

**FROM SPORTS TRANSFORMATION TO SPORTSWASHING STEREOTYPE IN SAUDI ARABIA:
 FOCUS ON LESSONS FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Sports in recent times is no longer a source of entertainment and social peace but it has grown into a strong driver of international labour migration, tourism and economic transformation. Recently, many countries of the globe have been making efforts to transform their economy through practical investments in the area of sports. This study focuses on the outstanding transformations that have been championed by the Saudi Government in the area of sports investments, which a number of analysts have stereotyped as sportswashing. The study used secondary literature to develop its content and presented its findings on how sports have locally and internationally advanced the national and international image of Saudi Arabia thematically. It recommends that African countries must follow suit in the quest to transform her mineral resource based economy through sports in line with the sports wonders going on in the Kingdom.

Key words: Saudi Arabia. Sportswashing. Human Rights Management. Africa

RESUMO

Da transformação esportiva ao estereótipo de lavagem esportiva na Arábia Saudita: foco nas lições para o desenvolvimento africano

Nos últimos tempos, o desporto deixou de ser uma fonte de entretenimento e de paz social, mas tornou-se um forte motor da migração laboral internacional, do turismo e da transformação económica. Recentemente, muitos países do globo têm feito esforços para transformar sua economia por meio de investimentos práticos na área do esporte. Este estudo centra-se nas notáveis transformações que têm sido defendidas pelo Governo saudita na área dos investimentos desportivos, que uma série de análises estereotipados como sportswashing. O estudo utilizou literatura secundária para desenvolver seu conteúdo e apresentou suas descobertas sobre como o esporte tem avançado local e internacionalmente a imagem nacional e internacional da Arábia Saudita tematicamente. Recomenda que os países africanos sigam o exemplo na busca de transformar sua economia baseada em recursos minerais por meio do esporte, em linha com as maravilhas esportivas que estão acontecendo no Reino.

Palavras-chave: Arabia Saudita. Sportswashing. Gestão de Direitos Humanos. África

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INTRODUCTION

In recent times, Saudi Arabia has taken some giant strides in the world of sport. Saudi Arabia through her Public Investment Fund (PIF) also known as Sovereign Wealth Fund with an endowment of 650 billion USD has invested in the area of sport through hosting of major sporting events, sponsorship of tournaments, signing of high profile sport stars into the Saudi Arabia Leagues, buying of major football club(s), bidding to host the 2030 FIFA World Cup alongside Egypt and Greece, etc.

However, these Saudi Arabia foray into the world of sport has been termed as sportswashing - a means of using sport to conceal or draw away attention from human rights issues. In recent times, some countries has used this means (sportswashing) to draw away attention from her bad human rights record.

Among this include the hosting of the 2018 and 2022 world cups by Russia and Qatar respectively. Both countries were previously accused of poor human rights records by the West.

Russia is widely known for her treatment of dissidents, and political opponents of Vladimir Putin. The country has also advanced the process of annexation of territories, and holding human beings hostage etc. The Russian hosting of the 2018 world cup was done to draw away media and world attention away from her after she annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

This was evident during the build up to the 2022 world cup hosted by the country. Foreigners who worked in the constructions of stadiums alleged that they were treated badly through poor working conditions and payment of wages, hard labours, discrimination, etc.

However, Saudi Arabia recently made important and necessary reforms were announced to improve basic human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

For instance in 2019, Saudi Arabia introduced significant women rights reforms, including lifting travel restrictions and allowing Saudi women to drive, register their children birth, and providing new protections against employment discrimination and sexual harassment (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Therefore, in other to extend her hospitality and draw away media attention from

some of the Western media re-inforced human rights abuses, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has carried out some development strides in the world of sport.

However, Saudi officials have denied this allegation of sportswashing but maintained that they are promoting the transformation of sports in their country. They maintained that sports investments in the Kingdom are part of Vision 2030, a broad government plan to diversify the country's economy. They asserted that sports investments will help boost foreign investment, increase domestic employment, spur tourism to Saudi Arabia, and encourage fitness in a country that struggle with obesity.

The current reality is that Saudi Arabia has made unprecedented investments in international sports and has designated the country as and has assumed the status of a global player in international sports, spending billions of dollars in recent years on several high-profile deals across the industry Critics have accused Saudi Arabia of 'sportswashing' its reputation for human rights abuses and intend to use sports to enhance its prestige and cleanse its poor human rights record.

