

**PARTICIPATORY ACTION
RESEARCH (PAR) IN
MONITORING AND
EVALUATION OF SPORT-
FOR-DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMMES**

Cora Burnett

ABSTRACT

International agencies are becoming increasingly involved in sport-for-development work, as sport is seen as pivotal in addressing socio-political, health and cultural issues in affected and/or impoverished communities earmarked for 'development'. A comparative case study of the Siyadlala Mass Participation Programme (a national sport development programme) and the Active Community Clubs' Initiative (an Australian programme) in the South African context of poverty, served to demonstrate the potential role of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Utilizing the S•DIAT (Sport Development Impact Assessment Tool) in both cases allowed for quantitative and qualitative data collection, and informed researchers about contextual issues essential for interpretation and the potential application of results. A collaborative relationship developed between researchers and research subjects, as local volunteers of the Active Community Clubs were trained as fieldworkers inherent in a Participatory Action Research Training (PART) model. Following an inductive research paradigm and offering training in monitoring and evaluation, positively influenced the sustainability and 'local penetration' of the Active Community Clubs' Programme, compared to the top-down delivery and deductive approach of the Siyadlala Mass Participation Programme. Collaboration, the establishment of success indicators and benchmarks for assessing programme-related impact in a local context, contributed to the implementation of a needs-based service delivery.

Key words: Participatory action research (PAR), development, sport, community.

INTRODUCTION

Since the declaration of the International Year for Sport and Physical Education by the United Nation, and the appointment of an Inter-Agency Task Force to promote the systematic and coherent use of sport-in-development activities, sport for development projects have proliferated in developing countries (United Nations, 2005 & 2006). Sport and related movement phenomena thus find expression in a 'sport-for-all' framework that emphasises development-based outcomes such as using sport in the advocacy for HIV/Aids prevention (Cingiene & Laskiene, 2004) and/or addressing gender equity among vulnerable populations (Farrell, Johnson, Sapp, Pumphrey & Freeman, 1996). Differentiating between the two models (plus sport or sport for development and sport plus or sport development) is mostly captured by the strategic goals and objectives of a programme (Burnett, 2007). Reporting on the manifestations and impact of development programmes and practices, an emerging body of knowledge has evolved since 2003 (Burnett, 2008; United Nations, 2003).

Multi-level (macro-, meso- and micro-level) analyses, rigorous research designs and research synthesis of diverse theoretical frameworks were utilized for studies where 'development' was investigated across a range of indicators to register 'positive change' over time (Vanden Auweele, Malcolm & Meulders, 2006). Different stakeholders such as politicians who often emphasize macro-level impact in terms of the nation-building capacity of a programme, contrary to the stakeholders or beneficiaries who may primarily focus on social integration may be interested in different types of impact, (Coalter, 2008). Community-level change or impact most often serves as the unit of analysis on which findings and implementable recommendations are based (Burnett, 2008). If programmes are merely exported from a first to a third world context, local needs are often neglected, which compromises the sustainability and 'uptake' of a programme (Cairnduff, 2001). Understanding the process of monitoring and evaluation, as well as impact assessment may further enhance the focused and needs-based delivery of services and programmes.

In addition to the delivery of accountable and cost-effective development initiatives, stakeholders are increasingly concerned about local acceptance and the sustainability of programmes over a reasonable time span (Lawson, 2005). It is for this reason that a bottom-up approach (Coalter, 2006), reciprocal engagement (of researchers and the research participants), and guidelines for indicator development, monitoring, evaluation and assessment (Cunningham & Beneforti, 2005) are advocated. The intentions of bringing about a 'desirable state of being' as product of a development initiative, can only bear fruit in the long run if the envisaged change is framed in a developmental approach that is context sensitive (Shuttleworth & Wan-Ka, 1998), addresses the needs of the recipients, and minimizes political agendas (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994).

This paper will explore the utilization of the Participatory Action Research Model by comparing the research processes and impact results of two different case studies.

