

## Chapter 7

# Evaluating the Contribution Sport Makes to Development Objectives in the Pacific

---

*Dr Allison Simons*

It is widely acknowledged that there is only limited long-term and systematic research into the effectiveness of sport as a tool for development outcomes. In response the Australian government, through a partnership between the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), has invested approximately A\$2 million to assess the contribution of sport to development outcomes in the Pacific and build the capacity of partners to deliver effective programmes. This investment underpins Australia's commitment to its aid programme, delivering results through evidence-based policy and programmes.

This chapter serves as a case study of this initiative, and includes preliminary findings on the contribution of the Australian Sports Outreach Program (ASOP) initiative to development objectives in the Pacific, drawing on research and data collected to date.

### 7.1 Introduction and background

The Australian Sports Outreach Program (ASOP) is an Australian government initiative that aims to build the capacity of partners to plan and conduct quality sport-based activities that address locally identified development priorities. This programme, which started in 2006, is funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and is delivered by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC).

ASOP Pacific Country Programs are delivered with government and civil society partners in seven Pacific countries: Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Through these programmes, ASOP seeks to address three high-level outcomes:

- an increase in healthy behaviours across the Pacific;
- an improvement in social inclusion outcomes for youth, people with disabilities and women; and
- an improvement in social cohesion.

The ASC has engaged Sustineo (a project management, assurance and evaluation professional services firm) to undertake three separate, but interrelated activities:

- to develop and enhance participatory monitoring and evaluation systems to meet the operational needs of the ASOP Pacific Country Programs, and which build local capacity for reflective learning;
- to test whether the ASOP Pacific Country Programs have achieved their stated objectives (that is, their effectiveness) and to ascertain whether there are better ways of achieving these objectives (that is, their efficiency); and
- to contribute to the evidence base for the case for sport in a development context through research.

The focus of this chapter is on the results of the research activities conducted to date, in order to provide some interim insights regarding the contribution of the ASOP Pacific Country Programs to development outcomes in the Pacific.

## 7.2 Impact of the ASOP Pacific Country Programs

Many claims have been made about the power of sport to contribute to a wide range of social outcomes, but these claims often lack the support of sound evidence (Donnelly et al. 2011). The ‘vacuum created by a lack of systematic and long-term studies’ (Massao and Straume 2011) means that policy-makers often lack the information required to make decisions about sport for development programmes, and about sport for development as a development approach more generally.

The research funded by the ASC across the Pacific will help address this empirical vacuum by building an evidence base for sport for development in the Pacific, in order to assess the impact of the ASOP Pacific Country Programs’ activities. The evidence

gathered can also be used to design better sport for development interventions in the future.

Between June 2012 and February 2013, research was undertaken in Tonga, Vanuatu and Nauru. This research represents the first stage of a multi-year research programme, which will conclude in June 2014.

Through a mixed-method approach that employs both quantitative and qualitative activities, the research seeks to address three main questions:

- How, and to what extent, have the ASOP Pacific Country Programs contributed to a growth in sustained healthy behaviours?
- How, and to what extent, have the ASOP Pacific Country Programs contributed to improving social cohesion?
- How, and to what extent, have the ASOP Pacific Country Programs contributed to improving social inclusion?

Provisional answers to the three research questions – based on the results of the quantitative research in Tonga and the qualitative research in Vanuatu, Tonga and Nauru – are provided below:

***How, and to what extent, have the ASOP Pacific Country Programs contributed to a growth in sustained healthy behaviours?***

The main healthy behaviour promoted by the ASOP Pacific Country Programs is an increase in physical activity through participation in sport. Other healthy behaviours promoted by the programme include a reduction in kava, alcohol and tobacco consumption and the promotion of a healthy diet. The exact focus of each programme differs depending on locally defined priorities. Research into the impact of the ASOP Pacific Country Programs on improving healthy behaviours was undertaken in Tonga, Vanuatu and Nauru. Only the results from Tonga and Vanuatu are presented here in regards to health-related data, as the Nauru research was still underway at the time of writing.

The ASOP Vanuatu programme (known locally as ‘Nabanga’) has contributed to a significant rise in physical activity for youth and adults. Knowledge and awareness of the benefits of healthy behaviours is also very high and directly linked to the Nabanga programme. This is particularly important considering the lack of health promotion and basic service provision provided by the

government. In this health awareness void, the programme plays a vital role.

