such as education and child development, peace-building, disability and disaster response, health, gender and economic development. As a snapshot of the sector, the website backs up Giulianotti’s depiction of a sector in its infancy but expanding. As a central communication portal and clearing house for information and communication, it is beginning to address the needs of members, but still is dependent on submissions by the same members and is consequently lacking in academic focus.

In its thematic profile on peace-building, Sportanddev.org quotes John Paul Lederach, Professor of International Peacebuilding, at Notre Dame University, Indiana for a definition of the concept of peace-building:

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38 International Platform on Sport and Development
http://www.sportanddev.org/en/about_this_platform/governance/steering_board/

39 Although sportanddev.org refers to S&D, I will keep using Giulianotti’s acronym SDP throughout this paper
http://www.sportanddev.org/en/about_this_platform/vision_mission_goals22/

40 Cited by Lea-Howarth and others. Becoming the standard for peace-building in SDP.
“...a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships...”

Sport can be an innovative, say Sportanddev.org, in the creation of the ‘relational spaces’ that Lederach emphasizes as important as a part of peace-building:

“The nature of conflicts since the Cold War is widely perceived to have changed, taking place between rival groups within a nation state rather than between nation states. The OECD\textsuperscript{43} cites ‘cycles of civil violence’ as characterising these conflicts, which occur predominantly in developing countries, affecting civilians the most. Increasing attention is thus being paid to the role of civil society in peace-building processes, emphasising a ‘relational’ response to reducing violence and tension between competing groups by fostering positive relationships.”

Sportanddev.org cites several examples of the successful implementation of sports programmes (mostly football) that bring together formerly opposing factions, in countries as varied as Libya, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Liberia. In the last-named, they offer a case study of the 2007 Lofa Peace Dream Cup, organised by the NGO Right to Play. The project took place in Lofa County in 2007 – a county much affected by the Liberian Civil War, particularly in terms of religious as well as tribal tension – and involved a week-long mixed football tournament for 240 children from “all ethnic, religious, gender and age boundaries”, with the rule that “only girls can score”. Messages of peace,

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{43} Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
\bibitem{44} Sport and Peace-building: Thematic profile
\url{http://assets.sportanddev.org/downloads/090611_sport_and_peacebuilding_profile_for_print.pdf}
\end{thebibliography}

\textsuperscript{45} This kind of "local rule" derives from the work of Jurgen Griesbeck, founder of streetfootballworld with gangs in Colombia \url{http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2009/may/01/football}
cooperation, communication and inclusion were “embraced by about 3,000 individuals,” and, according to the report, “demonstrated the unifying effects of sports on the community.”

Several participants gave favourable quotes about the project, for example: “The tournament was very much in line with community development. I am looking forward to the next tournament. As a Kissi woman I felt good to mix with young people from other tribes in sports. I believe sports can bring people of different tribes and faiths together.”

To balance the success shown in the case studies, the Sportanddev.org thematic profile gives a warning that sport should be part of “a holistic approach that is sensitive and tailored to the political, economic and socio-cultural context. Sport ... should be considered as just one among many components…”

In many ways, this example from the sportanddev.org. thematic approach falls neatly into Giulianiotti’s second category – ‘diological’ – but shows some of the limitations of such projects. The Lofa Peace Dream Cup was not a one-off but the reporting seems to take place only on one occasion. The claims for success are vague, and there is little verification of the long-term outcomes or the reasons why sport is a ‘unifying’ force. Evidence – such as it is – comes from the mouths of the participants, interviewed shortly after an exhilarating and adrenaline-inducing experience. In this example, emphasis is placed on gender issues by introducing the ‘only girls can score’ rule, and yet the project is explicitly aimed at religious and ethnic integration. Was there any attempt to mix teams on ethnic or religious lines? How would an ‘only Mandingos can score’ or ‘only Muslims can score’ rule have worked? Were they using girls as symbols of all excluded parties?

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47 P13, Sport and Peace-building: Thematic profile P13
Commentators, such as Coalter, agree with Giulianotti about the lack of a “strong cumulative body of research evidence” to back up the claims of sport as a socio-cultural tool for reconciliation and development. But while lacking depth, credit must be given to the NGOs for frequently leavening their enthusiasm for sport as a community-builder with caveats such as this:

“It is important to be aware that there are limitations to peace-building through sport ... In general, peace-building is a fragile and unpredictable process. Sport for peace initiatives, undertaken in complex and volatile contexts, are the same in this regard. To be effective, they must be strategic and undertaken in coordination with other key stakeholders in the peace-building process — not by sport organizations alone — especially during periods of conflict.”

While the specific projects have a tendency towards being top-down (or ‘outside-in’), and shallow reporting seems common, there have been a number of case studies chronicling successful sport and peace-building in a number of diverse locations, such as N Ireland (Sugden), Palestine-Israel (Sugden), and Liberia (Armstrong) and the weight of evidence is that sport can be a useful tool for reconciliation, even if the reasons why are not always clearly developed.

2.4 Sport and community development

Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), the flagship community sports project in Africa, can be found in the Mathare slum in Nairobi, Kenya. It is an example of an SDP project featuring football

50 Right to Play: Sport And Peace Social Inclusion, Conflict Prevention And Peace-Building
52 John Sugden, Teaching and playing sport for conflict resolution and co-existence in Israel 2006 International review for the sociology of sport, 41/2, 221-240
where the main focus is not peace-building but community development. According to the MYSA website,54 “MYSA is a development project which pioneered the linking of sports with social improvement and community development activities. Today MYSA is the largest self-help youth sports and community service organization in Africa. Over 15,000 youth now participate in the different MYSA programmes.”

Established in 1987, MYSA organizes a wide range of sports and community development activities: “involving youth in development; linking sport and environmental cleanup; reducing diseases and death in slums; tackling the aids threat; reducing substance abuse; helping young leaders stay in school; helping Mathare youth excel in school; encouraging young artistic talents; helping jailed kids; changing gender attitudes; practising good governance and accountability; expanding horizons and hopes; creating new role models; changing public images of slums; changing distorted images of Africa.”55

Like the SDP sector in its earliest stages, in MYSA there was initially “no clear ideology involved other than a hunch about the potential a popular sport such as football might have as a means of social development.”56 An early kickabout led to a group of slum kids telling a visiting Canadian referee they would “remove garbage if he gave them a new football. This laid the foundation for the MYSA principle: ‘You do something, MYSA does something. You do nothing; MYSA does nothing.’”57

At one level, the MYSA senior team has secured sponsorship and won the national Kenyan League and participated in the Confederation of African Football (CAF) Champions League, at the

54 Mathare Youth Sports Association www.mysakenya.org/  
57 Hognestad and Tollisen, Playing against Deprivation p212
other, the same players – themselves products of MYSA’s system – work as coaches with slum teams back in Mathare.

The whole association is based on a simple code of conduct “for those who want to be winners on and off the field ... no indiscipline; no unfair play, no retaliation, no fouls, no appeals, respect the coach, respect the captain, respect teammates, respect opponents, respect the officials, respect myself and the environment”.

Discipline leads to empowerment. From 1997, young MYSA members have been “controlling their own publicity” through the MYSA Shootback project, photos from which appeared in a book, and the website talks of their attempts to empower the community: “We purposely chose that name [Mathare Youth Sports Association] because one of our goals is to change the bad and unfair reputation of Mathare.”

MYSA has provided livelihoods for numerous coaches and community leaders in the last 24 years. It aims to transform its community by tackling extreme poverty in all its manifestations from the inside out, and for however long it takes.

The example of MYSA has been an inspiration and there are other effective sport and community development projects in other Nairobi slums: e.g. St John’s Sports Society in Korogocho, and Amani Kibera Sports Foundation in the vast Kibera slum.

