

**“Strengthening the Global Framework for Leveraging Sport  
for Development and Peace”**

**Report prepared for the United Nations Department of  
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## **Executive Summary**

The content of this report is based on the key findings of two separate and unrelated research projects in the field of 'Sport for Development and Peace' (SDP). Firstly, the report draws on a four-year ethnographic study of youth and SDP practices, programmes and local experiences of sport for post-conflict rehabilitation implemented in Liberia, West Africa. The research's target population of youth, former child soldiers and displaced young people allows for valuable insights into the SDP post-conflict landscape, particularly in relation to sport's contribution to building and sustaining peace and the notion of mainstreaming sport into wider development programmes and policies.

Secondly, key findings will be shared from a social scientific research project, entitled 'Sport for a Better World?', funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)<sup>1</sup>. This three-year project was essentially comparative in method, with research being conducted in five international locations – Jamaica, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Zambia – and centred on three major themes, specifically the ability of SDP to advance human rights, empower people with disabilities, and facilitate peacebuilding and reconciliation in post-conflict contexts (See; Collison et al 2016). For the purpose of this report the 'Sport for a Better World?' research project will enable insights and commentary on the main focuses of this expert meeting and demonstrate the challenges, opportunities, effective practices and intersectional nature of sport and its potential relationship and role for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **Rationale for Research**

The Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) sector features hundreds of programmes and organizations across the world which use sport as a tool of social intervention to promote non-sport goals such as development, peace, human rights and social justice (Giulianotti 2012). Key SDP stakeholders - in facilitating, delivering or receiving this work - include national governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, private corporations, campaign groups, and SDP user groups. Despite its rapid growth, we have limited knowledge of: how the SDP sector is structured socially and organizationally; and how different kinds of SDP work are planned, implemented, and experienced in diverse cultural contexts. This knowledge is essential if robust policies and practices for the future development of SDP are to be identified. The broad aims of both research projects, particularly the second, have been to fill that knowledge gap by providing a substantial comparative social scientific investigation of SDP, and to have long-term impact on the sector's development.

## **The Research Objectives**

1: Research in Liberia (2009-2012, 2018), Kosovo, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Rwanda and Zambia (2014-2017) examined how the SDP sector is constructed in social and organizational terms. Research examined the different policies and ideologies of SDP stakeholders; the networking, collaboration, and power relations across stakeholders; how particular stakeholders are

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included or excluded from different networks and activities; and, how the sector may become more effective through new types of partnership and coordination.

2: The 'Sport for a Better World?' research project examined SDP comparatively across multiple sites with regard to disabilities, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and advancing human rights. Research explored how SDP stakeholders understood each location; the particular types of SDP work in each location; the difficulties and problems encountered, and how these were responded to by different stakeholders.

3: Research in all six locations examined SDP programmes with regard to their organization, implementation and user-group experiences. Thus, the 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' aspects of SDP programmes were investigated. Research examined the different influences of SDP stakeholders in identifying local needs and shaping SDP work, relative to context; the voices, experiences and perspectives of diverse user groups, and how these aspects were engaged by SDP organizations to shape policy and practice; how wider community groups understood SDP work; and, how these and other aspects of the SDP sector developed over time.

4: The 'Sport for a Better World?' research project examined comparatively SDP work in five national settings: Kosovo, Jamaica, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Zambia. These locations enabled the research team to examine: key contextual issues that impact on SDP interventions and whether SDP work is adapted to these conditions; how SDP organizations engage (or otherwise) with other local actors; and, the actual and potential roles of national and local government in facilitating SDP work.

### **The SDP Landscape**

SDP is a broad social field in which sport and related activities are utilized to pursue different types of non-sporting development and peace-building goals across the world (Darnell 2012; Kidd 2008; Levermore 2008). To elaborate on this definition, it is proposed that SDP has several basic features. SDP has a diverse range of development and peace-building goals, these goals include drawing young people into education, employment and training; promoting conflict resolution and peaceful relations in divided communities; empowering women and promoting gender equality; assisting the social inclusion of people with disabilities; promoting health education, such as in tackling HIV/AIDS, obesity, and diabetes; working to cut homelessness; and, reducing gang activity, urban violence and crime. The choice of specific SDP goals will depend to a large extent on the perceived needs in local areas and will also vary over time.

