

**Not just playing the game: Possibilities of empowerment through an  
alternative type of engagement with sport in international development**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the potential benefits of an alternative type of engagement with sport than is commonly considered in the literature on sport and international development. The research explored the extent to which students from one UK and two Ghanaian universities were empowered through working together to identify proposals for sports equipment in Ghana. A multi-method research design utilised video diaries and email, text message, verbal and focus group interviews. The findings indicate a number of project design factors that constrained the empowerment of Ghanaian students. However, both Ghanaian and UK students were strongly motivated by, and developed new skills because of, the innovative nature of the project. Similar projects in the future can contribute further to the empowerment of young adults, if designed appropriately.

## Introduction

There is a burgeoning literature on the potential contribution of sport to development in the Global South. While it is frequently commented that the 'evidence base' for the impact of sport on development is limited (e.g. Coakley, 2011; Cornelissen, 2011), a survey of literature undertaken by Cronin (2011) identified 267 evaluation reports, book chapters and journal articles on the impact of sport-for-development that have been published since 2005 (albeit related to sport in the Global North as well as Global South). Earlier, Kidd & Donnelly (2007) edited a series of literature reviews on the potential contribution of sport to child and youth development; health objectives; gender and inclusion of people with disabilities; and peace. The available literature does, however, focus on a limited range of approaches through which sport may contribute to development. A large proportion of the literature evaluates the outcomes that may arise from active participation in sport, especially amongst young people (e.g. Burnett, 2006; Kay, 2009; Jeanes, 2011), and these participation-orientated outcomes are the main focus of Kidd & Donnelly's (2007) literature reviews. A further cluster of research is also emerging on the utilisation of mega-events, such as the South African World Cup, to promote development in the Global South (e.g. Cornelissen, 2011; Levermore, 2011; Darnell, 2012).

Literature that considers the potential outcomes of other types of engagement with sport is extremely limited. For example, many young people are trained to undertake (peer) leadership roles in sport-for-development programmes and yet research has, to date, largely ignored the potential benefits for these peer leaders and instead primarily focused on their impact on sport participants that they work with (e.g. Maro

et al., 2009; Coalter, 2010; Woodcock et al., 2011). Other types of engagement in sport are barely mentioned in the literature and yet sport-for-development policy documents highlight the potential impact on the development of non-sporting skills, leadership and employment (e.g. United Nations, 2005). This paper begins to address this lacuna by examining the involvement of university students from the UK and Ghana in a project in which they were expected to work collaboratively in order to develop proposals for the sustainable manufacture of sports equipment in Ghana.

The Sports Equipment Project was instigated and facilitated by the UK-based charity, International Development through Sport (IDS). Delivery of the project was overseen and managed by staff from two universities in Ghana and one in the UK. In the UK, thirty two students from Central Saint Martins (CSM, part of the University of the Arts, London) were involved in the project as a specific and assessed component of their MA Innovation Management postgraduate degree. Twenty two students from the University of Ghana, based in the capital, Accra, and the oldest university in the country, volunteered to participate in the project. The second Ghanaian university was the University for Development Studies (UDS) which was established in 1992 with a practical orientation to contribute to development in the largely rural north of Ghana, across which its four campuses are located. The thirty students from UDS also voluntarily opted to take part in the project although it was expected that involvement in the project could be linked with their Third Trimester Field Practical Programme (TTFPP) which is compulsory for all UDS students. As the project was to be undertaken through collaboration between these UK and Ghanaian students, all students were allocated to one of six groups (denoted by colours). Three groups

included students from CSM and UG and three included students from CSM and UDS.

At the outset of the project, all three universities hoped that involvement in the Sports Equipment Project would contribute to aspects of their own students' development. As this was a new form of project for all of the contributing organisations, IDS commissioned research, on which this paper is based, to examine the nature and extent of any development experienced by the both the Ghanaian and UK students and the processes by which any such outcomes were achieved. This research focus on the development of both Ghanaian and UK students was in itself novel as previous research on reciprocal volunteering programmes between the Global North and South has tended to focus on issues relevant to either one region or the other (e.g. Powell, 2011; Darnell, 2011). The concept of empowerment was chosen to underpin the research as it supported examination of both the students' own development and the facets of the project that facilitated or constrained this development. The utility of understandings of empowerment for both the Sports Equipment Project and the research will be examined further in the following section.

