

Original Research

No parasport development without social change: An investigation of parasport development constraints in Lao People's Democratic Republic

Shinichi Nagata¹, Takahiro Sato¹, Daniel Bloyce², Yuki Nakamura³, Latsame Vithaya⁴, Hanae Endo⁵, Mayumi Saito¹, and Yoshinori Okade⁶

¹ Institute of Health and Sport Sciences, University of Tsukuba ²Department of Sport Management, University of Florida

³ Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, University of Chester

⁴ Asian Development with the Disabled Persons, Lao People's Democratic Republic

⁵ Department of Sport for All, Ministry of Education and Sport

⁶ Faculty of Health and Sport, Doshisha University

⁶ Faculty of Sport Culture, Nippon Sport Science University

Corresponding author email: nagata.shinichi.gm@u.tsukuba.ac.jp

ABSTRACT

Countries in the Global South are marginalized in the international parasport space. While international aid has contributed to the development of parasport in the Global South, the aid was often given without clear evidence of local needs. The purpose of this study was to identify the needs related to parasport development in the Lao People's Democratic Republic based on the lived experience of parasport stakeholders. As such, this paper is highly original and provides a detailed examination of a significant yet underexplored area. A total of 14 parasport stakeholders participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven para-athletes, six parasport coaches, and one administrator. Transcribed interview data were analyzed with Thematic Analysis. The findings demonstrated the tangible need for parasport equipment and standardized facilities. Although less tangible, the need for a parasport coach training system was evident for parasport development. Perhaps more latent but equally important was the need for inclusive employment, as para-athletes require an income to continue training and competing. The findings indicate that parasport development cannot be achieved by sports policy alone. There is a need for greater focus on developing a more inclusive society, which suggests the need for inter-ministerial collaborations to develop parasport.

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Parasport has been utilized as a catalyst for the disability

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rights movement as it is believed to have a positive impact on the image of people with disabilities among the general population, especially in the Global South (Akambadi et al., 2023; Haslet et al., 2023; Nagata et al., 2023). In particular, the impact increases when athletes representing their nation achieve higher performance levels (Bruce, 2014; Brooke & Khoo, 2021; Nagata et al., 2023). As the Paralympic Movement spreads across the world, countries in the Global South, such as those in Southeast Asia, have become eager to develop parasport within their borders (Brook & Khoo, 2021; Nagata et al., 2023). However, development disparity among the Global South is apparent, as only seven (approximately 23%) developing countries were ranked within the top 30 based on earned medals in the 2024 Paralympic Games (Paris 2024 Paralympics, 2024a). In the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games, China, South Korea, and Japan made up nearly 45% of participants from 48 countries in the Asia region, and 24 of the 48 National Paralympic Committees sent five or fewer athletes (calculated from information from Paris 2024 Paralympics [2024b]). Clearly, there are “a small number of behemoths overwhelming a large number of also-rans” (Darcy, 2018, p. 221). This may be due to a lack of resources as developing high-performance parasport requires significant investment for sport equipment (e.g., prosthetics, sport wheelchairs, etc.), accessible facilities, and transportation (Dehghansai et al., 2020; Novak, 2017; Ojwang et al., 2025). To focus on developing greater equity in global parasport development, and possibly with wider social inclusion of people with disabilities, how a country with limited resources can establish more sustainable parasport development must be investigated.

As parasport development requires significant financial resources, Global North nations often play roles as investors (Khoo, 2016; Novak, 2017; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). The concern in this context, however, is the unsustainable practices of such international aid (Novak, 2017). Researchers argue that the Global North's one-time financial assistance is too common and criticize it as a "helicopter approach" (Schulenkorf et al., 2016), which does not have a significant, sustainable effect on a parasport development outcome (Townsend et al., 2020). While previous research has highlighted what not to do, there is a lack of knowledge about what needs to be done for parasport development in a resource-limited Global South country. In particular, there is a lack of literature concerning the perceptions of Global South parasport stakeholders regarding their developmental needs, despite researchers acknowledging that the low-income context requires a better understanding (Haslett et al., 2023; Swartz, 2022). Filling this knowledge gap can help identify what investment is needed for the local parasport development and possibly reduce the helicopter approach. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify the parasport stakeholders' – namely, para-athletes, coaches, and administrators – perceptions of needs regarding parasport development. The current study focuses on Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), which is a part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and is classified as a United Nations' Least Developed Country (United Nations, 2024). As Lao PDR is also engaging in more serious parasport development (Endo & Mano, 2020; Nagata et al., 2023), we considered Lao PDR as an appropriate research target for this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parasport Development