SDP is almost entirely focused on working with young people who are understood to be 'at risk' or are otherwise living in marginalized social contexts (Collison 2016). Hence, most SDP work is undertaken with young people in low- and middle-income countries (the 'global South'), although a substantial volume of SDP activity is conducted in high-income countries with socially excluded groups such as the young unemployed (Coalter 2013). The age-range of these young people varies according to local and national contexts, the goals of the programmes, and the expertise of the NGOs, with a particular focus tending to be on youths aged in their early teens through to early 20s (Collison & Marchesseault 2018). While many early programmes tended to have a heavy bias towards male participants, from the mid-

2000s onwards the field of SDP has been more explicitly focused on a stronger gender balance by engaging girls and young women in activities and in organizational management (Chawansky 2011).

### **The Background and Organization of SDP**

It was in the early 1990s that SDP really began to crystallize as a distinctive international field of activity, becoming a new 'movement' (Kidd 2008). The UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), running respectively from 2000-2015 and 2015-2030, have heavily influenced the shaping of many SDP programme objectives (UN 2003, 2015). The UN has also formally advocated for the role of sport in promoting development and peace-building, as Article 37 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) states:

*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. (UN 2015: 37)*

Moving beyond prior debates, policies and practices, the SDP sector, including its academic study, needs to engage with all SDGs.

Despite the global reach of the UN, the most important stakeholders within the field of SDP are the user groups of young people and their wider communities. These user groups vary enormously in their demographic, social and cultural profile, ranging for example from children traumatized by war, rape and ethnic cleansing in the world's poorest nations through to young adults receiving employment guidance or health education in Western Europe or North America.

The field of SDP is also made up of a wide range of organizational partners or stakeholders (Giulianotti 2011). Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) make up the greatest number of these stakeholders and play a pivotal role in organizing and delivering sport programmes. The world of sport also contributes substantially through its many athletes, clubs, leagues and federations, which help to resource or to run programmes, often through their own charitable foundations. Intergovernmental bodies such as the UN and Commonwealth Secretariat play key roles in delivering policy and strategy, acting as advocates for SDP, and delivering resources to different programmes. Local and national governmental bodies provide important support for SDP activities, particularly as gatekeepers to schools, sport clubs and communities. Private businesses also tend to act largely as donors to NGOs, ranging from funding international programmes through to donating equipment, food or transport to help run specific SDP events. Increasingly, SDP also features social enterprises which combine development and business activities, such as employing young people to manufacture sport equipment for SDP usage and for sale. Scale is a critical factor in most of these stakeholder categories. For example, in the case of NGOs, international agencies tend to play a coordinating and fund-raising role, while local and national agencies tend to undertake the implementation work on the ground. In addition, most stakeholders enter into diverse

partnerships to deliver SDP programmes. A distinct realm of activity, SDP also has relatively close ties to the wider development and sport fields.

## **Critical Issues**

### **Re-thinking the 'P' in SDP**

The current conceptual framework of peace within development contexts, debates and image narrows and restricts opportunities for sport-based interventions. Directly applied to civil-conflict, genocide and urban crime and violence, little attention has been given to intersecting socio-cultural and economic conditions and behaviours that affect everyday life, for example poverty, domestic violence and child abuse. Whilst peace is assumed as a universal ideal, an enhanced contextual and broader approach to the 'P' in SDP would enable traditional peacebuilding and conflict resolution policy and practice to:

1. Increase programming in non-traditional conflict settings
2. Enhance opportunities for local populations to construct and conceive development initiatives to create everyday peaceful lives
3. Increase opportunities for SDP to intersect and collaborate within new forms of partnerships removed from those tasked with post-conflict disarmament, conflict management and rehabilitation.

Reimagining of the 'P' is needed in both philosophical and practical terms, we might question if violence is the only prerequisite for achieving and sustaining peace? Research in Liberia, Kosovo, Jamaica, Rwanda and Sri Lanka leads to the suggestion that the Image and concept of conflict and peace needs revision within the SDP context.

