

Inquiry into the quality and evaluation indicators of sport and development projects

Summary

In 1998, two Dutch Ministries (Public Health, Welfare and Sport and Development Cooperation) jointly wrote the memorandum entitled “Sport in Development: teamwork scores!” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport, 2000). The Platform Sport and Development is a direct result of this policy memo. The Platform is an initiative of the National Commission on International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO). The Platform has commissioned the Utrecht School of Governance (USBO) to do a quickscan inquiry into experience and knowledge of quality standards and evaluation criteria of sports and development organisations.

The objectives of the inquiry were:

- to promote the exchange of knowledge and experience in monitoring and evaluating sport and development cooperation projects, and:
- to increase the body of knowledge concerning the social contribution of sport in various cultural contexts.

These objectives inform the attempts to arrive at recommendations for the evaluation of sport and development cooperation projects, with which the social contribution of sport and the quality of projects may be visualised.

Thus, the questions the inquiry sought to answer were the following:

What are the quality standards that various sport and/or development organisations use regarding the contribution of sport to the construction of a society?

What are the evaluation indicators used by various sport and/or development organisations that appraise the extent to which the project has actually contributed to the construction of a society?

Methodology

For the purpose of this inquiry, the USBO, in consultation with the NCDO, has selected various sport and development organisations based on existing projects. For the sake of clarity, these organisations have been placed into three groups: sports organisations (SOs), development organisations (DOs), and sport and development organisations (SDOs). These indicators will be used throughout this report. “Sport and development organisations” denotes all three types of organisations.

The SOs are the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB), the Netherlands Catholic Sports Federation (NKS) and the Netherlands Olympic Committee-Netherlands Sports Confederation (NOC*NSF). These organisations work in the areas of sport and physical education, utilising the social effects to their maximum extent. They are therefore mainly involved in a type of activity that is known as “sport-plus” projects.

The DOs are the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation (NOVIB) and the Catholic development organisation (Cordaid) - linked to medical organisation Memisa. They add sports and other kinetic activities to existing projects in the field of development cooperation, these are known as the “plus-sport” projects.

The third group, the SDOs, consists of the Foundation for African Sports Development (FASD), SCORE and Olympic Aid. They conduct both “sport-plus” and “plus-sport” activities and do not clearly belong to either of the other two categories.

A qualitative methodology has been employed for this quickscan. Based on the data that were gathered, analysis was started. A number of propositions has been formulated. These are the following:

1. Each type of organisation has its own vision as regards the social contribution sport has to make;
2. Quality standards are set within the donor organisation;

3. Evaluation indicators hardly differ from one type of organisation to the other;
4. In some areas competition among the Platform organisations exists.

These propositions have been based on the available data, which consist of interviews, scientific articles, additional documents and field notes.

Results

Below, we present the results. The discussion is moved forward along the lines of the propositions we have outlined.

Proposition 1: Each type of organisation has its own vision as regards the social contribution sport has to make.

Generally speaking, SOs regard (setting up) sport predominantly as the project's objective. They want to improve participation in sport and strengthen the sport infrastructure. SOs are certainly aware of the social contribution sport is able to make. Involvement in sport is definitely linked to the development of sport/work and other social options.

DOs regard sport as a means, which contributes to the construction of a society. Most projects are not oriented towards sport but being engaged in sports activities in an organised manner is often a corollary. The DOs differ from the SOs in terms of the manner in which they lend shape to this construction of a society. DOs choose sport because of the contribution it can make to, for instance, health care or conflict prevention. Sport is used in, among other things, AIDS information projects and in refugee camps.

SDOs take an intermediate position. They assume that sport can change lives, simply because it is a fun thing to do ("changing lives through sport") and that organising sports events can reinforce democratic principles and support a sense of community ("building communities through sport"). Whether sport is the means or the end is basically irrelevant to SDOs. Sport can be fun but SDOs believe that sport always serves a social purpose.

It is clear that the three organisation types have different and overlapping ideas about the social contribution of being involved in sport. SOs take as their starting point that promoting sport expertise and infrastructure will offer people more options in their society; DOs use sport as a means to help build a country or a group; SDOs choose sport because participation is fun and an education for those involved and contributes to an improved quality of life for the participants. In sum, they fit the Dutch government's policy as laid down in the memorandum "Teamwork Scores!" (2000). This policy's stated objective is "to promote the best possible organisation of physical education, sport, games and other kinetic activities in developing countries, with the aim in mind to improve the well-being, health and development of individuals and increase the cohesion and development of the society as a whole."

Proposition 2: Quality standards are set within the donor organisation.

The persons that were interviewed showed few differences in terms of the kinds of criteria they use to improve the quality of a given project. They aver that the quality standards always come from the donor organisations, even though the demand has its origin in a developing country. We present the criteria that were most frequently named.

