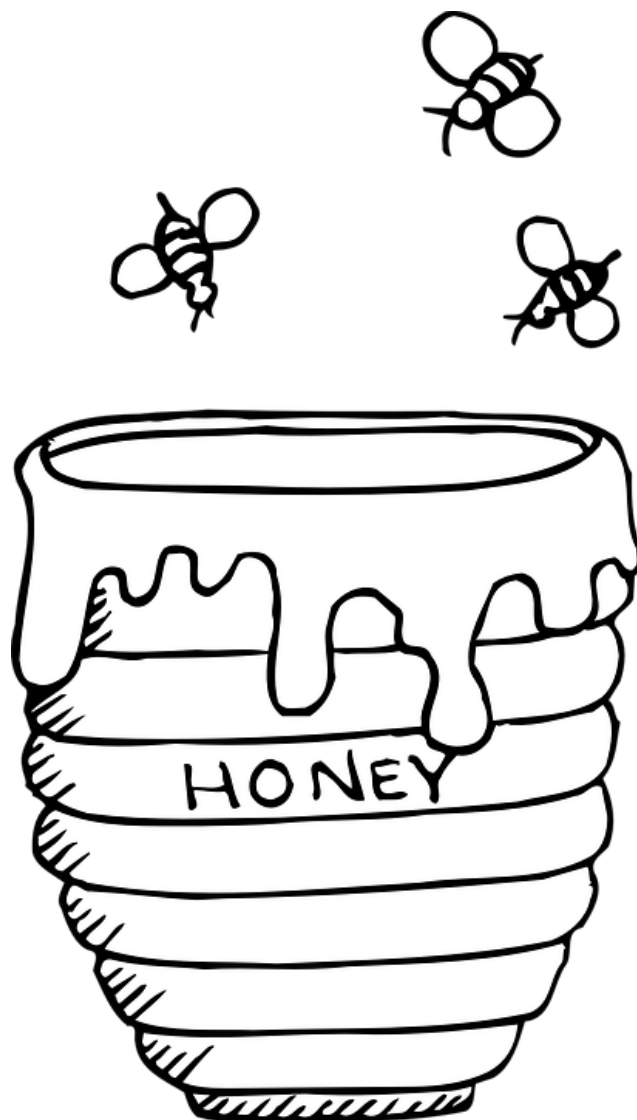


# *DIPPING INTO THE HONEY*



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# Dipping into the honey

A qualitative research study into the meaning given to  
Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning within the Sport  
for Development Programme

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## Preface

After a bumpy ride, I managed to be able to write my thesis on something I have always been very passionate about: Sport for Development. I have gained a lot of knowledge through both my time at ISA and the interactions I have had with the people that they work with and am still amazed at times at the work that they do. I would like to thank them for giving me the opportunity to finish my degree and internship with them, unfortunately I could not join them sooner or I would have done so.

Here, a special thanks goes out to Ward Karssemeijer, who supervised me throughout the entire internship and was my sparring partner on the different developments within the topics discussed in this thesis. I would also like to thank all the respondents, as without them I could never have gained the knowledge that I have and thus been able to create this piece of work.

I would also like to thank Marianne Dortants, my thesis supervisor. It was actually a coincidence that led me to her as a supervisor, but I am very happy that it did! Throughout the entire process, even during the observations, she helped me where necessary and always remained positive, a trait that really helped me get through. Her feedback was very valuable to fulfilling this research and I don't know how I would have done it without her.

Finally, I would like to thank my family – mum this is the last 'essay' you need to proofread! – my friends, and my boyfriend Michel in particular as they have really got me through this period when things got tough and I, as they say in Dutch, 'could not see the wood for the trees'. It was the little things here and there, sometimes even just creating the necessary distractions, that really helped me finish this research.

I am very happy to have fulfilled this research and I hope you will read this thesis with as much pleasure as I, mostly, have had in writing it.

Oh, and why honey, you might ask. During the gathering, one of our Mozambican partners shared with us that 'MEL' in Portuguese means honey!

Milena Alcorta

Eijsden, August 2018

## Summary

Sport is increasingly being used as a tool to help in other aspects of society. One growing field is that of Sport for Development (SfD). Throughout the years, an increase in organisations and projects that use sports for development purposes can be observed all over the world. In the Netherlands, this progress has led to the creation of the SfD Programme 2016-2020, with its predecessor being the SfD Programme 2012-2015. It consists of a partnership of three organisations, namely KNVB WorldCoaches, Right To Play and International Sports Alliance. They work in different countries where they aim to improve the lives of the people included in their programme, as well as the communities in which they are based. In order to do this, they work together with local organisations.

One aspect that plays a large role in the SfD Programme 2016-2020, as well as any organisation working in this field, is the implementation of a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) tool. Many organisations struggle with establishing a proper system in order to gather relevant data for it, including the partnership. The SfD Programme 2016-2020 has added learning to this tool, creating a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system. This research therefore brings to light the experiences the people involved have concerning M&E and MEL, and what struggles or pressure they might feel, that can cause hindrance to their use of the tool.

The literature shows that M&E is generally found to be difficult to implement, but that there are other aspects that need to be considered in order to create a holistic system. One concept that comes into play here is the Theory of Change (ToC), which enables programmes to create an overview of the goals and objectives. A main issue with M&E seems to be the divide between the 'Global North' and the 'Global South' when being involved in the decision making on how it is to be done. This suggested the use of neo-colonialism as a theoretical framework, as this is an underlying problem that plays a larger role than one might think. Additional to this concept, sensemaking was used as a framework as it enabled useful insights into how the experiences of the respondents translated into their meaning of the concepts of ToC, M&E and MEL.

The study takes the form of an interpretative study, with critical aspects coming into play when discussing the power relations and pressures between the different stakeholders. In order to fulfil this research, the Learning Event organised by the SfD Programme 2016-2020 in June 2018 in the Netherlands was considered a central focus. Here, ten international partners would be present to discuss the M&E and MEL that had been done in the programme so far. These participants were included in the research, together with the Dutch programme partners.

The results show that, firstly, there is an uneven playing field when discussing the ToC, M&E or MEL, as well as the SfD Programme 2016-2020 as a whole due to differences in experiences and involvement. Furthermore, the meanings attributed to these concepts are generally very positive. However, when focusing on the SfD Programme 2016-2020, these meanings are more distorted. Many challenges and issues are faced by respondents when using the ToC and

implementing M&E and MEL, which attribute negatively to the meaning associated with it. Power and pressure also play a key role in this correlation.

In order to improve this, the respondents give several recommendations. Two are presented as full in this research. Firstly, a centralised MEL strategy needs to be established. By creating this, the experiences will improve and the stakeholders will be much better able to implement M&E or MEL within the programme, ensuring better data is retrieved and thus the programme can grow into the future. Secondly, a form in which the different stakeholders involved in the programme can communicate among one another and share their experiences and their data needs to be established. This can be in the form of an online platform or in the form of set sessions, but the desire for such a model is present.



