Sustainable Development in African Sport

Research undertaken by International Network Partners:

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Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been a rapid expansion in the use of sport to contribute to development in Africa and other locations in the global South. Numerous ‘sport for development’ projects now seek to contribute to a wide range of outcomes such as health awareness and promotion, formal and informal education, gender and youth empowerment, social inclusion and poverty reduction. Such projects have been promoted by the UN Office of Sport for Development and Peace, supported by international agencies and delivered by a variety of state and civil society organisations in African contexts, including Ghana and Tanzania.

Despite increasing academic attention, significant limitations of sport for development research remain. For example, issues related to sustainable development and sustainability have been recognised as important (Wallis & Lambert, 2014) but have not been subject to detailed empirical examination. More broadly, research on sport for development has lacked sensitivity to local issues and instead has tended to have an international focus as a result of being predominately undertaken by researchers working in universities in the global North.

A grant from the Leverhulme Trust enabled these limitations to be addressed through research undertaken by an International Network of five partner universities from the UK, Ghana, Tanzania and Australia. The project, ‘Sustainable Development in African Sport: Interventions in Ghana and Tanzania’, was undertaken from 2011 to 2015.

Research objectives and methods

With the concept of sustainable development being both contested and ill-defined (Taylor, 2014), three exploratory and broad research objectives were identified at the outset:

1. to understand how sustainable development is conceptualised by indigenous and overseas agencies involved with Tanzanian and Ghanaian sport
2. to learn about the factors that support or hinder the achievement of sustainable development through Tanzanian and Ghanaian sport
3. to capture evidence regarding the achievement (or otherwise) of sustainable development outcomes through Tanzanian and Ghanaian sport.

In addressing these objectives, all aspects of research design, data collection and analysis were underpinned by a collaborative approach intended to build on and develop the skills, experiences and capacities of all Network Partners.

Two strands of qualitative data collection were undertaken:

- **Stakeholder interviews** with representatives of a broader range of state and civil society organisations which investigated aspirations, approaches and factors affecting sustainable sport for development more broadly. These interviews encompassed 17 and 11 organisations in Ghana and Tanzania respectively, as well as 11 international agencies funding or supporting sport for development projects across the two countries.

Analysis was undertaken individually and collectively by Network Partners. Ongoing discussions between all Network Partners and Research Assistants developed findings that drew on specific areas of expertise and culturally-sensitive understandings. This collaborative analysis was undertaken using innovative video-based methods where geographical distance precluded in-person discussions.

- **Localised school- and community-based case studies** that examined the sustainability of specific sport for development activities and the potential long-term outcomes for the intended beneficiaries of these activities. Interviews and focus groups with young people, teachers, coaches and other community members were undertaken at a total of 66 schools and community venues. Importantly, much of this data collection was undertaken by 16 new Ghanaian and Tanzanian Research Assistants, whose experiences are explored further in the box on the following page.
Experiences of African Research Assistants

Capacity building through the project was strongly enhanced by the involvement of Research Assistants in the data collection undertaken by all three African Universities. The majority of these Research Assistants previously had some involvement in the delivery of sport for development projects but had limited or no experience of undertaking research. Through ongoing training and support provided by Network Partners and, especially, the experience of undertaking data collection, various research skills were developed as Derrick Charway (Ghana) identified:

‘it went a long way to increase my confidence to undertake such projects [through] learning various research methods of collecting data and techniques involved in entering the community’

Undertaking the research led to more critical appraisals of sport for development. For Mohammed Mvumagu (Tanzania), the lack of sustainability identified through school visits was ‘quite different’ from his initial expectations with Eric Sena Adjei (Ghana) similarly identifying a future need for sport for development projects to integrate ‘continuous follow up, assessment and training so that momentum can be maintained’.

The personal development experienced was, therefore, important as many of the Research Assistants both continued their involvement in sport for development projects and their own education after their engagement in the project. Further discussion of Research Assistants’ experiences and personal development has been captured in a collective video produced by the project.

Note: The engagement of Research Assistants in Tanzania benefited from support and further funding provided by UK Sport, Youth Sport Trust (YST) International and International Inspiration.

