



Impact Research in the Pacific

Australian Sports Commission

Sport has unique attributes that enable it to contribute to development processes. Its popularity, its capacity as a communication platform, its role in reducing the risk of non-communicable diseases and its potential to set the foundation for healthy child development together with its ability to connect people make it a tool that can be used to meet a range of development objectives. When used strategically, sports-based assistance can make a measurable contribution to Australia's development efforts. Sport has made a significant contribution to developing healthier and more inclusive communities through sport in the Pacific. These research results on the Australian Sports Outreach Program highlight the impact of sport for development in the Pacific.



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Non-communicable Diseases

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease and chronic respiratory diseases are growing rapidly, particularly in low and middle income countries. In 2008, NCDs accounted for an estimated 36 million deaths (or 63 percent) worldwide. In the Pacific, 75 percent of all adult deaths are due to NCDs. NCDs also place an extra burden on health systems that are already struggling to cope. While NCDs are a global problem, this is a particular issue in our immediate region. At the 42nd Pacific Island Forum in 2011, Pacific Islands leaders stated that NCDs had 'reached epidemic proportions' in Pacific island countries and territories. The statement highlighted the huge economic costs of NCDs, and its potential to undermine achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Sport is well placed to help combat NCDs. Research shows that to reduce NCDs, it is necessary to reduce population exposure to the four common modifiable behavioural risk factors - unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, tobacco use and harmful use of alcohol. Of these, sport is uniquely positioned to address physical inactivity by getting people more active more often. Sport also provides opportunities to deliver messaging on the three other risk factors (diet, tobacco and alcohol) to large groups of people.

Disability

People with disability are among the poorest and most vulnerable in developing countries. They face many barriers preventing them from fully participating in society. People with disability are the most likely to face social exclusion. This includes the inability to access education and health services, and the right to earn a living or participate in decision making like others in their communities. Around 15 percent of the world's population – about a billion people – live with a disability and about 80 percent live in developing countries. Research has shown the value of sport in improving the inclusion and well-being of people with disability. Sport works at two distinct, but related levels. At the individual level, sport provides opportunities for social interaction and helps build confidence, self-esteem and a positive self-image. Sport also

contributes to physical fitness, strength, range of movement and physical independence. At the community level, sport can be used as an effective platform to deliver messages about inclusion and the rights of people with disability. It also creates opportunities for people without a disability to encounter people with a disability in a positive context to large groups of people.

The Research

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. The vacuum created by a lack of systematic and long-term studies means that policy-makers often lack the information required to make decisions about Sport for Development programs, and about Sport for Development as a development approach more generally. In order to address this empirical vacuum, the Australian Sports Commission has commissioned independent research to test the effectiveness of the Australian Sport Outreach Program (ASOP) Pacific Country Programs, a Sport for Development program delivered by the Australian Sports Commission and funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Through a mixed-method approach that employs both quantitative and qualitative activities, the research seeks to determine how and to what extent the ASOP Pacific Country Programs are contributing to a growth in sustained healthy behaviours, improved social inclusion and improved social cohesion. This investment underpins Australia's commitment to its aid program delivering real results through evidence based policy and programs.

Sustaining Healthy Behaviours

The main healthy behaviour promoted by the ASOP Country Programs in the Pacific is an increase in physical activity through participation in sport. Other healthy behaviours promoted by the program include a reduction in kava, alcohol and tobacco consumption and the promotion of a healthy diet. Research into the impact of the Country Programs on improving healthy behaviours was undertaken in Tonga, Vanuatu and Nauru.

By providing opportunities to get involved in sport, the program in Nauru is encouraging

healthy patterns of behaviour with participants engaging in more physical activity, smoking and drinking less, and eating better than those not involved in the program. The research shows that two-thirds of current EK participants believe they are healthier now than before they were involved in the program.

There has been a marked increase in physical activity since the inception of the program—19 per cent of the population is now involved in sports activities on a regular basis and participants are two and a half times more active than non-participants, significantly reducing their risk of acquiring non-communicable diseases. Current participants are also significantly more likely than non-participants to have tried to increase the amount of their physical activity over the last 12 months.

The research shows that the program is encouraging Nauruans to be more active in all aspects of their lives, with participants not only undertaking considerably more vigorous and moderate recreational physical activity than non-participants (in fact non-participants reported doing no recreational physical activity at all) but also doing more physical activity at work and for transport than those not involved in the program.

The program has also helped improve knowledge and attitudes towards physical activity—important precursors to behaviour change. Current program participants have a higher level of understanding about the impact of physical activity on their health and are much more likely than non-participants to participate in physical activity three times a week. They also have greater confidence in their ability to participate in physical activity than non-participants. Those included in the qualitative research indicated that increasing opportunities to play sport can help give young people something positive to do. They now have less time on their hands to engage in unhealthy, risk-taking behaviour, such as overeating, smoking and drinking.

