

**Paul K. Kurgat, Alice J. Kurgat**

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**THE SHIELD AND THE SICKLE:  
ASPECTS OF KENYA – RUSSIAN  
RELATIONS  
FROM THE COLONIAL PERIOD  
TO THE END OF THE COLD WAR  
(1929–1989)**

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THE RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES  
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Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Russia are used synonymously and interchangeably in the monograph. Russia was the largest and strongest in the defunct USSR and a successor state.

This monograph is the final product of three articles researched in Kenya and Russia, “Kenyatta’s Moscow Years (1929, 1932–1933) and the Struggle for Kenya’s Independence”, “The Shield and the Sickle: Aspect of Kenya-Russian Relations Since 1963” and “Running into Fame and Wealth: The Role of Sports in Kenya’s Foreign Relations”. The authors completed their research and submitted the monograph manuscript, prior to the Ambassador’s appointment and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors.

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## **PART II**

### **RUNNING INTO FAME AND WEALTH: THE ROLE OF SPORTS IN KENYA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS**



## Abstract

This article provides an international relations perspective of the role of sport as a potential factor in Kenya's foreign relations in post-colonial Kenya. It notes that while sports events and sports-persons can serve important political functions, their actual diplomatic values depended on what the political 'arena' saw fit in utilizing sport as a means of furthering "higher" diplomatic interests. In other words, sport is only independent in as much as it has no significant bearing on political affairs. When foreign policy and diplomacy is used as an instrument to coerce, sport become useful and is co-opted by politics. In contemporary Kenya, sporting activities in the Olympics and other major world sporting events have created an image of a big power Nation. The country constantly produce world class sportsmen and women and this is manifested in the rising number of sportspersons breaking world records and the scramble by a number of states to grant citizenship to Kenyan athletes and recruitment into the coaching opportunities that are availed by the sporting world. Sports have become a major diplomatic and foreign policy tool in advancing inter-state relations and many a times used to express state's stand on global issues. This article firstly outlines the nature of sport and lists instances in which Kenya's sporting prowess has manifested itself since the 1960's; secondly, it relates Kenya's sporting achievements to her foreign relations. Thirdly, it evaluates the extent to which sport have created famous and wealthy sportsmen and women in Kenya and globally. Finally, the article draws conclusions from these sporting relations that might shed some light on the nature of Kenya's sporting relations generally.

## Introduction

Sport and foreign relations in a globalizing world are intertwined and are a global phenomenon. However, international sports have always been part and parcel of international politics. Africa is an emerging continental giant in the sporting world. There is a growing number of African stars in boxing, football, track and field athletics.

In recent decades, success of Cameroonians, Nigerians, Tunisians and South Africans in world football leagues has attracted the attention of overseas television viewers, football fans, coaches and trainers, institutions of higher learning and foreign press. This paper explores the emergence and significance of a single sport in one particular African country, Kenya. It focuses on track and field athletics and how it has impacted on Kenya's foreign relations. Kenyan runners have caught the imagination of the world sports since independence in the 1960's.

The Kenyan sport has become an imaginative world mental map for European, American and African sports persons, fan and the general Kenyan public. Kenya has become part of a global cultural system in sports. This globalization of cultures in sports forms a theoretical basis of this article whose central argument is that of Kenyan sports impact on Kenya's foreign relations. Kenya's successes in international competitions have been both tangible and intangible. Awards from the competition have seen tangible results in investments while the intangible results are creating a friendly outlook toward Kenya abroad.

Athletes' successes are symbols and ideals that rally national cohesion and development. The achievements of such athletes like Kipchoge Keino, Paul Tergat, David Rudisha, Tecla Lorupe among others are remarkable. Their involvement in sports locally and internationally, has created a positive image of the country abroad. While their partnership with the private sector, Non-Governmental organizations and Government Agencies have positively impacted on local communities' development. The Tecla Lorupe Peace Foundation support peace building among communities in Kenya and Uganda.

The foundation also champions and initiates development projects such as schools and dairy farming to boost livelihood for local communities.

Flying a National flag at international podiums brings with it a sense of prestige and honour, while at National level, towns and villages, tangible results in terms of real estate are visible. Kenyan towns like Eldoret and its environs are being transformed into "athletics town" by virtue of investment accrued from athletics related activities.