Sustainable Sport for Development: Findings from Localised Case Studies

Within localised and, especially, school-based case studies, sport for development projects commonly combined delivery of activities for young people together with the provision of training in order to address sustainability. Data collection undertaken in the first year after training and while activities were ongoing found that such projects:

- assisted in raising the profile of sport, physical education and physical activity within schools
- provided support and training for teachers that has enabled them to feel confident and enthused about delivering sport and physical education
- encouraged teaching staff to consider alternative pedagogical approaches with more focus on facilitating young people to take responsibility for school-based sport and physical activity provision
- enhanced young people’s self-confidence and developed leadership and organisational skills, especially amongst those who had the opportunity to train as youth leaders
- improved young people’s ability to work with others and relationships between young people and teachers.

Examination of such immediate outcomes of sport for development projects is important in order to consider the subsequent sustainability of activities and impact. Identified key factors that contributed to, or limited, these aspects of sustainability were:

- gaining support from the school’s senior management and teaching staff for whom the concept of using sport for wider developmental purposes was commonly a new one.

As such, there was a degree of novelty in the provision of training that gave priority to the development of leadership and other social skills, rather than necessarily focusing on sporting aspects. In some cases at least, this developmental focus helped to gain the support of head teachers and school staff for the ongoing delivery of activities.

- seeking an ongoing place within the school timetable for sport for development activities. While doing so was dependent on the support garnered from senior school staff, it also contributed to developing ongoing enthusiasm amongst young people. Feeling that their efforts were going to be continually supported and valued meant that young people were more likely to invest effort in leading and developing activities.

- the availability of equipment and resources to run sporting activities was identified as a basic but key element required for sustainability. Whilst both young people and teachers remained enthusiastic and committed to delivering activity, they often felt they were hampered by the limited resources available to them.

- repeated provision of training to counter the skills lost due to the high turnover of school staff and the progression of young people to other stages of their lives. Additional training was also cited as sustaining the motivation of remaining staff and young people.

- For young people who had been trained as leaders, ongoing opportunities to utilize leadership and organisational skills were important to ensure they continued to develop such skills and could subsequently transfer them into other areas of their lives.
Sustainable Sport for Development: Sector-wide Findings from Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews indicated the broader relevance of some of the findings from the localised case studies. Sustainable sport for development was commonly conceived as the continuing provision of those activities that were initially delivered through particular projects. This ongoing delivery of sport for development activities required a combination of financial and human resources. Data from this research, as well as development studies literature, indicated a number of significant practical challenges with this approach to sustainable sport for development:

- In the vast majority of cases, funding provided by international and even in-country donors was time-limited with there being little possibility of the same donors continuing their funding. Instead, responsibility for seeking further funding was often passed to Ghanaian and Tanzanian organisations that required specific skills and a significant commitment of time to do so. Despite efforts to diversify funding sources, a number of examples of programmes being discontinued or significantly scaled down were identified.

- Provision of training to develop in-country and local (human) capacity to continue to deliver sport for development activities was a widespread practice beyond the selected case studies. The dissipation of trained personnel over time, identified in the previous section, was recognised more widely as a problem, as it has been in the development studies literature (Mog, 2004). Moreover, the often narrow focus on training to deliver sport for development activities meant that less attention was given to capacity building of management skills that could also support programme or organisational sustainability.

Beyond these practical challenges, there were further problematic issues with the conception of sustainability as the linear, ongoing continuation of existing activities. Amongst sport for development stakeholders this conception of sustainability was underpinned by, sometimes implicit, assumptions regarding the efficacy of existing activities in achieving developmental outcomes. With evaluation also widely conceived of as a means of advocacy rather than improvement, there was limited questioning of ‘what actually needs to be sustained’ (Walsh et al., 2011, p2).

Nevertheless, possibilities and some examples of alternative approaches to sustainable development through sport can be identified. The building of sport facilities, designed to become financially self-sustainable and to complement community development efforts in Ghana was one such example. In Tanzania, the development of a system of coach accreditation could be sustained with few resources and thus may have ongoing impact. Such examples reflect contributions in the development studies literature that suggest sustainable development may be achieved through more holistic approaches, that combine different resources and integrate change at various levels (Mog, 2004). Sustainable development is also recognised as a complex, contested and non-linear process of change (Robinson, 2004).

