Original Research

The Contribution of Sport to the Sustainable Development Goals: Insights from Commonwealth Games Associations

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are hailed as a common language to unite a global commitment towards a change of trajectory regarding social, economic, and environmental development issues. Although not overtly cited within the SDGs or their related targets, sport has been widely accepted and promoted as an enabler of social change and a mechanism through which to strategically map and measure commitments to sustainability. However, despite the numerous case study examples of specific sport-based programs that have demonstrated the potential of sport to contribute to the SDGs, there is limited knowledge about the currency and value that the SDGs hold for key sport stakeholders in development, and a shortage of concrete evidence to assess the uptake and integration at the level of national policy. In an attempt to address this shortage, this paper presents insights from the analysis of secondary data collected by the Commonwealth Games Federation from 62 Commonwealth Games Associations (CGAs) in relation to their perspectives on the contribution of sport to the SDGs. The paper provides examples of specific areas of strength, or those in need of further development, to present a baseline for the current state of play in understanding the contribution from individual CGAs to the SDGs.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: INSIGHTS FROM COMMONWEALTH GAMES ASSOCIATIONS

The advent of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was welcomed as a catalyst to address manifold social, economic and environmental issues. Hailed as a common language to unite a global commitment towards a change of trajectory regarding development issues (Spangenberg, 2017), the UN 2030 Agenda outlined 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 related targets to provide direction for national development plans and international development cooperation (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Although not explicitly mentioned within the Goals or related targets, Paragraph 37 of the UN 2030 Agenda recognized the potential of sport as an enabler of sustainable development. Furthermore, sport has been widely acknowledged as a global mechanism through which to strategically map and measure commitments to sustainability (Guilianotti et al., 2018; Lemke, 2016; Lindsey & Darby, 2018).

The vocal support and advocacy from global organizations, such as the UN, for sport as a means to address several targets contained within the SDGs has prompted large numbers of organizations (both private- and state-funded) to

integrate sport as a cultural vehicle to contribute to their attainment (Collison et al., 2017, Guilianotti et al., 2018). Furthermore, numerous case study examples of sport-based programs have been presented, analysed and championed to demonstrate the potential of sport to contribute to the SDGs (e.g. Burnett, 2019; Lemke, 2016; Mojtahedi & Katsui, 2018; Oby & Egaga, 2018; Otterbein, 2020). Yet, several years after their inauguration, little is known about the currency and value that the SDGs hold for key sport stakeholders in development. Moreover, there is little concrete evidence of uptake and integration at the level of national policy, despite the high level of political endorsement of sport's transformative potential (Svensson & Loat, 2019; Svensson & Woods, 2017).

Therefore, in an attempt to address the shortage of empirical insights at a sport policy level, this paper presents findings from an analysis of secondary data collected by the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) from 62 of the 71 Commonwealth Games Associations (CGAs) in relation to their perspectives on the contribution of sport to the SDGs. Building upon work conducted by the Commonwealth Secretariat, which has benchmarked the measurement of sport's contribution to development objectives (cf. Dudfield & Dingwall-Smith, 2015; Kay & Dudfield, 2013; Lindsey & Chapman, 2017), the paper provides insight into specific areas of strength, or those in need of further development, to present a baseline for the current state of play in understanding the contribution from individual CGAs to the SDGs. In doing so, the findings may act as a foundation to facilitate future policy, strategic direction and resource allocation for global sport policy makers in considering their contribution to the sustainable development goals.

Our central intention is to present much needed empirical insight into the perceived contribution of (inter)national sport organizations towards the SDGs (Svensson & Woods, 2017; Whitley et al., 2019). Following Svensson and Woods (2017), we contend that providing a more detailed understanding of the practical landscape is critical to ensure that theoretical perspectives on development are representative of sport for development practice and provide important insights which might help to shape capacity-building. In addition, we anticipate that the baseline insights presented in this paper will provide a foundation for future research (Svensson & Woods, 2017). As such, in offering these empirical insights, we seek to invite theoretical developments in relation to the role of sport as a tool for sustainable development, whilst constructing a foundation to facilitate strategic direction and resource allocation for global sport policy makers in considering their contribution to the sustainable development goals.

The Sport for Development and Peace Movement and Sustainable Development

Since the turn of the millennium, sport has become an increasingly mainstream feature of policy and development agendas across the world. Often attributed to Nelson Mandela's speech at the Laureus Sport for Good Awards in 2000, the notion that sport has the power to change the world gained traction in domestic and international policy discourse. Today, it serves both as a principal site through which to foster inclusive cultural norms and societal values, as well as a tool for addressing the myriad discontents which impinge on the social, economic and environmental development of societies across the globe (Coalter, 2007; Darnell, 2012). This conviction in the power of sport is evidenced in a vast assemblage of social problem oriented interventions. These include health, education and community initiatives, environmental protection campaigns, humanitarian and human rights programs, peace and reconciliation schemes, while a trend towards corporate social responsibility has fuelled the expansion of elite sporting foundations and charitable arms (Coalter, 2010; McGee, 2018).

Academic research has generally kept pace with this feverish uptake of sport, which as Kidd (2008) observes, originated through efforts by international actors such as UNESCO and the International Olympic Committee's Olympic Solidarity Commission, who reinvested revenues into a range of programs to assist sports development in disadvantaged regions of the world. In the 1990s, the advent of a revolution of non-governmental organizations (Fisher, 1997) saw sport become popularized as a low-cost high impact tool in development practice culminating in the UN's publication of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 (Levermore, 2008). Before long, a distinct Sport-for-Development and Peace (SDP) Movement (Guilianotti, 2011; Kidd, 2008) saw the rapid emergence of international non-governmental organizations who pioneered partnership working with nation-state governments, transnational corporations and sporting stakeholders in multiple lower income countries (Black, 2010).