However, Saudi officials contend that government investments in sports are part of a plan to diversify the country's petroleum-based economy This is because the government, as of 2021, was 74% dependent on oil exports for its budget and oil accounts for 30-40% of the real GDP (gross domestic product) of Saudi Arabia, not including the proportion of the economy that is also dependent on oil distribution.

Decreasing the dependence on oil resources has been one of the government's goals since the 1970s. This necessitated the country's Vision 2030, which aims to increase diversification economically, socially and culturally, in line with the vision of Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman.

Thus, the transformation of sports in Saudi Arabia s is seen as an instrument of foreign policy, diplomacy, and societal engineering and foreign policy transformations.

Foreign policy in this context implies how nations or countries conduct their affairs in the international system, while diplomacy is the strategies that states employ to achieve their foreign policy objectives in the global system. Soft power is the ability to co-opt rather than coerce and it involves shaping the preferences

of others through appeal and attraction. Today sports is used to co-opt individuals and groups into the act of advancing the public opinion and human rights posture of a country.. It consists of shaping the preferences of others through appeal and attraction using sports transformation.

Thus, the Saudi Government is using sports as a means of appeal and attraction of talented sportsmen from all over the globe to come to the Kingdom and enjoy their rich resource wealth.

Therefore, to appeal to and attract others, the Saudi government has spent at least 6.3 billion USD in sports deals since early 2021, more than the previous amount spent over six years (The Guardian, 2023).

The kingdom's first significant investment in a foreign sports enterprise came in 2018 when the Saudi sports ministry signed a ten-year contract to host World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) events, a deal worth a reported \$100 million per year (about 10 percent of WWE's annual revenue). While the Kingdom is transforming their sports in line with the changing world order, a number of analysts have termed Saudi Arabia's foray into the world of sport as a means of sportswashing - the use of sports to whitewash a country's international reputation, especially its human rights record (DAWN, 2023).

They opined that Saudi Arabia is not the only country using sportswashing. However, Saudi Arabia is taking this tactic to a whole new level, given the unprecedented amounts of money being spent by PIF on golf, soccer (football), WWE, Formula 1, Boxing, Cricket, etc (DAWN, 2023). Critics have argued that sportswashing is part of a vast foreign policy campaign by Saudi Arabia to expand its economic leverage, especially in the US. Other means of sports transformation in the Kingdom include buying significant stakes in Uber, gaming companies - Activision Blizzard and Electronic Arts, and the private-equity giant Blackstone as well as sponsorship and funding of media houses in Europe to project a positive image of the Saudi sports transformation.

Therefore, this article tends to examine the level of sports transformation in the Kingdom and how that has been stereotyped as sportswashing to cover cases of human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia.

The article used peer-reviewed journals, newspapers, and internet sources as well as. Government and non-government records to develop the content thematically.

Conceptual Clarifications

Sport is any activity that uses physical exertion or skills competitively under a set of rules not based on aesthetics. It covers any form of physical activity or game, often competitive and organized, that aims to use, maintain, or improve physical ability and skills while providing enjoyment to participants and, in some cases, entertainment to spectators. Sports are part of every culture, past and present, but each culture has its definition of sports.

Each culture promotes the culture that gives their people pleasure and it is played according to defined rules. Indigenous sports and sporting games are grouped into acrobatic, air, archery, ball games (ball-over-net games), board, catching games, climbing, cycling, combat (wrestling and martial arts), and animal sports.

This is a nation's deliberate investment in sports to distract the world's attention from its continual disregard for international human rights standards. It is equally the use of sports to whitewash a country's global reputation, especially its human rights record (DAWN, 2023).

It is seen as investing in sports as a way to 'sportswash' away criticisms of a country's domestic and foreign policies, especially concerning human rights. It can also be seen as bankrolling big-name sporting events to distract from a poor human rights record (The Guardian, 2023).

Britannica defined sportswashing as an athletic event by an individual or a government, a corporation, or another group to promote or burnish the individual's or group's reputation, especially amid controversy or scandal.

