

**SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA:
A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE FIELD
POLICY BRIEF**

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INTRODUCTION

Sport for Development (SfD) refers to the use of sport to promote varied outcomes beyond the playing field and encompasses a range of initiatives seeking to harness the power of sport for social change. Many actors now view sport as an ideal development tool since it is cost-effective, relatively easy to implement and has a unique ability to attract at risk youth in deprived settings. The start of the 21st century saw the incorporation of sport into the mainstream development sector. Sport was touted as a means to supporting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with the United Nations (UN) establishing various task forces and passing a number of resolutions (United Nations, 2018). April 6 has been recognised as the ‘International Day of Sport for Development and Peace’ since 2014 while the role of sport in development has been emphasised in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015), noting that:

“Sport is also an important enabler of sustainable development. We recognize the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives”.

However, despite the rapid growth of the SfD field, there remain serious gaps in our collective understanding of which initiatives work best, how and why, and whether these can be scaled. Many SfD actors tend to espouse the positive benefits of sport or SfD programmes. Critical voices tend to urge against oversimplified notions of sport with a lack of rigorous research, monitoring and evaluation of SfD work. Therefore, broad, absolute claims made by the SfD movement must be treated with caution. Sport can have positive micro-impact on individuals but this does not necessarily lead to greater meso or macro level outcomes (Darnell, 2007; Coalter, 2007; Coakley, 2015; Sugden, 2010). Further, most SfD actors do not challenge the structures and systems that create and reinforce macro issues (such as poverty and inequality) in the first place (Sanders, 2016; Hartmann and Kwauk, 2011).

Given the growing presence and increased investment within the SfD sector (including within South Africa) as well as the continuing concerns around the efficacy and evidence base of this emerging field, the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation in South Africa has commissioned a review to examine critical factors that impact on the reported efficacy and potential to scale youth-focused SfD interventions.

BACKGROUND

The review seeks to identify if there are common critical factors that contribute to an effective SfD intervention and more broadly, if there are common features of an ‘enabling policy environment’ that can support scaling of the positive impact of SfD programmes. This review compliments similar Laureus commissioned reviews globally of six cities (including Cape Town) and in the United States.

Sport and Development in South Africa

Sport inequities continue to haunt South Africa, with a range of disparities in terms of equity and access to sport and recreation, primarily as a result of the legacy of Apartheid. The Sport and Recreation South Africa (SRSA) White Paper (1995:2) notes: *“In the apartheid era more than 30 million South Africans were never taken into serious account when it came to sport and recreation.”*

It is thus hardly surprising that many South Africans are unable to exercise their right to play. A BMI Sport Info Survey (2007) revealed that 66% of adult Whites play sport, as compared to 35% of Blacks, 33% of Coloureds and 47% of Asians. While the number of youth participating outside of school has increased, the majority of youth (51%) still play sport at school. The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) found that 25% of South Africans play sport, with most people engaging outside formal sport structures. ‘Exposure to Sport at School’ was cited as the biggest reason among respondents (33%) for becoming involved in sport. Reasons for non-participation included ‘No interest’ (24%) and ‘Lack of Facilities and Opportunities’ (SRSA, 2009). The data illustrates the great sporting divide in South Africa and the importance of providing inclusive access to sport for all, including within the school system.

Given this background, the South African government has prioritised increasing access to sport and ensuring it can contribute positively to development outcomes. SRSA, and stakeholders including civil society and academia, have developed a National Sport and Recreation Plan (NSRP) based on three pillars: (1) active nation; (2) winning nation and (3) enabling environment (SRSA, 2012). This plan reflects a commitment to SfD. Objective one ‘an active nation’ is centred on mass participation or ‘sport for all’, a central tenet of the SfD movement. While objective two is more focused on high performance, it recognises that a ‘winning nation’ is only possible with mass participation. There is clearly overlap between the development of sport and sport for development, though they boast different goals. The last objective an ‘enabling environment’ is central to the state’s role, with the NSRP (SRSA 2012: 34) identifying 14 strategic goals required to enable an active, winning nation.

In addition to the state, many civil society actors, including non-profit organisations (NPOs), have developed programmes that seek to harness sport for development in South Africa. Networks such

as the Sport for Social Change Network (SSCN) and foundations such as Laureus Sport for Good South Africa seek to coordinate the diverse range of actors that use sport to achieve change.

EVIDENCE AND FINDINGS

The review analysed the efficacy of SfD interventions in South Africa, focusing on five thematic areas: (a) community development, social cohesion, and peace building; (b) education; (c) employment; (d) mental health and wellbeing; and e) life on land. The primary research questions were:

- *What is the quality of evidence for SfD interventions in South Africa in relation to the specific thematic areas?*
- *Which critical factors impact the efficacy of SfD interventions in South Africa and is there potential to scale these approaches?*

Quality of Evidence

The review showed that for both academic and grey literature in SfD, **the quality of methods and evidence in South Africa was weak** and findings should be interpreted with caution. The literature provided limited insights and evidence into the critical factors impacting the efficacy and scalability of SfD interventions in South Africa because intervention theories and contextual factors were inconsistently reported and studied. This makes it difficult to draw any wide-ranging claims from such studies.

