

**Distinctive policy diffusion patterns, processes and actors: Drawing implications from the case of sport in international development**

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## **Distinctive policy diffusion patterns, processes and actors: Drawing implications from the case of sport in international development**

### **Abstract**

This article examines the diffusion of “Sport for Development and Peace” (SDP) across sub-Saharan Africa following global policy impetus provided by international organisations, including the United Nations, since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In so doing, it centres a geographical region that has been unconsidered in the policy diffusion literature and, particularly, responds to calls for research into the effects of policy characteristics on diffusion mechanisms and patterns. This rationale beget methods that differed from the predominant use of quantitative, dichotomous indicators of policy diffusion, instead integrating data from global, international and national policy documents, from a review of SDP literature, and from stakeholder interviews in Ghana and Tanzania. Patterns of increasing governmental engagement with, but limited implementation of, SDP policies contrasted with the significant expansion of SDP provision by diverse NGOs. In turn, these patterns represented the varying influence of different diffusion mechanisms on state and non-state actors. Compared with the diffusion of other types of policies, these findings indicated the effects of an instrumental, malleable but complex global policy model for SDP diffusion. There is, therefore, significant value in research that examines how policy diffusion may depend on the configuration of particular policy characteristics, mechanisms and actors.

**Keywords:** Sport for Development and Peace (SDP); Policy Transfer; sub-Saharan Africa; Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs); Sport.

## **Introduction**

There is an expansive literature that examines policy diffusion, that is the patterns and processes by which policies from a single global, national or sub-national source consequently spread across jurisdictional boundaries. However, reviews of this literature (Marsh and Sharman 2009; Shipan and Volden 2012; Graham et al. 2013; Obinger et al. 2013) identify common limitations that are associated with the scope of, and conceptualisations underpinning, previous policy diffusion studies. This article extends understanding of policy diffusion through research that addresses three particular and identified limitations. First, there has been a predominance of quantitative studies which have operationalised the policy diffusion as a dichotomous variable based on the adoption, or non-adoption, of legislation (Shipan and Volden 2012; Graham et al. 2013). The basis for these studies remains, therefore, a conceptualisation of policy making that is centred on a unified state, rather than an understanding that the diffusion of particular policies may occur across a differentiated state and, potentially, non-state actors (Stone 2004). A related second limitation is that “research has largely ignored the characteristics of the policies” that may be diffused (Schneider 2013, 218). Reviews by both Shipan and Volden (2012) and Obinger et al. (2013) identify that enhanced understanding of diffusion patterns and processes may be achieved through expanding the types of policies investigated. Third, policy diffusion research has been limited in geographic scope. Studies have commonly focused on the diffusion of policies either within the United States of America or across other Western countries, and Marsh and Sharman (2009) specifically identified the potential value of policy diffusion research within and through countries of the “developing world”.

Given these limitations, there remains significant scope for further research that examines the diffusion of global development policies that are orientated towards countries of the global South. In this regard, connections are relatively rarely made between the state-centred policy diffusion literature and extensive development studies research that gives attention to global influences on national and sub-national policies. Exceptions that explicitly consider the diffusion of global development policies have focused variously on gender mainstreaming (True and Mintom 2001), health and reproductive rights (Lopreite 2012), environmental protection (Orihuela 2014) and, in the case of McNeill (2006), a range of global development policy “ideas”. The geographical scope of these and similar studies has varied from focusing on individual countries (e.g. Lopreite 2012, in Argentina), to small samples of countries within particular regions (with Latin America being a common site, Marsh and Sharman 2009), to global patterns of diffusion (e.g. True and Mintom 2001).

Examination of the diffusion of recent global policies that promote the use of sport as a tool for development offers the potential to build on these studies. The label “Sport for Development and Peace” (SDP) has become used to promote sport-based policies and provision that are specifically orientated to the achievement of broader development objectives. For example, the then newly-instituted United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace (United Nations 2003, 5) advocated that:

*Well-designed sports programmes are ... a cost-effective way to contribute significantly to health, education, development and peace as a powerful medium through which to mobilize societies as well as communicate key messages.*

Put more critically, sport has been positioned as a tool that “offers an economy of solutions to a wide range of development problems” (Coalter 2010, 295). It is this instrumental orientation of SDP that particularly serves to differentiate it from other policies and practices that have traditionally sought the development of sport (alternatively, “sports development”) through enhancing infrastructure and performance in respect of organised and competitive sport.

Since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, SDP has increasingly been promoted through numerous global policies and institutions that have particularly sought to contribute to its diffusion across the global South (Beutler 2008; Kidd 2008). Policy documents produced through the United Nations system have collectively framed and pursued a global model for SDP which has been closely aligned with increased emphasis on aspects of human and social development within the Millennium Development Goals (Hayhurst 2009; Coalter 2010). Engagement by other multinational and transnational organisations, such as the Commonwealth, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), has provided additional global impetus to SDP through their own policy statements, events and programmes. Further, there are now numerous manuals and other documentary resources available through online portals, such as the International Platform for Sport and Development ([www.sportanddev.org](http://www.sportanddev.org)), which provide practical guidance for the delivery of adapted sporting programmes, games and practices that are designed specifically to address the varied developmental objectives of SDP (Cronin 2011). All of these developments have contributed to SDP gaining in global status to the extent that the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* became the first global development policy to formally and substantially recognise “the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace” (United Nations General Assembly 2015, para 37, 10).