Along with increasing attention from policymakers, research on parasport development aimed at achieving international success at the Paralympics is growing rapidly (Dehghansai et al., 2020; Dehghansai et al., 2023; Pankowiak et al., 2023; Patatas et al., 2020). Researchers agree that national level parasport policy is critical for success on international stages (Pankowiak et al., 2023; Patatas et al., 2020). For example, similar to the sporting systems established for non-disabled counterparts, building developmental pathways for para-athletes can facilitate high-performance parasport development (Patatas et al., 2020). This may include increasing societal exposure to parasport so that people with disabilities are more attracted to participate, establishing federations to provide opportunities to compete at local and regional levels, supporting elite para-athletes to travel and compete, and

offering resources for retiring athletes to transition their careers (Patatas et al., 2020). However, researchers suggested low-income Global South countries need greater levels of support for key resources such as sport wheelchairs and practice venues/facilities that meet the Paralympic standards, to make sure parasport athletes can continue playing and prepare for official competitions (Brittain, 2019; Novak, 2017; Ojwang et al., 2025; Richardson et al., 2017). However, the issue of parasport resources in the Global South is understudied and requires more empirical evidence, which can be constructed through an investigation of the bottom-up needs related to parasport development.

Another factor that has been identified as key for parasport development is coaching development (De Bosscher et al., 2015; Patatas et al., 2018). Parasport coaching requires parasport-specific knowledge about the types and levels of disability, as well as how these affect athletic performance, Paralympic sport classification, and parasport equipment (Duarte et al., 2018; Pankowiak et al., 2023). Therefore, providing training for coaches to better support athletes with disabilities is necessary. To that end, some coaches may be directed to utilize existing parasport coaching courses provided by the International Paralympic Committee, the Coaching Association of Canada, and Sport Coach UK (Bentzen et al., 2020; Dehghansai et al., 2020; Pankowiak et al., 2023). However, at this point, these are among the few formal training opportunities available to parasport coaches in the most advanced countries of the Global North, and many cannot access such training due to limited availability and high cost (Bentzen et al., 2020). Thus, researchers suggest that policymakers should facilitate the development of parasport coaching through greater interaction among existing parasport coaches (Duarte et al., 2018; Pankowiak et al., 2023). At this point, research in parasport coaching circumstances in the Global South countries has been quite limited. As most coaching research has been conducted in the Global North, and parasport coach training resources are more accessible in wealthier nations (Bentzen et al., 2020), there is a lack of understanding of the low-income context.

Global North Investment in Global South Parasport

The Global North's parasport investments in the Global South often take the form of sport for development, which is defined as "the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, ... [and] the social inclusion of the disadvantaged" (Lyras & Welty Peachy, 2011, p. 311). Sport for development efforts in Global South countries appears to be problematic as Zipp and Nauright (2018) stated:

Historically, international SDP [sport for development and peace] has been a Global North to Global South movement with athletes, NGOs and sport organisations from Europe and North America developing sport-based interventions in impoverished countries and communities (most often in sub-Saharan Africa). These relationships reflect deeply troubling colonial histories and may reinforce long-standing dependencies whilst overlooking important socio-cultural norms, such as gender roles. (p. 35)

In addition, the investment amount from sport for development organizations can be inconsistent because the international sport for development effort is heavily influenced by domestic politics and securing continued funding is challenging (Bauer & Moustakas, 2024).

While studies on sport for development have been increasing, an integrated review found that research on parasport in the Global South is quite limited (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). Devine and colleagues (2017) reported on a sport for development program aimed at promoting parasport development conducted by the Australian Sports Commission. Their program aimed to increase regular participation in parasport and improve health-related behaviors of, and attitudes toward, people with disabilities. Devine et al. (2017) found that the program contributed to improved self-worth, well-being, and inclusion as key outcomes. Novak (2017), however, found that international parasport development aids, particularly those focused on elite parasport, resulted in dependence on these aids, which makes this unsustainable. Parasport development in African nations has been facilitated by foreign aid from organizations such as UK Sport, the United States Agency for International Development, and the International Paralympic Committee, as well as various national governments that have included parasport as part of their government agendas (Novak, 2017). However, the more the aim is for better performance in elite parasport, the more costly parasport equipment (e.g., prosthetics, sport wheelchairs, facilities) becomes. This, combined with a lack of access to specific parasport coaching knowledge domestically, leads to an increased dependence on international parasport aid and technical assistance (Mojtahedi & Katsui, 2018; Novak, 2017), which is unsustainable. It is unclear whether these aids are given based on the opinions of athletes, coaches, and administrators, who engage in parasport daily.

