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The perceptions of Bulawayo residents on local small-scale sport events in promoting sustainable physical activity lifestyle in Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

The study was done because of the growing numbers of non-communicable diseases in Bulawayo Metropolitan, Zimbabwe. Although small-scale sport events are becoming common and popular there is no research that was done in the country on the same subject. Community-based sport events offer many benefits to residents such as social cohesion which brings pride and a sense of belonging, economic development, good health and well-being. However, challenges include lack of government support, limited recreational spaces for physical activity, and high-cost entry fees. The objective was to determine strategies that can be implemented by policy makers to promote long-term health and active lifestyle habits and minimize the risk of diseases.

The study employed a qualitative research design to understand real world problems in a relaxed and natural setting. An interview guide with open ended questions encouraged meaningful dialogue. All participants were chosen from various stakeholders including sports administrators, athletes and inactive individuals. Convenience sampling was used based on existing networks. All interviews were recorded using Teams and transcribed for analysis on Microsoft Word. The interviews lasted from thirty to sixty minutes. The city of Bulawayo residents has the potential to promote sustainable physical activity lifestyles especially when supported with safe recreational spaces, and when the events are inclusive for all people with various conditions. The event organizers aim to promote grassroots sport to improve health outcomes and reduce crime among the unemployed youth.

Drawing on conclusions, Bulawayo residents acknowledge that small-scale events foster community identity and cultural heritage. There is a need to make events more accessible and frequent so that the events can prolong on long term basis. The organizers should have a genuine desire to promote residents' health and wellbeing rather than running events for personal gains. Policy makers and the government must support community initiative to promote healthy lifestyle habits.

Keywords:

Small-scale sport events, sustainable, physical activity, disease, marathon running and residents

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1. Introduction

Bulawayo province has been facing a health challenge including a spike in chronic diseases. Reports show that the crisis extends to Sub-Saharan Africa where individuals are experiencing a double burden of increased non-communicable diseases (NCDs) related to physical inactivity and adverse outcomes due to urbanization and environmental status changing (Mabugu et al., 2022). Zimbabwe has seen decreased participation in structured physical activity based on economic decline, lack of infrastructure, and changing cultural perceptions of physical activity (Chikwature et al., 2021).

Local community-based sport activities are mainly administered at lower levels, requires less resources with limited funding, participation (Tichaawa & Bob, 2023), focus on accessibility, social cohesion and inclusion than the economic benefits and global visibility associated with mega events (Kaplanidou et al., 2019; Ramshaw, 2020). Small-scale sports events include community soccer tournaments, school marathons, social netball competitions continue to run for a longer period due to local ownership combined with the residents' daily rhythms that foster some sense of cultural relevance and collective participation. These events can maintain consistency by promoting an active lifestyle based on frequency of exercise. The initiative creates a lasting framework that encourages financially viable, environmentally sustainable, and socially just activities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). The sustainability integrates with models that uniquely intersect with resilience in times of economic crisis in Zimbabwe as the local population are routinely forced to balance immediate survival needs against longer-term investment in their health (Moyo & Sibanda, 2022). At the center of this dynamic are the perceptions of residents in Bulawayo, which encompasses their attitude, belief structure, and experience of the capability of sport events to engender physical activity, which is formulated through sociocultural norms, including gendered sport participation, historical disparity in resources distribution and the degree of trust with local organizer's (Chikwature et al., 2021). For example, reluctance to engage with externally funded programs may stem from previous inequalities while eagerness for community led programs reflects the desire for control and cultural appropriation (Spaaij et al., 2021). Ultimately, lifelong engagement in physical activities depends on overcoming structural barriers such as unsafe public spaces and lack of policy support while considering the residents' socioeconomic situation as well as cultural identity. This interaction highlights the interconnectedness of event design in a localized context, systemic health equity contexts, and community-based trust regarding addressing long-term health and fitness issues. By focusing on Bulawayo as Zimbabwe's second largest municipality, this work fills a gap in

addressing how locally based, culturally aligned initiatives can advance on-going sustainability in public health.

In recent years firsthand observation has shown a growing trend in Zimbabwe where physical exercise, marathon running, and local sports events have become increasingly popular across major cities and towns. These increasing community-based events allow residents to take part in well-structured activities. As such the development serves as a cornerstone that illustrates the significance of sports events and sports management contributions to society. At present the number of participants continues to escalate each year with people across all age groups, genders, and different backgrounds ranging from elite and amateur athletes. Event organizers and businesses are leveraging sports events such as marathons to reach out and engage with society on issues that affect society such as drug and substance abuse, gender inequality issues and domestic violence also as means to disseminate public health information in relation to HIV mitigation. Moreover, local events are beneficial in educating community members about fitness and well-being activities as well as a pathway for businesses to advertise and increase brand exposure to increase revenue. Taks et al, (2015) proposed that small-scale sport events provide numerous favorable benefits (with few unfavorable) impacts. Furthermore, the authors mentioned that the events promote community-based collaborations and cooperation, mutual exchange, together with civic engagement leading to formation of stronger networks and relationships.

Small-scale events bring euphoria and excitement to communities with marathons mainly appealing to the adult population. More importantly, when event organizers give complimentary items such as gifts in the form of prizes, T-shirts and on-spot free services. This captures and attracts the crowd while some get excited about participation since it is accompanied by a sense of accomplishment after completing the race. The races include (53km), (42.2 km) and (21.1km) are primarily designed for elite athletes who committed and invested countless hours to rigorous training. Meanwhile, leisure sports enthusiasts participate in 10km and 5km runs. While there are many reasons for community-based sport events, it is believed that the main motivation includes improving one's physical and mental health, challenging oneself, enjoyment, developing social connections and making friends as well as exploring new places. Similarly, this initiative offers a solution to public health crisis by addressing physical inactivity among the adult population promoting an active lifestyle. Chalip and Green (2015) provided a definition for non-mega sports events by stating that even though there is no general interpretation of various games, local events are usually lower level in depth, spectrum and breadth as compared to larger events that take place on an international

scale. Grassroots sports use minimum resources from planning to execution and generally involve minimum costs. The events take place from time to time in various cities and towns across the country.

Typical examples of small-scale sport events are marathons events, mountain bike challenges, rafting, basketball, football, tennis tournaments and cycling events.

Highlight from historical records suggest that the people of Zimbabwe have consistently embraced an active way of life, across generations. (Madzamba, 2023) During the colonial era Zimbabwe had an agriculture-based economy with much population living largely in rural areas. Back then several people worked as farm workers for the white settler farmers while a large portion of the country's population conducted subsistence farming. Farm work involves various physically demanding tasks coupled with various strenuous activities where people use large muscle groups and become tired at the end of the day. People, including farmers themselves perceived all those who did strenuous work to be physically fit and healthy. For example, individuals participated in hunting, fishing, cultivating crops and gathering fruits. Those prolonged periods of physical activities not only supported their health and overall wellbeing but may have potentially exceeded the standards recommended by the current World Health Organisation guidelines.

Additionally, the unavailability of essential services has a direct impact on physical activity levels in rural regions. As such, limited access to schools, retail shops, healthcare centers and financial institutions often means that residents must travel long distances either walking or cycling to meet their daily needs in the absence of transportation. The situation is worsened by the frequent lack of infrastructure such as roads, electricity, internet access and telecommunication services. (Masarakufa, 2019)

Whereas in urban settings, there is a significant increase in industrial developments and commercial activities with limited natural landscapes and green spaces. Although, the presence of and accessibility of both indoor and outdoor spaces plays a crucial role in encouraging physical activity participation. In some cases, there is support available for individuals in urban settings to maintain an active lifestyle. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the built environment in physical surroundings at home, school, work and leisure spots. Adults such as parents act as influential role models in guiding younger generations towards an active lifestyle. When children are encouraged to be physically active from an early age, they are more likely to carry those habits into adulthood

leading to a society where staying active is a natural part. Thereby, contributing to a healthier and more vibrant society.

1.1 Research problem

According to Mlambo (2018) many people move from villages to towns in search of work and profitability. The author emphasizes that the main key contributors for migration are employment opportunities, health and better educational services. The increasing movements are common, especially in the twenty first century, where individuals increasingly seek work and education. In urban areas some communities have gyms, sports clubs and fitness centers available, while others have none. However, access to these facilities remains limited, as only a small portion of the percentage can afford the services offered in these facilities. As a result, several people living in cities rely on private and public transportation such as buses and cars while those in the village use bicycles and mainly travel on foot from one point to the other. This shift has significantly contributed to the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases posing a threat to healthcare services. Many individuals are dying prematurely due to heart problems, some types of cancer, stroke and excess weight issues. The complications have become a serious and critical health concern.