On the island of Aniwa in southern Vanuatu, the qualitative data gathered indicates that Nabanga has been directly responsible for a significant increase in physical activity in the vast majority of islanders in the 15-to-40 age range. Each of the participants in that age range play sport at a moderate to intense level, between three and six times per week. This is significantly higher than the recreational physical activity levels that existed before the programme.

A high level of physical activity on Aniwa has also been recorded in a study led by Siefken (cited in Massao and Straume 2011) and in the Vanuatu Ministry of Health *Mini-Steps Survey* (2012). The Siefken study identified high levels of leisure time physical activity (82.6 per cent of men and 89.9 per cent of women); these levels were significantly higher than those recorded on the nearby island of Aneityum (77.3 per cent of men and 70.7 per cent of women), where the Nabanga programme is not active.

In addition, there is a high awareness of healthy behaviours throughout Aniwa. This awareness has been raised over time through multiple non-communicable disease (NCD) surveys and health promotion through the Nabanga programme. Key informants and participants could recount the dangers of diabetes and high blood pressure, and all of them saw physical activity as the main way to reduce the risk of these negative outcomes, alongside changes in tobacco consumption and the consumption of high-energy foods.

The Nabanga programme has also directly contributed to a rise in awareness of the negative effects of tobacco consumption among the younger male population, and many of those interviewed spoke of reducing smoking during the football season or quitting altogether. Smoking is banned during Nabanga activities, and this ban is enforced by chiefs and others during games. When probed about the reasons for reducing smoking or quitting during the football season, respondents suggested the main reason was to be fitter so they could play football at a more intense level.

In Tonga, the ASOP Country Program focused on the delivery of the Kau Mai Tonga strategic health communication campaign, which aims to increase participation in netball among women in the 15-to-45 age range through mass media approaches. A number of

key messages were disseminated during the 2012 campaign and their recall was tested using a quantitative survey, which was nationally representative. Qualitative research was also undertaken with women in the target age range to understand more about the impact of the programme and the barriers to participation in netball.

The key finding of the quantitative survey is that there was a high level of message recall, demonstrating that the campaign was effective in disseminating health promotion messages. Those respondents who reported having increased their physical activity in the last four months had a significantly higher recall of the campaign messages than those reporting to be less active or those reporting the same levels of physical activity.

Preliminary analysis of the qualitative data suggests that the majority of participants were aware that the aims of the campaign were to increase women's recreational activity in order to improve their health. Some women were initiating netball-related activities in their own communities. Importantly, many participants indicated they had made lifestyle changes since playing netball, including eating a healthier diet, drinking less alcohol and smoking less.

Participants believed there was considerable support to engage in netball from their communities, parents, husbands and from their churches. Many participants commented on more positive community attitudes towards women of all ages being actively engaged in sports; this was a shift from the dominant expectation that married women should stay at home and complete chores and care for their children and families.

***How, and to what extent, have the ASOP Pacific Country Programs contributed to improving social cohesion?***

The ASOP Pacific Country Programs draw on the convening power of sport to connect youth and adults in inter- and intra-village situations, with a view to improving communication and fostering social cohesion. Research into the impact of the ASOP Country Programs on social cohesion was undertaken in Vanuatu and Nauru.

In summary, the Nabanga programme has directly contributed to a significant improvement in social cohesion on Aniwa Island. The practice of playing sport together, coupled with the increased social interaction engendered by Nabanga activities more generally, has generated a sense of unity that transcends community and religious affiliations.

The most striking impact of the Nabanga programme on Aniwa Island in Vanuatu has been its ability to foster social cohesion on an island suffering from a chronic legal and cultural dispute based on access to the lagoon in the north of the island. The dispute has escalated in recent years, as different groups seek to exploit the lagoon for tourism ventures and other economic opportunities. This conflict, in turn, restricted movement around the island. Personal and social interaction between groups was limited to participation in religious worship and traditional ceremonies.

With the introduction of the Nabanga programme in 2008, representatives from all villages have worked closely through the Nabanga committee to organise sporting activities, and the games have provided a focal point for the communities to interact more regularly. The bonding created through organising and playing sport two days per week has led to a wider range of social and economic negotiation, including exchanging goods, discussing traditional ceremonies and organising labour exchange activities, fundraising and religious events. The Nabanga programme provides an important neutral territory for such social negotiation, which was previously undertaken primarily in village or religious settings.