Exemplifying this perspective, a sport and youth leadership programme resulted in the commencement of diverse activities including competitive sport clubs and environment clear-up campaigns in different settings across Ghana and Tanzania. Attaching greater value to such unintended, yet locally-valued and sustainable, outcomes should be prioritised rather than following particular or pre-ordained models for sustainable development (Walsh et al., 2011).

Sport and Development: Perspectives from Rural and Urban Ghana

With Network Partners located in urban and rural regions of Ghana, the project was able to address the current lack of geographical and contextual comparison in sport for development research. The urban and rural areas of Ghana can be respectively described as endowed and deprived with regard to relative socio-economic development. Whereas the urban communities are heterogeneous in culture, the rural communities are homogeneous. Access to the research participants in the urban communities was mainly through youth leaders, while researchers involved in the project had to go through community leaders and traditional rulers in rural communities.

Significant findings in the two contexts were that the young people in urban communities saw sport as activities that instil in them desirable values such as honesty, self-confidence, leadership skills, female empowerment, and as providing networking opportunities. Young people in the rural areas, in addition to these values, saw their involvement in sport as avenues for financial gain, employability, breaking of gender stereotypes and school retention especially for young girls. With regard to impact on the communities, the urban respondents noted communal spirit, development of leadership skills and sense of belonging, while the rural community noted the impact of sport participation as conflict resolution and prevention, peace and unity, improved sanitation, entertainment and economic development. Generally, the impact of sport as a tool for development and peace appeared more keenly felt in rural communities in Ghana.
Developing Impact through Dissemination

Enacting innovative approaches to research dissemination was vital to achieving the aspiration of the project to engage local stakeholders in Ghana, Tanzania and elsewhere in the global South as well as contribute positively to sport for development policy, practice and literature. A full and up-to-date list of publications and access to other dissemination formats are available here: http://bit.ly/sport4devresearchoutputs.

- The project’s partners have organised, contributed to and presented at a number of conferences, events and presentations. In Ghana and Tanzania, a total of five stakeholders’ forums that involved policy makers, practitioners and academics were locally organised by the Network Partners over the duration of the project. The impact of one of these forums is discussed below. A final workshop entitled Sport for development: Exploring global and local futures organised at the 2014 European Association of Sport Management (EASM) conference was one of a number such contributions to academic conferences throughout the project.

- Web-based and video dissemination has enabled relevant and accessible dissemination of findings and learning from the project. In a pioneering development, the EASM conference workshop was streamed online through a partnership with the International Sport and Development Platform. Videos of other conference presentations and of the Research Assistants’ reflections have also been made available online.

- Through and beyond the lifetime of the project, Network Partners contributed to a number of academic and other written outputs. Notably, a collective chapter in an edited collection ‘Beyond Sport for Development and Peace’ enabled Network Partners to specifically consider the experiences and learning from collaboration within the project itself. A series of further journal articles addressing sustainable sport for development, community development through sport and governance of international sport for development are in preparation. These articles are accompanied by a complementary series of working papers written specifically to ensure further impact amongst policy makers and practitioners.

Dar es Salaam Stakeholders’ Forum

A total 45 representatives from stakeholders as diverse as the University of Dar es Salaam, National Sports Council of Tanzania, local NGOs and schools attended this Stakeholders’ Forum held at the British Council, Dar es Salaam in June 2014. Presentations by Drs Ndee and Lindsey were supplemented by contributions from Tanzanian Research Assistants and were all followed by lively debate amongst the delegates. A local practitioner, Sabrina Nafisa from Buguruni Youth Centre provided her perspective on the forum:

I did find the workshop very useful … I hope that we will be able to come up with innovative strategies on how to tackle the sustainability challenges in the long-run with reference to the research.

Alternatively, through her attendance at the Forum, Dr. Mwajuma Vuzo (Director of Research in the School of Education, University of Dar es Salaam) spoke of her appreciation of the research project’s innovative approach:

The Unit of Physical Education and Sport Sciences (at the University of Dar es Salaam) is involved in such interesting research. … it has combined experienced academic researchers and grassroots researchers and the networking of the research is international in the real sense of the word.
References


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