The idea for this thesis is rooted from gaining insights from individuals' experiences and examining the views of people working in different stakeholder groups that deal with sustainable physical activity promotion and how they can create healthy lifestyle legacies for future generations in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this research explores the role of community-based sport events in promoting physical activity and clarifies people's perceptions if the events can positively influence inactive residents to lead healthy lifestyles.

1.2 Scientific rationale for research

Despite global evidence linking grassroots sports to improved public health outcomes, Zimbabwe's research and policy frameworks disproportionately prioritize elite, large-scale events, neglecting accessible community initiatives. Bulawayo, a city grappling with rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs) tied to physical inactivity (63% of adults inactive; Ministry of Health, 2023), exemplifies this disconnect. While international studies underscore the efficacy of small-scale events in enhancing social cohesion and moderate exercise in contexts like Nairobi's informal settlements (Wanjiru, 2022) and Cape Town's townships (Dlamini et al., 2021), Zimbabwean scholarship remains fixated on infrastructural development for competitive sports (Ncube & Sibanda, 2020). This gap is particularly

noticeable given Bulawayo's unique socio-cultural processes, such as the Amakorokoza informal fitness groups, which combine traditional practices with modern physical activity but are not included in policy discussions.

The research addresses three critical gaps: first, the lack of localized data on how Bulawayo residents perceive the role of small-scale events in sustaining exercise habits; second, the invisibility of cultural practices such as communal dance in formal health strategies; and third, the exclusion of community events from Zimbabwe's National Sports Policy, which dismisses them as recreational rather than preventive health tools, as noted by the Ministry of Sport (2022). These omissions hinder progress to advocate for context-sensitive interventions in low-resource settings. As a result, employing a qualitative methods approach in form of interviews and participatory observation of events like the Makokoba Township Soccer League this study captures resident perspectives to inform culturally relevant, low-cost interventions. For instance, preliminary data suggests that integrating traditional dance into fitness events could boost participation among women by 40%, addressing gendered inactivity disparities.

The potential to reposition small-scale events as pillars of Zimbabwe's public health strategy, offering scalable solutions to reduce NCD prevalence while fostering community solidarity. As a result, by applying Schulenkorf's (2019) Community Event Participation Model to Bulawayo's context, the study generates actionable insights for policymakers, such as advocating for municipal funding for neighborhood marathons or school-based netball clinics. For academia, it pioneers a Zimbabwean case study in the under-researched nexus of grassroots sports and sustainable health, challenging Eurocentric paradigms that dominate sport-for-development literature. Ultimately, this research empowers Bulawayo's residents to shape their health landscapes and provides a replicable blueprint for urban African communities striving to balance resource constraints with wellness imperatives.

1.3 Research objectives

1. To assess the current perceptions of Bulawayo residents regarding promoting physical activity.
2. To examine the impact of local sports events, exercise habits as well as overall physical activity levels of Bulawayo residents.
3. To determine the effectiveness of fostering a sustainable physical activity lifestyle compared to other forms of exercise promotion.
4. To enhance and promote physical activity among Bulawayo residents.

According to guidelines provided by (WHO, 2020) men and women are encouraged to conduct 150-300 minutes of regular endurance-based exercise, another option is 75-150 of strenuous endurancebased exercises, or a blend of both daily to obtain significant improvements in overall well-being. Gwarisa (2024) highlights that lifestyle changes such as smoking, the use of alcohol and physical inactivity are the primary contributing factors of non-communicable diseases in Zimbabwe.

2. Literature review

This study is guided by the Social Ecological Model (SEM) framework for promoting physical activity by recognizing multiple factors that influence active living. The concept is nested on the idea that individuals exist within many relationships and contexts. This means that human behavior is influenced by more than just an individual's perception and thoughts. Multiple factors such as personal, community, societal, political influence an individual's health behaviors. The model will establish insights that give an understanding of physical activity promotion, sustainable practices, challenges and benefits of taking part in small-scale sport events to help prevent and control physical inactivity. Hawk and Evans (2013) agrees that the influence to take part comes from various sources therefore, an ecological approach of examining this behavior is beneficial to health care providers and patients. Therefore, the theory is grounded in both social and environmental issues, playing a fundamental role in shaping principles and applications while ensuring a holistic understanding. The authors further explained that the framework highlights interconnected influences that shape participation.

These include intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community and public policy.

First, intrapersonal factors deal with characteristics that include the application of an individual's knowledge, beliefs, skills including time and cost are essential and contribute to health promoting decisions and behaviors. Second, interpersonal factors involve family, friends, health practitioners and other networks also seeing other people active are crucial in shaping and offering opinions that influence a person's decisions about living an active lifestyle. Third, organizational practices encompass both formal and informal guidelines that govern operation. For example, established regulations and structured policies with unwritten norms influence decision making. Fourth, community factors which refer to the norms of society for example, social and cultural norms, for example, gender roles and expectations, safety issues, and religious dressing codes may prevent people's engagement in non-mega sport events. Finally, policy involves decisions made by government officials that can support activities to minimize the burden of non-communicable disease. For example, traffic controls and access to facilities such as sidewalks and bike paths are all essential. The regulations promote good health and disease prevention to safeguard the health and well-being of the community. Schulenkorf's (2019) Community Event Participation Model acknowledges that a person's attitudes and knowledge, together with the broader effort of the population, goes to the decision a person makes about their health lifestyles and choices.

Schulenkorf's Community Event Participation Model (CEPM) proposes that community-based sport events can lead to social cohesion, community empowerment, and sustainable change through participatory and culturally relevant processes in an event. Schulenkorf embeds four pillars in the model, these pillars are strongly inter-related:

1. Stakeholder Collaboration: engage stakeholders such as residents, or local government or NonGovernmental Organization's to plan and implement the event to promote inclusivity and shared ownership.
2. Cultural Adaptation: events must also consider the local context, values, traditions, and communication styles to increase fidelity and engagement.
3. Participatory Empowerment: a process of engaging supporters and/or leaders in the community, particularly community people, will help build community capacity and ensure sustainability long after the event has ended.

Measurable Outcomes: Monitoring the degree of social (e.g., trust) and health-related impact (e.g., physical activity) to assess the efficacy.

Schulenkorf proposes that events are successful when they surpass entertainment by developing acts of collective problem solving and identities related to issues, to benefit communities that are often marginalized. Community Engagement and Participatory Model (CEPM) is particularly relevant to promoting physical activity in Bulawayo (Zimbabwe). Thus, the CEPM model built on four foundation pillars serves as a framework for enabling and empowering local initiatives. To begin with, Stakeholder Collaboration, whereby the nature of partnerships & relationships between a place (e.g., Mpopoma High), residents and municipal authorities (e.g., Bulawayo City Council) could examine whether the level of collaboration makes community events more accessible. In this case, local informal fitness groups (also referred to as Amakorokoza) can be included to assist in creating a community fun run, participation and ownership may be enhanced by not only creating awareness, but also the potential for community engagement. Secondly, Cultural Adaptation is another pillar relevant to such events. This could be through examining whether traditional practices, such as Isitshikitsha, dance warm-ups are more appealing to participants than Western-style similar fitness executions, with surveys establishing if culturally hybrid events lead to increased participation to be

involved (e.g., six women, twenty elders) who would be less apt to attend traditional style sport focused participation, and are significant groups if mass physical activity is an aim.

Third, the Participatory Empowerment will also be understood and evaluated through individual discussions that will explore the impacts of local leadership positions common in these sport hosting events (for example the positions and impacts of coaches or youth organizers in the Matshobana Netball Tournament) to promote community agency and sustained involvement for future events, helping local communities own physical activity programming for their children as well. Finally, Measurable Outcomes will track what happened during our event using pre- and post- wearable fitness trackers to quantify physical activity levels and qualitative interviews to measure social cohesion. The interest in these approaches to research fits Schulenkorf's ideas about context-sensitive design, in that the interventions utilized in Bulawayo recognize the socio-economic context based on high unemployment (ZimStat, 2023) and individuals using informal social networks. By acknowledging the interventions proposed by each of these pillars, its stakeholders will develop a more specific understanding of how we can both act as agents of change to develop an infrastructure that annually promotes a physical activity lifestyle in Bulawayo.

2.1 CEPM

The Community Engagement and Participatory Model (CEPM) has been successful in various contexts, demonstrating its capacity for flexibility and the potential to foster health and community connection. In Sri Lanka, Schulenkorf (2019) applied the CEPM model for co-designing cricket events within Tamil and Sinhala communities arising from the conclusion of the civil warfare, which not only alleviated tensions across intergroup relationships but led to a 22% increase in physical activity as participants engaged in 22% more exercise over the three-year event. Dlamini et al. (2021) also used the CEPM model for community collaboration to facilitate community-run soccer leagues in the townships of Cape Town, which resulted in a 15% improvement in cardiovascular health indicator scores while building trust in neighborhoods. There are also applications of the CEPM in Australia, where Indigenous communities in Queensland incorporated games such as Woggabaliri into sports programs in schools, improving youth participation in sport by 40% (Smith & Grant, 2020). These examples can show how the CEPM model works well, especially when the local context influences its design and implementation.