The review complimented the Laureus Sport for Good *Sport for Development: The Road to Evidence* report, which included Cape Town as one of six target cities. Articles identified in line with the inclusion criteria thus included articles related to Cape Town from the global review, as well as new articles identified within the South Africa review.

The most frequently assessed themes across the studies that met the inclusion criteria were community development, social cohesion, and peace building and mental health and wellbeing (in line with the global findings). SfD interventions under these themes were concentrated around HIV prevention and violence reduction and SfD interventions consistently focused on the acquisition of knowledge and life skills in their descriptions of how change occurred. There was significantly less literature and interventions focused on employment and education, and no studies observed related

to the use of sport in promoting life on land¹, despite the importance of environmental sustainability.

In addition, literature that met the stringent inclusion criteria was concentrated in **urban locations**, with few studies from the rural areas, while **studies were far more prevalent** in the Western Cape than other provinces. Lastly, only 1 National intervention and 1 multi-site intervention was reviewed. While the literature meeting inclusion criteria comprises only a fraction of the total SfD literature, it is worrying that the most rigorous studies tend to focus predominantly on Cape Town. Furthermore, a few large SfD organisations (with international donor funding) appeared to dominate the literature.

Critical Factors

The SfD evidence base in South Africa mainly presents specific intervention outcomes (often only relevant to a certain organisation, programme or location), making it difficult to identify the critical factors that may impact these outcomes or the potential to scale these outcomes (if any). However, the review observed the same existing factors identified through the *Sport for Development: The Road to Evidence* report and identified a number of additional critical factors that may impact the reported efficacy of SfD interventions.

Programmatic factors identified in the *Sport for Development: The Road to Evidence* report included: programme climate; relationships; programme design and implementation; programme leadership; and participant access to opportunities. Additional programmatic factors identified in this review included: self-efficacy which emerged as a key construct and outcome measure in the SfD literature; outcome significance and validity, especially the problems associated with self-reported data; and variances in attention paid to noting and measuring the characteristics of youth (e.g. age; sex; education level; disability; income).

Contextual Factors identified in the *Sport for Development: The Road to Evidence* report included a focus on access, the type of sport, poverty, and pathways for long-term engagement. Additional programmatic factors identified in this review included priority social issues (e.g. HIV prevention and violence reduction/anti-social behavior). However, both globally and locally there were few coherent attempts to detail the way in which the contextual factors may impact intervention efficacy. Similarly, the role of stakeholder impact on the efficacy of SfD interventions was rarely considered. However, the review showed that partnerships with research institutions and students provided

¹ It must be noted that Life on Land was included as an extra thematic area in South Africa and was not included in the global and US reviews.

more detailed analyses of stakeholder and contextual factors in relation to any intervention outcomes.

While some programmes had expanded or shown the capacity to scale, the potential to scale these SfD programmes and/or an assessment of the critical factors necessary for scaling these approaches was rarely examined. The lack of literature on multi-site interventions and national studies, and the weak quality of evidence, make it difficult to generalize findings and assess the potential to scale evidence-based interventions. This is exacerbated by the lack of studies that assess cost effectiveness of SfD interventions. No SfD studies in South Africa that met the inclusion criteria critically assessed intervention costs, though several global studies demonstrated social return on investment (SROI) in SfD. This suggests the need for more studies using SROI methods or other cost-benefit analyses.

Overall, these findings informed five overarching recommendations for organizations, researchers, funders, and policy makers that are listed below. The implications for policy are then explored in detail.

- 1. Promote Multi-Sector Collaboration to Advance SfD in South Africa;*
- 2. Develop Better Outcomes Measures for Youth-Targeted SfD;*
- 3. Position Individual Behaviour within a Broader Ecosystem;*
- 4. Improve Youth Participation in SfD; and,*
- 5. Coordinate Efforts Among Researchers, Practitioners and Donors to Improve Quality of Methods in SfD Research.*

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The review provides a range of implications and considerations for policy and policy makers.

Firstly, it is clear that the current state of evidence of SfD interventions does not yet provide sufficient levels of quality or methodological rigor, thus undermining the case for scalable impact. Therefore policies and investments need to be prioritised to ensure rigour and quality in SfD research, including the use of appropriate theories and methods, such as high quality (meta) research and systematic reviews of SfD initiatives rather than stand-alone project evaluations. While the latter are useful, there is a need to better understand common variables that impact initiatives. Further, this provides an opportunity to aggregate and compare data at scale, allowing governments and other actors to better assess the value and viability of investments in sport for development (versus other priority areas).

