Sport-for-Development in the South Pacific Region: Macro-, Meso-, and Micro-Perspectives

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Abstract

As the field of sport-for-development (SFD) has developed, there has been increasing debate over the ability of SFD programs to effect lasting structural change on target communities. Highlighting the barriers to SFD program delivery in five Pacific Island nations, in this paper we argue that numerous challenges emerging at macro-, meso-, and micro-levels must be explored, understood, and accounted for to enact structural change. Building on thematic findings from our empirical cross-nation research project, we discuss the importance of addressing SFD challenges at all levels of society to ensure that interventions are appropriately tailored for the specific and often divergent sociocultural contexts in the Pacific Islands region. We argue for a more holistic approach to planning, management, and evaluation when attempting to deliver structural change through sport.

Keywords: sport-for-development, Pacific Island nations, structural change, program challenges and barriers, qualitative research

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Sport-for-development (SFD) is a term used to describe the use of sport programs and activities to achieve non-sport outcomes, such as education, health, conflict resolution, gender equity, and community capacity building (see Beacom & Levermore, 2009; Hayhurst, Kay, & Chawansky, 2016; Sherry, Schulenkorf, & Phillips, 2016). Over the past decade, the number of SFD organizations and projects enacted has steadily increased (Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016). One such project is the Pacific Netball Partnership (PNP) program, delivered through the Australian Government's Pacific Sports Partnerships (PSP) initiative, and managed through a partnership between Netball Australia and the Australian Sports Commission. The PSP is designed to support grassroots sport, build the capacity of national sporting federations in the South Pacific region, and contribute to positive social and health-related development outcomes for participants and their local communities.

Our research into the PNP aims to provide a holistic investigation into the barriers and challenges for sustained social development, structural change, and capacity building across macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. Previous research (e.g., Darnell, 2010; Hayhurst, 2009) has found that many SFD programs fall short of their overarching aim to enact structural change within a community—such as education outcomes or female empowerment—with any changes seemingly coming to a halt at the individual level. Against this background, we conducted research across five Pacific Island nations—Tonga, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Vanuatu, and the Cook Islands—in cooperation with the respective National Netball Federations (NNFs), in an attempt to better understand SFD programs' efficacy in enacting positive development outcomes for their target communities. We recognize the complexity around the use of the term 'community' in this context and the dynamic social processes related to aspects of identity, belonging and diversity that make it a rather ambiguous term. However, while 'community' may not capture unique individual experiences, it has proven to

be an important symbolic principle that helps to highlight shared sociocultural values, heritage, and beliefs as well as tensions, challenges, and issues present in local populations (see Azzopardi 2011; Studdert 2005).

In this paper, we will discuss the macro-, meso-, and micro-challenges to SFD program delivery and sustained community outcomes related to the PNP. First, we present a review of the relevant SFD literature, including critiques of SFD programs' ability to effect lasting structural change. We then provide a brief overview of each Pacific Island nation involved in the research, including an examination of the cultural context and social factors influencing netball (for) development. Next, we outline our research approach and present thematic findings from our qualitative enquiry. Finally, findings are critically discussed and implications for theory and practice are provided.

Literature Review

SFD is an emerging research field investigating the use of sport programs and activities to achieve non-sport outcomes. Schulenkorf et al.'s (2016) review of SFD research demonstrated that over half of all published SFD research studies examined the actual outcomes of specific programs and interventions. As interventions are often supported by government and sponsor funding, this focus is hardly surprising; in fact, pressures to explain and justify external spending against desired outcomes have led to an increased emphasis on monitoring and evaluating sport-based development initiatives (Schulenkorf & Adair, 2014). In addition to providing the impetus for monitoring and evaluation, donor demands have also led to significant tensions in the SFD discipline, particularly the need to demonstrate immediate results rather than efficacy in effecting lasting structural change within participant cohorts (Burnett, 2011). Moreover, critics have suggested that as a consequence of external pressures on SFD programs to "perform," there is a tendency to overstate positive program outcomes and associated impacts (Coalter, 2015). Additionally, in the absence of a critical

foundation, Darnell (2012) argued that the increasing focus on monitoring and evaluation risks SFD becoming nothing more than a management function, and questions remain about programs' ability to address larger societal constraints and achieve meaningful structural change (see also Coalter, 2010; Darnell, 2010; Hayhurst, 2009).

Against this background—and with the intent of providing a clear focus for the empirical research that underpins this paper—it seems important to provide some definitional clarity around the term 'structural change'. As indicated above, a number of SFD scholars have previously referred to this term in their respective studies; however, their understanding and interpretation of structural change varies. For the purpose of our investigation, we are building on research in the sport, health and community management domains (see Brest, 2010; Redfern & Christina, 2003; Salem, 2002; Taplin & Clark, 2012), to define structural change as *"a major or transformational change within a community that challenges the status quo and influences the way in which society functions. Structural change is seen as a multi-dimensional construct that alters the way a community operates in its policy, social, cultural, economic, physical, educational and/or managerial environment"*. This definition links closely to the community-focused and process-oriented Theory of Change (TOC) approach that underpins many social change initiatives, including those related to international development (see Stein & Valters, 2012). In short, TOC critically explores and explains the process of change by establishing and investigating an integrated network of relationships between micro, meso and macro factors that enable (or otherwise) short-term, medium-term and long-term development outcomes (see Brest, 2010; Taplin & Clark, 2012). Thus, the TOC approach is particularly useful for the design of our study; in short, it is structured and inclusive of different perspectives to determine the particular resources and strategies that are used (or needed) to meet various community development goals.

The ability of SFD programs to achieve desired structural change is controversially

discussed amongst practitioners and academics. Critique has particularly been raised in

situations where SFD interventions are orchestrated by individuals or organizations from

high-income countries (HICs), yet implemented in communities within low- and middle-

income countries (LMICs). Here, concerns about power imbalances and the prioritization of

ideologies stemming from HICs over subjugated LMIC communities surround (a) the

potential for misunderstanding need (Beacom, 2007; Darnell, 2011); (b) the imposition of

external cultural and social values (Giulianotti, 2011); (c) failure to adequately prioritize local

knowledge, skill, and contribution (Lindsey & Grattan, 2012); and (d) the maintenance of

Western hegemony (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011).