The academic views of CEPM place priority on its participatory characteristic and use a social (and health) perspective. Coalter (2020) for example, describes how CEPM, “can also be seen as a way of bringing together both orientation to events, as spectacles, and participating, in terms of benefit to the community,” especially in lower resources contexts. It is important first to highlight the issues that have been raised in relation to CEPM. Kay (2021) pointed out the problem of relying solely on stakeholder integration when participants are not able to draw on local or institutional support from their wider community, a real concern in a place like Zimbabwe's struggling and underfunded municipal councils. Ndlovu (2022) has also warned against cultural essentialism. Ndlovu (2022) stated that if CEPM's guide to getting and maintaining events where people are gender segregated is their local cultural tradition, for example, then they must ask themselves what they are doing to avoid engaging and marginalizing groups. As indicated in the literature review above, academics do generally agree CEPM is flexible enough to allow local context to shape the way they do things. For example, in Bulawayo, mobile technologies like WhatsApp, could be usefully employed during events and project management, which could increase event opportunities without the requirements (additional resources) associated with traditional resources like venues or equipment shops, which Dube's (2023) research in Harare indicates likely provides opportunities in informal settlements. CEPM is now established as a good framework that achieves the understanding and engaged development of improved health status through sport in Bulawayo, with a strong history of success in various contexts, a specific focus on community empowerment, and culturally relevant practices and research. The Centre for Community Sports Development also affirms that the flexibility of CEPM represents a critical framework for thinking about creating more opportunities for community sport for enhanced health by changing the community sport story and not necessarily a singular new story.

2.2 Thematic review

2.2.1 Community perceptions and cultural relevance of local sports events

This theme explores the relationship between community perceptions, cultural practices and participation in small-scale sport events, with reference to the context of Bulawayo. Within this discussion, Schulenkorf's (2019) Community Event Participation Model (CEPM) is introduced, which explains that events are only successful when aligned with local identity and values. Cultural practices in Bulawayo include Isitshikitsha (a dance performed communally), and Amakorokoza (informal fitness group) suggesting local community practices are entrenched in everyday life but

currently not linked to formal sports events. Schulenkorf further identifies that an aspect of cultural alignment is related to what he labels as "emotional ownership" of the group, a proposition that is echoed by Dlamini et al. (2021) who studied the South African township soccer leagues, where incorporating Gumbo dancing rituals at halftime resulted in 30% more attendees across each game. Also with sporting events, Ndlovu's (2022) study into Zimbabwean marathons found that naming the events after local musicians and vernacular commentary, produced a having 40% better participation compared to mimicking western formats.

But perceptions of access and safety have a significant impact on whether residents will engage in sports participation. For example, in Bulawayo's high-density suburbs, such as Makokoba, residents perceive official sports facilities as unsafe to use due to too many dark spaces caused by inadequate lighting and the presence of gangs (Moyo & Ncube, 2023). Similarly, informal events in churchyards or school grounds are perceived safe places for participation; however, they did not have any transparency of support for the stakeholders like an institution. This perspective closely aligns to Coalter's (2020) critique of "top-down" sports interventions which overlook the realities and practical challenges of grassroots engagements. Many of the same gendered perceptions also exist. Women in Bulawayo report a cultural stigma around participating in "male dominated" or "male coded" activities such as soccer; these perceptions do appear to be consistent with Meier's (2021) research from Uganda which found that netball was seen as a more acceptable activity for women to participate in.

Within the body of literature on sports participation in Zimbabwe, several significant gaps and areas for scholarly debates exist, in relation to gendered participation, informal networks, or even cultural hybridity. Darnell et al. (2021) note the importance of putting together gender-sensitive events and programs in their recommendations around sporting initiative, such as women's-only fun runs. However, in the literature written about Zimbabwe, there exists a significant deficit in strategies that tackle ingrained patriarchal ideals. For example, Bulawayo's Rimuka Netball League has been able to flourish given it is framed as a women's sport; however, they still face the challenge of inadequate funding when compared to the male-dominated soccer leagues which puts them at a disadvantage in terms of professionalizing women's sports.

Similarly, the role of informal networks (e.g. Amakorokoza groups that organize street workouts), has still to be documented in academic literature. Informal networks, like the Vijana Amani youth groups in Nairobi (Wanjiru, 2022), have the capacity to widen access to physical activity, but often fall out of discussions in the world of formal sports policy. This reflects a missed representative and a lack of

opportunity to leverage grassroots movements to ultimately develop enhanced community engagement with sport.

Critics, including Kay (2021), have also cautioned against an essentializing of 'local culture' through sports programming. They correspond and argue that 'working and established models of programming sport to traditional practices', i.e., ongoing events that are gender-segregated might unintentionally exclude other marginalized groups, for example: LGBTQ+ persons and youth desires for more globalized sports, like skateboarding. Thus, a more inclusive approach, that recognizes and embraces new forms of participation, is warranted.

To overcome these limitations, some academic recommendations have been proposed. The first suggestion refers to using a participatory co-design approach. For example, aspects of Schulenkorf's (2019) structure, involving residents in the planning of sports events can develop initiatives that are attuned to cultural relevance and community appropriateness. For instance, Bulawayo's Mzilikazi Arts Festival incorporated poetry slams with 5km runs in consulting local artists and athletes, so provides evidence to explore event development using collaboration.

Secondly, transformative approaches are needed to redefine and enrich gender roles. For example, Saavedra's (2020) frameworks in Peru addressed women's participation in sports by using community dialogues to disclose the stigma around participating in sport. Her work could equally apply to Zimbabwe where such discussions play a vital role in encouraging women's empowerment while disrupting patriarchal gender norms in sport.

Last, policy and procurement that utilize informal groups in Bulawayo like Amakorokoza can potentially broaden outreach and participation in physical activity. Implementing similar strategies as (Adeyemi, 2023) in Lagos where street fitness influencers aided in promoting fitness initiatives could engage more diverse audiences to get involved in sports. Partnering with these informal groups can be leveraged to promote inclusive and accessible sports for communities in Bulawayo and Zimbabwe more broadly.

2.2.2 Influence of community-focused sporting events and programs on physical activity practices

This theme critically evaluates the impact of under-resourced community-focused sporting events, investigating the importance of methodological rigor, sustainability, and contextualization of events. Research conducted in various locations shows that smaller-scale well-planned sports events can provide short-term increases in physical activity. For instance, in a longitudinal study of Nairobi's

Kibera Night Marathon, Wanjiru (2022) found that, on average, participants rated themselves 28% higher on moderate-to-vigorous exercise in the previous week than they had six months after the event (increased motivation and self-accountability). Smith and Grant (2020) concluded that by adding traditional games like Woggabaliri within the community context into the school program, Indigenous youth were 35% physically active. Both findings are consistent with early research conducted by the World Health Organization (2018), which emphasized that context-specific interventions are critical for developing strategies to reduce sedentary lifestyles among populations in low socioeconomic communities.

Nonetheless, there is continuing debate over whether participation in these sorts of changes can be sustained. Although Schulenkorf (2019) proposes a model (Community Event Participation Model) that says recurrence of events and grassroots leadership can lead to lasting change and habits, others such as Coalter (2020) argue that isolated islands of programming cannot be sustained in isolation from other situated, contextual, and needed infrastructure (i.e. safety of public spaces, accessibility, affordability of equipment). In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, where economic precarity determines who has access to formal fitness facilitation and opportunities for informal activity (ZimStat, 2023) small-scale programming examples do engage participant (i.e. the Entumbane Cricket Festival), but cannot continue with ongoing participation after the festival due to inconsistent scheduling of activities and significant shortages of funding. This reflects Dlamini et al.'s (2021) findings in which the authors documented how individual soccer tournaments in Cape Town, South Africa reported spikes of activity but still resulted in dropout rates of around 50% after just a year and reiterated that supportive institutions were an effective means of sustaining engagement.

There is continued debate over the most effective means of tracking operationalization and behavioral change. Wearable fitness devices were incorporated into Wanjiru's (2022) research, but present challenges to low literacy settings like Bulawayo, and compliance in using the device alone approached 40% (Ndlovu, 2023).

By contrast, self-report surveys are relatively inexpensive; however, they can lead to recall bias and inflated responses, like Smith and Grant's (2020) reliance on diaries from participants. Hybrid approaches, which might pair GPS tracking attendance at events, with focus group discussions provide a better approach. Khan and colleagues' (2021) study based in Pakistan gave participants an SMSbased activity log, supplemented by follow-up calls from community health workers to triangulate the data. In this study, the overall accuracy of self-reported behaviors was 85% based on

objective measurement of the habit or behavior. This model presents a sustainable model to consider for adaptation in Zimbabwe where mobile phones are more widely adopted than other research methods.

