

The Olympic Movement as Stakeholder in the UN–IOC partnership: Configurations in Southern Africa

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Abstract

International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Olympic Movement (OM) members have unique roles to play in the newly formed global partnership with the United Nations (UN) in relation to the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) sector. Common ground relates to two main global trends: sport mega-event legacy programmes and the influence of the SDP movement. This paper reflects on the case study work of OM stakeholder arrangements in three African countries, namely Zambia, Lesotho and South Africa. It offers a re-interpretation of the findings of a larger study and interrogates existing partnerships delivery on diverse goals associated with development. It reflects on globalised neo-colonial underpinnings evident in the UN-OM partnership and questions the meaningfulness of current stakeholder configurations for the delivery on sustainable development through sport.

Keywords

International Olympic Committee (IOC), United Nations (UN), Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), stakeholders, partnerships.

Burnett, C. (2017). The Olympic Movement as stakeholder the UN-IOC partnership: configurations in Southern Africa. *Diagoras: International Academic Journal on Olympic Studies*, 1, 35–54. Retrieved from <http://diagorasjournal.com/index.php/diagoras/article/view/6>



Introduction

The announcement of a direct United Nations–International Olympic Committee partnership in January 2017 points to the prominence of 206 National Olympic Committees and International Sport Federations as stakeholders in ‘development’. The OM’s profile as strategic partner was detrimental in that it led to the closing of the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) by the incoming UN Secretary-General, António Guterres (IOC, 2017). This act created multiple levels of uncertainty and opportunity within the affected sectors regarding the envisaged potential of this global partnership that “will strengthen the position of sport even more in society and will help sport to fulfil its role as ‘an important enabler of sustainable development’” (IOC, 2017, p.2). This came in the wake of a UN General Assembly plenary discussion (Seventy-first session, A/71/L.38) on SDP on 7 December 2016. In this session more than 50 country representatives motivated for increased capacity for the UNOSDP and UN International Working Group for SDP (UN, 2016). During the plenary session, the President of the UN General Assembly (Peter Thomson) acknowledged:

... the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace for its work to promote sport as a means for furthering the goals of the United Nations, including through the UN Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace. The Offices’ priority areas of conflict resolution, gender equality, development of Africa, and inclusion of persons with disabilities and youth development, are particularly important (United Nations, 2016).

The overlap of global policies and actions yields an unclear picture of domain specificity and strategic policy and partnership alignments. The roles of other UN agencies such the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have become prominent in driving human justice, educational and development issues within SDP initiatives, physical education and school sport (United Nations, 2005 & 2016).

In-country leadership inevitably prioritises national development goals and local conditions, and this is increasingly the case for developing economies in the Global South (Kay & Dudfield, 2013). It is partly for this reason that South Africa, despite having hosted the 2010 FIFA World Cup, pulled out as host for the 2022

Commonwealth Games. The increased globalisation and competing national development priorities often require a re-positioning of sport policy stakeholders (Coalter, 2013), reconciling interests around different forms of sport and patterns of participation (Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010), and channelling resources for sustained implementation of impactful programmes (Lindsey & Champan, 2017).

Black (2017) interrogates the two main thrusts of development related to sport: SDP in association with resource mobilisation around sport mega-events and the inroads made by the SDP movement. In practice, the OM members of hosting and non-hosting countries are vastly different in that partnerships demonstrate either an in-country focus aligned with the IOC mandate, or ones that are in competition with it. This paper reflects on existing partnership arrangements of in-country OM membership in three African (non-hosting) countries to provide critical insights into strategic partnerships within the field.

Background

Africa as context

Modern sport became part and parcel of colonial governance systems that utilised competitive sport as a tool of domination and progression according to a Western model of civilisation and prosperity (Coubertin, 2000). Over time, the modernisation of African states included investments in competitive sports that reflected relationships constructed around power, resources, and legitimacy. For African athletes and nations to demonstrate their socio-political and economic significance, success in international sporting competitions serves as the norm for legitimacy (Richardson, 2000).