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## 1 Introduction

In the words of Nelson Mandela: “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does” (sportanddev.org, 2013). Nelson Mandela recognised that sport is not only an activity in itself, it is a tool that can be used to aid in many other societal issues, as it did in South Africa to take down the Apartheid system. More and more people, organisations, governments and multinationals are using sport in order to achieve goals related to other topics such as health or inclusion.

One area where sport can mean a great deal is for development purposes, which has created the Sport for Development (SfD) field. Within this field, researchers, NGOs, governments and even the UN are increasingly taking action in order to improve the different initiatives that are being taken within this field. Within the Netherlands, SfD is also becoming increasingly important. Currently, there are three organisations that are mainly active in using SfD: International Sports Alliance (ISA), KNVB WorldCoaches and Right To Play (RTP). These organisations each have their own projects, spread over different countries, but have also joined into a partnership to provide the Sport for Development Programme 2012-2015, Sport for Development Programme 2016-2020 and hopefully the Sport for Development Programme 2020-2024 together. This study will focus on the SfD partnerships and the different projects that are organised under this programme.

ISA, RTP and KNVB WorldCoaches (also referred to as the ‘programme partners’) have decided to embark on this journey together, where each organisation uses their own skills, knowledge and network to organise the programme in different countries. Overall, the programme is currently active in 10 countries<sup>1</sup>, with possibilities to expand in the future. In these countries, the partnership works together with local organisations that have experience in their own context in order to be able to make the programmes as fitting as possible, such as FootballPlus, ProSport or RTP Palestine. From the programme, there is a need to create an overview of the different undertakings and evaluate the results. Within this partnership, ISA is the organisation responsible for bringing forward midterm evaluation reports and annual plans. Therefore, it is logical that the need for improvements in the partnership would come from ISA as they have an overview of where improvements and identification of best practices need to be made to ensure the sustainability of the programme.

In order to be able to measure what the impact of projects is, one important aspect that comes about when using sport for development purposes is the measuring of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the projects. Monitoring and evaluation is very important for organisations in the SfD field. It helps them justify their work as well as create an image of the impact they are having with their projects, what changes are taking place and what this means for everyone involved. In terms of justification, this is especially the case towards funding organisations and donors

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<sup>1</sup> The SfD Programme 2016-2020 is implemented in Kenya, Mali, Burundi, Mozambique, Palestine, Indonesia, Egypt, Suriname, South Africa, India



due to the dependency on them. Van Rooij (2017) argues for adding the learning aspect to M&E as well, where you use the information gathered from M&E to learn systematically from the experiences and hopefully make changes for the better. Theory and experience shows that doing monitoring, evaluation – and learning – (MEL) is a very important part of a project. Despite this importance, MEL is not always implemented to the extent it could be, for example due to differences in knowledge on it or limited capacities. Besides, each person and/or organisation has its own ideas about MEL and how it should be done, and they also give their own meaning to it. Reflection and learning are key aspects within MEL, however, when not enough time is put into it or the right data is not retrieved, it is hard to reflect and learn from previous experiences. This can then lead to no changes or even wrong changes being made to a programme. Additionally, partners involved in all aspects of a programme often find MEL very time consuming and hard to make time for. Also, the different partners within the SfD Programme 2016-2020 seem to take care of their MEL in different ways. The consequence is that this variation means that it is more difficult to compare the impact of the programme between the countries, and that each of the organisation has the liberty to do MEL according to their own standards, rather than standards set up for the SfD partnership, where all parties, including implementing partners, are taken into consideration. It is very likely that they are somehow considered, however the extent to which can differ per organisation and even per project. Therefore, it is important to have a MEL system in place that can be implemented easily by all partners and also give results fairly quickly, rather than having to go through lengthy processes to gather data. In order to work towards this, the SfD Programme 2016-2020 occasionally organises Learning Events, where partners from the different implementing countries are gathered in the Netherlands to exchange experiences and developments. The last Learning Event took place in June 2018, where the focus was the MEL being done by the partners.

The stakeholders involved in SfD projects need also to be considered. They include not only the implementing organisations, coaches, participants, but also donor organisations or states that fund the projects. Between all stakeholders there is a level of dependency that plays a role in the relations, that can be reinforced due to the manner in which cooperation takes place. NGOs such as ISA and Right to Play are often dependent on resources (funding) from other, mainly Western, donors, e.g. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). In the case of the SfD Programme 2016-2020, it is indeed being funded by the Dutch MFA. The M&E is therefore often done in ways that these donors deem right, that tends to be a more quantitative evaluation, overlooking the learning aspect. Western accountability standards often require a certain type of MEL that is more adherent to the wishes of the donor – the Dutch MFA – while the implementing partners may have other norms and standards that are likely to be left aside. It is often hard to convince the participants in local communities of the value MEL has for them as well as for ISA and the other stakeholders. A balanced MEL system needs to provide measurements that fulfil the donor standards required to maintain future funding and has to be able to be used by the implementing partners to observe their own progress. Also the consortium has to be able to measure more in-depth and qualitative aspects of the programme in order to improve the quality of the programme and assess its

impact. In order to come to such a system, all parties additionally have to deal with certain power relations, for example the 'South' versus the 'North', the three programme partner organisations versus the MFA. These power relations also ensure there is dependency of the implementing organisations and the programme partners towards the MFA. This dependency can ensure specific actions are undertaken within a programme if the donors wish so. Additionally, they are fully susceptible to changing agendas within the MFA which creates a form of uncertainty and also pressure to do as the donor wishes in order to ensure future funding. The identification of these aspects and struggles within the field have led to the research topic of this study.

The problem is thus that, currently, the MEL that is being done by the partners is not uniform and is usually being organised on-the-go, rather than arising from a system central to all of the partnership's projects and can be adapted per session or phase of the project. MEL is experienced as very time consuming and difficult to keep track of and report on. There is also a difference between the experiences of MEL among stakeholders, where for the MFA it is important as the Sfd partnership needs to ensure its accountability, whereas for the Southern partners it is sometimes unclear as to why they would need to fill in yet another questionnaire. Besides, MEL often stands on its own within the efforts being made, whereas it could certainly also add to other aspects of the organisation, for example as a marketing tool or for communication purposes. The programme partners want to improve MEL in order to be able to generate better insights into their programmes, however find it difficult to manage how to do so.

A recent development being applied to the Sfd field is the use of a Theory of Change (ToC) from which a programme or an organisation work. Within the partnership, the ToC lies central to the work they do, and therefore is also closely linked to MEL, as the ToC describes all the steps that the partners need to take in order for them to reach the goals set out for the project. With the right MEL, they can see what the steps forward are and adjust their ToC accordingly. The ToC can be observed in three different levels, the input – what are they doing with their projects; the output – more quantitative information on the participants; and outcome – the long-term, qualitative impact the programme will have.