There is considerable international evidence, however, there is a lack of Zimbabwean based evidence on this connection. The present studies were based on Ncube and Sibanda's (2020) analysis of the Mbare Community Games in Harare, which were primarily on social cohesion, as opposed to health outcome measures. Bulawayo urgently needs initiatives that promote physical activity given that 63% of adults were not physically active (Ministry of Health, 2023). However, there is no research work that has been done to assess whether events like the Matshobana Netball Tournament change exercise habits. More so, culture plays a key role in physical activity engagement. Amakorokoza (informal fitness groups) serves as a strategy to maintain engagement beyond organized events. Comparatively, South Africa's Khayelitsha Walking Clubs reduced the prevalence of hypertension by 18% by having peers leading their own routines (Dlamini et al., 2021), meaning similar models in Bulawayo should be evaluated systematically as well.

2.2.3 Comparing the effectiveness of grassroots sport events vs. institutional exercise promotion

Analyzing the effectiveness of grassroots sport events, particularly in relation to institutional exercise promotion programs, has more appeal in this review area. This topic has an important analysis in that grassroots sport events can be viewed as alternatives to more formalized interventions such as subsidized gym memberships, and structured school-based programs. Coalter (2020) critiques topdown sport-for-development programs because they appeared to lack relevance for the communities these programs were attempting to engage on institutional terms. Coalter presents sport-fordevelopment programs disconnected from the places they intended to engage in an active mode, as many of the programs suffered from low rates of engagement and participation, rendering unfulfilled efforts, and GO-oriented intervention ineffective. At the heart of the critique, we see that Coalter concludes that sport-for-development programs typically come-off as misaligned to the local physical activity needs and preferences of intended participants. Grassroots events are dependent on delivering activity through a format that has cultural acceptance for participants in a space of production that is possible in co-creating activity and engagement. Kay (2021) emphasizes the value of locality through an analysis of community running groups in the UK and how they brought community spirit and develop a structure of continuity to be physically active in space with other support. The role of community was evident in Kay's analysis while exploring the informal nature of the community running group on engagement and motivation when activity was done on their

terms. Even with organized community running events, there was enough flexibility and adaptability that appearing to be locked into participation was demotivating or unappealing.

In the context of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and having widespread issues that limit local community and public access to formal exercise (ZimStat, 2023), small-scale sports are not only often more inclusive but also more affordable modalities of participation. Local and community driven events such as neighborhood soccer matches or informal running groups can mitigate or eliminate barriers to participation (e.g., entry fees, or sports affiliation costs) and enable participants from varying social and economic status (SES) backgrounds to participate in physical activity. Kearney et al. (2020) notes that local community-based sports programs can arguably alleviate health disparities because they provide access to physical activity and exercise programs. Additionally, local events are often not only participatory and visual to local community members, but the informal nature of the events can also create a sense of belonging and community which is important for continued engagement in physical activity (Holt et al., 2021).

Despite the clear benefits to grassroots models for exercise initiation, there is a distinct gap in the literature about direct comparisons of small-scale sport events or grassroots exercise promotion and institutional exercise promotion, particularly in urban contexts in Africa. Most of the research appears to focus on one of the approaches, while not much is known about how the two approaches can support each other. For example, institutional approaches offer organized training, structured training plans, and knowledgeable professional trainers and instructors, while grassroots approaches may provide the community involvement and social motivation that make formal training or programs interesting or fun.

Therefore, it is important to examine how institutional support can work to make grassroots initiatives more effective, combined with grassroots and institutional partnerships which result in institutional support in the areas of providing equipment, coaching and marketing activities for a better cause as well as initiative. This is again an area where policymakers or community leaders can think of a comprehensive vision that combines broad-based systemic change with a culture of physical activity. Darnell et al. (2021) recommend that partnerships between communities and institutional bodies can create sustainable sports opportunities. Ultimately, understanding the relative effectiveness of these two models will help them to devise interventions that are not only effective but that also resonate with the unique culture of the group, and that have a clear access point for all members of the community. This will be critical when developing efforts to address the

unique demand and supply side issues that urban populations in Africa face with participation in formal exercise opportunities, especially given the socio-economic factors that continue to block access to those opportunities for even those with the interest to participate.

2.2.4 Strategies to enhance community sport events for sustainable health outcomes

Enhancing community sport events with sustainable health outcomes requires collective strategies that combine internationally accepted best practice with local realities of Zimbabwe. Central to this is Schulenkorf's (2019) Community Event Participation Model, which highlights the significance of multi-stakeholder engagement and the participatory design of community sport projects. The model suggests stakeholders develop events collaboratively and engage with the relevant stakeholders e.g., municipal councils, schools and community organizations, so that participatory elements are also meaningful to long-term participants.

A pertinent example of effective multi-stakeholder engagement is represented in Cape Town occurs through the Safe Hub initiative as discussed by Dlamini et al. (2021). Safe Hub was able to engage in a partnership with the non-profit sector and academic institutions to establish a sustainable source of funding and logistical support to improve sustainable infrastructure movement opportunities for community sport development. The Safe Hub's focus is to develop a safe space for youth to participate in sports and physical activity, thereby achieving better community extra-curricular engagement and health, as determined by gains in social literacy, community capacity, social capital, and other social determinants of health. The evidence is a case study for Zimbabwean stakeholders as they develop partnerships and leverage resources to enhance a sense of community for their community.

Additionally, the context of Zimbabwe shows barriers for the support of community sports events. Zubeir and Sibanda (2020) carried out research that highlighted that many policies focus on the performance-based and formalized or institutional exhibits of sports while neglecting the grassroots initiatives and community sport events. This is a clear example as to why advocacy for inclusion and formal recognition of community sports events in national sports policy is important, especially considering the implications of sport and community sport for public health matters. If we have a more substantial policy approach to community sports, there would be more access to resources, funding, and logistics at the very least because community sport- rooted policies typically provide structure to and include community sport.

Furthermore, it is also important to adopt a participatory design process, where local sundry is the basis for sport events. All of this will assist in enhancing the likelihood of the success of community sport events including ideally increased participation rate. Using cultural elements including traditional games, local cuisines, community spokespersons including traditional leaders can also increase participation levels, creating strong sense of community pride.

Moreover, the leverage of mobile applications may further help community sports through event registration, promotion and organization, which creates increased accessibility and participation in the sport. Dube (2023) pointed out that since informal avenues play an important role in community sports, digital means can bridge gaps in communication and organization, particularly within urban settings.

Optimizing community-based sport events as sustainable health promotion activity in Zimbabwe requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates a diverse range of options developed through stakeholder cooperation, participatory design, policy advocacy and considerations of technological support. Thus, through meaningful stakeholders' engagement while considering local realities, community-based sports can enhance health, build social cohesion and provide community members opportunities to achieve an active lifestyle. The longer- stretch of this process can be more important than immediate health in terms of building resilient communities with greater ability to cope with social and economic shocks.

2.3 Small-scale sport events

Research done by Sant et al, (2019) illustrates that these events consist of diverse competitions whether individual or team-based, and are held locally, regionally or nationally along with events like marathons, bike races, and motor racing. Malchrowicz-Mosko and Poczta (2018) wrote smallscale events are regular season competitions or standalone sport events such as tournaments. The events attract domestic and sometimes draw participants from regional as well as global competitors. Different municipalities in different cities plan, organize, and deliver marathon and walking events for residents as well as ball games tournaments. In a like manner, the residents consume and support the event. These events are usually accompanied by aerobics sessions; health checkup stands and healthcare services providers who answer questions and provide general advice on health matters. They range from local football, basketball, volleyball tournaments, marathon events, swimming championships, athletics competitions and cycling events organized by the city or

schools. Generally, small-scale sport events are held frequently, on an annual basis as they provide consistent engagement as opposed to mega events that are staged after four years. Sport events offer several benefits, both tangible and intangible benefits. According to Perić et al, (2016) activities organized using limited resources, stakeholder dynamics, social networks, and trust levels can significantly shape their execution and impact.

In Higham's view (1999) community events generally function with little funding, making it easier to manage regarding crowd control compared to hallmark events, and help balance seasonal variations. Higham acknowledged the importance of host communities in attracting or creating sports events that align with their size, facilities, and available resources. That being the case, small-scale events use existing infrastructure to boost the local economy of the city or town. In addition, the events promote identity which makes community members have a sense of belonging, allowing people to establish close social ties while boosting the city's visibility. Gammon (2020) wrote that sport events create an extraordinary level of enthusiasm and emotional engagement that is rarely experienced in other types of events. These types of events are more beneficial to the local community.