Athletes invest in real estate because the span of holding track records in brief two to three years. Sports create identities that go beyond the stadiums as foreign nationals come to know Kenya through sport. With live transmission of sports events through the media the world interacts with Kenya not only in the stadiums but also inside their living rooms. Through media interaction athletes from other countries visit Kenya to train in the high altitude training centers. This in a subtle way enhances cultural diplomacy.

### **International Diplomacy of Sport**

The founder and first President of the International Olympic Committee Baron Coubertin held the idealized and functionalist view that participation in the Olympics by diverse identity groups would foster international cooperation and eventual peace among states. However, Coubertin did not anticipate the inverse that politics would inevitably come to influence sports as well. The argument is that is sport a cultural strategic tool that a state can utilize to achieve foreign policy objectives. It has been observed that strategic uses of culture are associated with social power and the will to power.<sup>1</sup> According to Brown tactical uses of cultural factors are primarily the domain of the weak, or the disenfranchised. Tactical uses of culture are thus equated to exploiting or reconfiguring the relationships between practice and meaning. Kenya, aware of sport as a strategic cultural tool with International Implications do support and



and encourage national representation in the global events such as Olympics games, All African Games, World Athletic Championships and the many World Marathons.

The relationship between sports and development of international relations is can be traced back to the origins of the Olympic movement. Today sports connect millions of people from different, countries, cultures, religions and race. Sports play a positive role of bridging the gap between states and act as a great balm in the reduction of tension.<sup>2</sup> Stabilization of International relations formed the core reason in the foundation of the Olympic Movement as athletes and footballers representing countries other than their countries of origin is on the rise. In this regard professionalizing and commercialization of sports are eroding international boundaries in favour of regional and global integration.

According to Berg<sup>3</sup> in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Olympics took on a stronger nationalist visage than had previously characterized the Games when the emphasis shifted from the individual athlete as the competitor to the state, as a whole. This shift is attributed to the media's constructed world view comprising of states and national identities. Indeed, while sporting activities may once have been a competition of individuals, not countries without prejudices, or extrapolations of the events to determine a nation's superiority, this is no longer the case. The media is arguably key in superimposing cutthroat inter-state competitions that matches with provocative headlines seeking to influence worldviews and public perceptions. The contemporary medal count, with countries ranked by number and quality of medals attained, without mention of the individuals who won those medals as meant that the state absorbed the athlete, and the citizenry as well, in the new realist state vs. state contest that come to embody the Olympics<sup>4</sup> and other international sport forums.

Apart from the Olympics, Football World Cup has come to be a sport event that illustrates how sports occupy a central role in international relations. The last Football World Cup held in South Africa 2010 was not only a South African and the International Football



Federation (FIFA) affair but served as a mapping lens of the place and role of Africa in the world affairs. To many commentators June 11, 2010 to July 11, 2010 was a historical year that saw the World Cup played for the first time on African soil. It was a moment that helped challenge not only the way South Africa is Perceived around the world, but Africa as a whole as the President of South Africa aptly put before the start of the games:

South Africa is ready for the World Cup...We look forward to welcoming the world, hosting the world and to celebrating with the rest of the continent in the first World Cup here in Africa.<sup>5</sup>

The world cup positively impacted on South African national continental psyche and world view of South Africa. It united South Africans, momentarily brought the world together and the World Cup to Africa. The World Cup songs *Wave the Flag* and *Waka Waka* summarized the meaning, that the World had agreed it was "time for Africa" after many years in the background. For South Africa it was a unity thread after decades of apartheid and a booster to its international prestige as one South African Parliamentarian stated: "We South Africans can use sports to achieve what other nations have done through war."<sup>6</sup>

Here the invocations of patriotism which accompany the official boosterism around mega-events like the Olympics and the World Cup entails a further overlap with warfare, notwithstanding the fact that such events are about sports not security.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Evolution of Kenyan Running**

Modern sports in Kenya is traced to the colonial era under a National Governing Bureaucracy and affiliated to the Amateur Athletic Association of England founded in 1880, the global equivalent of the International Amateur Athletic Association Federation (IAAF).<sup>8</sup>

Modern sport formally replaced the traditional folk-games of ethno-Kenyan society. It marked the start of modernization and globalization of Kenyan sport.

