



**Evaluating Psycho-Social Sport Programmes:  
A Pilot Study Using Photo Monitoring in the Context of the  
Project 'Sport and Play for Lebanese Children and Youth  
Affected by Conflict'**

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## Abstract

The project *Sport and Play for Lebanese Children and Youth Affected by Conflict* has been accompanied by a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programme. In addition, to traditional quantitative and qualitative methods a participatory photo monitoring tool has been piloted in an experimental way. This article provides a short overview of the project, and informs about the use of participatory photo-collection as a monitoring tool in this context and its outcome.

## 1. Introduction

Psychosocial sport programmes have rapidly gained popularity in the last decades among grassroots organizations, government agencies, international development and humanitarian organisations. Sport is increasingly cited as useful in a number of ways: whether it is in overcoming the stress and trauma among those affected by armed conflict or natural disasters; integration of marginalised populations; awareness campaigns of health and medical issues; promotion of peace; or greater gender equity – all within the cadre of fun, healthy physical exercise and competition.

For children and youth, in particular, sport, play and physical activity are crucial to healthy growth and development, physically, socially, and mentally. Within the context of this article child and youth sports refers to organized and supervised activity that facilitates and encourages teamwork, discipline and fair-play at the grassroots level. The main focus lies on how participants engage with sport and its positive values, rather than on how they are performing in sport.

There is an increasing awareness and evidence of the potential of sport and organizations operating in the field of sport and development want to show that interventions implemented are making a difference and can reach the pre-defined objectives. How do they know that what they are doing is really working? Herein, the importance of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) becomes evident.

M&E programmes should aid the assessment of programme progress and impact as well as the planning for future measures. Thus, the choice of tools and methods have to reflect these two needs, in the sense that different methods produce data on different aspects of children's lives and psychosocial wellbeing. Against this background the SAD project *Sport and Play for Lebanese Children and Youth Affected by Conflict* was accompanied by a comprehensive M&E programme using both quantitative and qualitative methods such as a quantitative survey administered to participants and a control group, weekly questionnaires completed by the coaches and guideline-interviews conducted with parents of participants. The measures were implemented in order to assess the impacts of sport programmes on social and personal development of the targets. In addition to traditional M&E tools, a creative participatory photo monitoring was piloted and compared to other monitoring instruments.

Creative M&E is understood as a participatory approach which combines traditional, standardised M&E tools with alternative, innovative M&E tools. Such innovative instruments are not intended to substitute traditional M&E tools, but rather should complement them.

The creative M&E approach allows the 'filling of gaps', minimising weaknesses of each method and appraising projects from different perspectives. Such a multi-method approach allows a more comprehensive survey and increases the understanding of complex issues.

Furthermore, a creative and participatory M&E approach goes beyond a mere data collection. By involving beneficiaries centrally in M&E processes, their input can be integrated more effectively in

to decision-making and follow up action. This means getting beneficiaries, in our case children and young people engaged in the process of what information to collect, and how to interpret it. To give children and youth the opportunity to describe some aspects of their experience in their own words and views in a creative way increases their skills and by having their opinions taken into account, provides a sense of empowerment. By letting participants decide what is important to them we have the basis for a joint analysis based on a more equitable power distribution between programme management and participants.

The idea of photographic monitoring is not new. However, to date the method has mainly been used in land management and agricultural projects to document change of vegetation and plant communities over time. This is achieved by taking a series of photographs of an area over a defined period of time from the same location and looking in the same direction.

Nevertheless, during recent years international development organizations have started to discover the participatory use of film and photo cameras in their work with children and youth. The most common forms of using photo and video making with young people can be found in baseline studies or needs assessments. Children and young people equipped with cameras document their lives and realities from their own perspectives and in their own words<sup>1</sup>. The UK/France based organisation *Insight* is also using participatory video in combination with the 'Most Significant Change' approach<sup>2</sup> for the monitoring and evaluation of their projects and programmes.<sup>3</sup>

Using video and photo as a participatory M&E tool is still a relatively new approach. However, as far as we know there are no documented cases where a participatory and standardized photo collection has been used as a monitoring instrument in projects working with children and youth. The case presented here is therefore a significant contribution to the use of this method of programme monitoring and evaluation.

## **2. Project Background – Research Context**

SAD launched the project *Sport and Play for Lebanese Children and Youth Affected by Conflict* in cooperation with the Lebanese NGO Oum el Nour at the beginning of 2007.

The objective of the project was to help overcome emotional stress and enhance the psychosocial rehabilitation of children and youth affected by conflict through guided sport activities. By means of sport and other game-based interventions, children and youth were provided with structured leisure time to help channel emotions, frustration and aggression, improve mental and social wellbeing, promote values such as teamwork and fair-play as well as provide orientation.