Few SOs have something written on paper that covers quality criteria. Criteria hardly existed because the projects were established through the informal circuit. Having said this, most SOs increasingly use quality criteria that have been laid down beforehand, because they want to know a number of things before they decide to invest. These include:

- a good and reliable counterpart

- a counterpart who is able to carry the project; support (also in organisational terms)
- security in-country
- continuity; after a certain amount of time has elapsed the project must be able to continue as an independent activity
- reaching the right target group
- participation of women in the project.

The quality criteria always come from the donor organisations, even though the demand has its origin in a developing country.

The people from the DOs who were interviewed indicate that a number of fixed criteria is always used. These are created within the donor organisation. Among the issues mentioned are the following:

- autonomy of the receiving country and organisation
- most projects must meet EU criteria and those laid down by the Dutch Ministries of Public Health, Welfare and Sport and Foreign Affairs)
- criteria are established by way of certain circumstances already given, for instance the EU policy and policies established by the minister of development cooperation
- there is a concentration policy, which means that the focus is on a limited number of developing countries, not all. The criteria for this focus include good governance and security
- clearly circumscribed objectives and plans
- sustainability
- attention to gender aspects
- demand must come from a developing country.

SDOs mention the following quality demands they use to guarantee or improve the quality of a project:

- demand must come from a developing country
- the projects are carried out by local staff, (temporarily) assisted by volunteers/experts from the donor country
- clearly circumscribed objectives
- quality criteria are not yet clear but are committed to paper as of now
- the organisation uses an implementation plan consisting of 11 steps before a project begins, which partly guarantees the quality of a project.

Underpinning most of the criteria that were mentioned is the idea that “good things must be done with the money”. What the organisations mean with “good things” is the subject of the next proposition.

Proposition 3: Evaluation indicators hardly differ from one type of organisation to the other

Before presenting the inventory of evaluation criteria in use, it is important to make a distinction between two evaluation phases. Phase One concerns the evaluation that will decide whether or not a project will be started. Phase Two is about the evaluation while the project is going on or after its completion.

Phase One

The pre-project evaluation is naturally close to establishing quality criteria. Even though the interviewees have not made a clear distinction between the quality criteria and pre-project evaluation, we have elected to process the data on pre-project evaluation separate from the quality criteria.

All organisations indicate that projects are not begun for the sake of having projects. There are a number of factors that are evaluated, before it is signalled that a project can go ahead or not. These include:

- the project proposal. Among other things that are examined is whether the objective tallies with the objective of the Platform organisation, the feasibility of the activity plan, the way in which an action plan has been put together

- expenditure and the criteria according to which a certain outlay is justified. What are the costs, who will pay, what is the contribution made by the requesting party, how many people will eventually benefit from the project
- autonomy and responsibility are with the organisation in the country from which the demand comes
- the contribution sport may make to other social objectives.

Most organisations indicate that they evaluate the in-country situation before a project is taken on board. Some organisations run through a questionnaire or action plan in this phase, which is a way of finding out what the actual state of affairs is and whether or not a project is feasible. This is frequently done during on-site visits.

Phase Two

This phase concerns the time that the project is going; it also covers a post-project time period. Evaluations are carried out not only for the sake of the organisation, the financiers play an equally important role.

All organisations indicate that evaluation in this phase is important but the manner in which this is done differs considerably. Among the methods employed, we found:

- standard procedures
- fixed indicators
- in the case of the non-existence (or not-yet-existence) of explicit criteria, progress is measured in terms of the stated objectives
- qualitative criteria are sometimes employed as early as a mid-term evaluation
- weekly evaluation, at which quantitative and qualitative data are recorded. The on-site evaluations done at various stages guide the process to the final objective and evaluation.

The reasons why evaluations are carried out are varied and concern the assessment of the extent to which a project has been successful, creating moments of learning (a learning curve) but also and largely justifying expenditure to financiers.

Having established that organisations do indeed evaluate and attach values to this exercise, it is useful to inspect the indicators that are used. A number of organisations indicate that external factors influence the evaluation criteria that are employed. For instance, at times the following EU criteria are used, taken from the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO, 1999):

- *relevance*
- *effectiveness*
- *efficiency*
- *impact*
- *practicability*

Another external factor is the policy laid down by the financier (donor organisation). In such cases, evaluation is done post-project, using the policy of the relevant Platform organisation.

In the evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative indicators are used. The quantitative indicators are easily made clear when one follows the stated objectives. These may include the number of people that are involved in the various activities, the number of activities taking place, and so on. Even though all indications are that having formulated concrete and measurable qualitative pre-project objectives before is considered important by all concerned, the inquiry shows that this is not seen as an easy task. For instance, how does one measure the quality of life?