In Vanuatu, the research has shown that knowledge and awareness of the benefits of healthy behaviour is very high amongst people on Aniwa Island in Tafea Province and can be directly linked to the ASOP program. There has been a significant rise in physical activity since the program's introduction, particularly amongst those aged between 15 and 40, or 35 per cent of the island's population. In fact, according to a 2010 Auckland University of Technology Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition report, the high rates of participation in regular physical activity through Nabanga on Aniwa contributed

to a 50 per cent reduction in obesity from 2009 to 2010.

Volleyball and football competitions require teams to train or play between three and six times a week, and team members constitute more than 80 per cent of those between the ages of 15 and 40. Many of those who don't play volunteer to officiate, and many do both. This level of activity is significantly higher than the recreational physical activity levels that existed before the program.

The research also found a high level of awareness on what constitutes healthy behaviours, which has developed over time through other surveys on non-communicable diseases—such as those conducted by the World Health Organization—and through community reinforcement of health messages. This awareness has translated to action for Nabanga participants, who recognised that physical activity reduced their risk of diabetes and high blood pressure, along with changes to smoking and diet.

Nabanga was also found to have had a positive impact on young men where smoking is concerned (47 per cent of Ni-Vanuatu men smoke), as the habit is banned during sporting activities. Many interviewed spoke about reducing their smoking during the football season, or quitting altogether.



In Tonga, a carefully designed mass media campaign aimed at influencing socio-cultural attitudes towards women and girls being physically active achieved very high levels of cut through on key health messages. The research shows that the program has been the catalyst for a remarkable shift in knowledge and attitudes towards physical activity. Following the mass media campaign and related activities, nearly all Tongan women (84 per cent) said they had considered some form of physical activity as a result of the campaign, 90 per cent said they wanted to exercise regularly, and about 80 per cent held a strong perception of their ability to participate in physical activity.

Importantly, 74 per cent of women tried to persuade others to be more physically active.

A key campaign message, 'just 30 minutes of simple exercise three times a week will help you stay fit and healthy', achieved a 52 per cent recall, which underscores the campaign's success in building knowledge about required levels of physical activity to achieve better health outcomes. The campaign's tag lines, 'C'mon Tonga, Let's Play Netball' and 'You Can, I Can, We Can All Play Netball', are strong calls to action for community building that achieved high levels of recall (70 per cent and 58 per cent respectively).

Women's understanding of the health benefits from physical activity has also increased. Those aged 15 to 45 displayed considerable awareness of the link between various medical conditions and a lack of physical activity. They also noted the link between physical activity and a number of desirable lifestyle benefits, such as losing weight, eating healthier, drinking more water and having more energy to complete household chores.

Getting women onto the netball court has also enabled the program to build knowledge of other important health messages. Research has shown that vegetable consumption has increased, and the consumption of tobacco, alcohol and sugary drinks has decreased. This is an important finding given the key role women play in Tongan households.

A clear link was also demonstrated between knowledge and awareness of health risks and participation in physical activity, supporting the program's long-term approach to building sustained improvements in physical activity by increasing knowledge about the risks of inactivity. One of the research's most prominent findings was the acceptance in Tongan society of women undertaking and participating in physical activity, and the level of support they received to participate in netball from their families, peers and community networks. Since the first media campaign, there has been a significant shift from the expectation that married women should stay home to care for children and the household. Now 80 per cent of women aged 15 to 45 years believe that people important to them would approve of their participation in physical activity. Husbands, family members and the church all expressed their support for women of all ages participating in physical activity. This back-up was emotional—a lot of family and church members attended matches and sport festivals and voiced their support for the women throughout netball games—but also practical. Help was given with transport to and from games, and by

providing food and minding children while women were participating.

Women and girls are also adopting new attitudes towards physical activity, with nearly all Tongan women aged between 15 and 45 (90 per cent) strongly agreeing that they want to exercise regularly. The qualitative research also indicates that the majority of women are engaging in more physical activity than before the program's inception. Many (66 per cent) also reported exploring playing netball. Considering that less than a year ago netball was barely played in Tonga, this shows a significant shift in attitudes to being active.

The research has also revealed significant changes to the health-related behaviours of women and girls, particularly towards trialling and adopting more active lifestyles. After just one campaign, 58 per cent of women aged 15 to 45 reported undertaking at least some physical activity in the previous week, and 33 per cent were meeting or exceeding the campaign target of being physically active for 30 minutes or more on three or more days a week. This is significant when compared to a Tongan survey conducted in 2004 (Tonga STEPS Report, 2012) before the program's inception, which showed very low physical activity levels amongst women, and 92 per cent of women aged 15 to 64 engaging in no vigorous physical activity at all.

Research findings are clearly supported by tournament participation data. For example, the fact that only 27 teams were registered for Tonga's netball tournament in 2012, and more than 370 teams—or about 3,000 women—were registered following the first media campaign, is evidence of the program's success in attracting and encouraging women and girls to be more physically active. As a result of engaging in more physical activity, a number of program participants noted they had lost weight, and older women saw changes in their health and body size.