For SFD to address these challenges and to effect structural change, Schulenkorf,

Sugden, and Burdsey (2014) stressed the importance of recognizing diverse community

perspectives on the value of programs, arguing that successful SFD initiatives require "an

appreciation of the intricacies, complexities and nuances in the way that the programme (and

SDP work more generally) is received" (p. 14). Thus, only if these requirements are met can

collective capacities be identified to bring about meaningful changes in wider political and

structural frameworks through SFD practice. Moreover, as the processes through which

individuals develop meaning and agency are necessarily collective, an individual's capacities

are never isolated but instead formed within the context of a group (see Appadurai, 2004).

Involvement in specific collaborative group contexts, such as participation in an SFD

program, may subsequently lead to an increased sense of agency (Fine, 1979) that is

developed collectively and "gradually through social and cultural engagement in everyday

life" (Sugden, 2010, p. 268). Sugden (2010) demonstrated this development of agency

through collective beliefs and behaviors via a "ripple effect model", illustrating how social

impacts experienced at the individual and small group level can effect positive change in

multiple layers of community and society. This requires, however, a holistic perspective of SFD programming, accounting for a broad range of development processes and driven by a deep understanding of stakeholder needs, including an appreciation of the sociocultural context.

The paradigm that underpins the ripple effect model can be described as critical left-realism, a framework that allows "for the mobilization of a radical and critical sociological imagination in determining strategies for progressive and pragmatic engagement with social problems with a view to influencing local policies and interventions that could improve the conditions of [people and their communities]" (Sugden, 2010, p. 267). Social activism and critical pragmatism are key ingredients for achieving positive change that is intended to transcend the different levels of society. Using the example of peacebuilding, Sugden (2010, p. 268) explains that positive societal development "is only possible when significant proportions of ordinary people are ready for and open to conflict resolution. By way of illustration, politicians may be in the driving seat but for the 'peace bus' to get anywhere meaningful along its road map there must be passengers willing to climb on board. This comes gradually through social and cultural engagement in everyday life. The challenge for peace activists is to discover ways to join up specific grassroots, civil society, interventions with more broadly influential policy communities and those elements of political society that hold the keys to peace".

When considering and applying this philosophical stance, research in the SFD space requires a careful selection of an appropriate research approach as well as a purposeful selection of research participants to understand the processes of change on the different societal levels. In particular, if the strongest impact is created at the center of an SFD program, then community members and local representatives (micro level) should play a key role in the investigation. At the same time, the program organizers and a network of activists

and institutional partners that represent the surrounding circles of the model need to be

represented (meso and macro), given that they are in charge of articulating and influencing

the way in which projects, programs and events can have an impact on the wider political

agenda (see Sugden, 2010). Here, the ripple effect model is in line with the previously

described TOC, as both concepts share an inclusive, community-focused approach to

planning, development and research. A more detailed overview of the methodological

considerations taken for our study will be provided in the Research Approach section.

   In sum, SFD is a growing field with a strong level of influence and support from

government and donors, resulting in an increased emphasis on research including monitoring

and evaluation of SFD programs and activities. As the SFD field has developed, tensions

have arisen in the discipline, with specific concerns about the ability of SFD to have an

impact on broader social and structural issues. In addition, SFD researchers have criticized

the HIC–LMIC divide in SFD practice and research—including challenges of colonialism

and privilege—arguing that macro-level impacts require programming based in deep

knowledge of stakeholders and program context. Building on this general overview of the

SFD discipline, we now present a more tailored review of SFD-related research in the Pacific

Islands region.

SFD in the Pacific Islands Region

To date, there is a dearth of SFD literature in a Pacific Islands context, though there are

notable exceptions. Stewart-Withers and Brook (2009) explored the impacts of NRL

programs and the role of rugby league in PNG, attributing community development, youth

development, creation of economic opportunities, and poverty alleviation to the presence of

rugby league-based development initiatives. While these outcomes were broad in nature, the

authors highlighted the importance of strategic policy and practice development in order to

align with local needs and improve prospects of long-term program sustainability.

Khoo, Schulenkorf, and Adair (2014) focused on understanding the opportunities and challenges of using cricket as an SFD tool in Samoa, finding that gender equity, social cohesion, health awareness, and travel opportunities were the most important outcomes attributed to the program. They also identified a lack of resources and equipment, monitoring and evaluation challenges, poor stakeholder collaboration, and cultural sport factors as barriers. Like Stewart-Withers and Brook (2009), Khoo et al. identified broad thematic outcomes from a first exploration into the field; importantly, they suggested follow-up research to focus more strategically on different approaches to planning, designing, and managing SFD programs for sustained community benefit.

This request for more work on planning, designing, and managing for sustainability is pertinent within the context of Hartmann and Kwauk's (2011) exploration of SFD programs in Samoan communities. The authors highlighted the efficacy of sport to engage or "hook" individuals, but questioned whether externally funded interventions were in fact relevant or meaningful for participating local communities. Similarlty, Kwauk's (2014, 2015) wider ethnographic work in Samoa has been critical of the Eurocentric values—particularly on issues such as health and education—which dominate the foundation of many SFD programs. Moreover, while sport may provide selected young men with opportunities to access global markets and social and economic capital that would otherwise be beyond their reach, Kwauk questions such (hidden) agendas and demonstrates the importance of accounting for wider sociocultural expectations and assumptions in SFD work, particularly as these relate to at times conflicting economic and neocolonial politics.

More recently, Sherry and Schulenkorf (2016) undertook a study of a rugby league program aimed at primary school-aged children in PNG with the overall aim of addressing low school attendance rates and antisocial behavior. In line with previous work in the SFD sector (see e.g., Khoo et al., 2014; Sugden, 2010), their research underscored the importance

of understanding and considering local context within a SFD program. Here, this related to putting relevant strategic parameters in place that would help facilitate future benefits, including macro-level education impacts. In short, the authors recommended that future SFD programs ensure that development activities are discussed, designed, and delivered in targeted, strategic, and culturally relevant ways.