The colonial class undertook jogging events very seriously. Sir Percy Girouard, Governor of British East Africa (1910–1912), and a great believer in keeping fit took pre-breakfast runs around the outskirts of Nairobi, even though, the white settlers were not attracted. However, sporting athletics were more pursued in the activities of the military – the King’s African Rifles (KAR) in 1902, and played an important role in the development of athletics.<sup>9</sup> Captain Richard Meinhertzoggen a British Colonial soldier while on duty in Kenya, organized sports for his KAR Company in Murang’a. He recorded that the winner of a race of 3.6 kilometers covered the course in “exactly 14 minutes”. The first time foot racing was recorded in Kenyan history.<sup>10</sup> In 1919 championships, held in Nairobi, Webster recorded that he was beaten into third place in the 100 yards championship by two men who had benefited from their longer residence at a high altitude a theory advanced sixty years later in relation to the middle-and long-distance performance in athletics.

The Europeanization of ethno-African sports during the colonial period assumed a form of social control of a people and acceptable to both the missionary and the military. Sport was to be used by the colonial administration as an alternative to ethnic “ballet” deemed sexually explicit, lascivious and undesirable.<sup>11</sup> The adoption of colonial sport was meant to provide the Africans with a diversion from internal political discontent, a safety valve for excessive anti-imperialist feeling and the creation of a fit workforce. According to Norman Leys, “the thwarted emotions find vent in secret vices and smug hypocrisy”.<sup>12</sup>

In 1924, the colony’s first Director of Education James Orr with the help of European members of the police, army, schools and church met in Nairobi to form the Arab and African Sports Association (AASA). National sports meeting was to be held annually and local committees arranged local events from which competitors

would be drawn to compete in the National Championships.<sup>13</sup> The first such meeting was held on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1925 in Nairobi and by 1930 the provinces became the main representational units. The colonial secretary arranged sports day between Commercial organizations (tea plantation owners), armed forces and schools. Here the significance of sport as a form of social control was emphasized. Henry Moore<sup>14</sup>, the colonial secretary in 1929 said:

The government attaches great importance to African athletics and to the encouragement of a spirit to local emulation, if for no other reason than because such pursuit provides not only a substitute for political intrigue but also a legitimate channel into which may be diverted inherent instincts which otherwise lead to raiding and stock thieving. They are in the fact a not unimportant part of the African's education.<sup>15</sup>

In the subsequent years, Alliance High School, in Nairobi, and The Government African School in Kapsabet played major roles in the development of sports. In 1949 and 1951, Alliance made a breakthrough in cementing race relations when it hosted a triangular competition between Alliance, Prince of Wales School and the Indian High School. This was the first multi-racial athletics meeting to be held in Kenya. By 1949, athletics was spreading throughout the country and in particular central and western districts. Football was more popular in Nyanza and athletics was dominant in Rift Valley province. In October 1951, the first Kenya Amateur Athletics Association (KAAA) championship which was a multi-racial event held at the Sports Ground in Nairobi.<sup>16</sup>

The seeds of the internationalization and modernization of Kenyan athletic competition was given a boost when annual inter-territorial athletics championship were initiated by Kenyan and Ugandan delegates in 1934. The first of these was held in Kampala in Uganda in November 1934. Alliance High School provided five students and two 'old boys' for the Kenyan team. The Kenya – Uganda meeting led governing bodies of both nations to be affiliated



to the Amateur Athletic Association of England in 1936.<sup>17</sup> This was a deliberate attempt by the colonial government to integrate East African diplomacy and foreign policy.

In 1952 two KAR soldiers posted outstanding achievements in Sports. Chepkwony threw a javelin for a distance of 55.9 metres and Kipsang registered a time of 15 minutes 34 seconds in Ipoh Malaya and became Malayan record holder.<sup>18</sup> In the same year (1952) a Kenyan multi-ethnic team of 23 athletes competed in an international meeting in the Indian Ocean Games in Madagascar. The Kenyan team met French Olympic athletes symbolically marking Kenya's entry into international competition.<sup>19</sup> In August 1953 Kenyan athletes numbering twenty two Africans participated in an international meeting called the Central African Games in Zambia, organized as part of Rhodes Centenary celebrations. The best Kenyan performance was in the javelin where Tesot Manoria won a javelin throw of 60.45 metres.<sup>20</sup> The Kenyan victories projected the nation's prowess in the world of Sport.