The Status of Para-Athletes in Lao PDR

Parasport research focusing on Lao PDR is lacking, which no doubt relates to a severe deficiency in opportunities to play sport among people with disabilities. According to

Phanthalangsy (2023), people with disability in Lao PDR have been heavily stigmatized and are largely excluded from every domain of life, including sport. Until recently, the Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) have played a crucial role in promoting sporting activities among people with disabilities in Lao PDR (Sánchez Rodríguez et al., 2021). Another key player for parasport development in Lao PDR was an international NGO, Asian Development with the Disabled Persons (ADDP), which has provided financial support to athletes, training for parasport coaches, and also consultations with the Ministry of Education and Sport, which administer parasport in Lao PDR (Endo & Mano, 2020).

Historically, in Lao PDR, as elsewhere, sport has been regarded as an embodiment of masculinity and the demonstration of national progress (Creak, 2015). While government investment in sport has been quite limited, parasport can be a more accessible path to international recognition compared to the Olympics and other international sports competitions (Nagata et al., 2023). Consequently, the government appears to regard parasport as a welcome opportunity for promotion (Freeman, 2012). Recently, the Ministry of Education and Sports of Lao PDR established the Department of Sport for All (DOSA), which focuses on providing opportunities for all Lao citizens, including people with disabilities, to have equitable access to sport (Ministry of Education and Sport of Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2020).

Summary and Research Question

As highlighted above, there is a disparity in parasport development, with the Global South being marginalized (e.g., Darcy, 2018). The inadequacy of parasport equipment, standardized facilities, and possibly coach training has been suggested in the literature (Novak, 2017; Ojwang et al., 2025; Richardson et al., 2017), but this lacks empirical evidence. Global North organizations often provide international aid for parasport development in Global South countries; however, some practices, such as the one-time donation of parasport equipment, have limited effect on actual, sustainable parasport development in the country (Novak, 2017; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). The problem resides in the lack of understanding of parasport developmental needs, such as equipment, facilities, coaching, and possibly other factors, constructed by parasport stakeholders who have lived experience of the local parasport context. Such culturally informed knowledge in the context of the Global South is deemed critical for effective parasport development (Swartz, 2022). The current study focuses on Lao PDR – one of the Least Developed Countries categorized by the UN (2024) – with

the following research question: What do para-athletes, coaches, and administrators perceive as necessary for parasport development in Lao PDR and why?

METHOD

Research Design

The current study employed a qualitative research design, as it is suitable for an exploratory goal of generating new knowledge about a topic that has been understudied (Ravitch & Carl, 2021), such as parasport development in the Global South. The qualitative research design enabled us to engage with the lived experiences of Lao parasport stakeholders, including daily struggles and challenges faced as coaches, para-athletes, or administrators, through direct interactions with research participants. Additionally, this research design can facilitate an understanding of the local context, which, as argued, is necessary to advance knowledge (Swartz, 2022). We adopt a constructionist epistemology, which goes along well with Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach recognizes researchers having an active role in interpreting the narratives and generating coherent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For this study, we highlight the latent needs of parasport development from its interpretive, inductive approach. The research protocol was approved by the Nippon Sport Science University Institutional Review Board.

Participants

In this study, we conducted interviews with individuals from three stakeholder groups: athletes, coaches, and administrators. For the recruitment of interview participants, we consulted with the DOSA, the Ministry of Physical Education and Sport of Lao PDR. We asked them to nominate participants for the study from various groups, including active para-athletes who were currently competing, coaches involved in both daily practices and competitions, and administrators overseeing parasport from a governmental perspective. An invitation to participate was subsequently sent to all nominated individuals, and communication was mediated through the DOSA. As a result, a total of 14 individuals were invited and all agreed to be interviewed: seven para-athletes from a range of sports (boccia, goalball, powerlifting, swimming, track & field, wheelchair basketball, and blind football); six coaches (from boccia, goalball, powerlifting, swimming, wheelchair basketball, and blind football); and one Vientiane Capital governmental officer who administered parasport. There were three female para-athletes and four male para-athletes. All the coaches and the administrator were males. Other

relevant details of our participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic information of participants

