

Editorial

A Vision for the Next Vanguard of Sport for Development**Per G. Svensson¹, Meredith A. Whitley² and Richard Loat**¹ School of Kinesiology, Louisiana State University² The School of Health Sciences, Adelphi University*Corresponding author email:* psvensson@lsu.edu**A Vision for the Next Vanguard of Sport for Development**

The Journal of Sport for Development (JSFD) was founded in 2012, with the first issue published in early 2013. In light of this ten-year anniversary, we reflect on the current state of the field and highlight important opportunities for strengthening Sport for Development (SFD) knowledge and practice.

The growth of the SFD field is undeniable in terms of practice, policy, and research. Yet, growth – defined as the amount of programs, organizations, money, or stakeholders involved – does not always correlate with more meaningful or impactful solutions. Instead, it can result in duplication or redundancy. An important question to consider is whether there is enough innovation in the field? Historically, SFD organizations have drawn on the work of other SFD organizations when designing, implementing, or restructuring their initiatives. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many organizations to pivot their operations on short notice to sustain programming (LeCrom & Martin, 2022). Funders, like Laureus, Beyond Sport, and Comic Relief, also pivoted to create special funding mechanisms including the Sport for Good Response Fund (Chalat & Fraser, 2021).

Now—three years into the pandemic—there is a growing recognition that the SFD field is in a precarious point in time where we ought to consider how the field can be

transformed. The SFD field has a strong foundation upon which we must build, yet the innovation shown during the pandemic proved just how resilient and adaptable stakeholders can be – and how much the field might benefit from more innovative approaches. With this in mind, we propose three topics in this editorial which can advance SFD practice, policy, funding, and research, provided that stakeholders are willing to embrace innovation and collaboration at all levels (Svensson & Loat, 2019; Whitley et al., 2019). We recognize these are not the only changes that should be considered, and so we call on stakeholders across the SFD field to share their ideas, experiences, and approaches. JSFD was designed to serve as an open hub of evidence, information, and commentary, with a wide range of submission categories for all audiences.

Ten years ago, JSFD was founded with the intent to serve as a platform for not only researchers, but also practitioners, funders, and other stakeholders. The former editors challenged us to “embrace innovative approaches to research and novel ways to communicate with JSFD’s target audience” (Schulenkorf et al., 2018, p. 39). In response, we created a new submission category entitled “Thought Leadership from the Field”, which serves as an outlet for industry leaders to share their experiences and ideas in publications that stimulate meaningful dialogue on how to transform the field. Ultimately, there is the space for a diverse range of publications that stimulate meaningful dialogue on how to transform the field, both on the topics proposed below and far beyond.

Funding

Funding models remain one of the most common challenges for SFD organizations, which in many cases remain heavily dependent on a limited number of external funders. Despite the growth of the SFD field over the past 10 years, SFD-specific funders are still uncommon, and most grant programs are built around short-term funding cycles (Lindsey, 2017). Moreover, few existing grants allow for practitioners to take on risks and try new ways of operating in pursuit of potentially transformative ways of organizing. The small-scale Sport for Development Innovation Fund was one of the few exceptions. In response to the lack of funding, some SFD organizations have successfully developed their own alternative funding models to achieve greater financial self-sufficiency (e.g., Kick4Life in Lesotho, Street League in the United Kingdom, and Alive and Kicking in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia).

As we think about different funding approaches that might better serve the SFD field, there are several important questions to consider: How can risk taking and change be enabled within existing funding programs? How can funding support place-based solutions? How can funding support emerging local leaders who are positioned to design and lead programs to address local needs? Why have new funders not emerged in the SFD field? And how can multi-year funding programs be supported?

