

Sport-For-Development Impact Study

A research initiative funded by Comic Relief and UK Sport and managed by International Development through Sport, written by Professor Fred Coalter

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aims and objectives of the research

This report provides an analysis of data collected as part of a major research project funded by Comic Relief and UK Sport and managed by International Development through Sport (IDS). The research sought to test the hypothesis that ‘sport contributes to the personal development and well-being of disadvantaged children and young people and brings wider benefits to the community’. Because of resource constraints and logistical issues it was decided not to address the complex and vague issue of ‘wider community benefits’. In addition, it sought to:

- Build a body of evidence and good practice around the use of sport and development.
- Enable participating organisations to develop their M&E methodology.

The organisations

The research was undertaken with six sport-for-development organisations:

- **The Kids League** work with internally displaced people in northern Uganda and provide mixed-sex open-access 6-7 week football/netball programmes for 12-15 year olds. A before-and-after survey of participants was undertaken.
- **Praajak** is a Kolkata (India) based social development agency which works with ‘railway children’ – young people who run away from home to work on the railways. They held three all-male outdoor physical activity camps over 20 months and a before-and-after survey of participants was undertaken.
- **Magic Bus** works in the slums of Mumbai (India), providing a range of age-related programmes, including the Voyagers programme for 14-16 year olds. Two before-and-after surveys were conducted: (i) with participants in the Voyager programme; (ii) with participants in the peer leader training programme.
- **Elimu, Michezo na Mazoezi (EMIMA)** is a Dar-es-salaam (Tanzania) based after-school and weekend programme which uses sport and other activities to develop life skills and raise awareness of HIV and AIDS. Two sets of data were collected: (i) A survey of participants and non-participants; (ii) a before-and-after survey of participants in the Girls’ Empowerment Programme (although respondents had been taking part in the programme for at least four months).
- **Kamwokya Christian Caring Community (KCCC)** in Kampala is a faith and community-based NGO seeking to improve the quality of life in an impoverished area and deal with issues of HIV and AIDS. A before-and-after survey was undertaken with participants in the All Star Sports Academy (which holds weekend soccer clinics) and the Treasure Life Centre which provides recreational and competitive netball plus education and training activities (although participants had been taking part in the programmes for some time). In addition, a survey of non-participants was undertaken to enable comparisons with the KCCC data.

- **Sport Coaches Outreach (SCORE)** is a South African NGO which aims to empower individuals and develop communities through sport and recreation. In-depth interviews were undertaken with female and male community sports leaders to explore the impact of their training and aspects of their practice.

We chose a survey-based approach because of the lack of qualitative research expertise in the organisations, it was easier to provide technical support via email and quantitative data permitted some degree of inter-programme comparability.

Defining outcomes

All organisations found it difficult to outline a programme theory - the various components, mechanisms and sequences of causes and effects which are presumed to lead to desired outcomes – and to formulate precise programme outcomes. In workshops with each organisation project-specific outcomes were agreed and some inter-programme comparability was ensured by exploring two core aspects of personal development - perceived self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Self-efficacy and self-esteem

Perceived self-efficacy relates to an individual's belief in her/ his ability to plan and perform a task, to achieve a particular outcome, to address difficult issues. Sport would seem to provide an effective medium for the development of self-efficacy beliefs, with its emphasis on practice, skill development, mastery and learning from defeat. It is often assumed that the development of self-efficacy will lead an increase in participants' *self-esteem* i.e. their sense of their self-worth and that these two attributes are necessary for personal and social development.

Age and personal development

In the early teenage years young people begin to develop an abstract adult intelligence, begin to reason beyond their own experience, think hypothetically and begin to anticipate achievement and reflect on many of the traits implicit in 'personal development'. Therefore, as far as possible, we surveyed only those aged 14 and over.