African athletes first made their mark at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, where the Ethiopian marathon runner Abebe Bikila won a gold medal, and this was followed by the dominance of long-distance athletes from the Rift Valley in Kenya. South Africa unsuccessfully bid for the Olympic Games in 1995 but hosted many international sport competitions, including the 2010 FIFA World Cup. However, the country pulled out as host of the 2022 Commonwealth Games due to multiple factors, including the financial cost associated with hosting requirements from the Commonwealth Games Federation and questionable developmental impacts (Black, 2017).

The spread of global humanitarianism is informed by the neo-liberal thinking of global agencies in their quest to instigate or manipulate sustainable development according to their conceptualisation of progress (Giulianotti, Collison, Darnell & Howe, 2017). Neo-liberal frameworks place the onus of development on the individual (human capital), whilst ignoring the multiple systemic barriers and poverty-related manifestations that people face in their daily lives (Darnell, 2012; Guest 2009). The provision of resources and education can hardly eradicate the existing systemic inequalities intensified by increased globalisation. Within stakeholder arrangements with the Olympic Movement at the centre lie the differential realities of the 'other' and the 'periphery', framed by Amara and Henry (2004) as 'developmentalism'. This bears the political ideology of 'thirdworldism' with its associated identification of the West as superior (Girginov & Hills, 2008).

UN–IOC relations: Implications for Southern Africa

The end of colonial rule for many African countries meant a time for rebuilding and for managing the inequalities that emerged with the growing wealth of first world economies. The Olympic Movement became part of the envisaged solution of the time, which entailed multiple interventions of empowerment and fast-tracking 'development' in and through sport. In 1971, the IOC established the Olympic Solidarity Committee through which athletes, coaches, and administrators received financial support to ensure that they would get the necessary support to compete at the international level (Henry & Al-Tauqi, 2008). The IOC also became a global player in harnessing the 'power of sport', being awarded observer status in the UN General Assembly, and endorsing the fundamental role of *sport as a means to promote education, health, development, and peace* (UN Resolution A/69/L.5, adopted on 16 October 2014) (International Olympic Committee, 2015a). The IOC's Agenda 20:20 provides a strategic framework for a post-2015 development agenda for global collaboration between the Olympic Movement and UN member organisations, particularly in a direct partnership arrangement (International Olympic Committee, 2017).

Human legacy programmes featured prominently in recent bidding proposals, with little regard for critical voices warning against nationalistic outcomes (the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games) (Brownell, 2009) and non-sustainable delivery (the 2016 Rio Olympic Games) (Knijnik & Tavares, 2012). Post-event assessments

seldom validate stakeholder benefits or community-level uptake (Burnett, 2015a), or account for how event-related initiatives affect real people in real ways (Girginov & Hills, 2008). In addition to in-country programmes, the Olympic Value Education Programme (OVEP) gained significant global traction by developing resources for implementing it in physical educational curricula in a sustainable manner (Naul, Binder, Rychtecky, & Culpan, 2017).

Dominant partnerships within the Olympic Movement thus present different institutional arrangements driven by self-interest, or on the principle of reciprocity, where the latter would deliver shared envisaged outcomes. In this vein, sport for development and educational initiatives are widely implemented by an array of partners or channelled through complex stakeholder arrangements (Coalter, 2013; Leopkey & Parent, 2015). For example, the 2012 London Olympics implemented International Inspirations as a worldwide Olympic Legacy programme that engaged diverse agencies for delivering educational and development programmes intended to create a more equitable global society (Chatziefstathiou, 2012).

Stakeholder configurations: conceptual framework

New interpretations of stakeholder theory in a multi-disciplinary paradigm provide insight into a 'developmental framework', where the stakeholder 'net' encompasses the media, fans, coaches, athletes, sponsors, government, and members (Fassin, 2012). Fassin's expanded notion of 'stakeholding' articulates the changing dynamics of relationships, which in turn are affected by ever-changing circumstances (Fassin, 2012). Many stakeholders engage in short- or longer-term network collaboration depending on the urgency of co-existence or lack thereof in cases where there are conflicting objectives. Thus, each stakeholder holds a unique position of 'stakeholder salience' based on the attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). Hence, stakeholder collaboration relies on the reciprocal nature of relationships that influence the degree of connectivity.

