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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Stakeholder perspectives on promoting health enhancing sport through the Rwanda Sports Policy

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ABSTRACT

Sport is an adaptable channel for change. It has been widely used to enhance health and wellbeing, foster social cohesion, and engender peace and development in different societies. The government of Rwanda developed a Sports Development Policy (SDP) to advance sports within the spectrum of its development agendas. However, the extent to which health constructs are integrated and implemented within the tenets of this policy remain unexplored, despite their pivotal role in population wellbeing and in contributing to the country's overarching development goals. This study sought to understand if and how the Rwanda SDP promotes sports for health from the stakeholders' perspectives. In-depth semi structured interviews were used for thirteen purposively sampled stakeholders of the SDP. Thematic and narrative analysis were used to examine and report the findings. Themes highlighted a progressive awareness of the Sports Policy pertaining to health outcomes, less involvement of stakeholders in sport policy formulation which affected its implementation, disproportionate efforts between sports policies for health, competitive, and mass sports activities. Stakeholders further underscored cultural beliefs, attitudes, and contextual environmental factors as the key constraints to bridge the policy theory and practice of sports. Finally, findings emphasise the integral role stakeholders play in the life course of a policy. Further, the SDP does not primarily promote sports for health, but rather elite sports, on the premise that health benefits are automatically achieved through participation in sports activities. Thus, reinforcements are still needed to clearly define the national physical activity plan either through the SDP or other national physical activity guidelines.

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Introduction

Sport is an adaptable channel for change, and has been widely used to enhance health and wellbeing, foster social cohesion, and engender peace and development in different societies (Tannenwald 2013). The government of Rwanda recognises the importance of sports and recreation to the general population as linked to its Sports Development Policy (SDP). The SDP was developed not only to advance sports for health and wellbeing of the Rwandans, but also for other economic development agendas in Rwanda, mainly through three categories of sports activities: Elite sports, Mass sports and Sports for All (MINISPOC 2012).

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The role of sports in disease prevention and management continuum is incontrovertible (Warburton *et al.* 2006, WHO 2010). For a low-income country such as Rwanda, sport is a strategy used frequently to shield the double-edged sword of lingering infectious diseases and the surging non-communicable diseases. Sport programmes have also been employed as reconciliation media by the government of Rwanda to rebuild its societal fabric that had been shredded by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi (MINISPORTS 2021).

The genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 claimed one million lives and left Rwanda institutions with no base of support to rehabilitate the ruins (Straus 2004). Life expectancy in this period saw a steep decline from 50 years of living in 1984 to 27 years in 1994 (World Bank 2022a). Beyond mortality, quality of life curve laid even flatter on the chart. From the genocidal acts of murder and sexual violence to the loss of families and social connections, the long-term negative effects on individuals' physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing were being nursed by financial difficulties, loss of trust in humanity, and desperation (Rieder and Elbert 2013, Straus 2004). Efforts and hope were needed to raise, move, and rebuild the country. Fortunately, the aftermaths of this tragic history met a transformative administration and politics that have led Rwanda to a remarkable socioeconomic and development recovery, improvement in health system infrastructure and living conditions as exemplified by an increase in the average life expectancy (Binagwaho *et al.* 2014). In 2019, life expectancy had increased to 69 average years of living (World Bank 2022a).

Sports, mostly in competitive tier were in the background of development process tying together the pieces in the recovery journey. A decade after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda qualified and attended the 2004 African Cup of Nations (CAN) for the first time, a triumph that brought internal cheers (Nkuutu 2015). Sport has later been seen as an opportunity to strengthen other booming areas such as tourism by building infrastructure that have eventually rendered Rwanda the capacity to host major international tournaments including African Nations Championship (CHAN) 2016, Basketball African League, Regional Motorsports Rallies, Tour du Rwanda, Kigali International Peace Marathon (KIMP) and African Para Volleyball Championships (MINISPORTS 2021). Indeed, MINISPORTS (2021) commends on how sports have been a vital part of the development strategies in rebuilding and promoting social cohesion, regaining a forward stance in economic growth, and restoring positive health outcomes among Rwandans through their active participation in sports activities.