ID	Role	Sport	Age	Gender
A1	Para-athlete	Boccia	20s	Female
A2	Para-athlete	Wheelchair Basketball	30s	Female
A3	Para-athlete	Powerlifting	30s	Female
A4	Para-athlete	Track and Field	20s	Male
A5	Para-athlete	Swimming	30s	Male
A6	Para-athlete	Blind Football	30s	Male
A7	Para-athlete	Goalball	20s	Male
C1	Coach	Wheelchair Basketball	50s	Male
C2	Coach	Goalball	40s	Male
C3	Coach	Swimming	40s	Male
C4	Coach	Powerlifting	60s	Male
C5	Coach	Blind Football	30s	Male
C6	Coach	Boccia	40s	Male
G1	Administrator	Vientiane Capital	30s	Male

Participants were asked to come to a research venue, specifically a conference room at the DOSA office, where individual interviews were conducted. At the venue, these participants were also invited to the information session where we exchanged information about parasport development, which allowed us to build rapport with the interviewees. Participants provided informed consent to participate in this study to share their thoughts, perspectives, and experiences related to parasport.

Interviews

An interview guide was developed using existing literature on parasport development (e.g., Brittain, 2019; Dehgansai et al., 2020; Patatas et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2017). The interview questions included experience of being a para-athlete or a coach of parasport in Lao PDR, how they felt they were treated in parasport and wider society, their opinion about financial support and retirement, and their opinions about policy changes needed. Using the developed semi-structured interview guide, the first and second authors conducted individual in-person interviews in August 2023. As the interviewers were not able to speak Lao, we conversed with interviewees through a professional

translator who translated between Lao and English. The translator was a Lao national who grew up in Lao PDR and received higher education in the United States. The interviews lasted an average of 62 minutes, with a range of 42 to 79 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Researcher Description

For this study, the first author and second author conducted all the interviews. Both were Japanese researchers with experience in parasport and international development through sport. Both researchers had an excellent command of English as they had completed academic degrees in the United States. The first author led thematic analysis and developed the first draft of the manuscript. The second author and the third author, who is British and an expert in sport policy, contributed to developing the interview guide, analyzing the data, and revising the paper. The fourth author was a Japanese NGO worker with extensive experience engaging in parasport development in Lao PDR. She reviewed the analysis, provided relevant literature, and revised the paper. The fifth author was a Lao native and parasport administrator in Lao PDR and reviewed and contributed to the paper. The inclusion of the local individuals enabled us to discuss the research findings relevant to the local context.

Data analysis

We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to analyze the interview transcripts. The basic strategy of this analytical process is to generate meaningful themes based on interpretations of the narratives. The first, second, and third authors read the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the narratives and met to discuss what stood out. Based on the discussion, the first author developed a list of codes and coded the interview transcripts. Along with coding, a new code was created as needed. After the coding was completed, the first author generated candidate themes and presented them to the second and third authors. With their feedback, the first author revised the themes. Once the themes were established, the fourth author, an NGO worker in Lao PDR, reviewed the themes and quotes, providing further feedback. Finally, the first author reviewed the themes and transcripts to confirm that the themes represent the narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify perceived needs for parasport development in Lao PDR by exploring the experiences and opinions of parasport stakeholders –

athletes, coaches, and administrators. We generated three interrelated themes from thematic analysis: (a) the need for parasport equipment and infrastructure: the consequence of resource poverty, (b) the need for coaching knowledge: the lack of sport-specific parasport coach training, and (c) the need for income: labor equity for sustainable parasport development. These themes uncovered key issues in parasport development in the Global South, which responds to the call for such investigation by Swartz (2022). We will now discuss each theme in turn.

The Need for Parasport Equipment and Infrastructure: The Consequence of Resource Poverty

Lao parasport stakeholders consider the lack of parasport equipment, such as sport prosthetics and wheelchairs, and parasport facilities to be major constraints for parasport development in Lao PDR. A blind football athlete (A6) said that “we do not have a proper pitch ... and also the equipment, like the blindfolds, the balls, the knee protectors, and other protectors that will be needed, but the most important one will be the border, the wall.” Participant C5, who was a blind football coach, explained that a proper parasport facility set-up is lacking, and it causes risks for injuries when athletes practice blind football:

I need support to build a rebound panel [a board that runs around the pitch to help provide a reference point for the athletes], because we need to ensure safety to prevent any injuries. We also need support in terms of the balls themselves, the protective gears, the blindfolds... My concern is that elite athletes are facing risks while playing blind football, because I know that there are some athletes with disabilities who are afraid of getting injured when they play in the game.