As the growth of this movement continued apace, academic critique has centred on several issues, most notably the unequal geopolitics which shape the development relationships, which are often top down interventionsimposed by Euro-American organizations in formerly colonized regions of the world (Black, 2017). As Darnell (2010) and Darnell and Hayhurst (2012) have argued, this raises questions about the hegemonic power relations underpinning the SDP movement, and the extent extent to which it represents merely a neo-colonial

extension of Global North-Global South inequalities. Amid mounting critiques of this international SDP movement, and its apparent mission drift (Coalter, 2007), the launch of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 was welcomed as an opportunity to empower nation-state integration of sport in social, economic, and health policy.

As an ambitious "blueprint for shared prosperity in a sustainable world" (United Nations, 2019, p. 2), the SDGs proposed a more universal, integrated and indivisible framework for action. Foremost was the active pursuit of cross-cutting elements (United Nations General Assembly, 2015) as part of a strategic shift towards policy coherence deemed lacking in the discrete and limited purview of the Millenium Development Goals (Lindsey & Darby, 2018). In theory, this meant addressing complex issues such as health and wellbeing, education, inequality, and empowerment in a more holistic manner (Chawansky et al., 2017), acknowledging the need for implementation methods that have support across the pillars of sustainable development—namely, the economic, socio-political, and environmental sectors.

As noted above, although sport is not directly noted within the goals or targets of the UN 2030 Agenda, Paragraph 37 of the agenda acknowledged how sport can be an "important enabler of sustainable development and peace" (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p. 10). This includes contributions to tolerance and respect, the empowerment of women, young people, and communities, and to projects focused upon health, education, and social inclusion. In response, the Sixth International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VI) held in Kazan (July 2017) created an Action Plan of which Action 2 was focused on developing common indicators for measuring the contribution of physical education, physical activity and sport to prioritized SDG targets. Critically, the Kazan Action Plan recognized that the full potential of sport to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs will only be realized if a broad range of state and non-state stakeholders are mobilized through new partnerships and platforms. Otherwise, "at national and international levels, there is a high risk that SDG-oriented policy interventions in and through sport will be neglected, ineffective and/or insufficiently recognized" (MINEPS VI, 2017, p. 19).

The messages contained within the Kazan Action Plan serve as an invitation to sports organizations to corral a collective effort towards demonstrating the contribution of sport to the attainment of the SDGs. As an inter-governmental organization that coordinates and undertakes work on behalf of 54 associate countries representing 2.4 billion people (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2020), the Commonwealth Secretariat has been recognized as being instrumental in guiding the emergence of policy and strategy to enhance sustainable development through sport (Lindsey & Chapman, 2017). Moreover, Commonwealth countries have been noted as being at the forefront of sport-based initiatives for development (Guilianotti, 2014). More specifically, the Commonwealth Secretariat has published various documents which have progressively sought to provide support to stakeholders seeking to strengthen their contribution to the SDP movement (Kay & Dudfield, 2013), offer policy guidance, technical assistance or assist capacity building processes (Dudfield & Dingwall-Smith, 2015), or recommend evidenced and balanced policy options to support effective and cost-efficient contribution to SDG attainment (Lindsey & Chapman, 2017).

This body of work has focussed upon the contribution of sport to six identified SDGs—ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all (SDG 3); ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting life-long learning (SDG 4); achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (SDG 5); promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8); making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11); and promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16) (United Nations, 2019). In addition, it has identified the need for alignment with SDG 17 (sustainable development through global partnerships) to enable configurations of various SDP stakeholders to be formed as an effective means of implementation for these identified SDGs (Lindsey & Chapman, 2017; Lindsey et al., 2020).

However, despite this substantive work, there remains a dearth of evidence to measure the progress of sporting organizations towards SDG targets (Collison et al., 2018; Lindsey & Chapman, 2017; Svensson & Loat, 2019; Svensson & Woods, 2017). A lack of pragmatic, yet sophisticated, methods to capture the contribution of sport-based interventions to the SDGs has been noted as an impediment to strengthening this evidence base, as has the absence of national systems of data collection (Lindsey & Chapman, 2017). Consequently, space exists to explore how (inter)national sports organizations are contributing to the attainment of the SDGs and adopting roles as key policy actors and partners to facilitate action towards these goals.

Sport within the Commonwealth Movement

The CGF is a transnational institution which represents a constituency of affiliated national Commonwealth Games

and for selecting the host city for each event (Byrne, 2014). Although distinct from the operations of the Commonwealth Secretariat, which predominately works in conjunction with governments, the CGF promotes itself as a progressive leader in sport and social change efforts (Commonwealth Games Federation, 2015) and has been noted as an early adopter in efforts to align sport policies and sport development projects with the aims, imperatives and objectives of the SDGs. Given that the CGF's staging of the Commonwealth Games is the most tangible and visible expression of efforts to raise global awareness of the aims and intentions of the Commonwealth Secretariat, collaboration between the two organizations in relation to sport and sustainable development is frequent.