The SDP builds on these accomplishments and serves to bridge existing gaps within a multifaceted arena of sports objectives (MINISPORTS 2021). However, the proportions or distribution of implementation efforts have not yet been equally exploited, in that elite sports take precedence over 'mass sport and sport for all'. This paper therefore sought to understand how the Rwanda SDP promotes physical activity for health from the stakeholders' perspectives, with an emphasis on the assessment of mass sport and sport for all components of the policy that mainly target health outcomes.

The sports development policy and sports in Rwanda from a theoretical framework perspective

While the SDP does not indicate the use of any policy theory frameworks in its development, it was reviewed using two policy process models for complementarity, namely ADEPT & Linear models (Sutton and Levinson 2001, Rutten *et al.* 2010), to understand its development process. The policy process models have predetermined criteria that guided the policy review process. The ADEPT (Analysis of Determinants of Policy Impact) model was adopted from Von Wright's Theoretical Model of Human Behaviour, which is based on four determinants: wants, abilities, duties and opportunities. Subsequently, these were interpreted as: goals, resources, obligations and opportunities (Rutten *et al.* 2010). The Linear model on the other hand follows a rational sequence and has four steps of policy development namely: problem identification, policy formation and adoption, implementation and evaluation (Sutton and Levinson 2001).

The Rwanda SDP was developed in 2012 under the Ministry of Sports [MINISPORTS], which is also the responsible and main implementing ministry of the policy. It takes the lead in guiding and coordinating the implementation process of the policy in conjunction with the assigned stakeholders. The SDP is hitherto the one major document that serves as a broad channel to develop all sports activities in the country. Based on the policy process models' assessment, the SDP was developed based on the identified problems like the underperformance of sports bodies and federations, which also mainly govern sports activities in Rwanda, and the need to address some of the government priorities like the socioeconomic development of the country. Thus, the main objective of the SDP was to establish a framework that promotes the development of professional sport, mass sport and sport for all at individual, community, and national levels in Rwanda (MINISPORTS 2012).

During the planning phase, a total of eight stakeholder institutions were identified and assigned tasks on how to implement the policy (MINISPORTS 2012). The stakeholders were selected based on their presumed capability to contribute to the development of sports, either technically or institutionally. Institutionally, the policy visualised what needed to be done at the ministerial level, local government level, National sports bodies, and all levels of education. Technically, the objective was to develop players and coaches, sports infrastructure, as well as sports and business (MINISPOC 2012). It was noted that besides the strong government will that was seen as an opportunity to support the SDP implementation, the policy had no external funding to support its implementation, which could be a challenge (Mukaruzima and Frantz 2019). Nonetheless, in spite of the prevalent challenges, the SDP demonstrates that Rwanda is committed to pursue both health and non-health related benefits, although the clarity of the objectives to attain these benefits together or independent of each other remains to be explored.

In 2021, the original policy was revised to acknowledge the ever-changing nature of the sporting landscape and the country's development. It formatted its label from solely being a guiding framework to being an evolving process. Original orientations were integrated into the reorganised version that re-emphasised the need to put more efforts in mass sports, develop elite sports, and improve physical, moral, and mental health of school children (MINISPORTS 2021). The revised SDP 2021 version outlines seven key foci it intends to address with a flexibility to refine and reorder their priorities in response to the social realities. These are namely; enhancing governance and leadership of sports bodies, developing skills of sports technical experts, enhancing talent detection, development of system and structures, developing sports infrastructure, building strategic partnerships, and improving coordination and communication (MINISPORTS 2021).

In relation to other theories, such as the Multiple Streams Theory (MST) which consist of three streams; Problems, Policies, and Politics (Hoefler 2022). The Rwanda SDP is specifically closely linked to the Political stream, which mainly encompasses national atmosphere, group campaigns, and administrative turnover (Kingdon 2010, Hoefler 2022). The national atmosphere of Rwanda, which was and still is about rebuilding the country, and one of the strategies to achieve this is through sports development. The author of MST (Hoefler 2022), however critiques the policymaking process, stating that it does not necessarily follow a logical process but rather, a random process based on the presented problem and how it will be solved, on the pretext that there are numerous solutions available to solve any policy issue (Kingdon 2010). This also resonates with Bramham *et al.* (2007) who argue that although Policy development is seemingly a rational process with clear stages followed (problem definition, policy plan strategy, implementation and evaluation of outcomes), when it comes to practice, it is rather an irrational, practical and incremental process which is determined by power play. The conflicting power influence and personal gains of the various players do pose major setbacks that complicate the entire policy process, including its implementation (Smith and Platts 2008, Bloyce and Smith 2010).