### 1.1 Aim of the study

The problem that can be observed is thus the lack of knowledge of MEL and a system from which the partners can work in the different projects that they have. Therefore, the aim of this study is first to gain knowledge about the current experiences that the different partners have with MEL, both negative experiences as best practices, to obtain a full picture. This will be done by bringing to light what the partners think of MEL now, what they deem needs to improve and how they wish to change it or how it should be. Secondly, the knowledge and experience surrounding the ToC will be examined, as well as the relationship with and influence on MEL, as this is a central part of the work being done in the Sfd Programme 2016-2020. This in order to form an empirical view of how a ToC works in the Sfd field. Thirdly, with a view to the future, this research will also give an insight in what aspects a future MEL system could include for the Sfd

Programme 2020-2024, according to the participants of the Learning Event organised in The Netherlands in June 2018. Finally, this research also aims to bring to light the possible struggles there might be between the different stakeholders involved as seen by the participants of the Learning Event. The input received from interviews with the different participants will give an insight into what they feel could benefit the programme in terms of MEL. Additionally, the Learning Event, which is used as input to see what has been done with MEL in the different participating countries and how they have experienced this, will also be observed by the researcher. Observations and short conversations made throughout the internship of the researcher showing the issues surrounding MEL will also be taken into consideration as this can add further value to this research.

## 1.2 Research question

This study seeks to answer the following research question:

*What meaning is given to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) by the participants of the Sport for Development (SfD) Learning Event and how could this impact future use of MEL within the SfD Programme?*

In order to be able to answer this question, sub-questions will be used.

1. What is currently known about Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning (in SfD organisations)?
2. How does the Theory of Change concept combine with Monitoring & Evaluation?
3. How do the participants of the Learning Event experience the Theory of Change and link it to Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning?
4. How do the experiences that the participants of the Learning Event have had with Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning, attribute to their meaning of Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning?
5. How can the Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning being done in the SfD Programme 2016-2020 be improved?

The first two questions are meant to create a baseline from the existing literature. The third, fourth and fifth sub-questions will then be answered through the interviews with the participants and their participation in the SfD Learning Event, and people involved within the SfD partnership in order to provide as much detail of the current and desired situation as possible.

## 1.3 Societal and scientific relevance

The gained knowledge of the current MEL experiences can be of great value, not only for the partners but also for the entire SfD field. Up until now, mainly generic guidelines and toolboxes are being formed giving you an insight in possibilities. However, the direct insight into the experiences that the partners have with the different MEL undertakings and the joint effort into creating a MEL system for the future can be a significant step, not only for the partnership but possibly also for other organisations as well. Experience tells that doing MEL separately is usually difficult, as much is often done during the sessions and each of the partners does

it in their own way. Also, it is important to make MEL relevant to the participants as it can be a good way to ensure systematic learning on a local level, which can enhance the quality of the programme as it creates more ownership by the local partners, rather than give them the feeling that they are doing it for 'us', as the Northern society. The groundwork of this research can give other organisations a baseline from which they can also easily gain insight in their own MEL experiences and show where struggles may be or come up with good practices. Additionally, conversations had with several stakeholders throughout the internship of the researcher tell that there is a need for a better understanding of what is being done and what can be expected of the different stakeholders.

In the scientific field, this study will add to the existing research on MEL. Currently, not much research can be found where a ToC is linked to M&E aspects in a general context, let alone in the SfD field. This research will contribute to this greatly as it will create a beginning for other organisations and researchers to look at how these two concepts can be combined and add to one another in the SfD context. Additionally, the empirical nature of this research ensures that the existing theoretical background is tested in a real life SfD setting. Apgar et al. (2016) identify that little empirical study is done on how to implement MEL systems – they call it planning, monitoring & evaluation – in order to enable stakeholders to reflect on change processes. This research will include the main stakeholders that are heavily involved in MEL. Their inclusion ensures specific examples and key recommendations on how they view MEL systems should be implemented and what this could include are given, emerged through their vast experiences. This insight is therefore valuable as it adds to some shortcomings in the literature.

#### 1.4 Report structure

In the second chapter, I will examine the existing literature on four main topics: Sport for Development, Theory of Change, Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning and the Theory of Change and Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning combined. This will provide an overview in the existing focus of the literature and will give an insight in possible gaps in the literature or frameworks. The third chapter will explain the theoretical framework that will be used in order to analyse the results. In the fourth chapter, the methodology that will be used in order to create this research will be explained, where I will walk through all the different areas and chosen methods, as well as make comments on the reliability and validity of the research. The fifth chapter will show the results and the analysis of the results. Here I will illustrate the results I received from the interviews and observations and analyse them in order to create an overview of the experiences with MEL and the meaning given to them. The sixth chapter will link the results to the theoretical framework and the literature. The seventh chapter will lead to a conclusion and possible recommendations as a result from this research.

## 2 Literature review

This literature will examine current literature on the SfD field. For this research, the following key terms have been identified that will be the base of the literature review: Sport for Development; Theory of Change; and Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning. These topics will also be examined in combination with one another.

### 2.1 Sport for Development

It is commonly believed that sport has the power to influence other societal aspects. The SfD field has been growing for years as increasingly, more organisations see its value and consider using it for development purposes. Its growing importance was confirmed by the establishment of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace in November 2001 and the celebration of April 6<sup>th</sup> as the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace since 2014. This significant effect it is having, however, also creates a form of dependency by the receiving countries. This section will explore the way in which sport can be used for development and the SfD Programme 2016-2020's position within this field, followed by the issue of dependency and in what form this is identified by the literature.

Within the literature, it can be observed that sport for development is being used interchangeably with other naming such as sport-in-development (Kay, 2012) or sport for development and peace (Darnell, 2012). These fields, however, in general are overlapping and will refer to the same or similar fields. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, sport for development (SfD) will be maintained. When observing the field as a whole, Kruse (2006) mentions how it is “intriguingly vague and open for several interpretations” (in Coalter, 2010, p. 296).

Kay (2012) identifies that there is a reason why sport can now have such a great impact in the development world, whereas several decades ago this would not have been foreseen:

*“To some extent, this shift reflects the effectiveness of the sport lobby in positioning sport as an effective tool of social policy nationally and internationally. This would not have been possible, however, if ideas about what constitutes international development had not changed. While international development decision-makers of the 1940s would have considered sport an irrelevancy to their work, 60 years later there was a very close match indeed between what sport claimed to offer and what international development believed it needed. The result is that sport is increasingly recognised and active in international development.”* (p. 889)

Kay (2012) understands that the relevance of sport has increased over the past 100 years, creating more and more possibilities for it to have an impact. This can also be seen in the increasing power of sporting instances such as the IOC or FIFA, that are now able to exert considerable pressure on governments to accept their wishes if they want to participate in their events.

There are different reasons an organisation may choose to use sport for development purposes. Levermore (2009) identifies the following three, in which the SfD movement links with modernization development goals:

1. Strengthening infrastructure, for example by building sports fields.
2. Creating a stronger social and economic environment, particularly through developing employment and other life skills and investment, one example being through the training of locals in order to increase their capacities.
3. Encouraging the escalation of business/private interest involvement in development, through contacting

The emphasis of this research will mainly be on the second linkage, where the transferring of specific life skills can aid the local community in their development. The work being done within the SfD Programme 2016-2020 is mainly involved in this section, albeit recently an increasing amount of emphasis is laid on business development. Levermore (2009) notes that sport and specific sport related projects increase capacity-building and strengthen empowerment, two areas that the SfD Programme 2016-2020 is very involved in. This second area is therefore also the area where the programme aims for their work to have the largest impact in.