2.5 Sport in development education

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58 Hognestad and Tollisen, Playing against Deprivation p226
59 Hognestad and Tollisen, Playing against Deprivation p214
60 Mathare Youth Sports Association www.mysakenya.org/
The use of examples from the SDP sector in the field of development education is under-analysed. The term development education is a contested one and other synonyms may be used for the same process of addressing global issues in a school context, such as global education, global citizenship, or even conscientisation or politicisation. The current standard in the UK seems to be to refer to it as ‘the global dimension’. A definition of the global dimension goes thus:

“The global dimension incorporates the key concepts of global citizenship, conflict resolution, diversity, human rights, interdependence, social justice, sustainable development and values and perceptions. It explores the interconnections between the local and the global. It builds knowledge and understanding, as well as developing skills and attitudes.”

While implementation of SDP projects is something of a niche area and tends to be dominated by agencies specifically dedicated to using sport, during the world’s mega-sporting events such as the World Cup or the Olympics, a wide range of organisations produce educational resources focusing on SDP. In terms of development education, SDP offers great opportunities for a wide cross-section of development agencies to educate supporters about global issues because of the accessibility of and blanket coverage by the media of the global mega sports event. SDP gives educators positive images from the developing world, and an accessible entrance point for audiences that are generally difficult to reach on development issues, such as teenage boys. International sport also gives examples of a different world order, where Ethiopians are among the best in athletics, where the USA is still a developing nation in soccer, where India is the centre of riches and glamour in cricket.

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61 Developing the global dimension in the school curriculum (2005) DfES
During the South Africa World Cup in 2010, the UK’s Development Education Association’s global dimension charity ‘Think Global’ compiled a list of 20 links to teaching resources on the global dimension about South Africa and/or football to tie in with the 2010 World Cup, from organisations as diverse as Oxfam, Kickitout, and the Geographical Association.

In the UK, the biennial charity event Sports Relief – organised by Comic Relief and BBC Sport – brings together the worlds of sport and entertainment to raise money to help vulnerable people in both the UK and the world's poorest countries. In 2010, £31,000,000 was pledged on the night of the broadcast, but educational aims are also part of the campaign as well as fundraising. The Sport Relief website features educational resources focusing on sport as well as fundraising guides.

Figure 3: Young Millennium Stars and organisers with Paul Robson 2010

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64 Sport Relief [http://www.sportrelief.com/](http://www.sportrelief.com/)
Chapter 3

3.1 History of Liberia, and the Civil War, 1989 to 2003

After Liberia ratified its constitution in 1847, it was ruled by settlers arriving from the USA or their descendants. The settlers, also know as Americo-Liberians or Congo people, installed themselves as a ruling elite originally on land bought by the African Colonization Society under US President James Monroe. The names of Liberia’s Governors and Presidents are commemorated in buildings, places and towns across the country and point to their provenance in America’s Deep South: Buchanan, Roberts, Spriggs-Payne, Cheeseman, Barclay, Tubman etc. The system was based on paternalism, with a limited number of indigenous Liberians sponsored through education by rich patrons from the settler community.

In 1980, a military coup installed the first native Liberian as President, Samuel Kanyon Doe. Doe was himself overthrown in 1990 after a rebellion led by Charles Taylor, a former minister in his own Government and now leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). The Taylor rebellion began in December 1989 and drew popular support across the country, particularly from Gio and Mano tribes oppressed by the previous regime. President Doe was lured from safety, tortured and murdered by Prince Johnson of the breakaway INPFL. After sporadic fighting and skirmishing across the country between Taylor’s NPFL, a new group of rebels ULIMO, and ECOMOG the supposed peace-keepers, Taylor won the 1997 election. Although deemed free and fair at the time by outside observers, it is now evident the populace voted for Taylor out of fear,

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65 I first wrote a version of this summary of the Liberian war in my research paper for Transitional Justice: POL 8037 Moving towards Justice. Failures and unexpected successes in the process of transition in Liberia.
66 Prince is a forename in Liberia and not a royal title.
67 Former warlord, currently Senator for Nimba County.
68 Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
69 United Liberation Movement for Liberia
70 ECOMOG, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group was the peace-keeping force operating under the auspices of ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States. It consisted of soldiers from Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.
shown in the election chant of some of his supporters: “You killed my ma, you killed my pa; I’ll [still] vote for you.”

In pre-1980 Liberia, nepotism and patronage formed the backbone of the country’s political and social structures. The Doe and Taylor Presidencies added violence to the cronyism and kleptocracy. More rebel factions sprang up to oppose Taylor who was persistently linked with the atrocities committed by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in neighbouring Sierra Leone. In summer 2003, with armed rebels surrounding Monrovia, Taylor was charged with war crimes in Sierra Leone, including the use of child soldiers, and he fled to Nigeria, where he was granted asylum until 2007. He was then extradited to face charges in the Hague under the auspices of Special Court for Sierra Leone.

The proliferation of rebel groups each with its own leader and acronym is telling; in spite of the nods to Liberation, Patriotism, Democracy, and Reconciliation in their names, none was distinguishable from any other from a political standpoint and all existed for the sole purpose of self-aggrandisement: “From its inception in December 1989, the war had been waged primarily as an instrument to capture power and wealth. At various stages over the following 14 years, all armed factions had shown a willingness to switch from war to politics to achieve their ends whenever circumstances made this switch propitious.”

3.2 Millennium Stars history

Millennium Stars’ story splits easily into two parts. The first part takes them to the UK on a successful tour, then back to Liberia and the rise and fall of the Millennium Stars football academy, and to apparent split as the war re-starts. The second part tells of the Stars’ re-birth, and their

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71 Sarah Left, War in Liberia. (2003), The Guardian.  
http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/aug/04/westafrica.qanda

72 LURD – Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, and MODEL – Movement for Democracy in Liberia

struggle to set up a humanitarian project in their home city to work with disadvantaged children like themselves through football.

In 1996, the war was over, or so people thought, and all everybody wanted was a return to normality. Survivors separated from their families by the fighting were coming back together, finding out who was still alive, looking for ways to bring in a few dollars, and waiting for schools to re-open. A bunch of lads living in the Gbangaye Town area started getting together on the Gbangaye Town field to play football.

Gbangaye Town is an urban slum in Monrovia south of 24th Street, Sinkor, bounded to the east by Cheeseman Avenue and to the west by the road known locally as ‘Airfield Shortcut’ that heads directly from Tubman Boulevard to James Spriggs Payne Airfield. Once off the paved road, Gbangaye Town is quiet and self-contained, like a village in the interior. It has its own video club, mosque, casino, town square and town chief, all on an intimate scale. At the north end is the Gbangaye Town field – a large rectangle of sandy scrub land, frequently washed away down the westward slope during the rainy season. Adjacent walls form the limits of the pitch.

The group of friends would gather several times a week to train and play with other lads they met there and a few mates they called in from other nearby neighbourhoods. The local people were still wary – a group of teenage boys getting together for any reason triggered alarms bells. The war had turned society upside down. Children became the aggressors and adults had to do their bidding. If you were a healthy teenage boy, people thought you must have been a fighter.

Whether fighter or not, all had stories about the horrors the war had brought. Millennium Stars Goalkeeper Nusee Cooper:
“I was five years old when rebels attacked a local church where my family and I had gone to seek refuge. We had to walk for about nine hours [to get away].

“The journey was tough because we had no food or water. Children lost their lives trying to cross a swamp, while others drank from streams that had corpses at the top. We managed to survive without drinking any water along the way, because my mom made a wise decision not to drink from streams on grounds that she did not trust their sources. I think it was just a divine intervention. We needed his blessings, as anyone could easily be killed only because of tribal differences or how they spoke. Our survival was actually at the mercy of their perception.