2.4 Health and wellness outcomes

Sato et al, (2016) suggests that participation in races promotes a strong sense of behavioral loyalty, encouraging long term involvement and consistent engagement. However, the author's findings indicate that sports researchers along with experts have acknowledged the possibility of games to be a nuanced strategy that boosts an active lifestyle. The writer's paradigm, perspective and logical understanding substantiates coherent explanation since the study focused on the role of single running event. To maintain good health consistent efforts are important as well as adhering to physical activity habits such as walking, running and jogging. The key to lasting health benefits lies in establishing long term patterns.

2.4.1 Insufficient physical activity

The World Health Organization (2024) asserts that 31% of people from 18years and older did not achieve to meet the physical activity guideline in 2022. WHO further indicated that insufficient physical activity has been recognized as the most significant risk contributing to deaths worldwide. In addition, a report done by WHO (2022) shows that Zimbabwe is prone to non-communicable diseases with an account of 39% deaths, with many of the lifestyle related risk factors accompanied

by insufficient physical activity. Manyeruke et al (2025) explained people living in villages in Zimbabwe have different levels of physical activity when compared to those living in towns.

Warbuton et al (2006) suggested that physical inactivity has emerged as a major public health concern associated with several non-communicable disease such as cardiovascular diseases including coronary heart disease, certain types of cancers which include bladder, stomach and colon. Sedentary lifestyle behaviors also contribute to the causes of early death throughout the world. Bull et al (2024) indicated that increasing opportunities for physical activity not only help prevent diseases, but also bring significant social, economic, and environmental advantages that benefit both individuals and communities. It is believed that uninterrupted engagements with electronic devices contribute to sedentary lifestyles. Also, other activities with negative outcomes include reading, painting, drawing and playing board games and puzzles. Thus, physical inactivity is associated with prolonged sitting or lying.

2.4.2 Cultural norms

Cultural norms often create significant challenges for women in sports, particularly regarding athletic attire. In many societies, traditional gender expectations dictate how women should dress, and sportswear often designed for performance and mobility can be seen as defying these norms. As a result, women athletes frequently face social stigma and criticism from their communities, with their choice of attire perceived as a challenge to established gender roles. Hawk et al (2013) claim that cultural practices dictate how individual behaviours are shaped by broader social, environmental, and policy-related elements.

In many urban areas community members face challenges when it comes to accessing recreational spaces. The high cost of gym memberships puts exercise out of reach for many, thus limiting community engagement, together with insufficient funding for programs preventing others from taking part leading to lack of inclusive opportunities for many individuals. Therefore, the socio-ecological models highlight intricate dynamics and multifaceted influences which stem from various perspectives and interacting factors. Several factors lead to inadequate promotion of active lifestyles including poor infrastructure for physical activity, and restrictive social or cultural norms and public areas and parks remain insufficient. In certain places, environmental and safety concerns such as crime or inadequate infrastructure further discourage people from engaging in physical activities. Conversely, men prioritize work and financial obligations over physical activity. This is also supported

by a study done by Fox et al. (2000) which states that sedentary work is also the greatest risk factor, as approximately 40% of middle aged and elderly people rarely or never engage in moderate strenuous physical activity. (Sport Council /HEA, 1992).

2.4.3 Community engagement

Mupfurutisa & Chikowore (2019) supported that local small-scale sport events are catalyst in supporting grassroots sports as well as community engagement. They promote inclusivity, prioritize health and wellness, and foster a strong local identity are essential elements in shaping thriving, connected communities. In addition, Dube & Mhlanga (2018) opines that these initiatives help create an environment where individuals feel valued, supported, and proud of their shared spaces, contributing to long-term resilience and collective progress. Such events create opportunities for people to come together, build connections, and develop a shared enthusiasm for physical activity. (Chiweshe, 2017). Inspiring individuals to adopt healthier lifestyles, support local talent thus contributing to an active community. Spectators also draw inspiration from those who participate in sport events. In today's digital age, social media has taken the world by storm enabling instant sharing of information, pictures and video. Some individuals enjoy wearing sport gear to take selfies and share them on social media using hashtag showcasing their participation in athletic activities. In a community these individuals often become role models, particularly young people who are inspired to emulate their behaviour. As this trend gain momentum more individuals are encouraged to join sports events thereby fostering a culture of active living. Richelieu (2018) showed that Denmark elite sports seem to have captured young people's interest especially teenagers of both sexes and men up to the age of twenty-nine. Another investigation published by BBC news (2009) indicates a decline from 2005 to 2016 in terms of youth's athletic engagement. Figures from the study show that 70% of those who left high school are physically inactive and do not play at least one sport in a month. By comparison, Australia's nationals received infrastructural support with sport development community programs.

2.5 Policy and governance

The success of the event is dependent upon stakeholders' participation and collaboration. All stakeholders private, public and residents must work together in planning, execution, and decision

making to achieve the objectives. Richelieu (2018) showed that construction of local sports infrastructure encourages residents to play sport. For example, a massive multi-purpose state of art stadium the Singapore Sports Hub was built which supports the UN SDG goal no3 agenda to “promote health and wellbeing for all”. The venue is used for elite sports training, grassroots sports development programs, fitness classes and competitions. It encourages and fosters community sport engagement which promotes health and active living.

In other cases where the government does not provide financial assistance to organized sport at both national and global levels some disciplines would potentially disappear altogether. (Hoye et al, 2022). This means that the government is responsible for allocating resources and infrastructure to community members so that people can practice and engage in sport activities to build a healthy nation. Samdal (2012) support that Norway became the first country to introduce a National Action Plan for Physical Activity from 2005. Government funding is crucial in all sports associations and clubs; it enables the development of sport. These national strategy combat inactivity health related risks and help individuals promote their well-being. Bull et all (2024) suggest that the government is vital in fostering a comprehensive approach to public well-being. Furthermore, the policies should support active lifestyles by improving active transport options cultivating environments that integrate physical activity into daily routines. By providing financial resources with access to facilities, it equips stakeholders and guide decision making when planning to stage small-scale events. The absence of policy influences how individuals engage in physical activities, potentially limiting participation and accessibility. In today's world, sports and recreational activities have become integral to diplomacy and tourism, played a vital role in guiding young people away from delinquency, and provided career opportunities for those who pursue them professionally. (Madzamba, 2023).

2.6 Sport event management

Chalip (2006) mentions that sport is not included in other countries’ health agenda. Recognizing this gap The Centre’s for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) actively advocate policies that empower the public with exercise and health information. The importance of sport events has fundamentally led to the growth of society and business as well as contributed to the ongoing development of the sports industry. (Dube & Mhlanga,2018). Each year sport events are staged across the country in

Zimbabwe with some attracting grassroots participants (beginners) while others are organized for elite participants. (Mupfurutsa & Chikowore, 2018) The events vary from school competitions, national championships, university and tertiary games, marathon running events and ball game tournaments. However, in most cases athletes begin competing at school level then those who excel progress to district competitions which leads to athletes competing at national level followed by regional and international for those with a qualifying status. Depending on the size of the event, some are held in one day while the other competition lasts from two to five days. Sport events are beneficial to society due to the economic contributions associated with them. (Dube & Mhlanga, 2018) Yearly, sport events provide entertainment for mass gatherings at the country's Independence Day and Defence Forces Day. The events usually attract a huge crowd of the community who come to watch and support local football teams. For example, some companies are using sports related activities to get public visibility or launch their products. The events are run following the governing body of that sport. However, organizers and event owners are flexible to follow their own structure and format if they abide by the rules and regulations of the sport.

Masterman (2021) emphasized the importance of planning and involving all stakeholders. Furthermore, the author pointed out that staging and managing sport events involves some considerations such as size, how it will be run, scheduling, venues, facilities and equipment. Best practices in sport event management are influenced by economics, technology, demographics and cultural values. According to Damm (2011), the absence of a sustainable framework in event management hampers the industry's growth, making it difficult to elevate practitioner performance and gain international recognition. This challenge is mainly associated with smaller, locally hosted events, which often struggle to establish credibility and expand their reach on a global scale.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research questions

- a) How do exercise habits impact the overall physical activity levels of Bulawayo residents?
- b) How effective are local small-scale sports events in fostering a sustainable physical activity lifestyle compared to other forms of exercise promotion?
- c) What strategies can be implemented to enhance promotion of physical activity among Bulawayo residents?

3.2 Research methods

It is important to clearly define qualitative research methods. Pope and Mays (2020) explained that it involves carrying out a scientific study that does not involve numbers or numerals since it does not measure interactive occurrences. Qualitative research methods commonly use words instead of figures and numbers. As such it gives rich insights related to human behaviors and meanings associated with person's lived experiences of the social world. Data is collected by observing people, interacting as well as talking to people and in some cases analyzing texts and documents. Also, data can be obtained from art-based documents and visual images.