The role of women in sport remained insignificant until 1956 when the first official national women competition was held in Kenya. In 1965, a European – Kenyan – Diana Monks won the 80 metres hurdles.<sup>21</sup> The gains obtained in the continental competition in relation to Kenyan athletics had earlier in 1954 affiliated Kenya to the IAAF and the formation of Kenya Olympic Association in 1955. Kenya therefore became a global sporting community. Kenyan athletes began reaching out to modernity and globalization while the Kenyan state began to utilize sports as a means to further and secure National Interests.

### **The Role of Sports in Kenya's Foreign Relations**

Sports and foreign relations in a globalizing world are intertwined. International Sports like the Summer Olympic Games are real world spectacles in terms of size, the geographic spread, the excitement of the competition, and the huge media presence. Such



ingredients demonstrate the relationship and connectivity between politics and international sport.<sup>22</sup> Sport with its common language, ostensibly a political in nature, and its universal appeal provide countries with an excellent means to make statements, whether censures or gestures of good will in subtle ways. Many a times participation or boycotts in International Sports are loaded with underlying meanings and communication.

In the history of Sports, Kenya has experienced three issues of concern arising from sports and foreign relations. First, sport ban of apartheid South Africa and its consequences were domestically disruptive and painful to both interstate relations and sportsmen. Internationally the country faced serious foreign policy challenges i.e. to support her allies or not at the UN forum. Second, concerns the so called 'leg drain' of Kenyan athletes to "economic power houses" i.e. U.S.A., Bahrain, Qatar, Denmark, Netherlands, etc. One needs to watch any top-level world competition to realize the many Kenyans participating and representing different countries of the world. Third, challenge on how to fit sports into the country's foreign policy and diplomatic representation abroad i.e. sports and foreign investment.

At international level sports began to be linked to human rights issues. End of the World War II (1945) and concerns over human rights introduced sports boycotts as an expression of states foreign policy and diplomatic disapproval on actions deemed anti-human rights in the international arena. The Hungarian uprising and the intervention by the defunct Soviet Union attracted the boycott of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.<sup>23</sup>

In 1972, a large number of African countries threatened the International Olympic Committee (IOC) with a boycott, as they demanded a ban on South Africa, Rhodesia, and New Zealand, from the Montreal Olympic games of 1976. Finally, twenty two African nations and Guyana stayed away to demonstrate their opposition to Netherlands' continued rugby contacts with South Africa. The proponents of continued rugby contact with apartheid South Africa argued that there was no place for political interference in sport as; that was

the birthright of citizens of a free, democratic country to travel and play sports with whoever they chose. Ironically, they pointed out that other states with notorious human rights record played sport freely on the international stage without objection. The African countries that boycotted the 1976 Montreal games included: Kenya, Libya, Zambia, Nigeria, Gambia, Sudan, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, Algeria, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Central African Republic, Gabon, Chad, Togo, Niger, Congo, Mauritius, Upper Volta, and Malawi.<sup>24</sup>

The boycott trend was repeated in the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games, when sixty-five nations stayed away because the defunct Soviet Union had militarily invaded Afghanistan in 1979<sup>25</sup>.

In boycotting the XXII Moscow Olympic Games, President (rtd) Moi advanced the argument that Kenya was upholding the protection of Afghan Human Rights.<sup>26</sup> Kenya's Olympic games team was invited to Bukhungu Stadium, Kakamega to perform in front of President Moi, the Cabinet and invited guests. Moi further defended Kenya's position by arguing that:

...we are not against the Soviet Union as a nation nor are we trying to harm the Olympic Movement...But we do not believe that the interests of our country and the peace of the world are going to be served by our ignoring what is clearly a threat to the security of small nations and to world peace by big powers.<sup>27</sup>

However, it has been argued that Kenya's boycott of the Moscow Olympic games was more of pressure from her western allies and the Montreal Olympics Games pressurized by the Organization of African Unity.<sup>28</sup> In retaliation the defunct Soviet Union and fourteen of its Eastern Bloc partners (except Romania) boycotted the Los Angeles Olympic in 1984, arguing that the safety of their athletes could not be guaranteed there and that anti-Soviet hysteria was being whipped up in the United States.<sup>29</sup>