Stakeholders have different power relations where 'power' relates to a stakeholder's capacity to influence the organisation and ensure the distribution of value (Harrison, Bosse & Phillips, 2010). A study conducted by Hayhurst and Frisby (2010) reported enduring tensions from the NGO-sector in partnership with high-performance sport agencies based on the lack of stakeholder 'salience' with reference to aspects of legitimacy and urgency.

Legitimacy as a stakeholder's attribute encapsulates core beliefs and perceptions of the appropriate, suitable, and convenient match of social beliefs, norms, and values (Mitchell et al., 1997). Urgency relates to time sensitivity, since an organisation requires different partnerships along the pathway of differential delivery. The accumulative effect of power, legitimacy, and/or urgency contributes to the strength of ties within a stakeholder arrangement.

Stakeholder prioritisation is also based on situational factors, with stakeholders being motivated to collaborate in search of optimal reciprocal benefits and satisfying the needs of their constituencies (Friedman, Parent & Mason, 2004). The roles of Olympic Movement members are analysed within the envisaged potential of stakeholder arrangements of the current UN–IOC partnership and commitment to sustainable development in Africa.

The research

The research followed an inductive approach, which allowed for a strategic focus and Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that ensured the capturing of opinions and experiences from research participants as an integral part of the research process and design (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). The research describes and reflects on Olympic Movement members and stakeholders in three countries within the Southern African region with a shared colonial history, although the political pathways and development trajectories in which sport can play a meaningful role are different (Burnett, 2015b). The research foci allow for critical reflection on the IOC 20:20 Agenda, as represented by two of the three identifiable clusters, namely: IOC-level change (21 recommendations); and NOC-centred activities (10 recommendations) (International Olympic Committee, 2015b). The research addresses the current discourse of the IOC–UN partnership and consequential partnership configurations framed by the OM's premise of “building a peaceful and better world” (IOC, 2013:15).

Methodology

The Sport-in-Development Impact Assessment Tool (S-DIAT) was adapted to allow for rich case study descriptions and evaluation research, whilst incorporating the differential semantics of a process theory of change and diverse programme mechanisms

relating to 'outputs', 'outcomes' and 'impact' (Burnett, 2007; Parsons, Cokey & Thornton, 2013). For validity and enhanced trustworthiness, the study made use of multiple forms of triangulation, which included a range of methods (e.g. document analysis, interviews and focus groups), evidence from studies across a range of paradigms (literature study and meta-analytical review techniques) and different political and conceptual standpoints (Lindsay & Chapman, 2017).

A total of 21 interview transcripts and narratives from three focus group sessions were selected from a comprehensive data set. Research participants in the sample represent NOC executive board members (n=10), sport federations (n=8), Olympafrica centres (n=2), the Olympic Youth Development Centre (Zambia) (n=2), the government sector (n=4), UNICEF (n=2), local sponsors (n=3), civic society (NGO-sector) (n=4) and individuals (e.g. course directors) (n=3). The three focus group sessions were held with representatives of NOCs (n=2) and sport federations (n=3) in follow-up discussions after interviews. Qualitative data was transcribed verbatim, coded, and clustered in semantic units for theme-generation under the guiding questions (Guzel & Ozbey, 2013).

Due to the relatively small research population, ethical considerations in terms of anonymity were strictly observed. All research participants volunteered to participate freely at a place of their choice and could terminate their participation at any time without any repercussions. All signed consent forms and gave or refused permission for the recording of sessions. All could request the research report and related publications, in which case it would be provided to them.

Prior to the presentation of case studies, a brief historical overview frames the political and social realities for the three countries. The case studies are offered alphabetically and demonstrate in-country stakeholder positioning and collaboration regarding 'sustainable development outcomes'.