“The journey continued, and then came my toughest moment as a child after seeing several dead bodies. It was the time when I was to witness the killing of my mother who was accused of being a Mandingo woman. This was far from the truth, but there was no means of defending her. My uncle tried to talk, but was ordered to leave.

“We left in tears and waited for the sound of the gun, to be sure of her death, but God was there to perform his miracle. According to my mom, she was given a cup of cane juice. This was done to prove that she wasn't a Mandingo. She failed because she never drank cane juice. They all rejoiced and said: “You see da Mandingo woman, en I told your!” She said all she could see was total darkness. The gun was again pointed at her, but by then their commander had arrived and he said, 'Hey, my man, stop. That woman is innocent.' The guy declined [to kill her] and she was eventually set free.”

Football provided the only bright spots during the previous seven years. One of football’s famous sayings is that when Liberia played at home during the civil war, the guns fell silent. George Weah was playing in Europe for AC Milan and was named World, African and European Player of the Year in 1995. He was supporting the Liberian national team, Lone Star, out of his own pocket and they qualified for their first ever African Nations tournament in January 1996. South Africa, back after the apartheid ban was lifted, was host. Lone Star got off to a tremendous start, beating Gabon 2-1 in their first game, and only went out of the tournament on goal difference.

Then in April 1996 came an infamous chapter in the war in Liberia – a rampage of looting, killing and terror known as “April 6,” which began on that date but lasted for a month.

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74 Locally produced alcohol from fermented cane sugar.
75 Mandingos are Muslims, so in theory, wouldn’t be able to drink alcohol.
76 Minnesota’s Liberians debate whether to mourn or celebrate
But later that year, if you were playing in bare feet on the sandy uneven surface at Gbangaye Town, it was much better to cast your mind back to January 1996 and imagine you were Kelvin Sebwe or Mass Saar Junior banging those two goals in against Gabon.

Christian Neh – striker coach and organiser of Millennium Stars from the beginning wrote a history of the team in 2009.77 “Because football is widely played across the country and remains the nation’s number one passion, as it was so often used to soften tensions between belligerent forces during the war days. The effect the game has had on the sporting populace has meant that most growing youths would relish playing soccer now more than engage in any harmful habits.”

Boots were difficult to come by in 1996 and so were footballs. So the team would organise a clean-up, collecting rubbish and generally tidying up round Gbangaye Town to raise some cash for equipment. It didn’t do their image with the locals any harm either. The Gbangaye Town housewives appreciated their efforts and one of them said she’d ask her son to coach them as he was a few years older than them and a decent player.

This was Mulbah Kpaiwolo, who had attended the Catholic Don Bosco Technical High School78 and at age 17 was on the fringes of a Don Bosco sponsored football team, Bosco United Sports Association (BUSA). Although the Gbangaye Town group already had a coach, they were still only turning up for fun a couple of times a week. Mulbah gathered them together at Gbangaye Town Field on January 7, 1997, to launch the new team, to be named “Power from Heaven” in the spirit of thanksgiving for the end of the hostilities and trust in a better future to come. The players all agreed


78 The school was one of the projects run by the Salesians of Don Boaco, an international Roman Catholic missionary order, founded by Italian priest Fr John (Don) Bosco, that specialised in working with children. They also ran several parishes and were beginning to work with street children and ex-child soldiers, which work later became NGO Don Bosco Homes (DBH).
to a code of conduct – no drink or drugs, respect for each other and the coaches and to be serious about training.

As Fr Joe Glackin, a Motherwell-born priest of the Salesians of Don Bosco, later told it, Mulbah asked him for a ball, and told him about the team, their training sessions and the friendlies they were organising against other neighbourhood teams.

The Scottish priest had been in Monrovia since the early days of the war and had created an ad hoc NGO called Don Bosco Homes (DBH) to deal with hundreds of streetkids and ex-child soldiers who were living rough and fending for themselves. DBH had outreach workers and night shelters in town, but it was the homes they ran that gave the NGO its name – around a dozen kids would live with a house parent while DBH worked with bigger international NGOs to locate a parent or suitable guardian for them.

In July 1997, Fr Joe was heading down the coast to visit the DBH set-up in Buchanan with a press officer from the Catholic aid agency CAFOD, who had previously volunteered with the Salesians for a year in the Don Bosco school and the youth centre where the first Don Bosco hostel was. The talk moved to CAFOD’s tentative plans to organise something big for the Millennium, then less than three years away, and they conversation began to centre on the possibility of taking the team to the UK for a nationwide tour.

Personally, Fr Joe had never had much time for football previously, but could see the potential now. In an article written at the time, he said: “In a world that seems so divided and torn by suspicion and doubt it is becoming more and more important to find ways of bringing peace and reconciliation without the aid of experts. And believe it or not football for some people can do just

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that. Through its high profile, its world-wide appeal and the demands of the game itself can make it an instrument of reconciliation.”

Somehow the team gathered something was being planned for the turn of the century and they astutely re-named the team Millennium FC, which later became Millennium Stars FC. They remember it as a time of great excitement: “a life-time opportunity for many of the lads who haven’t had such glorious chance to lift a foot outside of Liberia more so to a place as highly glamorous as the UK.”

During 1998 and early 1999, the Millennium Stars FC touring squad took shape. Christian Neh said: “As the name of the team spread across the community of Gbangaye Town, it attracted more people from other communities thus increasing the number of players. Not only did this numerical strength grow in personnel, the reflection was also seen in the results on the pitch as the team swept aside opponents in its initial few matches winning handsomely. This boosted the morale of the team and attracted lots of youths from other localities.”

The 17 players who flew to London in September 1999 were joined by two Catholic youthworkers from the Archdiocese of Monrovia and two young leaders from the Catholic schools network who were to act as team spokesmen.

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80 The similarity of the team’s new name with the name of the second largest diamond in the world, the Millennium Star, is purely coincidental. However it is striking, since the connection between Liberia and blood diamonds through Charles Taylor is well known. Equally serendipitous is that in 1999, the year of the Millennium Stars FC UK football tour, the owners of the Millennium Star, De Beers, decided to stop all outside buying of diamonds in order to guarantee categorically the conflict-free status of De Beers diamonds, effective from 26 March 2000. See http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/221/47059.html
81 Neh, Brief History of the Millennium Stars
82 Neh, Brief History of the Millennium Stars
Figure 4: 1999 tour poster
3.3 The 1999 playing squad with their tour squad number and playing position, and tribe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Current Location/Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nusee Cooper</td>
<td>goalkeeper</td>
<td>Kpelle</td>
<td>Currently studying for a degree in Accountancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Saah Tamba</td>
<td>centre back</td>
<td>Kissi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Prince Momo</td>
<td>centre back</td>
<td>Kpelle</td>
<td>Currently playing for George Telegraph in India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kunta Varney</td>
<td>fullback</td>
<td>Vai</td>
<td>Currently playing for Invincible Eleven, one of the most celebrated teams in Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Moses Barcon</td>
<td>fullback</td>
<td>Bassa</td>
<td>Currently playing with Gedi &amp; Sons in Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Abraham Clarke</td>
<td>centre midfield</td>
<td>Bassa</td>
<td>Currently playing with a second division team in Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Zay-Zay Kollie</td>
<td>midfield</td>
<td>Loma</td>
<td>Currently playing for LISCR FC, Liberian Premier League Champions, and called into the Lone Star squad in 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Togar Thomas</td>
<td>centre midfield</td>
<td>Bassa</td>
<td>Currently studying in Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bob Kpaiwolo</td>
<td>defender</td>
<td>Loma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Teku Nahn</td>
<td>midfield/striker</td>
<td>Mende/ Kpelle</td>
<td>Currently playing for Barrack Young Controllers in Liberia and called into the Lone Star squad in 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Forkpah Sumo</td>
<td>midfield</td>
<td>Loma</td>
<td>Currently playing in India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Emmett Glassco</td>
<td>striker</td>
<td>Bassa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nostelda Thorpe</td>
<td>winger</td>
<td>Kpelle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mulbah Kpaiwolo</td>
<td>striker</td>
<td>Loma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Vasco Kaba</td>
<td>fullback</td>
<td>Bassa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Christian Neh</td>
<td>striker/winger</td>
<td>Grebo</td>
<td>Currently playing for LPRC Oilers in Liberia and studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Morris Kermue</td>
<td>winger</td>
<td>Kpelle</td>
<td>Currently living in the UK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5: 1999 tour programme*
CAFOD saw the three-week tour as a development education project to teach young people in the UK about the impact of war and poverty on young people, through the experiences of members of the team as ex-child soldiers. The tour would begin in London, then circle the UK anti-clockwise, via the North East of England, central Scotland, North West England and North Wales, before finishing back in the South East of England.