The one case study entails a top-down approach where collaborative research engagement was limited (the national Siyadlala Mass Participation Programme) and a bottom-up approach, (the Active Community Clubs' Initiative), where intergroup collaboration between researchers and research subjects was extensive. The comparison of two case studies reflects on the causal relationship between programme deliverables (based on results), research and programme approaches.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A developmental research approach, constituted in a Participatory Action framework is advocated. Reason and Rowan (1981) describe this approach as involving research participants as an integral part of the research process and design, where qualitative data is collected to provide insight into life-worlds of the research subjects. In this sense, most types of Participatory Action Research (PAR) may have explicit commitments to 'empower' local participants so that they are informed, and as such can take action to improve their social conditions. This conceptual

framework has affinities with the Neo-Marxist critical paradigm. It focuses on the involvement of research subjects, a process that enhances the chance of high construct validity and meaningful contextual explanations of findings (Burnett & Uys, 2000). A complementary methodology was developed and packaged, namely the Sport-in-Development Impact Assessment Tool (S.DIAT) to collect data through a collaborative process, and to train local volunteers in methodological issues and fieldwork skills. As the Tool focuses on the monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment of sport-related programmes, it is designed to foster multi-level interactive engagement and optimal participation in the research process and implementation of results for practice enhancement (Burnett, 2007).

Collaboration between stakeholders at different levels of involvement and delivery, does not automatically guarantee effective implementation and community-level uptake. Engaging local stakeholders to meaningfully contribute to the research process, is at the heart of Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Gore (1993) emphasises a reciprocal process of empowerment between the community under research and the research community, where one sector needs to provide the data and contextual framework for interpretations, whereas the latter provides the scientific knowledge and strategies. In this sense, collaboration and reciprocal empowerment are crucial elements of projects to foster self-determination and direction in the pursuit of 'own goals' (Gahin & Paterson, 2001).

Sports development managers and agents who do not involve the 'community-in-development' may expect rejection since top-down, product-driven interventions are often met with resistance. Claimed trusteeship by public stakeholders (political power), commercial partners (financial capital) and voluntary agents (self-motivation) would require legitimacy for their development work from the recipients (Vanden Auweele et al., 2006). Cunningham and Beneforti (2005) stress the importance of community engagement in defining relevant indicators for programme

implementation, monitoring and assessment.

Researchers took cognisance of the interdisciplinary, comprehensive or holistic, multi-level, people-focused (participatory) issues within a pre-post research design that may register change according to the comparison of baseline and 'impact' data (Taylor, Bryan & Goodrich, 1990). Impact assessment constitutes a cyclic process. During the first phase, indicators are identified by an external agent (top-down approach) or representatives of the local population (e.g. recipients of a development initiative or programme) in a bottom-up approach. Benchmarks or success indicators against which impact is assessed, are formulated. Where local stakeholders participate in the research process, they are informed about the findings and can translate them into achievable outcomes. They can also engage in the formulation of practical recommendations for planning, programme management and delivery that will enhance the delivery of envisaged outcomes or impact according to a reasonable time frame.

The `case studies that follow demonstrate the effect of research collaboration on the nature of the findings and interactive engagement as strategy for empowerment and the development of community-based stakeholders. In both cases, quantitative data (obtained through questionnaires) and qualitative data (obtained through interviews, focus groups and case studies) were collected, synergized and utilized for triangulation purposes (Lane, Ross & Dale, 1997).

The S•DIAT was utilized as a context-sensitive, multi-dimensional instrument that ‘measured’ change from baseline data according to 13 indicator fields and two indicator bands, namely: i) 6 for programme management and delivery, and ii) 7 for human and community development (UNICEF, 2005). Indicators were developed through a mutual process of engagement and interchange between researchers so as to broker delivery and uptake between ‘decision-makers’ and ‘decision-takers’ (United Nations, 2005). In the project cycle, the meaningful collaboration of strategic planners and implementers is continued and linked to functional

engagement during all the different phases of programme development, from planning to sustainable service delivery (Chalip & Green, 1998; Cunningham & Beneforti, 2005).

CASE STUDIES

Siyadlala is a national initiative whereby a mass participation programme has been implemented by Sport and Recreation South Africa (SRSA) in all nine provinces since 2004. The intended outcome was to ‘get the nation to become active’ and provide access to a relatively wide variety of activities to impoverished communities, identified as ‘hubs’ (Burnett, 2006). Local implementers, mainly unemployed youth, were recruited and trained as coaches and administrators to implement seven sporting codes (general gymnastics, aerobics, fun run/big walk, indigenous games and street ball games which included basketball, soccer and handball) at community facilities and local schools. Hub Coordinators were appointed to coordinate and manage Activity Coordinators, who were responsible for delivering the different sporting codes at community level.

As they were recruited from amongst the most vulnerable groups, they earned a relatively small stipend (R1 800 or about 240 USD for Hub Coordinators, and R1 200 or 150 USD for Activity Coordinators per month).