Recalling that stakeholders are regarded as a pivotal part of an organisation or business, who contribute to the achievement of its vision (Miragaia *et al.* 2014), their inability to decide on how to implement a specific policy, or determine how resources are allocated, negatively affect their

commitment, and how they conduct the implementation process, which, eventually, hinders the intended policy outcomes (Weimer and Vining 2005, Bloyce and Smith 2010). Freeman and colleagues, refer to stakeholders as groups, or individuals, whose support contributes to the existence of an organisation and that their interests should be valued and convergent for them to be in unison (Freeman *et al.* 2010, p. 51). Conversely, stakeholders may hold conflicting and diverging views for a part or entire guidelines (Nam *et al.* 2018), nevertheless, whatever directions stakeholders' perceptions take, they eventually emerge as the critical pillar of both policy formation and implementation (Freeman *et al.* 2010, Stuij and Stokvis 2015).

The Rwanda Sports Development Policy (SDP) and health

The SDP is featured in several arrays of policies that are to contribute to the Vision 2050. This is a Rwandan national development strategy that was developed under the country's Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and launched by the Rwandan President in December 2020 (MINECOFIN 2020). Its main aim is to make 'Rwanda become an upper-middle income country by 2035 and a high-income country by 2050 through prosperity and high quality of life for all Rwandans'. This Vision will be implemented based on five pillars, one of them being human development (MINECOFIN 2020). However, economic development trajectory transforms the ecosystem and ways of human living. Through public health lenses, the seemingly breakthroughs of modern-techno industrial growth are quantified in terms of the associated ecological costs on climate change and prospects of increasing chronic diseases prevalence (Egger 2011).

The progression of chronic diseases in African context is often correlated to economic development. For example, in a span of two decades, type two diabetes mellitus prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa had increased by 10-fold in 2008 (Amuna and Zotor 2008). In 2015, East African countries attributed 40% of their population deaths to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (Kraef *et al.* 2020). Rwanda had also linked 50% deaths that occurred in 2019 to NCDs (World Bank, 2023). Whether the alarming increase of these diseases has come to light due to improved diagnostic technology and the establishment of surveillance infrastructure, or due to epidemiological transition in nutrition and physical inactivity as an effect of economic development remain to be rigorously examined. Nevertheless, a knotty question emerges. Can NCDs get untangled from the economic development by enhancing population wellbeing in developing countries? Kraef and colleagues propose that carefully developed and implemented health policies provide a coping strategy to combat NCDs in developing nations (Kraef *et al.* 2020). Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to answer the above question, the plausibility of a healthy workforce being the foundation of achieving the long-term economic target of Rwanda to become a developed nation by 2050 becomes more apparent when NCDs impacts are evaluated economically. NCDs negatively affect the speed of economic development by increasing health care costs and contributing to the gross domestic product (Muka *et al.* 2015). The sport for all components of the SDP targets mass physical activity, which is then a modifiable determinant of NCDs (Peters *et al.* 2019).

Based on the premise of the SDP to promote wellbeing, this paper sought to understand from the stakeholders' perspectives, how physical activity for health is promoted. To investigate this, this paper explores the views and perceptions of stakeholders of the SDP, with an emphasis on the assessment of mass sport and sport for all components of the SDP, which mainly target health outcomes

Methods

A qualitative case study design using in-depth semi-structured interviews with Sport Policy stakeholders was used. Participants were identified using non-probability purposive sampling. A homogenous sample of 13 key stakeholders were purposively selected from the stakeholder institutions, as stipulated in the Rwanda Sport Policy (MINISPORTS 2018). Homogeneity was linked

to the participants' knowledge and/or contribution to the SDP development process and implementation.

The stakeholder institutions included: Ministry of Sports & Culture [MINISPOC], Ministry of Health [MINISANTÉ], Ministry of Education [MINIEDUC], Ministry of local government [MINALOC], Ministry of Defence [MOD], Rwanda National Police [RNP], Rwanda National Olympic Committee [RNOC]: National sports bodies, and the Private Sector Federation/Civil society organisations. The inclusion criteria for this cohort included anyone in charge of sports activities in the stakeholder institutions as mentioned in the sports development policy, or who directly or indirectly participated in the Sports Policy development.