### **Building and Sustaining Peace**

The goal of achieving peace and the task of peacebuilding remains a primary objective for global policy makers and NGO practitioners. Indeed, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recently observed, "We are a world in pieces. We need to be a world at peace," (UN 2017). From the inception of formal SDP policy and discourse, the objective of peace, security and the priority of fragile states has been well documented. The SDGs affirm this commitment specifically – yet not exclusively – in Goal 16, 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'. The Commonwealth Secretariat's 2017 publication for enhancing the contribution of sport to the SDGs recognizes the complex and cross-cutting threats to peace and security, specifically in relation to human rights, the values of tolerance, respect and understanding and the principles of good governance, transparency, accountability and integrity (Lindsey & Chapman 2017). Even in the absence of academic references, NGO experiences or local accounts aligning to such issues, the notion of peace is extremely complex and intersects with a number of interrelated development goals and social challenges. It also fits at times within a confusing space between legacies or historical accounts of war and armed conflict, and present-day forms of conflict, unrest or unpeaceful social realities.

Academic inquiry on SDP and 'peace' specifically has significantly advanced current understandings of SDP programming in post-conflict and fragile nations (Collison 2016, Kleim 2006, Schlenker and Sugden 2011), policy implications for peacebuilding and sport (Hayhurst 2009, Black 2010, Beacom and Levermore 2008) as well as theoretical frameworks for SDP in relation to peace (Levermore 2009, Woodhouse 2010, Lyras & Peachey 2011). Such academic work has influenced and enabled SDP to be recognized as a legitimate development sector and academic discipline. Despite peace being positioned as the traditional and established theme within SDP, key issues and challenges have been identified. A contextual approach to sport-based policy and practice may facilitate alternative and broader thought on the positive impact sport can have for creating relative safety, reducing violence and empowering local populations to lead peaceful lives.

As previously mentioned, the notion of conflict and peace is highly contextual. A 'best practice' framework for both policy and practice would consider such issues through a local lens. The research theme of 'Peacebuilding and Reconciliation' proved to be the most connected theme for all six locations. Yet each location highlighted historical, social, cultural, local and strategic differences in the narratives and images attached to conflict and the specific objectives placed on achieving sustainable peace. Research findings in these locations uncovered diverse conflict-affected locales and environments, alongside different theories of change and sport-based approaches to constructing safety for local populations, implementing educational initiatives and conflict management and peacebuilding interventions.

### **Key findings**

The narratives and experiences of peace and conflict are contextual, with varied bases in civil-conflict, genocide, ethnically rooted conflict, urban crime and violence, political violence and social division. Whilst at global level the development goals in areas such as peace-building remain stable, they are differentiated, variable and changing at local and national levels. Thus, the everyday reality of living 'in a state of peace' is mostly unaccounted for, which stems in part from the lack of an intersectional approach that would have the potential to engage with other areas in the wider development sector.

To summarise, some of the key opportunities and challenges for developing the 'P' within SDP would be:

#### Opportunities:

1. Facilitate cross-community contact, encourage dialogue and build trust
2. Overcome language barriers
3. Create neutral and safe spaces
4. Practice peace through sport via controlled conflict management
5. Remember and acknowledge past conflicts

#### Challenges:

1. Negotiate the prevention v cure conundrum
2. Organise around the funding cycles and lifespans of programming

3. Identify how to go beyond 'breaking the ice' between communities
4. Building the narratives and frameworks of peace in the absence of conflict

### **Mainstreaming of Sport by Recognising the Disconnected Goals**

It was noted earlier that the SDP sector needs to engage with all SDGs. Some relatively established areas of SDP activity have strong links to the SDGs (e.g. SDG5 on gender equality, SDG4 on education, SDG3 on health). Work in these areas should be continued. There is definite need for the SDP sector to enter relatively new fields that connect directly with the SDGs. Two are highlighted here.

#### **Environment**

The natural environment is a major theme in both the research and practice of international development that has been largely neglected by both SDP stakeholders and scholars. This is despite the critical importance of issues like environmental degradation and the threats posed by climate change, as well as the fact that sport is directly linked to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. At least twelve SDGs have profound implications for the environment. The most obvious cases relate to SDGs 6, 7, 13, 14, and 15, concerned respectively with securing water and sanitation, sustainable energy, combatting climate change, conserving natural water environments and resources, and protecting ecosystems.