A representative sample of two communities from each of the nine provinces (one urban and one rural) was chosen for data collection. The 18 impoverished communities were representative of the initial 60 hubs and served as case studies for the research. A total of 470 interviews, 479 case studies of implementers and participants, 54 different focus group sessions, 1476 questionnaires on programme delivery and needs, as well as 1040 self-esteem questionnaires were completed by research participants.

Although community members were actively involved in the research process, relatively little ‘empowerment’ took place as an independent and external research team collected data during three intervals (pre-, mid- and post-intervals) without local dissemination of results on which the ‘Hub Coordinators’ could act, and which they could utilize for future

planning and implementation of programmes. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation entailed the compiling of monthly reports from the implementers (Activity Coordinators) who provided feedback on general observations and experiences. One Activity Coordinator from an urban community in the Eastern Cape Province expressed her frustration of “always writing reports, but not seeing any change”, and urged decision-makers to “put their mouths where their money is”. This sentiment was expressed by most research participants as the centralized management structure tended to “not always deliver on promises, leaving the Hub and Activity Coordinators to become despondent as they have created expectations among participants that are not met.” An example of non-delivery mainly relates to ‘promised quality equipment’. In some provinces, an inadequate quantity and quality of equipment was delivered, with a very slow or no replacement process in place after eighteen months of implementation.

The Australia-Africa 2006 Sport Development Programme’s **Active Community Clubs’ Initiative** aims to

facilitate the regeneration of civic engagement by addressing the community regeneration around a community club. The Initiative recruited local volunteers and set out to plan, structure and implement sport, recreation and educational programmes to address local needs and challenges. The sport development programme was mainly channelled through the local schools and implemented by volunteer coaches and administrators who were locally recruited and capacitated through training and mentorship. These volunteers were mainly unemployed youth who were attracted to the programme due to their interest in sports, community development and/or to gain skills, knowledge and experience that would “make them more employable”. The fact that they “did not earn anything, made many to look out for greener pastures” in terms of finding employment and regular income.

Research was conducted during 2005 and 2006 (pre- and post-impact assessments) in two communities in the Eastern Cape (one rural and one urban), followed by another rural community (Keiskammahoek) where the training of

volunteers in fieldwork (data collection) took place during a pre- and post-impact phase (Burnett & Hollander, 2007). In accordance with the philosophy of active community engagement, the research team was requested to develop ‘research capacity’ by training local volunteers to conduct monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.

A three-tier cascading training programme was developed whereby volunteers were first trained as fieldworkers to gather data through questionnaires, interviews and focus group sessions. Following theoretical training, trainees entered a process of experiential learning during a pre- and post-impact assessment in the rural area of Keiskammahoek, before continuing their training and the transfer of skills to volunteers of another Active Community Club in KwaZulu Natal (in Margate). This direct engagement in monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment afforded them the opportunity to get actively involved in the collection, processing and interpretation of data which they have to apply to develop their own Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely

SMART) indicators and to reflect on implementation and service delivery.

RESULTS

The **Siyadlala Mass Participation Programme**, implemented in impoverished communities or hubs in all nine provinces of South Africa, focused on the provision of opportunities for sport participation in communities that were mostly affected by the lack of resources and disenfranchisement caused by Apartheid legislation (1948–1994). The number of hubs increased from 60 in 2004, to 256 in 2006 when the post-impact assessment was conducted (Burnett & Hollander, 2006). By September 2004, a total of 6267 participants were registered with the programme, comprising school children (80.9%), with more male participants (59.4%) compared to female participants (40.6%). This represented an over-all increase of active participation from 8.1% (n 2547, school sport only) to 11.8% (n 3720, added Siyadlala MPP participation) in the 37 targeted schools. All research participants indicated an increase in regular school attendances where sport was offered.

Sport and Recreation South Africa (SRSA) (the national department) was mainly interested in the delivery of participation (expressed in figures), utilization of physical resources and poverty alleviation. The identification of ‘good practices’ and challenges to which macro-level solutions could be offered, included the offering of education and training (coaching courses, life-skills training, sports administration and first aid training), leadership and funds to provincial officers to purchase and distribute equipment, employ contract workers (Hub and Activity Coordinators) and sponsor regional, provincial and national events such as indigenous games festivals. The impact on community and human development indicators, mainly entails the forging of partnerships with community-based organisations such as loveLife, that offered counselling in HIV/Aids. Activity Coordinators expressed a heightened sense of self-worth being recognized as ‘coach’ and ‘role model’ in their communities. Turning previously ‘white elephants into workhorses’ relates to the over-utilization of limited community facilities.