Questioning the deficit model

Most sport-for-development programmes are underpinned by an assumption that young people from disadvantaged communities are themselves deficient and in need of 'personal development'. However, the data raise significant questions about this assumption. Although there were important individual and cultural differences, all programmes recorded a diversity of self-evaluations, with the majority of respondents recording scores within the 'normal' range. Such data warn against over-generalising about vague 'personal development' needs and suggest that some programmes might need to re-evaluate the nature and extent of expected programme impacts.

Programme impacts

Perceived self-efficacy

Programme participants' average score was not significantly different from that of non-participants. Further, the diverse programmes produced a variety of impacts – EMIMA and

The Kids League recorded statistically significant increases in average self-efficacy scores; Praajak recorded a non-significant increase; Magic Bus Voyagers a decrease and KCCC a statistically significant *decrease*. The only robust mixed-sex data set – The Kids League – indicates no significant difference in the *degree of change* between males and females. The programme did not benefit one sex more than the other.

Self-esteem

The impact of programmes on self-esteem was varied. There were no statistically significant differences in the average score between EMIMA participants and non-participants, yet KCCC participants had a statistically significant *lower* average score than non-participants. All programmes, except Praajak, recorded an increase in the average score, but only in EMIMA was this statistically significant. As with self-efficacy, in terms of the degree of change, the programmes did not benefit significantly one sex more than the other.

Change was not uni-directional

There was a *general tendency* for those with lower than average scores to increase their self-evaluations for both perceived self-efficacy and self-esteem – a positive impact. However, there was a parallel pattern of some with initially higher-than-average self-evaluations lowering their evaluations. Such reductions cannot simply be taken as negative outcomes - this may reflect a realistic adjustment based on practical experience or an adjustment to collective norms. Perhaps more realistic self-evaluations might be a policy aim.

Changing evaluations and group diversity

Although it is important not to over-emphasise the trend, the various shifts in self-evaluation resulted in most groups becoming less diverse in terms of the competence-based perceived self-efficacy. However, the various adjustments to the more egocentric self-esteem led to slightly increased group diversity in several programmes.

Relationships between self-efficacy and self-esteem

The relationship between these two aspects of self-evaluation is contingent, varying between programmes. In The Kids League there a significant relationship between *changes* in self-efficacy and self-esteem; in Magic Bus Voyagers there was a statistically strong relationship in a small sample of females, but a weak relationship for males; although EMIMA recorded statistically robust increases for both self-efficacy and self-esteem, the relationship between the *changes* in both measures was weak.

Personal development, contingent outcomes and understanding process

Overall, despite certain tendencies, there is no consistent and predictable ‘sport-for-development effect’ in terms of personal development. As in all forms of social intervention, the nature and extent of impacts are largely contingent and vary between programme types, participants and cultural contexts. Such data illustrate the limitations of our ability to generalise about sport-for-development and emphasise the need to understand better the nature of differing programme processes and participant experiences. In addition, as few sport-for-development organisations seek to achieve their desired outcomes solely through sport it is very difficult to isolate a specific ‘sport effect’.

Programmes’ impact on gender attitudes

Many sport-for-development organisations regard issues of gender attitudes, behaviour and equity as central to their mission. However, approaches to such issues vary, including formal

workshops and discussions and the ‘hidden curriculum’ implicit in the provision of inclusive sport and the encouragement of mutual respect and understanding.

The evidence of programme impacts is mixed, with few clear and consistent differences between participants and non-participants on issues relating to women’s wider domestic and societal roles. Many of these issues are rooted in traditional cultural and socio-religious beliefs and sustained by social institutions (family, church, education, peer groups). Consequently, there is no obvious reason to believe that such values and attitudes can (or should) be changed via a sport-for-development programme, which may seek to do so indirectly. As a consensus of such issues is rare, there is a need for more precise definitions of desired outcomes and the methods to achieve them.