No clear qualitative indicators have been given during the interviews. Some organisations, however, perceive a link between achieving quantitative objectives and quality improvements. In addition, instruments have been named that may shed light on qualitative results. These include:

- evaluation forms for local participants, containing questions about their own experiences
- evaluation forms for coaches and staff, in which they are specifically asked to relate their experiences
- reports from the counterpart organisation.
- In the case of a large or important project, an independent evaluator is sent.
- Some Platform organisations write their own reports, based on feedback from the field.

It is not clear which qualitative indicators are used within these instruments to measure whether or not social objectives have been attained.

The variety of evaluation approaches is large and fewer differing standards and procedures would certainly make life easier for the receiving countries. Eveline Herfkens, former Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation said the following in an address she delivered in Amsterdam on February 25th, 2002: ‘Harmonising donor procedures. It would be a blessing for receiving countries if they did not have to submit yet another form, yet another evaluation and yet another justification for every single donor.’

Proposition 4: In some areas competition among the Platform organisations exists

The results show that most Platform organisations consider it useful to keep each other informed about their sport and development cooperation activities and impart knowledge to each other. But the exchanges remain superficial and remain limited to the (not unimportant) discussions about sport as a means to an end or sport as an end in itself. There is hardly any information exchange about such tangible issues like methods of and criteria for evaluation. There is no effort to arrive at a joint drawing up of such criteria.

One of the reasons for this could be the vast differences in knowledge and experiences among the various Platform organisations. There are “old hands”, organisations that have been working in this field for a long time and have amassed vast amounts of knowledge and experience; there are “newcomers”, organisations that have only just started in either development or sport and development. Newcomers indicate their desire to make use of the knowledge and experience already present in the field, while the experienced organisations do not see it in their interest to release the knowledge that they have accumulated over the years “just like that”. This was said by a number of organisations and further evidence was provided by the simple fact that not all information concerning criteria for evaluations and quality standards are publicly available. An open attitude among the members of the Platform and willingness to actually share information is a condition for mutual and/or joint learning. For the time being, however, this is not a matter of course.

The interviews did not clarify whether or not such an exchange of concrete information will actually benefit the quality of the projects currently under way. The indications were that there is very little time to arrive at tangible steps leading to output.

Conclusion

Various organisations have differing views of the social contribution made by sport. SOs see sport as an end in itself, DOs see it as a means towards an end. The gap between these two types of organisations can be narrowed by the Platform.

All organisations we investigated judge projects according to their own vision. There are, however, a number of similar quality criteria that can be found in all organisations. These are:

- demand must come from a developing country
- the existence of a good and reliable counterpart
- security in-country
- continuity; the project must be able to continue as an independent activity
- reaching the right target group
- clearly circumscribed objectives and plans

- sustainability
- attention to gender aspects.

Generally speaking, the organisations don not exchange knowledge regard to in terms of the quality criteria that are employed.

It is difficult to distinguish between the quality criteria and the evaluation indicators that have been mentioned by the various organisations with regard to Phase One. The notions are used as if they were interchangeable. The organisations differ little when it comes to pre-project evaluation. The following factors are weighed in, before a project is taken on board:

- the project proposal
- a cost/benefit analysis
- the situation on-site
- a local partner
- the role of sport

However, there are important differences in terms of evaluation while the project is going on and post-project (Phase Two). Organisations find it difficult to draw up a list of qualitative evaluation criteria. The manner in which qualitative evaluation are carried out contain substantial differences. When mentioning or discussing quality criteria and evaluation indicators, no organisation refers to the cultural context.

Recommendations

Moments of exchange could be created, at which quality and evaluation criteria are subject of the exchange. This requires participants in such moments to be prepared to exchange concrete knowledge and experience. The Platform meetings could be used to create such moments of exchange. In addition, special meetings or a working group could be set up. The objective of such exchange moments could be to arrive at the creation of concrete instruments and criteria for quality and evaluation. This could lead to the harmonisation of donor procedures in relation to the evaluation of sport development projects. Formulating qualitative criteria should be an important point of attention.

We suggest a number of subjects for discussion within the Platform or working group:

- ways of evaluating qualitatively, given the fact that many organisations have expressed the difficulties they have in assessing the quality of projects, while they do pursue qualitative objectives
- the difference between quality criteria and evaluation criteria (Phase One). For now, organisations do not make clear distinctions between these two types of criteria in the pre-project phase. It is advisable to create clarity in this matter by means of discussion and the exchange of information, because we are dealing with two different issues here
- the various cultural contexts. When donor procedures are developed, attention should be paid to this issue. The receiving organisation should be consulted when quality criteria are established. Perhaps it would be option to involve the receiving organisation at the time these criteria are developed exchanges. There is a large body of knowledge present inside sport and development organisations. In the area of quality standards and criteria and evaluation indicators respectively, some organisations have accumulated a vast amount of knowledge, while others have just begun documenting their own knowledge. Exchanges, however, are few and far between. Platform members would benefit from cooperation in this area and it should also be clear that these types of cooperation serve all interests.