A rapid expansion in academic research has accompanied the increasing global interest in SDP. A significant proportion of this research is concerned with the production and limitations of evidence in respect of potential developmental impacts of SDP (Schulenkorf et al. 2016). Separately, significant critiques have situated SDP within the global political economy. Aspects of 'colonial residue' can be identified in SDP approaches (Darnell and Hayhurst, 2011) which can be linked to the histories of both sport and development (Beacom, 2007). Common critiques also identify various forms of alignment between SDP and globally-dominant neo-liberal ideologies (Darnell and Hayhurst 2014; Forde, 2014). Nevertheless, research that specifically focuses on, or is conceptually orientated towards, analysis of SDP policies remains relatively rare (for exceptions, see Hayhurst, 2009; Keim and de Conning, 2011).

Examination of the diffusion of global SDP policies, therefore, offers the potential to address the identified limitations of the wider policy diffusion literature. The focus of this research on sub-Saharan Africa reflects the direction of much of the global impetus for SDP, and also offers an opportunity to counter the constrained geographical scope of previous policy diffusion research. Moreover, twin objectives for the research were underpinned by a broad conceptualisation of policy that was important in addressing other limitations in the existing policy diffusion literature. First, the research sought to investigate patterns of SDP policy diffusion, not just in terms of formal and dichotomised policy adoption but also, as Marier (2013) suggests, in terms of policy aspirations, differentiated agendas and approaches to implementation. Second, the research adopted the recommendation of a number of authors (Simmons et al. 2007; Marsh and Sharman 2009; Graham et al. 2013; Orihuela 2014) in seeking to explain these patterns of SDP policy diffusion through investigation and analysis

that encompassed an extended range of potentially influential mechanisms and actors. Before turning to findings in respect of each of these research objectives, the methods used to investigate them will be explained and justified in the following section.

## **Research Strategy and Methods**

Marsh and Sharman (2009) and Starke (2013) both advise that multi-faceted research strategies may be gainfully employed to address those limitations of policy diffusion research identified in the preceding section. This recommendation was particularly pertinent given the orientation and broad scope of the research objectives, as well as the associated requirement to investigate diffusion of global SDP policies across multiple geographical levels. The research strategy thus drew upon the particular and complementary strengths of documentary analysis, academic literature review, and interview methods. Investigation of temporal trends of multi-level SDP diffusion especially benefited from analysis of global, international and national policy documents. National Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) published by 33 sub-Saharan African countries, primarily those classified as highly indebted, notably provided a means by which national engagement with sport and SDP could be specifically compared over time. An extensive search and review of academic literature on SDP supported tracing of the spread and depth of SDP diffusion and, particularly, enabled analysis of the influence of a range of specific mechanisms on these trends.

Finally, in line with Obinger et al.'s (2013) recommendation, in-depth investigation of SDP diffusion was undertaken in Ghana and Tanzania. These two countries were selected semi-opportunistically, as they were home to partner universities in a wider research project. Nevertheless, they are countries with significantly different international sporting profiles and

their engagement with SDP had not been substantially investigated previously. In both countries, interviews were sought with a range of key stakeholders and these gained in-depth data on engagement with, as well as multi-level mechanisms of, SDP diffusion. Interviewees also included representatives of international agencies, although the sample was constrained to those working directly in either of the countries and did not include multinational institutions such as the United Nations. Full details of the specific strategies, samples and data collected through all three methods are provided in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Subsequently, a ‘hybrid approach’ to thematic analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006), which combined deductive and inductive coding of data from all sources, was utilised to draw on, as well as address limitations of, the existing policy diffusion literature. Initial extraction and coding of data from across from policy documents, SDP literature and interview transcripts was undertaken deductively (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006), differentiating data excerpts by their respective relevance to either of the two research objectives. Subsequent inductive analysis in respect of patterns of diffusion identified separate subthemes that differentiated between SDP engagement and implementation by governmental and non-governmental stakeholders respectively. Data associated with mechanisms of SDP diffusion underwent a further stage of deductive analysis - coding by categories of mechanisms identified in the policy diffusion literature (as presented at the start of, and through, the following subsection on *Differential Effects of Diffusion Mechanisms*), before inductive analysis further differentiated the influences of these mechanisms on different stakeholders. As Green et al. (2007) recommend, all data analysis processes were continually accompanied by ongoing exploration of broader policy diffusion and international



development literatures in order to consider the distinctiveness of SDP diffusion patterns and processes.

## **Findings**

### *Patterned diffusion of global SDP policies*

Widespread referrals to the emergence and expansion of a SDP “movement” are indicative of processes of diffusion that have occurred since the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (e.g. Kidd 2008; Coalter 2010; Levermore and Beacom 2012). However, it is non-state actors and, in particular, NGOs that represent the most significant manifestation and carriers of global SDP diffusion. Common recognition of the rapid expansion in the number of NGOs involved in SDP in the global South and, in particular, in sub-Saharan Africa has been given by a range of academic authors (e.g. Levermore 2008; Coalter 2010; Sanders et al. 2014; Keim and de Coning 2014) and by global bodies, such as the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDPIWG 2008a, 15):

*Non-governmental organizations were among the first to recognize sport’s development and peace potential and have been at the forefront of the Sport for Development and Peace movement since its inception.*

[Table 2 about here]