Case studies

Background

The three Southern African countries chosen as case studies share a common, yet diverse colonial past. Lesotho and Zambia

are relatively small land-locked countries, with the former being completely surrounded by South African territory. All three countries were under British colonial rule and exposed to the exploitation of natural resources, administrative control, Western ideology and cultural influences within their main social institutions. Zambia (which was Northern Rhodesia at the time) gained independence in 1964 and experienced one-party rule by the Zambia African National Congress (ZANC) for 27 years before establishing a multi-party democracy. Lesotho became the home of the Sotho people who took refuge in the mountainous area to escape the Zulu wars in the nineteenth century. A local chief then obtained protection by remaining under British rule and avoided incorporation into the Union of South Africa in 1910. Lesotho became independent in 1966 and has up to the present faced political instability under successive monarchies. South Africa emerged from colonial rule following major wars (civil and against the British) after establishing a nationalist (apartheid) government of white minority rule in 1948. A continued armed struggle and international sanctions, including global sport isolation, which intensified from the 1960s to the late 1980s, contributed to the birth of a multi-party democracy in 1994 under the African National Congress (ANC) (Commonwealth, 2017).

Modern sports were introduced by the colonial forces and found educational support in Western schooling systems and institutional arrangements around institutionalised sport. South Africa has the most affluent economy, but like the other two sub-Saharan countries is facing multiple socio-economic and health challenges such as international debt, high levels of welfare dependency, and an HIV and AIDS pandemic. Although English remained as a national language, diverse cultural groups exist based on ethno-linguistic affiliation with a mix of traditional and Western values, diverse socio-cultural practices and a need for nation-building (especially in South Africa).

Lesotho

The **Lesotho National Olympic Commission's** (LNOC) position of relative autonomy still requires policies and activities such as that of the **Ministry of Gender, Sport and Recreation** (Ministry) and **Lesotho Sports and Recreation Commission**. There is a special drive to optimally access most categories of Olympic Solidarity Funding, and to appoint qualified interns and upskill staff, including volunteers from national sport federations. The

LNOC drives the Olympic Values Education Programme (OVEP) for 12-16 year olds. An IOC 'gender grant' aims to engage multiple stakeholders and address female leadership in the sports fraternity via a mentorship programme.

The *Olympafrica Youth Ambassador Programme* (OYAP) was established in 2003 due to the collaboration between the LNOC and Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC) (Mokupo, 2013). 'Youth Ambassadors' are trained by an NGO (Kick4Life) in life skill programmes such as HIV/AIDS prevention, *Girls on the Move*, *Boys on the Go* (for herd boys), sport programmes (Daimler Cup and Olympafrica FutbolNet Cup), and events (Samsung Games Tournament, Olympic Day and Queens Baton Race linked to the Commonwealth Games Federation).

The **Ministry of Gender, Sport and Recreation** (Ministry) has a Department of Sport, which is responsible for the development and implementation of legislation, policies, and strategic directives. According to the Sports and Recreation Act of 2002, the then Sports Council (with appointed members) was replaced by the **Lesotho Sports and Recreation Commission** (17 members selected by 31 affiliated Sport Federations) as implementing body.

UNICEF's collaboration with the 2014 Host of the Commonwealth Games triggered an increase of in-country sports-related interventions under the Lesotho United Nations Development Assistance Plan. Sport and physical activity is used across the country's programmes that focus on HIV/AIDS, Basic Education, Child Protection, and Social Policy and Planning (United Nations Children's Fund, 2014).

The government sector remains the central stakeholder, with a controlling body (Lesotho Sport and Recreation Commission) to which all national federations are affiliated and from which they receive discretionary funding. The LNOC mostly assists in managing the national team and ensuring its participation in multi-sport events such as the Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games. Development programmes are implemented through NGO partnerships and OYAP, whilst OVEP and gender leadership programmes are parallel (top-down) offerings.

South Africa

In its quest for international sporting success in the post-apartheid era, the **Ministry of Sport and Recreation** revoked the various sunset clauses of existing sport structures and assisted in constituting

the **South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee** (SASCOC) (2015), which was formed and registered as a Section 21 Company in 2008 to act as the custodian of high-performance sports and to provide strategic leadership as a professional organisation. The National Sports and Recreation Plan defined the role of SASCOC to promote and develop high-performance sport, manage the preparation and delivery of Team South Africa, award national colours, and endorse bidding proposals for hosting international events (Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2012). Currently 70 national federations are affiliated to SASCOC, of which 28 are Olympic sports. Substantial funding is channelled from the National Lottery Board into the Operation Excellence (Opex) Programme. All national sport federations are required to comply with the principles of good governance, implement a Long-Term Participant Plan (LTPD) and Long-Term Coach Plan (LTCD), and deliver on transformation targets.