After a pilot phase of two years (January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007-December 31<sup>st</sup> 2008) the activities were in part handed over into local structures.

Activities were implemented in the Southern suburbs of Beirut, in the region of Dahieh in two public schools: one for girls and one for boys. Each of these schools had between 300 and 500

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Faulkner, J. (1998): Participatory video-making in Brazil. In: Johnson, V. et al, *Stepping Forward: Children and Young People's Participation in the Development Process*. London, Intermediate Technology Publications, 88-91. Save the Children: *Eye to Eye with Child Labour. Photos and Stories by Working Children around the World*. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/eyetoeye>.

<sup>2</sup> Davis, R. & Dart, J. (2005): *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique. A Guide to its' Use*. <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.insightshare.org/>

pupils at the time the activities were initiated. The project also included children and youth from a Palestinian refugee camp.

In order to implement the sport and play activities the infrastructure of the partner schools as well as playgrounds of the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) schools were used. In addition to the physical education classes, the project coaches carried out extra-curricular sport and play activities twice a week in each of the partner schools. Participation was on voluntary basis and the activities were organized in an open manner so new participants as well as children and youth from the neighbourhood could join the activities at any time.

A total of 120 children and young adults, between the age of 7 and 18, participated in the activities. In accordance with the wishes of the participants, activities such as football, volleyball, basketball, handball, gymnastics and Taekwondo were offered. The activities and games were combined with the learning of social competences including information and education on health, substance abuse, as well as conflict management and violence prevention.

### **3. Method**

The idea behind the photo monitoring was to encourage the participants to be involved in a creative way in the monitoring process and to assess what kind of information and outcomes of the project can be observed through this form of visible data.

In the preparatory phase of the photo monitoring it was decided that digital cameras were the most appropriate for our purpose. In each of the programme localities a camera was provided to one of the coaches who had the responsibility for collecting the photo-monitoring data.

In each of the sport sessions, one of the participants was chosen to have the responsibility of documenting the activities, through her/his own eyes, by taking pictures. At the end of the session the responsible participant had to choose three pictures and explain why these pictures were, for her/him, representative of the activities and why she or he is taking part in the activities. The photo documenters were chosen on a rotating basis. The interview at the end of each session was conducted by a responsible coach.

When the research design for the photo monitoring was drafted it was decided to collect photo stories in three intervals: October/November 2007, January/February 2008 and April/March 2008, with the aim that every participant would have the opportunity to document the activities by pictures three times during the running of the project. However, the security situation in Lebanon became extremely tense between January and May 2008 with the consequence that many activities were cancelled or they took place but not all the participants were present. Due to this situation it was difficult to manage the photo monitoring as initially scheduled and it was decided to collect the photo stories whenever possible on an ongoing basis.

Although we faced the above mentioned difficulties we collected around 50 photo stories which were analysed and provided an important basis for qualitative interpretation as the following section will show.

The use of the tool as well the photo material was analyzed and evaluated jointly with the coaches and the local project team.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Reactions**

Various reactions to the photo collection exercise were identified and were found to differ according to age, gender and social class. For example, the younger participants and children less used to taking pictures with cameras were very fond of the photo collection. They felt very proud of the responsibility and the trust given to them to handle the project camera. In addition they had a great deal of fun in taking the pictures. Alternatively the participants more familiar with cameras, found taking photos to be less important. Nevertheless a majority of them liked to comment and give their impressions on the project by taking pictures, especially the female participants.

Some of the boys felt somewhat constrained by the task of taking photos, as they preferred to simply play. They often took their photos in the first half an hour of the sport class and then turned their focus back to the activities. Conversely, the girls seemed to manage to do both at the same time.

In addition, girls tended to engage in significantly more posing in the photos than boys. Although this situation changed in the photo stories taken towards the end when the boys started to pose in small groups or hugging each other in front of the camera, which could be done to the developed group dynamic, which fostered the friendships between the participants.

### **4.2. Reasons for participating in the activities**

Generally, the most important aspect of the programme for all the participants were the friendships and social relations they established through the activities as well as the fun they had in participating. In comparison to the girls, boys gave much more importance to the sporting aspects of the activities: the fitness, the training, the skills they were taught, the rules and discipline. This was seen not only in the comments but also in the pictures. The pictures taken by the boys are often taken from a distance, showing the whole group concentrating on the training. The majority of the pictures taken by the girls indeed tended to show smaller groups of participants, taken from a closer range and often focussed on the faces.

