Swimming As A Gateway To Formal Education: A Sport-For-Development Investigation

Walker, Matthew[1]; Dixon, Marlene[1]; Cunningham, George Benjamin[1]; Salaga, Steve[2]; Barry, Adam[1]

[1]Texas A&M University, USA; [2]University of Georgia, USA

E-mail: walkerma@tamu.edu

Introduction/purpose

One issue that Sport-for-Development (S4D) programs seek to address is access to formal education. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2016) shows that ~263 million primary school age children are out of school worldwide. These data are amplified in Latin American nations where free education ranges from 0–3 years for pre-primary and 3–6 years for secondary (UNESCO, 2016). Youth in this region are denied access to formal education for numerous reasons and suffer from low-quality teaching, leading to dropouts and underachievement. These issues reflect the disparity in conditions promotive of educational achievement and encumber developmental outcomes realized via formal education (Bing, 2008). This study builds on S4D work by adopting a multi-phase, mixed-method approach to assess individual and community outcomes of a Nicaraguan swimming program. Nica Nadadores' mission is to provide children with education access and reinforce the skills necessary to navigate the education system. Nica's developmental approach is unique in the S4D space, whereby access to education is realized through swimming participation. Traditional S4D approaches might typically use swimming as the reward mechanism but here, education is the reward for swimming participation. The purpose of this presentation will be to discuss the initial qualitative phase of the research.

Literature review

The last two decades have seen a marked increase in the use of sport to impart positive social change in developing regions (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). The United Nations' (UN) decision to incorporate S4D as part of its Millennium Development Goals (2000) helped spur such interest. Subsequent interest in S4D emanates from practitioners and academics supporting large-scale and local community endeavors aimed at social ills among the disadvantaged. Illustrated by sport organizations that operate under the S4D umbrella (Koo, Schulenkorf, & Adair, 2014), the concept has been widely adopted by governments, NGO's, and communities around the globe. The majority of S4D programs have targeted micro-level issues, while others have targeted larger meso/macro-level problems (Walker, Hills, & Heere, 2015). Despite a rise in resources and research devoted to S4D, planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes lack robust empirics to identify impacts and guide programming. This study seeks to address these gaps by considering both the development and delivery processes and the associated program impacts.

Method

The research team gained access to a swimming-based intervention for Nicaraguan youth aged 8–16 years old. The program was established in response to the lack of educational access and the need for leadership and personal advancement in the community of Chiquilistagua. The Nicaraguan case is interesting given the socialist nature of the government and the lack of emphasis placed on formal education. While data on net enrollment ratios and out of school rates are not available, the primary education completion rate in Nicaragua is 72% (2009–2014), the lowest among its neighboring nations (UNESCO, 2016). The multi-phase, 18-month analysis consists of: (1) document analyses, (2) participant, administrator, and parent focus groups, (3) questionnaires assessing attitudinal and education-related outcomes, and (4) econometrics to reveal school success probabilities based on program participant characteristics and a control sample. This presentation will discuss the findings from phases 1 and 2.

Results/discussion

Swimming in this context is more than a 'hook,' but rather a gateway. That is, participants must be enrolled in the swimming program for at least 6-months to receive a school scholarship. Parent (N = 13 participants) and participant focus groups (N = 24) revealed Nica has a positive and focused strategy to enable education access and reinforce those skills needed for educational success. Program participants must be engaged, positive, punctual, and demonstrate program citizenship to earn the scholarship. School attendance and grade checks are performed regularly in order to retain said scholarship. The focus group data showed several additional trends: (1) improved behavior and self-discipline (2) improved relationships with parents and family, (3) demonstrated leadership, and (4) reduced pejorative behavior and improved community citizenship. In the S4D literature, individual sports are largely absent, so documenting how swimming

offers unique benefits beyond other activities is important. At this early stage of the research, we assume the novelty of the activity (i.e., 93% of community residents cannot swim), (2) the direct ties of effort to swimming success, (3) the desire for education, and (3) access to a pool facility, are all markers of success. While early to draw any definitive conclusions about overall programmatic impacts, our initial evaluation suggests that the program is having a positive impact on participants and their community. However, there are sustainability, funding, and scaling issues that could pose threats in the future.

References

Bing, W. K. (2008). Education and inequality in the developing world. In *Inequality in Education* (pp. 86–127). Springer Netherlands.

Khoo, C., Schulenkorf, N., & Adair, D. (2014). The opportunities and challenges of using cricket as a sport-for-development tool in Samoa. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies, 6*, 77.

Lyras, A., & Peachey, J. W. (2011). Integrating sport-for-development theory and praxis. *Sport Management Review, 14*, 311–326.

UNESCO. (2016). *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*. Paris: UNESCO.

Walker, M., Hills, S., & Heere, B. (2015). Evaluating a socially responsible employment program: Beneficiary impacts and stakeholder perceptions. *Journal of Business Ethics, 143*, 53–70. doi: 10.1007/s10551-015-2801-3