### **Conceptualising Empowerment**

Since the mid-1980s, the concept of empowerment has become increasingly important in development policy, practice and research (Jupp with Ibn Ali, 2009). Initially considered largely in relation to gender in the Global South, subsequently 'the term "empowerment" was enthusiastically adopted by international development agencies' (Luttrell and Quiroz, 2009, p3) more widely with the use of the term being

particularly prominent in various World Bank reports from the turn of the century (Wong, 2003). The relevance of empowerment to sport-for-development, and projects such as the one examined in this article, can be identified through the frequent usage of the term in sport-for-development policy and programmes (e.g. United Nations, 2003; Right to Play, n.d.; MYSA, n.d.), with the United Nations (2005, p92) claiming that sport can 'encourage individual and collective empowerment'. This widespread adoption of empowerment has led it to become identified as a development 'buzzword' (Rowlands, 1998; Mosedale, 2005). However, as with other such 'warmly persuasive' terms such as 'participation', 'capacity building' and 'sustainability' (Cornwall and Brock, 2005, p1043), a number of authors raise similar concerns that the status of empowerment as a buzzword has meant that the term has become 'depoliticised' and that its 'radical, challenging and transformatory edge has been lost' (Cleaver, 1999, p599).

A root cause of both the popularity of the concept of empowerment and its potential neutralisation (or even misuse) is the lack of a clear and commonly accepted definition of the term itself (Luttrell and Quiroz, 2009; Hennick et al., 2012). Instead, a variety of definitions of empowerment have been suggested and utilised, not only amongst development organisations (Bebbington et al., 2007) but also in the academic literature. As an indication of this variety, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) list 29 definitions of empowerment that are present in either the academic or grey literature. Examples of the multiple definitions include:

*Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power ... in people, for*

*use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. (Page and Czuba, 1999)*

*Empowerment is defined as a group's or individual's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 10).*

It was important that the use of empowerment as an analytical framework for this research was not constrained by the adoption of any single definition, especially given the novelty of the project for all those involved in it. Neither was it important for the research to test any single model of empowerment. Rather, the following review of the various definitions and the empowerment literature more generally was used to support the analysis of students' experiences of the Sports Equipment Project and the extent to which these were relatively empowering or disempowering.

The two quotations above are indicative of further common and key themes in the empowerment literature concerned with the relationships between individual and collective agency and social and political structures. In terms of agency, the literature recognises not only the development of particular and relevant capacities of individuals, but also of improvement of self-esteem and understanding of existing constraints, as important aspects of empowerment (Rowlands, 1995; Mosedale, 2005; Hennick et al. 2012). It is also noted that, while definitions of empowerment are often couched in individualistic terms (Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009), collective empowerment may also be possible within particular groups or communities (Page and Czuba, 1999), such as those created within and between Ghanaian and UK

students in the Sports Equipment Project. While there is a common focus in the literature on people who would be considered as disempowered in some way (Kabeer, 1999), Mosedale (2005, p244) highlights that 'people are empowered ... relative to others or, importantly, relative to themselves at a previous time'. This again points to the utility of the concept in examining the development of both Ghanaian and UK students in and through the Sports Equipment Project.

However, Hennick et al. (2012) state that developing individual or collective agency is insufficient to achieve empowerment as social structures affect, positively or negatively, the available opportunities within which agency is realised. Kabeer (1999) indicates that structures may affect empowerment through shaping the interests and perspectives of individuals or groups, determining the resources available to particular agents and offering varying constraints on the actions of different individuals and groups. The understanding of contexts in which Ghanaian and UK students were situated and through which they engaged with the Sports Equipment Project was therefore vital. Moreover, maintaining a dual focus on both agency and structure was important as Luttrell and Quiroz (2009, p10) reflect the ongoing debate in the social sciences through advising that 'that care should be taken not to overemphasise the separation between structure and agency and that attention should be paid to a combination and a sequencing of both forms of approach'.

Debates on structure and agency are also connected with conceptions of power that are intimately tied to empowerment. If empowerment is a process by which people become more powerful (Moore, 2001) then an important question is whether or not

power should be considered as a zero- or potentially positive-sum concept. This issue is addressed in Rowlands' (1995) commonly cited distinction between four forms of power, all of which were considered in the research. Of these four, 'power over' could be recognised as a common starting point for empowerment processes whereby individuals or groups have been subject to influence, control or domination by others. While challenging such domination may be an ultimate goal of empowerment, it is commonly acknowledged that empowerment processes are likely to have closer associations with more positive-sum conceptions of power (Page and Czuba, 1999). The development of individual agency, and in particular critical consciousness, is related to 'power from within'. 'Power with' can arise from collective action, such as was hoped would happen between UK and Ghanaian students in the Sport Equipment Project. Finally, 'power to' has greater connection to structures in referring to the capacity to 'organise and change existing hierarchies' (Luttrell and Quiroz, 2009, p6). In the context of Zambia, Jeanes (2011) suggests that sport and education programmes involving young people were more effective in developing agential 'power from within' and 'power with' then addressing structural aspects associated with 'power to' and 'power over'.