Another participant (C2), who was a goalball coach, similarly said that they “don’t have standard court for goalball in Lao PDR... The surface is not designed for goalball.” Even worse, because they had no way but to use a public sport facility for goalball practice, they need to share the gym with able-bodied local citizens, which is not desirable:

When our team practices, we have to share the court and practice together with other people without disabilities. One challenge is that the surface and structure of the court is not designed to play goalball. ... When people without disabilities and para-athletes share the same court, our players are visually impaired, but people without disabilities are not quiet and silent, they talk and speak, so para-athletes were distracted to focus and lost concentration during the practice. Regarding rules of

goalball, all players must be silent and quiet, so that para-athletes can focus on sounds from ball. (C2)

Clearly, the facility set-up was a significant constraint that undermined the quality of goalball practice. Similar claims were made by a parasport swimming coach (C3): “I want to share is that we are searching for more equipment, facilities, and support, even swimming pool, that is up to a standard.” In addition to equipment and facilities, human resources can be a major constraint. Participant A4, who was a sprinter with a visual impairment explained:

I do not have any companions for para-athletes with visual impairment. Therefore, there are unexpected incidents happening. For example, some people walked casually and blocked me during practice. When I increase my speed when I run, sometimes I have an accident and injuries. In the past, I mentioned that I had a Japanese volunteer who supported me or assisted me during practices. In Laos, when we have no competition, we do not have any coaches or support team at all... Regular days, I needed to practice by myself.

Participants reported that they could not practice appropriately due to the inadequate physical environment, and the problem of shared use of the facilities that were available.

To develop parasport, sport equipment and facilities specific to parasport are required (Patatas et al., 2020), which comes at a significant cost. As Lao PDR is categorized as one of the most economically disadvantaged countries (the United Nations, 2024), our findings of the parasport equipment and facilities needs are rather obvious. In fact, the need for equipment and facilities has been a consistent problem for parasport development in ASEAN countries (Wilson & Khoo, 2013) and other Global South nations (e.g., Novak, 2017). The poor success of resource-poor countries at the Paralympics compared to resource-rich countries is well known (e.g., Brittain, 2019; Darcy, 2018). We argue that such resource poverty leads to lower performance in parasport, in part because their facilities are not ideal, and the risk of injury may be higher. Athletes may not be able to practice with maximum effort as they do not want to get injured. Additionally, the practice setting differs significantly from real-world competition, and the learning may not be effectively transferred.

Regarding how this problem of resource poverty should be addressed, Nagata et al. (2023) demonstrated that achieving good results in regional and international games can increase the motivation of private funders. However, this is something of a double bind for Lao PDR as they are far less likely to be successful due to the resource poverty in the

first place. Another possible avenue is international aid. Foreign aid can help fund expensive parasport equipment and build modern facilities, which have been common ways to develop parasport in the Global South (Novak, 2017). While such an approach – often criticized as a “helicopter approach” (Schulenkorf et al., 2016) – can temporarily fulfill certain needs, this is not a sustainable way to achieve development objectives (Bauer & Moustakas, 2024). Furthermore, expensive parasport equipment and facilities cannot be purchased by the locals and there is no way but to become dependent on aid for future development (Haslett et al., 2023; Novak, 2017). Undoubtedly, the equipment and facility needs are tangible and urgent, but greater dependency may be generated if international aid is the only way for Lao PDR to fuel parasport development. As others have claimed, pursuing parasport high-performance reproduces Global South countries’ reliance on the Global North (Darcy, 2018; Novak, 2017; Swartz, 2022). It may be time to question parasport development that is oriented toward materialistic pursuits. The next theme suggests possibilities for more meaningful parasport developmental needs.

The Need for Coaching Knowledge: The Lack of Sport-Specific Parasport Coach Training

The second theme concerns a less tangible constraint, the coaches’ knowledge. Coaches say that they did not receive any official training to be a coach. C6, who was a Boccia coach, said:

I only had the basic training on Boccia... I haven't had any professional training or a coaching certificate. I do want to get one, but I don't think we have the budget to support coaches to get this type of training.