In Ghana and Tanzania, NGOs were similarly found to be well represented and at the forefront of SDP diffusion. However, as the characterisation of these NGOs in Table 2 and

evidence from elsewhere (Giulianotti 2011; Lindsey and Grattan 2012) both indicate, patterns of NGO-based diffusion of SDP are uneven in respect of both developmental and geographical orientation. The divergent range of development objectives prioritised by different NGOs represented varying influences including a malleable global SDP model that emphasised contributions across the spectrum of MDGs (Darnell and Hayhurst 2011). Further divergence reflected the strong ties that some NGOs had to the priorities of particular international donors (Adom-Aboagye et al. 2016), whilst the orientation of others reflected a lack of international links and more locally- and founder-driven needs and motivations. The pattern of NGOs' geographic diffusion was also uneven, with most operating in urban centres in Ghana and Tanzania. Provision was also often focused within specific communities, as is common within SDP elsewhere (Coalter 2013; Darnell and Hayhurst 2014).

Recognition of the commonality of NGO-based diffusion has, however, been accompanied by ongoing and widely-articulated calls for governmental engagement in SDP. This aspiration has been consistently portrayed through the United Nations system from its earliest SDP policy documents (United Nations 2003) and through nine United Nations resolutions on "Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace" from 2003 to 2014. Further, the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group was instigated by the United Nations in 2004 to undertake governmental advocacy, based on the premise that "the future of Sport for Development and Peace ultimately depends on national governments" (SDPIWG 2006, 17). Similar aspirations are also evident across SDP documents produced by other multinational organisations (e.g. International Olympic Committee 2013; Commonwealth Secretariat/Kay and Dudfield 2014) and were shared by a range of international and in-country interviewees representing both state and non-state organisations.

Nevertheless, deeper analysis across aspirational narratives of government involvement in SDP revealed two particular subthemes of relevance to understanding policy diffusion. First, aspirations evident in global policy documents and voiced by interviewees spanned both the adoption of development goals by government ministries with responsibility for sport and the use of sport by other government ministries as an instrumental means towards their own policy goals. Thus, aspirations for SDP crossed the distinction, emphasised by Howlett and Rayner (2008), between the diffusion of policy ends and means. The complexity associated with this aspect of the global SDP policy model was well-captured through an earlier review of global policy documents which identified

uncertain[ty as to] whether the goal for each country in the movement is to create a ‘sport for development policy’, or, alternatively ... to integrate sport into pre-existing development policies and programmes (Hayhurst 2009, 215).

Second, there was greater consistency in diffusion discourses regarding the potential role of government in SDP. Global policy documents rarely distinguished between the potential contributions of governments and non-state actors beyond suggesting they work together in largely unspecified SDP “partnerships” (United Nations 2003; SDPIWG 2008b). Instead, governments were encouraged to contribute directly to implementing, sustaining or scaling up SDP programmes, including those that may have been initially delivered by non-state actors. Such aspirations were represented across multiple documents and interviewees, for example:

appropriate national government policies, investment, and capacity are needed to support programs and, where appropriate, to scale-up these programs on a nationwide basis (SDPIWG 2008a, 14)

the development of quality national policies to promote and support sustainable SDP programmes ... should be a priority for member states. (Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting Communiqué 2014)

If we want sustainable programmes, there must be a political will to support that [SDP] philosophy or that policy ... there should be a continuity of national policies ... then we can progress. (Executive Director, Indigenous NGO, Tanzania)

Contrary to such widely-held aspirations, analysis of the extent of sub-Saharan African governments' engagement with SDP indicates significant limitations as to the extent of policy diffusion. In unpacking this overall assessment further, analytic subthemes reflected distinctions between "soft" and "hard" policy diffusion (c.f. Stone 2004, 2012). Soft diffusion promulgates policy norms or ideas and, in these regards, the global SDP policy model has a significant degree of incompatibility with both institutionalised cultural values and political interests across sub-Saharan Africa countries and governments. Interviewees in Ghana and Tanzania recognised that the political purchase of SDP was limited by ingrained cultural representations of sport as a form of play with little wider significance. Similar constraints are also reported by Chapyator-Thomson (2014) in respect of education policy across multiple African countries and by Njelesani (2011) and Lindsey et al. (2017) in respect of Zambian education and health policies respectively. Further, a lack of compatibility with existing sport policy agendas also constrained possibilities of SDP diffusion. Symbolic

associations between high performance sport and nationhood are prevalent in public discourses across sub-Saharan Africa, even in countries with limited success in international competition (Chapoyator-Thomson 2014). As a result, it is high performance sport, rather than SDP, that has remained institutionalised as a common priority amongst high profile politicians and policy makers in countries across the region (Akindes and Kirwan 2009; Dudfield 2014).

[Figure 1 about here]

This is not to say that ideas regarding the potential contribution of sport to development objectives had wholly failed to diffuse amongst governments and policy makers in sub-Saharan Africa. Figure 1 shows that all but two of 33 sub-Saharan governments had included passages pertaining to sport in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers by 2014, following a pattern of initially rapid and subsequently steady increase from the mid-2000s. However, further qualitative data and analysis indicates that commitment to SDP amongst governments and national policy makers was, at best, variable and fragile. Only 12 of the 31 governments to include sport in PRSPs framed these passages in terms of contributions to wider development objectives. Ghana was one such country and yet interview data from a range of Ghanaian stakeholders was pithily captured by a representative from the state agency responsible for sport:

the Minister [of Sport] is aware of the sports for development thing. I don't know what he has done with it yet.

