

## The Continued Unpopularity of Cricket in Sierra Leone Against the Numerous Laurels Won at Sub-Regional Tournaments.

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### Abstract

*This study identified the reasons for the unpopularity of the game of cricket in Sierra Leone amidst the series of success stories of the game; unlike football. The study investigated the reasons for the present level of interest in cricket, identified strategies that can be employed to develop cricket, and made recommendations as to how cricket can be popularized in Sierra Leone. The study contends that the unpopularity of cricket was as a result of the inadequate publicity of the game, inadequate government attention to the game, schools, and colleges not teaching the game either theoretically or practically or both, lack of expatriates, trained and qualified coaches, inadequate equipment, inadequate awareness raising campaign and inadequate sponsorships. Data for the study was sought from cricket authorities, players, coaches, Physical Education teachers, lecturers and the community people. Descriptive analysis and the bivariate correlation were done using the SPSS analysis software. The study suggested robust engagement of the media in selling the game out to the public and restore the game to the schools and colleges. Standard facilities and equipment were to be available throughout the country. Training programs organized for coaches, league matches organize and sponsorship sought*

**Keywords:** Cricket, unpopularity, numerous laurels, sub-regional, tournaments

### 1 Introduction

Cricket was brought to Sierra Leone as far back as 1898 by a British Artillery Regiment. Since then, cricket has been playing in all four corners of the country in schools, colleges, and communities.[7] The Sierra Leone Cricket Association (SLCA) was founded in 1942 and has since been playing international cricket tournaments first against the Gambia in 1935, later joined by Nigeria and Ghana that formed the West Africa Cricket conference (WACC) of which Sierra Leone was a founding member who was later transformed into North-West Africa cricket Conference NWACC with a membership of seven (7) Nigeria, Sierra, Ghana, the Gambia, Cameroun, Mali and Morocco. Sierra Leone is a member of the Africa Cricket Association- (ACA) and an Affiliate member of the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Cricket began diffusing to other countries when British soldiers and settlers brought it with them to the various colonies of the empire, and today, most Commonwealth countries support active cricket cultures, though not all. [8]

Cricket originated in England as an informal rural game, though it quickly emerged into a highly competitive sport. Over time, cricket evolved into an English national pastime, along with soccer, rugby, and horse racing. [1]

Cricket is the most successful sport in Sierra Leone with its Board of directors headed by a chairman responsible for control and administering. By the organogram of the Sierra Leone Cricket Association, the Chief Executive officer is responsible for the day to day operations of cricket activities in the country.

Cricket has developed from a game played only by English noblemen and aristocrats to a sport played and watched by millions in India, Pakistan, Australia and the West Indies. The origins of the game may be disputed, but the popularity of the game was created and promoted through the British Empire in the early 20th century. [4]

Sierra Leone played Inter-colonial sub-regional cricket from the 1930s. In 1967, the West African Quadrangular tournament commenced with matches between Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia. Despite breaks in the tournament, it lasted until 2006 after which the ICC introduced the new North West African Cricket Championship, which made its debut in the Gambia in 2007. Sierra Leone won the old quadrangular tournament five times, winning the Sani Abacha trophy outright in 2000 after three consecutive championship victories.[4]

One of the reasons for Sierra Leone's Cricket team's success is the arrival of Peter Kirsten as a consultant on the recommendation of Cassim Suliman, the chief executive of the Africa Cricket Association. Kirsten spent two weeks in Freetown with the national team before their trip to Benoni. His first task was to take two players, and turn them into spinners because most bowlers in the country wanted to be quicks.[7]

The Sierra Leone senior national cricket team participated in the ICC Africa World Cricket League Division 3 tournament held in Benoni, the Republic of South Africa from March 22nd – 27th March 2014 and finished as runners-up with silver medals on net run rate difference with Swaziland, the champions.

With more African nations joining the fold, Sierra Leone competed in 2009 ICC World Cricket League Africa Region Division III in Malawi, finishing in second to gain promotion. The first Division II campaign got the team finishes in fourth-place in South Africa in April 2010.

Sierra Leone also won the first ICC/ACA West Africa U7 championships in Lagos, Nigeria in 2002 and finished as runners-up in the Africa Affiliate Division 2 tournament in Benoni, South Africa.