Although the CGF has a detailed and complex history (Byrne, 2014; van der Westhuizen, 2004), the publication of the CGFs Transformation 2022 strategic plan (Commonwealth Games Federation, 2015) signalled a step-change in their focus away from a sole concern with performance in sport towards a "transformational leap … to performance impact in the Commonwealth" (p. 11). Consequently, Transformation 2022 and associated strategic documents have outlined the CGF's intention to harness the potential of sport to enable social change at an individual, community and global level (Commonwealth Games Federation, 2020).

As constituent members of the CGF, the primary purpose of CGAs is to oversee their nation's participation within the Commonwealth Games. Although their main focus is at high-performance level, CGAs are often at the forefront of broader sport development promotion within their respective countries. However, following the lead of their affiliated body, CGAs have more recently acknowledged their responsibility as pivotal contributors to the development of national sport policy and consultants within efforts to position sport as an instrument for social and economic development. In some nations, in particular the less economically developed countries of the Commonwealth, CGAs enact a significant role in public affairs and often their work is combined with that of the National Olympic Committee (Robinson & Minikin, 2014). In more economically developed nations, the CGA is typically a stand alone association with limited policial influence.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The CGF and Commonwealth Secretariat are key stakeholders and early adopters in efforts to benchmark the contribution of sport to the attainment of the SDGs. In order to continue this work and illuminate the contribution of CGAs to the SDGs, it was imperative that the research design enabled all CGAs participating at the General Assembly of the CGF to provide data in as efficient a manner as possible. Due to these practical imperatives, it was deemed that a questionnaire was the most appropriate method to adopt. However, the methodological benefits of quantitative research, such as anonymity, reduction in bias, and logical structuring of data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Ryen, 2008) were equally important factors in the choice of a questionnaire.

The research instrument used was a questionnaire designed by the CGF and the Commonwealth Secretariat in order to broadly investigate the contribution of CGAs to the sustainable development goals (see Appendix A). However, it was also important that the questionnaire design provided the opportunity to allow respondents to provide more open, unstructured responses. Therefore, the use of an open-ended question was also incorporated into the questionnaire design in order to provide rich qualitative data on the topic and allow for the triangulation of data to enhance understanding and meaning.

The quantitative element (8 items) investigated the experiences and perceptions of representatives from the CGAs via a self-report questionnaire. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 utilized a 5-point Likert Scale to assess topics including CGA familiarity with the SDGs, CGA collaboration with relevant Government bodies, strategies for the inclusion of people with a disability, and reflection on ten indicators identified as relevant to the SDGs[1] . Two items (Items 5 and 8) required respondents to consider specific policies that were in place which related to the safeguarding of various participants of sport and/or protecting the integrity of sport. The remaining item (Item 7) elicited information relating to the gender breakdown of CGA Board Members. In the interests of transparency, the current paper reports on items 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7. The qualitative element of the research comprised analysis of a ninth item contained within the questionnaire (an open-ended question), which enabled respondents to describe specific sport, physical activity and physical education activities that their CGA was currently engaging with that had direct relevance to the 17 SDGs.

Although the choice and design of the questionnaire had the potential to reduce bias in its broadest sense (for example, by controlling for extreme, neutral, acquiescence and dissent biases as well as decreasing the number of excluded and non-responding participants), it should be highlighted that the completion of the questionnaire by the CGA impart response bias on the data collected in unintended ways.

Examples of this unintended, accidental response bias—largely linked to the manner in which the questionnaire was administered—would be demand and social desirability biases whereby the CGA representatives could feel influenced to respond in a manner more positively aligning their CGA to the SDG agenda. Strictly adhering to the ethical parameters of the data collection (for example, assuring anonymity for each CGA) mitigated as much as possible the impact of the accidental biases on the data collected.

Ethical Considerations

The CGF were responsible for the ethical approval process for the data collection which indicated that any public reporting of the responses of individual CGAs would not identify the CGA concerned and that reporting would be of aggregate data either by region or by the collation of overall responses of CGAs, thus assuring anonymity for each CGA. The completion of the questionnaire was voluntary, and respondents were assured that the management of their data would be in strict accordance with the CGF's data management policy. The data received by the authors from the CGF were handled in strict accordance with their University's code of good practice in research integrity, paying particular attention to the institutional research data policy to ensure that the researchers fulfilled their legal and ethical obligations regarding research data management.

Research Setting and Participants

The questionnaires were completed by CGA Representatives who attended a meeting of the General Assembly[2] of the CGF held in 2019. In total, 68 CGAs attended the General Assembly , and 62 completed Items 1-8 of the questionnaire (91% response rate). Response rate for the open-ended question (Item 9) was lower with 40 of the 62 (65%) CGAs completing this item and offering more detailed insights into their sport, physical activity and physical education provision. At a regional level, questionnaire response rate ranged from 79% (Caribbean) to 100% (Oceania and Asia). Regional response rate to the open-ended question ranged from 20% (Americas and Asia) to 91% (Caribbean) [see Table 1].

Data Analysis

Cognisant of the seven decades of debate surrounding the appropriate analysis of rating scales (Carifio & Perla, 2008; Jamieson, 2005; Pell, 2005) the Likert Scale responses derived from this questionnaire were analysed in a manner sensitive to the ordinal, discrete, and limited range of the data associated with this mode of data collection. As there was no attempt to combine responses across the questions, each question was therefore stand-alone, analysed independently, and the resultant data analysed in accordance with what Clason and Dormody (1994) identify

Table 1: Regional response rate (based on CGA attendance at CGF General Assembly, 2019).