Policy makers need to understand that access to sport (and physical activity / physical education) is regarded as a universal human right, enshrined by the the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1959), the International Charter of Physical Education and Sport (UNESCO, 1978, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990), the Olympic Charter (Olympic Review, 1998) and the Geneva Conventions (1949), among many other international commitments. This is further reinforced by the National Sport and Recreation Plan (SRSA, 2012) and the National Sport and Recreation Act (2007) which seek to promote inclusive access for all to sport, especially those who have been historically marginalised. Despite these commitments, the right to play is often referred to as “the forgotten right” (United Nations, 2003) and policymakers need to ensure this is not the case. Thus while there is a need to ensure higher quality research, this should not underscore the fact that access to sport is a fundamental human right and should be freely available to all South Africans.

Given the disparities, there exists an obligation to ensure equity in terms of access to sport facilities, opportunities and experiences. In this regard, investments need to be prioritised in terms of ensuring a balance between elite sport (including mega-events) and grassroots sport (including sport in school and sport for development) that best serves the needs of the public. This requires policy makers to pay attention to the differences (and complementarities) between the development of sport and the use of sport for development, including where policies are prioritised and investments are made.

The majority of data considered in the review was supplied by civil society organisations, with non-profit organisations prominent, though various national and provincial state departments were contacted. This reflects the broader SfD field in which programming and research has often been driven by civil society, including the academic sector. The public sector has supported research and delivery of interventions but generally has a broader sporting mandate and is less focused on SfD. This has implications for the governance of the sport and emerging SfD sector, with a consideration of roles and responsibilities for the public sector, civil society and academic sector needed (Sanders, 2018).

Beyond the Playing Field

It is clear that attempting to isolate the factors or variables that may impact the efficacy of SfD interventions is a complex and difficult undertaking. This is partly because the levels of evidence and methods are generally weak, making it difficult to draw broader conclusions. However, in addition, it is difficult to distinguish the contribution(s) of sport vs. non-sport components in SfD programmes.

Further, it is clear that one's ability to access and benefit from sports opportunities is profoundly affected by other variables such as income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location. Furthermore, even if participation does occur, there remains a further set of variables that affect whether positive outcomes are achieved or if harm is prevented. And even if positive outcomes are achieved, there is considerable debate as to how and why these outcomes were achieved, whether they can be scaled or replicated elsewhere and whether (usually) short-term outcomes will lead to any form of sustainable impact. This illustrates the complexity in isolating the role of sport in leading to social change, and in determining the extent of its influence or impact.

This complexity is exacerbated by the diversity of SfD initiatives, as revealed in the review, which differ considerably in terms of context, programme design and delivery, target audience(s), expected outcomes and ability to measure and evaluate their work. It is therefore imperative that policymakers reflect on the importance of context (both in the surrounding environment and programme itself) as a critical variable that impacts interventions and poses challenges to them being replicated successfully elsewhere. Yet, despite the challenges that this poses in terms of identifying common elements, policy makers and others would do well to recognise this diversity as a strength rather than a limitation, as it demonstrates the potential of sport to be used in a myriad of ways and in a variety of contexts to contribute to a range of policies and outcomes that go far beyond the sporting realm.

This means that policymakers and others can consider the use of sport within other policy domains (e.g. health) and recognise that sport can be embedded as one component of a broader intervention. While sport can be used as a stand-alone intervention, recognising its ability to influence other domains and attract youth in a positive manner allows policy makers to connect sport to other sectors. The role of sport in contributing to (positive) youth development is one example as is the role of physical activity and sport in tackling non-communicable diseases. Sport need not be a lone player.

Related to the above, the review provides evidence for the consideration of sport-based approaches to be included in broader development work. While sport for development is often considered a stand-alone sector, others would caution against isolating this sector as sport is intentionally used to contribute to outcomes in other fields. As such, sport may be viewed as a methodology in which to advance the goals of other fields, including but not limited to, public health, education, youth development, gender equality and crime prevention. In this light, it is recommended that policy makers outside sport are engaged as to the value and utility of sport. It is further recommended that the Kazan Action Plan and the corresponding MINEPS (International Conference of Ministers and

Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport) VI Policy Follow-Up Framework are considered as they identify 10 SDGs and 36 targets to which sport initiatives can contribute. It is worth noting that the South African government were instrumental in these global initiatives and plans.

CONCLUSION

South Africa encompasses a diverse range of SfD interventions, organisations and intended outcomes, and offers many promising contributions to positive youth development across the five thematic areas assessed in this review. However, the overall weak quality of methods and evidence makes it difficult to determine which thematic areas SfD approaches seem capable of making the most effective and impactful contributions in the future, and whether this differs across contexts. Furthermore, it is difficult to identify common factors that impact the efficacy of interventions and potential for scale.

As such, it is clear that policymakers need to develop a nuanced and holistic understanding of sport and its potential for development, including recognizing its limitations and complexity as well as its diversity and huge potential to contribute to an array of development outcomes. Greater investment in SfD initiatives, especially in relation to improving standards of evidence and methods will be able to provide a clearer assessment of the (largely untapped) value of sport in South Africa and beyond.

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