The idea of sportswashing was coined in 2015 as a portmanteau of sports and whitewash to describe Azerbaijan's use of the European Games to divert international attention away from concerns over human rights in the country. Sportswashing came into widespread use about 2018 as Amnesty International began using it to draw attention to the correlation between the decline of human rights in Russia in the 2010s

and Russia's hosting of the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games and the 2018 FIFA World Cup

The history of sports transformation, referred later by some as sportwashing in Saudi Arabia, especially by Western commentators can be traced to 2018.

This is because the Kingdom's major investment in global sports enterprise came in 2018, when the Saudi Sports Ministry signed a ten-year contract to host World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) events for two years. This deal was reportedly worth a combined \$100 million per year, which was about 10 percent of WWE's annual revenue.

However, that year (2018), coincided with the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a US-based journalist and critic of Saudi Arabia's government, who was killed in a Saudi consulate in Istanbul (BBC, 2021).

It has been argued by the US intelligence agencies, that the crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman, approved the murder of Jamal Khashoggi (The Guardian, 2021) but that position, remains a one sided account. Worthy of note is that the Saudi Arabia government has spent at least \$6.3bn on sports deals since early 2021, more than quadruple the previous amount spent over a six-year period (The Guardian, 2023). Saudi Arabia has spent lavishly to host boxing, tennis, horse racing, and Formula 1 events.

The Kingdom has also financed international golf competitions and bought stakes in a Formula 1 franchise and an English soccer teams etc. These investments in the area of sports has led legendary European players to switch from their clubs in order to play in the Saudi Pro League. However, it should be simply argued without distortions that the Saudi investment in sports cannot be seen nor stereotyped as 'sportwashing', because sports investments are part of Vision 2030, a broad government plan to diversify the country's economy beyond oil. Furthermore nations spend their huge resources to transform their national sports without excessive stereotype.

According to United Nations, human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.

Therefore, everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination . Meanwhile, international human rights law lays down the obligations of governments to act in certain

ways or refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups (United Nations, 2023).

These rights are grouped into: political, civil, social, cultural, and economic. The concept of human rights arises from at least three sources - religion; political and legal philosophy; and political revolutions in the 18th century such as the American and French Revolutions.

In 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted what is considered the core international document concerning human rights: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The declaration proclaim that 'all human beings are born free and equal' without regard to race, sex, language, religion, political affiliation, or the status of the territory in which they were born.

The UDHR does not have the force of international law, but it sets forth (hoped-for) international norms regarding behaviour by governments towards their own citizens and foreigners alike.

Even with the introduction of women's rights reforms, work sponsorship reforms, criminal justice reforms (Human Rights Watch, 2021), different countries have peculiar human rights challenges.

Human Rights Watch (2022) reported that in 2021, Saudi authorities carried out arbitrary arrests, trials, and convictions of peaceful dissidents.

however, there have been negligence of the Saudi criminal justice reforms. These reforms have aided the increasing penetration of the country by foreign workers who are heavily paid beyond the standard labour rewards in many European and American countries. That has led to the massive emigration of medical doctors from all over the world to the Kingdom. It should also be noted that the excessive emphasis on women and children rights tends to neglect the historic cultural norms and values of the people, which is also a source of legal instrument, human rights and sports development from the ancestral times.

Recent Human Rights Advances/Reforms in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia in recent times have had some advances in the area of human rights. Some reforms have been announced by the kingdom in order to increase the equality of women in the society.

The legal changes, adopted by the Council of Ministers decision and endorsed by royal decree M.134, will allow Saudi women to obtain passports without the approval of a male relative, register births of their children, and benefit from new protections against employment discrimination (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Equally, Saudi officials announced that women over 21 will no longer require male guardian permission to travel abroad, elimination of a provision allowing men to include their wives and unmarried daughters on their passports, removal of the idea requiring women to live with their husband (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Women will also be permitted to notify the civil status office of a death, marriage, or divorce, and to obtain family records. This will allow women, along with their husbands, to be considered a 'head of household' with respect to their children, which would improve Saudi women's ability to conduct government business on their children's behalf (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Labour law clarify that a 'worker' can be female as well as male. Employers will be prohibited from dismissing or threatening women with dismissal during pregnancy or maternity leave or if they have an illness resulting from pregnancy or childbirth (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

New provision will entitle women to equal pay with men and citizens are equal with respect to the right to work without any discrimination on the basis of sex, disability, age, or any other form of discrimination (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In 2018, Saudi Arabia lifted a ban on women's rights to drive and equally halting the death penalty for alleged child offender for certain crimes (Human Rights Watch, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2019).