Description of the participants (Table 1)

The final sample, therefore, is mainly comprised of directors or heads of the sports departments, or units. In cases where sports departments were non-existent, human resource managers, or other designated individuals, identified by the institutions' officials were selected to be interviewed.

Procedure

The data collection process takes into consideration the criteria of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and consistency of the research findings as discussed herein. Before engaging participants for interviews, permission was sought from the respective institutions, followed by arranging individual appointments, in person or telephonically, with the participants. All the participants were interviewed by the researcher on separate days, as per their availability, and the interviews lasted for about 20–45 min. Participants were allowed to express themselves in either of the two national languages used in Rwanda: English and/or Kinyarwanda, of which also the research is also well conversant. Apart from one interview that was recorded by only taking notes as per the interviewee's request, the rest of interviews were recorded with an audio tape recorder, as well as the researcher's cellular phone for safety of data.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants.

Participants	Position/ Department	Gender	Age	Education level	Marital status	Years of work experience
P 1	Human Resource director	Male	>40	University/ Bachelor's	Married	1–4
P 2	Executive director/Sport body	Male	>40	University/ Bachelor's	Married	1–4
P 3	Director/Sports body	Male	>40	University/Master's	Married	1–4
P 4	Director/Sports unit	Male	>40	University/ Bachelor's	Married	>10
P 5	Good governance	Male	31–40	University/ Bachelor's	Single	5–10
P 6	Human Resource director	Female	>40	University/master's	Married	1–4
P 7	Director/Sports unit	Male	>40	University/ Bachelor's	Married	>10
P 8	Director/Sports unit	Male	>40	University/Master's	Married	5–10
P 9	Head/Sport unit	Male	31–40	University/ Bachelor's	Married	1–4
p 10	Head/Sport unit	Male	>40	University/Master's	Married	5–10
P 11	Designated staff/RBC	Male	31–40	University/ Bachelor's	Married	5–10
p 12	Office manager/Sport fed	Male	31–40	University/ Bachelor's	Married	1–4
p 13	Director/Sport body	Male	3–40	University/ Bachelor's	Married	5–10

Credibility and consistency of findings was ensured through conducting interviews that were guided by an interview question guide, which was prepared based on the Rwanda SDP review findings, as well as relevant literature. This triangulation of methods facilitated the interpretation of findings based on different data sources. In addition, this approach aided in minimising the researcher's influence on the research and maximise credibility of the findings. Credibility and consistency were further ensured through member checking of the scripts, whereby participants were given back the transcribed interview scripts of their responses to crosscheck and ensure the researcher's interpretation of their responses was accurate, or for more explanations or information where required (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

To ensure transferability, a detailed and explicit description of the research methods and procedure, the sample of participant, their profiles and selection, as well as the study settings are provided (Guba and Lincoln 1989, Graneheim and Lundman 2004). To ensure anonymity, participants were assured that their identity and place of work would be kept confidential in any subsequent report. Their names or identities were not recorded, but only codes were used for identity purposes.

To further ensure consistency of the findings, the analysis phase involved coding data independently by the researcher, and then by an external coder, who later met to reach consensus regarding the emerging themes (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Krefting 1991, Shenton 2004). The data were also given to a translator to ensure cohesion between the Kinyarwanda interviews and the English transcriptions.

The data were analysed using the thematic and narrative analysis procedures (Braun and Clarke 2006). A narrative analysis was concomitantly done during interviews when participants were describing the SDP development process, problem identification, priorities, adoption and implementation process, as well as their involvement, interpretation and execution of the policy directives. Interview data were transcribed verbatim, after which the scripts were manually coded, in conjunction with ATLAS.ti software. Following the six phases of thematic analysis, emerging themes from the data were identified and interpreted as per the main objective of the study. Inductive approach to develop themes was adopted to satisfy the exploratory nature of the study. Specifically, themes were identified following an iterative process of getting familiar with the data during the transcription and initial coding process done by the researcher. The themes emerged from corresponding responses with similar patterns to the questions asked. Subthemes and categories then unfolded as participants further described their responses following the probing questions. To further expound and buttress the sub themes and categories, direct quotations were extracted from the interview responses and are presented in italics, with corresponding identity codes. Subsequently, a report of findings was produced (Braun and Clarke 2006, Creswell 2014), and presented under general themes, sub-themes and categories with relevant excerpts from the data corpus to support them.