A key research finding was the oversight that was reflected in the often-marginal status afforded to environmental issues within programmes, campaigns and initiatives that take place within the SDP sector, as well as the general paucity of SDP research that focuses on the environment. In broad terms, it seems that the SDP sector has been, and largely continues to be, centred on the *intersubjective* world, in terms of what people do with and to each other, rather than on social relationships with the *natural* world, in terms of what people do to and with these surrounding environments.

How can environment be mainstreamed into SDP practice and what is needed?

1. Environment education and good practice mainstreamed in all programmes
2. Distinct strand for some specialist agencies
3. funding support for NGOs on SDP and environment
4. key element is education and working for global change.
5. A need to bridge the divide between the environmental and SDP 'movements'

#### **Disability**

A primary objective of the 'Sport for a Better World?' research project was to examine whether or not the SDP sector empowered people with disabilities. It is a requirement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) that this population has access to leisure and sport provision (Article 30); SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10, 11 and 16

all refer specifically to people with disabilities. As a research team we identified a significant gap in both SDP literature and practice initiatives that focused upon disability. Whilst we acknowledge that providing access to sport and physical activity is not restricted to development contexts nor the global South, our lack of significant findings and data relating to disability exposed a lack knowledge, awareness and expertise within the global SDP landscape.

In Liberia, disability in the form of both mental health and physical impairment became a symbol of participation in conflict. Disabled populations were considered 'bad' or 'risky' and they were often ostracised from mainstream society. The consequences of this stigma were highly significant, impacting negatively on social and economic mobility opportunities and their abilities to experience peaceful lives. Despite the overwhelming presence of the international peacekeeping and development sectors, those with disabilities were not actively engaged with, and remained liminal and silent observers. Although the critical issues of disability in relation to human rights, peace, inclusion, empowerment and participation can be connected, the initial investigations into SDP provision for people with a disability highlight the fact that the basic needs of a population often trump more marginal segments of developing societies.

The lack of data on this critical issue has become a significant finding of both research pursuits. Such challenges were consistent amongst our locations and included the stigma of disability, accessibility of facilities and limited opportunities. There is an opportunity for SDP to engage more vigorously with disability and make the connections to broader development themes.

Opportunities:

1. Increasing inclusive programmes beyond the rhetoric of open access
2. Encourage people with disabilities to become actively involved in SDP provision
3. Developing integrated pathways
4. Establishing core competencies
5. Pursuing results within and beyond sport

### **Monitoring and Evaluation: An Effective Leveraging Tool?**

The requirement and need for M&E has become one of the most significant challenges, and sites of critique, within the SDP sector in recent years. It is connected to knowledge production, as well as engagement with and between local organisations, the influence of external donors and even debates over methodologies (Kay, 2012). The assumption that M&E is an appropriate tool for evidencing impact and assessing the worth of SDP has been questioned, especially as it is often aligned with the politics of legitimacy, accountability, sustainability and validation (Jeanes & Lindsey 2014). In turn, many social scientists have highlighted the importance of M&E in empowering local voices and have advocated for participatory methodologies within these processes (Nicholls, Giles, & Sethna, 2011, Burnett 2008). An additional point of contestation is whether conducting research and managing M&E are one and the same. Arguably, the assumption that research *necessarily* informs,



guides, influences or even constructs M&E frameworks or evidence is misguided. Progressive research methodologies focused on M&E, for example Participatory Action Research, may well serve the dual purpose of co-creating knowledge whilst assisting the formal process of evidencing and reporting, but the relationship between these processes requires ongoing negotiation and reflexivity.

M&E has become a *mantra*, or a vague term and process pursued and discussed with great intensity within the SDP sector. In all research locations M&E was recognised as something necessary and often important to their work. However, there were distinct contrasts to approach and purpose. Donor driven M&E as opposed to producing knowledge for learning and development presents very different challenges, objectives and requirements. Going beyond the formal obligations of M&E in relation to accountability and legitimacy, embracing new forms of knowledge and developing new 'Theories of Change' reduced the avoidance and risk associated with the process.