HIV and AIDS

The participant/non-participant data indicate that some programmes recruit from communities with a reasonable level of understanding of these issues. Except for one or two key issues, the differences between levels of understanding were small and in some cases participants knew slightly less than non-participants. The before-and-after participant data *do* illustrate an increased understanding of certain key issues, but some changes were marginal and misunderstanding remained. Further, as the organisations use a mixture of formal workshops, discussions and cultural activities it is not possible to attribute any changes simply to ‘sport’

The data indicate that there is variety of sources of information and this raises important questions about the extent to which information from various sources is consistent and the role of sport-for-development programmes within this network. Further, the SCORE community sports leaders outlined a number of difficulties faced in dealing with HIV and AIDS – cultural resistance, young peoples’ boredom, parental opposition, lacking credibility with older people and a suspicion of their level of knowledge about a taboo subject. Such issues raise general questions about the role and effectiveness of such work and the level of training needed in sport-for-development programmes.

Peer leaders

In community-based sport-for-development projects peer leaders play a central role: to reduce costs and contribute to sustainability; to enable learning via relevant role models; to provide development opportunities for programme participants. The differing approaches to training are illustrated by Magic Bus’s 35 supervised sessions training programme and the work-based approach adopted by SCORE for its community sports volunteers.

Selection

The data also illustrate the varied approaches to the selection of those central to the sustainability and effectiveness of such programmes. Whereas Magic Bus selected from their Voyager programme after a prolonged period of observation, SCORE tended to select older and more experienced volunteers, who had not necessarily taken part in their programme.

The impact of training

Whereas SCORE interviewees provide systematically positive testimony as to the impact of the training, the more objective Magic Bus data indicate more complex impacts and in some cases raise doubts about the suitability of some to be peer leaders.

From training to delivery

In unsupervised and non-curriculum-based approaches there appears to be substantial scope for individual interpretations and variations in delivery. Such variation raises important questions about the comparability of many sport-for-development ‘programmes’ and illustrates some of the basis for the contingent nature of impacts found in the research.

Good practice

The data enable us to identify ‘what’ happened, but there is a need to develop a more in-depth understanding of process – the ‘how’ and ‘why’ - and the reasons for inter-programme differences, in order to consider issues of ‘good practice’. Further, as many of the impacts varied in scope, strength and direction between programmes and in ways that are hard to predict, the identification of easily transferable ‘good practice’ may be difficult. These are matters for further investigation.

Developing organisations’ M&E methodology

The difficulties involved in enabling organisations to develop their M&E philosophy and methodology were under-estimated. There were three main issues, which must be addressed if robust outcome and process-oriented M&E is to become widespread.

- Lack of M&E expertise and the limits of short-term technical training.
- Widespread lack of programme theory and resulting imprecisely defined outcomes.
- Lack of NGO staff continuity. This is a generic problem, but raises doubts about the extent to which a robust M&E philosophy and practice can be embedded in under-funded and relatively unstable organisations.

The way forward**Programme theory and theory-based evaluation**

The research has raised a number of key strategic issues – the *variety* of sport-for-development programmes, the *contingent* nature of impacts, uncertainty about *valid impact measures*, and unexamined assumptions based on a *deficit model* and a lack of understanding of *programme processes*. All point to the need for programme providers and funders to develop *programme theories* and to articulate *how* programmes are meant to work. A programme theory details the components, mechanisms, relationships and sequences of causes and effects which are presumed to lead to desired outcomes (which are also a subject for analysis and clarification). Some of the advantages of this approach include:

- It emphasises the critical distinction between necessary conditions (i.e. participation) and *sufficient conditions* (the processes and experiences) necessary to maximise the potential to achieve desired outcomes.
- It assists in the formulation of theoretically coherent, realistic and precise outcomes related to programme processes and participants.
- It provides the basis for formative, rather than summative (i.e. outcome), evaluation and contributes to improving interventions.
- It maximises our ability to identify possible generic mechanisms, contributes to the possible identification of ‘best practice and the development of sport-for-development.