Findings

The interview findings are presented under five major themes, with corresponding sub-themes and categories (Table 2).

Participation in SDP development process and knowledge of the policy

It was noted that while most participants had knowledge about the policy, they were not aware of the entire process of its development. Only a few of them were directly involved in its development.

Direct participation

Direct participation in the SDP development translates into a better understanding of the policy and ease of sharing the information about the policy process. It was highlighted that the development process mainly entailed consultative meetings with stakeholders whose day-to-

Table 2. Themes, sub-themes and categories.

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
1. Participation in SDP development process and knowledge of the policy	1.1. Direct participation 1.2. Indirect participation	1.1.1. Stakeholders' knowledge of the sports policy
2. Sport and health	2.1. Sport participation implies automatic health gains	
3. Policy implementation strategies	3.1. Speed of implementation depends on institutions' function. 3.2. Developing talents in sports for future elite professionals 3.3. Facilitate mass sports and train sports trainers.	
4. Challenges of implementing the policy	4.1. Cultural beliefs towards sport/exercise 4.2. Lack of infrastructure and convenience of built environment for sport 4.3. Lack of human resources to develop sports. 4.4. Accountability of the sports policy	4.1.1. Experience and attitudes of role models and authority figures towards sport 4.1.2. An attitude of reluctance towards engaging in sports programmes
5. Recommendation	5.1. The need for a social marketing strategy to promote sport and exercise for general health. 5.2. Use of role models for sports development	

day activities directly consisted of working for sports bodies/federations, the National Olympic Committee, and other relevant national policies to align the Sport Policy within government priorities.

... , and for a policy to be developed there are guiding documents, e.g., Vision 2020, we have the 7-year government program, EDPRS and other guiding documents in the government's plan so that the policy will be well aligned with the vision of the country, those guiding documents are the ones that helped us. (P8)

Indirect participation

Indirect participation of stakeholders in the policy development meant that institutions where these participants were employed could have been involved in the sports development process in one way or another. During the consultative meetings, invitations were sent to the selected stakeholder institutions whereby either someone in charge of the sports department or an alternative would represent the institution, and in some cases, some institutions would not have a representative at the time of the meetings.

Not recently do I know who participated in the sports development itself, but as far as sports development goals, yes that's what our mandate is So operationally speaking, we have a strong mandate of involvement for the operations of sports within Rwanda. (P2)

I have no idea about that policy, not anything that I know of, either we might not have been invited during its development or it might have been brought and kept in the CEO's office and not disseminated. . . (P6)

Stakeholders' knowledge of the sports policy

The stakeholders' direct participation in the sports policy development, as well as their knowledge about it, influenced their commitment level towards its implementation. A sense of either indifference or lack of information about the Sport Policy was noted among some stakeholders, particularly those who were not directly involved in its development. Although a few participants admitted to knowing about the sports development policy, all the participants seemed informed of the Prime

Minister's order regarding the Friday sport participation for all government employees as a section from the SDP.

I really don't know much about the Rwandan sports policy but one thing I can tell you is that sport is a recommendation ... Yes, every Friday, all ... members ... are supposed to do sports. (P10)

We do sports for different reasons. One of them is for the good of our staff and also in response to the mandatory Friday sport from the PM instructions. (P6)

Sports and health

Sport participation implies automatic health gains

There was a consensus from the participants inferring that the health benefits of sport are automatically embedded in its participation. Specifically, they referred to mass sports as one major category of sports reflected in the SDP that has inherent health benefits while voicing resentments that often more focus is directed towards advancing elite sports, than other sports categories.

In relation to health, you see, we started doing sports, and realized, or rather that's how I see it, we were going more towards the competitive sport that is related to federations, international federations, and things like that for competition. We forgot sport for all/mass sport. (P4)

No, it was not in that sense although in our policy it's included that we should promote sports for all among Rwandans, the population of Rwanda to do sports, however, that was not our motivating factor ... It's understandable that health is part of the policy ... , but normally sports cannot be separated from health promotion. That is implied. May be during the review we shall address it in writing so that any reader will see it as an objective otherwise it's obvious and implied that you can't do sports with people who don't have a good health and get anywhere ... (P8)

Policy implementation strategies

Speed of implementation depends on institutions' function

Strategies to implement the policy were assigned to various stakeholders in line with their functions as an institution. However, some specific strategies seemed to focus on institutional goals and little about actual implementation of the Sports Policy. There was a goal congruence in institutions that are directly involved with sports compared to those that were considering institutionalising sports programmes. For the former, implementation strategies sounded flawlessly aligned with their day-to-day activities, such as training trainers and coaches, creating sports teams, organising mass sports for talent detection and facilitating informal and compulsory exercise sessions on Friday afternoons.

