

Commentary

‘Sport for development’ in Japan**Chiaki Okada¹**¹Osaka University, Graduate School of Human SciencesCorresponding author email: chiaki@hus.osaka-u.ac.jp**INTRODUCTION**

Although the field of Sport for Development (SfD) has been progressing in the international community for some time,¹⁻³ the Japanese government only recently began looking for ways to contribute to the field during Tokyo's bid to host the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Promoting Tokyo's bid, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe introduced the 'Sport for Tomorrow (SFT)' programme to bring the joy of sports to at least 10 million children in 100 countries by 2020.⁴ However, the progress made as of 2016 indicates that reaching this target would be difficult at the current pace. Japan's sluggish economic growth is creating various problems for the sports world in Japan, and the significance of aiding developing countries through sport has not been properly explained. Most Japanese people are unfamiliar with both SfD and SFT, although the scope and amount of SFT activities are expected to increase as the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games approach.

To begin with, we need to question if the Japanese trial of SFT has the same concept as the international society has for SfD, or if it was actually the paper tiger for success in the bidding for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Although Japan has started SfD initiatives, going along with the current trend of the Olympic/Paralympic bidding, this trial could be temporary and could very well disappear from Japan after 2020, if the concept of SfD is not widely recognized and has not gained status in the context of sport development.

This commentary firstly examines Japan's scant experience

with SfD prior to the Olympic bid made in 2013, although most of such activities were dominated by Sport Development (SD) programmes mainly in developing countries. Secondly, the paper examines the background against which SFT was launched in Japan, and the environment in which SFT exists. Finally, the issues currently facing SfD in Japan are enumerated and actions that can be taken to ensure SfD survives in Japan after 2020 are examined.

SPORT DEVELOPMENT (SD) AND SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT (SfD) IN JAPAN**Activities of official development assistance**

Official development assistance (ODA) in Japan has included direct grants to developing countries in the form of development funds, the provision of personnel and equipment, and technical aid aimed at improving technological capacities in certain fields. Development funds given to developing countries, together with other grants, are used to purchase the materials, equipment, and services needed for socioeconomic development. In particular, they are offered to regions in developing countries with relatively low income levels. The Japanese government created the Grant Assistance for Grassroots and Human Security Projects in 1989 to fund small-scale projects (e.g., constructing gymnasiums for people with disabilities), which are 10 million yen or less, and conducted by municipalities, educational or medical institutions, NGOs, and other entities in developing countries.⁵ The funding is mostly handled by Japanese

diplomatic offices overseas. Cultural Grant Assistance has existed since 1975, primarily to support culture and higher education (e.g., providing tatami mats, which are straw mats for Judo). Sport can be seen within all these categories as a grassroots activity, as related to ‘human security’, and as a part of culture.

In addition, technical assistance related to sports has been offered through the Japan International Cooperation Agency’s (JICA) volunteer programmes and the Grassroots Technical Cooperation Project. Here, the largest SD- and Sfd-related activities the Japanese government has engaged in are providing volunteers. JICA volunteers are selected using examinations based on requests for assistance. After spending about 70 days training in Japan, they are dispatched overseas for around two years. As of 2016, the largest of these—Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV)—had sent more than 42,000 volunteers to 88 countries since its creation in 1965. About 10% have been involved in sports—or slightly over 4,000 volunteers.⁶ When JOCV first started going overseas, volunteers involved in Judo—a Japanese specialty—made up more than 70% of the sports department. Since the 1980s, the importance of educational assistance has increased, and more volunteers have been sent to take part in ‘physical education.’⁷ Since developing countries make various kinds of requests (e.g., guidance for their national teams or help in increasing grassroots-level involvement), volunteers must possess varying levels of qualifications. This also means that Sfd programmes and activities overlap with traditional SD aspects of development.

Sports-related assistance in the form of technical aid is also provided through the Grassroots Technical Cooperation Project. This project funds the activities of Japanese universities, municipalities, foundations, and other groups that benefit communities in developing countries, and is considered a form of ODA. Though small in number, these projects have been carried out in Laos, Cambodia, Kenya, and Malaysia. Overall, while sports-related international assistance is being provided in the form of funding and technology, such projects comprise only a small percentage of overall ODA expenditures and the amount of funding is small compared to that provided by other developed nations.

Activities of sports-related organizations

While the scale of international assistance offered by sports-related organizations is not large, several groups have been operating for many years. The Japanese Olympic Committee, Japan Sports Association, Kodokan Judo

Institute, and other groups are involved in such projects and they are inviting or dispatching coaches, athletes, and sports administrators. These groups are also deeply, if indirectly, involved in sports-related ODA projects (e.g., providing advice with grants and offering supplemental technical training for JOCV). Still, unlike other developed countries, these activities do not have policy backing as a field of development, and their work is strongly associated with exchange initiatives.

