K4D | Knowledge, evidence and learning for development

Sport and development

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Question

What are the key success factors and key barriers of sport for development interventions contributing to educational inclusion, social cohesion, HIV prevention, gender equality and stigma/discrimination against people with disabilities?

Contents

1. Overview

Some individual studies noted factors for success and what did not work well. However, there was not enough evidence to get a synthesis on barriers and enablers to sport for development in general. Often programmes in the literature were described but rarely evaluated. Where they were evaluated, specific features contributing to success or otherwise were not identified. The few examples where barriers and enablers are discussed are noted in sections 3 and 4 respectively.

Key findings on each outcome area:

- No evidence on sport for educational inclusion was found within the boundaries of this review.

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that sports are favourable for social cohesion. Examples all come from football. One example, in Israel, notes the potential for competitive sports to fuel divisions (Sugden, 2006).

- Sport has been an effective means of communicating messages about HIV but cost-effectiveness is questioned (Kruse, 2006). And evidence on reduced infections was not identified.

- Evidence suggests sport programmes are positive for gender-related attitude change and improving girls' self-esteem, however evidence identified in this review was not recent.

- No evaluation of sport for disability programmes were found within the parameters of this review.

Using DFID's How To Note: Assessing the Strength of Evidence (2014) the body of evidence is limited. Technical quality of studies is generally low. The risk of bias has in most cases not been addressed. The size of the body of evidence is small. With regards to consistency the studies pointed to similar conclusions. The findings are context specific. It should be recognised also that the evidence found for this report is quite old.

2. Methodology

For this helpdesk, the requester provided two sport for development reviews (Langer et al., 2013 and Kidd & Donnelly, 2007) to draw on the evidence cited rather than conducting a search, to allow adequate time to focus on review and synthesis. Some snowball searching was undertaken. Criteria for inclusion of evidence were: focus on geographical regions Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle-East, North Africa, and South Asia; and limit studies to those that include young people aged between 10-24. Papers were not accepted or rejected based on quality. All papers identified in the reviews provided were included if they met the region and age group criteria provided they were accessible from the database available at IDS.

3. Barriers

Social cohesion

In a mass participation programme in South Africa, Siyadlala, lack of facilities was found to have a negative effect on social cohesion (Burnett, 2009). Sugden (2006) notes that the competitive nature of sport does have the potential to aggravate already disparate groups. Difficulties are also noted in bringing people together when there are language barriers, in this case Jewish and Arab children in northern Israel. The project was also "criticised for being patronising, neo-imperialistic and overly supportive of the Israeli state" (ibid, p238).

Continued participation is a problem. Post-conflict situations can have problems of continuation in leadership also as these situations are in a state of flux by their nature (Armstrong, 2002).

Gender

Retaining girls in sports programmes when they reach adolescence is noted to be an issue by Brady and Banu-Khan (2002). Younger girls, described in this case in Kenya, are more allowed to "act like tomboys" (ibid, p13) and at puberty girls are discouraged or forbidden to engage in sport.

4. Enablers

HIV prevention

Delver and Temmerman (2006) put forward that whether sport programmes are able to avert HIV infections depends on the socio-economic context of the targeted behaviour. They go on to note that the evidence base regarding the socio-cultural and political appropriateness of sport programmes for HIV/AIDS prevention is sparse. They also suggest that promoting safe sexual behaviour successfully depends on a favourable epidemiological context (prevalence of HIV and cofactors, mixing patterns between targeted and non-targeted, and the sexual behaviour of the untargeted population).

Gender

Parental concern for girls' sports activities was found to be a barrier for participation of a football project in Kenya (Brady and Banu-Khan, 2002). It was found to be helpful to involve parents for example, in keeping scores. In the same case anecdotal evidence finds parents are much more positive where playing sport has earned them school fees.

Sports initiatives for girls should factor in safety considerations. A project in Egypt made sure that programme sites were within the village where the girls' participating lived and girls from the same neighbourhood walked together (Brady, 2005). The playing fields used also had walls for privacy.

5. Educational inclusion

No evidence on sport for inclusion of previously socially excluded groups was found within the scope of this review.

No evidence on educational inclusion was found within the boundaries of this review. Anecdotal evidence is recorded in a publication from the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDPIWG, 2007) but the requester excluded the publication as the contents were communications case studies rather than based on research. The paper was identified through snowball searching and not included in either of the reviews. It is noted here if the reader would like further reference.

6. Social cohesion

In most cases sport is found to be positive for social cohesion.

The organisation of sporting activities has been found to bring people together. The Active Community Clubs Initiative in South Africa take an outside-in, bottom-up approach building partnerships with local stakeholders through community participation (Burnett, 2009). Social value of increased trust between coaches and participants, reduction of social distance between children and parents, increased self-esteem and a sense of self-worth for the unemployed volunteers is noted (ibid.).

Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) in Kenya have children take part in the organisation of activities (Willis, 2000). The original aim of the programme was to give children a sport outlet whilst addressing shanty town filth for community and personal development, and youth empowerment. Children were required to clear up rubbish before their weekend games. Anecdotal evidence suggests MYSA improves social cohesion by creating a sense of belonging for children.

Sport has been used to restore trust in children in post-conflict situations. An NGO in Kabul, Skateistan, connects children and restores community through skateboard tuition and a shared space (Thorpe & Rinehard, 2013). Children view their experiences very positively however formal evaluation is not available. Lauder et al (2015) question the value of the evidence on this programme.

In the Galilee region of northern Israel, a programme known as 'Football for Peace' was run for Jewish and Arab youths (Sugden, 2006). Interviews with participants and organisers shows support and belief in F4P in promoting peaceful coexistence, however challenges were also identified. Problems included uneven ratios of participants, language and translation, female participation had different views, and question whether competitive sport can fuel divides.

In a published paper by Armstrong (2002) a football project is described in Liberia which had child protection as a dual purpose. A sense of community was created in the project where men have sense of duty to report child abuse which is then followed-up by project personnel. Children who were involved in the football teams had to keep to life standards and anyone found to be using drugs or thieving for example, were thrown out of the club (Armstrong, 2004). Children were also taught about child rights.

7. HIV prevention

Sport has been a successful way to get messages about HIV to children but the extent of effectiveness is difficult to ascertain.

Respected sportsmen may be useful in getting messages across to children about HIV. Botcheva and Huffman (2004) evaluate HIV attitude change in children educated by prestigious soccer players in Zimbabwe. Features are: Classroom-based curriculum and innovative action-oriented approaches such as warm-up games, role plays discussions and brain storming activities. The curriculum is based on the principles of social learning theory, reinforcement of learning by observing others (models) who engage in the new behaviours. Results were positive for change

in attitudes but no measurement of HIV prevention was recorded. This evaluation was not formally published. Clark et al. (2006) carried out a small trial evaluation of the same project against a control which was published in a peer-reviewed journal. Students in the project classes had significant improvements in knowledge and attitudes. A delayed increase in the same factors was found among control students suggesting a possible diffusion of information from peers who had received the intervention. The authors recognise the limitations of the study as it was not possible to randomly assign students to treatment and control. Participating schools were selected by convenience and the headmaster chose the intervention and control classes within each of four different schools. Although randomisation was not possible students in both groups were noted to be similar.

Kicking AIDS Out, in Zambia, used educational games and activities to build awareness about HIV and AIDS and encourage discussion among peers (Kruse, 2006). A survey found limited impact compared to a control. Possible reasons noted for the insignificant difference are that several among the control group have been: involved in other programmes with a similar HIV component, exposed to media and social campaigns focusing on HIV/AIDS, exposed to in-school anti-AIDS clubs activities, and/or exposed to similar messages from churches. It may be useful that the messages were reinforced by footballers but difficult to assess. MYSA also gave football squad members training in HIV/AIDS prevention to be peer educators but research ascertaining effectiveness was not carried out (Willis, 2000).

8. Gender

Sports programmes for girls can be positive for changing gender-related attitudes and building girls' confidence however, evidence identified is not recent.

MYSA started a girls' soccer league in 1992. The involvement of girls in sport noted as an achievement in breaking barriers "the fact that girls are playing a role in a soccer sport and promoting organisation is an achievement in itself" (Willis, 2000). Anecdotal evidence from a Population Council Paper (Brady and Banu-Khan, 2002) suggests the programme was effective in building girls confidence. Boys attitudes towards the girls playing sport was sometimes unfavourable but the fact that girls were more able to voice this was noted as a positive. The problem came from boys outside the programme. MYSA boys were found to be more respectful in their behaviour than prior to the programme. A girls' task force was created to try and address some of the concerns arising from the girls' programme in 1999. Safety concerns were addressed by changing locations of games and giving transport allowances.

A pioneering project in Egypt for girls called 'Safe Spaces to Learn, Play and Grow' is outlined by Brady (2005) but little in the way of effectiveness is described. This was the first time girls sport was organised in Egypt. Organised sports is part of a wider programme for literacy, skills building, and reproductive health awareness. Safety and privacy concerns were addressed. Effectiveness was found in drawing girls into a network of other institutions, programmes and mentors that were previously unavailable.

9. Disability

No evaluations of sport for disability programmes were found which fit the criteria for this review.

Most of the examples that were found using the methodology of this review were from high-income countries. The one item identified was a report from a GTZ project with Handicap International in Cambodia and Angola (Ikelberg et al., 2003). The 'Rehabilitation through sports activities for children and young people in war affected countries' pilot aimed at strengthening disabled children both mentally and physically, by promoting their rehabilitation, facilitating their social integration and their capacity for self-help. After a short description of the programme the document provides a practical handbook and checklist. Nothing on impact is described.

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