There are also different approaches that one can take when using sport for development, according to Kidd (2008). The first focuses on the traditional provision of sports coaching, equipment and possibly even infrastructure. The second is in the form of humanitarian assistance, usually in the form of fundraising with or in sports in moments of need. Lastly, Kidd identifies the 'sport-for-development-and-peace' movement. Here, the focus once again lies on a broader social development rather than focusing purely on sporting development. Within the partnership it can be observed that, within the same programme, different approaches are used. The KNVB WorldCoaches' work focuses mainly on the first approach, the traditional provision of sports coaching, whereas Right To Play often works in the form of humanitarian assistance, combined with the broader social development. ISA, on the other hand, works almost exclusively in the third approach of sport-for-development-and-peace.

Besides there being different approaches and areas where sport can have an impact on development, Coalter (2010) identifies three ways in which sport itself can be used for development purposes. Firstly, there is the providing of sport with implicit or explicit knowledge of it having developmental aspects, where you train the coaches in sports aspects. This links to Kidd's first approach of traditional sports coaching. Secondly, there is that what Coalter refers to as *plus sport*, where programmes adapt in order to include sports to maximise the possibility to achieve their developmental objectives. In this case, existing programmes decide to add in sporting elements in order to attract more participants or find different ways in which to bring their message across. For example, in prevention programmes it is being done increasingly in order to create a larger impact. Finally, there is *sport plus*, where sport is used as the main focus in programmes of education and training. The skills learned during the programme are of great importance, however, these will be taught through the sports coaching and trainings that are

being organised. In this spectrum, the SfD Programme 2016-2020 lies within the *sport plus* category.

Despite all the positive impact SfD can have, there is still one issue that often appears in development contexts: the North-South divide. The colonial past creates a divide within the world, where the Northern actors, mostly high-income countries, are opposed to the 'Global South', mostly low-income countries. Fokwang (2012) recognises this as the classical development assistance process, where Northern donors aid Southern recipients. Levermore (2009) reports that Frey identifies that improvement in development can only happen once domination (from Northern states) disappears. This is not only the case in terms of aid going from one end to the other, but also in terms of research being done on the programmes. Kay and Spaaij (2011) emphasise that the reliance on Global North researchers to undertake research in Global South countries restricts the possibilities there are for (empirical) research being done in the Global South. Cronin (2011) reinforces this statement by stating that only 9% of the research in the SfD field is being done by researchers from the Global South. The importance of this is explained by Rato Barrio and Ley (2014, p. 292), where "the participation or leadership of local researchers is crucial not merely for translation, but to initiate, develop, understand and maintain locally meaningful research processes". Burnett (2015, p. 820) emphasises that "participation and collaboration in decision-making is limited by hierarchical power structures". This influence from the North can also be observed when looking at the M&E being done, which is predominantly enforced by (Western) donors, for example in the form of log frames, receiving increasing criticism by the 'recipients' from the NGO's "who are denied partnership status due to continued paternalistic attitudes of donors and limited local knowledge of researchers" (Kay in Burnett, 2015, p. 820). The recent transition into MEL, however, might enjoy different experiences as it is a much more bottom-up approach where the implementing partners are fully included in the process.

## 2.2 Theory of Change

Changing and emerging programme theories lead to shifts over time in models being adapted by organisations, where one approach that has gained prominence is the use of a theory of change (Archibald, Sharrock, Buckley & Cook, 2016). Weiss (1995) laid the groundwork for this theory, as she emphasized the importance of using theory-based evaluation as this gives a wider view for evaluation in community-wide programs and avoids common pitfalls in evaluation. Van Eekeren (2016) explains this theory starting with the fact that, in complex interventions, stakeholders are often unclear about the small changes that start occurring the moment the intervention starts. The idea is that the long-term goals are brought into place by all the mini steps and changes that happen reaching up to the long-term goals. The mapping of these mini changes is then formed as the Theory of Change. Vogel (2012, p. 11) identifies that many different types of organisations, from small-scale NGOs to donor agencies, have started taking up a ToC, concluding that most are using ToC "thinking to bring a more integrated approach to programme scoping, design, strategy development, right through implementation, evaluation and impact assessment".

The need for using a ToC, as a theory-based evaluation rather than other types, is due to pitfalls identified by Weiss (1995, p. 86) as “exclusive reliance on individual-level data, which evades questions about the role of ‘community’ or ‘neighbourhood’ and casts no light on the effectiveness of directing programme efforts at ‘refocusing the system’”. The second pitfall is the “inability to explain how and why effects (or no effects) come about in response to programme interventions”. The problem therefore lies in the acknowledging of other impact factors in the programmes and there not being much space for shifts within the programme or reasoning behind effects of the programme, which, according to Weiss (1995), theory-based evaluation does address. Since the SfD Programme 2016-2020 is so involved in the communities and aims to make it a best fit in order to have the biggest impact, the inclusion of these issues in the ToC makes it very applicable and therefore reasonable to use as a baseline for the programme.

However, when choosing to use a ToC in an international development context, Vogel (2012) identifies five key aspects that need to be considered with a ToC:

1. The formation of the ToC needs to include both logical, current thinking as a deeper, critical reflection (also linked to the future), as the ToC impacts on all the different levels the programme is a part of.
2. A set definition cannot be given as it fluctuates per case. A consensus on the basic elements is formed, however, and consists of the following: there needs to be a context, a long-term change, a process or sequence of change, assumptions about how these changes might happen and a diagram and narrative summary to put this all into place.
3. The ToC is flexible and should always be considered as such. This flexibility ensures the effectiveness of the approach and entails critical thinking throughout.
4. The ToC is put in place in order for innovation and improvement to take place in programmes. If used correctly, assumptions are proven right or wrong, leading to follow-up action and reflection, strengthening and improving the programmes.
5. In order for the ToC to work, there needs to be willingness to adapt according to results in all stages of the programme, which is very challenging in the existing funding and performance management systems in the international development sector.

Additionally, when implementing a ToC, Thornton et al. (2017) claim that several implications are needed in order to put it into place. First, there needs to be a combination of qualitative and quantitative monitoring of the performance of research projects; second, a wide range of people need to have been involved in formalising the project’s ToC; and finally, there needs to be regular examining of the assumptions associated with the ToC which leads to adjusting programme management accordingly. The aspects mentioned by both Vogel and Thornton et al. show that the use of a ToC does not come lightly and should not be applied without thorough investigation into the different aspects and difficulties. The process, however, describes the setting needed also for a MEL cycle, where one monitors the performance and examines, or evaluates, its effect – in relation to the ToC. For the SfD Programme 2016-2020, the partnership it has between ISA, KNVB



WorldCoaches and Right To Play, but also with Utrecht University and MDF for the M&E aspects ensures that its ToC is thought out thoroughly and checked by different institutions.