Similarly, wheelchair basketball coach, C1, stated:

I am not formally trained to be a coach. I became a coach because of my past history in being an athlete myself. I did some training but not a lot. I would not consider it as advance training and I do not have any coaching certificate.

As C5, who was a blind football coach, mentioned: “I really want to know which division or sectors or which international organization to endorse this certificate or the course because we don't have here in Laos for sure.” As it appears coach training is not available in Lao PDR, they need to seek coach training in other ways. One avenue is receiving training in other countries. Some of the neighboring countries are more advanced in sport coaching and many coaches are trained in Thailand, for example. As

C1 said: “in Thailand, they always have the wheelchair basketball clinics. Each session will run for two days, then you would do a practice and the discussion there.” Furthermore, as a powerlifting coach, C4, said, “I found, in Thailand, they are going to do this test for a certificate, and I have proposed to the NPC [National Paralympic Committee] to send two of our coaches to get training and to get the certificate to be licensed coaches.”

Developing coaches' qualifications and knowledge might be where international aid can be applied more effectively. Some coaches had received coach training from parasport experts deployed by a governmental organization, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), or a non-governmental organization, Asian Development with the Disabled Persons (ADDP), from Japan. Goalball coach, C2, said:

We received support from ADDP, Japan, back in the day, who sent goalball experts to teach us, focusing on two skills: teaching skill and coaching skill for the Lao coaches and also to teach the athletes as well in 2008... then later, in the year 2018, I had a training from JICA who sent the Japanese experts to train us on being a coach properly.

Blind football coach, C5, also mentioned, “ADDP conducted a workshop in promoting skills for a para-athlete. It was the pathway for me to become a coach, and then I have led so many para-athletes to join and participate in a lot of competitions in international events.”

In Lao PDR, several government officers serve as coaches for parasport. A2, a wheelchair basketball athlete, pointed out “the current practice in NPC here is that when the staff, the coaches, the administrators, they join the national team to go into events, these people are sometimes not capable people in that sport.” The Vientiane Capital administrator, G1, expressed his concerns about the knowledge and skills of the current coaches and advocated for further training:

I know that government officers serve as coaches in the national team and travel with para-athletes to international competitions. We are not capable coaches in that sport. We don't think we are highly qualified coaches. I think all coaches should receive training and learn how to work with para-athletes and how to deal with any liability cases. I think that coaches should be specialized and respected by para-athletes.

The current study provides evidence that coach training is a pressing need for parasport development in Lao PDR. Our findings are unique because reports on parasport coaching are mostly from North America, Europe, or Australia, and

rarely from Global South nations (Bentzen et al., 2020). The need to produce more parasport coaches has been discussed in Global North parasport policy research (De Bosscher et al., 2015) and a recent study more clearly claimed that the system of training for coaches should be established for parasport development (Pankowiak et al., 2023). Our findings for a Global South nation align with the importance of providing advanced and specialized training opportunities for parasport coaches. Although a lack of such training opportunities and qualifications is not uncommon, even in the Global North. An official coach training system has been established only in a few areas (Taylor et al., 2015; Bentzen et al., 2020), such as Canada's National Coaching Certificate Programs, the emerging Para-Disability Coach Education and Learning Project of the European Union, and some sport-specific programs by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) in para-athletics and National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) coaching courses. It is not clear, however, to what extent the above training can help with high-performance coaching. On the other hand, developing coach training systems can increase knowledge about disability, sport classification, and parasport equipment (Duarte et al., 2018; Pankowiak et al., 2023), which might not only facilitate effective training but also help establish safer sporting environments for para-athletes (Rutland et al., 2022).

Although the coach training deficiency was identified, addressing this issue would require significant groundwork. In fact, systematic coach training for parasport coaches in the Global North is also in its infancy because coach development heavily relies on informal training such as mentoring and learning through personal experiences and non-formal training such as at conferences and seminars (Bentzen et al., 2020; Duarte et al., 2018; Townsend et al., 2022). While attending the existing coach training sessions might fulfill the need to some degree, it may not be realistic due to language barriers. Thus, a first step for Lao parasport development could be to develop coaching manuals for specific parasports and to conduct workshops to disseminate them (Cregan et al., 2007). The development of coaching manuals may require collaboration between Lao coaches and international experts, which could be an area where foreign aid can contribute funding more sustainably. Furthermore, assistance for Lao parasport coaches to engage in active networking with other parasport coaches in other countries could improve the standard of coaching in Lao PDR (Dehghansai et al., 2020). For this exchange of coaching knowledge to occur, language learning support may be needed because the Lao people typically do not have high English language proficiency, a necessity in networking (Achren & Kittiphanh, 2020). While it is a more ethical approach than simply providing materials to the