In 2021, the crown prince, Mohammad bin Salman, announced plans to introduce significant changes to Saudi Arabia's judicial system, including the promulgation of a

personal status law (or family law) (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

In 2020, the reforms by the authorities in the Kingdom allowed migrant worker to change employers under some circumstances and cancel the requirement for permission from their employers - an exist permit - to leave the country.

This reform was against the backdrop of the notorious kafala (sponsorship) system, which ties the legal status of millions of migrant workers to individual sponsors, facilitating abuse and exploitation, including forced labour, working hours without a day off, forces confinement, and physical and sexual abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

As part of the justice reforms, the country announced on February 8, 2021, that the country's first written penal code for discretionary crimes and a law of evidence are being prepared which are meant to increase the level of integrity and efficiency of judicial institutions and in April 2020, the kingdom announced an end to flogging for some crimes (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

U.S. Department of State, 2021 and 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in Saudi Arabia; Amnesty International, (2022); Human Rights Watch: Saudi Arabia Events of 2021 and 2022), etc.

The government persecuted some officials for corruption, although there were allegations of significant due process violations and other human rights abuses, including allegations of torture in these cases (U.S. Department of State 2021 and 2022 Country Reports on Human Practices: Saudi Arabia).

Sports Transformation and Sportwashing Stereotype

Sportwashing has no general acceptable definition. However, it is the use of sport both by individuals, corporate bodies, and governments, through sponsorship, partnership, funding, development, in order to conceal a bad record of human rights abuses.

This is equally known as reputation laundering. Since her foray into the world of sports, Saudi Arabia has spent at least \$6.3bn in sports deals since early 2021 (The Guardian, 2023).

However, this developments and spendings has not gone down well with some scholars, human rights activists, pundits, etc.

Thus, rights groups including Grant Liberty, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch term such spending 'sportswashing' - bankrolling big-name sports events in order to distract from a poor record on human rights (The Guardian, 2023).

The kingdom's first major investment in a foreign sports enterprise came in 2018, when the Saudi sports ministry signed a ten-year contract to host World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) events, a deal worth a reported \$100 million per year (about 10 percent of WWE's annual revenue) (CFR, 2023).

Since then, Saudi Arabia has spent lavishly to host boxing, tennis, horse racing, and Formula 1 events. The Kingdome has also financed international golf competitions and bought stakes in Formula 1 franchise and an English soccer team. Therefore, we shall be taking a cursory look at how the Saudi kingdom has used sport as a tool I'm 'washing' her bad international image, for a better understanding of the subject matter.

The first Formula 1 race in Saudi Arabia that was held in Jeddah wassponsored by the national oil company, Saudi Aramco. Since then it becomes an annual event known as the Saudi Arabia Grand Prix . In February 2023, Saudi Arabia announced that she would be hosting the 2023 FIFA Club World Cup (The Guardian, 2023).

In 2021, PIF invested a \$550 million sponsorship of McLaren Group Ltd, a Bahraini-owned company based in Woking which is a major part of Formula One through its manufacture of racing cars while there was a recent \$1bn investment in Video game company - Embracer Group - and a 2022 four-year deal between the planned city of Neom on the Red Sea Coast and the Asian Football Confederation (The Guardian, 2023).

The Saudi Arabian oil giant Aramco is the joint title sponsor for Aston Martin F1 team. Earlier in 2023 Saudi Arabia tried to buy the Formula 1 tournament outright for \$20bn while in 2018 the Saudi Sports Ministry signs a ten-year deal to host two annual World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) events, reportedly worth a combined \$100m per year The Saudi cup, the highest-paying horse race of all time, with a purse of \$20m, is held for the first time in

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, thus becoming an annual event (CFR, 2023).