Despite its large scale of advantages, not everyone agrees with the use of a ToC. Mulgan (2016) disagrees with the framing of the approach itself, as theory does not encompass the notion explained within the approach. Mulgan (2016) argues that a theory normally is used for a general concept, separate from that being explained, whereas in terms of a ToC it refers to a specific explanation of a specific example. This creates a misleading framing of the concept. Besides this issue, he also finds that the approach in its form may risk squeezing out the space for learning from the experiences, as well as it may create a linear view of the programme, where inputs lead to outputs which then lead to outcomes, whereas in reality social phenomena are way more complex and can get in the way of this linear aspect. Sharrock (2017) goes one step further in identifying the weakness that, when applying a ToC, no matter how many logical planning tools are used, they may not be able to accommodate the systemic complexity of development interventions. The ToC might still be too simplistic when applied in the real world in order for it to work fully for the programme. Mulgan (2016) does, additionally, comment on the lack of a debate on the good and/or bad aspects of the ToC approach, noting it as an example of how civil society adopts ideas without critically considering them and possibly choosing the most ‘fashionable’ approach at that time. Thornton et al. (2017, p. 146) provide some evidence for this, as no evaluation can be made yet on the research done with the CGIAR Research Programme on the effectiveness of the ToC approach, although “its implementation to date has generated important lessons that we believe can enhance its effectiveness at scale”. This shows that, despite it not being proven yet, it is believed that the use of a ToC approach is effective.

### 2.3 Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning

MEL is a topic that has been growing over the past few years, since it emerged from the basic M&E systems that were previously in place. Kay (2012) notes that, in general, doing M&E is considered to be problematic by any party involved in it. This literature review will create an overview on the current knowledge on MEL and M&E, particularly linked to SfD, and what gaps there may be within this field.

Coalter (n.d., p. 9) defines monitoring as “the regular, systematic, collection and analysis of information related to a planned and agreed programme of action”, whereas evaluation is defined as “the process of undertaking a systematic and objective examination of monitoring information in order to answer agreed questions and make judgements on the basis of agreed criteria”. From the definitions alone, M&E are linked to one another. Evaluation cannot be done without having done monitoring previously and monitoring is no use unless you evaluate it afterwards. Holvoet and Renard (2007), however, do note that they are often seen as one topic, whereas there is a clear difference between both. This misinterpretation can lead to confusion on M&E but also to misuse of it. Reinforcing Kay’s statement, Coalter (n.d.) recognises that M&E can be found difficult by organisations, leading to them being resistant to it, especially when

seen as disruptive to the scope of the programme delivery. The problem identified here is that M&E can be seen as purely for accountability purposes, where quantitative evidence needs to be provided in order to please the sponsors and partners. M&E is, however, much more than just accountability.

Holvoet and Renard (2007), focusing on national M&E systems, identify a shift in aid provided, towards more programme-based approaches, which creates a need for 'restyling and upgrading' current M&E tasks. They note that there should be decreased donor earmarking and an increase in recipient responsibility for the implementation of M&E, for which opportunities are created in programme-based approaches. This new approach aims to blend donor resources with those of the recipient, creating more power for the recipients and increasing their responsibility. Holvoet and Renard (2007, p. 4) identify that the previous top-down approach for planning is in the past, and now a shift can be observed towards a policy cycle that relies on "continued feedback from monitoring and evaluating progress" where they also consider their own accountability. M&E in international development can thus be said to be shifting from strict donor terms to a more mixed approach, where the recipient has increasing input in the measures. The main issues with this approach therefore seem to be linked to M&E issues, noticeably also the absence of an underlying programme theory, such as a ToC. Both in independent reviews as in the research done by Holvoet and Renard (2007), it seemed that the lack of a comprehensive 'grand design' or details about overarching institutional structure was a large problem in M&E within the countries.

Some of the biggest issues with M&E are its actual implementation and its accountability. Here, a contrast can be found between the North and the South, where the South is usually the party that needs to do the M&E, but they possibly do not agree with the information that is being asked of them. Win (2004, p. 124), puts clearly: "We have to fit our visions, our way of thinking, into your template. Gone are our free expression, our long paragraphs and our way of seeing and interpreting our reality. We are now forced to express ourselves in a way that you understand and want". According to this author, there is a large contrast between what is being asked of the local community in terms of M&E, and how they see and experience the programmes. This is often a problem, since M&E systems tend to be developed by the (Northern) donor. She also questions the depth of the M&E that is done and what can be learned from it:

*"Think of any NGO that you have funded during the last five years. If you were to ask them right now to give you something that provides enough depth and critical reflection to contribute to learning, would they have it? They would certainly have their annual reports and reports written for their other donors, but not much that is deeply reflective" (Win, 2004, p. 126).*

The main issue identified here is the limited time, energy and resources to commit to the time-consuming processes needed in order to do M&E, causing it to be done by Northern parties who might not take into consideration the aspects that they do want to learn from the project. Kay (2012, p. 891) identifies M&E as "the most immediate and explicit embodiment of the power imbalances that permeate this

policy field”, as it creates a visible mechanism where ‘recipients’ of SfD support are accountable to their ‘donors’. This is later reinforced, as M&E systems serve multiple interests, where those imposing them emphasize their positive contributions that create opportunities for learning, especially in new programmes. However, Kay (2012, p. 891) does mention that “the need to demonstrate accountability by collecting data frequently takes precedence over concerns to disseminate it to provide programme with learning” and followed states that ‘in-country actors’ often have to go along with imposed data collection requirements. Another issue that comes about when doing M&E, is the desire to maintain the programme within the community, leading to socially desired answers and withholding information that might be damaging for the organisation or programme (Win, 2004).

Coalter (n.d., p. 9) therefore hopes for a shift to a formative M&E, “undertaken to provide information that will lead to organisational and programme improvement. In the context of sport-in-development projects, it is essential that M&E play a central role in learning and development”. Here, Coalter introduces the learning aspect, which, when included in the M&E system, can help improve the programme rather than just report on the current course of events. Since this is a fairly new take on the M&E, there is not much literature that includes learning. Shah et al. (in Coalter, 2009) find that M&E should provide the basis for a dialogue, from which all parties involved – organisations, sponsors – can learn. From here, the aim is for these partners to recognise that organisational development is just as important as the outcomes defined by the programme. Holvoet and Renard (2007) find that the

*“starting point of the first track is a diagnosis of the actual state of a recipient’s M&E supply and demand. This diagnosis, identifying strengths and weaknesses, should preferably be done by a team consisting of independent M&E experts and representatives of all stakeholders involved, including donors, government and non-government actors” (Holvoet & Renard, 2007, p. 15)*

Within the SfD Programme 2016-2020, thought has been given to this process. Within its ToC, one of the five key implementing areas is the community organisations that are involved in implementing the programme and helping them improve their skills as well as the participants.

