

NEW BOUNDARIES FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE: SPORT AID IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Context

As the status of sport in international society evolves, assistance with the development of sport is emerging as a valuable asset in the international aid portfolio. The development of such aid packages highlights wider changes to the international aid agenda and its contribution to enhancing quality of life, as well as indicating the shifting priorities of sports organisations as actors in international society. More established programmes such as 'Olympic Solidarity', have for some time enhanced the capacity of sports International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs) to actively engage in international society. Such programmes focus on the needs of elite athletes in developing countries and thus fulfil the dual role of contributing to the international sporting infrastructure necessary for developing international competition, as well as providing support for individuals and groups in the recipient state. Alongside such elite athlete support, the increasing inclusion of sport and recreation programmes in community development projects provides a vehicle for individual and communal rehabilitation. This is particularly the case in relation to aid for disabled people in post-conflict situations. Through a consideration of sport in an increasing range of aid contexts, the paper assesses how such programmes are influenced and informed by wider debate on the evolution of international development assistance.

Methods

The paper considers sport aid in international development from the perspective of International Relations theory.¹ As such it is concerned with shifting influence between the key actors in the international frame and the changing nature of the international political agenda. International sport aid is located within that agenda.

Research is centred on qualitative interviews with decision-makers in international development assistance, as well as an assessment of archive evidence relating to aid in foreign policy. At governmental and quasi-governmental level, there is a particular focus on the Department for International Development (DFID) the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and related activity of British Trade International and the British Council.² Outside the UK, reference is made to activities of US Department of State, where it relates to international development and more specifically, sport aid. The enhanced diplomatic dimension of such activity is assessed. This is brought sharply into focus through initiatives such as those launched by the US Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs for the development of sport in Iraq in the wake of the 2003 invasion.³ The work of such organisations in the context of the development of international disability sport is also noted.⁴ At non-governmental level, changes in development assistance objectives of organisations, both sport-specific and non-sport specific are considered. In particular, the international development assistance activities of the International Rugby Board (IRB) and the Rugby Football Union (RFU) are compared with shifting priorities of mainstream aid NGOs.

¹ Within International Relations theory, much has been written about both the evolving role of NGOs in international relations and the impact of aid in international society. Recent examples of literature relevant to this investigation:

Hattori T. (2003) The Moral Politics of Foreign Aid *Review of International Studies* 29,2 229-48

Avant D. (2004) The Politics of INGO Policy Implementation *Review of International Studies* 30, 3 361-82

² The engagement of the British Council in the international *Dreams and Teams* sport development initiative, in conjunction with the Youth Sport Trust, provides a particular focus for the study.

³ http://exchanges.state.gov/intathletics/sports_diplomacy_iraq.htm US Department of State, ECA, Director of International Sports Initiatives. 'Sports diplomacy in Iraq'

⁴ <http://exchanges.state.gov/intathletics/archives.htm> US Department of State, Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. Director of International Sports Initiatives: 'Collaborative project for the development of sports programmes for youth with disabilities'

Through considering aid activity at both governmental and non-governmental level, the paper is able to relate the influence of changes to foreign and development policy, to the implementation of sport aid packages.

Results

The process of analysis which forms the basis for the paper involves:

- Investigating the nature of involvement of sports federations in international development assistance through an assessment of strategic planning documentation.
- Identifying the parameters for development assistance set by wider foreign policy considerations.
- Examining the legislative framework through which international development assistance is directed.
- Establishing possible performance indicators for use in measuring outcomes of specific sport aid programmes.

Discussion / implications

Development assistance is ultimately about enhancing quality of life. While sport has a role to play in that process, sport aid cannot operate in a vacuum. The implementation of sport aid is influenced and informed by wider political, social and ethical considerations. Identifying the appropriate level and nature of that influence will form the basis for discussion relating to the paper.

A range of issues emerge from the paper, that have implications for the aspirations and capacity of sports organisations to engage as independent actors in the international arena, as well as their evolving relationship with state institutions. This includes the potential roles of private organisations such as sports equipment manufacturers, in international development.

More fundamentally, questions arise about the capacity of international organisations involved with development assistance, to play a part in international diplomacy.

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