In addition, sports competitions are sites of social and cultural negotiation and sanction. Traditional *kastom* systems of exchange and ‘sorry’ ceremonies are used to address any issues that may arise on the sports field, which helps address latent conflict and reinforce traditional justice systems.

In Nauru, the inter-community social interaction provided by the ASOP programme (known locally as ‘*Ep’on Keramen*’) has helped foster a broader sense of community within the island. Despite the small size of the island, there was previously little social interaction between communities. Community members tended to reside in their respective villages and typically only interacted at Australian Football League (AFL) matches, which often became adversarial and violent. Despite a strong following, Australian football was banned by the Nauru minister of sport in 2006. Since then, *Ep’on Keramen* has helped build a model of community-driven sporting interaction, which in turn has helped overcome the history of sports-related violence on the island.

***How, and to what extent, have the ASOP Pacific Country Programs contributed to improving social inclusion?***

The ASOP Pacific Country Programs seek to empower youth, women and people with disability to improve their lives by

building human capital, strengthening self-efficacy and leadership opportunities, and transforming socio-cultural perceptions of physical activity and health. Research into social inclusion issues was undertaken on Aniwa Island and Espiritu Santo in Vanuatu.

Like many other islands in Vanuatu, Aniwa Island is characterised by a lack of economic opportunities and a lack of access to education and health services. It is a place where traditional governance systems remain relatively intact, and where state institutions are conspicuous by their absence. The youth of Aniwa have very limited employment opportunities and rely primarily upon the exploitation of natural resources to make a living, alongside work in traditional gardens. Due to the lack of services and employment opportunities, and the relative abundance of natural resources, the youth of Aniwa spend a large proportion of their time on recreational activities. The qualitative research data indicates that the Nabanga programme has filled a void in the lives of many youth on the island, and has made some inroads into strengthening their self-efficacy. The vast majority of the youth on the island participate in the Nabanga programme as competitors, while some act as officials or work closely with the Nabanga committee in a voluntary capacity.

The Nabanga programme on Espiritu Santo works with a local disability advocacy group, Sanma Frangipani Association, to promote social inclusion and well-being outcomes for people with disability and their families. The programme provides 'Sport Ability' training for volunteers, who deliver inclusive sports programmes in community settings.

Qualitative research indicates that the promotion of sports activities that allow people with disability and able-bodied participants to interact builds self-confidence in children with disability, expands social networks and builds awareness within the community of the ability of children with disability.

Many children with disability interviewed described the increase in self-efficacy and confidence they felt after they realised they could play sport. Beneficiaries appreciated the fact that the programme helped build their confidence, and as a result expanded their social networks and allowed them to make more friends. Playing sport with able-bodied children was particularly important in this regard. There is some evidence that general community activities are being modified in a way to encourage greater participation of children with disability.

The parents and carers of children with disability described an increase in awareness of their child's capability upon watching them play sport, and for some parents this resulted in feeling more engaged with their child. Parents also commented on the importance of feeling supported in the care of their child. All of the parents noted that community attitudes at the village level had changed for the better once people saw children with disability playing alongside their able-bodied friends.

### 7.3 Conclusion

The ASOP Country Programs are on track to achieve the intended development objectives. Evidence collected from the research activities to date indicates that the programme is contributing to a growth in sustained healthy behaviours, improved social cohesion and improved social inclusion. These findings indicate that sport is being used successfully as a tool to address these development priorities.

The ASC is using the results collected through the research to feed into the continuous improvement of ASOP initiatives. Lessons learned will be applied across the ASOP Country Programs and will inform the design of new projects in the future. Research activities will continue until June 2014. The Australian government is committed to sharing the results of this with the sport for development sector and continuing to build the evidence base for sport as a tool to achieve development outcomes.

### Further information

[www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/international](http://www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/international)

[www.ausaid.gov.au/aidissues/sport/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/aidissues/sport/Pages/default.aspx)

### References

- Donnelly, P, M Atkinson, S Boyle and C Szto (2011), 'Sport for development and peace: a public sociology perspective', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No. 3, 589–601.
- Massao, PB and S Straume (2011), *Urban Youth and Sport for Development*, UN HABITAT, Nairobi.
- Ministry of Health, Government of Vanuatu (2012), *Mini-Steps Survey of Aniwa Island*.