The number of organisations that are using SfD is large, however, according to Coalter, none of these use “a clearly articulated strategic model for leveraging sport to achieve its aims, and SfD programmes have not been subjected to rigorous evaluation” (in Chalip & Heere, 2014, p. 188) In order to facilitate good evaluation, Morrow and Nkwake (2016) have created the following overview. The key aspect to be considered, is that one needs to be aware of assumptions made as they lead to choices.

Figure 1: Assumptions in discussing evaluation purpose

**Box 1. Assumptions in discussing evaluation purpose**

Examining these assumptions gets to the following questions (Nkwake, 2015):

- Has the evaluation's purpose (including questions) been appropriately derived?
- Did the formulation and prioritization of questions engage stakeholder input to make the purpose agreeable, rational, and feasible?

*Assumptions in selecting evaluation designs and methods.*  
Examining these assumptions gets to the following question:

- To what extent do the measures (methods, constructs, variables, comparisons) accurately depict the essential features of a program?

*Assumptions in determining measures, tools, and data collection*  
Examining these assumptions gets to the following questions:

- How acceptable are the measures, tools, and data collection procedures
- To what extent does the data obtained from evaluation measures truthfully depict the program's features, dynamics and outcomes?

*Assumptions in analysis, inference, interpretation, and conclusions*  
Examining these assumptions gets to the following questions:

- Are conclusions and inferences correctly derived from evaluation data and measures that generate this data?
- To what extent can the evaluation findings provide conclusions about other situations?

*Assumptions about evaluation use*  
Examining these assumptions gets to the following questions:

- How will evaluation results be put to use?
- Will consequent decisions be in line with the conclusions of the evaluation?
- Does the evaluation address values to which major stakeholders (or audiences)

Source: Morrow & Nkwake (2016) – Conclusion: Agency in the face of complexity and the future of assumption aware evaluation practice

This overview gives an insight into the different aspects that need to be considered when setting up evaluation tools and think about the consequences these aspects may have.

Overall, much research has been done on M&E, added by the learning aspects that can be added to this when implemented correctly. Holvoet and Renard (2007), however, observe that

*“A more holistic approach towards M&E necessitates a holistic diagnostic instrument. Whereas, to the best of our knowledge, no tailor-made instruments are currently systematically used, there are some interesting donor-led and independent assessments and studies that might provide some inspiration for the elaboration of such a diagnostic instrument”* (Holvoet & Renard, 2007, p. 17)

This remark illustrates the need for the creation of a holistic M&E instrument that has come about from empirical research. For the Sfd Programme 2016-2020, this lack of a holistic tool can also be observed. Currently, there is a lack of a holistic M&E approach in place for the programme, leading to new approaches to be developed along the way whenever M&E needs to be done. This is where this study fits in, as it will be questioning not only the position within MEL but also how MEL is and/or ought to be done according to the participants' views.

## 2.4 Theory of Change & Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning

According to Kay (2012, p. 890), M&E systems are “among the most widespread sources of knowledge and information in international development, and the ones which directly link ‘donors’ with ‘recipients’”. Therefore, it is crucial that M&E takes place in programmes aiming to contribute to international development. Kay (2012, p. 891) introduces the logic model framework, also known as the ToC, which is widely adopted as an approach as it can offer “holistic approaches to the design, planning and management of programmes that require funders’ and partners’ aims, objectives and performance measures to be aligned”. Here, the link between the ToC, as it stands, and M&E can be observed. When used in evaluation, Connell and Kubisch (1998, p. 17) describe the ToC as “a systematic and cumulative study of the links between activities, outcomes, and contexts of the initiative”. Vogel (2012) notes that, in order for the ToC to be effective within the M&E system, both qualitative as quantitative information is needed. The inclusion of both, however, is often a challenge.

## 2.5 Summary

This literature review has created a compact overview of the literature currently available on SfD; Theory of Change; Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning and Theory of Change and Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning combined. The literature on SfD shows that this field is evermore increasing, such that the U.N. has included it in the work that it does. A shifting environment can be observed in the recent decades in terms of development, giving the possibility for the SfD field to evolve. In terms of impact, the focus of this SfD Programme 2016-2020 lies mainly in Levermore’s (2009) ‘creating a stronger social and economic environment’ impact field, whereas it strongly adheres to Kidd’s (2008) sport-for-development-and-peace movement. The SfD Programme 2016-2020 links to Coalter’s ‘*sport plus*’ approach as it focuses on providing sport as the sessions ensure that educations and training is achieved. One issue identified within the SfD field, is that there still seems to be a classical development assistance process, where the North gets funding to provide programmes in the South, creating a North-South divide. The ToC is described as an integrated approach to programme setting, which is being used increasingly by all sorts of organisations. Problems with previous approaches were that these did not always allow for changes and shifts to be made during the process of the programme, which is possible and even aimed for within the ToC. Using a ToC correctly can be difficult, as there is much room for error. This is overcome as much as possible within the SfD Programme 2016-2020 with the collaboration with Utrecht University and MDF to ensure its stance. However, problems can also be identified with the ToC. Mulgan (2016) finds the naming of it misleading, as theory is used but does not mean theory in the sense used in academics. Another issue that is identified is the fact that it might be too complex to set up, but also to check and adapt constantly according to the interventions. In terms of M&E, much literature can be found. The key aspect to consider is that monitoring and evaluation are undoubtedly linked to one another, although not one and the same thing which can be misinterpreted as such. It is often experienced as difficult by organisations, possibly causing resistance to

doing M&E, especially when the value of it is only linked to accountability purposes. Recently, a shift can be observed in M&E where top-down planning is being replaced and local organisations get increasingly more responsibility and ownership of the programme and the M&E needed for it. A problem with this is that there is a contrast between what the North wants, and the South sees as applicable, which is becoming more relevant as the partners in the South are usually doing the M&E, but according to norms and measures decided in the North. This has also to do with the fact that there is limited time, energy and resources to do M&E, as it is a long, time-consuming process. Additionally, the desire of the South to keep the programme in the communities could potentially lead to them giving socially desirable answers. M&E plays a central role to organisational and programme development and, linked with the ToC, can provide a solid base to work from and constantly adapt the programme to improve it. It should create a basis for dialogue, from which can be learned and evolved.

The different concepts of this literature review together form a basis from which the empirical research will be done. The background on SfD creates an overview of the environment the respondents work in, whereas the review done on the ToC ensures the basis of the programme is understood and it can help comprehend the views of the respondents of the research. The same accounts for the review of M&E. The struggles observed can then also illustrate the possible issues the respondents are having. The literature review is also the base for the following chapter, the theoretical framework, as it has given stepping stones for a lens to be held throughout the research.



### 3 Theoretical framework

The SfD Programme 2016-2020 situates around many different influences, be it the interpretation the different stakeholders have of the concepts that are being dealt with, the pressures that they feel or the context that they work in. In order to be able to understand the different interpretations and actions of the stakeholders, from the eyes of the participants of the Learning Event, a theoretical framework needs to be established to give form to the results. This chapter will illustrate Weick's (1995) sensemaking and Nkrumah's neo-colonialism (1965) as the concepts that have been chosen as a theoretical lens for this research.