Region	Number of responses by CGAs in attendance (Item 1-8)	Response rate	Open-ended responses by CGA to Item 9*	Response rate
Africa	18/19	95%	12/18	67%
Americas	5/6	83%	1/5	20%
Asia	5/5	100%	1/5	20%
Caribbean	11/14	79%	10/11	91%
Europe	9/10	90%	4/9	44%
Oceania	14/14	100%	12/14	86%

* based on number of CGAs who completed Items 1-8.

as Likert-type items. Appropriate statistical procedures for Likert-type items utilized in this paper are modes, medians, and frequencies.

The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended item were coded, managed and organized manually, and were subjected to analysis in four stages (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). First, the open-ended responses were transcribed verbatim (by the first author) and read in full to obtain a broad overview of the data. This entailed the first and second author reading the transcripts in full, individually and independently, to gain an overview of the data and familiarize themselves with the vast array of responses from the CGAs. Second, the responses were coded and indexed according to indicators contained within the SDG targets. This stage again involved the first and second author analysing the transcripts independently to capture the analytically significant features of the data and improve the systematicity, communicability, and transparency of the coding process (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Third, the identified codes were clustered into a number of over-arching topics before being organized into generic themes, which form the basis of the qualitative findings presented in this paper.

Having completed the first two stages independently, the latter two stages were undertaken jointly with first and second authors combining to reflect on the qualitative data set. Acknowledging the cautions of Smith and McGannon (2018) and Braun and Clarke (2013), we avoided member checking or any form of inter-code agreement (even those considered subjective inter-coder agreement: Guest et al., 2012). Instead, our reflection consisted of conversations framed by the existing literature pertaining to the contribution of sport to the SDGs as a way of refining and confirming our themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of CGAs as a Strategic Partner in SDG Delivery and Policy

An initial finding pertinent to the role of CGAs in contributing to SDG delivery was the perceived extent to which CGAs engaged with, or were engaged by, relevant Government departments and agencies in their country for the betterment of sport, physical education, and physical activity. With the exception of one CGA from the Oceania region, all CGAs responded positively (either "strongly agree" or "agree") that they enjoyed a collaborative and positive relationship with their respective national Government.

Findings from the qualitative responses underlined the complementary nature of relationships that were evident between CGAs and national Government departments, to reinforce the centrality of CGAs as key stakeholders within the structure of sport in their respective countries. For example, a large proportion of CGAs in Oceania, the Caribbean, and in Asia indicated that they enacted a central role as consultants with a range of national Government Departments in areas as diverse as sport, health, education, and environmental matters.

Our CGA has been engaged with government to cooperate in all aspects of sport [and] we aim to consolidate a memorandum of understanding with our government in regards to sport development (Oceania CGA).

The CGA coordinates with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Youth and Sport to coordinate physical education in our schools both at primary and secondary level (Caribbean CGA).

Our CGA works closely with the National Sports Council, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Department of Environment initiating programs as well as giving support to them in relation to SDGs in sports (Africa CGA).

As Lindsey and Bitugu (2018) observe, such relationships between sport organizations and government departments is not uncommon, especially in the diffusion of policies related to sport or in circumstances where sport could be used instrumentally towards broader policy objectives. To reinforce this point, CGAs in these same regions outlined how they frequently adopted an advisory role in the creation of national sport policy. Similar sentiments were expressed by several CGAs in Europe, most pertinently in respect of their active involvement as a strategic partner on sport policy development. Responses ranged from European CGAs adopting roles as "part of the Government Sports Council" to being "a member of a functioning All Party Group on sport" in their specific country.

CGAs also reported on their familiarity with the SDGs and the importance of their contribution to achieving relevant SDG targets. Overall, 81% of CGAs responded positively ("strongly agree" [18%] and "agree" [63%] responses combined) that the leadership of their CGA was familiar with the SDGs and their relevance to sport, physical education and physical activity. However, this broadly positive message masked some interesting inter-regional variations and it was evident that the Americas region, where 44% of CGAs responded positively, did not have as positive a perspective on the familiarity of leadership with the SDGs ("strongly agree" [20%] and "agree" [20%]) as all the other regions (Range 67% [Europe] to 95%

[Africa]).

Finally, CGAs were asked to reflect upon their perceived level of responsibility for the attainment of relevant SDG targets within their respective countries. Overall, 89% of CGAs responded positively ("strongly agree" [25%] and "agree" [64%] responses combined) to this item, to indicate a broad, general agreement with this statement. However, this broadly positive message again masked some important inter-regional differences, with "strongly agree" responses ranging from a lower level of 0% for the Americas and Asia regions to 44% for Africa. Furthermore, it was evident that Europe did not have as positive a perspective on the engagement and contribution of CGAs to achieving relevant SDGs (55%) as the other regions (Range 80% [Americas] to 100% [Asia, Oceania, and Africa]).

These findings reveal that the extent to which individual CGAs regarded their strategic value as a partner in SDG-related projects and programs was based on their perceived position within the often over-crowded sport policy landscape (Hayhurst, 2009; Morgan, 2013). Indeed, as Lindsey and Chapman (2017) have observed, there is significant diversity across Commonwealth countries with regard to the location of sport within national government structures, and Lindsey and Bitugu (2018) have warned of the challenges inherent within differentiated policy landscapes. Accordingly, in low- and middle-income countries or less economically developed countries, where CGAs often doubled as the country's national Olympic committee, the influence of the CGA as a strategic partner was much more significant than that of CGAs in more developed countries, where competition from a broader assortment of competing sport policy actors was apparent (Hayhurst, 2009). Indeed, qualitative responses offered further insight into this variance. For instance, in some cases, the intent and involvement of CGAs in contributing to SDG delivery and targets was highly tangible. As an example, one CGA from the Oceania region noted:

[Our] CGA has been charged by the Government to create a National Sports Policy that will detail how the country will address its contribution to sustainable development goals.