Multi-purpose facilities were crowded and gender-based friction occurred as soccer and basketball participants (mainly boys) dominated practice times. The severe lack of handball facilities left Activity Coordinators for this particular sporting code without strategies to “cope with disappointed participants who only attended a few times, just to be chased away by the soccer bosses” as practices mainly took place on one or two available soccer pitches where “many teams have to train at the same time.” Relationships with local municipalities that ‘manage facilities’ were often found lacking, and priorities were given to established soccer teams.

In the face of extreme poverty, having access to an income was positive for most coordinators (89%). It contributed to the survival of 54 households (42.7%) of Activity Coordinators who were breadwinners of their households. Most participants (53%) reported a decrease in ‘soft-fabric’ crimes and an increase in acceptable social behaviour amongst the participants. Trusting social relations developed between implementers and participants who “tell us (Activity

Coordinators) about abuse at home or their hardships”.

Access to education and training was highly valued, despite most (61%) not being satisfied with the formal training component as they expressed a need for continuous and more advanced accredited training in coaching, sport and event management and marketing.

An impact study on the **Active Community Clubs’ Initiative** (Burnett & Hollander, 2005) was based on a rural and urban community in the Eastern Cape Province conducted between 2002 (pre-impact assessment) and 2003 (post-impact assessment). These two community clubs (Thembaletu and Siyakhula) were selected as being representative of the five that were established during that period of time. A total of 39 interviews were conducted with decision-makers, 424 participants took part in 15 focus group sessions, 301 respondents completed questionnaires and 31 case studies were conducted. In accordance with the philosophy of community club development and ‘community regeneration’, sport (netball, cricket and rugby) was coached at the local primary schools and

competitions offered at All Star Tournaments (in August 2002 and July 2003). The community-level impact mainly related to the average 'growth' of volunteers and 30% in player participation during the 13-month research period.

Most volunteers (91%) were satisfied with their training, and could offer regular training despite the lack of adequate and good quality physical resources, transport and 'uniforms' to participate in league matches and the All Star Tournaments. Participants and coaches demonstrated remarkable resilience to obtain money for food, transport and to facilitate participation for all. Volunteer coaches and administrators became valuable assets for running other programmes (such as a gardening programme) for community members. The Siyakhula Active Community Club in Tshabo (the rural community) became a social home for other networks such as the Women's Group who took the initiative to successfully negotiate for local workers to be employed for a government project, and offered their services to care

for the elderly and most impoverished households in the community.

Sport teams provided boys with the opportunities to establish friendships within the same age cohort, which resulted in a reported reduction of 'social fabric crimes' (fighting, drug abuse, stealing and drinking) and the collective resistance against the intimidation by older boys and 'criminal elements'. An increase in self-esteem, pro-social behaviour, increased collaboration and an 'attitude of care' were reported by volunteers and participants. Trusting relationships developed with a decrease of 'social distance' between volunteers (including sport teachers) and participants. Local sport events provided community members and parents with rewarding recreation opportunities and served to develop 'community integration'. Successful teams and athletes led to expectations of future sporting success and feelings of entitlement. Absenteeism in the schools declined and children from neighbouring villages (rural) and townships (urban) were increasingly recruited as learners.

The ‘success stories’ and challenges identified by this impact assessment, provided a blueprint for programme management and delivery, as well as human and community development indicators of similar urban and rural communities. With the aim of building and delivering regular and sustainable programmes, the Australian Sports Commission contracted the research team to train local volunteers in the monitoring and evaluation of their own programmes. The different villages of a rural community in the Eastern Cape Province, (Keiskammahoek), served as a pilot for the training of fieldworkers (first level of training) and implementers (second level of training) of the S•DIAT. This was followed by a third level of training, namely to become trainers, a programme which is currently being piloted at an Active Community Club in Margate (within the province of KwaZulu-Natal).