Revisiting the question of apartheid and sports and Kenya's position, it is worth noting that Kenya was a signatory of the Interna-

tional Convention against apartheid in sports signed on the 16 May, 1986 adopted and ratified by the General Assembly and came into force on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1985. State parties undertook to pursue the elimination of apartheid in all its forms and banned contact with a country practicing apartheid, promised not to offer financial assistance and withdrawal of national awards from individuals going against the conventions spirit.<sup>30</sup> Visas were to be denied persons representing a country practicing apartheid, expel South Africa apartheid regime from all federations in which it held membership and impose sanctions against national federations condoning exchanges with a country practicing apartheid. The convention's provisions ceased to apply when apartheid was abolished in 1994 when majority rule came to power under Nelson Mandela. The international Convention against Apartheid had been signed by the following African countries: Kenya, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania.<sup>31</sup>

The then Secretary General of the UN Javier Perez de Guellar said the convention reflected a universal consensus on what needed to be done to isolate from the field of sports those who advocated the doctrine of racial discrimination.<sup>32</sup> According to Kenya's Foreign Minister, apartheid negated human rights, values and ideals of equality the highest attributes of sportsmanship. By the 1980's, shoe firms such as Adidas, Puma, Reebok and Nike – multinational corporations with an international division of labour adopted footwear trademarks on the images of world class runners. Nike footwear company carried out a sales promotion which read as follows:

To believe you can win is like any other kind of faith. You can think about it, talk about it, and write about it. But it doesn't matter, simply as the sun shines. And even if you match their training, to beat them, you would have to match their faith. In my mind I am a Kenyan. Nike Air – just do it.<sup>33</sup>



The image of Kenyan athletes pounding through the savannah wearing a pair of Nike shoes has become a common site of modern world sport demonstrating the role of Kenyan athletes in International trade relations.

Sport has undoubtedly become a form of a global culture. Kenya today is 'closer' to the USA and Europe in 'time-space' than it was in the last century and sports Agents or coaches are able to create global festivals of a scale previously unknown outside the Olympics. Some of the major events are Grand prix, Bislett games, Oslo or the Zurich Weltklasse and globally contested prizes have become the norm, rather than the four year Olympic games.<sup>34</sup> Sporting events have led to international collaboration in the development of stadiums, training etc. Sports aid is part of the overall package recipient countries gain from international co-operation and assistance include technical co-operation.

The British athletics coaches were sent to Kenya as part of assistance programme during the 1950's and in the 1960's the commonwealth aid programme contributed to the development of athletics in the former colony. In 1958 an English athletics coach John Vetzian, accepted the post of physical educationist and athletics coach at Kagumo Teachers Training College, Nyeri and worked also with the police from the Kenya Police Training College in Kiganjo. In 1962 the coach helped nurture Kipchoge Keino, Ben Kogo, Naftali Temu, Wilson Kiprugut and Daniel Rudisha serving police constables. He acted as head coach of the Kenyan athletics and started a national secondary schools' athletic championship (NSSAC). Other British coaches and laid the foundations of modern Kenyan track and field events by undertaking 'ambitious projects' in the 1960's and 1970's.<sup>35</sup>

The Federal Republic of Germany made its contribution to Kenya from the mid-1970's through a special branch of the Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), which provided top coaches and advisers on both long and short term basis. The most influential of them was Abmayr who became Kenya's national athletics coach from 1980-1985. He set up the Kenya Athletic Coaches Association, and between 1981 and 1985 was responsible



for the training of 260 athletic coaches. He organized short-term visits of other German experts to give lectures, practical lessons and instituted a western form of documenting information on Kenyan athletics.<sup>36</sup>

The United States of America sought to enhance her image in Africa in general and Kenya in particular, by dispatching prominent athletes and coaches for short visits.<sup>37</sup> The American Peace Corps, describe sports as a crucial tool in eliminating inter-state political differences as stated below:

Athletic programmes pose a unique ability to transcend political differences and thus gain access to countries with which official relations are strained or even non-existent. Peace Corps experiences with athletic programmes have repeatedly proved this case.<sup>38</sup>