Sierra Leone cricket team had dominated the Quadrangular cricket tournament that involved Ghana, Nigeria, and Gambia. It has won more laurels than any of the other major games in the country yet support from within and without has not been attractive. The stakeholders seem to have shown less interest, and spectator turnout is abysmal. Ironically though, its success at sub-regional tournaments is marked by a sharp decline in its popularity in the country.

The aforementioned problems, therefore, prompted this research so as to ascertain the level of the unpopularity of cricket amidst the quality representation of the team at sub-regional tournaments.

## **2 Literature Review**

The ICC Development program report of the cricket Quarterly Magazine in June 2007 quoted the case of Ireland as a success story. Mathew Kennedy was charged with the responsibility to head the committee for Development of Cricket. He said, "The success of Ireland at the cricket world cup was very encouraging for all of us who care about spreading the game and improving the overall standard of cricket around the world." He also continued "the success did not come easily and was the product of a huge amount of hard work not only with Ireland but also with ICC." [2]

This is thus a crystal indication that Associations should also move from their comfort zones if they are to see the game developed and popularized.

In England where modern cricket was born, it was seen as more than a game. "Cricket was much more than just another game to the Victorians. They glorified it as a perfect system of ethics and morals which embodied all that was most noble in the Anglo-Saxon character" [9]

In other countries, cricket is taught in schools and colleges. Schools compete against each other, and league matches are being played year in and year out. International friendly competitions are being organized, and the media gives full coverage of the events.

The above are indications of the popularity of cricket globally. The game is held in high esteem, and a good many people have accepted it. While cricket is attracting many people in other parts of the world, the Sierra Leone Chapter remains pathetic. It should, however, be noted that the unpopularity of cricket in a country is not

a new phenomenon, rather other countries have gone through the same trend, but frantic efforts were made to turn things around.

Cricket was popular in Canada and the United States in the mid-nineteenth century; in fact, the first official international cricket match in the world took place between American and Canadian “elevens” in 1844 (Boller 1994a:23).[3] The game’s popularity rivaled that of baseball until the late nineteenth century, after which interest declined sharply. The game languished in both countries until quite recently, when new immigrants from the Caribbean and South Asia began arriving in North America in significant numbers (Gunaratnam 1993; Steen 1999). [5]

As fewer Canadian elite schools devoted time to training young men in the finer points of cricket, the quantity and quality of play declined. Without fresh infusions of talent or widespread networks of league play, the game gradually took on the air of a marginal, old-fashioned pastime for antiquarians and Anglophiles.(JUANA&CO The popularity of cricket in Sierra Leone hinges on its teaching and practice in schools and colleges for grassroots and youths to be highly involved in the game.[1]

The Sierra Leone Grammar School and the Methodist Boys High School were the first schools to play cricket in Freetown. In the provinces, the Bo Government Secondary School, founded in 1906, was the first to play cricket. Sierra Leone became an Affiliate Member of the ICC in 2000.

The game gradually began to gain grounds when it was introduced in prominent schools such as the Sierra Leone Grammar School, Methodist Boys High School, and the Bo Government Secondary School. By 1930 Cricket was played in all the provincial headquarter towns with many Sierra Leoneans now involved.

In 1947, the Sierra Leone Cricket Association was formed after the completion of the constitution which remains in operation until November 16, 2007, when the first amendment was made which saw Beresford Burns-Caulker in office. A further amendment was made in February 2012 which included a Board to oversee the activities of the executive. Cricket was played at various grounds in the country by the 50s to the mid-70s. However, although many Sierra Leoneans were involved in the game then, the bulk of the players and organizers were experts. Companies like Sierra Leone Selection Trust, Delco at Lunsar also emerged. These companies also sponsored cricket matches played in the provinces as far as Kono in the Diamond Mining areas in the Eastern region.

Regularly by the end of the 1970s cricket died in the provinces largely because of the reduction in the size of foreign experts. However, the game continued in Freetown with the regular play of National League involving teams like Old Edwardians, Police, Army, None descript, Fourah Bay Sports, Railway Cricket Club and Prince Wales.