Key Learning and Opportunities:

1. A culture of change is needed in relation to M&E. Specifically, by challenging ambiguous objectives
2. Training and support is needed for local NGOs, programme personnel and funders
3. M&E should be positioned as an opportunity to 'give voice' to local recipient populations
4. The task of M&E should be part of an on-going process that should evolve and develop organically and reflects the various stages of implementation, learning, adaption and impact
5. New forms of knowledge and diverse perspectives should be encouraged and used as a tool to enhance, leverage and develop good practices

### **Coordinating the Global SDP Sector: Leadership and Networking**

Our projects found that different stakeholders considered there to be a clear leadership vacuum across the SDP sector at international level, which has direct consequences at local and national levels. The best and most sustainable source of leadership across the SDP sector would be at intergovernmental level, and offer the following attributes: advocating for SDP activities, and mobilizing stakeholders across the sector; building strong lines of communication across all stakeholders within SDP and across the wider development field; nurturing and facilitating collaborative opportunities and sustainable partnerships across different SDP stakeholders; promoting education across the SDP field; and, more broadly, cultivating greater degrees of cohesion and self-regulation across the sector. Crucially, the leadership agency would represent a 'go-to' body for national governments in the development of National Action Plans and broader strategies for grassroots work; and would potentially enable the sector to respond quickly to new policy issues and crises, such as Ebola, refugees, and the centrality of the environment to the SDGs.

We found that a substantial volume of local and national SDP programmes would benefit greatly from a more direct and sustained networked engagement within the international SDP sector. The potential advantages of such networking include sharing and disseminating knowledge of best practices, curricula, programme models, and guidance in funding applications; mobilizing stakeholders and wider interest in the sector; and, improving the education and experience of staff, volunteers, and project user groups. Findings from the ‘Sport for a Better World?’ project suggest that emerging SDP locations are strongly engaging with international partners and professionalisation is considered a desirable approach to success (Darnell et al 2017). Yet this was observed in isolation and did not represent the experiences and opportunities presented to many of our in-country research partners. Networking would strongly assist the sustainability of local SDP projects, and would be very strongly enhanced by securing effective leadership at national and international levels, and by ensuring that national sport ministries were sufficiently informed of SDP activities in different regions beyond the provision of school-based sport.

With regard to leadership and networking, key tasks would include funding and resource management assistance, advocacy, implementation and Monitoring & Evaluation. A key research finding identified that the global sector is organised and connected more horizontally than vertically. Local SDP organisations increasingly connect to global funders, advocates and networks.

#### Opportunities:

1. Stability and sustainability
2. Political neutrality
3. Sharing of information and training, networking, advocacy

#### Challenges:

1. Isolation from public policy
2. Instability and a lack of sustainability
3. lack of legitimacy
4. fragmentation, competition and repetition

## Summary

The SDGs have presented an opportunity for the continued growth and momentum of the SDP movement. Research conducted in diverse international locations has significantly contributed to current understandings of local experiences, organisational practices and top-down perspectives of SDP. This report makes the following recommendations based on long-term fieldwork conducted in six diverse contexts:

1. The notion of peace is contextual and therefore policy and practice frameworks focused on the 'P' need broadening and deeper thought. An intersectional approach is recommended to account for diverse understandings of both experiencing peace and the local risks to achieving this, most notably beyond the narrative of civil-conflict.
2. Mainstreaming SDP into the SDGs requires the recognition of non-traditional SDP priorities. The environment and disability have provided examples of two critical issues that have largely been neglected by the SDP sector. In all research locations, need and opportunities for engaging with environmental concerns and disabled populations were observed. Advocacy in this area would provide opportunities for leveraging SDP activity and connecting SDP to wider development goals and agendas.
3. Monitoring and Evaluation remains to be an area that encourages critical debate, resistance and ambiguity. Effective M&E has the potential to leverage knowledge and encourage learning through the sociological imaginations and experiences of those intimately involved at the grassroots level. Whilst the ambiguous (often ambitious) nature of M&E is likely to remain, assistance for implementers, facilitators and funders would support the construction of new forms of knowledge, meaningful reflections and 'Theories of Change'.
4. Coordination, Leadership and Networking are critically important principles of creating partnerships, pursuing professional practices and education, securing funding and sustaining an organisational presence. All three principles should be pursued with vigour by those in a position to support local sectors through policy, advocacy and engagement.

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