Although none of the CGAs noted explicitly that SDG targets were too difficult to address or were beyond their current capacity, some reported that their contribution to the SDGs was more incidental than founded on considered, intentional program design. For example, a different CGA from the Oceania region revealed:

Our CGA does not currently engage in activities with the

SDGs in mind. [However], our promotion of sports and physical activity does so indirectly and includes the objectives of the SDGs.

Other CGAs, in particular those located in the Caribbean, highlighted the necessity for alignment with the SDGs to be an emerging feature of future programming and strategic intent. For instance, one CGA from the Caribbean observed how they "will redefine the SDGs with Government agencies and work to strengthen the [related programs] which exist", while another acknowledged that:

The CGA tends to play a supportive rather than an advocacy role in the [SDG] areas under consideration. There is, however, an increased awareness and urgency to become more vocal, strategic and active among the Directorate of the CGA who must now seek the buy-in from its constituents (Caribbean CGA).

The overall picture in relation to the importance of CGA involvement in contributing to the SGDs was best exemplified by one, further, Caribbean CGA who reported that their intentions were to:

Broaden the reach and tentacles of the organization and show the impact of sport beyond just "playing the game". The SDGs are centrefold for our organization and we have secured training to enable us to begin the transformation process.

Clearly, both the quantitative and qualitative findings highlight that CGAs recognize their centrality in contributing to the achievement of SDG targets. As such, it would appear that CGAs acknowledge their potential to align with the intentions of SDG 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development) and act as pivotal actors to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development (Lindsey & Darby, 2018).

Areas of Significant Contribution to the SDGs

Analysis revealed that there were several areas related to the SDGs where CGAs were utilising sport to make a significant or tangible contribution to identified targets. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the areas most evident in this respect were those that had been identified as the focus for the Commonwealth Secretariat's contribution of sport to the SDGs (Dudfield & Dingwall-Smith, 2017; Lindsey & Chapman, 2017). As such, CGAs reported significant contribution and involvement in relation to (a) advancing gender equality; (b) raising levels of physical activity (and (and thus improving physical and mental health); and (c)

developing the provision of physical education within the primary and secondary curriculum.

Advancing gender equality was the area which all CGAs perceived there to be the most regular involvement. In keeping with SDG 5 (Gender equality), CGAs were able to outline how they considered themselves accountable for commitments made to women's rights (United Nations, 2019). Specifically, 86% of CGAs reported that they were currently involved in programs or projects that intended to advance gender equality (44% regularly; 42% irregularly). Qualitative findings further supported this view, with a host of CGAs highlighting specific initiatives that were designed to promote gender equality and demonstrate how sport can be utilized to challenge gender ideology (Collins & Kay, 2014). Furthermore, the findings illustrated the importance attached to enhancing the experiences of women as a key component of many SDP programs (Collison et al., 2017).
Many responses emphasized the implementation of delivery-level initiatives to inspire female participation in sport or support specific programs designed to enable women to be more centrally involved in sports leadership. These findings illustrate a general awareness of gender-based empowerment as a key component of many SDP programs (Collison et al., 2017), and may serve as tentative evidence of the effectiveness of coordinated efforts, across national and international policy agendas, to promote gender equality. As one example, a CGA from the Oceania region remarked:

[Our] CGA advocates equality and inclusion. At the recent Pacific Games, [our] women athletes won gold medals for the first time. These athletes have been giving inspirational speeches at schools [and] at sports promotions for all.

Similarly, in the Caribbean, one CGA noted that it "has forwarded opportunities for women in coaching, women in education (scholarships) and women leadership programs", while another reported how they had "focussed on [the delivery] a specific project called Future is Female over the last quadrennial".

Other responses identified more structural imperatives such as the development of "a Women in Sport Commission" (Oceania CGA) or measures to ensure that "the rights of gender equality are enshrined in the [National Olympic Committee/CGA] Constitution" (Caribbean CGA). Similar good governance in relation to gender equality was reported by an African CGA, who listed a variety of initiatives including:

… constitutional minimum representation [on the CGA Board]; equal opportunities in education (trained 600

female sports administrators out of 1074 administrators in 6 years); key appointments for women in medical and technical commissions; all Chef de Mission at Olympics, All Africa Games, [and] Commonwealth Games are women.

Despite the apparent wave of initiatives aligned to gender equality and female empowerment across many CGAs, literature has highlighted how initiatives with this focus often lack substantive weight (Sen, 2014) or provide solutions that offer limited permanence (Eden & Wagstaff, 2021). Indeed, there was no evidence from this study to indicate how or if these various initiatives were impacting positively towards the attainment of targets within SDG 5. However, a commitment to gender equality appeared to be a central consideration for all CGAs, and of the remaining 14% of CGAs who reported that they were not currently undertaking projects to advance gender equality, all reported that they were at least considering the necessity to engage in such projects. This was exemplified by a concession from an African CGA, who responded:

Gender equality has not been too good in our CGA activities because we have very few women involved in sports but from 2019 there is now a sustainable effort to get more women into sport.