The once popular game is deteriorating in support and interest especially when compared to football, volleyball where new teams are emerging regularly. Not much of cricket is being heard of or even seen play in schools and colleges. The Media reports very little about cricket. There are other sports programs on Radio Stations weekly yet sometimes it takes months before cricket is mentioned in a program. Even where they do it is but brief.

The then Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service now a corporation reported extensively on the 13<sup>th</sup> Quadrangular Cricket Tournament held in Freetown in 2001 which gave an opportunity for the government of Sierra Leone to turn a bit of attention to cricket. The then Minister of Education, Youth and Sports, Dr. Alpha Wurie in his opening statement spoke gladly of the success of the Sierra Leone Cricket Team in Ghana and Gambia in 1997 and 1999 at the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Edition respectively where they emerged Grand Winners.

Dr. Wurie noted that cricket is not merely a game in the Sierra Leone Calendar of sporting Events but a full discipline on its own rights and consequently a source of valuable education for the children of Sierra Leone. He noted that the extent of positive values intended in cricket could only be fully appreciated when the right

kind of attitude and appropriate climate are provided. Dr. Alpha Wurie on behalf of the government of Sierra Leone-registered commitment to ensure that cricket does not only regain lost glory but will match up to international standard.

The Awoko Newspaper, February 9, 2008, edition spoke about the constraints facing the National Cricket Team as they prepare for the West Africa Cricket Tournament that was held in Nigeria in April of the same year. Sierra Leone, however, won the silver medal. The then coach Cyril Panda attributed that to poor preparation due to lack of funds. The result, he noted would have been Gold in a better form.[6]

Ibrahim Kamara, an all-rounder, while describing the country's cricket oval says, "There's no grass, the outfield is gravel, and the pitch is concrete," Such a pitch is not conducive for a dive or slide. If a player is used to dive and slide on his pitch back home, he would not be hesitant to do so on a foreign pitch which is expected to be standard. The status of our pitch is an inhibiting factor for optimal performance, he noted.[7]

The Managing Director of Mercury International, Martin Michael has described Cricket as the "most successful sport" in the country even though it is not the most popular. Mercury International is the chief sponsor of the 2016 T20 Division One Cricket League. [6]

### **3.0 Methodology**

It was a descriptive survey that was conducted using the four regions of the country. One hundred respondents were targeted. The survey was on the "unpopularity of cricket in Sierra Leone amidst the numerous laurels won at sub-regional tournaments." In doing, so both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been used.

#### **3.1 Population and Sample**

The study selected hundred (n=100) participants as the sample which was drawn from the following categories in the four regional headquarter towns: Officials of the Sierra Leone Cricket Association, Players, the community, schools and Cricket Coaches. The sampling was done using the simple random technique.

#### **3.2 Instrumentation**

The instruments used in this investigation included: semi-structured questionnaire. Questions required yes or no responses where the value for YES is "1" and "2" for NO. There were also, multiple choice responses and a five-point Likert scale responses, (Point 5 for excellent, 4 for very good, 3 for average, 2 for below average and 1 for poor). Positive attributes were given the high point values. The highest point value goes to the most positive attribute and the lowest point value to the most negative,

#### **3.3 Data Collection**

Data was collected using questionnaire. There were some respondents who by virtue of their busy schedules could not find enough time to fully respond to the questionnaires. Others are followers of the game but are not literate enough to respond to questionnaires. In those circumstances, the interview guide was used to aid in the direction of relevant questions or statements to respondents.

#### **4.0 Data Analysis**

Table 1: Selected variables showing mean, median, mode and standard deviation as reported by respondents.