The first six volunteers qualified as fieldworkers, with four being selected for a pathway for implementing and training as stipulated. When the impact assessment of Keiskammahoek indicated several shortcomings (such as

inadequate training), the trainees immediately addressed this by partnering with Sports Federations and expert coaches to deliver appropriated training. They reduced the number of community clubs serving different villages by focusing on resource provision and optimal community engagement for needs-based programmes and services to different sectors of the community. The local municipality made an office available and provided access to local facilities, whereas the local police offered opportunities and resources for collaboration in ‘fighting crime’. The local hospital and health workers offered their services for a ‘health day’ and ongoing campaign where the volunteers are considered key figures in “delivering health messages in a community riddled with HIV/Aids” (Burnett & Hollander, 2007).

The bottom-up approach and being trained in monitoring and evaluation, contributed to their utilization of research results for strategic planning and collaborative service delivery.

DISCUSSION

As the methodology of the S•DIAT entails a quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative component (interviews for local stakeholders and focus group sessions for community representatives, presenters and participants), it provides ample opportunity for Participatory Action Research and community engagement. In the case of the Siyadlala Mass Participation Programme, reciprocal engagement between the researchers and research community was limited. Monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment was a relatively one-sided affair where the research findings were reported to a national stakeholder (Sport and Recreation South Africa) that had to make strategic decisions in terms of governance, resource and policy development. Programme implementers were left to produce their monthly reports, often without tangible change resulting from their recommendations. Although similar findings in terms of social (e.g. increase in pro-social behaviour) and human development (e.g. increased self-esteem) were recorded, the programme implementers were not part of collecting or interpreting such data.

The reporting system that merely focused on numbers, activities presented, *ad hoc* cases and implementation challenges, negatively impacts on a development framework where implementers and community-based stakeholders may collectively engage in the decision-making process. This relative position of being marginalized is exacerbated by a top-down approach of prescribed job descriptions and the delivery of sport development according to national development priorities, rather than serving local interests and needs.

The legitimacy of findings rested in the expertise and objectivity of the research team who mainly consulted with local representatives on contextual issues that impacted on the interpretation of data (Vanden Auweele et al., 2006). The report was issued by a national agent and the results translated into possible national expected benchmarks as norms for macro-level involvement and success indicators. The process however, left little capacity behind for continued monitoring, evaluation and impact assessments where the results could be

applied to the local context (meso-level) for the improvement of implementation and service delivery. Capacity-building and accepting co-ownership of the Programmes were thus relatively restricted, although perceived as an important prerequisite for the sustainability of a programme (Cunningham & Beneforti, 2005). Ownership was therefore limited to the national and provincial funders and decision-makers with limited transfer of 'entitlement' to local programme implementers. The implementers are dependent on "new sets of instructions issued from the top", not knowing to what extent they were successful in delivering a programme, or how they were contributing to development goals.

Contradictory to the Siyadlala Mass Participation Programme, the Active Community Clubs' Initiative utilizes 'community development' as a unit of analysis. Their approach necessitated the involvement of various stakeholders from the local communities who were part of the decision-making process. The developmental approach was also facilitated by the engagement of local volunteers in the research process. The

development dynamics inherent in the Participatory Action Research paradigm, contributed to active community engagement in planning, implementation and sustainable service delivery (Gore, 1993). As volunteers, the sustainability of the community clubs became mainly their responsibility, and was largely perceived as a product of self determination (Gahin & Paterson, 2001).

It became an inevitable process to engage in building monitoring and evaluation capacity, which in turn was utilized for local presenters and decision-makers to engage in setting their own benchmarks, planning for the local setting and taking responsibility for successes and failures. The cascading of the learning and research process affords a unique transfer of knowledge and experience, as it is delivered with a deeper understanding of 'being in their shoes'. The building of capacity in fieldwork such as capturing, analyzing and reporting of data, is followed by strategic planning, demonstrating active engagement in delivering on relevant development goals for a particular community.

CONCLUSION

Development agencies often focus on the investment returns of the programmes or initiatives they financially support, thus losing the focus on active engagement, building of capacity and transfer of ownership which is part and parcel of 'sustainable development'. Without a needs-based and people-focused programme, sustainability is compromised and funding agents remain responsible for providing resources, governance and taking responsibility for monitoring, evaluation and impact assessments.

The development of local agency and ownership entails an interactive process of continued engagement, as local presenters and stakeholders are taken on board by doing their own monitoring, evaluation and impact assessments. Through this process they can be adequately informed to strategically plan and take responsibility for continued service delivery and programme adaptations. The Participatory Action Research model may thus meaningfully contribute to the development of agency and independence of community leaders and representatives who may take

responsibility for their own development.

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