Although the measurement of sustainability remains a topic of debate among researchers, policy makers, and other stakeholders (Miola & Schiltz, 2019), it is evident that robust monitoring and evaluation of ongoing efforts to address gender inequality will be vital to a deeper understanding of how the aforementioned commitments reported by CGAs translate into tangible action and impact.

CGAs also reported on the gender identity of their CGA Board Members. Gender identity was indicated as either Male, Female or Other (see Table 2). Aggregate data from the 62 CGAs indicated that there was a total of 586 Board Members, of which 391 were identified as male, 192 as female, and 3 as other. As an overly simplistic measure of female representation (Nhamo et al., 2018), these data highlight a disparity between male and female CGA Board Members, resulting in a gender ratio of 2.04:1 (Male: Female). Although qualitative responses noted how some CGAs were making a concerted attempt to balance representation on their Boards, the data also revealed some pertinent regional differences, with female representation most prevalent in Oceania (39%) and least prevalent in Asia (23%). Of the 62 individual CGAs surveyed, only three constituted more female Board Members than male, while a further three reported an equal distribution of male and female Board Members.

Table 2: Gender identity of CGA Board Members

	Overall	Americas	Asia	Caribbean	Europe	Oceania	Africa
Male CGA Board Members	391	34	38	69	44	68	138
Female CGA Board Members	192	20	12	35	23	45	57
Other CGA Board Members	3	0	2	0	0	1	0
Total	586	54	52	104	67	114	195

Despite the proportion of female Board Members being comparatively low, overall the findings highlight that CGAs recognize their responsibility to contribute to gender equality strategies in their country (SDG 5), and specifically SDG Target 5.C (Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels). In addition, it is clear that CGAs acknowledge a commitment to meeting SDG Target 5.5.2 (increasing the proportion of women in managerial positions) and SDG Target 16.7.2 (increasing the proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive by sex, age, disability and population group).

A second area related to the SDGs where CGAs perceived that they were making a difference through sport-based approaches was in promoting and supporting participation in physical activity and healthy lifestyles (SDG 3). Although the targets related to SDG 3 are broad and far-reaching in scope, Target 3.4 is specifically concerned with the growing burden of non-communicable diseases (United Nations, 2019), a feature that aligned specifically with several of the responses from CGAs. Evidence from our data highlighted how CGAs recognized their obligations in contributing to the prevention of non-communicable diseases, including the promotion of mental health. Indeed, 76% of CGAs reported that they were currently involved in programs to promote and support participation in physical activity or projects designed to improve physical and mental health (32% regularly; 44% irregularly). Furthermore, only 2% of CGAs indicated that they were not involved and not considering involvement in such programs.

Although explicit examples of these specific programs were limited in the qualitative data, several CGAs across all regions reported that they were often advocates or advisors on physical activity programs. For example, one CGA from the Americas region noted that they "enjoy a very high profile in the community and contribute substantially to health and well-being [programs]", while a CGA from Oceania explained that they were:

… very active in advocating sport and physical activity to address the high incidence of non-communicable diseases in [their country] due largely to inactivity.

Data indicated that the majority of projects reported were concerned with enhancing physical health. However, 43% of CGAs expressed that they were currently involved in programs or projects that were aligned to improving mental health and wellbeing, either for athletes and/or the general population (7% regularly; 36% irregularly). Importantly, where tangible provision for this aspect of health was not yet evident, 48% of CGAs indicated that they were considering programs with a specific accent on mental health, with only 9% of CGAs reporting that they are not involved and not considering involvement in such programs. This represents a notable point of diversification from traditional development-centred agendas that have tended to prioritise action on epidemics of AIDS and malaria to a broader concern with the prevention of non-communicable diseases and the holistic promotion of health and wellbeing (Buse & Hawkes, 2015).

The third area where the data inferred that there was regular sport-based involvement from CGAs was in relation to the development of quality physical education and sport in schools. Drawing parallels with Paragraph 7 of the UN 2030 Agenda and the necessity to provide universal access to quality education as an example of how sport can be an "important enabler of sustainable development and peace" (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p. 10), 63% of CGAs reported that they were currently involved in programs or projects to enhance the quality of physical education and sport in schools (24% regularly; 39% irregularly). Furthermore, only 10% of CGAs indicated that they were not involved and not considering involvement in such programs.

Although there were some minor inter-regional differences, the qualitative responses indicated that initiatives related to quality education revolved around three main areas. First were initiatives designed to utilize physical education and

and sport to educate young people about the SDGs and sustainable development more generally. Aligning with SDG Target 4.7 (ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development), several CGAs expressed that they had initiated a "values through sport" project in schools. For example, one CGA outlined how their project consisted of "curriculum related resources and an Olympic Ambassador program" (Oceania CGA), while another had instigated "collaboration with the Ministry of Education and UNESCO for a value based education in [their country's] primary schools" (Africa CGA). The second area involved advocating for physical education to become a more visible or statutory element of both the primary and secondary school curriculum. CGAs across the Caribbean, Africa, and Oceania indicated that their most important role in relation to quality education was to advocate for the inclusion of physical education in the curriculum. For example, one CGA (Oceania) reported:

We are trying to put PE back into primary schools and promote sports in schools. We are also trying to insert PE in the curriculums to make sure students [can] pursue careers in sports.