Sport and Recreation South Africa (SRSA) provides SASCOC with an annual budget to drive high-performance sport and fund 60 national sport federations in addition to the funding received from the National Lotto Board, where a break in the current funding cycle left SASCOC economically vulnerable (SRSA representative). SRSA has agreements with foreign ministries, the United Nations, UNESCO, and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). Other **government partnerships** include the Department of Basic Education, Department of Higher Education, Department of Trade and Industry and to a limited degree, the NGO sector. Educational and gender-based programmes are implemented by the organisation's staff in direct collaboration with selected schools, but these have a relatively limited reach.

SASCOC receives funding from SRSA with the mandate of cultivating competitive sport and ensuring (medal) success at international sport competitions, whilst driving a social transformation agenda of ethnic diversity in national team compositions. Other partnerships are mostly formed with funders and sponsors for competitive sport and athlete development. Educational programmes and gender initiatives are *ad hoc*, with minimal engagement with development agencies or NGOs as partners in the field of SDP.

Zambia

The **National Olympic Committee of Zambia** (NOCZ) played a significant part in establishing integral relationships with the

Ministry of Youth and Sport and in the establishing the **Olympic Youth Development Centre (OYDC)**, launched in 2010. This placed Zambia's Olympic Movement at the heart of the Olympic Agenda 2020 (Recommendation 24) (International Olympic Committee, 2015b).

The NOCZ enjoys a high level of independence and has set up eight commissions, with **Women in Sport** linked to a cultural exchange programme and international partnership (Score Card Project sponsored by their Norwegian counterpart). The **OVEP** programme is rolled out from the Olympafrica Centre and OYDC, assisted by Young Leaders from local NGOs. Up to 500 children and youth play sport daily, including 17 schools offering physical education classes on the 'fields' and participating in *Futbalnet*. It also hosts several community programmes and recently the Japanese Embassy funded the completion and upgrade of the Olympafrica infrastructure.

The **OYDC's** original concept was adapted by the NOCZ for developing elite athletes, and it serves as a regional 'hub' for hosting major sporting events, international training workshops, educational programmes, and conferences. The Centre attracted international sport-for-development funders (UNAID) as part of a drive for contextual significance and self-sustainability. With limited funding from the government sector (about 1%) income-generation is a priority. The **Ministry of Youth and Sport** and its implementing arm, the National Sports Council, sets the policy framework and allocates annual funding, as well as providing (limited) assistance for game preparation.

The OYDC is a main driver for sport development and SDP work in partnership with the government sector, Olympafrica centre and local NGOs. The OYDC provides a space for the implementation of a hybrid model, where sport facilities and resources are dedicated to mass participation delivered by the NGO sector in partnership with sport federations. Multiple partners provide health-related services and sport-for-development programmes to address issues such as HIV and AIDS. IOC-funded programmes (e.g. OVEP) is offered separately to local schoolchildren. The OYDC also serves as a regional (southern African) hub for sport events, training camps and conferences.

Discussion

From the cases studies analysis, four main themes emerged: i) the dominant ideological framework and focus areas, ii) institutional legitimacy, iii) global positioning and stakeholder arrangements, and iv) national positioning stakeholder arrangements. These main themes of stakeholder positioning within their main focus of their mandated sphere of delivery are captured in the stakeholder typology categorised in table 1.