Motivation has also increased, with participants reporting that they have more energy, are sleeping less during the day, and have greater capacity to undertake household duties. The program is building sustainability by supporting women and girls to lead netball and physical activity at the local level. Women report that they are initiating netball-related activities including practices and games, actively forming teams, and encouraging their friends and relatives to get involved, some for the first time.

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 Espiritu Santo Island in Vanuatu and in Nauru.

Qualitative research has shown that people with and without disability are interacting, building confidence and transforming attitudes and community activities are being modified to encourage greater participation by children with disability. Children are motivated to join the program after seeing other children with disability playing sports and being encouraged by parents, friends and volunteers. As a result, these children have increased their self-efficacy and confidence, and expanded their social networks.

Parents and carers of children with disability described an increase in awareness of their child's capabilities after watching them play sport, and for some parents, this meant they felt more engaged with their child. All parents believed village attitudes had changed for the better once people saw children with disability playing alongside those without. They also commented on the importance of feeling supported by their community in the care of their child. Broader impacts include a greater level of awareness of children with disability in the community as a result of the program, an important driver for which is watching children with disability playing sport. There is also evidence that general community activities are being modified to encourage greater participation of children with disability.



In Nauru, the research has shown that the program is having a significant impact on social inclusion, with the majority of current participants (84 per cent) feeling like they met and made new friends in the program. The

program also appears to be promoting more opportunities for social interaction, with 58 per cent of participants attending more community gatherings and meetings than non-participants (43 per cent).

Participants in the qualitative research highlighted the program's success in including people of all ages—females as well as males—irrespective of their sporting ability and body weight. Over a third of all program participants are female, and people aged over 35 felt they were encouraged to participate, either by playing or helping to fundraise. By providing women and girls with opportunities to develop their leadership skills and involving them in decision-making, the research shows the program in Nauru is having a positive impact on women's empowerment. For example, female participants were much more likely than female non-participants to feel that they have a say in decisions that affect their community (67 per cent compared to 37 per cent of female non-participants), or their country (51 per cent compared to 36 per cent of female non-participants). This is a significant finding in a nation where there is currently only one female Member of Parliament.

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, Nauru and Tonga.

On Aniwa Island in Vanuatu, playing sport has created a cohesion and unity that transcends community and religious affiliations. Playing sport together, coupled with the increased social interaction that sports activities encourage, has generated a sense of unity and harmony. According to the research, a most striking impact of the program has been its ability to foster social harmony following a deeply embedded dispute on Aniwa Island, where a chronic legal and cultural row has been waged for many years over access to a lagoon. Until the program has introduced, this long-running disagreement had restricted movement around the island.

The program's "unity" focus however—which is supported by senior traditional leaders and those of the island's nine religious groups—combined with increased opportunities for people to come together regularly through sport, has transformed social relations on the island. Sports competitions have become

important neutral sites and religious groups now come together to fundraise, build churches and in joint worship. Sporting activities are modified to take into account the belief systems of others. Social interaction has also increased considerably as people come together to spectate, officiate or participate in sport. This increased interaction also benefits many social and economic processes, including through opportunities to discuss traditional ceremonies, organise fundraising or religious events, or to trade goods.

In Nauru, research has shown that the program's emphasis on fair play and sportsmanship has brought people closer together and has helped overcome Nauru's history of sport-related violence and fierce inter-district rivalry. By getting involved in the program, participants are not just being physically active—they are building networks and forming friendships outside of their community. Participants in the program now speak about having greater respect for each other and consideration of different points of view, as well as more willingness to work together. For example, program participants are far more involved in social and community meetings than those not involved (58 per cent versus 43 per cent of non-participants).

By creating opportunities for young people to occupy their time after school and on weekends, the program in Nauru has contributed to reducing anti-social behaviour such as drinking and petty crime. As a result, a higher proportion of program participants reported feeling safe in the area where they live. The program has also improved perceptions of community cohesion. Current participants were significantly more likely to feel a sense of community cohesion compared to non-participants, with a higher proportion of program participants feeling they belong to the

community and get on well with people who live near them. Importantly, the majority of current participants also felt they had a say in community decisions, as well as those related to the country.

The program in Tonga has also supported greater cohesion across Tonga. By getting involved, women are not just being physically active; they are building stronger communities, developing their leadership skills, and showing a willingness to collaborate in positive ways across their community. The community-strengthening element of program is prevalent throughout the research, and the program is seen to allow different members of the community, age groups and religious groups to interact and engage on the same level.

“The evidence presented above indicates that by making people aware of the risks of physical inactivity and providing them with opportunities to be more physically active, the ASOP Pacific Country Programs are making a significant contribution to improving the long-term health and well-being of the Pacific. It also shows that the program is addressing barriers to inclusion, building relationships within and between communities, and helping to shift attitudes and change behaviour, particularly towards people with disability and women and girls. Together this provides compelling evidence for the value of sport as a development approach.”