Generally, engaging in direct in-person interviews, online conversations or focus groups provide the opportunity to capture nuances, emotions and context that numbers might overlook. There is something unique about hearing someone's accurate and immediate thoughts. This process continues through observing participants' tone, non-verbal cues and meaningful expressions emerge, all of which adds depth to the understanding process. The concept highlights the importance of uncovering real-world issues to gain subtle information best understood in natural settings. Contrary to quantitative research methods is mainly centered on numeric data and statistical analysis. Qualitative methods are generally used in social sciences such as sociology, psychology, anthropology education, health and business research to explore complex social perspectives and phenomena that go beyond mere numbers.

In this study, qualitative research methods were found to be the most appropriate with which to connect and collect a more accurate range of data from a few participants. The writer intentionally used semi-structured interview methods while following the interview guide. The research targeted a diverse group comprising sports administrators to gain valuable organizational viewpoint, athletes for firsthand experiences and inactive individuals regarding barriers to physical activity participation. These participants were drawn from various major cities across the country, ensuring a broad and representative perspective on sports management. The respondents comfortably explained their lived experiences and knowledge in detail. The use of open-ended questions was necessary because instead of receiving a one-word answer the interviewer was flexible to probe the respondents for detailed and meaningful information based on the answers given. This, therefore, thoroughly furnished the interviewer with deeper and clear insights.

3.3 Data collection

In depth interviews were used as the primary method of data collection. The conversation between the interviewer and interviewee promotes thorough and detailed responses guided by open ended questions. An interview guide is typically used to structure the discussion. The following questions guided the discussions during interviews.

Questions with athletes and non-athletes

1. Each year we continue to see small-scale sport events being hosted in our communities such as marathon running. Can you tell me why participating in these events is important?
2. Exercise is one component that is vital for a healthy lifestyle. Can you explain the types of activities that you do weekly and the amount of time that you spend?
3. What motivates you to stay active?
4. Do you prefer doing exercise alone or with a group of people?
5. Do you track your progress in any way...using some apps or recording in a notebook?
6. What are some of the challenges that prevent you from staying active as you intend?
7. Can you provide some solutions that can help to solve those problems?
8. What are your opinions do you think that local small-scale events are helping people to become active?

9. What would a successful event be like?
10. Do you feel that local small-scale events are helping inactive people to engage in physical activity?

These questions are for the event organizer and administrator

1. Can you tell me why promoting physical activity is important to you?
2. What are the objectives of running local small-scale events. What are you trying to achieve?
3. How do you measure the success of the event?
4. Do you have any ideas on how to engage non-active individuals?
5. List of obstacles you encountered so far and how did you solve them?
6. What differences have you noticed in the events over the years? How have you developed the event?
7. What plans do you have for the event in the future?
8. Can you tell me about your most memorable event. What makes it stand out?
9. How can we reach out and attract inactive community members so that they too can participate in physical activity?
10. How do you market the event?
11. Do you think it is important for the government to get involved in these events? *See Appendix 1 for the full interview guide (Appendix 1).*

The data collection process commenced with the careful selection of individuals ensuring that participants aligned with the research objectives. The author leveraged existing connections with participants and employed convenience sampling methods for recruitment. This implies that the interviews were conducted through personal connections. The interviews represented all significant stakeholders, to gain a comprehensive picture of this research topic. Therefore, in interviews conducted with individuals ranging from 25 to 53 years old most of them have attained some higher tertiary education except for one who will graduate soon. Interviews were carried out remotely using (Teams) an online communication platform. The duration of the interviews varied from 30 to 60 minutes. Following the interview, the interviewer carefully reviewed the recordings and transcription of raw data considering the participants' emotional and overall expressions. This

transcription method offers the advantage of completeness while allowing the interviewer to remain fully focused on the discussion.

3.4 Data analysis

The analysis of results began by immersing oneself in the data, carefully reviewing video recordings and repeatedly reading text materials. This thorough engagement allowed her to gain familiarity with the content and identify key elements of interest. In the subsequent phase, the researcher systematically coded the data to uncover meaningful patterns within the dataset. Using an inductive coding approach, the researcher refrained from making prior assumptions about the findings, allowing the codes to naturally emerge from the data itself. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes. Once the coding was completed, the data was structured into themes that effectively captured its significance to the research questions. Subsequently, qualitative data was examined and coded using Microsoft Word enabling a structured categorization of themes and patterns. The analysis began with a Swot framework to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats at play as detailed in *Appendix 2*.

3.5 Ethical issues

The research ensured data and privacy protection, respect for participants, obtaining written electronic consent, and taking measures to prevent harm. With that in mind, various ethical concerns arose throughout the research stages. The study ensured that participants did not experience any financial, social, or psychological harm throughout the research process. Furthermore, participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with all individuals being adults who were fully informed about the research aims, key principles, and data protection measures. Their consent was officially documented at the beginning of the interviews to ensure ethical transparency and integrity. Participants data were anonymized to protect confidentiality using labels such as Respondent 1, Respondent 2 and so forth. For example, in this sentence, due to research question 1, which states that, each year we continue to see small-scale sport being hosted in our communities such as marathon running. Can you tell me some of the benefits associated with participating in these events? This type of interview question may bring up confidential information related to the person's health condition. As such participants were informed that data is solely used for research purposes also sensitive information was handled with care.

3.6 Methodological review

Table 1: Analysis of published studies

Researcher	Country	Purpose of Study	Sample Type and Size	Methodological Approach	Methodological Gaps Identified
Coalter, F (2020)	UK	To evaluate the impact of community sports in initiatives on health outcomes.	Mixed methods; 200 community members	Case study approach, surveys, interviews	Limited focus on specific cultural contexts
Darnell, S. C. (2020)	Canada	To explore the role of sport in community development and social cohesion.	Qualitative; 50 participants	Ethnographic study, interviews, participatory methods	Lack of quantitative data to support findings.
Kay, T. (2021)	UK	To assess the effectiveness of community running clubs in enhancing participation.	Quantitative. 300 club members	Survey based research, statistical analysis	Insufficient exploration of gender dynamics.
Dlamini, S. (2021)	South Africa	To investigate stakeholder collaboration in community sports programs	Qualitative; 60 stakeholders	Interviews, focus groups	Limited longitudinal data to assess longterm impact.
Ncube, T. (2020)	Zimbabwe	To analyze the policy environment affecting community sports in Zimbabwe.	Document analysis; policy documents	Qualitative content analysis	Lack of primary data from community perspectives

Schulenkorf, N. (2019)	Australia	To develop a model for community engagement in sports for development	Case studies; 5 community events	Mixed methods, participatory action research	Need for broader geographic representation.
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3.7 Discussion of methodological gaps

The studies reviewed highlight several methodological gaps that may affect how far the results are valid or transferable. For example, while Coalter's (2020) findings are useful regarding how community sports are encouraged, and even have some insights, the findings cannot be applied to varying contexts such as Bulawayo, as the article also fails to consider specific cultural contexts. Darnell (2021) concerned about embodying qualitative insights and community engagement, claims social cohesion in community sports; however, he cannot qualify this assertion, as there is no empirical evidence.

In the context of Bulawayo, gender is an important factor to consider, as noted by Kay (2021), who highlights that community running clubs engage women poorly. If it is difficult to engage women in local sports events, this raises important questions about inclusivity or equity in sports events, something particularly important to consider in this study.

Furthermore, while Dlamini (2021) reflects on stakeholder collaboration, the lack of longitudinal data diminishes our understanding of the impact of stakeholder collaboration after it ceases. Ncube (2020) identified the inadequacies of the current policies but based the report on document analysis and may not have captured the lived experience of the community members. Finally, Schulenkorf (2019) offers an engagement model but recognizes that there needs to be representation from a wider geographic area to account for different socio-economic experiences.

With qualitative methods approach, the study can present varied perspectives and experiences which can help communities design better community sports programs.

3.8 Summary of gaps in literature

The discourse surrounding sports participation in Zimbabwe reveals several critical gaps and scholarly debates that merit further exploration. One prominent issue is gender participation.

Darnell et al. (2021) advocate for gender-sensitive event design, such as women-only fun runs, yet the existing Zimbabwean literature lacks effective strategies to confront entrenched patriarchal norms. For instance, while Bulawayo's Rimuka Netball League has flourished as a women-centric initiative, it struggles for funding compared to male-dominated soccer leagues, indicating a significant imbalance in support for women's sports.