Matches were arranged in each location as well as visits to leading professional football clubs in the area, their academies or stadiums – including Arsenal, Middlesbrough, Newcastle United, Celtic, Albion Rovers, Motherwell, Manchester United, Everton, Liverpool, Wimbledon and Reading. The predominant desire of the visiting Liberians was to make friends, so they were accompanied by youth groups and school pupils in most areas, who planned part or all of their local itinerary. They had a day's coaching at the Bobby Charlton Soccer School in Manchester, and Liberian internationals Chris Wreh and Mass Saar Jnr added extra flavour to the visits to Arsenal and Reading, where they were playing professionally.

Millennium Stars played six 11-a-side matches against schools, diocesan teams, a team of African refugees, and a CAFOD Select XI and won them all. The tour was a phenomenal media success and CAFOD collected 69 'hits' on TV, radio and in print during the three weeks. As much as possible, the players spoke for themselves in media interviews. A major highlight was a feature on BBC TV's flagship children's news programme Newsround. CAFOD won Best Public Information Campaign by an NGO at the One World Media Awards 2000. Afterwards, CAFOD produced Kick Start a youthwork resource pack about Millennium Stars and football, featuring exercises on Identity and Teamwork and a video made from black and white shots of Millennium Stars in Liberia.

The tour was also making news in Liberia. On their return, the Millennium Stars were greeted as conquering heroes. The Catholic Bishop met them at the airport and blessed them. They were set
up in a house formerly occupied by Catholic missionaries, with the intention of turning it into a football academy.'

Excerpts from emails from Fr Joe were printed in an article in the Catholic Times newspaper at the time:

October 13, 1999: “Excitement still running high here, every practice session still draws huge crowds – especially since some of the boys announced in a radio interview that the academy would be opening in six months time!”

October 26, 1999: “Millennium has a double page spread in two of the major papers today. ... I was out in Virginia to say Mass for a group of elderly women. At the end of Mass, 10pm, one of them got up and gave a big speech about the Millennium Stars, how proud they all were, how they used to follow all the news on the radio and generally how great it all was. I really don’t think I have worked out the effect the trip has had on so many people. ... Almost all the boys are in school. In the end the schools were fighting to give them scholarships so it’s worked out well.”

January 9, 2000: “The under-10 tournament was a big success with the final match broadcast live on the radio. Seventeen teams took part and the final on Christmas Eve was great. Almost by accident, we’ve now got an U-8 team because they were around all the time. ... Along with the U-13 team there are now five teams in a loose federation. ... The 17 community teams associated with the child protection work have all been reactivated in Monrovia, Kakata and Buchanan which means: making sure they are a community team – right age, regular practice etc; giving some input to them and the community on child rights; collecting information for action on abuses going on. In addition, all the schools have started football teams, which to date is another 20-something self-supported

83 CAFOD Reporting Young footballers prove they are in a league of their own. Catholic Times (January 30, 2000)
teams. I also have 12 of the Millennium originals living at a house we have, as the start of an academy – all of them go to school, and have some kind of responsibility in a community setting. I noticed the other day that the whole Millennium squad – half of whom were not on the tour – are able to talk about all the experiences as if they had all been there.”

The dream of the Academy was not to be. Fr Joe decided to leave the priesthood and leave Liberia; Mulbah got the chance to go to the USA and ended up living in Norway, and with these connections gone, Millennium Stars were asked to move out of the beach house. By 2003, with rebel soldiers once again marching on Monrovia, the Stars were scattered to various parts of Liberia, and as refugees in Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana.

Christian Neh⁸⁴ remained behind in Monrovia but lost his brother to a random mortar attack. He said: “In June 2003 … people were moving helter-skelter in search of safety and as the rockets fell indiscriminately from all fronts the chances of surviving became slimmer by the day. ... No member of the team was involved in a major disaster, but as the crisis subsided people became disillusioned. ... [A] vast majority decided to abandon the team and concentrate on creating other means of carrying on their lives.” It’s worth pointing out that not a single player went back to the fighting.

3.4 Millennium Stars rebirth

Back in Monrovia in 2004, Moses Barcon, Prince Momo, Nusee Cooper, Abraham Clark and Christian Neh began to re-build the team and the club. A UK contact agreed to provide some financial support towards equipment and soon numbers in the senior team were approaching the 1999 levels of 40 to 50. They also established a set of feeder teams. The senior players not only coached the juniors, but also aimed to inculcate the Millennium Stars spirit: “[T]he [senior] team thought it was about time to get along with its objective – that is creating a place where the talents of young people

⁸⁴ Neh, Brief History of the Millennium Stars
can be tapped upon, polished and made to glister for international recognition. Youngsters between the ages 7-12 and 13-15 were brought aboard to bolster the beginners’ level of the team. They were given regular sessions by the bigger lads and this improved their standard of play and provided them more appetite to play soccer.”

In 2008, Millennium Stars were invited to enter a junior team in an international football tournament in Co. Durham, UK, in September 2009, which had the backing of the renowned former football manager, Sir Bobby Robson. Again excitement spread in Liberia, but the 1999 success was not to be repeated as the global recession hit the project’s main sponsors and the tournament was cancelled. Frustration and disappointment hit the Millennium Stars hard and again many senior players drifted away, but the core decided to keep going, kept alive by the enthusiasm of the young players they were still coaching: “Those staunch members believed that remaining with the youngsters and helping them build the desire to play football at their very best would set the basis for a stronger team. The legacy of the team must live on and the objective [of establishing a soccer academy] must be protected.”

Millennium Stars continue to be a focus for the media. In 2008, a BBC camera crew accompanying Adrian Chiles for Sport Relief, made a short film shown on BBC1’s The One Show about football’s powers for reconciliation and reintegration. George Williams, Head of the Liberian FA at the time, called football a “magical force” for reintegration. He said: “It takes their minds off the trauma of the past and gives them a level of self-esteem.”

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85 Neh, Brief History of the Millennium Stars
86 Bobby Robson Supports Consett the World
http://www.true-faith.co.uk/tf/features.nsf/0/990725C44E438CB1802574F90072BAFC?OpenDocument
87 Neh, Brief History of the Millennium Stars
In 2010, Paul Robson – son of Sir Bobby – visited Liberia on a CAFOD trip a year after his father’s death, to hand over several hundred football shirts that had been left in honour of his father at the various clubs he had played for or managed.  

Millennium Stars players continue playing for other big teams in Liberia, and in the Far East, as well as getting together to practice or play friendlies as Millennium Stars. They also train younger players at the Gbangaye Town field.