Recently, the J. League made contributing to developing countries part of its ‘Asian Strategy.’ In the global soccer market, which includes broadcasting rights fees, more than 200 billion yen is said to flow from Asia to Europe every year.⁸ The Asian Strategy aims to develop soccer in Asia to reverse this flow. Beyond knowledge transfers for managing professional leagues and increasing top-level support, initiatives have included hosting skill clinics and providing balls and uniforms to increase a region’s soccer population. Initiatives have also areas less directly related to soccer, such as anti-disaster education, dietary training, and tourism marketing. Projects have been conducted in Thailand, Vietnam, Brunei, Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore, Cambodia, East Timor, the Philippines, Laos, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The projects have been carried out in a diverse array of settings, including refugee camps, schools, and communities damaged by natural disasters. A range of partnerships have been formed to include Japanese club teams, aid organizations, companies, and the media. This could be described as a leading initiative in Japan’s Sfd involvement.

At the same time, the Japan Volleyball Association’s ball bank has collected more than 6,000 volleyballs from around Japan—including almost-new game-used balls from official tournaments. The Japan Volleyball Association’s ball bank has also collected poles, nets, antennas, ball cases, and other equipment, donating them to developing countries through over 30 initiatives. However, in contrast to the activities by J-League, the activities of the ball bank could be regarded as a classical SD involvement.

Activities by public-service groups

Comparatively few NGOs in Japan are active in SD and Sfd. Suzuki et al.⁹ identified a total of 35 groups, including NPOs, general incorporated foundations, and voluntary associations. According to that study, these groups were characterised by (1) a preponderance of activities aimed at popularising sports or fundraising, (2) a large number of baseball-related groups, (3) a large number of groups by the

former JOCV, and (4) a recent increase in student groups. In addition, many top athletes founded groups after their retirement.

While Suzuki et al.⁹ looked merely at groups that provided aid to developing countries, the numbers of groups carrying out SD or Sfd activities inside Japan have sharply increased since 2000. For instance, various initiatives were launched after the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011 to provide sporting opportunities to children affected by this disaster.¹⁰ Such sport activities addressed the problem of the lack of exercise and the need for emotional support among the 380,000 people evacuated to 2,000 school gymnasiums and other centres.

Moreover the Japan Foundation was established in 1972 as a quasi-governmental corporation under the jurisdiction of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, with the objective of promoting interpersonal exchanges in Japan studies, Japanese language education, art, publishing, film, and culture. Its projects such as sending sports instructors abroad and subsidising lectures could be categorized as SDP and many activities have involved Karate, Judo, and other martial arts.

A few universities and research institutes also carry out SD- or Sfd- related activities. Rare opportunities for research exchanges specifically involving Sfd exist, such as the annual conferences held by the International Health and Sport Studies section of the Japan Society of Physical Exercise and Sport Science since 2002.¹¹ In 2013, the Japan Society for International Development included a planning session on ‘new roles for sports’ in its 13th annual spring conference. Recently, the Japan Society of Physical Education, Health, and Sport Science has considered creating a new field of ‘international sports development.’ The University of Tsukuba and the National Institute of Fitness and Sports in Kanoya offer a joint master’s degree programme on ‘International Development and Peace through Sport’ and are expanding their research sites.¹² Overall, this suggests that public service groups are a growing body in the Sfd space and they are expected to provide increasing opportunities to Sfd practitioners and researchers.

Sfd IN SPORTS POLICY AND THE TOKYO 2020 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

In October 2015, the Japanese government created the Japan Sports Agency as an external bureau of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. The idea was to unify sports policies that had for years been

carried out by multiple ministries and agencies—including the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism—were considered, but creating a new government agency amid the global trend toward slimmer central administrations and the decentralisation of power to local authorities was not easy. With Tokyo chosen to host the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, people involved in sports realised a long-awaited opportunity—the creation of an agency composed of five departments: a policy department, sports for health department, competitive sports department, international department, and Olympic /Paralympic department (time limited).

The SD- and Sfd- related activities to be carried out by the Olympic/Paralympic department were swiftly decided during Tokyo’s Olympic bid. In Prime Minister Abe’s final presentation for the bid, he laid out the ‘Sport for Tomorrow’ programme for Japan to contribute to international societies through sports until 2020. The goal of SFT is to bring the joy of sports to at least 10 million children in 100 countries by 2020 through projects that (1) support the creation of sports academies, (2) contribute to sports internationally through strategic bilateral partnerships, (3) strengthen international anti-doping activities, (4) develop the Olympic/Paralympic involvement nationwide, and (5) study the idea of a digital sports archive. Although the plan was allocated about 1.22 billion yen in the Sport Agency’s budget for the fiscal year 2016 and 1.17 billion yen for the 2017 budget,¹³ it is difficult to clarify what percentages of the budget will be practically used for the SD and Sfd programmes in the fields. However, the specific mandate, goals and conditions listed above would suggest that a large proportion will be allocated towards traditional SD initiatives.

