Developing the Paralympic Movement in West Africa:
Challenges and opportunities for social inclusion in Ghana

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Aims

Background
- Disability and sport in the international debate
- Disability demographics in Ghana

Challenges
- Attitudinal
- Physical
- Institutional
  - 3 categories outlined by WHO

Opportunities
- National benefits of para-sport
- What has been done so far in Ghana
Disability has taken a prominent role on the international stage

World Health Assembly drafts Resolution 58.23 on “disability including prevention, management and rehabilitation,” requests W.H.O. produce a World Report

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRD): UN treaty reinforces our understanding of disability as a human rights & development issue

World Report on Disability WHO and the World Bank launches first-ever report, using IC(d)F(h) conceptual framework of the environment enabling & disabling people
The Paralympic Movement has raised interest even further

“Meet the Superheroes” Advertisement Campaign (U.K.), 2012
Disability demographics in Ghana

Prevalence estimates of total disability
- 7 – 10% of total population ([1.5-2.2M])
- 8 – 12% among working-age individuals (18-65 years)

Topography of disability in Ghana
- Women (10.6%) > Men (6.2%); 64% PWD are female
- Similar overall rates in urban versus rural areas
- Prevalence higher in older age groups (38% working-age PWD are 46-65 years of age)

W.H.O.
Ghana Federation of the Disabled, 2012
Mitra, S et al. (2011) Disability and poverty in developing countries, in World Bank Social Protection and Labor Unit discussion papers
Disability demographics in Ghana

- Among children, disability is highest 1-9yrs

Most frequent causes of disability in this age group

- Infectious (post-polio predominantly)
- Trauma/injuries
- Epilepsy
- Mental retardation
- Visual Imp.
  - “Squint” often due to nutritional deficiencies
- Hydrocephalus
- Kyphosis
- Burn scarring

Physical (58%)
Visual & Auditory (25%)
Neuro-cognitive (11%)
Other (6%)

All told: most common disabilities are physical and visual

- Physical
- Visual


Clear preponderance of visual and physical disability

If the aim is to promote social inclusion through parasport, the selection of specific sports should perhaps follow these demographics.
Many organizations for PWD exist

- Ghana Federation of the Disabled (1987)
  - Ghana Society of the Physically Disabled (1980)
  - Ghana Association of the Blind (1963)
  - Ghana National Association of the Deaf (1968)
  - Parents Association of Children with Intellectual Disability (2001)
  - Ghana Association of Persons Living with Albinism (2003)
  - Share Care Ghana (2006)

- Ghana Research and Advocacy Initiative (poor)

- Multiple international development partners, Salvation Army, the Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian Churches

- National Paralympic Committee

- Right to Dream® elite sports, education and leadership academy in Eastern Region (registered charity in Ghana, UK & US)
One has invested in structured para-sport programming

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Their efforts (and others) face significant challenges

Right to Dream® elite sports, education and leadership academy in Eastern Region (registered charity in Ghana, UK & US)

Ghana Federation of the Disabled
Center for Disability & Rehabilitation Studies, Ghana Disability Database in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2012
Attitudinal challenges
At the level of the individual

Social isolation fosters negative perceptions of self and society
At the level of the family

Non-biologic concept of disability ("kinkirgo" or curse)

Due to shame, intentional educational + sociorecreational exclusion

Body and Soul (De Corpo e Alma), documentary film (2011) distributed by Meetings Production co © Matthieu Bron
At the level of society

Apathy, avoidance and discrimination

Built environment can be inaccessible even with adaptive equipment

Body and Soul (De Corpo e Alma), documentary film (2011) distributed by Meetings Production co © Matthieu Bron
Transportation is often crowded, worn and inaccessible

Body and Soul (De Corpo e Alma), documentary film (2011) distributed by Meetings Production co © Matthieu Bron
Challenges are complex, but para-sport can address at least four challenges.