#### 3.1 Weick's sensemaking

Sensemaking as a framework consists of the structuring of the unknown by active agents. The questions concerning sensemaking one could ask is "how they construct what they construct, why, and with what effects" (1995, p. 4). Different definitions can be found on sensemaking, while Cantril identifies the "frame of reference" where a generalised point of view directs interpretation (in Weick, 1995, p. 4). According to Starbuck and Milliken (1988, p. 51), sensemaking "has many distinct aspects – comprehending, understanding, explaining, extrapolating, and predicting, at least". This concept adds to the knowledge perceived in this research as the interpretive nature entails it focuses on "attending to cues and interpreting, externalising, and linking these cues." (Porac et al. in Weick, 1995, p. 8). The missing element in, says Weick, is information on how the cues were created and how these were chosen from 'an ongoing flow of experience'. This is the added value of sensemaking as a framework, as its process "is intended to include the construction and bracketing of the textlike cues that are interpreted, as well as the revision of those interpretations based on action and its consequences" (Weick, 1995, p. 8). When applied to this research, it can be observed that the pure interpretation of the participants of the SfD Programme 2016-2020 is not enough to state the relevance it has to them and to the programme, the importance lies in the meaning given to the different topics and experiences by the participants themselves and how this influences their actions. Sensemaking has already taken place within this research as the problematic situation of the differences in meaning and experiences in MEL, observed as 'puzzling, troubling, and uncertain', has been transformed into a problem by making sense of this uncertain situation.

Weick (1995) identifies seven properties of sensemaking, namely being: 1) grounded in identity construction; 2) retrospective; 3) enactive of sensible environments; 4) social; 5) ongoing; 6) focused on and by extracted cues; and 7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. Of these, a few are relevant for the scope of this research. The first property refers to the fact that no individual ever acts like a single sensemaker, however, the position people take (or think they are in) automatically shapes how they fulfil that position and how they interpret events and experiences. In terms of the SfD Programme 2016-2020, their position regarding MEL and the ToC gives them a certain context and therefore enforces this position within their sensemaking. The fourth property considers

sensemaking a social activity, as it entails that stories are exchanged with one another and the narratives are formed through both individual and stories from others. Within the scope of this research, the combination of the different views, partially through the Learning Event, will add to the understanding they have of MEL and the ToC. The fifth property refers to the constant shaping and reacting of the sense created by an individual. Each interaction the respondents have with MEL and the ToC ensures the sense they make of it changes. Finally, the seventh property refers to the fact that there is not one right or wrong answer in terms of sensemaking regarding MEL and the ToC as it consists of individual constructions of reality.

### 3.2 Nkrumah's neo-colonialism

The second concept that will be considered during the analysis of the data, is that of Nkrumah's (1965) neo-colonialism, which is a Marxist theory that discusses the conflict between the 'rich North' and the 'poor South'. The examined literature shows that often there is a struggle between what Northern people, organisations or donors want with what Southern people works for them to develop in their own way. According to Nkrumah, "the essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (1965, p. 1). Here, two separate frameworks can be identified: the political and the economic. Nkrumah describes neo-colonialism as "an attempt to export the social conflicts of the capitalist countries" where the "internal contradictions and conflicts of neo-colonialism make it certain that it cannot endure as a permanent world policy" (1965, p. 2). The main issue with neo-colonialism is the investment "increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world" (1965, p. 1). The problem is not the money flow, but finding a way to prevent the developed countries from using their financial power in a way that they impoverish the less developed countries. Holden (2016, p. 100) describes the struggles as followed: "the accepted framework for regulation and governance is framed by a 'northern' agenda, despite the huge differences in opportunity, wealth, democracy, sporting taste and models of professional sport that prevail beyond the confines of the G8 countries", talking specifically about the power of the G8 countries. When looking at the impact of post-colonialism on development, McKay (2004) mentions how power is a large issue that shapes how development is thought out and policy is framed around it (in Mwaanga, 2016).

This framework is used on a large scale, exercising countries as examples. It can, however, also be applied on a smaller scale, in this case for the Sfd Programme 2016-2020. Within the Sfd Programme 2016-2020, the problem with neo-colonialism can be observed in a softer form. The relationship between the donor, the MFA, the programme partners and the local organisations can be said to be enforced in a neo-colonial manner, although several steps are taken to ensure these stakeholders are involved in the organisational aspects of the programme. This does not take away that it can still be experienced as pressure by the different parties involved. The problem within this programme relates to the reasoning behind it and the aspects concerning MEL that are taken into consideration, but



not shared with all the parties involved. Key aspects here are the ToC, which is the basic underline of the programme but not widely known or applied by the local partners; the reasons for doing MEL, which are considered as ‘we do what you ask’ rather than for their own needs and learning; or different understanding of different concepts due to how it is perceived or made sense of by the partners.

### 3.3 Summary

Weick’s sensemaking framework in essence talks about how people structure the (unknown) world around them by using the influences they have available. Nkrumah’s neo-colonialist framework, however, looks at how people’s worlds are framed by the (colonialist) influences from the ‘North’ and the struggles there are between what people from the ‘North’ think is appropriate and what the people from the ‘South’ feel is necessary. When combining these two frameworks, a contrast can be observed. There is a difference between what one makes of the ToC and MEL within their own perspective and experiences, and what they make of it partially due to the neo-colonialist influences. They do not necessarily influence one another, however, they will most certainly be affected in terms of the respondent’s interpretation of the concepts.



## 4 [Methodology](#)

In this chapter the methodology that was followed to carry out the research will be presented, together with explanations of the choices that were made.

### 4.1 [Methodological approach](#)

This research has adopted a qualitative method approach, as it was clear for this topic that in-depth information was needed from the parties involved in order to be able to bring to light issues and opportunities in the opinions of the people involved, which also links to the choice of using Weick's sensemaking framework as this also refers to a person's own opinions and meaning that has been formed. Boeije (2009, p.11) portrays the purpose of qualitative research as "to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them". A qualitative approach can thus create more knowledge and illustrate different people's opinions, and in such a way portray the social issues that can be found surrounding MEL. Boeije (2009) observes three elements that comprise the reasoning behind choosing to use qualitative research. First, one needs to be looking for meaning, which in the case of this research is the meaning behind MEL for the parties involved and how this should be formed best. Second, you need to be able to use flexible research methods that enable contact. For the scope of this research this is certainly achieved as methods such as interviews, informal conversations, observations (of the Learning Event) and current MEL documents have all been taken into consideration and used. Finally, you need to be able to provide qualitative findings by identifying and coding themes together to create categories, which in the case of this research lead to findings based on MEL and the ToC, the experiences with this – both positive and negative – and the general knowledge on these topics and the SfD Programme 2016-2020. The meanings given by the different respondents as well as the influences they experience from different stakeholders have also been examined through this process.