Saudi Arabia's LIV Golf tour, reportedly created at a cost of \$2bn, held its first event while the PIF reportedly agrees to contribute more than \$1bn to a PGA Tour-LIV Golf partnership. Saudi Arabia is reportedly planning to set up a newer, richer Twenty20 Cricket tournament, along the lines of hyper-successful Indian Premier League (IPL), and wants star cricketers like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma to participate. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has been chosen to host the 2029 and 2034 Asian Winter Games and Asian Games respectively. Separately, Saudi, is weighing a bid to host the FIFA 2030 World Cup with Greece and Egypt, even offering to fund stadium construction in the two countries if they allow the kingdom to host three-quarters of the matches. Also, the kingdom is planning on hosting the Olympics - which is an ultimate goal for the country (Ibid).

In January 2021, Lionel Messi, one of the greatest-ever soccer players, signed a three-year, \$25m deal to promote tourism to Saudi Arabia on social media (CFR, 2023). The US PGA Tour announced a shock merger with the Saudi-bankrolled LIV Golf on June 6, 2023 while in October 2021, Saudi Arabia led a consortium that bought Newcastle United, marking the country's entry into the valuable, fanatically followed English Premier League In 2022, Cristiano Ronaldo agreed to move to Al Nassr, a Saudi Arabian club, for a reported \$6m. At the time, it is the highest-paying contract in sports history. Since then, other star players like Neymar Jr, Karim Benzema, N'golo Kante, Sadio Mane, Koulibaly, etc, have signed for one club or the other that is based in Saudi Professional League. In June 2023, PIF bought four teams in the Saudi Professional League (CFR, 2023).

Thus, is this investment an attempt to diversify the economy and cater to younger citizens, as its leaders claim? Or is it done to paper over human rights abuses, authoritarian rule and murder? (CBS NEWS, 2023).

Only time can tell. Others are buying major stakes in the likes of Uber, gaming companies like Activision Blizzard and Electronic Arts, and the private-equity giant - Blackstone - (DAWN, 2023).

However, the kingdom through the sport minister insists that the massive investment is an essential pillar of what is called

Vision 2030: A \$7 trillion plan by the kingdom's effective ruler Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman to diversify the economy beyond oil (CBS NEWS, 2023). Due to her bad human rights records, the international community is concerned about Saudi Arabia's sudden interest in sport.

Implications of Sports Transformation

Firstly, there is the increasing promotion of sports diplomacy from the Kingdom to the rest of the world.

Therefore, in order to chart a new course, Saudi Arabia government has undertaken some developmental strides in the area of sport. Thus, this has resulted in silencing major oppositions criticizing her bad human rights records.

The purchase of Newcastle United, a football club based in UK, and the sponsorship of LIV Golf and merger of the latter with her bitter and arch rival - PGA Tours - in US, has been heavily perceived as land mark break even point in the rise of sports diplomacy.

Secondly, the transformation in the area of national sports within the Kingdom have charted a more independent foreign policy.

The implications of sports towards the promotion of the national image of a country cannot be neglected as sports drives international tourism. It also promotes increased spending of strong international currencies from different parts of the world. Such tourism and recreation tendency enhances the soft power diplomatic posture of a country. Soft power is part of a nation's foreign policy that advances the behaviour or thinking of others through the power of attraction and ideas. Regardless of its motives, the Kingdom's sports investments have significant international implications: with a larger and more diversified economy, Saudi Arabia would chart a more independent foreign policy while enhancing its international image by using sports to attract strong international business actors from different parts of the globe. Saudi Arabia is forging a foreign policy through her Vision 2030 sports transformation that will enable her to be independent of Western influences and build more robust economy.

Thirdly, Saudi Arabia is not alone in this race of sports transformation. In the same manner, China and Russia has employed sport

as a tool for her reputation building. Russia annexed Crimea weeks after hosting the 2014 Olympics and invaded Ukraine four years after hosting the 2018 FIFA World Cup. China hosted the 2008 and 2022 Olympics amid international criticisms and Sino-American diplomatic crisis. Qatar's investment authority reaches a deal to buy 5 percent of the parent company of NBA's Washington Wizards after the National Basketball Association changed its rule to allow ownership by sovereign wealth funds.

Fourthly, expansion of Saudi Arabia economic and political leverage to other countries. Saudi Arabia is spreading her tentacles in the area of sports not only within her immediate environment but also across the globe. In the US, UK, and other countries (DAWN, 2023).