One further theme in the empowerment literature, captured in the two definitional quotations presented above, is the relationship between processes and outcomes. That capturing both of these aspects was important in the research provides a further indication of the value of this literature. As Rowlands (1995, p103), states 'there is broad agreement that empowerment is a process' of change which has intrinsic value in itself (Jupp with Ibn Ali, 2009). Although Mosedale (2005) suggests that 'there is no final goal' of empowerment processes, many other authors agree

that empowerment can also have instrumental value in contributing to the achievement of particular outcomes (Wong, 2003; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). In terms of these outcomes, much of the literature, and associated development policies, focuses on the potential contribution of empowerment to improvements in economic welfare or political participation (e.g. Rowlands, 1995; Wong, 2003; Mosedale, 2005). Nevertheless, other authors also highlight different 'domains' of empowerment, some of which are more commonly associated with involvement in sport-for-development, such as human, social, health, cultural and even spiritual dimensions (Luttrell and Quiroz, 2009; Hennick et al., 2012). Hennick et al. (2012), in particular, recognise the 'interdependence' between empowerment (or disempowerment) across these different domains.

Rather than focusing on specific aspects of empowerment in depth, this literature review has provided an overview of the various prominent aspects of the concept and in doing so has indicated the utility of these aspects to the Sports Equipment Project research. Moreover, this exploration of the concept of empowerment is important given the limitations of its previous application in the sport, and especially, sport-for-development literature. Empowerment is a term that is frequently used in the sport-for-development literature, to cite Woodcock et al. (2012) and Schulenkorf (2012) as only two of many examples, but rarely have empirical studies been underpinned by a comprehensive exposition of the concept. Jeanes (2011) provides something of an exception in this regard in utilising Rowlands' (1995) four forms of power to examine HIV / AIDS education through sport in Zambia and, in the broader sport literature, Pensgaard & Sorensen (2002), for example, conceptually examine empowerment with regard to disability sport involvement. Other authors do offer

insights as to approaches by which interventions can foster empowerment and these are commonly aligned with similar issues in the wider literature that also have relevance for the Sports Equipment Project. For example, the intended collaboration in the Sports Equipment Project aligns with Schulenkorf's (2012) argument that empowerment can only be achieved by 'co-operation' between external 'change agents' and local communities. In literature on empowerment, authors such as Moore (2001) and Mosedale (2005) put this more strongly in citing the extreme difficulty in generating empowerment through external intervention. Jeanes (2011) also recognises that meaningful empowerment through sport may only occur over significant periods of time. Similarly, Wong (2003) and Eyben et al. (2008) also identify that timescales for empowerment may be beyond those encompassed by typically project-based external interventions, of which the Sport Equipment Project could be considered an example.

## **Methodology**

A short-term longitudinal research approach was adopted in order to fully capture the empowerment processes experienced by Ghanaian and UK students through the period of their engagement with the project between January and June 2011. The need to understand the perspectives of students who were, largely, geographically distant from the researchers necessitated the implementation of flexible and innovative approaches to data collection that were as accessible and appropriate as possible to both Ghanaian and UK students given the communication channels available to them. As a result, students were invited to contribute their perspectives either by group or individual video diaries, email or text message interviews. The use

of such methods in international development work generally, if not specifically in research, has been advocated in reports by Lunch & Lunch (2006) and GMSA (2012) amongst others.

These methods, and the research as a whole, were introduced to the Ghanaian and UK students through a video prepared by the researchers. Appropriate equipment was also made available to record video diaries and costs associated with the use of email and text messaging were reimbursed to those Ghanaian students utilising them. Students were asked to voluntarily engage with the research through the method that was most appropriate for them and student engagement by group and university is provided in Table 1. Email and text message interviews<sup>i</sup> were undertaken on an on-going and iterative basis with the evaluators communicating a series of questions for the students to respond to specific issues emerging from their respective groups. Issues for students to discuss in video diaries were similarly provided by the researchers on a regular basis. All data collection was guided by a set of common topics related to empowerment that included the relevance of student's backgrounds to the Sports Equipment Project; the individual and collective actions undertaken in the project; how this involvement was shaped by the project's nature, conditions and relationships; the skills and experiences that students developed through the project and the perceived value of students' development within other and future contexts. Within these topic areas, the researchers' specific prompts and questions differed according to both the particular data collection method and students' previous responses.

[Table 1 around here]

Additional methods were implemented to supplement the data gained on an ongoing basis from students. Focus groups were conducted in person with CSM and UG students after their involvement in the project had ceased. Unfortunately, due to term dates, bringing UDS students together for a focus group was not possible. At these focus groups, initial research findings were disseminated and discussed amongst the students with a view to triangulating existing data and identifying any other aspects of the project and their experiences that the students felt were important. In addition, a total of nine interviews were undertaken by telephone and in-person with staff involved in managing the project within all three Universities. These interviews were undertaken at the outset of the project and after student involvement had ceased to further contextualise the students' experiences.