Figure 6 Millennium Stars with Thierry Henry

Chapter 4

4.1 Analysing the Millennium Stars’ legacy

The assessment below follows three of the perspectives identified by Jarvie as important for those studying the role of football – its functions, its role in social interaction and its role and

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89 Jarvie, Sport, Culture and Society, pp414.
potential as a tool for social change.\textsuperscript{90} I have decided to present Jarvie’s perspectives as a table beside comments from Christian Neh\textsuperscript{91} to compare indicators for the fulfillment of those perspectives by the Millennium Stars and show how Millennium Stars themselves have analysed and understood their actions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions\textsuperscript{92}</th>
<th>Grant Jarvie</th>
<th>Christian Neh</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-emotional function, wherein football contributes to the maintenance of socio-psychological stability;</td>
<td>They had pasts that they really didn’t want people to know about. What happened in the past happened. It was about re-starting their life and moving on. So we just considered everybody as people who were affected by the war and didn’t focus on that aspect of who actively fought in the war. Getting to know what each individual did was difficult. We said it wasn’t something we would always talk about. We would just let it go.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Socialisation wherein football contributes to the inculcation of cultural beliefs and mores</td>
<td>Because football is so popular in Liberia, it was easy to get people involved. We no longer focus on war, but building a future, building a career, being of service to your community, to develop to be someone who can be counted on in the future. Even though we are night fighting a war, some of them will be tempted to be street children and may damage their own career, wanting to be wayward, or engage in stealing or doing things that are harmful to them, so we try to guide them against that, and we provide tips for them to follow so that they can be good people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrative function, wherein football contributes to the harmonious integration of disparate individuals and individuals and diverse groups;</td>
<td>It was a link, to serve as a point of connection, to bring people together. During the war people were divided, especially young people, forcibly conscripted, there was division, so we thought we would come back together as a unit and do something to pull us together and this idea of establishing a team came to the fore. In spite of different backgrounds, the aim was to focus on friendship. We didn’t allow tribal or religious links to interfere with what we were doing. We considered Millennium as one boat that everyone could float in. We put together a team that could bring back the memory of the team that existed in 1997, so we began to work together again as a group.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Political function wherein football is used for ideological purposes;</td>
<td>Not just sharing as a team, but we decided to take that off the pitch. It spread everywhere we went. We all wanted to see a new Liberia. We wanted to see a new group of people. We used Millennium Stars as a beginning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{90} Rather than switch between the words ‘sport’ and ‘football’, I will use ‘football’ throughout as it is appropriate to the study, even where Jarvie may have ‘sport’ in the original.

\textsuperscript{91} Christian Neh Interview, August 2011

\textsuperscript{92} Jarvie, Sport, Culture and Society, p24.
point. We use the same formula we used in the past. But the focus isn’t on war any longer. It’s about building a career, building a future. It’s about acquiring the skill that will make you a better footballer, and things that will make you a role model in society.

When we initially started, the idea was to flush out the bad habits, the behaviour that divided us. Young people then were counted as evil-doers or mindless people because of what they did in the war. After the war, there was that stigma. Young men were associated with violence. We wanted a new breed of people, so really the football was all about that and the overriding focus was to get away from the past.

Social mobility function wherein football serves as a source of upward mobility.\(^9\)

It's not only about playing football. There are some lads who have potential. Who have a future and can develop into a top professional. We give them encouragement. It’s successful because almost the entire team is in school, and most of them have been offered scholarships because of their skills on the field of play, so that burden of school fees is no longer on their parents. Now that we don’t have any war, the focus is on building a career, making young people feel that they can be counted on, model citizens for tomorrow, because during the war, it has made people who were less valuable in terms of status in society. We want to make them feel that they could be the next Messi, the next Ronaldo, the next Rooney.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social interactionism(^9)</th>
<th>Grant Jarvie</th>
<th>Christian Neh</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does football mean to oneself or what place has football played in the individual’s biography?</td>
<td>After the war [in 2003], there were a lot of us who felt disenchanted having in mind that you excel at a certain level, and then you perceive yourself dropping down. That didn’t go down well with us, and so we wanted to abandon what we were doing. For me it was a difficult moment, because I felt that maybe we would end up the same way we ended the first time. But as a young man you can’t give up. There are times when you have challenges and you have to go through them.</td>
<td>2000 to 2003, things went from bad to worse within the republic. Young men were pressured to go back like what happened in the past. Everybody was fighting for survival. People used that as a last resort: “Since I didn’t take part in the war in 1990, or since I didn’t take part in the war in April 6, I will use the opportunity to do what I can do, it was something that we learned that we all learned up there that fighting wasn’t necessarily good. We should try our best to control it, even if we were pressured to do so. And that was something we all promised to stand for. The experience we had from the UK tour and the bond we built over time. That experience changed them as people. We couldn’t go back.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent have feelings about football been influenced by a process of interaction with others?</td>
<td>Or we would hold a clean-up campaign to raise funds: beating a drum and cleaning a yard or drainage. In ‘95 and ‘96 it was quite difficult to get money, but we still went the extra mile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does football form a pattern of association and integration?</td>
<td>We had the opportunity to share the UK experience [with those who didn’t go] to make them feel they were part of the trip. And they accepted everything we wanted to share with them. Many of the guys who were involved the first time wouldn’t accept [the second time]. They said future had been wasted and they would concentrate on doing different things. They said their future had been gambled with and they didn’t want to be members of the team. But we managed to convince them that this is about making ourselves feel happy and making ourselves have hope. No matter the challenges we face, we must pull together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do athletes in certain situations reciprocate with and against one another?</td>
<td>It was a shared endeavour so we were all willing to give whatever was needed to get it going. To play in a pair of boots at that time was too costly, so we had to improvise, so we would tax each member of the team to pay a specific amount of money, so that money would be used to purchase football and jerseys for the entire team. For boots, you had to go that extra mile or play barefoot or in sneakers. Every week $5 or every month $20.</td>
</tr>
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**Social change**

**Grant Jarvie**

How has football been affected by the historical period in which it is located?

Football was already known as the thing that brought people together. It’s no longer about war. No member of the current junior team ever took part in war. They are aged 17 down. They might have had difficult times and experiences, but none of them took part as active combatants. Off the pitch, we encourage them, we tell them what it is like to be someone successful, what are the things you should do, what are the things you are supposed to avoid in order not to get your future damaged, or not to get yourself damaged. Now that Liberia can play more on international football stage, it’s a step forward.

What is the role of the football person in producing change?

What they saw was special was the change of attitude. After the war, young men were counted as reckless, wayward, brutal, these were things associated with young people, but to see a group of young people changed in behaviour, changed in the way of relating to one another. In 2004, we decided now not to only focus on ourselves. We decided to improve people who were younger in the community. People we saw who had the potential for the future. That’s when we sub-divided the group: we had the senior team, we had the under-19, we had the junior team.

To what extent has football had a part to play in the formation of different forms of identity and/or

Everyone felt there was something special about this team. It made us feel it was a special team. Something we wanted to share with the rest of the community.

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\[\text{Jarvie, Sport, Culture and Society, p37}\]
Millennium Stars are aware of the active role they have played and understand it, albeit at a non-verbalised level.

3.2 Millennium Stars and Child Soldiers

The civil war in Liberia from 1989 to 2003 is estimated to have killed 300,000, displaced 850,000, and made use of approximately 15,000 children as child soldiers, some as young as seven. The war was horrific and brutal, and particularly took its toll on the youth of the country. Just under 50% of Liberians are below the age of 18. The average adult is expected to have had less than four years’ education. Only 40% of children are in primary education. Illiteracy rates for 2009 in Liberia were over 30%, while for young people aged 15 to 24, it was 75%.