Interestingly, it was in one of the boy's schools' where comments such as 'everybody is included' and 'I like to be part of a team' were seen repeatedly. The reason for this distinctive feature may be explained by the fact, that in this school the participants were religiously significantly more mixed than at the other locations where activities were taking place. Religious segregation or the question of social inclusion/exclusion was clearly seen as an issue at that school with this being reflected in the analysis of the interviews with the parents as well. The programme coaches, who came from different religious background, successfully managed to integrate participants from different religious groups into the activities and build a team spirit beyond religious boundaries. This was appreciated by both the participants and their parents.

Surprisingly, in the quantitative assessment only a minority of the participants gave importance to friendships and social relationships. The top three reasons for participating in the programme assessed by the quantitative assessment were 'to play and have fun', 'to become fit' and 'to learn about sport skills'. Meanwhile friendship and social relationships were a repeated and conspicuous subject in the photo monitoring reports. This inconsistency could be attributed to the nature of obtaining data through each of the two methods – filling in a questionnaire, sitting alone at a table is much more formal than documenting the activities that they have been involved with directly. The answers in questionnaires tend to be more deliberate and there is a risk that

participants answer in a way they believe is expected of them. Conversely, the photo documentation is more spontaneous. Nevertheless, the quantitative research pointed to the fact that participants of the sport activities felt significantly less socially marginalized at the end of the programme than at the beginning. As the same effect could not be detected among the control group of the research sample the effect can be regarded as an outcome of the programme activities and underlines again the importance of friendships established through the activities.

While nearly all the photographs from the Lebanese participants focus on or around the activities, many pictures of the Palestinian participants show the surrounding area of the playground: the nature, the sky, trees etc. Being familiar with the tight living conditions in the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, where there is nearly no space for children to play and run outside, it is not surprising that their documentation of the programme focuses on the surroundings of the playground. Like the interviews with the parents, the comments by the participants also underline the added value of the project to bring the young people out of the camp. 'To leave or go outside the camp' is a repeated reason for taking part in the activities by the Palestinian participants.

#### **4.3. The Coaches**

Congruent to the experiences and outcomes of similar projects, the findings of this programme in Lebanon once again emphasised the central position of the coaches for the success of psychosocial sport activities. Initially the coaches were treated like teachers but the relationship between them and the participants developed gradually into friendship. The coaches became role models to whom the participants became closely attached and in whom they developed trust.

The data from the photo monitoring highlighted the important role of the coaches. This was also confirmed by the interviews with the parents and other collected data. In nearly all stories the coaches are pictured as well although, the boys focused more on the coaches in their written reports. However, not having mentioned the importance of and their respect for the coaches does not mean that the girls were not as focused on the coaches as the boys- rather they included the coaches when they generally spoke about the friendships established through the programme. Nevertheless both boys and girls equally appreciated the friendly relationship with the coaches and the collected photo stories demonstrate the importance of the coach as a role model for the participants. This was highlighted through repeated statements that the coaches were taking part in the games as ordinary players; they were not standing aside, controlling the activities like a teacher. In this way the participants felt that they were respected and taken seriously.

#### **4.4. Group Dynamic**

The visual data was also helpful in analysing the group dynamic between the participants. Although in all teams there were many pictures that only focussed on a small group of participants or individuals, the group composition pictured always changed and there was nobody in particular who seemed to be in every picture. This reflects the balanced relationship between the different participants. In the photo stories of one female team however, there was a group of approximately four girls, which appeared frequently in many photo stories. The rather dominant role of those girls in the activities was also evident in reports from the coaches.

### **5. Reflection and Conclusion on the Use of Photo Monitoring**

The data generated by the photo monitoring proved useful in various aspects. The method provided an immediate inside picture of the activities and the attitudes of the participants towards them. The information generated brought to light what is relevant for the participants; interestingly differences between sexes or social groups could clearly be identified.

The method is especially promising with very young participants with whom conducting standardized interviews or quantitative surveys is difficult. Generally, the photo-monitoring was welcomed by the participants. This was in contrast to the survey with which not everybody felt comfortable.

The selected pictures and the additional comments do not always fit together. Nevertheless, we consider it very useful to conduct the short interview with the participants around the pictures taken. In this way the entire interview is conducted in the context of fun and far from a test situation. This produces more spontaneous comments and reactions towards the programme than other tools. In this way unforeseen aspects are easier to detect, like in our case for example the importance of the bus ride to the activities for the Palestinian participants or the hope to get in contact with the opposite sex through the activities for some of the male participants.