Projects that contribute to sports internationally through strategic bilateral partnerships can be considered Japan’s version of Sfd. These include exporting Japanese-style physical education to schools in developing countries and supporting the hosting of sporting events. The Sports Agency has contracted an SFT consortium composed of the Japan Sport Council and other related organizations to carry out the projects. Its working committee is composed of 12 organizations, and, as of January 2017, it counted 256 groups among its members, including local governments, sports associations, companies, and NGOs.¹⁴

Since SFT was launched, its budget and membership appear to have grown favourably. Yet, when its actual

contributions to developing countries are examined, it has had very limited effects.¹⁵ SFT will need to generate more results if the promise of reaching 10 million people in 100 countries is to be realised. Actually, Japan is unlikely to come close to achieving this under the current framework, where the executive office's job mainly involves accrediting consortium members' activities as SFT projects. This suggests that the billion yen budget from the national government has barely been effectively used. Moreover, as activities carried out voluntarily with private funds are also counted as part of SFT, the true measure and impact of the programme is difficult to ascertain. Given this state of affairs, members of the consortium will start demanding specific outcomes or benefits sooner rather than later.

CONCLUSION: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS FOR SFD IN JAPAN

Some developed nations carefully introduced the concept of Sfd many years ago, and have pursued policies and research in a manner that reflects activities actually conducted in developing countries.¹⁶ Meanwhile, it seems that Japan abruptly opened the SFT umbrella to coincide with its bid for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Before then, only a limited number of Sfd projects were quietly conducted as a part of ODA or by NGOs. There was little discussion of Sfd as a field, with very few people involved in Sfd administration, policy, or research. Those who were involved in Sfd often performed that work separately from their regular career responsibilities, or as a small part of them, and few were Sfd specialists.

Although there are several reasons that Japanese people may be unfamiliar with the concept of Sfd, two significant historical and cultural arguments were put forward. Firstly, Sawamura¹⁷ argued that a restrictive attitude to expanding Japanese ODA in the 1980s existed because "the government of Japan and the Japanese people required proper and understandable reasons for providing ODA to developing countries. Such a situation may be different from that in many American and European countries, where people generally have had a Christian background and Western charitable values."¹⁷ (p.27) Additionally for most Japanese, topics concerning immigration problems, ethnic conflict and multiculturalism, as well as international development activities are not part of their daily lives.

Another perspective is that Japanese sport culture has not matured and diversified at the same rate as other developed nations. Uchiumi et al.¹⁸ described that "generally speaking, the area of sport (in Japan) is conservative and sometimes reactionary."¹⁸ (p. 103) It seems that since the 1990s, the

general understanding of and attitude toward sport in Japan has not changed much. Looking forward to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, dynamic changes in sport and related areas by the leadership of the new Sports Agency are now expected and in line with these, and Sfd should be included as a central pillar.

If this can be realised strategically, Japan will benefit from its sport-specific knowledge and resources. As described earlier, more than 4,000 JOCV are or have been taking part in JICA programmes. Experienced volunteers have spent an average of two years engaged in sports-related activities in developing countries, and are now active both in Japan and overseas in schools, national institutions, research institutes, sporting associations, regional municipal institutions, competitive associations, professional leagues, private companies, NPOs, and NGOs. If a framework were created to take advantage of their experience, many would likely participate enthusiastically. This could involve people supporting athletes around the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, particularly those from developing countries. Building on people's volunteer experiences abroad, a great service could be provided as individuals would be familiar with foreign languages and customs. Such a service at the Games could be a unique characteristic not yet found at previous Games hosted in other countries.

In addition to creating opportunities for the limited number of people already involved in Sfd, support must be provided to create a new stratum of people who show interest in Sfd. If SFT's target of 10 million people in 100 countries is to be achieved, a system needs to be created to fund the activities already being conducted around the world, and a framework needs to be created that educates the Japanese public that the budget is being used appropriately. Without support mechanisms, it will not be easy for people involved in sports to fully understand international cooperation or to create trusting relationships with people in developing countries. At the same time, it will not be easy for people involved in international aid to explain the value of sports or to carefully execute the detailed social and sporting aspects of running tournaments, creating curriculums, and other sport-related projects. Funding, information, and a framework for sharing past experiences are needed to carry out joint Sfd projects, and in the SFT, the Japanese government should not simply demand that members of the consortium produce results. The SFT committee needs to provide added value and stockpile the wisdom gained from conducting the projects. Increasing the number of people involved in Sfd and gaining practical knowledge from carrying out projects will

help ensure that the concept of Sfd survives in Japan beyond 2020. Effective collaborations with several related sectors in Sfd will be highly demanded and discussions need to be begun early about who should handle related policies after 2020.