Table 1. Stakeholder typology within the IOC–UN partnership framework

Drivers	Olympic hosts (LOCOG) Development sector – UN agencies Government Civic society (NGOs)* Olympic movement (Olympafrica) Higher Education Institutions Corporates (CSI)	Development sector – UN agencies (UNESCO & UNICEF) Government (mass participation and Physical Education & School Sport/PESS)* Olympic Movement (LTAD) Higher Education Institutions Corporate sponsors	Olympic Movement (IFs, NOCs and Games) LTAD Government Private sport academies and institutions* Higher Education Institutions Corporate sponsors
	SDP, life skill education & legacy (Olympism)	Sport development legacy & life skills education (Olympic and Olympism education)	Sport development, legacy & elite athlete development (Olympic & Olympism education)

Source: Burnett , C.

In the first instance, the dominance of a Western **ideological framework and focus** of sporting excellence underpins the institutional legitimacy of the OM to drive sport development as a main focus area. It is within the mandate of the OM to spread the Olympic ideology (Patsantaras, 2008), and the members claim a central position to drive social transformation through sport, which Amara and Henry (2004) refer to as ‘developmentalism’. The main ideological approach for OM members is to spread Olympism as a philosophy and promote neo-liberalism through individual agency (Guest, 2009). Such educational programmes delivered by NOCs can hardly deliver impactful change due to their limited scope and assumed value fit for local communities. The solution of utilising NGO partners as in the case of Zambia and Lesotho also does not avoid neo-liberal understandings of development, where systemic barriers inherent in unequal power relations are not accounted for (Darnell, 2012; Darnell & Black,

2011). In this way the OVEP and educational legacy programmes, regardless of implementing agency, are products of the Global North's domination of SDP development work in Africa (Black, 2017).

Secondly, the IOC–UN partnership provides **institutionalised legitimacy** for the IOC to promote 'sport for good', but the impactful implementation of development initiatives necessitates complex stakeholder arrangements and proof of effect beyond the political rhetoric and institutional branding. Episodic initiatives from Olympic host countries and potential mainstreaming of educational programmes does not ensure legitimacy in broader educational curricula focused on the holistic development of individuals in the context of a developing nation (Naul et al., 2017; Leopkey & Parent, 2015). National educational agencies and, in some cases, NGOs enjoy a higher level of relevance and trust to deliver on desirable social outcomes (Fassin, 2012). A hybrid model (Zambia) and NGO-partnership programme delivery (Lesotho) carry more stakeholder salience given their contextual embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Global positioning and stakeholder arrangements associated with mega-events' legacy programmes reflect complex stakeholder arrangements motivated by self-interest and reciprocal exchanges to achieve collective outcomes (Leopkey & Parent, 2015). The global positioning of the IOC and other Olympic Movement stakeholders seeks to serve the development of elite athletes, expert coaches, officials and managers within a competitive sport ethos. This type of development's transference into broader socio-political (empowerment) and economic contexts is indeed questionable (Darnell, 2016; Giulianotti et al., 2017).

The IOC and OM members operate inter-related agencies, but within the collective stakeholder arrangements have unequal power relations. For instance, there is a global hierarchy with experts and trans-national sponsors or corporate partners dominating and steering development from the Global North or from wealthier nations (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015). In Region Five (the southern African region) the Olympic Youth Development Centre in Zambia is supported by neighbouring countries in hosting international and regional competitions. Lesotho's athletic and cycling experts are well positioned for high-altitude training, and South Africa's OM offers expert coaching and sport science services to neighbouring countries. Such South–South exchanges

provide the OM with stakeholder salience in the competitive sport sector, with potential spin-offs for development through advocacy at the regional level of intervention (Burnett, 2015b).

At the **national level**, OM members forge partnerships with the government and corporate sector to ensure access to resources and an enabling environment for athlete and sport development. NOC's autonomy and global structure provide a blueprint for operational effectiveness through established partnerships. For example, the opportunity for athletes to train at high-altitude centres in Lesotho or access expert and scientific support in South Africa is based on multi-lateral partnerships within the OM sector. In-country stakeholder arrangements to achieve international sporting success are formed for access to political power (the government sector) and economic power (the government and corporate sectors) (Harrison et al., 2010).