Young people have been considered as both victims and perpetrators of the conflict. Child soldiers were used throughout, by all factions. Programmes for post-conflict reconciliation not only sought to improve conditions for young people, but also to rehabilitate those who took part in the fighting in order to ensure that they didn’t do it again. Some projects working with ex-child soldiers or potential combatants have used football as a tool to build peace for more than 10 years, well before the war ended.

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95 Parts of this section – particularly the facts and figures – appeared in my dissertation proposal: “Kicking against the system”: Globalization, football and post-conflict social reconstruction in Liberia.
96 Considered in some places to be two wars – 1989 to 1997 and 1999 to 2003.
97 Some estimates make it more than 20,000.
98 http://www.irinnews.or/
99 http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/liberia_statistics.html
100 3.9 years http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LBR.html
103 http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/liberia_statistics.html
Between 6,000 and 15,000 children are estimated to have taken up arms from 1989 to 1997,\(^{104}\) many of whom resumed fighting along with new recruits when hostilities resumed in 1999-2000. Ex-President and ex-warlord Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) had a policy of recruiting Small Boy Units (SBUs)\(^{105}\) and Taylor is reputed to have “conscripted, drugged and armed thousands of children” in advance of Operation Octopus, his 1992 attack on Monrovia.\(^{106}\) By early 2006 more than 100,000 combatants had been disarmed. More than 10 per cent of those demobilized were children.\(^{107}\)

War caused major disruption in the lives of the Millennium Stars, as it did for thousands of children in Liberia. Most were infants at the time it started in 1989 to 1991. By the time of the April 6 terror spree in 1996, they were old enough to join in. The reasons for fighting given by Millennium Stars players in the 1999 interviews\(^{108}\) fall into five categories: survival, security, revenge, to meet basic needs and forcible conscription:

“The only way you could survive was by joining the fighters. If you didn’t join them then you will suffer.”

“My mother and my father left me, and a friend picked me up and I was living with my friend. But time came when my friend joined the NPFL, but each time when I sit down, soldier men come and take advantage of me, so I said: ‘I’ll join the NPFL.’”

“The fighters on the NPFL side decided to treat my father, bad. They beat him, so I decided to join and pay my father’s debts.”

“They were forcing people to join because there was no manpower.”

“So we started to loot food … and go and bring it back for our people to get something to eat.”

\(^{104}\) How to Fight, How to Kill Human Rights Watch February 2004 Vol. 16, No. 2 (A)
\(^{107}\) Child Soldiers Global Report http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/liberia
\(^{108}\) Transcripts with the author
In 1999, several Millennium Stars squad members described their careers as child soldiers. One told of his time serving in two factions and how he became involved with Millennium Stars:\textsuperscript{109}

“During the war, it was not my intention to fight. ... I was on the Old Road; that's where we lived during 1990. When it got hot, we left and went across.\textsuperscript{110} ... Later on after they started taking advantage over my people, it got me angry, and the INPFL\textsuperscript{111} – which is Prince Johnson – started treating my people bad and it got me angry and I started to fight for ULIMO-K ... until 1990. Then when I left, I went across the lines to Buchanan and I came to fight for NPFL.

“The leader for ULIMO-K\textsuperscript{112} was Alhaji Kromah.\textsuperscript{113} [I was fighting for them] because that's the area I was at. [I decide to join] because of the way they treated my people. ... They grabbed my uncle and said they were going to kill him in front of me, and they started beating my sisters, started treating them bad and it really made me angry.

“The INPFL was doing this, across the bridge. ... It was younger soldiers. The size of me, or above me a little bit. Those were the people that were doing it. I am a man who can get vexed. ... I and them are equal; I and them the same size, so the way they started to treat my people made me to feel very bad, so I left and I went across to Bomi Hills and I started to fight for ULIMO-K.

“When I was fighting for ULIMO-K ... I was with General Dadá. I was the CP commander. I was at the gate. That's the work I only do until it got hot and we went on the front line and NPFL started to attack ULIMO-K. We were fighting with arms. They were on the other side, while we were on [this] side, so they wanted to attack our area, to get our area under their control, but our commander, our head, which was Alhaji Kromah, told us it shouldn't happen and so we started to fight, until [they] called for a ceasefire, and we stopped later on.

“The people we were fighting against, some of them were very old, some of them were young and some of them were above me [in age, but still children]. We even captured some of them alive and we never did anything to them, we carried them over, keeping them in a safe area, because Alhaji Kromah said that whenever anyone is captured on the war front, we shouldn't kill them, we should just put them down\textsuperscript{114} because they are prisoners.

“The other factions were very bad on us, because sometimes when our people leave and go, let's say, to Buchanan, they say they are going on reconnaissance and sometimes they arrest them, and sometimes they kill them, and then we are going to hear the information, so when the time came, Alhaji Kromah say if we catch anyone from NPFL, we shouldn't kill them, but we should keep them and let him come and see the people.

\textsuperscript{109} CAFOD/Tim Hetherington, \textit{Millennium Stars interviews} 1999 unpublished
\textsuperscript{110} To Bushrod Island, the part of Monrovia beside the Freeport.
\textsuperscript{111} Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia – a breakaway group from Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Prince Johnson.
\textsuperscript{112} ULIMO split into two factions, under Alhaji Kromah and Roosevelt Johnson. The two factions added K for Kromah or J for Johnson to their respective names.
\textsuperscript{113} Former warlord and presidential candidate in the 2005 general election. Now standard bearer of the All Liberian Coalition Party.
\textsuperscript{114} i.e. keep them safe
“Kromah was the head for ULIMO-K. He was a Mandingo man. He was good to us. Let’s be frank, he was very good to us. Sometimes he came and talked to us good and shared fun, and when he had money, he gave us something.

“The reason why I left was after they called for a ceasefire. ... I couldn’t see my mother, I couldn’t see my father. So I left there, and I came in town. I heard that my mother, my father, my other family were in Buchanan, so I left and I went to Buchanan and then war got hot there again. And then I decided to start fighting for NPFL too.

“At that time, we were heading for the city. It was in 1996. ... Taylor told us we should come, but we should not intimidate peaceful citizens. ... We should come and complete this mission and everything finish. So we decided to come. And ... the AFL, ULIMO-K, INPFL began to fight against NPFL. When we got to Red Light, there was a heavy fight that night. There was heavy rainfall and we fought that night, and at the end NPFL took over the whole of Red Light and that was the base, and that’s where we were at.

“We stayed a certain time, and we begin to pick up from that time, and General Jack the Rebel – that was our general – he came and said: ‘Oh gentlemen, we’ve got to move ahead. We’ve got to capture the city.’ And we came as far as Old Road and we captured it, and at that time the AFL soldiers went in the barracks.

“I was just like, let’s say, a Lieutenant ... Life were too hard with me. And that’s the only way... For one example, my people don’t have something to eat, you know, so now some time when I fight hard, I go sometimes in the villages and I talk with people and I say ‘Oh look, can you please help me?’ Sometimes, they gave me foodstuffs that I can carry for my family.

“And what really encouraged us to join again because, for our size, if they come and see us, they say ‘Oh we are looking at the other enemies’, and they come and grab us and start beating us. That’s the ULIMO-K now, the time I wasn’t with them.

“[Why did I join NPFL?] For one fact, I had left ULIMO-K already, and the NPFL were forcing people to join because there was no manpower, because they were really killing people on the frontline too much, because most of their children were small small, so they were killing them. So we were the kind of boy [they wanted]. One time I was in the market and they saw me and they said: “Oh, this man, he’s good to go.’ and just grabbed me and threw me in the truck, and said ‘Let’s go.’