In this institution we have the directorate of sports which facilitates all our employees to do sports on every Friday afternoon. ... We realize the importance of sports in terms of health and fitness as far as our profession is concerned. (P1)

Developing talents in sports for future elite professionals

Stakeholders such as the sports federations had a good grasp of what was expected of them that naturally corresponded to the guidelines in the policy.

... and our daily responsibilities are in line with the policy as we can't do anything outside the policy. The Sports Policy has many parts but as we represent sports federations, we encourage them to develop sports based on children who gradually develop until they become professionals. (P13)

Facilitating mass sports and training sports trainers

This is the understanding of the implementation strategy of the SDP as reflected in institutions that are not directly involved with sports in their day-to-day activities.

We support it (the Sports Policy) from all angles, example in elite sports we have different sports teams such as basketball, soccer, volley etc. Mass sports we go to retreats . . . , and other gatherings . . . Basically that's how I think we can implement it, train people who can train and teach others the benefits of sports . . . (P7)

Challenges in implementing the policy

Participants expressed various challenges encountered with the implementation of the Sports Policy, mostly related to cultural norms. Other challenges included but were not limited to insufficient finances, lack of infrastructure and human resources, unclear implementation framework, and accountability.

Cultural beliefs towards sport/exercise

Most participants were of the view that engagement in exercise programmes among Rwandans was influenced by various factors, with cultural or traditional norms being the most prevalent. This creates a negative attitude towards sports participation.

Otherwise in general I think sports performance is not yet a well-established culture in Rwanda and people still have poor perceptions about sports, they haven't really appreciated its importance in as much as they are being told to engage in sports activities . . . (P11)

The main challenge which is possibly general is culture and people not being aware of the benefits of sports . . . culture that contributes to people not liking sports . . . (P7)

Experience and attitudes of role models towards sport

Participants expressed the role of models in sports participation. Models' attitude towards sport participation were thought to hold biases that are engrained in culture. This, in turn, has a negative impact on the speed of implementation of sports enhancing policies. Further, successful implementation also gets some hindrance from a lack of prior exposure to sports that affects the individual's perception and value of sport.

One of the challenges is the political background/history of our country where sport participation is not part of the Rwandan culture . . . , (P8)

. . . the structure is still weak due to various reasons such as perceptions of people about the importance of sports is still a strong barrier especially among parents, teachers, school directors, because most of them were not initially exposed to sports. Basically, people don't understand the importance of sports, thinking that sports is just a waste of time, some think that sports would interfere with a child's education rather than facilitate them . . . (P4)

An attitude of reluctance towards engaging in sports programmes

The following excerpts indicate that stakeholders' views expressed Rwandans as a population with reluctance to engage in leisure-time physical activity irrespective of the existing challenges.

Of course, one main problem is the attitude of the Rwandans, they are lazy in doing sports, take an example of this Friday sports, people use this time as an advantage to do their own business, that shows that not all people have gotten the concept. (P11)

Sport in Rwanda is plagued with a disease of a charity mind set, and that's our biggest obstacle, in that even if we have good leadership in sport but still coming from a sports history that sports is maintained through gift versus through sports that is maintained through commercial structure (P2)

Lack of infrastructure and convenience of built environment for sport

Although it was not the main challenge hindering participation in sport, the participants acknowledged the need to increase and improve infrastructure that is more accessible to the general population. For example, having convenient exercise locations within their communities, schools or workplaces would lead to more sports participation.