An American Peace Corps official John Manners was instrumental in the development of athletics at the grassroots in the Rift Valley Province from 1968 to 1971. The role of private firms and in particular John Hancock Financial Services was of crucial significance. Hancock Financial Services and the Kenya Athletic Association collaborated and as a result Kenyan runners annually take part in the Boston Marathon. In 1990 John Hancock Financial Services provided KAA with 12 million Kenyan shillings to develop athletics in Kenya.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, China used sports to establish friendly bilateral relations generally and with Kenya in particular. Since 1980, China played a significant role in the development of the Moi International Sports Centre at Kasarani in Nairobi.<sup>40</sup> The sports facilities enabled Kenya to demonstrate her prowess not only through participation in world athletics but also through its ability to organize world class sports events for example in 1987 Kenya hosted the All African Games. Sports therefore have become an international contact point between states. However, these sports assistance display a preference for the development of competitive sports rather than traditional ethno-games, recreational sports.<sup>41</sup>

Kenya has in the recent past has been faced by the “Leg Drain” (migration) of Kenyan athletes to the Gulf and other world regions. The phrase “leg drain” is driven by individual commercial contracts. In the recent past a non-profit organization “Run with Kenyans,” has organized “running Safaris (tour running) that celebrates runners and their remarkable history of achievements in distance running. Run with Kenyans build on the positive spirit of Kenyan athletics to help raise awareness of all that Kenya has to offer. They seek to promote goodwill, cultural exchange and economic development, as well as engage Kenyans in the Diaspora. Further the group hosts educational and cultural events in the U.S.A and bring elite and recreational runners to Kenya to participate in running safaris events.<sup>42</sup> Run with Kenyans has promoted people to people diplomacy and partnered with Brand Kenya and Kenya Tourism Board in promoting cultural diplomacy and recognition of the contributions of Kenyan athletes to nation building.

### **Conclusion**

Sports and International Relations are intertwined and have become major foreign policy tools in the operation of inter states relations. Sports help foster international trade, by aiming at the top end of the market, by selling quality products and attracting high spending travelers. On the other hand a country’s foreign relations assist the smooth landing of sportsmen in any part of the world. It is the principal agency liaising with other governments or organizing authorities.

Sport provides a positive attitude of young people towards each other by enhancing self-esteem, interpersonal skills, and guarantees good health as it provides a platform for regional integration, conflict and conflict transformation. In sport a sport person is humbled in victory, is gracious in defeat and an ambassador of peace and liberty. In Kenya sport and specifically athletes have brought with it wealth and fame to the individual sport person and contributed enormously to the Kenyan economy as a major foreign currency

earner through athletes Diaspora remittances. Sports is also a foreign policy tool as indicated by Kenya's Olympic boycotts over regional and international Issues.

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<sup>10</sup> Meinhertzshagen, R., *Kenya Diary (1902-1906)*. Edinburg: Oliver and Boyd, 1957, pp. 22-23.

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<sup>13</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Quercetani, Roberto and Regeli, Fulvio, *International Athletics Annual*. London: World Sports, 1954, p. 150.

<sup>19</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, p.95. That competition was important for the victory of Nyandiko Manyoro in the three thousand metres the first Kenyan to win an international competition.

<sup>20</sup> Quercetani and Regeli, *International Athletics Annual*, p. 168.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>36</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp. 113-114.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp. 114-115.

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**Paul Kibiwott Kurgat** is a Lecturer in International Relations, Conflict & Conflict Resolution and a Researcher in the Department of History, Political Science and Public Administration, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya. He is a holder of Master of Arts (M.A) degree in International Relations from the Ukrainian Institute of International Relations, Kiev State University. He has a Post-Graduate Diploma (PGD) in Conflict & Conflict Resolution and a Diploma in Peace and Security Studies from Uppsala University, Sweden.

Kurgat has presented his PhD thesis to Moi University, titled: Education As A Foreign Policy Tool: Kenyan Student Airlifts to Russia and Eastern Europe during the Cold War (1958–1991). The book manuscript was submitted before his appointment as Kenya's Ambassador to the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus.



**Alice Jebungei Kurgat** is a Lecturer in the Department of Development Studies, School of Human resource and Development, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya. Dr. Kurgat holds a PhD from Moi University, Kenya, a Master of Arts (M.A) degree in International Relations from Ukrainian Institute of International Relations, Kiev State University, Ukraine and a Post-Graduate Diploma (PGD) in Peace and Conflict Resolution from Uppsala University, Sweden.



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