“Myself, I knew that I was an old fighter, so nothing strange to me, so they took arms and give it to me, and I went on the frontline and decided to fight to come in the city. At that time, I was 12 years old.

“I was feeling bad because that was the first time war came into my country, Liberia, but because of the situation that’s what made me to hold a gun. For me to survive and for my family to survive, that’s what made me hold a gun.

“When we came through with the NPFL, April 6 broke out. ... After April 6 I was fighting for the same NPFL. On the Old Road. ... I was with armoured division, about 500 men. ... [T]hey have Cobra, they

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115 A well known junction and market in the Paynesville area of Monrovia.
116 Likely, because of where the fighting was coming from, to be the Barclay Training Center in central Monrovia, rather than the official barracks at the former Camp Schiefflin on the main road between Monrovia and Roberts International Airport.
have Armoured Division, they have Black Spear, you know, they have different different divisions. So they have Marines division also, so the divisions were very very plenty.

“Charles Taylor took all the city. He started to loot the city. Like Broad Street, they have certain boutiques. We started to loot. Video decks, tapes, clothes, but mostly for me ... I was really looting foodstuffs. Like UN Drive Supermarket, we went and looted enough foodstuffs because I wanted my people to have food. So we started to loot food, because one of our [colleagues] from the Marine group, he had a taxi, so we needed to go and pack foods in the car and go and bring it back for our people to get something to eat. We went on for the whole of April.

“When April 6 came, we were already in the city, so ULIMO-K, Lofa Defence Force, NPFL, ULIMO-J, we all came together as one, so we decided to start fighting the AFL at the barracks to get everything under control, because that's where the Krahn people were, doing some bad bad things, so we were fighting to get the area from them and for them to leave there.

“So we fought throughout and then we called for ceasefire and Taylor said everyone should be disarmed. Some people left and went to Sierra Leone, but I decided not to fight war again because everything was all right.

“ECOMOG came in to disarm and we started to disarm. Right after the disarmament, that's the time people came right in town. It was the base here on the Old Road, our old spot, that's where we were, and I saw [one of my friends]. [He] came to me and he encouraged me and said: 'Oh, we are having a team. ... I want you because you are a good football player and you can not fight [any more].'

“Because I feel that I am with a good programme that will make me to forget about war. Don Bosco has really been talking to us about war to forget about war, that I think it's all right now because I was not doing it for my own will, but let's say, for me to live, for I and my family to be together and for no-one to humbug us. That's what we were doing it for, but I think I don't find pleasure in being an armed man. I think I'm someone to go to school and that's what I am concerned about.”

“So we started to play and started to forget about the gun and presently we are playing football for the Millennium team.”

Programmes for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of child soldiers were established in Liberia to assist children and young people to leave fighting forces and return to civilian life on a number of occasions throughout the war, when it appeared that hostilities were over. DDR is generally seen as a three-fold process: Disarmament – children give up their weapons; Demobilization – they are formally discharged from the armed force or group with which they were associated; Reintegration – programmes assist former child soldiers to return to society by offering training or livelihood support.

Prevention of child recruitment in the long term involves ensuring the social well-being of children through access to education and healthcare, as well as engaging in awareness-raising and strengthening of community actions. The latter part of the process was not seen as a complete success: “According to local child protection agencies ... [t]he disappointment and frustration experienced by children ... during the reintegration period led many to seek to re-establish links with

117 The main street in the main shopping area in downtown Monrovia.
118 Armed Forces of Liberia – the official army.

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their former commanders – not necessarily in an attempt to become soldiers again, but rather to return to the last person who had provided them with food, shelter and protection.”

It is certain that many boys who had seen and done terrible things were suffering from severe post-traumatic stress that would take more than this cursory treatment to overcome. “[Trauma] shatters the basic beliefs we have about life. ... It may be that the image we have of ourselves is shattered, we may have responded differently in the crisis from how we expected or wanted to behave. ... We have no time to adjust to this new experience. ... In the face of this danger our mind holds onto the memory of the trauma ... probably as a natural form of protection to ensure you never get into that situation again.”

Part of the guidance to overcoming such trauma is to make sense of it by talking it through, and this takes time. While all arms-bearing children were in some way part of the DDR process in Liberia, the numbers and the chaos in the country meant that long-term mental care through counseling was impossible. Football seems to have played the long-term role for many, enabling them to see the positive in their current situation, involving them in physical activity and in a shared public project, and getting them to sign up to codes of conduct that accentuated positive behaviour and kept them away from alcohol or drugs, which may have created further health or psychological problems.

However, football can only do so much. The unnamed subject quoted above has recently denied to me he or any of his teammates were ever involved in the fighting – they only said it at the time because it was expected of them – and in the interviews I conducted in August 2011, all subjects name only three players who were combatants, and none of them took parting the UK Tour.

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120 Child Soldiers Global Report http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/liberia
122 Post Traumatic Stress: a self help guide p5
123 Post Traumatic Stress: a self help guide pp5 to 12
Christian Neh believes that the reason for making up stories about fighting was not to manipulate people, but because it was so close to the truth: “It’s about trying to portray something that almost was. Because a lot of kids were involved in the war, everybody was vulnerable in the crisis, anybody could be conscripted at any time, anybody could be pressured to get involved actively.”\textsuperscript{124} However the same anonymous subject above has been in hospital this year suffering depression, where he was convinced someone was trying to get into his room and kill him.

While the football project was concentrating on rehabilitation and reintegration of troubled youth, it was part of the process to turn a blind eye to the past. But now it seems experiences are returning that were buried but not fully dealt with. However, it is also possible that none of the team did take part in the fighting. Nevertheless they still experienced severe and probably lasting trauma, with only limited treatment.

\textbf{4.3 Millennium Stars academy}

From an early stage, it seems that the Millennium Stars members had the vision of a football academy – a place for ordinary kids to develop football skills and through playing to develop social skills, a place to promulgate an ethos and code of behaviour, and a place to create job opportunities. At one stage, it looked like there was a possibility to have an academy consisting of a building and a piece of land. That possibility was shortlived, but a frequently voiced need is for an academy that produces footballers who can make a living from the game: “To this end there was a unanimous decision within the team to establish a football academy that could serve the purpose of nurturing the latent talents of youths and making it marketable.”\textsuperscript{125}

However, Millennium Stars have continued to run an academy since 1999 on public spaces like Gbangaye Town through coaching of younger teams and through the example they set through their

\textsuperscript{124} Interview with Christian Neh, August 2011

\textsuperscript{125} Neh, \textit{Brief History of the Millennium Stars}
behaviour to younger players. Pen pictures of two beneficiaries of Millennium Stars Academy show their impact:

1. “Daniel, like most kids in downtown Monrovia, roamed around playing street soccer all day and hanging out with hardened criminals at night. Our regular counsels stress the importance of primary education as a growing footballer plus exhibiting good moral conduct. Today Daniel is a changed person and has vastly improved in his soccer. He’s currently attending the Bethlehem Baptist School on a soccer scholarship and is the most outstanding player in the primary school and on the YMS.”

2. “Gabriel has made a stunning impact in the team since coming aboard. His total composure between the sticks and ability to make wonderful saves has so often made him matchwinner in most of the games. He is a lad with much influence on his colleagues and shows true leadership quality on the pitch. He most often goes the extra mile of stressing to his fellow team mates the importance of having education. A friendly and sociable player Gabriel most often shares with his colleagues and even allows outfield players to use his personal boots while he stands in sneakers to man the posts.”