	Have you seen cricket game being played?	Is Cricket popular in your city?	How do you rate the popularity of cricket in your country?	Is the national Cricket team successful in international tournaments?	How often do you see and or hear about cricket on television or radio?
N Valid	100	100	100	100	100
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	1.75	1.92	1.22	1.06	1.77
Median	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
Mode	2	2	1	1	2
Std. Deviation	.435	.273	.629	.239	.423

Table 1 is a frequency distribution that shows the mean, median ,mode and Standard Deviation(SD) for n=100 respondents. The Standard deviation for the popularity in cities is .273 and that for the country generally is .629.The responses were so close for the popularity of cricket in the cities but widely spread in the case of popularity in the country generally; an indication that though is seen as popular in some cities, the converse holds for the responses for the country. Responses were also spread out in the frequency of hearing or/and seeing cricket on the television and/or radio at .423

Table 2:Shows responses to popularity of cricket in the cities and the country at large

			How do you rate the popularity of cricket in your country?		Total
			poor	average	
Is Cricket popular in your city? yes	Count		8	0	8
	% within Is Cricket popular in your city?		100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within How do you rate the popularity of cricket in your country?		9.0%	0.0%	8.0%
no	Count		81	11	92
	% within Is Cricket popular in your city?		88.0%	12.0%	100.0%
	% within How do you rate the popularity of cricket in your country?		91.0%	100.0%	92.0%
Total	Count		89	11	100
	% within Is Cricket popular in your city?		89.0%	11.0%	100.0%
	% within How do you rate the popularity of cricket in your country?		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

From table 2, n=8 respondents (8.0%) responded that cricket is popular in their cities while n=92 (92%) reported the game is not popular in their cities. The rating for the popularity of cricket in the country generally had n=89(89.0%) respondents with poor rating n=11(11.0%) said the popularity rating countrywide was average.

**Table 3: Shows responses to the successes gained by the national cricket in international tournaments and how often respondents see and or hear about cricket on television or radio.**

			How often do you see and or hear about cricket on television or radio?		Total
			never	occasionally	
Is the national Cricket team successful in international tournaments?	yes	Count	21	73	94
		% within Is the national Cricket team successful in international tournaments?	22.3%	77.7%	100.0%
		% within How often do you see and or hear about cricket on television or radio?	91.3%	94.8%	94.0%
no	no	Count	2	4	6
		% within Is the national Cricket team successful in international tournaments?	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within How often do you see and or hear about cricket on television or radio?	8.7%	5.2%	6.0%
Total		Count	23	77	100
		% within Is the national Cricket team successful in international tournaments?	23.0%	77.0%	100.0%
		% within How often do you see and or hear about cricket on television or radio?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table three shows that n=92(94%)of respondents acknowledge that there was a tremendous success by the national cricket team for which they were satisfied and n=6((6.0%)said they were not satisfied with the successes of the national team at international tournaments.

Responding to their source of information about the game=23(23.0%) of respondents said they have never seen or heard of the game of cricket on radio and or television while n=77(77.7%) they occasionally hear about cricket, not always or often.

**Table 4: Shows the Pearson’s correlation coefficient for the popularity of cricket in in the country and the rating on the administration of cricket in the country.**

		How do you rate the popularity of cricket in your country?	How do you rate the administration of cricket in your country?
How do you rate the popularity of cricket in your country?	Pearson Correlation	1	-.178
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.076
	N	100	100
How do you rate the administration of cricket in your country?	Pearson Correlation	-.178	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.076	
	N	100	100

Table 4 shows the bivariate correlation between popularity rating of cricket in the country and the rating of how cricket is administered in the country. It reveals that there is a strong negative correlation between the two variables. It depicts that when the responses of the rating for the administration of cricket increases, there is a corresponding decrease in the positive responses to the popularity of the game in the country and vice versa. This is a clear indication that the game is not popular in the country irrespective of the efforts of the cricket administration in getting cricket to the level they. The cricket administration, therefore, needs to put shoulders to the wheel to get the game popularized.

**Table 5: shows respondents rating on the administration of cricket in the country.**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid fairly good	15	15.0	15.0	15.0
good	33	33.0	33.0	48.0
very good	52	52.0	52.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