Data from all sources was analysed collectively after full transcription of all interview data and converting any abbreviated text and email interview data into full English language spellings. As data from individual email and text messages was often limited in terms of its depth and occasionally incomplete, the process of analysis was vital in terms of triangulating data from different sources and identifying consistent key themes. Data was initially grouped by its relationship to the themes that structure the following sections, namely the starting points of students with regard to empowerment, their empowerment within the project itself and the potential that involvement in the project had for ongoing empowerment of the students. Different aspects of empowerment identified from the literature were especially useful in

grouping the data in this way and identifying further sub-themes (May, 2011), for example the relative influence of structure and agency.

## **Findings**

Findings on the potential empowerment of Ghanaian and UK students through involvement in the Sports Equipment Project will be presented in three sequential sections in line with the longitudinal process of data collection. As a starting point for empowerment, the first section will examine existing and relevant skills, knowledge and understanding that students came to the Sports Equipment Project with. The following two sections correspond to the conception of empowerment as both a process and an outcome. The former of these two sections will examine the extent to which students were empowered within the operation of the project and the latter will consider the extent to which involvement in the project resulted in these same students becoming more empowered in the broader context of their lives.

Throughout these sections, comparisons will be drawn between Ghanaian and UK students and also between different groups of students, including those from each Ghanaian university.

### Starting Points for Student Empowerment

Students came to the project with different levels of prior engagement with sport.

This diversity was particularly prominent amongst CSM students, whose course had no specific connection to sport, and it was decidedly unusual for a sport-for-development project that at least one CSM student indicated a previous antipathy to

sport. As all Ghanaian students from UG and UDS had volunteered for involvement in the project, it was unsurprising that they more commonly indicated affinity with sport and a number were involved as regular participants. Similarly, about a third of UG students had gained knowledge that was potentially empowering for the project though previously undertaking youth sport leadership training through another project instigated by IDS. Beyond these students, few came to the project with any prior conception of, or involvement with, sport-for-development. Nevertheless, irrespective of their sporting backgrounds, students from both Ghana and the UK commonly indicated that they were strongly enthused by being involved in a project that held the practical potential of using sport to contribute to development in Ghana as the following exemplar quotations indicate:

*Initially, I thought of [the] great possibilities this project could bring to not only to children but also to local communities in Ghana. (CSM Student, orange Group, Email Interview)*

*[The project] is most welcoming as it seeks to transform our approach to sport and the way we obtain our sporting equipment. (UG Student, Green Group, Text Interview)*

There were significant differences in terms of the relevant skills and knowledge that students from CSM and the Ghanaian universities brought with them to the project, and therefore their relative starting points in terms of empowerment. Within each group of CSM students, there were commonly individuals who had expertise in product design and CSM students often cited the value of previous academic or

work-based experiences of group projects. Conversely, it appeared that Ghanaian students typically lacked such type of experiences and, while some UG students drew tangential links between the project and their course of study, one UDS student articulated a more common perspective: 'the project is not related to anything I have done within the university or in my past life, I believe this my first experience'. On the other hand, Ghanaian students recognised that their existing knowledge of local contexts and cultures was important to the project especially as this was something that the CSM students knew little of at the outset. For example, one UDS student (Yellow Group, Email Interview) stated that:

*I have also lived with [and] have studied the way of life of rural people, which is one of the most important tools when we talk about sports equipment project as it involves rural people. I also know common games rural people do play, e.g. football and some other local games.*

While such a diverse range of skills and experiences amongst the Ghanaian and UK students were considered as useful for in undertaking the project, the literature also emphasises the influence of contextual conditions on empowerment. In this regard, a common concern amongst both Ghanaian and UK students at the outset was a lack of clarity about the objectives of the project and how it was to be undertaken collaboratively. The project had been conceived for CSM students as one where they would encounter 'uncertainty'. Nevertheless, one junior member of staff responsible for working with the students at CSM subsequently reflected that the uncertain context for the project may have disempowered students:

*It could have been further developed if [the Universities and IDS] were clearer about what was their main interest from this. If that had been the case to begin with I think that ... it could have helped the students to come up with even more defined ideas [for equipment].*

To an extent, this uncertainty could be attributed to the lack of experience of amongst some Ghanaian and CSM staff in developing projects that involved international collaboration. Staff from the Ghanaian universities remained unsure as to how the project was to operate which resulted in uncertainty regarding the project, and its potentially disempowering effects, being even greater for Ghanaian students. The following comments from Ghanaian students were representative of oft expressed perspectives:

*Initially I was very confused and could not figure out the usefulness of the program and how it was going to effect the said development in the school children involved. (UG Student, Red Group, Text Interview)*

*Initially the concept was not so clear to me but I wanted to know what it was all about (UG Student, Blue Group, Text Interview)*

The latter quote also exemplifies the motivation drawn by some Ghanaian students through attempting to overcome their uncertainty, a facet that is important given that developing awareness can be considered as a component of empowerment.