locals, building the system for coach education must still be largely reliant on capital from Global North nations for its initial development. Thus, like the materialistic pursuits, it involves risk, leading to dependency. If not parasport materials or coaching education, what are some other possible ways to facilitate the development of parasport? We discuss the need for wider societal development issues next.

The Need for Income: Labor Equity for Sustainable Parasport Development

The third theme, societal environment as a constraint, demonstrated that social change, particularly in the Lao PDR society, is necessary for continuing parasport development, enabling athletes to maintain their livelihoods. To keep competing as an athlete, they need to pay for related expenses such as travel and nutrition, as athletes mentioned: “for travel, for example, from my house to the training center, I spend all my money...” (A5, para-swimmer); “I mean, the budget of nutrition and stuff. Most of the times, I am self-funded” (A4, track and field athlete). However, there is not a high expectation to earn money from sport among athletes as “para-athletes don't consider sports as a profession” (A7, Goalball athlete) because “we cannot make a sport for living here in Laos” (A4, Track and Field athlete). Moreover, people with disabilities in Lao PDR do not have financial aid: “In Laos, if you are a disabled person, you don't have a welfare compared to other countries. You don't get a monthly allowance” (C3, Swimming coach). Thus, to keep competing as an athlete, they need a job for sustainable income. However, for people with disabilities in Laos, getting a job is not easy. As A7, a goalball athlete, mentioned: “people have pessimistic thoughts, ... they [people with disabilities] won't be able to find jobs.” Certainly, athletes expressed a feeling of exclusion from employment: “I mean, I would say in another country, especially abroad or Western, they really include the people with disability. But here, I feel isolated sometimes” (A3, powerlifting athlete). We acknowledge that even in the West (or Global North) there is still not the kind of parity this athlete implies in employment for people with disabilities (Barnes, 2019). Nevertheless, the above quote demonstrates the disconnect the athlete feels from broader society in Lao. But, through sport, athletes appear to be more empowered and willing to work: “when they are engaged in sports, they don't just stay at home, they don't have the stigma anymore, and this could lead them to have future career and jobs” (C1, wheelchair basketball). So, what is needed is “the inclusiveness in the policy, ... for career pathway” (C5, blind football coach). Envisioning such policy change, Boccia coach (C6) said:

I want to have the resources to gather the athletes to help them train. That would be the foundation one. We need to provide accommodation facilities. We need to help them to engage in income generation activity. Some sort of vocation or other profession, like working in a cafe, serving or making coffee.

Athletes consider jobs not only necessary for income, but also for opportunities for personal development. Boccia athlete (A1) said:

I want our association to be able to not only provide the sports but also skill development, and also jobs, so that para-athletes can both play sports and also work, and they can enjoy and be happy. ... I want people to have a better future. I want them to have daily jobs. I want them to be able to develop themselves.

For parasport development, the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce is not enough. It is because, even if they are employed, their employer may not be supportive of them continuing to play sport to a competitively high standard. As reported by the powerlifting coach, C4, some employers were not happy when athletes left early for sport practice: “some private sector, they would not allow the time for their workers to go to practice like this, for example, and if they do, they may get fired from the job.”

In summary, employment opportunities for parasport athletes are a significant constraint to parasport development. While some researchers have advocated for policies and laws that enable people with disabilities to access sports facilities and programs (Dehghansai et al., 2020), the issue of employment for people with disabilities presents a distinct dimension, and this important issue has been overlooked in parasport development research elsewhere. It is ironic because, according to the IPC (2024), employment should be considered as one of the key agendas toward the goal of an inclusive society. The reason for the oversight may be that most parasport development research has been conducted by researchers from the Global North (e.g., Dehghansai et al., 2020; Patatas et al., 2020; Pankowiak et al., 2023), where some funding may be available for some elite-level para-athletes without them engaging in income-generating activities. On the other hand, as a para swim coach mentioned, people do not receive social security benefits in Lao PDR, and there is no money for the Lao government to support para-athletes full-time. In Lao PDR, equal employment opportunities are necessary for sustainable parasport development because the key stakeholder – para-athletes – cannot continue playing without that.

