

ACHIEVING COMMUNITY COHESION THROUGH SPORT

Report of Siraz Natha : Churchill Fellow 2003

Section one -The domestic aspects

-How far the purpose of the fellowship was achieved

The purpose of the fellowship was to look at how sport was contributing to the cohesion amongst the different communities in South Africa following years of apartheid keeping people apart. The key aspect was whether there were lessons to be learnt for England, following the racial disturbances and the community cohesion debate that had occurred. Whilst in South Africa I spent time with people from Cricket, Football, Golf, Rugby as well as representatives from government. I went to different townships, spoke to a number of people from different communities and the impression it left on me was that it is still early days to judge completely how South Africa is adapting. In a lot of areas radical changes are being made. Black people seem to welcome the change more than the other groups, maybe its because they suffered the most and have most to gain. I sensed optimism with slight caution amongst the other groups.

I felt that cricket out of the sports I studied were doing the most to integrate their participants and seemed to have good leadership driving this process. In a sense cricket more than any of the other major sports had participation from all the major communities in South Africa, although participation was lower amongst the Black population. I feel that I achieved a large part of what I set out to do. I visited the different cities and looked at the organisation of the major sports. Perhaps, I was looking to much to South Africa having the answers to our problems. Whilst I was there I realised that South Africa is undergoing major changes and after ten years of a new regime, some of the old ways are only just being eroded. What did surprise me was that change is being pushed through at a hectic pace, although some people will still say that it is not quick enough. Through positive discrimination in employment, I saw many black/asian people in prominent sporting positions, which I did not expect. Companies were being encouraged to involve black people as shareholders and a target was set to achieve position where half of all businesses were black owned within the next twenty years. Ambitious, but if years of inequality was to be addressed something as drastic as apartheid would be needed to correct the imbalances. What repercussions this has on the different people and the economy, only time will tell. But already, the downturn in the south African economy post apartheid is beginning to see an upturn as international markets become used to a change in leadership in South Africa.

So what lessons for England? Well probably the biggest one is a commitment by people to work together to try and shape a new South Africa and in a sense this is what the people of Burnley, Oldham, Bradford and the other towns struggling with cohesion should focus on. In South Africa, for years people emphasised each others differences and from that your whole life chances were determined. Now, people are trying hard not to use ethnicity as a dividing factor, but instead focus on people's abilities. I was beginning to notice another division, this time not on race, but on wealth. People now aspired to better jobs, living in better areas, going to better schools, but the deciding factor was not ethnicity but money.

- The adequacy of the grant

Prior to my going to South Africa, I had mentioned to friends that I had received a Winston Churchill Fellowship and their reaction had two aspects to it. Firstly, that I would have a great time and secondly that the cost of living is cheaper than in England,

with the Pound getting a good rate to the Rand.

Prior to my interview, I had calculated the following projected cost:

Return flight	: £600
Accomodation (30 nights)	: £1500
Internal flights(Jo'burg-Durban-Cape Town):	£125
Food	: £900
Internal travel	: £300
Misc costs	: £300

	£3675

I received £3500 for a four week trip. I booked the flight/accomodation with a travel agent and it cost me £1914, which included internal flights. My projected cost was £2225 for the same items, thus a saving of £311. As I had received £175 less than I had anticipated, it meant that I it left me with £1586 to spend whilst in South Africa.

In the early 1990's, the Pound had gained ground on the Rand and the exchange rate was up to 19 Rands to the Pound. By the time, I was ready to go, the Rand had recovered slightly and the exchange rate was 12/13 Rands to the Pound. As security was an issue, travelling round South Africa had to be mainly by taxi, which was quite expensive. The grant in the end was sufficient and with a small financial input by myself for social activities, the amount was sufficient.

- Suggestions for future fellows

There were two aspects to my project, firstly, the selection of different sports and secondly, the choice of a number of cities to visit.

The choice of a selection of sports was done to assess whether different sports were tackling cohesion issues and the choice of different cities was done to see how different areas were coping with life after apartheid.

For me, the selction of sports worked reasonably well. Some sports were better organised and offered more support, whilst others didn't really offer too much insight into the issues within their sport. On reflection, my advice to future fellows would be to limit the number of sports, preferably to only one, although the risk is that it might be one which does not have good organisation ,but with at least four weeks to explore and talk to people, there should be enough opportunities to form a judgement.

The selection of different cities/towns would be recommended. The contrast between Jo'berg/Pretoria to Durban to Cape Town is apparent and worth including to see the different contrasts and ways different cities operate.

Jo'berg/Pretoria is very urban and in parts doesn't appear very safe, so it is a good idea to plan ahead and ask local people in the hotel or other official positions about where to go and not go.

Durban is pleasant near the beach front, but again can be risky in certain parts.

Cape town appeared the most safest, although again you need to be aware of your surroundings. Maybe it was my perceptions prior to going about the safety aspects or that most people I met warned of being careful, but I did survive a whole month going to a lot of different places, but this involved being alert all the time whilst travelling around.

- Your dissemination plans

My original plan was to return home and present my findings to Sport England, Community Cohesion unit, Preston City Council, UK Sport and hopefully they would take some of the findings to influence their policies.

This outlook has changed because whilst in South Africa, I was taken aback with some of the hospitality I received and the trouble that some people went to in order to help me. I decided that instead of presenting my findings and leaving it at that, I would look for a longer term outcome.

Initially, this has involved exploring possibilities with the British Council, South African high commission and a newly formed international development group set up by the government called 'connections for development.' The discussions have centred around setting up a project to further develop the links that I have made and establish a long term initiative that would involve exchanges of clubs/students, economic development and mentoring/job placements. The result of which would be a closer link between the two countries through sport and a mutual sharing of ideas, resources etc.

To date, the South African High Commission, Connections for development have signed up, with further contact being made with UK Sport and the British Council, the Lancashire Cricket Board and a few local sports clubs have also been contacted and have indicated a willingness to take part.

On completion of this report, A series of meetings will be held with relevant government departments, sports organisations to establish a steering group and develop terms of reference for the group.

I feel with the enthusiasm generated in me through receiving the Churchill fellowship, I will keep trying until the project takes off. In a sense, I feel compelled to repay the Churchill Trust for supporting me and the people who helped me in South Africa. I have publicised my trip to my friends, colleagues and have appeared on radio to talk about my experiences and on completion of the report further publicity will be gained. But the real legacy will be on the establishment of the sports project between South Africa and England.