### (Collaborative) Empowerment within the Sport Equipment Project

It was only through initial contact that UK and Ghanaian students identified the need to develop a mutual understanding of the project, and their roles in it, to overcome the uncertainty that existed. CSM students had received an assignment brief due to the project being a formal part of their course and so it largely fell to them to explain the project to their Ghanaian colleagues. As the following quotes from CSM and UG students in the Green group respectively testify, this challenge was positively addressed in some student groups although in a way that emphasised the relative disempowerment of Ghanaian students within the project:

*I was under the impression that the University [of Ghana] had more information and we were really surprised that they knew nothing about the project at all, so the first time we spoke, it was mainly explaining the programme and letting them know what was going on and what we needed to do. (CSM Student, Green Group, Video Diary)*

*Initial interactions with the CSM students gave a clearer understanding of their expectations of our participation in the project. (UG Student, Green Group, Email Interview)*

Clarification of the project amongst other groups of CSM and Ghanaian students was harder due to communication difficulties. Even at the end of their involvement in project, some Ghanaian students were still unsure about the purpose of the project,

what was understood as 'equipment' by those involved from CSM and what their own role in the project could be.

The variation between student groups in clarifying understandings of the project reflected the extent to which different groups were structurally constrained, and as a result disempowered within the project, by access to necessary communication facilities throughout the project. Staff from Ghanaian universities indicated from the outset that internet access was likely to be problematical for their students.

Nevertheless, all groups of CSM students continually attempted contact via internet-based communication although UDS students, who were often based in rural areas, found it especially difficult to receive and respond to these messages. Even amongst those groups that did manage to correspond via email, there was recognition that interaction was often shallow and there were delays due to the asynchronous nature of the communication medium. In contrast, the Blue and Green groups of CSM and UG students managed to overcome technological difficulties and converse by Skype and send video messages to each other. These forms of visual communication helped to build positive relationships between Ghanaian and UK students, as one UG student (Blue Group, text interview) commented: 'you get to hear their voices and see them active and it makes it less formal'.

While those groups with better communication were potentially more empowered to develop 'power with' between UK and Ghanaian students, the second quote presented previously in this subsection is representative of the continued power imbalances in relationships as students undertook the project. To undertake the project, all students required to develop their understanding of local Ghanaian

contexts in which sports equipment could be used. To do this, UG students independently visited local schools to investigate sporting provision although the limitations of collective planning between CSM and UG meant that this information gathering process was not always aligned with the collaborative objectives of the project as the following comment demonstrates:

*Together with my group, we went to a local school to inquire about the kind of games they do and how to help improve upon them as well as to develop new sports for them. Then we also realised later that we had to respond to questions from [Central] St Martins to assist them in their project too. (UG Student, Green Group, Text interview)*

The nature of the project meant that the flow of information about local Ghanaian contexts was largely unidirectional from Ghanaian to CSM students. This was a source of frustration for some Ghanaian students, one of whom expressed this particularly strongly:

*The project was solely dictated by the CSM students. We felt we were those on the actual site of the problem so we had to fish information for them just because they couldn't be here. We had no involvement telling how the project could go or what should be done. (UG student, Red Group, Email Interview)*

However, some CSM students indicated a similar sense of frustration regarding the imbalanced nature of the project. In part, they associated these problems with the uncertainty and lack of guidance as to how they should interact with their Ghanaian

colleagues. However, it was also acknowledged that the different status of the project for UK and Ghanaian students was a key contextual influence that constrained empowerment:

*The fact is that we have got a structured [compulsory] project which is deliverable and they are volunteering. I think the balance has tilted a little bit now ... but it is never going to be an equal relationship.* (CSM student, Green Group, Video Diary)

The constraints of volunteering were also frequently recognised by Ghanaian students who had to balance their contribution to the project with their separate academic studies. That the students gained an understanding of these contextual constraints on empowerment within the project only as it progressed is also important given that CSM students had a limited period of approximately six weeks to complete their assessed work on the project. One UG student simply expressed the widely recognised difficulties that were caused by short timescales: 'they had deadlines we could not meet because of our extra busy schedules'. In fact, UDS students were further disempowered as a misalignment of timescales meant that they were unable to contribute to the project, as initially intended, during their Third Trimester Field Practical Programme (TTFPP) as this only commenced after the CSM students had completed their assessed work.

The implications of these contextual constraints strongly affected the relative empowerment of Ghanaian and UK students in developing their proposals for the creation of sports equipment. The input of Ghanaian students in this process of

proposal development was limited to commenting on suggestions that were identified and put to them by CSM students, as one UG student expressed:

*In my perspective, it seemed the frameworks were already designed but needed a local [Ghanaian] input to tailor it a bit more to the project's aim and expectations. (UG Student, Green Group, Email Interview)*

This lack of effective collaboration, or 'power with' (Rowlands, 1995) overseas students, was a source of disappointment for CSM students and especially their counterparts from Ghana. The following students were among those who reflected on a missed opportunity for collective empowerment within the project itself with the latter, notably, recognising that this was a consequence of contextual constraints:

*I'm positive that the project will show more progress in the future if we are involved in putting up the framework, making suggestions and coming up with equipment ideas. (UG Student, Green Group, Text Interview)*

*I feel like the aspect of co-design [with Ghanaian students] could have happened if we had known from the beginning that the whole project is actually about that. But ... we only found out about it a week ago. (CSM Student, Blue Group, Email Interview)*

One consequence of the limitations of Ghanaian input into the process of designing equipment was that at least two Ghanaian groups believed that the final equipment proposals were not appropriate for the local context. As a result, there was

disappointment that these proposals would not result in the manufacture of sports equipment that could be used in country.