Overall, the studies from the Pacific Islands draw attention to the need to deconstruct the macro-, meso-, and micro-factors that shape, and ultimately impact SFD programs in the culturally diverse region (see also Uperesa & Mountjoy, 2014 for a detailed exploration of contemporary Pacific sport spheres). Against this background, we now provide specific contextual detail related to our cross-nation research study.

Study Contexts

To contextualize the research presented in this paper, a brief overview of the PSP and the five research sites is provided. The PSP is an Australian Government initiative, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, facilitating the partnering of Australian national sporting organizations with Pacific counterparts in order to deliver SFD programs focused on social development aims. The PSP spans 11 sports (Australian Rules football, athletics, badminton, basketball, cricket, football, netball, rugby union, swimming, table tennis and volleyball) and has been implemented across nine Pacific nations (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) since 2009. PNP is the program's netball arm, managed through a partnership between Netball Australia and the Australian Sports Commission. Importantly, a a sport, netball provides a significant point of distinction compared to most other sporting codes: it is traditionally identified as a 'feminine' activity and in the Pacific, it provides a significant entry point into sport for women and girls in an otherwise male-dominated sporting world (for a more detailed discussion of the history, role and place of netball in international development –

including women's experiences of netball in post-colonial settings – see e.g. Mansfield, 2014).

The PNP was designed to support grassroots sport and the capacity building of national sporting federations in Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu, PNG, and the Cook Islands, while also contributing to wider social development outcomes. Over the course of the program, the development aims have been amended and now include a particular focus on reducing the impact of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and developing female leadership capacity within Pacific sporting communities. The activities facilitated by the PNP involve sporting and non-sporting pursuits. In particular, each national netball federation funded via the PNP is responsible for fostering netball activities in local communities and educating individuals about NCDs. To achieve these goals, education by local health organizations is provided in combination with netball activities at various programs and events. This involves educating individuals about NCDs (prevalence and risk reduction) and partnering with health organizations to provide an ongoing source of expert support and knowledge. The PNP also aims to establish the organizational capacity of each sporting federation and has created a range of opportunities for individuals in each nation to undertake roles as development officers, coaches and umpires. These positions – coupled with professional training and development sessions – contribute to women's progressive skill development and management capacity and facilitate their exposure to leadership positions in their local (sporting) communities.

Though the PNP is focused on development across the Pacific, it is imperative to acknowledge the diversity within the Pacific nations and the impact that this has on development priorities and capacity. For example, Tonga, Samoa, and the Cook Islands are part of the Polynesian subregion, while PNG and Vanuatu are located in Melanesia; furthermore, the geographical, social, and cultural makeup of each country is unique. A brief

introduction to each nation is now provided to illustrate some of the most critical contextual factors pertinent to the design and delivery of the PNP program.

Tonga

Tonga comprises 177 islands in the southern Pacific Ocean, of which 52 are inhabited by approximately 103,000 people. Seventy percent of Tongans reside on the main island of Tongatapu. The Kingdom of Tonga is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy with a governing structure consisting of the executive (cabinet), legislature, and judiciary. Tonga has a strong hierarchical social structure, whereby all titles are heritable and patrilineal. This social ranking system dictates who has power and authority in the community context; therefore, these social structures must be considered in the context of development work, including SFD project implementation.

The Tongan PNP was implemented in partnership between the Tongan Ministry of Internal Affairs (which includes the Department of Sports), the Tongan Ministry of Health, and the Tonga Netball Association (TNA). In Tonga, netball development has been part of a broader government initiative named Kau Mai Tonga (which means "Let's Go Tonga"), which had the specific purpose of improving health behaviors in women aged 15–45 through netball participation. Kau Mai Tonga was aimed at stimulating demand for netball, while utilizing the PNP to build the TNA's capacity to provide sport and physical activity opportunities. The TNA was established specifically to facilitate the implementation of PNP; previously, a formally constituted national netball federation did not exist.

PNG

The 2011 census showed that PNG had a total population of over 7,275,000 (PNG National Statistics Office, 2011). Of the five countries within this project, PNG is the most linguistically and culturally diverse, with over 200 discrete cultural groups and around 800 distinct languages and local dialects. Intercultural and intercommunity conflicts are ongoing

issues, particularly in the Highlands region and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Furthermore, the mainland is extremely mountainous with limited physical infrastructure, creating significant access and transport problems for local communities, as well as organizations.

The complex social, cultural, and environmental milieu in PNG presents a unique set of challenges for SFD programs. The PNP was delivered by the Papua New Guinea Netball Federation (PNGNF), which—unlike its Tongan counterpart—was well established. However, for the previous 10 years, the PNGNF had predominantly focused on developing a national team, with limited resources directed at building grassroot-level participation. With the introduction of the PNP, the PNGNF was required to focus more clearly on the local and social development aspects of the game; they attempted to do so by balancing high performance objectives with recommended capacity-building aspects of the PNP.

Samoa

Samoa consists of 10 islands located in the southwest Pacific Ocean, though only four of these are inhabited. There is a population of over 187,000, with 19.6% of people located in Samoa's capital, Apia (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2011). In Samoa, there are strong hierarchical village, political, and social structures. The political system occurs within the framework of a parliamentary representative democratic state, whereby the Prime Minister of Samoa is the head of government. Alongside the country's Western-styled political system exists the fa'amatai chiefly system. The matai is the holder of the family chief title; he/she is responsible for caring for the family, and controlling and preserving village lands/resources. Each matai represents their family/clan in the village council, fulfilling a dual role as both chief and local politician. Like Tonga, there is a conservative cultural context in Samoa and the hereditary social stratification system creates complex sociocultural nuances that must be considered in SFD programming.

The Samoan PNP was implemented as a partnership between the Samoan Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture's sport for development arm, and Netball Samoa (NS). Prior to the PNP, NS had delivered netball development initiatives in a relatively ad hoc manner. Even with a more structured approach to development, there remain organizational challenges in Samoa, such as balancing health promotion objectives with the need to secure sustainable growth by developing sporting and managerial capacities.