In the US, Saudi Arabia has been directing billions worth of investments into the US economy through the PIF and is busy buying major stakes in the likes of Uber, gaming companies - Activision Blizzard and Electronic Arts, and the private-equity giant Blackstone. Recently, she succeeded in merging two rival Golf giants LIV Golf and PGA Tour Golf. In the UK, the Saudi kingdom, through her sovereign wealth funds also known as Public Investment Fund (PIF) purchased Newcastle United, a football club that plays in the English top flight (English Premier League).

The kingdom is proposing a joint hosting of the 2030 World Cup alongside Egypt and Greece. The kingdom has promised to finance the construction of stadiums in these countries.

These and others has underscored a powerful reality where the bedrock of a nation's economy - and by extension, possible even the nation's government itself - can be bought by the world's richest religious state.

Fifthly, the sports transformation goin on in Saudi, enhances the enthusiasm for sports by Saudi citizens around the world. Saudi Arabia has began to build local talents from the wealth of experience they have gotten from big sporting personalities that they successfully attracted to her kingdom in other to promote sports, tourism, and development.

Some players has seen the country as an alternative means of escaping the hard work with excessive task in European sports.

Others has seen as an alternative means of cashing out big in the world of sports.

A notable example was a former Chelsea player, Kalidou Koulibaly, who moved to the Saudi Pro League on the basis of making money and catering for his family. Qatar hosting of the World Cup resulted in some fans not traveling to the country to watch the game live.

Lessons for African States

Sports remains a wonderful tool for peacebuilding (Ani, Anyanwu, 2023a) and in Africa that is currently undermined by conflicts and human rights abuses that goes with it, sports will help in healing and promotion of sustainable peace for national and continental development, considering the degree of negative effects from conflicts that are experienced in the continent (Ani, Anyanwu, 2023b).

The Saudi Arabia's foray into the world of sports presents numerous lessons for African countries. There is a need for African countries to invest tremendously in different areas of sports. Heralding Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is investments in sports. Though some critics, experts, human rights practitioners, scholars has termed such the Kingdom sports transformation as as 'sportswashing', its impact cannot be denied.

Therefore, there is a need for African leaders to adopt the Saudi strategy in accelerating her sports development plans. This will equally led to the diversifying of most African economy and reduces her dependence on fossil fuel and other mineral resources through adequate investment in other sports.

Sport can be a major form of Africa's diplomatic tool. Sport diplomacy is the most neglected form of diplomacy. However, African countries can through the development of sport tap into the inexhaustible advantages in sport diplomacy.

This could give the continent a form of leveraging tool in other to carryout her foreign policy objectives. Thus, Africa will have a say in the world of sports through hosting, funding, sponsorship of major sports events. In the history of FIFA World Cups, the continent has only hosted the event just once (in 2010, when South Africa hosted the 2010 FIFA World Cup).

Sport can help African countries diversify her economy and forge an independent foreign policy. Most African economies are mono-based economies.

Therefore, in other to diversify, there is a need to invest in sports. Since 2019, sport contributions to Saudi Arabia's GDP has quadrupled and the nation is trying to forge an independent foreign policy objectives that is free of Western influence and imperialism. The kingdom wants to be known for other things than oil.

Therefore, African countries can take advantage of her youthful population in other to diversify her economy and forge an independent foreign policy through adequate investment in sports. As at present, in most African countries sport contribute less than 5 percent of the gross domestic product.

However, in other to achieve the above, there is a need to develop, fund, and sponsor major sporting activities across the continent. Saudi Arabia today has become a hub and destination for most foreign football players. Equally, Saudi Arabia through her PIF bought five clubs from the Saudi Pro League. This has helped the clubs to compete favourably among other clubs around the world.

One of the major factors affecting African sports or sports in Africa is lack of funding. Therefore, adequate priority should be given to sport in other to allow it grow and develop thereby contributing meaningful to the Gross domestic product of the continent.

CONCLUSION

This study has presented the radical transformations in the Saudi sports history in recent times.

The investment within the sports sector of the Kingdom has grown to the level that it is generating global migration into Saudi.

Some World leaders and sports analysts are at a crisscross as a result of Saudi Arabia's massive investment in sports, which has led to the sportswashing stereotype.

The study has maintained that this form of transformation is what is needed within the African continent in the bid to transform both the African sports and the African economy.

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