In only four PRSPs were plans for sport policy implementation aligned with the specifically designed and instrumental use of sport represented in global SDP policy documents. Rather

the majority of PRSPs focused on developing performance in high performance sport and providing varying types of sporting infrastructure. Kenya was one such case in which the 2008 PRSP focused on increasing and exploiting the country's "international reputation in sports" (Republic of Kenya 2008, 61) and a subsequent study found only rhetorical support for SDP:

While the [Kenyan] government has enormous interest in sport for development, the actualisation of the intentions of government sport policy as an avenue to promote access to gainful benefits ... remains limited (Byron and Chepyator-Thomson 2015, 10).

Further cross-country studies and analyses reinforce these findings that "hard" diffusion of SDP, in terms of adoption and implementation of particular policy tools, structures or practices (Stone 2012), has been extremely limited across different countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Keim and de Coning's (2014) in-depth, comparative study of sport and development policies across 10 sub-Saharan African countries concluded that as "necessary political commitment and leadership is not in place, very little impetus exists to drive [SDP] policy as a pillar for development" (p158). A Commonwealth Secretariat publication similarly recognised that governmental sport policy makers could be "highly supportive of SDP [but] they have to balance high performance sport and sport development priorities with investment in SDP drawing from an already overstretched resource pool" (Dudfield 2014, 6).

This final quote is particularly resonant of a gap between "soft" and "hard" diffusion in respect of SDP. In part, this gap can be explained by the incompatibility between the cited aspiration for governments to directly contribute to the implementation of SDP programmes

and widespread recognition that, in sub-Saharan Africa, they lack the human and, especially, resource capacity required to do so (SDPIWG 2008b; National Sports Council of Tanzania 2013; Keim and de Coning 2014; Ecorys 2014). Linking to the wider policy diffusion literature, this finding may be superficially unsurprising given that Simmons et al.'s (2007, 453) review suggests that “developing countries often sign on [to new policy ideas] but fail to implement”. In contrast, however, True and Mintom's (2001) seminal study identified that the diffusion of gender mainstreaming institutions was not dependent on national resource capacity, even in countries where the policy appeared incompatible with existing cultural values. The penultimate Discussion section will return to this apparent contrast between SDP and gender mainstreaming policies, drawing also on the examination of potential mechanisms of diffusion presented in the following subsection.

#### *Differential Effects of Diffusion Mechanisms*

Reviews which have categorised potential policy diffusion mechanisms (Simmons et al. 2007; Shipan and Volden 2008; Marsh and Sharman 2009; Graham et al. 2013) underpinned analysis which sought to explain SDP diffusion patterns. Coercion, considered first in the subsection, and competition are commonly categorised respectively as hierarchal and horizontal mechanisms that are based on the existence of external incentives for diffusion. Analysis of competition mechanisms in SDP highlighted the relevance of a further distinction between competition for investment or for (economic) returns (van der Heiden and Strebel 2012) that led to these subthemes being linked to and presented alongside other relevant mechanisms. Similar overlaps can also exist in respect of differing classifications of those diffusion mechanisms that Simmons et al. (2007) collectively refer to as “changing ideas”. In sequence, the subsection follows Simmons et al. (2007) and Graham et al. (2013) in

separately considering diffusion that may result from socialisation and learning-based mechanisms. The latter is also further differentiated by considering the potential influence on SDP diffusion of both evidence-based learning and rationally-bounded processes of emulation and imitation (Shipan and Volden 2008; Obinger et al. 2013).

On the surface, organisations from the global North may appear to hold significant top-down coercive power to promote the diffusion of SDP within countries in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the global South. Connected to those studies that have drawn attention to the influence of post-colonial relations of power on SDP in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Darnell and Hayhurst, 2014; Byron and Chepyator-Thomson, 2015), the potential for external donors to influence SDP policy adoption amongst Southern governments was explicitly advocated in early SDPIWG (2006) policy guidance. Coercive and top-down mechanisms of diffusion may also operate more indirectly (Stone 2012) and, in this regard, critical literature recognises the potential influence of international organisations, and especially SDP donors, arising from personnel transfer (Darnell 2007; Hayhurst 2009), monitoring and evaluation, and associated systems of accountability (Nicholls et al. 2011, Kay 2012). Such perspectives lead some authors to draw particularly strong conclusions that SDP can “be viewed as part of an external agenda with essentially no local design or input” (Akindes and Kirwan 2009, 242). However, there remains limited empirical investigation across those in the global South who may be subject to this coercive power (Lindsey et al. 2017) and, as such, this data and analysis helps to qualify potentially over-generalised assertions in the literature regarding the influence of coercion on patterns of SDP diffusion.

Graham et al.’s (2013) recognition that coercion requires a high level of hierarchical interaction helps to explain the limited influence of this mechanism on diffusion of SDP



policies amongst sub-Saharan governments. Multinational and international actors, including the UNOSDP and Commonwealth Secretariat, have lacked capacity for long-term, consistent and in-depth interaction across different countries. Similarly, interview data demonstrated how interaction with sub-Saharan governments was either constrained or unrealistic for larger or smaller international donors respectively:

we have only limited funds ... I had then to deal with two countries and then three or four ... so you can travel there, maybe, two or three times a year but not more with that kind of human capacity. (SDP Project Manager, Donor Government)

I don't know enough about the local politics and governmental structures in the countries that we operate in because we stay out of it. We're not a big enough player to be involved. (CEO, UK-based SDP NGO).