Vanuatu

The total population of Vanuatu is just over 200,000, with inhabitants in 65 of its 83 islands. Overall, there are 113 indigenous languages spoken across the culturally diverse country; communities are governed by a combination of the country's official legal system and the ruling of local chiefs. The chief system spans across all islands and significantly impacts community life; for example, in the central and southern regions of Vanuatu, individuals gain land rights, possessions, and leadership of communities by the endowment of chiefly titles. Here, leadership is described as rather 'situational and contextual, diffused and dependent on acknowledged access to and control of ritual knowledge' (Douglas, 1988, p. 228).In the traditional areas of northern Vanuatu, leadership is largely determined through a "graded society" system, whereby an individual's status is acquired by the exchange of high value items (e.g., mats, circle-tusked pigs). Despite the regional differences, in most locations of Vanuatu leadership strongly correlates with age, gender, status, physical strength, and the ability to influence others and be respected. Unlike in many Western societies, leadership is therefore not a concept or skill that can necessarily be 'learnt'; instead, leadership development follows a particular community philosophy where aspiring leaders are often groomed and responsibilities are 'passed on' following local *kastom* processes (see Bolton, 1998, for further detail).

At the commencement of the PNP, the Vanuatu Netball Association (VNA) had already been established. However, the organization could not deliver a program with the size and scope of the PNP. The small number of appropriately trained and skilled staff within the netball structures resulted in a limited ability to engage in social development objectives and netball capacity-building programs. The original focus of the VNA was largely elite-level netball development and pathway building. Consequently, this focus affected the implementation of PNP; in short, the VNA had to quickly shift its attention to closer engagement with alternative social and grassroot development aims.

Cook Islands

The Cook Islands is a self-governing parliamentary democracy in free association with New Zealand, composed of 15 small islands and home to a total population of 13,600. Approximately 75% of the population resides in Rarotonga, which also hosts the country's main administration and government centers, and is the location of Netball Cook Islands' (NCI) headquarters and main sporting facilities.

The Cook Islands' geography and its topology are challenging; in particular, its territory spans a total of almost 2 million km^2 of sea and parts of the islands are mountainous, creating access and transport problems, particularly on the outer islands. While a hereditary system of chief titles still exists across the country, in the present day, education and profession are more likely to determine an individual's status. Therefore, there is a greater amount of scope for social mobility.

At the commencement of the PNP, NCI was already in a good position to deliver and implement the newly proposed program. In fact, NCI and Netball New Zealand (NNZ) had been working on a related SFD partnership program for several years. However, there were internal issues between NCI and NNZ with an apparent misalignment of organizational cultures, expectations, and resources that were negatively impacting the program. In

particular, unclear boundaries over the control of netball administration responsibilities resulted in a "fresh start" for NCI when it terminated its engagement with NNZ and engaged with its Australian counterpart.

Research Approach

In the context of the PNP initiative, the aim of our study was to investigate perceived barriers and challenges for sustained social development, structural change, and capacity building across the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. We particularly looked at identifying factors that had a limiting effect on the programs' achievement of—or progress towards—the original PSP outcomes of reducing NCDs and increasing female leadership capacities. To achieve an in-depth understanding of these phenomena, we collected data during several in-country visits to each of the five nations. In cooperation with Netball Australia and local staff on the ground, we utilized a combination of qualitative research methods. In particular, we conducted a total of five to 10 individual interviews, three to five focus groups, and one collaborative workshop with board members, program staff, and a variety of stakeholders at each program site. Stakeholder interviews included government representatives, community leaders, non-government partner organizations, schools, program volunteers, and program participants (e.g., players, coaches, and officials). Additionally, Netball Australia staff involved in the development and delivery of the program were also interviewed. In total, 68 individuals participated in a combination of individual and focus group interviews.

The research approach employed throughout this study was based on Participant Action Research (PAR), and as such, all interviews (including focus group and workshops) were undertaken in the understanding that those located in each nation were the experts in their national context and community development needs, and our role as researchers was to merely facilitate this process as a partnership (Dawson, 2010; Authors, 2017). As our study reflects on the establishment phase of the PNP program in each country, we conceptualised

participants as those staff, volunteers (both program delivery and organization leadership) and community stakeholders who were tasked with designing, developing and implementing new initiatives under the PNP banner. Unlike a traditional understanding of sport participants, i.e. those participating in the netball activities on the court, in this case the research focused specifically on those individuals in the start-up phase who were responsible for establishing new programs and activities in their local community.

Across the program localities, we employed similar methodological strategies to ensure consistency with the underpinning philosophies of PAR. This involved a detailed program design phase engaging the Australian NSO, Australian Aid, the in-country NSO (both paid staff and volunteers), and key community stakeholders (such as local netball clubs and health organisations) in each of the five nations. During this process the research team worked intensively with local communities and stakeholders to better understand their needs and current capacity. The knowledge generated during these discussions drove the direction of the research design and the implementation of programming. Incorporating this phase was imperative to identify the most relevant project outcomes for participating communities and address the diverse ethnic, geographical and sociocultural influences in each nation and region.

We argue that the specific engagement of the research team in the design phase fostered the development of a culturally appropriate research and evaluation approach. In particular, this inclusive process facilitated a greater understanding of the needs of local actors, which connects with recent work by Collison et al. (2016) that highlighted the importance of building strong, transparent relationships with local organizations and individuals amidst transnational networks. For this reason, interview frames were primarily exploratory and unstructured, to facilitate open discourse with the participants and ensure discussions were, in part, driven by them. To illustrate the practical application of our PAR

approach, during interviews, workshops and focus groups, participants were first asked to share their knowledge of their sport, their community and their development needs. From these discussions and subsequent engagements, program designs and evaluation frames were developed in partnership with those responsible for the design and delivery of the PNP. Other action cycles included collaborating with in-country participants to develop data collection tools that would operate most constructively in each program and community; engaging with local staff and volunteers to facilitate data collection (including the translation of materials); and review of data collected and initial research themes to sense-check and ensure that any cultural and contextual nuances were not misinterpreted by the international research team.