While the Millennium Stars Academy clearly functions, it lacks connections with the outside world, so there is no outlet for the players as they grow. There is no chance to make a living playing football in Liberia – crowds for the top league matches are around the 300 mark – and it’s more likely that you will be picked for Lone Star if you are playing outside the country, so the Liberian Football Association (LFA) actively encourages Liberian players to leave. Up to now, there has been no system to nurture grassroots talent; it happens on an ad hoc basis and the LFA does not get involved although they will help you leave if you make the contacts yourself.

Millennium Stars have been seen as a failure in their own communities because they don’t have the infrastructure of an academy – changing rooms, coaching pitches and so on. Liberian society demands that you have visible assets to prove your worth; words and deeds alone are not enough. If you don’t have your own resources, you have to go to someone who does. A system of patronage exists whereby wealth and power are concentrated in a few, and favours flow down from the Big

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126 Neh, Brief History of the Millennium Stars
127 Christian Neh interview
128 Prince Momo interview
129 Prince Momo and Abraham Clarke interviews
Man through connections to lesser figures lower down the strata. It’s who you know, not what you know, as Steinberg sums up:

“This national system of patronage turned Liberians, Congos and natives alike, into a fawning and obsequious people. To get anything, you had to know somebody more powerful than yourself, a patron to whom you must show great deference.”

George Weah has been criticised by some of the Millennium Stars for not starting his own academy in Liberia. Weah was a potent symbol for Liberians during the war of the country’s possible future. While all was falling apart in Liberia, one Liberian was acknowledged as the best in the world. There is a much quoted phenomenon that when Weah and the national team played during the war period, members of all factions would leave their weapons and go together peacefully to the football stadium. Perhaps Weah’s success gave the Liberian people a vision not just of temporary peace, but of a new identity of the small nation that could strike it big on a world stage, by taking on and beating all-comers on the soccer field.

It is also a popular perception that the route to a lucrative contract with an internationally well-known club is an easy one. African footballers are now a common sight on European pitches and are seen as role models: Ivorian Didier Drogba (Chelsea) and Togolese Emmanuel Adebayor (Man City/Spurs) are Goodwill Ambassadors for the UN. As was George Weah, until his decision to engage in politics. While the status of African footballers increases, so do the expectations placed

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132 Descendants of the returned freed slaves, so called because they were believed to have originally come from the Congo.
134 http://www.unicef.org/media/george_weah.html?q=printme
on them at home. According to Poli, a disproportionate amount of space is given in local media to the big African stars playing in Europe compared to the local teams, so “millions of young Africans dream of leaving their country by playing this sport.”

The image of easy riches in Europe persists because of the illusion created by the big European games broadcast at the local video clubs, but “the vast majority of footballers from the continent who attempt their chances in Europe fail.” “Often the African football players’ fate in Europe is not so different from the fate of more ‘normal’ African migrants.”

A lesson for millennium Stars could be in the contrast Manzo makes between MYSA and Diambars – a soccer school set up by ex-football stars of African background or African extraction, including Patrick Vieira, who wanted “to give something back.” Both organisations, she says, suggest that they “are more than merely football training academies and/or magnets for European agents and scouts,” but she is concerned that they reproduce “neo-colonial patterns of underdevelopment, impoverishment, and exploitation.”

“Diambars’ primary aim is the realisation by its graduates of a specific sporting dream, that of securing a lucrative contract with a top European club – like the founding members of Diambars. This is development as globalisation, through skilled labour migration or (as neo-colonial thinking

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136 Poli, Migrations and trade of African football players
137 Poli, Migrations and trade of African football players
138 Poli, Migrations and trade of African football players p412
140 http://diambars.org/
141 Former France international footballer of Senegalese descent, who played for Cannes, Milan, Arsenal, Juventus, Internazionale, and Manchester City and won a World Cup winners medal for France in 1998.
143 Manzo, Learning to Kick
144 Manzo, Learning to Kick
suggests) through the facilitation of cheap labour exports. MYSA is different because migration doesn’t enter the frame.”

Perhaps a clear route to the lucrative leagues of the North would be of benefit to some individuals, but equally so would be training programmes for referees and physiotherapists and coaches at home, to give them economic possibilities in their own country and contribute to community building. Sportanddev.org, for example, talks of football and livelihoods in terms of kids getting a fair wage for stitching footballs, or of players sending remittances home, but not of finding employment as a player, coach or physio in their own country.  

Involvement in voluntary associations, such as Millennium Stars, lies at the heart of the contribution sport can make to civil society by generating social capital.

Social capital, Jarvie says “has been seen as a way of contributing to social inclusion. Social groups and individuals learn more when they can draw upon the cultural resources of people around them. They learn from each other directly but they also learn to trust that the social arrangements are in place to ensure that learning, through a multitude of mediums including sport, will benefit them both culturally and for employment opportunities.”

The LFA model encourages or even insists on players leaving the country, and runs contrary to this view. Sending players abroad in pursuit of economic gain destroys the benefits of the social capital generated by community teams. The Liberian government has begun to see the benefits of sport for reintegration, but not yet for economic regeneration. At the ceremony to launch the Liberia’s first National Sports Policy on September 16, 2009, Dunstan McCauley, Chairman of the

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145 http://www.sportanddev.org/en/learnmore/sport_and_economic_development/developing_local_markets_through_sport/
146 Jarvie, Sport, Culture and Society, p333
Sports Advisory Council, told journalists in Monrovia: “We believe that the rift that has existed among Liberians for so long can be healed with the provision of a comprehensive sports program. A program where everybody participates as equals, where individuals respect one another for their abilities and competence, where there is respect for the rule of law and authority will help go a long way in developing a wholesome functioning society.”

The experience of Millennium Stars indicates that a self-directed grassroots sports society is fine as a conduit for aid, or a recipient of charity, but challenges many institutional monoliths, such as the LFA, when it tries to step up to becoming a self-directed agency for change.

Figure 7: Millennium Stars with Liberian Ambassador William Bull, 1999
Chapter 5

5.1 Conclusion

It will always be difficult to assess the impact of such initiatives as Millennium Stars, but to give the opportunity to anybody to be part of any team which can be seen as part of a larger team and a yet larger and larger team – as the neighbourhood, the city, the county, the nation, the world – can only be of benefit to the individual. The person imbued with the team ethos, respect for self and others, is a goal worth pursuing. The transformations that take place as a result of such experiences create a desire in that individual to influence his/her environment for the better. The evidence here shows that through football and other means, these are achievable goals, though, as with all things human, success is finely balanced and progress will not ever be certain.

For Millennium Stars, football gave them a way to distance themselves from and deal with their horrific past. It gave them an opportunity to make connections to another part of the world and it gave them the confidence in their own abilities and sense of worth as human beings to attempt to bring about change in their community for the benefit of those they perceived to be struggling like they had.

Football began as a simple reaction to unpleasant situations. Faced with things out of their control, they did the only thing they knew how to do – play football. Over time, the team has taken on much more than just developing players in the game. Football has taken on a symbolic nature, which allows them to contribute not just to the rebuilding of their country, but to shaping a vision for Liberia’s new peace-time identity.

Finally, the real point of the Millennium Stars is perhaps in danger of being hidden beneath concerns around child soldiers. Liberia had 14 years of war, but more than 160 years of suppression and oppression of the huge majority of its population. The fundamental role for any grassroots
project, using sport or not, in Liberia, as in so many other places, is to tackle extreme poverty by creating trust and social bonds at the most basic community level.

The world-famous Ethiopian runner Haile Gebreselassie said: “Eradicate poverty. ... This is all that matters in my country. When I am out training I think about this a lot; when I am running it is going over in my mind. As a country we cannot move forward until we eradicate poverty.”

Figure 8: Abraham Clarke in a coaching session, UK 1999

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