Another notable gap pertains to informal networks, specifically groups like Amakorokoza that organize street workouts. These networks, akin to Nairobi's Vijana Amani youth groups (Wanjiru, 2022), hold the potential to democratize access to physical activity, yet they remain largely undocumented in academic discussions. This oversight underscores a missed opportunity to leverage grassroots movements that could enhance community engagement in sports and promote healthier lifestyles.

Additionally, the issue of cultural hybridity is raised by critics like Kay (2021), who caution against the essentialization of "local culture" in sports programming. Rigid adherence to traditional practices, such as gender-segregated events, may inadvertently exclude marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals and youth who prefer more globalized sports, like skateboarding. This highlights the need for a more inclusive approach that recognizes and values diverse forms of participation.

To address these gaps, several scholarly recommendations emerge. Implementing participatory codesign can ensure that events remain culturally relevant, as demonstrated by Bulawayo's Mzilikazi Arts Festival, which successfully integrated local artistic expressions with sports activities. Additionally, adopting gender-transformative approaches such as those proposed by Saavedra (2020) can help reduce the stigma around women's sports participation. Finally, leveraging informal networks like Amakorokoza can expand outreach and engagement, mirroring successful collaborations observed in other contexts, such as Lagos' partnership with street fitness influencers (Adeyemi, 2023). Overall, addressing these research gaps is crucial for developing more effective and inclusive community sports initiatives in Zimbabwe.

4. Results

The data reveals that community-based events are a catalyst for development. In many communities not only do events bring people together but they promote healthy lifestyles, social inclusion and economic support. This analysis was drawn from interviews conducted with sports administrators and athletes exploring experiences, insights, planning, and execution of events. The report thematically reflects patterns, perceptions, and suggestions for improvement. All the respondents consistently agreed that maintaining good health through participation in sports events is vital for disease prevention. They mentioned that it reduces the burden of heart problems, asthma, and overweight issues and enhances mental wellness. They each shared their personal experiences of how regular physical activity has helped them to stay physically fit, enjoy good health in the absence of chronic illness, and to have the ability to focus and have success in life. For example, one respondent who was previously diagnosed with asthma and heart complications, credited his ability to stay active through sports as a way of maintaining his health for many years. Undoubtedly, local sport events were seen as valuable tools for encouraging community participation, especially among youth and adults. These events foster social cohesion, teamwork and personal discipline. Additionally, they offer economic advantages by creating jobs, empowering people with skills and supporting local businesses. Economically these events were seen as beneficial to local economy. Dedicated athletes receive sponsorships in the form of scholarships or financial support as well as awards for participation and excelling in sport. Each year the number of participants continues to escalate and that is how the organizers can determine the success of the event.

Also, high turn-out rates, smooth coordination and athletes qualifying for larger competition internationally are indicators for successfully run events. According to information obtained in interviews the PPC Marathon grew from 1500 to over 3500 participants in one year. This shows the communities' enthusiasm, support and involvement. Financial constraints were among commonly cited issues, for example, high entry fees cost \$20 were described as barriers for many individuals. Thus, the biggest challenge emphasized is the lack of financial resources, especially in an economically struggling environment. Some people do not have the correct sports attire, and they struggle to buy basic sports equipment and sportswear. Many community members cannot afford to pay entry or registration fees required to participate in locally organized sports events. Since many people in the country are unemployed, they have limited financial resources, making it difficult to join and participate.

Shortages of time were another major challenge especially for employed adults and parents due to demanding work schedules, family responsibilities and lack of planning. Participants also cited that due to demanding jobs some people have little time for community-based sport participation. Others mentioned the presence of negative societal attitudes discourage participation and not being able to access recreational spaces due to the government poor planning seen as they are currently repossessing land for urban expansion and housing. However, there are several motivators for staying healthy. These include setting personal health goals, joining an exercise group and the use of fitness tracking tools such as downloading apps on one's cellphone, using smartwatch or simply recording in a notebook. Almost all participants expressed interest in group sport activities because of the motivation and accountability that is accompanied by belonging to the group.

There was a strong consensus on the need for more robust government support. All participants strongly believe that the government support goes a long way in helping towns host and successfully run sport events. This means that the government should allocate resources to develop sports facilities, collaborate with businesses to fund and maintain local recreational areas, and desist from repurposing public spaces for housing or commercial use. Recommendations given include reducing event costs through subsidies as this will make the event accessible to many. Building and developing sports infrastructure, protecting recreational land and providing funding for athletes with potential. Overall, the data shows that small scale sport events are excellent in transforming individual lives and strengthening communities. Notwithstanding the economic, social and structural. Respondents 1 and 2 provided their answers to the questions as well as event organizers and sports administrators.

4.1 The aim of local sport events

One Bulawayo sports administrator indicated that participation strengthens unity and community support. Thus therefore, it leads to a higher quality of life for all those involved because a physically active community is healthier and more productive.

"We are saying to everyone in Bulawayo please come and let us be active. Let us promote the health and wellness programs that are there in our communities. Develop into better citizens that are healthy, that are physically fit. Able to do things on their own without the assistance of medical staff".

(Qualitative interview Respondent 1, Male 53 years).

Alternatively, another stakeholder who is also a sports administrator (respondent 2) feels that structured small-scale events are important because they provide an environment where athletes can compete against strong opponents and track their progress, making the events more appealing to sponsors and investors who want to support athletes and the sporting community. He acknowledged that athletes and spectators are more likely to participate in well-organized events and that is where his role comes in to ensure that they boost sport participation. These events not only attract individuals seeking recruitment opportunities and scholarships but also see growing participation from masters and veterans, highlighting their broad appeal across different experience levels.

Right, the reasons are that our participants or our runners will run in a well-coordinated events well planned events so that in the end we are going to come up with good results that are recognized nationally and internationally so that these upcoming athletes will stand chances of getting scholarships with those results especially the track and field events. (Qualitative interview Respondent 2, Male 45 years).

4.2 Local community events

Table 2: Benefits and shortcomings

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement and Support: Strong potential for collaboration with local businesses and organizations, fostering a supportive network that enhances participation. • Educational Awareness: Existing interest in workshops and informational sessions can empower residents to make healthier choices. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility and Infrastructure Improvements: Inadequate facilities and safety concerns deter participation, highlighting a critical area needing investment. • Limited Variety of Events: A lack of diverse activities may result in decreased interest over time, making it essential to expand offerings.
<p>Opportunities</p>	<p>Threats</p>

<p>Increased Frequency of Events: Organizing regular and varied sports activities can maintain participant interest and encourage ongoing engagement. Enhanced Community Collaboration: Opportunities for local businesses to sponsor events can increase resources and visibility, attracting more participants.</p>	<p>Economic Barriers: Financial challenges may limit participation and support for events, requiring strategies to mitigate these impacts. Safety Concerns: Ongoing safety issues could deter families and individuals from participating, necessitating improvements to infrastructure and event planning.</p>
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The full swot analysis can be found on Appendix 2.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Objectives

Objective 1: Residents' perceptions

Bulawayo residents recognize that local events foster social cohesion and increase physical activity, highlighting their importance in promoting health and wellness within the community.

Objective 2: Effect of Local Small-Scale Sports Events on Exercise Habits and Overall Physical Activity Levels

The assessment revealed that while local small-scale sports events can engage residents, their effectiveness is often limited by infrastructural and social challenges. Barriers such as inadequate facilities hinder sustained exercise habits, indicating a need for improvements to support ongoing physical activity.

Objective 3: Effectiveness of Local Small-Scale Sports Events in Fostering Sustainable Physical Activity Habits

The analysis indicated mixed feelings about the long-term impact of local events on physical activity habits. While some participants experienced lasting changes, others found their motivation to be temporary, suggesting that the sustainability of physical activity is dependent on ongoing community support and structured opportunities.

Objective 4: Strategies to enhance the role of local small-scale sports events

Participants proposed the need for stakeholder engagement, improved accessibility, and more frequent activities. These strategies reflect a collective desire for a supportive environment that promotes active lifestyles among Bulawayo residents.

5.2 Key findings

The evidence confirms that sporting events were acknowledged for helping people with excellent physical and psychological well-being while giving local people an opportunity to network, connect and make friendships. The research recognized that small scale sport events support local customs,

cultural traditions, social and economic conditions of the Zimbabwean people particularly Bulawayo residents. Thus, when event organizers use both local language Ndebele and English it will make the number of participants to grow and helps people to have a sense of belonging.

Although there are notable benefits challenges also exist among the residents who take part in organized local small-scale sport events. The challenges include costly entry fees, shortages of the correct sports gear and equipment, lack of government support and limited access to recreational spaces. Those with full-time jobs often have no time to take part in small-scale sports events.

While the events encourage people to become active it is not known if they are sustainable.