### Ongoing Empowerment as a Result of the Sports Equipment Project

Both Ghanaian and CSM student involvement with the project largely ceased after CSM students presented their equipment proposals for assessment. A CSM staff member indicated that they thought that students could work towards implementing sports equipment proposals on their own behalf 'depend[ing] on the nature of the relationship' between students and if initial proposals generated sufficient 'excitement'. Some students from both countries indicated a desire to continue on this basis but were unsure how to do so:

*Now I am waiting for the next stage of the project to see how we could use our findings to develop sports in Ghana. (UG Student, Green Group, Email Interview)*

*I haven't got any plans because I do not know how to continue to engage with this project. (CSM Student, Yellow Group, Email Interview)*

These quotes suggest that, after relatively short-term involvement in the project (Wong, 2003; Eyben et al., 2008), both Ghanaian and UK students remained reliant on external encouragement and support if they were to be sufficiently empowered to continue to work towards implementing proposals for sports equipment in Ghana.

Nevertheless, there was some evidence that involvement in the project contributed to the empowerment of some students across other domains (Hennick et al., 2012), in particular in wider sporting contexts. The following exemplar comments indicated that the project contributed to students' increased understanding of sport and its potential contribution to development:

*I think sport for development is such a new concept, for me anyway. ... So I think that the whole idea that sport can channel certain emotions and help kids develop leadership skills and other skills on top of that, I find it amazing.*

(UG Student, Blue Group, Video Diary)

*The main task my team undertook was the visit to an elementary school off campus. Here we interacted with the pupils during their physical activity sessions. This was where I learnt about the local sports I initially was not aware of.* (UG Student, Green Group, Text Interview)

Demonstrating a degree of empowerment through putting this greater understanding into action, as in Alsop et al.'s (2006) earlier definition, one CSM student spoke of subsequently using sporting activities to support child development in their part-time teaching job. Similarly, a UDS student from the Orange group indicated that they had used the skills and knowledge gained through the project to speak to young sportspeople to 'educate them on how to develop sports and how to make good use of their talents' (Text Interview). UG staff also commented that some students had become involved in further sport-based volunteering as a result of their involvement in the project.

Both Ghanaian and UK students identified a variety of generic skills, experiences and knowledge that they had gained through involvement in the project. Perhaps due to their lack of previous experience of similar projects, Ghanaian students especially commented on the teamwork and leadership skills gained through working with fellow students from their own university. One UG student in the final focus group captured the wider value of these skills: 'the fact that I was able to work with other people is a plus for me because I know I will need this in future and I am learning now'. Corresponding to a main aspect of their involvement in the project, other Ghanaian students also spoke of learning research and analysis skills through having to find out more about sport provision in local communities. Conversely, CSM students saw most personal benefit from their involvement in aspects of the project in which they were required to develop new ideas and innovative designs for sports equipment. Where there was more commonality across UK and Ghanaian students was in the learning and problem solving skills that they gained from working in an uncertain and constrained context. Overall, this range of skills, experiences and knowledge identified as beneficial by students was indicative of the development of individualised agency as a component of empowerment (Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009) and came as a result of the independent involvement of Ghanaian and UK students in project activities.

**However, some** students also valued new skills and experiences that they gained through working with their counterparts in another country. Where possible, the

project enabled Ghanaian students to develop experience of new forms of communication as a member of the UG student noted:

*[Communication] was different in form (emailing, videos) and ... I now know that you do not only need to be at the same place to make things happen. I knew about the theory but this is my first time of applying such method. (UG Student, Blue Group, Email Interview)*

However, the extent of collective development of agency was dependent on the quality of communication between Ghanaian and UK students. For example, where communication was particularly strong in the Green group, UG students appreciated the knowledge gained through a number of relevant articles that had been sent by their CSM colleagues. As the following examples also identify, a number of students from both countries highlighted the learning gained about different cultures and ways of working:

*The point of view of the students there is however very encouraging. They are very innovative and [it is] interesting to discuss issues with them. (UG Student, Red Group, Text Interview)*

*I think it is really exciting to work with a team in a whole other country and from a whole different culture, so it has been really interesting to learn about their culture and their country and traditions and way of working. (CSM Students, Green Group, Video Diary)*