Finally, in line with PAR and Sugden's (2010) previously introduced ripple-effect model, it is important to note that the majority of local voices were sought from netball community leaders, volunteers and program facilitators who – as members of the inner circle of the SFD program – are most crucial in determining and experiencing the outcome of the intervention. At the same time, input from 'significant others' including different program stakeholders on the meso and macro level was sought as these are critical in 'rippling out' key messages and actions to wider organizational and societal circles.

Overall, our in-country investigations produced a wide range of qualitative data that were analyzed following a hybrid inductive/deductive approach (see Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Orton, 1997). All qualitative data were organized with the support of NVivo 10, a software package designed to assist in the management of large amounts of qualitative data. Using the NVivo software program, we engaged in a systematic data coding process, as described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). This process included a broad read through all interview transcripts, a search for recurring concepts and patterns, and then a clustering of these into themes to address the study's research aims. Specifically, data were analysed in the first instance to identify the program outcomes, as implemented in each

nation. Then, achievement or progress towards those outcomes was coded. It became

apparent during these steps that some progress towards development outcomes was achieved

in each nation, albeit projects being implemented or enacted differently. However, there was

also a common and substantial theme of structural barriers and challenges that had a limiting

effect on the programs' achievement at macro-, meso-, and micro-levels.

Research Findings

In this section, we provide thematic findings for the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels and

highlight key similarities and differences between the respective Pacific Island nations. In

doing so, we are less focused on presenting a structured cross-country comparison, but

instead are using quotes and examples from the different sites to highlight key barriers and

challenges across the board.

Macro-Level

Challenges on the macro-level are generally characterized as large in scope or extent; in other

words, they are exceptionally prominent in a particular culture or society. In our research, the

macro-level refers specifically to challenges related to—and discussed in—a country-wide

context. We acknowledge that the macro-themes identified here may also play an equally

important role on the meso- and micro-levels; however, in our investigation they did not

feature as such. Hence, while overlap between the levels and flow-on effects from macro to

meso and micro are possible, in the thematic discussion that follows we keep our focus on the

broadest level of implementation.

Cultural context. At the macro-level, a number of similarities emerged across the

five nations. For example, in Vanuatu, PNG, Tonga, and Samoa, the conservative cultural

context often inhibited women's participation in netball. There were strong expectations of

"appropriate" and subsequently gendered roles for women, which impacted the attire women

could wear for netball activities and the amount of time they had available to participate.

Overall, we encountered negative attitudes toward women's participation in sport and physical activity, particularly in rural village locations where women are expected to engage in domestic tasks or focus on traditional arts and crafts for recreation, rather than pursue sport and physical activities. These limitations regarding sport and physical activity are exemplified in the following comments:

> For a lot of women their role is to be at home . . . to cook, clean, feed, everything, so when you take them away from that for more than an hour or so it agitates the rest of the family members. A lot of families are turning away from that mentality, but not all yet, so it's a problem. (PNGNF Coach)

Further, an NS board member noted that "Traditionally, especially out in the rural areas, the men would frown upon the women if they came out in the afternoon to play so those are some of the cultural constraints that we have to consider".

The hierarchical structure within villages also made it difficult for the PNP program to secure appropriate support for the facilitation of women's participation. In the Polynesian cultural context of Tonga and Samoa, the (predominantly male) village leaders have a strong influence over their communities and not all leaders endorsed female sport participation. In addition, the relevant government departments are typically male dominated, impacting the political and financial support for female sport opportunities, as illustrated in the following comment:

> I've been involved with many sports codes for the country in league, rugby, soccer— you name it—and I've always felt that netball's been, compared to all of the other codes, a little underdone. I mean underdone in the sense that it's not recognized enough and it's not given the backing in comparison to the male-dominated codes. (NCI Board)

Infrastructure. The accessibility of sport additionally emerged as a macro-level challenge because it inhibited the PNP program's implementation and progress. This issue was most pertinent in PNG, Tonga, and Samoa, where women have difficulty accessing safe and affordable public transport to travel to sporting sites. These issues reduced the number of participants who could regularly attend training sessions and competitive games or other social activities organized as part of the PNP. In PNG specifically, there are significant safety concerns for women traveling alone. Compounding this issue, there are financial limitations that restrict the in-house provision of safe transport by netball clubs, teams, and programs. In short, these factors further restrict women's opportunities to play, a point emphasized by a community mobilizer who played a key role in engaging local women in netball and other community activities: "When we have to play people are not coming . . . I think maybe it's about the money, so the clubs didn't have any money to pay for their teams to come to the tournament".

Furthermore, Tonga and Samoa lacked an inadequate number of netball courts, hindering uptake of the sport. A TNA staff member explained, "The problem is that we need a more accessible court for everybody so that they can just come and play". Furthermore, the courts available suffered from poor quality and players risked injury by participating. One Samoan participant noted, "We play outside, but the surface isn't very good; you can't even see where the lines are and the surface is very bad. The first time I played, I fell and I actually scratched my whole knee".

Physical education (PE) policy in school curriculum. The priority accorded to PE in the respective national curricula also inhibited participation rates and the uptake of netball—particularly in Samoa, the Cook Islands, and PNG. For example, recent changes in PNG's school curriculum resulted in PE becoming less of a priority:

The government policy changed a couple of years ago. . . . There was a shift by the

national government, so physical education was not a priority and it really affected

sports being played in schools. It's been a struggle to cooperate with some of our key

stakeholders like the Department of Health and the Department of Education.

(PNGNF Board)

Similarly, in the Cook Islands and Samoa, PE's perceived importance in schools is a

challenge to any form of sport development. The limited status accorded to netball, in

contrast to more popular and male-dominated sporting codes (e.g., football), further restricted

schools' engagement with the PNP program. Furthermore, Samoan schools are discouraged

from using transport funding for sport programs as opposed to other educational excursions.

Overall, there is a failure to commit to strategic and sustainable development opportunities in

and through sport.