Although such findings may demonstrate the value of physical education in fostering a healthy and active lifestyle (Dyson, 2014) and a commitment to providing a quality education, the lack of basic sport development infrastructure within many Commonwealth nations may signify a challenge to ensure the sustainability of such advocacy in schools Keim & Coning (2014). As such, some CGAs saw their role as one of promoting and supporting educational opportunities through sport. Often this involved the CGA working in collaboration with Government agencies and departments. For instance, in one Caribbean CGA, it was reported that:

We are actively working with the Ministry of Sport and [Ministry of] Health to implement a physical literacy and long-term athlete development program in pre-school and primary schools.

Embracing the spirit of SDG Target 4.3[3], CGA involvement in supporting quality education concerned the provision of access to further and higher education, or vocational training for sport-related careers. As example, a Caribbean CGA mentioned that they supported "several teachers colleges that prepare physical education teachers that all are engaged/employed in the school system", while an African CGA reported that they:

… were and are part of the sport administration courses at

local Higher Learning Institutions. We also facilitate and offer post-graduate courses in sport administration.

Clearly, the data highlights and reinforces the potential for sport-based interventions to contribute to educational outcomes (Bailey et al., 2009) and supports the findings of previous sport-for-development research, which is replete with examples which illustrate the educational worth of SDP projects (Coalter, 2010; Dudfield & Dingwall-Smith, 2015; Lemke, 2016). Moreover, as the United Nations (2019) observes, quality education is critical to enabling upward socioeconomic mobility and a pivotal factor to escaping poverty. Furthermore, given that disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes are reported in sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Central and Southern Asia, and the Caribbean (United Nations, 2019), it is clear that CGAs can make a significant contribution to SDG 4 and ensure inclusive quality education for all and promote lifelong learning opportunities.

SDG Target Areas of Less Significant Contribution

As noted, CGAs were asked to reflect on several other aspects related to SDG priority areas. Despite some notable outliers, many areas appeared to be more difficult for the CGAs to provide regular and sustained engagement through sport-based approaches. In relation to several of the SDG priority areas, CGAs reported how they had previously been involved in projects but were no longer able to sustain this involvement. Although the available data did not enable our analysis to make assertions as to why this was the case, more stark was the concession that many CGAs were not even considering how sport and physical activity could contribute to some of the SDGs. Of these, initiatives designed to facilitate migrant inclusion (SDG Target 10.7)[4] were the least considered by CGAs, with 43% reporting that they were not contemplating involvement in programs related to this aspect of the SDGs. That said, qualitative data highlighted how individual CGAs were delivering initiatives that focused on inclusion, to align with the principles of SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) or SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). In some cases, the focus of sport-based projects was on reducing inequality in a broad sense. In others, the focus was more specific and sought to assist with the assimilation of migrant populations or the active promotion and integration of indigenous culture within their country (Stewart-Withers et al., 2017). For instance, a CGA from Oceania reported that they hosted an annual Refugee Sports Day, while another from the same region indicated that they had been central in "supporting the implementation of a Reconciliation Action Plan" in their country. A third CGA from Oceania outlined how they utilized sport to assist in the promotion of a peaceful and

inclusive society though indigenous and traditional games (Dudfield & Dingwall-Smith 2015):

Every two years, [our country] has its national games … This activity is instrumental to promoting island and national pride, and respect and sportsmanship is promoted throughout the games (Oceania CGA).

Other SDGs where some contribution of sport-based projects in relation to relevant targets was reported were sustainable consumption and production (various Targets related to SDG 12), where 22% of CGAs reported involvement; and job creation, innovation and entrepreneurship (SDG 8—Target 8.3[5]), where 23% of CGAs reported a contribution. Interestingly, where CGAs expressed that they were involved in projects or had considered the contribution of sport to meeting one of these SDG targets, there was often a pertinence of the SDG area with a notable concern within their region or country. For example, to align with targets noted within SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) several CGAs indicated that they were engaged in sport and physical activity projects that focussed on reducing violence and diverting young people away from anti-social behaviour. As one Caribbean CGA noted:

Our CGA has conducted workshops and engaged a number of stakeholders and   community groups across the island to enhance their knowledge base in the delivery of programs geared towards trouble youths.

An aspect of the SDGs that was notable for its varied response by CGAs was SDG 13 (Climate Action). With growing concerns surrounding the urgent need to combat climate change and its impacts (United Nations, 2019), a third of CGAs (33%) indicated that they had been involved in a project to mitigate climate change. However, 23% of CGAs reported that they had not considered nor had such projects in place, with the Americas, Asian, and European CGAs reporting the least consideration of sports-based programs to facilitate climate action. Although the reasons for this limited engagement in environmental projects are unclear, it would appear that this finding corresponds with research that has observed that the physical environment has been somewhat neglected by SDP stakeholders and that environmental issues are often afforded marginal status in comparison to issues related more directly with social and economic imperatives (Guilianotti et al., 2018; Millington & Darnell, 2020).

Where some consideration of climate action was evident, often this was restricted to ensuring that CGAs complied with their international obligations in respect to climate change, akin to what Miller (2017) has described as green-washing. For example, a CGA in Africa outlined how they are conscious to "use environmentally friendly initiatives in our operating environment" to underline how CGAs often gave the appearance of environmental responsibility but, in reality, did little to advance environmental sustainability (Guilianotti et al., 2018).