One of the recommendations should be to avail sports facilities where many people meet, example most universities here are found by the roadside, they don't have space for sports so how do they expect them to do sports . . . , (P7)

Infrastructure goes hand in hand with equipment and they are expensive as they are not made in Rwanda. . . Therefore, the fact that they are expensive plus people not really acknowledging the importance of sports, results in lack of interest in investing in them and instead they wait for the government. (P8)

Lack of human resources to develop sports

The lack of human resources to facilitate sports development was commonly mentioned. For instance, sports mentors, trainers, or coaches to advance sports in its different domains, are still lacking. There is therefore a need for committed people to be in charge of activities involving the implementation of the Sports Policy in all stakeholder institutions.

. . . there is shortage of sports trainers who can't reach to the majority of the population, though we are working on that and hope to achieve it soon. (P7)

Accountability of the sports policy

A sense of 'passing the buck' regarding the implementation and evaluation of the policy was perceptible. Some participants supposed that it was not their duty to evaluate or implement the policy, but rather that of the policy formulating ministry. Overall, the participants were adamant that the ministry in charge of the policy should be responsible for spearheading both the implementation and evaluation processes.

The ministry in charge should do that otherwise we will be taking over their responsibility, because the policy is theirs even though we help them to implement it, they are the ones supposed to implement it, they are responsible/answerable. (P7)

We have never seen people from the ministry of sports come to monitor and evaluate how sports is done. Basically, there is no follow up from the ministry. As a policy, the owners should inform the implementers on the way forward. This should be part of their duties. (P1)

Recommendations

Most of the participants' views about the policy were expressed in the form of recommendations. They highlighted the need to change people's perceptions about sports and address the lack of motivation towards sport and exercise participation. Using role models to increase public awareness of sports and encourage the public especially the youth is a one strategy that was thought to have potential for sizeable impacts. As one participant put it *'they need to understand sports and its benefits*

and then be motivated to participate, so there should be a strategy to motivate individuals to do sports' (P 8)

The need for a social marketing strategy to promote sport and exercise for general health

Participants also alluded to the lack of proper strategies for promoting sport participation which is viewed through the lens of the 'culture' of Rwandans not engaging in sports. The following excerpts refer:

... there are various activities that Rwandans have heard and implemented and we should be thankful to that because when Rwandans understand something and acknowledge it, they make sure they do it, likewise, if they understand the importance of sports, it can be done ... (P4)

... so basically like I said earlier this calls for more efforts to motivate and facilitate people. Work on their perceptions, make them understand that sports is beneficial to them and tell them about the dangers of being physically inactive such as the high incidence of NCDs globally and particularly within our African countries due to the current trend of modernization. (P10)

Use of role models for sports development

Lastly, participants highlighted that positive perception towards sports was related to positive tendencies to promote sports and vice versa. Leaders with a positive perception towards sport are most likely to promote it among their subordinates.

It is therefore evident that where the leadership has a good perception about sports, the outcome is good they easily and readily promote it among the locals ... (P9)

Discussion

In this study, stakeholders of the SDP shared their views on the health element of the SDP while reflecting on the development and implementation processes of the policy. They acknowledged the health benefits of sport and recognised that promoting sports for health was not the primary motivation and aim of the Sports Policy as the resounding aim for the SDP was to facilitate the general development of sports in Rwanda. This finding is consistent with the African Sports index study which showed that while most sports policies in Africa acknowledge the association of health and sport, policies targeting both are often aggregated in one to accomplish both ends (Keim and De Coning 2014). This grouping may originate from scarcity of resources to support branches of a policy as a coping strategy. The lack of resources was further emphasised by the participants as a major barrier in the implementation phase. It is likely that the lack of resources and other barriers for effective promotion and implementation of sports for all in the SDP might be rooted in the definition of sport for all elements of the policy.

The observed lack of effective base of support for sports for health in different institutions may have originated from the absence of clearly stated objectives targeting health in the SDP. This ambiguity can be attributed to using the sports concept in all aspects of the policy. While sports imply an automatic gain of health benefits, it is defined as a subset of physical activity that is governed by rules with an element of competition (Bouchard *et al.* 2012). This may not apply to mass sports as they are done in a relatively unstructured way targeting health and other social outcomes (Murphy and Bauman 2007). Sport also assumes a level of cardiorespiratory fitness that is higher than that which is required to involve in light or moderate intensity physical activity (Bouchard *et al.* 2012). The umbrella term, physical activity, which refers to any bodily movement of skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure above the basal level might clear this confusion (Caspersen *et al.* 1985).