- **Social Isolation**
- **Intentional Social Exclusion**
- **Discrimination**
- **Lack of (Positive) Role Models**
- **Inaccessible Environments**
- **Transportation Limitations**

Para-Sport programs can address these challenges.

Two big hurdles Ghana must clear.
The individual and community benefits of adapted sport are clear

**Psychological Well-Being**
- Mood
- Trait Anxiety
- Self-Esteem
- Mastery
- Role-Modeling

**Social Integration**
- Resuming age- gender- culture- appropriate roles (e.g. decision-making)
- Productive behavior in relationships in natural community settings

What has been done so far?

- The most organized and successful Para-Sport effort: Right to Dream
- Social enterprise, registered charity in Ghana, U.K., U.S.
- Founded in Ghana by British social entrepreneur Tom Vernon, in 2000
- Vision: To offer talented, underprivileged children an opportunity to reach life potential via ATHLETIC, ACADEMIC and CHARACTER development
- Fully-residential school offering scholarships to talented African children
- March 2010, opened new purpose-built facility in Eastern Ghana
- >100 graduates to date
- 35 graduates awarded full scholarships to leading universities, private boarding schools and colleges in the US and UK
- 15 grads signed professional contracts for international football clubs
- 6 grads now represent the Black Stars
Right to Dream sponsored Ghana’s four London 2012 paralympians
Para-sport development continues

- RtD is establishing a residential youth Para-Sport program
- Raphael Botsyo (3-time Paralympian) serves as the Development Officer for the Para-Sport program
- Target: Athletes with visual impairments (T11-13), limb deficiencies (T42-46) and competing in wc events (T51-T54)
- 100% scholarships offered to para-athletes, aged 15-18
- Same RtD talent development program used: sporting, education and character to create national role models who inspire their families and communities towards excellence
Creating role models is a priority
Developing para-sport programs in Ghana could not occur at a better time.
Further development of para-sport at the national level is needed.
Thank you
Individual benefits of adapted sports are clear

USA | Cerebral Palsy. Diane Groff et al. 2009
Participation \( \uparrow \) overall health, QoL, family life and social life (strength of athletic identity correlated with level of influence)

HOL | Amputee. Miheil Bragaru et al. 2011
Sport had a beneficial effect on cardiopulmonary fitness, psychological well-being, social reintegration and overall physical functioning

Benefits include socialization, acquisition of knowledge from others, greater awareness of health and well-being, weight maintenance, functional development and independence

TUR | Intellectually Disabled. D Ozer et al. 2010
Special Olympics soccer program \( \downarrow \) problem behavior, \( \uparrow \) social competence, \( \uparrow \) attitude of able-bodied youth towards PWID
Community benefits of adapted sports are clear

- Increased understanding, acceptance and integration of people with differences
- For older children, increased empathic sensitivity, social responsibility and competence and broadened knowledge of cultural norms
- Social inclusion
- Not the total “solution” by any means…
Disability among Ghanaian children enrolled in primary school

- Pre-natal and peri-natal deficiencies
- Infectious disease (vector/soil transmitted, viral)
- Trauma (road traffic injuries >> falls, violence)
- Congenital (including abortion attempts)

2006 Persons with Disability Act

Passed by Parliament (Cabinet-initiated in 2000)

Two-fold objective
- Fulfill a constitutional obligation of enacting laws to protect and promote the rights of PWD
- Fulfill Ghana’s international obligations

61 clauses in 8 broad categories
- Rights, Employment, Education, Transportation, Health-care facilities, Miscellaneous provisions, National Council on PWD, Administrative and Financial provisions

A Few Protected Rights:
- Family Life
- Participation in social, creative & recreational activities
- Equal residential tx
- Access to public spaces

Effectiveness and real-life impact of social organizations and formal legislation remain severely limited by weak lobbying power and many societal challenges.
The Paralympic Movement has further raised interest

*International Wheelchair Games (U.K.), 1948*
Athletics may be an ideal para-sport to develop nationally.