Let's dig a bit deeper into this last question. There is a huge challenge that comes with piecemeal funding. A smorgasbord of funding to different programs and organizations does not lead to meaningful, sustainable change, especially if it is only provided for short-term support. It is difficult to be strategic with such funding. Instead, let's imagine what could happen if funders pooled their money for the next 5 or 10 years? What if the shared funding model used for the Sport for Good Response Fund was employed on a larger scale? What kind of change could be achieved through a collective approach, recognizing that each funder brings a unique set of skills, knowledge, and connections to the table? Ultimately, if personal and organizational agendas can be set aside, with a focus instead on innovative, evidence-based, collective action – then there is the potential to see real, meaningful, sustainable change.

Environment

Another area worthy of consideration is the relationship between SFD and the environment. Although many SFD stakeholders draw on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to frame SFD efforts, an

emphasis on the environment (central to the SDGs) is still rare in existing SFD organization models (Giulianotti et al., 2018). This is concerning given the significant risks posed by climate change and human impact on the natural environment. There are some exceptions where local organizations have creatively developed SFD methodologies focused on environmental stewardship and education, such as the Coaching Conservation program focused on education and conservation of biodiversity, PITCHAfrica's community integrated rain harvesting facilities for local SFD organizations, and Society Empowerment Kenya's SFD curriculum on sustainable agriculture. Additionally, the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation was among the signatories of the United Nations Sports for Climate Action Framework. Yet these examples are the exception, rather than the norm.

Important questions remain. How do current practices impact the natural environment? How can environmental curricula be embedded into SFD practice? How can SFD organizations leverage social entrepreneurship to address local environmental issues? As Giulianotti (2021, para. 23) suggested, SFD social enterprises could “pursue eco-friendly commercial activities such as plastic recycling businesses that employ or support marginalized young people.” The relationship between SFD and the environment is somewhat different from some other SFD thematic areas in that it is both a cause and a set of values. Social enterprise models may be used to develop approaches to reduce environmental impact by upcycling materials for sport, but organizations that do not directly focus on environmental impact can still embed greener decision making to drive environmental change.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

The historical roots of the SFD field have been linked to colonialism and racial hierarchies, and existing processes can unintentionally perpetuate these issues without critical reflection on policies, programs, and practices. In many instances, the phenotypical and cultural identities and backgrounds – along with the lived experiences – of those working in leadership roles within SFD organizations do not align with that of the program participants. Likewise, are the programs themselves accessible to residents who may experience marginalization and oppression due to post-colonial and settler colonialism relations, racism, sexism, ableism, classism, ageism, heterosexism, and transphobia, just to name a few? To build a more inclusive field, it is imperative that residents with similar identities, backgrounds, and lived experiences have leadership roles, not just as organizational leaders but also as policymakers, funders, researchers, and beyond.

One possible strategy for doing so is to create SFD-specific accelerator programs centered around supporting emerging leaders within their communities (Whitley & Welty Peachey, 2022). Additionally, accessible pathways must be created for SFD program participants to achieve more diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices.

CONCLUSION

We conclude with a call to action for different stakeholder groups associated with the mission of JSFD. For the field to advance, there needs to be a collective step forward from researchers, practitioners, and funders. Researchers, we call on you to explore organizational resilience and different models for building a more inclusive field that is both financially and environmentally sustainable. Practitioners, the need for innovation in our approaches, organizational structures, and delivery models is greater than ever. Expanding thematic areas of practice, exploring new sports (traditional, indigenous, and/or digital), and modernizing how we achieve impact through sport will lay the foundation for our field's future. Funders, invest in innovation and organizational capabilities as much as you prioritize impact. The SFD field did not develop into what it is today with funders who were only intent on maximizing impact returns. To achieve greater, deeper, and more systemic impact, there needs to be investment beyond the tried-and-tested models. There is often as much value in discovering what does *not* work, as there is in discovering what does. The potential upside to investing in new models and learning from failure in the long term is greater than if we simply continue to only fund what we already know works. Strategic risk-taking and experimentation should be celebrated, provided there is a focus on learning – both internally and externally. For 10 years, JSFD has provided a platform for stakeholders to share experiences and lessons learned; we look forward to your contributions in the next ten years and beyond as SFD continues to grow and evolve.

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