Health awareness and behavior. In Tonga and Samoa, limited community

knowledge about NCDs presented a pervasive issue. Moreover, the failure to properly link

increased physical activity to healthy lifestyle benefits resulted in minimal female

engagement in sporting activities, including netball. This finding is particularly important

given that in Tonga, NCDs account for 4 of the 5 leading causes of mortality and the average

life expectancy has been reduced to 69 years for females and 65 years for males (Government

of Tonga, 2013). In Samoa, 52.7% of the population is obese, contributing to the high

prevalence of NCDs and related illnesses; in particular, 23.3% of the population suffers from

diabetes and 21.4% have high blood pressure (Government of Samoa, 2010). Regrettably,

local policies to address the issue are currently insufficient; thus, public awareness about the

dramatic consequences of NCDs remains limited, particularly in the regional areas and outer

islands:

There's a lot of conflicting information [given to people] because the government

itself continues to promote this dialysis unit and people think that's a cure . . . so they

will not change their eating habits, expecting that the next morning they'll go do

dialysis and they'll be fine. (NS Board)

In Samoa, public health policy focuses on treatment, rather than prevention, an

approach that fails to challenge behaviors and values. Furthermore, interviewees highlighted

that this reactive approach limits opportunities for securing additional funding, cooperation,

and support from relevant ministries at the macro-level. Moreover, this study revealed that

NS's government partner—the Ministry of Health, Educations, Sports and Culture—was

male dominated; thus, numerous participants asserted that the department failed to adequately

understand the unique sociocultural challenges women encounter. Subsequently, inadequate

support mechanisms are facilitated and financial resources are not distributed effectively:

"They have no understanding of the gender implications of this work, out in the rural areas,

yet they try to give us the upper hand in controlling those finances" (NS Executive).

Development Priorities. In Tonga, Samoa, and the Cook Islands, netball federations'

development priorities were an additional factor hindering programs' social focus and aims.

As previously outlined, the emphasis in Samoa and the Cook Islands had initially been on

netball high-performance outcomes and elite-level progression. In Tonga, the focus centered

heavily on health outcomes rather than on women's leadership building and gender equity.

Reconciling the newly introduced PNP program objectives with any pre-existing objectives

of established federations presented a challenge; ultimately, the financial resources provided

were inadequate to deliver both sets of goals and the federations struggled to find a

satisfactory compromise. An NCI staff member noted: "They're obviously giving us the

money and they know what they want from us, and so we try to meet the standard that they

ask for, but it's hard for a little nation to meet the expectations".

In addition to the management and implementation challenges described above, the final key emergent theme was the program's status at the end of the PNP funding period. Across all countries there had been notably limited planning for the post-funding period and each would struggle to maintain development gains once funding ceased. The comment below exemplifies the concern about the PNP program's long-term viability:

> We've been told at end of June there will be no more PNP so we're thinking, oh, well then what? We've never had a netball office. We've never had structure in that sense of the word. We used to just meet on people's verandas. With the withdrawal on PNP, it means that we've got to try and draw funds from somewhere otherwise it will go back to how it was before. (NCI staff)

Meso-Level

At the meso-level—which refers to broad organizational, community, and social groups—a number of important similarities and differences emerged between the countries. The fundamental similarities have been grouped into interactions with relevant organizations, including local netball stakeholders, local communities, government departments, and other sport federations outside of netball. Each country had differing baseline relations between and within the groups outlined above, and different capacity levels regarding sport development, player pathways, equipment facilities, staff training, financial resources, and overall vision. Ultimately, these factors influenced each federation's interactions with various organizations and community groups.

Interactions with local stakeholders. Across all five nations it emerged that limited in-country knowledge in managing sport development inhibited the delivering of netball programs under the auspices of the PNP. Issues in this area related to the organization of sport competition and events; player, coach, and umpire development; and grassroot participation opportunities. Furthermore, the laudable increase in women's awareness and

engagement with netball led to inadequate numbers of appropriately trained coaches and umpires to facilitate player participation. Additionally, as netball is a relatively new sport in some locations, knowledge about the rules/structure of the game hindered the progression of PNP and, in turn, women's sustained participation. Overall, local clubs' inability to effectively manage their own programs and assist with wider PNP development aims limited overall progress, sustainability, and growth of netball initiatives.

Relatedly, participants asserted that the communication between netball federations and local netball clubs should be improved to ensure that all relevant organizations are informed about the specific PNP development goals and future intentions. The comment below exemplifies these sentiments:

> The communication could have been clearer, I think, if we had to do it, we would go
>
> right down to the netball federations and say this is what the PSP is about, these are
>
> the timeframes, and this is what we must deliver so we need to all work together.
>
> (PNG Board)

Here, effective communication on behalf of all stakeholders was identified as an area deserving more attention. In short, at present both transparency and quality of communication are limiting factors at the meso-level.

Interactions with local communities. Interactions with local communities include the relations between each country's national netball federation and the respective target community groups. In Samoa, Vanuatu, and Tonga, the geographic spread and isolation of communities presented significant barriers to program implementation. The geographic landscape has previously been raised as a macro-issue; however, it further compounded the difficulties adhering to local village protocols in order to gain support for development initiatives. In rural locations, the process of working closely and consistently with village

councils and schools was a significant challenge. Without these encounters—important for

establishing trust and building village council support—implementation proved difficult:

>You need the support of the main people, so that includes the matais in the village.
>
>Also, the pastor of the main church in the village—he has a big influence, so you need
>
>all these key people. Like you just can't be sports people alone that endorse the
>
>program; it has to be, the chiefs of the village and that's difficult in remote areas to
>
>gain their support because we can't be there much. (NS staff)

Even when personal engagement and opportunities for direct interaction were

established, language barriers and low literacy rates in PNG, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu

further restricted the planning and delivery of PNP-related activities. Moreover, challenges

to administrative tasks were identified, including report writing and governance reviews, as

well as the organization and management of umpire examinations and accreditation.

