

Senegal YMCA Sports Project – Lessons Learned

Context:

YMCA Senegal through its partnership with Y Care International (UK-based) was selected to be a partner for the SRI in 2007. The YMCA is a youth-focused community development organisation with some experience of running sports programmes in Dakar, but this initiative focused on the south of the country (Casamance) where YCI and Comic Relief were supporting a 4-year programme implemented by Ziguinchor YMCA targeting war-affected children and young people, and their communities. The sports initiative was therefore conceived as an add-on to this wider project and was implemented in 5 villages. Due principally to a lack of clarity over agreed outcomes that could be measured within the confines of the SRI, all partners came to an agreement that the YMCA project would not be included in the ongoing research study, but that the programme being implemented would continue to be supported by IDS and Comic Relief. The external process evaluation of the SRI goes into more detail around some of the challenges that led to the exclusion of this project from the research process – it was not an easy process despite a lot of efforts put in by the YMCA and the research partners. However it is important that the lessons learned and experiences of the YMCA project are captured and shared as they can be valuable in demonstrating how in the ‘neither war nor peace’ context of Casamance, sports can be used as an important tool to contribute to wider development outcomes (including promoting peace and reconciliation!).

Lessons Learned:

What have you learned about your programmes through being a part of the research project?

Sport can be used as a tool to bring about a change in behaviour amongst participants and wider community members (e.g. families) around gender equality, in particular through promoting the participation of young girls in sporting activities.

Our ongoing M&E and end of project evaluation highlighted the following outcomes:

- Participation in the sports project enabled young girls and boys to acquire technical knowledge, improved skills, improved performance and instilled in some a new sense of hope for their future (‘the dream of becoming a star’)
- Establishment of a new Cultural Sports Association (in the village of Gonoum)
- Effectiveness of peer education (for peace & reconciliation, school health, self-esteem)
- Use of M&E data allows us to assess the evolution and impact of sport on the community (e.g. on behavior change)
- Facilitating the detection of new sporting talent
- Strong sense of ownership of the project by local communities, enabling sustainability of project activities beyond the life of this phase of funding
- Mobilisation (high youth participation) for development activities in the village
- Mobilisation of all sectors of society (women, youth, children, adults, elders), and close cooperation between youth, mentors and community members
- Improved team spirit and team working (acceptance of others, fair play, tolerance, discipline).
- Occupation of new positions in village activities
- Installation of management committees with responsibility for monitoring activities of the sporting centres established in each project locality
- A commitment of supervisors and increased youth participation in development activities in the locality

What have you learnt about programme design?

We might have started with a collective objective to undertake research to test a specific hypothesis around the contribution of sports to youth development, but we found that the community quickly took ownership of the project activities and had objectives of their own that may not have been conceived as 'realistic' by the researcher.

E.g. sports has been viewed by a number of the target communities as an important tool to reinforce unity and peace between communities, and bringing a sense of hope and joy for personal and community development. Youth peer leaders trained through a wider Comic Relief-funded project took the initiative to replicate sports activities in communities not targeted by the sports project, and directly contributed to the Head of a community (Youtou) declaring peace with neighbouring communities (including across the border in Guinea) and calling for refugees to return to their villages.

What have you learnt about doing M&E and participating in wider research projects?

Through this project and the wider community development project funded by Comic Relief, we obtained SPSS and staff and youth leaders received training in this. Y Care International provided additional training on M&E systems and tools and the YMCA continues to use these tools and systems in all ongoing community development projects. Staff and volunteers have participated in data collection and analysis for externally-commissioned evaluations for the Comic Relief-funded project. Monitoring data collected for ongoing programmes is regularly analysed and used to feed into the planning and implementation of work.

Despite challenges and eventually coming to consensus to not continue with the research process as designed by IDS, the YMCA considers that the process of implementation of project activities to feed into a wider research process was a valuable experience.