As has been hinted at earlier, many students also demonstrated a growing awareness of the challenges of international development work as a result of their experiences in the project. While Ghanaian students identified the disempowering nature of Northern-driven initiatives, the recognition of such imbalances led to critical reflection amongst CSM students, one whom questioned whether

*as western/British students, should we be going over and telling people what to do and is that the right path and I think people saw you can do something which lets people do things for themselves ... so it is interesting, international development.*(CSM Student, Violet Group, Video Diary)

As the literature indicates, the development of agency through enhanced knowledge or skills can only be considered empowering in respect of contexts in which this agency may be deployed. For example, only if students were to have further opportunities for international interaction could the increased awareness of international development and communication evidenced earlier be considered empowering. Nevertheless, a number of students expressed their belief that skills and understanding developed through the project would be valuable to them in the future. For example, the following quotes from a CSM and UG student respectively were representative of a number of comments regarding the perceived value of their experiences in working in conditions of uncertainty:

*The skills to manage uncertainty can be used in any project or task. For me, uncertainty and risk are unavoidable, and the most effective solution is to build a flexible system to cope with them. (CSM Student, Yellow Group, Email Interview)*

*For me, I think that the actual uncertainty project was something that was an experience on its own. ... Despite its challenges you know that the lessons you learn out of it, they are certain things that you can look at in the future ... because of having the experience before. (UG Focus Group)*

However, these quotes are also indicative of the difficulty both Ghanaian and UK students had in identifying *specific* contexts in which the capacities developed through the Sports Equipment Project could be beneficial in the future. In part this was perhaps due to their uncertain career paths but it was also reflective of the limitations of the design of the Sports Equipment Project in that it did not link into or open up further specific opportunities for the students involved.

## **Conclusions**

The Sports Equipment Project was a novel sport and international development project which was underpinned by the premise that it would be through developing 'power with' each other that Ghanaian and UK students would be able to develop relevant proposals for the design and manufacture of sports equipment. Certainly, there was a degree of mutual dependency between the Ghanaian and UK students. For example, Ghanaian students relied on CSM students for fuller explanations of

the project at the outset whilst the latter group were dependent on the former for local contextual information in order to inform the design of sports equipment. However, rather than the significant development of power with their international colleagues, the form of collective empowerment to which Page and Czuba (1999) refer was evident to a greater extent between the groups of students working independently within each University in their own countries.

Instead, structural constraints inhibited the potential for collaborative agency and gave rise to power imbalances, between the UK and Ghanaian students. Further analysis of the causes and consequences of these power imbalances allow similarities and differences with wider North-South relations in the sport-for-development field to be identified. Dissimilar to Darnell's (2010) well-argued case, there was no evidence of the specific sport aspect of the project contributing to furthering a Northern, neo-liberal hegemony. Neither were power imbalances a result of the provision of resources from the Global North, as has been commonly cited (e.g. Akindes and Kirwan, 2009, Nicholls et al., 2011). Instead, aspects of the initial conception of the project, including but not limited to, the respective academic and voluntary status of the project for UK and Ghanaian students and their differential ability to access feasible communication channels, were major factors in the relative disempowerment experienced by Ghanaian students in their relationships with counterparts from the UK. In terms of contributing to wider analysis of North-South relations, this analysis points to the importance of responsibility for instigating projects. That the inexperience of some of the Northern stakeholders involved in the instigation of the project contributed, perhaps unintentionally, to power imbalances

experienced by students is also resonant of other sport-for-development programmes (Nicholls et al., 2011).

However, the evidence presented does not indicate that the project was altogether disempowering for Ghanaian students or to suggest that empowerment was a zero-sum game with their counterparts from the UK. There was evidence of the enhancement of power within for both Ghanaian and UK students (Rowlands, 1995) in terms of, for example, the development and operationalization of increased awareness of the possibilities of sport, research competencies and problem solving skills. The contextual constraints appeared, in some cases, to challenge the students to develop new skills and students' increased awareness of constraints and inequalities in international development was also notable. Nevertheless, the knowledge and experience of Ghanaian students was subjugated to different degrees in the project, as has also been recognised in Nicholls et al.'s (2011) important paper. The position of both UK and Ghanaian students in the project meant that they were unable to challenge this subjugation even when they recognised and were morally challenged by it. Considering this aspect more positively, there was evidence that the recognition of power imbalances contributed to a developing 'critical consciousness' amongst some Ghanaian students that radical development scholar Paulo Freire (1993 cited in Jeanes, 2011) identified as vital to empowerment.