Thus, the resentments of stakeholders taking the SDP as a means to overly facilitate the development of elite sports may have stemmed from viewing all elements of the SDP as sport.

A lack of clarity was also reflected at the initiation of the implementation phase. In the SDP development process, the implementing institutions were deliberately selected and subsequently directives given to the seemingly suitable stakeholders of the current policy. As a result, some of the key stakeholders were unclear about their roles in implementing the policy despite being well stated. They alluded to the fact that being a stakeholder of the Sport Policy did not necessarily translate into having knowledge about it. Consequently, a contradiction was created between policy and practice, whereby what is on paper does not necessarily reflect what is on the ground. This is not new within the complex dynamic process of policy process that often deter intended policy outcomes (Eyler *et al.* 2016).

While policy development process should ideally involve the key stakeholders for a better understanding and implementation of the policy (Ball and Stevenson 2006, Bloyce and Smith 2010), it is not always the case. This being due to the central decision-making approach used, that normally overlooks the important contribution of the stakeholders, who yet have to acquiesce to the inclinations of the decision-makers (Sabatier 1986, Matland 1995). Also, the insufficient and biased understanding of the technicalities involved in the policy process, in terms of stakeholders' responsibilities, as well as the issues around policy implementation, affect how these policies are enacted (Weimer and Vining 2005). Consequently, stakeholders neglect to internalise their counterparts' challenges with carrying out policy directives, and, therefore, appear to pass the buck (Dopson and Waddington 1996, Weimer and Vining 2005).

On a more positive note, a strong political will to support health enhancing physical activity and sports in Rwanda emerged out of participants' views on implementation strategies. Such a claim is supported by the compulsory collective sports for government employees for 2 paid hours on every Friday of the week, a car-free zone for environmental and quality-of-life benefits established in Kigali City centre since 2015, and the two car free days per month to encourage mass physical activity for the city dwellers (Tashobya 2015, MINISPORTS 2018). It is also worth mentioning that since the development of the policy in 2012, the revised policy of 2021, highlighted some tremendous achievements in the seven foci of the sport policy such as the increase in sports facilities, development of partnerships with international sports bodies, hosting of international tournaments, and upgraded capacity of local sports trainers (MINISPORTS 2021).

Yet still, the Global Observatory for Physical Activity, Rwanda physical activity country card, continues to show a lack of surveillance and policy status (Ramirez Varela *et al.* 2018). Thus, reinforcements are still needed to clearly define the national physical activity plan either through the SDP or other national physical activity guidelines. Finally, the diversity of the Rwandan population further suggests different recommendations for different population groups considering the domains of physical activity that require interventions. For the service-oriented institutions, leisure-time physical activity programmes such as the Friday sports programme and lifestyle physical activity may be strengthened while examining the applicability of such recommendations in private and rural institutions.

Strengths and limitations

This study has generated insights that researchers, policy makers, and implementers may use in examining effective integration strategies to align and incorporate SDP components in the organisation targets. In addition, it has suggested redefining the goals of physical activity programmes for a better implementation.

Although this study has illuminated much about health in the SDP, it is not without limitations. Generalising the findings of this study should be approached with some caution given the reported flaws associated with generalisability of the case study research and purposive sampling (Sharma 2017, Yin 2018). This particularly applies to attributing the views of presented stakeholders countrywide

considering a segment of institutions and entities that do not endorse the SDP. Equally, although the used sample of stakeholders was obtained conveniently, the dominance of male in the sample necessitates further analyses on the role and influence of gender in institutional sports participation.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the SDP does not primarily promote sport for health, its implementation is rather skewed towards advancing elite sports, on the premise that health benefits are automatically achieved when people participate in sports activities. Besides, while stakeholders are considered an integral part of a successful policy formulation and implementation, some of the SDP stakeholders of the current study had a sense of either indifference or lack of information about the Sport Policy, particularly those who were not directly involved in its development.

Therefore, reinforcements are still needed to clearly define the national physical activity plan either through the SDP or other national physical activity guidelines. Further, the SDP design, successful execution, and maximisation of the intended outcomes, may be influenced by the commitment of all its stakeholders, coupled with contextual factors such as availability of resources and the political will. Finally, key recommendations to successfully achieve health outcomes through SDP are to adopt a social marketing approach in targeting the wider population and build collaborative networks among stakeholders.

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