Further, the differing extent of SDP diffusion amongst sub-Saharan governments and NGOs respectively reflects the balance of international funding modalities for SDP, and associated variation in the influence of coercive and competitive mechanisms. A review by van Eekeren et al. (2013, 30) found that few donors have committed resources to “strengthen the national sports systems within developing countries [through] working with ministries” and any such support has typically remained time-limited. Consequences of such temporal constraints on coercive diffusion (Shipan and Volden 2012) were evident through documentary (ECORYS 2014) and interview data which indicated that beneficiary governments’ commitment to SDP policies dissipated after the end of donor funding. On the other hand, and as in other development sectors (Brinkerhoff 2008), NGOs have been particularly influenced by donor funding for the direct implementation of specific and often narrowly-focused SDP projects

(van Eekeren et al. 2013; Lindsey 2016). The prevalence of this funding modality has resulted in both horizontal competition between NGOs in SDP (Beutler 2008; Kidd 2008) and top-down coercive pressure for specific NGOs to opportunistically adopt external SDP models (Coalter 2010; Hartman and Kwauk 2011). In Ghana and Tanzania, the influence of these mechanisms contributed to diffusion through both geographical expansion by existing NGOs and the emergence of new SDP NGOs instigated specifically to seek overseas investment.

“Idea-based” diffusion mechanisms have also been more relevant to SDP diffusion amongst NGOs rather than governments. Many NGO interviewees indicated that localised and personalised engagement with SDP activities resulted in socialisation processes that led to greater acceptance and “understanding” of the potential relevance of sport to development:

They [community members and leaders] can see how the youth also have grown and how much activity is suddenly happening in their community. So suddenly the whole community has the respect for the sport ... so they cannot do anything except just try to support it. (Representative, International NGO, rural Ghana)

We were not very active [in SDP], we did not imbed that concept straight away ... we started using it fully after the coaches’ training. I myself attended that training and from there, I understood the whole thing very well and we started using it.

(Representative, Youth-orientated NGO, urban Ghana)

While socialisation processes centred on personal observation and engagement accounted for numerous examples of SDP diffusion amongst different community organisations in Ghana

and Tanzania, it remains unlikely that such bottom-up processes could build towards national policy change. Accounts from interviewees and other sources (e.g. Nichols et al. 2011) indicate that there are few opportunities for engaging policy makers through direct observation of SDP in practice. Other forms of policy advocacy are also rarely enacted by SDP NGOs (Guilianotti 2011), in part because the significant time and resources required to do so (SDPIWG 2006, 2008a). Rather the focus of even the most established NGOs remained on delivery of SDP projects, with potential mechanisms for policy diffusion seen as a contingent and long-term by-product:

It takes a long time for the government to change laws and policies ... we start by making sure there are things implemented in the field, so from there [government] can see if it's possible to integrate... (Country Manager, International SDP NGO, Tanzania)

Socialisation mechanisms enacted on a broader geographical scale have also had limited influence on SDP policy diffusion as advocacy has commonly relied on an “evangelist” discourse which has uncritically exaggerated the potential of sport to contribute to development (Coalter 2010; Hartman and Kwauk 2011). Global SDP policy documents have contributed to, and relied upon, this discourse over time. As examples, the SDPIWG (2006, *italics added*) advocated that “governments need to *believe* more profoundly” (p38) in the “tremendous power of sport [towards] broader national development and peace strategies” (p2) and a joint United Nations Office on SDP and International Olympic Committee report suggested “it is not a question of whether sport contributes to the betterment of society; we are all in agreement that it does” (IOC-UNOSDP 2011, 2). A collective consequence of this overly positive and certain discourse has been to curtail recognition of SDP in other policy

sectors (Levermore 2008), as a more recent Commonwealth Secretariat policy document explicitly recognised:

Grandiose assertions that ‘the power of sport’ can ‘change the world’ have been received with scepticism by experienced development practitioners, many of whom regard these claims as unrealistic and/or uninformed (Kay and Dudfield 2014, 4).

Instead of assertion-based advocacy, debates about the potential for learning mechanisms to contribute to SDP policy diffusion have become increasingly prominent over time (Coalter 2010; Levermore 2011). Constraints on learning-based diffusion resulting from an inadequate “evidence-base” have been recognised in a number of global policy documents:

The absence of a strong body of compelling evidence in support of Sport for Development and Peace is repeatedly identified as a barrier to convincing policy makers ... to increase support (SDPIWG 2006, 75).

With a few exceptions, there is no hard evidence for a broad increase in investment by relevant government agencies in sport for development and peace programmes (United Nations General Assembly 2012, 18).

Perceptions that SDP policy diffusion is hindered by a lack of evidence remain despite “significant investment ... in developing an ‘evidence-base’ to demonstrate the impact of sport” (Cronin 2011, 5). Resources to undertake and publish reviews of SDP evidence have been committed by the SDPIWG (University of Toronto 2007), by international donors such as Comic Relief (Cronin 2011) and by academia (Schulenkorf et al. 2016). These reviews

collectively and chronologically demonstrate rapid expansion in the number of research and evaluation studies undertaken by academics and other organisations involved with SDP. As a result, the current scale of the SDP “evidence-base” may no longer be the most significant problem that it once was considered to be (Lindsey et al. 2017).

