Sport for Development's Adaptation to COVID-19: What Can We Learn Moving Forward?

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Sport for Development - Other (Community Sport) 20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Session: Sport for Development

The primary way sport for development (SFD) organizations deliver programming is in-person through direct contact. Many of these organizations focus on school-aged youth (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). In March of 2020, when COVID-19 reached pandemic status and countries reacted by mandating stay-at-home orders, the majority of SFD organizations came to an immediate standstill (UN, 2020). They had never, in their lifetime, faced a situation where they could not meet with and deliver programming to youth face-to-face.

SFD organizations reacted in various ways, some deciding to remain relatively dormant and wait-out the pandemic, and others adapting in creative and innovative ways. The current study was most interested in this second group – SFD organizations who adapted to the restrictions of the pandemic and found ways to continue providing content to their participants, adapted or added new content, and/or utilized creative delivery strategies to reach the youth. In interviews with program directors at 15 different SFD organizations based across South Africa, the research team was interested in how the organizations adapted and, as importantly, how the creative strategies adapted during the pandemic will be utilized post-pandemic to make the SFD organizations stronger. At some point, SFD organizations will return to in-person programming; however, there are chances for in-person programming to be enhanced by some of the more creative strategies and platforms for delivery that have been adopted during the pandemic. These outcomes are a primary focus of the current study.

The Global Theory of Change (Internews, 2020) provided the framework from which to approach the interviews, focusing on the areas of access, content, inclusion and engagement. More than half of the interviews have been completed, and the remaining interviews are scheduled to be completed by late October 2020. Following the completion of data collection, two researchers will individually code data, utilizing a deductive approach focused on the four areas of the Global Theory of Change. They will also remain open to new ideas emerging from within the data. This process will be followed by a collective assessment of codes, resulting in the final themes that will result from this study. Data analysis will take place in the month of November, to have the study complete by December 2020.

As the world adjusts to what has become our ‘new normal’ during the pandemic, we are all anxious to go back to our old ways of operating. SFD organizations are especially anxious, as their model of programming was brought to a standstill in March 2020. While many feel the impacts of the pandemic will be felt for years, SFD organizations are beginning to return to alternate versions of in-person programming, so it is extremely important that we learn from the innovation that was adopted in response to the pandemic restrictions. This study will provide a discussion around how SFD organizations who were able to adapt successfully can come out of the pandemic even stronger and in a position to provide additional and supplemental programming to what has historically been offered.