Having a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and limitations of Sfd (e.g., lack of funding, materials, personnel, and other essentials) – and being actively involved in SD and Sfd projects from a practical and research perspective – can provide hints about how sports should develop in Japan. Thanks to the opportunity afforded by the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Japanese sports administrators have undertaken a first proper engagement with Sfd. As previously suggested, ingenuity and strategic planning is needed to ensure the sustainability of Sfd projects associated with mega-events such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games.^{19,20} As this report has highlighted, Japan should use its knowledge around sport to not only achieve positive SD and Sfd outcomes in the lead-up to the Games, but also take the opportunity to establish itself as a leader in this space through strategic investment in human resources and supportive policy frameworks.

REFERENCES

1. Levermore R, Beacom A. Sport and International Development. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; 2009.
2. Richards J, Kaufman Z, Schulenkorf N, Wolff E, Gannett K, Siefken K, Rodriguez G. Advancing the evidence base of sport for development. *J Sport for Development*. 2013; 1(1):1-3.
3. Schulenkorf N, Sherry E, Rowe K. Sport-for-Development: An integrated literature review. *J Sport Management*. 2016; 30(1):22-39.
4. Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. Press conference [Internet]. 2013 [cited 2016 Jul 1]. Available from: http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2013/0907ioc_presentation.html
5. Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Projects. Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Kazakhstan [Internet]. 2015 [cited 2018 Jan 16]. Available from: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/000123711.pdf>
6. Japan International Cooperation Agency. JICA volunteer project achievements / deployment achievements [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2016 Jul 1]. Available from: <http://www.jica.go.jp/volunteer/outline/publication/results/>
7. Saito K. International cooperation through sports carried out as ODA. In: Saito K, Okada C, Suzuki N, editors. *Sports and International Cooperation*. Tokyo: Taishukan Publishing; 2014.
8. J. League. From the J. League into Asia, from the Asia to the world [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2017 Jul 2]. Available from: <https://www.jleague.jp/en/100year/asia/>
9. Suzuki N, Okada C. International cooperation through sports carried out by NGOs. In: Saito K, Okada C, Suzuki N, editors. *Sports and International Cooperation*. Tokyo: Taishukan Publishing; 2014.
10. Masumoto N. Dilemma on the occasion of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake: rethinking for the raison d'être of sport. *The Philosophic Study of Sport and Physical Education*. 2011; 33(2): 55-61.
11. Japan Society of Physical Exercise and Sport Science. International health and sports studies [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2017 Jan 20]. Available from: <http://internationalhealthandsport.jimdo.com/>
12. University of Tsukuba. Joint Master's Programme in International Development and Peace through Sport [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2016 Jul 1]. Available from: <http://tkjids.taiiku.tsukuba.ac.jp/about/idp>
13. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Main budgetary request items for fiscal 2016 [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2017 Jan 26]. Available from: http://www.mext.go.jp/component/b_menu/other/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2015/08/27/1361293_1.pdf
14. Sport for Tomorrow. News release [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2016 Jul 20]. Available from: <http://www.sport4tomorrow.jp/jp/>
15. Okada C. Twenty years of 'Sport for Development and Peace' in international society: towards the development of 'Sport for Tomorrow' in Japan, *Osaka Human Sciences*. 2016; 2: 85-102.
16. Saito K, Okada C, Suzuki N. *Sports and International Cooperation*. Tokyo: Taishukan Publishing; 2014.

17. Sawamura N. Japan's philosophy of self-help efforts in international development cooperation: Does it work in Africa? CICE Hiroshima University J International Cooperation in Educ. 2004; 7(1):27-40.
18. Uchiumi K, Ozaki M. History of sport policy and sport industry in Japan since 1945. Hitotsubashi J Arts and Sciences. 1993; 34(1): 103-128.
19. Mukoyama M. The disaster stricken city bids to host the mega sports event: Case study of Rugby World Cup 2019. Bulletin of Biwako-Gakuin University, Biwako-Gakuin College. 2014; 6: 93-102.
20. Okada C, Saito K. Some issues concerning 'Sport for Development and Peace': Towards the success of the 'Sport for Tomorrow' programme. J Physical Exercise and Sports Sciences. 2016; 22(1): 1-7.