Rather, recognition of connections between the global SDP policy model, predominant methodologies and the use and utility of evidence help to explain the limitations of rational learning mechanisms on SDP diffusion, especially amongst governments. Both SDP policy documents and reviews of evidence indicate the multiplicity of potential ways in which sport may contribute to diverse development objectives (SDPIWG 2008a; Levermore 2011; Schulenkorf et al. 2016). This complexity within the global SDP model mitigates against both the articulation of “short and simple” causal chains and the collection of quantitative forms of evidence that may especially influence policy diffusion (Keck and Sicking, 1998; Bissell et al. 2011; Cronin 2011; Keim and de Coning 2014). Moreover, the lack of capacity within sub-Saharan Africa to collect national- or population-level quantitative data limits the potential for cross-country comparison or, consequently, any competitive diffusion based on returns on investment (van der Heiden and Strebel 2012). Instead, the majority of SDP research and evaluation studies have commonly focused on the implementation of specific projects undertaken by NGOs (Schulenkorf et al. 2016). These studies have most commonly been undertaken at the behest of programme funders (Spaaij 2011; Lindsey and Jeanes 2014) with dissemination, learning and resultant diffusion effects largely remaining within the realm of civil society (Keim and de Coning 2014).

Similarly, attempts to enact diffusion mechanisms associated with imitation or emulation have limited relevance to sub-Saharan governments and, instead, tend to reinforce patterns of

NGO-based SDP diffusion. With one early exception (SDPIWG 2006), SDP “case studies” presented in global policy documents have not been primarily drawn from governments but rather, in the main, from NGOs and oft decontextualized examples of specific SDP projects (e.g. SDPIWG 2007, 2008a; Kay and Dudfield 2014). If such examples are not well suited for “hard” policy diffusion amongst governments, then neither are other opportunities where interaction could contribute to learning and imitation. Accounts that indicate the role of international conferences in “legitimising” (Hayhurst 2009, 209) or building awareness of SDP (as was suggested in respect of Ghanaian sport policy makers) are resonant of Stone’s (2004) broader assertion that such events may primarily enable soft diffusion of policy ideas. SDP conferences also continue to be commonly hosted by international organisations based in the global North, and have commonly included a limited subset of African policy makers. Further, and contrary to the SDPIWG’s (2006) specific aspiration, the African Union has not emerged as a regional hub that supports more horizontal processes of SDP policy diffusion. Conversely, Keim and de Coning’s (2014, 160) study of sport and development across Africa found that “opportunities to share policy experiences across the continent [remain] at a very low level at present”.

## **Discussion**

That global policy impetus has been followed by the significant expansion of NGOs involved in SDP in countries of sub-Saharan Africa is a significant finding in respect of existing policy diffusion literature. Although the influence of non-state actors *on* policy diffusion has been commonly recognised (e.g. Stone 2004; Simmons et al. 2007), consideration that NGOs could also *represent the outcome* of policy diffusion is largely absent from this particular literature. Nevertheless, historical precedent for NGO-based SDP diffusion can be identified

through development studies literature (e.g. Hulme and Edwards, 1997; Zaidi, 1999) that recognises the significant expansion of development NGOs in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of neo-liberal global policies of that period. More recent global development and SDP policies may lack the same ideologically-explicit prioritisation of NGOs, yet their common reliance on donor funding continues to enable the influence of coercive and competitive diffusion mechanisms. The flexibility that is characteristic of NGOs (Hulme and Edwards, 1997) also enables them to be particularly well placed to adopt, adapt and diffuse a global SDP policy model that is itself malleable and based on forms of sport-based activity which may become “understandable” through personal observation and engagement. Therefore, it is the configuration of long-standing global economic inequalities, aspects of the global SDP policy model, and the organisational characteristics of NGOs that explains their predominance in the field to date.

This explanation of the prevalence of NGO-based diffusion of SDP gains further significance when compared to recent trends in other development contexts and fields. For example, expansion of arts-based development projects delivered by a diverse and fragmented array of NGOs has also been linked to increasing global and international interest in a similar policy model to that pursued in SDP (Stupples 2014). Different contributions on the recent emergence of “new actors” in international development also highlight the relevance of NGO-based SDP diffusion. Develtere and De Bruyn (2009) specifically cite SDP as exemplar of the broader expansion of a new cluster of development actors whose involvement does not derive from engagement with “traditional” modes of development but, rather, from the personal activism of those involved. Similarly, but more broadly, a focus on activism rather than deeper structural or national policy change has been recognised across an array of influential donors, philanthropists and globalised development actors that have newly

emerged in both long-standing and new development fields (Banks and Hulme 2014; Richey and Ponte 2014). Collectively, these trends point to the importance of policy diffusion research that moves beyond solely state-centric analyses of legislative change, especially in countries of the global South that are significantly influenced by global development trends.