Furthermore, it was difficult to communicate the benefits of physical activity and the PNP's

development aims to the wider community. From a language and cultural perspective, it

became apparent that the strategic planning process in Vanuatu, Samoa, and Tonga was less

than ideal, and was exacerbated by the apparent lack of local community voices beyond

village leaders:

>In the more rural areas, it is about connecting these people with the program and they
>
>don't know how to write and might not have been to school so it is important to make
>
>sure they understand the program and we get their input. (VNA Staff)

Interactions with other sports. It became apparent that it was critical to consider

relations between netball and other sporting codes and activities regularly conducted in

schools and local communities. In Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands, interactions between

sports were typically competitive and regrettably, netball federations were largely unable to

compete with other sports in terms of financial and political support. Quasi-financial

incentives, such as food, equipment, and travel, are offered to villages if they engage with football, with support from their respective international federations. With netball's limited financial capability and absence of similar incentives, there was fear among netball staff members that the number of women opting to participate in the PNP program would dwindle:

> We're quite concerned now at this time in the season as our player numbers are fluctuating and we're now having lots of teams defaulting and that's because players are being distracted by other codes. There doesn't seem to be an incentive for these teams to want to still stay in and we're struggling in that area to compete on a financial level. (NCI staff)

Another NS staff member noted that other sports "give a lot of money to the schools to participate in their programs and it doesn't help our sport because we can't sustain that kind of program where you're paying for everything for them to participate".

The above comments clearly demonstrate local staff members' concern about the resources netball federations can access, and the negative impact this has on the sport.

Micro-Level

The micro-level refers to specific factors that could potentially impact the PNP, its delivery, and its management. These could be related to individual organizations (e.g., national federations), human resources, financial resources, or individual relationships. Netball federations in all five countries were initially challenged by the PNP program's size and scope; moreover, staff struggled to understand the specific roles and responsibilities of the different national and international stakeholders in developing and executing PNP. Furthermore, there was confusion about the initiative's overall objectives, hindering the effective program implementation and development. It was suggested that a more open and transparent communication process would help provide clarification and increase individual confidence levels:

I think bringing somebody out to explain it all and how we fit in with the PNP, we

needed someone to come in and do that. . . . We had some guy come up early in the

piece and we kept saying, yeah, it would be good to have him back but that didn't

occur. (NCI Board)

Another challenge in each country related to human resources, which included

attracting and retaining adequately skilled staff, as outlined by a local development officer in

Tonga:

One of the challenges we had was identifying people to work for us and we

advertised, I think it was twice, we did interviews and we know that there are

potentially good, young women out there. Some of them just didn't put their hands

up and you can't go and ask them to apply. . . . So we were not able to attract the right

people. (TNA Staff)

Two of the most important local level challenges individual organizations

encountered were high staff turnover rates and constant re-training of personnel. Overall,

there was a strong reliance on community mobilizers to organize and administer PNP

initiatives at the community level. Community mobilizers were local volunteers focused on

liaising with key village leaders to negotiate access, raise interest levels, and educate local

women about netball. The difficulties associated with recruiting capable and reliable

development officers led to even more work for these mobilizers, as the organizations

increasingly relied on their ongoing and increased support. One NCI staff noted: "It's a very

small group of volunteers and we're always using the same people over and over. And we do

feel sorry for them, but they just have the passion to keep helping us". This comment

exemplifies the adverse impact on the quality and scope of PNP delivery, given the reliance

on limited, yet essential, individuals. In other words, the NNFs struggled to deliver

appropriate resources (personnel and equipment) to meet increased netball demand and relied

too heavily on unskilled labor to support their missions. Consequently, tournaments and

community initiatives were not always adequately organized or well delivered. One NS staff

member noted "complaints left, right, and center from schools that couldn't manage their

own tournaments and there were all different types of issues and it was very hard to deal

with". In the following section, we will now discuss these findings and implications of our

research in more detail.

Discussion

The PSP program was designed to achieve macro-level changes to benefit communities

across the Pacific, specifically focused on social and health-related development, including

female capacity building and a reduction of NCDs. Our analysis suggests that these program

aims were both too substantial to be addressed through a single SFD program without

appropriate support from local government ministries, and not reflective of the cultural and

contextual nuances of the respective Pacific nations. In particular, given the many

socioeconomic and cultural differences among the countries, the PNP would have benefited

from a process that allowed for the establishment of locally determined program goals on a

case-by-case basis. Such a process would have also allowed for more targeted research

programs that are specifically relevant for the local context (see e.g., Schulenkorf et al., 2013;

Brest, 2010; Sugden, 2010).

A similar argument can be made for the communication of program goals and

outcomes to the different stakeholders. On the international level, government agencies such

as the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or the Australian Olympic

Committee require a different type of academic reporting compared to that of local Pacific

Island communities. As a consequence, reporting requirements may overwhelm local staff

members, given the length and complex statistical data expected as well as the academic

jargon used. A similar argument can be made for those local groups that are expected to

benefit from the practical recommendations made. Here, Siefken et al. (2014) have

previously demonstrated that alternative approaches to research communication (e.g., word

clouds, clear poster messages etc.) can assist local communities in understanding and

appreciating complex research findings. Their work with regional ni-Vanuatu health staff

and leaders from remote communities suggested that tailor-made communication of research

data and outcomes helped achieve meaningful engagement with for all stakeholders involved.

Meaningful engagement and local support are in fact crucial elements in the process

towards wider social development. Only if local engagement and support can be secured,

then the principles of Sugden's (2010) ripple effect model may come to fruition. The model

posits that,

> Like a stone dropped into a pool of water, the ripple effect of a development
>
> intervention dissipates as it moves further away from the center. The center is
>
> focused on local community participants and significant others (micro-level), which
>
> then ripples to include wider social and sporting partnerships between various
>
> stakeholders (meso-level) and then further ripples to the social and political context
>
> (macro-level). (Sugden, 2010, pp. 269-270)

Our specific research had at its centre community representatives and 'local

participants'. The latter were previously described in this paper as those staff, volunteers

(both program delivery and organization leadership) and community stakeholders who were

tasked with designing, developing and implementing new initiatives under the PNP banner.

While this group has perhaps more power and decision-making ability than those traditionally

at the centre of PAR investigations – i.e. disadvantaged groups or marginalized communities

– we argue that our study still applies directly to Sugden's (2010) model; in particular, it

shows how challenges experienced at the different levels – including that of the participants –

can impact, limit, reduce, or undermine the desired benefits of SFD programs. For instance,

the NNFs consistently noted difficulties when trying to achieve broader social outcomes; in particular, structural barriers limited the delivery of school-based netball programs. Against a backdrop in which sport and PE are given low priority in the current school environment, the idea that achievements on the micro- and meso-levels will possibly "ripple out" to allow for change on the macro-level is difficult to realise. With the intent of changing the status quo— and providing opportunities for local participants to realise positive change within and beyond the sporting ground—sports organizers are often preoccupied with establishing a supportive structural framework conducive to SFD, rather than focusing on SFT content per se.