The non-elite sport sector in the three African countries has relevance for the OM in terms of providing educational programmes (and spreading the philosophy of Olympism) with a relatively new development relating to the development and implementation of such programmes through physical education as driven by Olympic Studies Centres associated with Higher Education Institutions (Naul et al., 2017). The latter type of partnership has the potential of earning significant stakeholder salience (legitimacy, power and urgency) by mainstreaming selected elements of programmes in physical education and school sport (UNESCO and UNIDEF) (International Olympic Committee, 2005, 2017). Within the SDP domain, UN agencies provide ideological and policy direction and leadership, but funding and strategic partnership arrangements are decentralised and mostly lie with development agencies, foundations and the NGO sector. Initiatives often align with in-country NGO and government partners to ensure sustainable delivery and legitimacy by being aligned with existing educational curricula in schools.

Conclusions

At the centre of stakeholder arrangements for the delivery of sport development and SDP initiatives is the global-local articulation of the NOCs with the IOC and International Sport Federations. The NOCs are independent organisations, and in full adherence to the Olympic Charter (IOC, 2013) their mission is “to develop,

promote and protect the Olympic Movement in their respective countries” (p. 57) and to “preserve their autonomy and resist all pressures of any kind, including but not limited to political, legal, religious or economic” (p. 57). In the first instance the Olympic Movement states as a fundamental principle of Olympism the “practice of sport as a human right” to be honoured by NOCs, their affiliated Sport Federations and partners (IOC, 2013: 11). The funding and mandate is strictly controlled by the IOC with clear guidelines in providing assistance through Olympic Solidarity to resource-dependent NOCs in the form of (sport) development programmes and technical assistance of the International Sport Federations (IFs) if so required. Olympic Solidarity-funded initiatives such as Olympafrica centres and the Olympic Valued Education Programme (OVEP) have in turn provided National Olympic Committees (NOCs) with opportunities for implementing community outreach programmes in disadvantaged communities (Naul et al., 2017). Such an arrangement represents a neo-colonial understanding of development that positions international sporting success as a barometer of broader societal development in a way that is meaningful to developing nations (Darnell, 2012).

The National Olympic Committees’ leadership role creates a space for vertical collaboration within the Olympic Movement alliance networks, but still lacks the horizontal articulation with civic society agencies within local contexts (Darnell, 2016). African nation agencies became strategic partners for sport superpowers to demonstrate a global presence, but mostly act as implementing partners of top-down development initiatives and the spread of a universal (Olympism) philosophy (Ferkins, & Shilbury, 2015). These outreach programmes mainly relate to value-based education and lack the intensity and rigour for transferability of knowledge and skills to real-life settings where other values for survival and development are prioritised (Guess, 2009). The cyclic mobilisation of resources and implementation of educational programmes associated with hosting the Olympic Games are more related to the branding of a host country than delivering meaningful education for a broader sustainable development agenda (Burnett, 2015a; Darnell, 2016).

The potential mainstreaming of sport for development within the context of international development seems to be compromised by having the OM as key strategic and implementing agent that mainly focus on sporting excellence as a development pathway.

Competitive sport is exclusionary and would inevitably attract the talented individuals who would have access to resources for training and competitive participation. This would inevitably exclude the majority of a population given the manageable scope of OM in-country members. OM members would need to find different strategies and partnerships to ensure that there is a focus on and delivery of meaningful, impactful and sustainable social change at the societal level to make good on the proclaimed development outcomes.

The IOC–UN partnership thus holds unique challenges for OM members in relation to the forming of partnerships, including engaging the NGO sector to achieve community penetration whilst losing direct control of self-delivery. For UN agencies and existing partnerships in the SDP sphere, this global stakeholder configuration may offer a redirection to mainstreaming development work in collaboration with sport-related programmes in schools, at universities and in communities. Stakeholder salience for the OM is first and foremost in service of the sport fraternity, with new opportunities opening for sustainable educational (legacy) programmes facilitated by the UN partnership.

Without an in-depth understanding of the potential role of sport, partner and partnership mandates in relation to meaningful development, and the rigour of determining causal effects for broader societal change, the OM is taking on a daunting challenge that transcends the arena of sport.

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Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank the IOC for funding the initial research through the Advanced Research Grant programme 2014/2015.