That said, there was some limited evidence of a deeper engagement with climate issues. For example, a small number of CGAs reported how climate action involvement consisted of working in concert with Government to provide support, advocacy, or act as identified partners on environmental projects in their country (SDG Target 13.2[6]). For example, one CGA in Asia outlined how they had collaborated with Government and non-governmental organizations on projects to mitigate animal extinction in their country. In another example, a CGA from Africa explained:

[The] Ministry of Tourism and Environment works with our CGA on environmental issues such as protecting the environment, air, water and other related sustainable initiatives.

In other cases, CGAs were centrally involved in specific projects to educate or raise awareness of climate change issues (SDG Target 13.3[7]). For example, a CGA from Oceania highlighted a specific project (Go Green Values) which utilized athletes to promote and support activities to alleviate climate change and reduce carbon footprint, while several other CGAs indicated involvement in tree planting initiatives. As an African CGA noted, involvement in such initiatives often helped to raise the profile of their organization:

Our tree planting exercise with our sponsors all over the country has been hailed as the way forward for a sustainable climate growth.

However, despite these isolated examples, data indicated that there were a number of SDG areas that CGAs needed to consider more closely, or work to investigate the barriers to continuing activity. In addition, a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to integrating SDGs as the basis for project design and policy outcomes will be required if CGAs are to assume a leadership role in the sector. As a point of departure, individual CGAs could be encouraged to identify which elements of the SDGs are most relevant to the needs of either their country or CGF region, before moving towards the creation of focussed sport-based programs that align with the shared priorities of other national or regional stakeholders.

Conclusion

The inauguration of the SDGs provided a blueprint to enable concerted action towards addressing a range of critical challenges related to social, economic and environmental development (Spangenberg, 2017). There is extensive acceptance that sport may act as a cultural vehicle through which the SDGs may be tackled (Lemke, 2016). However, aside from small-scale evaluations of local projects that have championed the role of sport to contribute to the SDGs, there are limited empirical studies to evidence the commitment of national or global sporting organizations towards the SDGs (Svensson & Loat, 2019). To address this shortfall, this paper has sought to provide insights into the policy and practice contributions of 62 CGAs to present a baseline for current policy action towards the SDGs and provide a foundation for future strategizing.

The findings infer that there is widespread acknowledgement among CGAs that they have a pivotal role to adopt in contributing to local, national and international commitments related to the SDGs. Furthermore, there is evidence to indicate that there are considerable and noteworthy projects in place to address some SDGs, in particular concerning the advancement of gender equality, improving physical and mental health, and developing education provision. Given the constraint of space, we have applied a 'broad brush' approach to presenting these data and depicted an outline of current endeavours within the Commonwealth to connect sport with the SDGs. As such, although this article has purposefully avoided a detailed comparison of CGF regions and is limited by its width of focus in charting the current landscape, the prominent role of CGAs in many Commonwealth countries would suggest that they are well-positioned to design policy and co-ordinate strategic action in relation to sport's contribution to the SDGs at a local or national level. However, more critically, it would appear that this contribution is only focussed on a limited number of SDG areas, and that the contributions are often piecemeal or incidental rather than the result of co-ordinated, sustained involvement.

Although the use of sport to contribute to all of the SDGs would appear impractical or divert resources away from the existing work that has demonstrated considerable positive impact, there is clear potential for CGAs, and (inter)national sports organizations more broadly, to re-think previous strategic responses and establish coherent and better co-ordinated policy approaches to delivering on SDG obligations. Existing research has noted the urgent need to identify novel and evidence-based solutions to mobilize stakeholders and resources in sport for development

projects (Lindsey et al., 2019; Svensson & Loat, 2019), and Lindsey and Darby (2018) have outlined the specific challenges associated with instigating mutually and coherently agreed policy objectives. However, the identification and focus upon six of the SDGs by the Commonwealth Secretariat (Dudfield & Dingwall-Smith, 2015) provides a strategic platform for CGAs to direct attention and demonstrate their contribution to global imperatives beyond the narrow confines of sport.

Although progress towards the attainment of these six SDGs will meet with inevitable contestation from stakeholders, as they project their own interests and respond to the differing power relations of local, national and international partners (Lindsey & Darby, 2018), the findings presented in this paper provide a vital embarkation point for basing future collaborative efforts for sport to demonstrate its contribution to the SDGs. As noted, the lack of a granular level analysis of these data, to highlight noteworthy trends or differences between CGF regions or variance between high-income or low-to-middle-income nations, is a limitation of the current study, and would appear to be a logical direction for future research. Furthermore, if we assume the critical importance of partnership as the 'enabling driver' for the attainment of the SDGs, an essential next step in terms of research will be to continue to address the dearth of empirical knowledge on the perceptions of key stakeholders, and identify the extent to which partnerships are integrated as part of a wider strategic action plan on sport and sustainability.

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NOTES

1 The ten indicators identified by the CGF were Enhancing quality physical education and sport in schools; Promoting and supporting participation in physical activity and healthy lifestyles; Mental health and wellbeing for athletes and / or general population; Advancing gender equality; Reducing and address violence and anti-social behaviour; Citizenship education and education for sustainable development; Job creation, innovation and entrepreneurship; Inclusion of migrants, refuges and asylum seekers; Sustainable

consumption and production; Climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

2 Three of the 71 CGAs that comprise the CGF did not attend the General Assembly meeting.

3 SDG Target 3.4: ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education.

4 SDG Target 10.7: Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

5 SDG Target 8.3: Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

6 SDG Target 13.2: Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning.

7 SDG 13.3: Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

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