Similarly, attempts to change the opportunities for women to become involved in netball are made with the intent of achieving ripple effects beyond the netball courts and offices, with an overall outcome of empowering women within the community. However, our study findings suggest that both direct and indirect stakeholders—including politicians, policymakers, education specialists, and the business community—must play a greater role in realizing, supporting, and leveraging these initiatives at a structural level. Otherwise, developments remain insular and Coalter's (2010, p. 295) critique of "seeking to solve broad gauge problems via limited focus interventions" becomes an unfortunate reality.

Against this background, our research findings provide interesting opportunities for further discussion. In particular, we sympathize with Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) whose research on development programs utilizing sport in Samoan communities questioned SFD programs' ability to truly facilitate structural and sustainable change. Reflecting on our wider work in the Pacific, we agree that projects often remain focused on the "here and now" at the micro-level, without strategic plans for sustainability and project growth. However, based on our involvement with the PNP program, we argue that individual SFD programs may well *instigate* (rather than achieve) structural change, but only if they determine from the start how

programs can operate best across multiple levels of society. For this, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement and community inclusion are at the center of any successful development effort.

In advocating for inclusive structural change, it is also important to be critical and reflexive in our own research world. Given the abundant critique in the development literature related to SFD programs that attempt to achieve—and sometimes enforce—change from the outside (e.g., Coalter, 2010; Darnell 2010, 2012), we as researchers have to acknowledge that findings around the PSP were produced by an international team without permanent local members. We realize that as external researchers, we have both a responsibility and a desire to "do better" in the future, which in this case means expanding the team with local researchers to allow for the implementation of more authentic studies with potentially more meaningful results (see also Sherry, Schulenkorf, & Chalip, 2015). However, in this particular case we hope that the inclusive and reflexive approach taken— and the open and transparent discussions with local staff and stakeholders—would have at least reduced accusations of external dominance by "strong" internationals over "weak" locals. In particular, reflexivity was embedded in our research approach and involved being transparent with program partners; being focused on 'local voices' in the process; learning and sharing the objectives and wider role of our research; being mindful of how we negotiated data collection processes and interacted with the various participants on the ground; and establishing, and maintaining an engaged research partnerships by working closely and ethically with those involved.

Conclusion

In the context of an SFD program delivered across five Pacific Island nations, our study aimed to provide a holistic investigation into the barriers and challenges for sustained social development, structural change, and capacity building across the macro-, meso-, and micro-

levels of society. At the macro-level, our research highlighted key structural characteristics impacting effective development through the PNP program, including limited access to sport for children and women, negative cultural attitudes toward women's participation in sport, low priority of PE and sport in schools, and dissimilar development priorities of local organzsations and international funders.

Common meso-factors that constrained NNFs' work in achieving social and sport-related capacity development included limited technical knowledge of netball, limited trained and qualified local program staff and volunteers, and problematic interactions with other sports. At a micro-level, key factors impacting the NNFs were a lack of organizational readiness to embark on a development program of the PNP's size and scope, a need to balance objectives of various stakeholders in a sport development/health promotion partnership, and limited focus on strategic planning to maintain gains achieved through the development program.

At the same time, our research demonstrated gains made across the areas of capacity building, sport participation (on and off the field), and social development, with varied success, dependent on the NNF's social, financial, and managerial context and environment. Overall, the PNP established a foundation for the further development of netball in these nations. Importantly, the PNP funding enabled development that would not have been possible otherwise, given the lack of financial support for women's sport in these nations. How the different NNFs will sustain, and perhaps grow, their programs deserves more critical investigation in the future.

To summarize, there were both similarities and differences concerning the challenges faced by each nation in the implementation and development of the PNP program. The numerous differences across all levels of society demonstrate the importance of considering the local culture, government policy priorities, and environment when designing SFD

programs. Through such considerations, sport organizers can ensure that project aims are

relevant and meaningful for the local community, and that they can be effectively targeted,

implemented, and managed. In other words, programs delivered under one umbrella in

multiple countries must consider the unique societal complexities and organizational

capacities to achieve positive change at all levels. In fact, it seems essential that the planning,

management, research, and evaluation stages draw awareness to the challenges at the micro-,

meso-, and macro-levels in order to effectively and holistically enact change.

We conclude that the process towards desired structural change is hardly linear; it

rarely follows a set pathway or progression. In line with the TOC approach to community

development (see Brest, 2010; Taplin & Clark, 2012), SFD programs require ongoing critical

and reflective management and research, as well as close engagement with partners from

other sectors of society—including politics, economics, education and so on. In line with the

PAR framework discussed in this paper, a key contribution within this process of inclusive

change should be provided by *local* actors that contribute to the design and shaping of

initiatives. The combination of local knowledge and technical expertise will allow sport

organisers to better deal with the challenges and problems discussed, and provide the most

relevant approaches towards future monitoring and evaluation around SFD programs.

Moreover, an inclusive, reflective, action-based approach to development may overcome

some of the key concerns raised by SFD experts regarding power imbalances and the

prioritization of ideologies stemming from HICs over subjugated LMIC communities.

Finally, this also has implications for the engagement and partnerships with funding bodies,

who should be convinced that pre-defined assessment plans and tickbox exercises are hardly

a meaningful way of evaluating the 'success' of SFD initiatives in often unknown territory.

On the other hand, if meaningful engagement around the implementation of inclusive

programs can indeed be achieved, Sugden's (2010) notion of ripple-effects may well come to

fruition and SFD programs can indeed be relevant and impactful vehicles for change. We thus conclude that SFD programs are able to play an important role in instigating structural change; however, they can only be impactful (i.e. rippled out) if implemented against the background of an environment conducive to, and supportive of, positive change and development.

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