Besides NGO-based diffusion, analysis of the limitations of SDP diffusion amongst sub-Saharan governments are novel in respect of SDP literature and, importantly, further serve to re-emphasise and also qualify existing understandings of global policy diffusion. Suggestions made by Marsh and Sharman (2009) and Obinger et al. (2012), that coercive mechanisms may be especially influential in policy diffusion amongst governments in the global South, may be somewhat simplified. Instead, SDP is a further example, to sit alongside those of pensions reform (Weyland 2005) and gender mainstreaming (True and Mintom 2001), in which the effect of coercion on policy diffusion has been limited. In comparison with these studies, however, SDP offers a distinctive case in which the absence of “hard” diffusion amongst governments enables the conditions for coercive diffusion to be explored further. Funding incentives provided by international donors have been of insufficient scale or longevity to overcome the barriers to policy diffusion that come from the degree to which SDP is incompatible with institutionalised values, policy priorities and resource capacity within sub-Saharan governments. Neither do many international organisations have depth of ongoing relationships with governmental policy makers that brings influence and could enable greater engagement with a global SDP policy model that is, by turns, both malleable and complex in addressing various different development agendas. If McNeil (2006) suggests that malleability may enable global diffusion of development ideas, then the example of SDP strengthens Maske and Volden’s (2011) alternative finding that diffusion amongst governments is conversely hindered by corresponding policy complexity. Overall, therefore,



the case of SDP serves to reinforce Weyland (2005) who found that top-down influence from international organisations may contribute to governmental recognition of policy agendas without encouraging more substantial policy formulation or implementation.

Further comparison of SDP with the example of gender mainstreaming also serves to specify the potential contribution of non-state actors to horizontal or bottom-up processes of policy diffusion. Just as with SDP, gender mainstreaming policies were characterised as having a degree of complexity that came with a cross-sectoral policy model and incompatibility with cultural values in particular countries (True and Mintom 2001). However, compared to the instrumental orientation of SDP, global gender mainstreaming policies drew on rights-based rationales and it is this characteristic that helps to explain the greater extent of “hard” diffusion that led to the establishment of gender mainstreaming institutions across a majority of countries. Advocacy can be particularly effective in promoting rights-based agendas (Grugel and Piper 2009) and, similarly, True and Mintom (2001, 37) identify activism by networks of non-state actors as the “most compelling explanation” for the diffusion of gender mainstreaming policies. Conversely, a consequence of NGOs’ engagement with the instrumental policy model of SDP is that their focus primarily remains on their own service provision rather than balancing this with, or shifting towards, specific or collective advocacy as NGOs have done in other development sectors (Grugel and Piper 2009). Limitations of evidence that could enable rational policy learning may also be a particularly influential constraint on diffusion of an instrumental policy such as SDP. These distinctions between the diffusion of instrumental SDP and rights-based gender mainstreaming policies do, therefore, suggest a need for further research that extends Makse and Volden’s (2011) briefly-made suggestion that there may be different patterns of diffusion between economic and, what they term as, “moral” policies.

Temporal dimensions are a further under-examined issue in policy diffusion research (Dussauge-Laguna 2012). While there has now been global impetus for SDP for more than a decade, findings which indicate limited diffusion could still be challenged for not considering a sufficient time period over which policy changes may occur. Many SDP stakeholders appear to hope that improved evidence of the effectiveness of SDP will be the “magic bullet” that leads to greater policy diffusion (Jeanes and Lindsey 2014). On the other hand, Richards et al. (2013) warns that SDP will “perish” unless such evidence is produced. Each of these suggestions are based, however, on consideration of a single diffusion mechanism. Similar to suggestions in the policy diffusion literature (Marsh and Sharman 2009; Graham et al. 2013), SDP research would benefit from developing more multi-causal analyses. This research has demonstrated the value that combined analyses of the influence of various mechanisms enacted by different policy actors may hold for both the SDP and political science literature in deepening understanding of prevalent and changing patterns of policy diffusion.

In the case of SDP, the structured global context which gives rise to coercive and competitive incentives for NGO-based diffusion is unlikely to change. This form of diffusion could continue for some time if, as its recognition in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* suggests, SDP remains a socially-attractive option that can be emulated by both donors and NGOs. Conversely, the positioning of SDP in the *2030 Agenda* suggests continuation of a complex and instrumental global policy model that has inhibited “hard” diffusion amongst sub-Saharan governments. Policy diffusion arising from more collective forms of advocacy also remains unlikely when there are significant and structural disincentives for many NGOs to do so. The distinctive pattern of NGO-based diffusion may, therefore, continue as a “pressure valve” (Shipan and Volden 2006) that mitigates the lack of governmental resources

or impetus for SDP implementation. Those aspiring for alternative forms of SDP diffusion may instead be advised to consider how differently configured relationships between governments and NGOs may enable effective fusing of their respective and varied capacities and expertise (Lindsey et al. forthcoming).

## **Conclusions**

In addressing those limitations of policy diffusion literature identified in the introduction, broad research objectives were adopted to guide investigation of the diffusion of global SDP policies. The research is not without its own limitations, for example, in terms of being able to fully expose temporal patterns and processes of diffusion and differentiating engagement with SDP across different institutions that comprise sub-Saharan states. Further country-specific evidence could also show variations in diffusion mechanisms across sub-Saharan Africa and SDP diffusion patterns represented here may not be replicated in other regions of the global South. Nevertheless, the holistic examination of diffusion both in a policy field that has not received attention within mainstream political science and in the context of international development in sub-Saharan Africa has enabled identification of issues that require broader and future attention. The research reinforces the importance of maintaining and examining broad conceptions of policy in diffusion research, and this may be particularly important with respect to those policy types for which legislative change is not a relevant measure (Strebel and Widmer 2012). Attention towards the extent to which policy diffusion may be represented both within and beyond the state is also recommended, not only in the NGO-centric SDP literature, but also and particularly in respect of policy diffusion studies that examine country contexts where non-state actors can fulfil significant roles in aspects of social provision.