Last but not least it has to be mentioned that this method goes beyond a pure monitoring instrument as it introduces an additional pedagogical tool into the programme which makes the participants reflect upon the activities and fosters their creativity. The collected visual and written data is not only helpful to monitor the project process but also to inform the community of the focus of the activities as visible material can easily be shared offering new possibilities for more widespread communication.

For example, at the beginning of June 2008 we organized a photo exhibition where the collected photo stories were displayed to the public. The public event was a good opportunity to bring participants and their parents from different social backgrounds together and provide them with the possibility of sharing their experiences of the programme. It was very interesting to observe participants showing the pictures to their parents and explaining to them in detail what they were doing during the activities.

In addition, another advantage of using photos as participatory monitoring tool is the emphasis on the process rather than the product. However, it has to be recognized that visible data is much more difficult to evaluate as it opens the door for many interpretations. Therefore, we consider it crucial to combine the photo taking with a short interview. Furthermore it is important to include a wide range of stakeholders, particularly the participants, in the evaluation process.

Nevertheless, beside the mentioned changes in the group dynamics, it can not definitively be concluded how useful the photo monitoring tool is in measuring changes in the running of a project because in the Lebanese context the photo stories were already very positive at the beginning. In addition, as only a few participants made more than one photo story we can not assess if individual changes can be identified through the photo reports. Interestingly, in the comments about why the participants continued in the programme made in the final report statements such as 'I stayed because the activity taught me a lot and I have new friends now' or 'first I participated because it was a new activity and I like sports but now it's a real commitment' were made. Generally, based on the photo reports it can be concluded that there was an increasing identification with the activities and the group of participants.

We assume that participatory photo collection can be integrated in an exiting and dynamic way into psychosocial sport and play programmes with children and youth. Its experimental implementation in the project in Lebanon was a positive first experience in this direction. However there is a need for further research in order to develop and standardize the tool in the future.



## **Annex: Examples Photo Stories**



**My name is Rayan and I'm 15 years old.**



**I'm taking part in the sport and play activities since March 2007 because I like sport and I enjoy spending a good time with my friends.**



**I've chosen these pictures from today's activities because they reflect what we are living with our coaches: respect, love and collaboration. They also show the girl's will and sportive spirit.**





**My name is Ghina, I am 16 years old.**







**I am participating in the activities because I want to have fun and I like the new social relations I established.**



**I have chosen these pictures because they are the most beautiful ones.**



**My name is Georges and I am 15 years old.**



**I am taking part in the activities since February 2007 because I want to have fun and meet some new friends.**



**I have selected these pictures because they reflect the team spirit, collaboration and the respect of the rules during the activities. The picture of the coach demonstrates my love for him because he treats us with respect.**







**My name is Ali, I am 17 years old.**



**I joined the programme Sport and Play one week ago – beginning of November 2007.  
To be part of a team is the reason why I am participating in the activities.**



**My chosen pictures reflect the discipline among the participants and indicate the community: everyone is included – even the coaches are involved in the activities and games.**





**My name is Rajaa, I am 15 years old.**



**Participating in the Sport and Play activities gives me the chance to get out of the camp.**





**The chosen pictures show my best friends who understand and love me.**



**My name is Fatima, I am 12 years old.**



**I am participating in the Sport and Play activities since May 2007 because I want to learn from the older.**



**The pictures I have chosen reflect the enthusiasm and fun we have during the activities. I respect what the coaches are doing and want to learn from them.**



**My name is Danny, I am 14 years old.**



**I'm participating in the Sport and Play activities since this year because I want to have fun in my leisure time.**





**I have chosen these pictures from today's activities because they show my best friend with whom I play and our coach Mahmoud.**



**My name is Jad, I am 16 years old.**



**I'm participating in the activities because apart from the skills we learn we have fun and it's nice to spend a good time with my friends.**







**The pictures I selected show the physical difference of the participants, but also the team work and collaboration.**





**My name is Sawsan, I am 16 years old.**



**I am a member of the Sport and Play activities since March 2007 and I like it because of the socializing and the fitness aspect. I also enjoy it because I have fun participating in the activities. While I was taking the pictures I felt like being a reporter and I very much like the idea.**





**I've selected these pictures because they reflect the enthusiasm and the fun we have during the activities.**





**My name is Aya and I am 17 years old.**





**At the beginning I joined the activities because they were new and I like sport, but now it's a real commitment.**



**I liked the moment of enthusiasm in these pictures and the new things I have learned.**





**My name is Ayman, I am 15 years old.**





**I have joined the Sport and Play activities because I like running and playing football.**



**I have chosen these pictures because I like natural scenes very much.**