Therefore, if there were some various positive benefits derived from students' experiences in the Sports Equipment Project then the novelty of the project itself

begins to indicate the malleability of sport as a potential contributor to international development. While sport has commonly been used as a 'flypaper' to attract young people into educational programmes (Coalter, 2010), the Sport Equipment Project engaged and enthused students from Ghana and the UK who would have been unlikely to become involved in those participation-orientated sport-for-development programmes that are most commonly delivered (and researched). Moreover, while it is commonly organisational stakeholders that are involved in the international relationships associated with sport-for-development projects, in the Sports Equipment Project it was unusual that students' undertook this aspect of the project largely independently. A result of the alternative, and perhaps more intellectual, engagement with sport that the project enabled was the development of specific skills amongst the students that would not be likely within more common participation-based sport-for-development projects. The development of such skills may have been equally possible through an international development project that did not have sport as its focus. Nevertheless, returning to the previous point, such a hypothetical project would perhaps require a similarly novel focus if it were to engage students in the way that the Sports Equipment Project did.

It is also important to recognise that meaningful empowerment from the Sports Equipment Project may only arise from its subsequent realisation in various contexts beyond the scope and scale of the project itself (Wong 2003; Eyban et al. 2008). Students found it difficult to consider the specific value of their enhanced skills in alternative contexts and this indicates the challenge for researchers of evaluating empowerment through sport-for-development programmes. That the skills developed by students may be of use to them in very different domains within their own

communities and dependent on individual career paths also reiterates the need to avoid considering empowerment as an 'end point' that some can achieve at the expense of others. This is also a relevant consideration for the future design of sport and international development projects which aim to contribute to empowerment. Not only should the applicability to other contexts of skills developed through sport be considered but also the evidence from the Sports Equipment Project reinforces the perspectives in the literature that identify that achieving empowerment is a time-consuming process. In this project, the short and misaligned timescales as well as the lack of prior planning for student involvement beyond the initial proposals certainly constrained the extent to which Ghanaian students especially could become empowered through their involvement with the project.

The Sports Equipment Project also provides other lessons for the design of similar projects in the future. As Luttrell and Quiroz (2009) suggest, projects need to have a clear conception of, and strategies to achieve, empowerment. As has been shown, the lack of clarity regarding the aims of the Sports Equipment Project, whether in terms of equipment proposals or the students' own development, and its operation was a major barrier to the empowerment of these same students. Further, the nature of international collaboration requires careful consideration in order to be empowering rather than disempowering for intended beneficiaries in the Global South (Hennick et al., 2012). Better preparation of the CSM students for international collaboration could have addressed Darnell's (2011) previous call for improved training of young people involved in international sport-for-development prior to engagement in the Global South. Improved efforts on the part of institutional stakeholders to address communication barriers, or promoting more suitable forms

of communication, may also have been another way to limit contextual constraints on collaboration. As the data collection methods for this research indicated, the use of text messages could have been suggested as one communication method that both Ghanaian and UK students were familiar with and had easy access to.

The particular research methods used in this study, such as text messages, gives rise to some final conclusions regarding future sport-for-development research.

While much of the literature has emphasised the involvement of stakeholders from the Global North and South in sport-for-development programmes (e.g. Levermore, 2009), research undertaken has often been somewhat polarised in terms of utilising data collected either in the Global North (e.g. Darnell, 2011) or Global South (e.g. Kay, 2009; Jeanes, 2011). As a result, much empirically-based sport-for-development literature tends to focus mainly on either international or local aspects of sport-for-development programmes. The constraints on researchers in being able to gain data from different stakeholders in the Global North and South were partly overcome in this research by adopting innovative approaches to collecting data, at a distance, from students. These methods could potentially be open to criticism. In terms of examining empowerment, there were limitations as to the extent the broader social conditions of Ghanaian students could be understood via emails and text messages (Wong, 2003) and, more fundamentally, Jupp (with Ibn Ali, 2009) would criticise their use in enabling outsiders to make an assessment of empowerment. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the empirical data presented in this paper does go some way to demonstrate the potential of such methods. Text messages may be especially valuable in longitudinal research as a method to collect data from research participants at regular intervals. Further experimentation with such methods

is recommended in order to attempt to address the limitations identified in this study as well as those of the broader sport-for-development literature.

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**Table 1: Student Engagement in Data Collection Methods**

<b>Group</b>	<b>CSM Student Data</b>	<b>UG Student Data</b>
Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 group video diaries</li> <li>• 2 further video diaries received from one group member</li> <li>• 2 individual email interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 individual email interviews</li> <li>• 3 individual text interviews</li> </ul>
Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 group video recordings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 individual email interviews</li> <li>• 4 individual text interviews</li> </ul>
Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 individuals each contributed a video diary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 individual email interviews</li> <li>• 2 individual text interviews</li> </ul>
	<b>CSM Student Data</b>	<b>UDS Student Data</b>
Orange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 group video diary</li> <li>• 1 individual email interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 individual email interviews</li> <li>• 1 individual text interviews</li> </ul>
Violet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 group video diaries</li> <li>• 1 individual email interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 individual text interviews</li> </ul>
Yellow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 individual email interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 individual video diary</li> <li>• 1 individual text interviews</li> </ul>

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<sup>i</sup> Text message interviews were undertaken by the researchers using a web-based system which allowed collation of all messages into the form of an interview in a single document.