Distinctive findings from this research also serve to highlight issues that would benefit from further consideration. In comparison to previous studies which have commonly sought to “prove that diffusion actually takes place” (van der Heiden and Strebel 2012, 346), this research is somewhat unusual in seeking to explain limitations of policy diffusion in respect of SDP. Comparison with studies that have evidenced policy diffusion has valuably illustrated how specific policy characteristics may shape the combined influence of particular actors and mechanisms on patterns of diffusion. Therefore, contrary to Strebel and Widmer (2012), exploration of cases of “non-diffusion” is not to be discounted. In particular, broad-based comparison across different types of policies offers the potential to develop understanding of the ways in which specific factors combine in configurations to affect patterns of policy diffusion. There may be temporal challenges to the *a priori* identification of policies that have not diffused and there are significant data requirements to examine the (in)effectiveness of various diffusion mechanisms in such cases. However, as this article has sought to demonstrate, there is value in addressing these challenges so as to make important contributions to understanding policy diffusion.

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**Table 1: Data Collection Methods and Sampling**

<b>Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Focus of Data Collection</b>	<b>Sampling Approach</b>	<b>Sample</b>
<p><b>Documentary Analysis</b></p>	<p>Representations of, and aspirations for, global SDP policy diffusion over time.</p> <p>Enactment or encouragement of approaches to support SDP diffusion.</p> <p>National engagement with and adoption of SDP policies.</p>	<p>Internet searches, purposive identification, and specific requests for access to SDP and development policy documents from the start of 21<sup>st</sup> century. This sampling approach ensured the inclusion salient policy documents and reports authored or commissioned by global, international and regional bodies, key international SDP donors, and Ghanaian and Tanzanian governments and state agencies.</p>	<p><u>United Nations and Affiliated Agencies</u>            9 UN resolutions            21 policy documents and reports</p> <p><u>Commonwealth Secretariat</u>            2 policy documents            4 Ministerial communiqués or meeting statements</p> <p><u>Key International Donors</u>            9 policy documents and reports (from IOC, UK, Norway, Australia and Netherlands)</p> <p><u>African Governments and Bodies</u>            All 73 national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers spanning 2000 to 2013 published by 33 sub-Saharan African countries.            Specific sport policy documents from African Union (2008) and National Sports Council of Tanzania (2013)</p>

<p><b>Interviews</b></p>	<p>State and non-state actors' preceding, ongoing and prospective involvement with SDP.</p> <p>Influences on actors' involvement with SDP</p> <p>Relationships between actors and with the global and international SDP field.</p>	<p>Identification of interviewees of relevance to SDP in Ghana and Tanzania, as well as international donors associated with these countries.</p> <p>Purposive sampling drew on the expert knowledge of both in-country and external members of the wider research team as well as internet-based searches and snowball sampling from initial interviews.</p>	<p><u>Ghana Interviews</u>  3 - Government or State Agencies  4 - International Agencies or NGOs  9 – Indigenous NGOs</p> <p><u>Tanzania Interviews</u>  2 - Government or State Agencies  2 - International Agencies or NGOs  7 – Indigenous NGOs</p> <p><u>International Donor Interviewees</u>  3 - Government or State Agencies  8 - International Agencies or NGOs</p>
<p><b>Literature Review</b></p>	<p>Accounts of global and African sport and development over time.</p> <p>Representation of state and non-state actors involvement in SDP.</p> <p>Issues affecting the potential diffusion of SDP, particularly within sub-Saharan Africa.</p>	<p>Sample drawn from 437 SDP articles identified for a previous review of SDP literature (Schulenkorf et al., 2016) as well as an additional search for studies of sport policy in sub-Saharan Africa. Title and abstract of articles examined to select those pertaining to global and sub-Saharan SDP policy and roles of state and non-state actors.</p>	<p>52 articles read in full with extracts from 38 included as data for analysis</p>

**Table 2: NGOs involved in SDP in Ghana and Tanzania**

Characteristics	Range amongst NGOs		
<b>Prioritised development objectives</b>	Diverse and varied including: education, health (including HIV / AIDS), community development, youth development and leadership, economic development, gender equality, supporting orphans and vulnerable children, disability awareness and inclusion, rehabilitation of offenders, peace building.		
<b>Utilisation of, and specialisms in, Sport</b>	‘SDP NGOs’: sport core to all activities, core staff / volunteers bring existing commitment and expertise in sport.	↔	‘Development NGOs’: Sport utilised as one tool (amongst others) to contribute to core development outcomes, staff / volunteers have varied expertise / experience in sport, external support or training important for sport provision.
<b>Commencement of engagement with SDP</b>	2001	↔	2011
<b>Funding sources</b>	Self-funded by local volunteers	↔	Mixed private and civil society funding from in-country and international sources ↔ Predominantly funded by international sources
<b>Geographic scale of operation</b>	Specific communities / locations (most often in urban locations)	↔	Multiple communities / locations spread across different regions of country ↔ Specific communities / locations in multiple countries in global South and Africa
<b>Organisational Scale</b>	Small number of volunteers	↔	(Small to large) Core paid staff complemented by volunteers

**Figure 1: Inclusion of sport passages in PRSPs published over time**