**Figure 1: Shows the pie chart for the rating of the popularity of cricket in the country**

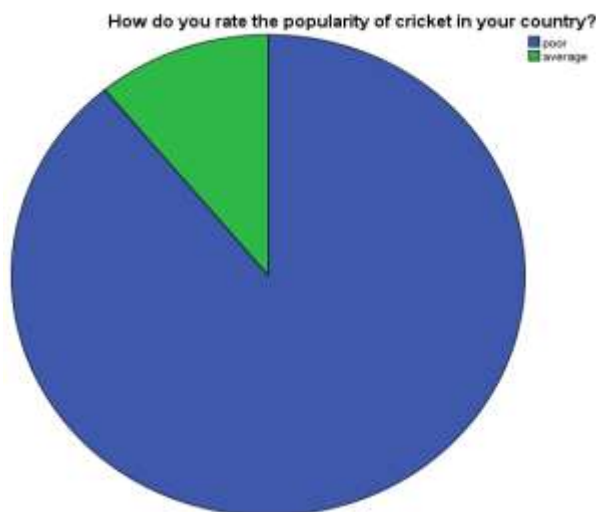


Table 6: Shows How often respondents see and or hear about cricket on television or radio.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid never	23	23.0	23.0	23.0
occasionally	77	77.0	77.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

FIGURE 2: Pie-chart is showing how often respondents see and or hear about cricket on television or radio.

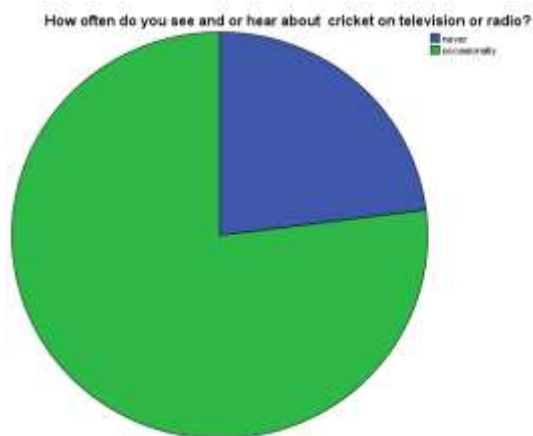
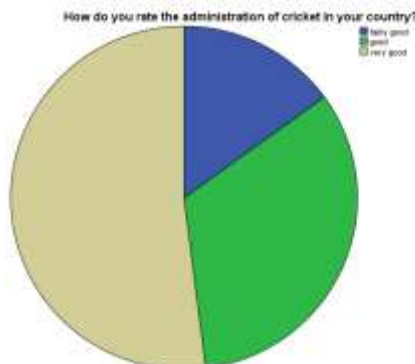


Table 7: Shows respondents ratings on of the administration of cricket in the country?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid fairly good	15	15.0	15.0	15.0
good	33	33.0	33.0	48.0
very good	52	52.0	52.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Figure 3: a pie-chart showing ratings of the administration of cricket in





## 4.1 Results

Results have shown that the popularity of cricket in Sierra Leone is yet at a low ebb. The study showed that the following are core reasons for the unpopularity of cricket in this West African country that was colonized by the British who are said to be the propagators of this beautiful gentleman's game:

Lack of standard playing grounds; as only one exists in the country, little funding for the progress of the game, inadequate supply of equipment to schools, lack of sufficient Government attention and support for the game, mismanagement of the existing equipment and facilities, inadequate training opportunities for coaches and teachers, little commitment by the officials who are inclined to the game, inadequate public education and sensitization of the people about the game of cricket, the game not taught in most schools. Lack of sponsorship and other fundraising drives. Also identified was inadequate sensitization of the public about the game.

There is no doubt that Cricket is popular among the ball games played in countries like Pakistan, England, India, South Africa, etc. simply because there are different competitions organized at various levels in various cities where players have benefited and are still benefiting by receiving rewards in the form of cash prizes, trophies and the like.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The researcher is of the view that there are absolutely huge cricket development and popularity potentials in Sierra Leone considering its history, background, and culture. The study concluded that the unpopularity of the game stems from the fact that the game is not popularized in schools and colleges; it lacks trained personnel and a robust public relations department for awareness rising. Above all, there isn't adequate playing facilities and equipment.

## 5.1 Recommendations

More than half of the population in this research reacted that the game needs financial support.

The Sierra Leone Government and the International Cricket Council and other well-meaning organizations have to come out strongly in giving support to cricket especially in the areas of finance and provision of facilities and equipment.

A robust approach to media engagement and sponsorship drive should be mounted, and the competitive playing of the game be reintroduced in educational institutions from primary schools to colleges and universities.

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