Enhancing employment of people with disabilities cannot be done with sport alone. In other words, there is no generalizable evidence that involvement in sport increases employability (Coalter et al., 2020). Even mega-events such as the Paralympics have had a quite limited effect on the local employment policies and practice as employment in a completely different domain from sport (Goh, 2020). As demonstrated in a sport for development context, direct intervention on the target development outcomes is necessary to leverage the impact of sport and achieve the intended outcomes (Levermore, 2010; Warner et al., 2020). It is true that, in the Global South nations, researchers report changes in the image of disability within the general population after seeing people with disabilities play sport (Akambadi et al., 2023; De Souza & Brittain, 2022; Nagata et al., 2023). This is significant as the image of them being weak and incompetent is often one of the constraining factors of employment (Khounpaseuth, 2024). Still, many other factors need to be addressed to improve the employment status in Lao PDR, such as increasing accessibility, particularly in areas like accessible toilets and transportation (Swartz, 2022). In the case of Lao PDR, inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral collaborations across the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and other NGOs would be necessary to move this agenda forward.

Implications

The current study identified the needs for parasport development in terms of infrastructure and equipment, coach education systems, and more inclusive employment systems within the broader society. While all of these are indeed important to consider for more sustainable parasport development, policymakers and international development aid organizations should consider how their interventions are implemented. In addition to contributing materials such as sport wheelchairs and prosthetics, as well as parasport facilities, targeted development is needed to improve the system for parasport coach education. Particularly, creating a training system with local stakeholders can have a more sustainable impact. For example, policy makers and international aid organizations can assist in developing a local coach training system by funding coaching experts from outside Lao PDR to work in the country for an extended period. Such developmental activities would likely have a significant and more sustainable impact on parasport athletes and coaches in Lao PDR. Helping to fund Lao coaches to make extended visits to other countries where parasport coaching is more advanced might accelerate the development process. But, without greater change in contributing to a more inclusive society in Lao more generally, these

suggestions would, inevitably, be limited. The Lao PDR government can engage in campaigns to promote inclusive employment throughout the wider society. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare can identify individuals with disabilities in local communities, and the Ministry of Education and Sport can provide them with education to enhance their employability. Additionally, Lao policymakers need to raise awareness about inclusive employment and create a system to promote the hiring of people with disabilities. International development organizations could leverage the generally positive image of sport to help make employment more accessible to all people with disabilities.

Limitations

While the findings shed light on a rarely studied parasport development in the Global South, which was done by a diverse team of local and international practitioners and academics, which was a strength of the study, we acknowledge some limitations. We had only one athlete and one coach from each sport. Having a small number of individuals in each sport might have led us to overlook important needs for each sport. Considering the heterogeneity across parasport (Patatas et al., 2020), future research should investigate parasport-specific development needs in the Global South. Additionally, interviews were conducted through a translator, which may have resulted in a loss of meaning during the translation process. Although the individual used was an experienced professional translator, and the translator asked the interviewees if there were any questions about the technical terms, very nuanced expressions may still have been lost.

CONCLUSION

The parasport stakeholders in our study argued that tangible, physical resources such as equipment and facilities are fundamental for parasport development in Lao PDR, but might not be enough on their own for sustainable development. Beyond that, parasport development in Lao PDR requires a system of coaching development. Furthermore, considering sustainability, wider societal changes, and policies that encourage such change, it is necessary to promote inclusion for people with disabilities in employment settings that provide a consistent income for continued parasport development. The findings demonstrated that in Lao PDR, a country in the Global South, there are considerable constraints related to facilities, equipment, and coach education for parasport development. Competing in parasport requires expensive equipment and knowledge from the Global North, which systematically excludes large parts of the Global South. As Brittain (2019)

argued, there is a need for the IPC to address the tendency to rely on resource-richness and the pursuit of high-performance parasport. It suggests that it does not aid local parasport development but rather fosters a dependency on aid. We argue that what is lacking – as our study participants claimed – is local disability rights policy improvements (e.g., disability employment policies), but the IPC rarely combines this with their programs. As such, this paper is highly original and provides an initial, detailed examination of a highly significant but little-studied area. While more studies are needed to unpack the needs in parasport development, sport for development organizations should consider the sustainability of parasport development, which may require development alongside non-sport domains.

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