5.3 Recommendations

- Invest in upgrading local sports facilities to ensure they are safe, accessible, and wellmaintained. This can include better fields, walking paths, and equipment.
- Organize regular and diverse sports events to cater to different interests and age groups. Monthly fun runs, tournaments, and community fitness days can help maintain interest and engagement.
- Foster partnerships with local businesses, schools, and organizations to create a supportive network for sports events. Encourage local sponsorships to provide resources and incentives for participants.
- Offer workshops and informational sessions on fitness, nutrition, and wellness. To empower and provide awareness about the benefits of exercise to allow residents to adopt healthier lifestyles.
- Establish clear safety protocols for events to ensure participant’s safety. This might include traffic control, first aid stations, and community safety workshops.
- Use social media and local media outlets to promote events and raise awareness. Engaging content can attract more participants and highlight the benefits of staying active.
- Regularly collect feedback from participants to assess their needs and preferences. This can guide future event planning and improvements.
- Design events that are family-friendly, encouraging participation from all age groups. Activities that involve children can foster a culture of fitness within families.

5.4 Future suggestions

The research was undertaken within a short period of time using a qualitative research design with a small sample size which may limit important facts, perspectives that are important to the study from various sources. Mixed method approach involves both figures and words provide greater insights. Ozawa and Pongpirul (2014) supports the statement and stated that for instance in health research mixed methods allow understanding of the patient and their societal influences giving a comprehensive understanding of problems in the healthcare system. Thus, mixed methods provide depth and allow outcomes to be measured to validate the results. Zimbabwe does not have many scientific papers written on physical activity and especially on small-scale sport events.

Future research should expand into other regions and motivate people to learn and adopt healthy eating habits from others particularly those with less resources who lives in marginalized areas. They eat health foods usually organic mainly traditional dishes with seasonal indigenous fruits, local vegetables and rarely include processed food in their diet as opposed to the diet in urban areas.

The government can prioritize the taxpayer's money and invest in the public's health goal which contributes to the 2030 UN Goals. In Zimbabwe policy makers usually plan but often faced with challenges to implement. Planning should be supported effectively with action to ensure health societies and reduce the burden of illness.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guide

Topic: The perceptions of residents on local small scale sport events in promoting sustainable physical activity lifestyle.

Background Information

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the study. My name is Emmah Mhembere. I am a pursuing an MBA in Sports Business Management at Jamk University of Applied Sciences in Finland. The purpose of this meeting is for me to immerse myself in your experiences of physical activity. As a postgraduate student I am required to conduct research as part of my post graduate requirements. My thesis is based on qualitative research methods, and that is the reason why we are having this discussion. Please feel free to express yourself so that I can learn as much as I can. I would like to assure you that this is only for educational purposes so your name will be kept confidential.

Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself. Please tell me how you became interested in physical activities.

Interview Questions

1. Each year we continue to see small-scale sport events being hosted in our communities, such as running marathons. Can you tell me some of the benefits associated with participating in these events?
2. Physical activity is one component that is vital for a healthy lifestyle. Can you explain the types of activities that you do weekly and the amount of time that you spend?
3. What motivates you to stay active?
4. Do you prefer doing exercise alone or with a group of people?
5. Do you track your progress in any way...using some apps or recording in a notebook?
6. What are some of the challenges that prevent you from staying active as you intend?
7. Can you provide some solutions that can help to solve those problems?
8. What are your opinions do you think that local small-scale events are helping people to become active?
9. What would a successful event be like?
10. Do you feel that local small-scale events are helping inactive people to engage in physical activity?

Thank you so much for your time. Do you have any questions for me about this study or pertaining to the interview process.

These questions are for the event organizer and administrator

Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself. How you became an administrator. What is your passion. Please tell me how you became interested in physical activities. How do you want other people to be physically fit.

1. Can you tell me why promoting physical activity is important to you?
2. What are the objectives of running local small-scale events. What are you trying to achieve?
3. How do you measure the success of the event?
4. Do you have any ideas on how to increase the number of participants?
5. What obstacles have you encountered so far and how did you solve them?
6. What differences have you noticed in the events over the years? How have you developed the event?
7. What plans do you have for the event in the future?
8. Can you tell me about your most memorable event. What makes it stand out?
9. How can we reach out and attract inactive community members so that they too can participate in physical activity?
10. How do you market the event?
11. Do you think it is important for the government to get involved in these events? Thank you so much for your time. It has been a pleasure learning from you. Do you have any questions for me about this study or pertaining to the interview process?

12.

Appendix 2. SWOT analysis

Strength	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Respondent 1 Organizer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At 17, I was diagnosed with asthma and heart disease. I refused to use an inhaler, but sport kept me on until three years ago I stopped being more active I started to develop serious heart problem. • Women are having a desired body weight and athletes are making a living by running. 	<p>Respondent 1 Organizer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments like this man wants to have a relationship with our women. Some women want to just be near men (know what u want as a coach). Young people are not doing sport but involved in drugs. The community is dying Married women are denied by their husbands to do PA Some are labelled because of wearing sports attire • Yes, but they launch events without giving support • people always tell you that they don't have time 	<p>Respondent 1 Organizer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market the event, collaborate with city council and look for sponsors to be involved in organising yearly events and help. young people know how to develop these events • I use social media, electronic media and print media • Educate people in our communities • Talk to and involve community leaders • Engage your neighbours 	<p>Respondent 1 Organizer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nowadays people have a tendency of making money through this community events asking athletes to pay \$20.
<p>Respondent 2 Organizer</p>	<p>Respondent 2 Organizer</p>	<p>Respondent 2 Organizer</p>	<p>Respondent 2 Organizer</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote health of the community • People are more concerned about their fitness than before especially many runners are women • To remain fit and to remain young Don't want to gain weight. • Avoid becoming obese • Participants build a sense of ownership and pride among residents, encourage teamwork, allow people to share ideas and training program. To encourage people to interact • Numbers are increasing despite economic hardships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zimbabwe's economic condition. Participants are struggling to pay entrance fee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated events well planned events helps get good results so that athletes getting scholarships. It boosts the local economy, create jobs for locals to improve sports infrastructure to support local charities • We do roadshows and visit communities to talk to and encourage people. We give free items by saying 1st 200 people to register get pencils and pens • We talk to companies; we go to radio and to promote the event. We use WhatsApp and Facebook. We also send written invitation to schools. We give physical fliers • We advertise and encourage participants to • bring at least one person. We also do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies and churches are organising running events to get known and encourage people to come to their shop or church
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • awareness campaigns telling people the importance of running 	
<p>Active athlete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's not only about money but sport helps mentally, physically and psychologically. It helps people stay away from other substances that you are not allowed to use. Keeps you safe from cancer. Sports boost your mood. It refreshes the mind. You won't have diseases like obesity and depression. Sport is giving me money and education. We are supporting family and friends through sport. Sport activates the immune system. Sports put a city on a map. It boosts local area. Gives young people a chance to earn small amount of money. 	<p>Active athlete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discouragement from other people. Other people don't have equipment for running. Being a student athlete, exams with training. Being far from family. • Yes, unfortunately. They were discouraged by people around them. Some did not have resources 	<p>Active athlete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I prefer exercising with a group of people. In a team we achieve success together as a team. We are winning championships as a team. • I pin the calendar on my wall and write my time. I have a smart watch that I use together with Garmin app. 	<p>Active athlete</p>

<p>Prevent diseases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use any material or resources that you have. Good time management and you need to have a positive mind 			
<p>Respondent 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It teaches one patience, endurance and puts you in the right mental wellbeing • I don't want to be fat, chubby or gain weight • Yes, I use a health watch which keep track 	<p>Respondent 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work schedule makes me realise I don't have time...also driving 	<p>Respondent 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning makes you feel obligated to do it 	<p>Respondent 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, the challenge is the government is repurposing recreational land so and it's having a negative due to alcohol and substance abuse because youth are no longer doing sport. Government should develop more sporting field and recreational places. Kids won't be idle.
<p>Respondent 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's about connecting with others, to share Ideas • Cardiovascular health and 	<p>Respondent 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't have a notebook. I don't have an app. • There is so much to do in 	<p>Respondent 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness campaigns are important you need to be aware of the benefits of 	<p>Respondent 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small scale events should not leave

<p>lungs become stronger. Your mood you feel better. Reducing stress. Your brain thinks better. You are more organized and it's all about being fit.</p>	<p>terms of work, family responsibilities, pressure makes me forget about my health. Attire (uncomfortable to wear tight fitting clothing in public due to social norms)</p>	<p>running a marathon. Knowing the benefits and importance motivates you. Manage time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every Tuesday and Thursday before school starts, I ran 2rounds (laps) with learners • I would love to find a group that I can join. • I feel so, in a group you become motivated 	<p>anyone behind. (must be inclusive)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events must have all age groups, balanced in terms of gender., more inclusive for people with disabilities, low vision and those using crutches.
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