Towards Sustainable Sport and Development Programs in Two-Thirds World Communities

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Socio-cultural 3:30 PM

Abstract 2012-141

In recent years, the movement to utilize sport for development purposes has received increased empirical attention to understand in part, the impact, tensions and responsible nature by which programs can and should be managed (e.g., Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010; Skinner & Zakus, 2008). The capability of organizations to deliver effective sport and development programs is influenced by many internal and external factors (Coalter, 2010; Kidd, 2008). In fact, an array of challenges related to program delivery, monitoring, and evaluation have exposed concerns regarding the nature of sport and development programs and their likelihood of achieving sustainability (Burnett, 2009; MacIntosh & Spence, 2010; Skinner & Zakus, 2008).

One sport organization involved in operating sport and development programs is the Right to Play (RTP). The RTP has operated community-based programs with marginalized and suppressed populations predominantly in two-thirds world countries (Hayhurst & Kidd, 2011). In order to operate these programs, the organization has relied on large development agencies, sponsors, and professional athlete ambassadors to endorse, fund and provide support for the initiatives (Beacom & Read, 2011; Black, 2010). Hence, the operation of these programs has required a large net-work of individuals responsible for the management related activity including the preparation, training and debriefing of participants (Black, 2010). Consequently, the outcomes of these programs are largely dependent upon the communication and partnerships created amongst the various stakeholders involved (Willis, 2000).

In this qualitative research study, one such sport and development initiative operated by the RTP and in partnership with two First Nation communities in Canada is explored in depth over the course of the first full year of operations. Specifically, the program known as “Promoting Life-skills in Aboriginal Youth” (PLAY) is the first experience for RTP in a one-thirds world country. This research, which is a part of a four year research project examining the impact of the PLAY program, was focused on identifying the community needs and the program challenges according to primary stakeholders.

Several types of data were collected during the first year of the research project which informed this study. First, in order to obtain a greater understanding of the contextual factors surrounding the two communities, the researchers visited each community during the summer of 2010 to conduct a needs assessment. There, the researchers engaged in many informal discussions with community members including children, youth, parents, community volunteers, health workers, educators, economic development managers and social assistance providers to help identify community needs. The researchers also were invited to participate in a number of events in each community. This participation helped gain a better insight into community life. Observations were made at different activities such as a three day Regional Health Forum, a basketball practice and other sport and fitness activities, community festivals, traditional elder’s ceremonies to name but a few. Based on these initial visits, reports for each community were produced and shared with the community leaders and the RTP to help inform the eventual sport and development programs. This phase of the research was deemed critical at the front-end, as we believed that assessing the needs of the communities that would partner in this program would enable a more accurate and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to emerge. Thus, the community members were seen as active agents of their affairs, and key actors in the sport and development program moving forward.

Further visits in the fall of 2010 and the winter and spring of 2011 enabled the researchers to collect more observational data, begin conducting interviews on sport and development program operations with various stakeholders (e.g., youth, parents and supervisors, community coordinators). In addition to these data, semi-structured interviews with RTP administrators and community sport and development leaders were conducted one-year after the start of the program (i.e., summer 2011) in order to identify the management challenges they perceived to be influencing this sport and development initiative during the first year of operations. In total, 56 semi-
structured interviews have been completed with various program stakeholders.

Through an inductive analysis procedure, six psycho-social youth challenges have been identified (e.g., high suicide rates of young people, addictions to drugs, poor nutrition), several barriers to participation have been noted (e.g., lack of volunteer interest, negative perceptions of sport and physical activity from elder religious leaders, transportation logistics), and a number of systemic programs that challenge the sustainable nature of programs have emerged (e.g., funding, human resource skill sets, strong community partners). Further, the findings connote the critical role of communication, organizational planning and strategy sessions, and the sharing of information in formal and informal settings with community members. This presentation will further detail the research methodology, analyses procedures and the findings of the first year of the project which will be used to examine the nature of sustainable sport and development programs in this context.