### 4.2 [Philosophical perspective](#)

The information gathered has been observed through an interpretative explanation, where data is transformed "to produce grounded theories, ethnographies or otherwise fully integrated explanations of some phenomenon, event or case. The explanations are composed of linkages between different categories that represent the studied phenomena in a new way" (2009, p. 153). According to Edwards and Skinner (2009, p. 27), within the interpretivist perspective, "what distinguishes human (social) action from the movement of physical objects is that the former is inherently meaningful". When linking this to the post-colonialism framework, however, the meaning given differs due to the influences created by the 'North'. Henry and Ko (2016, p. 8) explain the difference between positivism and interpretivism as: "classic positivism seeks to identify social 'facts' about patterns of behaviour at an observable level in an 'objectivist' fashion. Interpretivism approaches the task of understanding social reality by the analysis of actors' own understanding of the significance and meaning of their own

behaviour". For the purpose of this research, the human actions regarding MEL within the SfD Programme 2016-2020 have been questioned as to see what triggers certain opinions and experiences amongst the participants. This stance required the use of qualitative research methodologies, as one needs the insights of the respondents to be able to make sense of their lives (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research is both empirical as theoretical of nature, as it retrieves knowledge from the experiences and senses of the participants but was also driven by the research done in both the literature review as the theoretical framework. Boeije's (2005) concept of 'abduction' is therefore very applicable for this research. Through the use of an abduction process, a hypothesis is searched that can give an explanation for a certain matter. It requires both conscious as spontaneous thinking when analysing the data, in order to ensure the researched subject is understood to the fullest extent possible but is also evaluated to its capabilities. In using abduction, the knowledge and experience of people and literature regarding the topic are of significant value, as well as the theoretical sensitivity that is needed in order to analyse the data. The inclusion of neo-colonialism in the theoretical framework, additionally, adds a critical perspective to this research. According to Houlihan (2016), abduction is also one of the stages of analysis within a critical realist paradigm.

For this research, in terms of an ontological perspective, the stance was that social realities cannot necessarily be reduced to a numerical state (Denzin, 2001), therefore enhancing the choice for an interpretivist approach. There are different realities that can be interpreted according to the lens one chooses to put on and thus explained in many different ways (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). There is therefore no correct way to interpret the social phenomena formed around the SfD Programme 2016-2020's MEL system, the lens has been the one illustrated in the previous chapter. This leads to the epistemological position to grasp the subjective meaning of the social action (Bryman, 2012) For this study, the researcher did not value the results to be one single truth, mere an own interpretation of the information handed.

### 4.3 Research subject

The MEL system of the SfD Programme 2016-2020 has been questioned within this research, in order to bring to light the current experiences of and meaning given to MEL, as well as the ToC due to the close linkage between these two. The reason this programme was chosen, has to do with several aspects. First, the researcher was doing an internship with ISA and their assignment was to investigate MEL in general, which led to it having to be narrowed down to a specific programme. Since this programme entails a partnership with KNVB WorldCoaches and RTP, this created a wide base and possibly opposing opinions that could be taken into consideration during the data collection. Additionally, participants from several different countries could be considered, giving an insight into the differences between the 'Global North' and the 'Global South', rather than just from the 'northern' partners. Consequently, the implementing partners were all due to visit the Netherlands within the scope of the research, creating a better opportunity for including them as respondents. The SfD Programme 2016-2020 is the biggest programme of its kind in the Netherlands, thus establishing a good base

for possible follow-up research in other countries with similar programmes. Finally, currently negotiations are taking place about how the SfD Programme 2020-2024 should take form and the insight in different MEL and ToC experiences and meanings could really aid in this process rather than having to make it up as they go along.

The aim of this research is to get an insight into the experiences the participants of the Learning Event have concerning MEL within the SfD Programme 2016-2020. However, since there are several topics related to MEL and different contexts the participants work in, this has all been taken into consideration. The answers of the respondents are therefore related to their experiences with MEL in general, whether it be specifically related to the SfD Programme 2016-2020 or a more general overall experience. Firstly, since this is also valuable information as it can also give an insight into possible other issues or best practices and secondly as respondents might not be able to separate the aspects of the programme from their overall experience.

#### 4.4 Methods

In order to be able to retrieve the best data for this research, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data source, as “these types of interviews are often based on the knowledge of, and/or the assumption that the respondents have had a particular experience they can elaborate upon” (Edwards & Skinner, 2009, p. 107). The topics questioned focused on the topic of the research and the researcher could thus find flexible ways to ask more on specific topics. Judd et al. (1991), however, identify a major disadvantage in semi-structured interviews as the vulnerability of the researcher “to the interpretations and subjective insights of the informant” (in Edwards & Skinner, 2009, p. 107). For this research, the selection of participants was firstly made according to the presence within the Learning Event. All the international participants were interviewed, as well as the programme partners involved with the programme from KNVB WorldCoaches, RTP and ISA. Observations were also a significant part of the research, as the researcher took part in MEL Learning Event where all respondents participated in and discussed their experiences. The interviews took place around this event, some prior to the start of it, some during – as it was a three-day event – and some after, as there was not enough time to interview all the implementing parties during their stay here. Two different topic lists were used, one for the programme partners and one for the implementing partners, as their knowledge and the apparent struggles and concepts were introduced differently according to their understanding. The topics chosen were the introduction and SfD Programme 2016-2020, the ToC, M&E/MEL, data collection and the possibilities for change. The topic lists can be found in appendix 9.1.

According to Edwards and Skinner (2009, p. 103), “observation entails the systematic noting and recording of actions and behaviours (both verbal and non-verbal), events, and objects in the social or work setting that is the research site”. This entailed participatory observation as the researcher actively took part in the event, however did not disturb the environment of the Learning Event in the beginning of June for the research in order to maintain a greater level of neutrality

and objectivity. Since the participants were already asked to participate in this research, and some had already been interviewed, they were fully aware of the research being done and the purpose of it, therefore creating the setting for an overt observation. Throughout the Learning Event, supporting information was added to the central message of the notes, such as who said what, what was the context of the conversation and who was involved in the discussion. The main intention here was to bring to light the experiences the participants had with M&E and MEL throughout the programme and the issues they had come across with it. Since the event was quite descriptive, in particular the discussions were deemed valuable as here mainly the issues would arise, and the different people would express their feelings about it. These notes were added as data and taken with in the data analysis.

Interactions on the workforce and between co-workers were also taken into consideration, as these short interactions sometimes gave much information on the daily struggles that were maybe forgotten or did not come to light during interviews. The different methods of interaction with the (international) participants have also been taken in as data, for example Whatsapp conversations or e-mail transactions, as this gave an insight into their understanding of the concepts and also shed light on some of the questions they had. Here once again notes were taken throughout the internship period on comments and interactions that might be of value for this research and presented as data for the analysis. As the literature review and the theoretical framework took shape, it also had an effect on how the comments and interactions were perceived by the researcher. Especially stand-alone remarks increased in value as they gained much weight when considered in the perspective of, for example, the North-South divide or the neo-colonialism.

Finally, several documents concerning MEL were also analysed to come to an overall view of the current MEL undertakings. These documents included but were not limited to: Sfd Programme 2016-2020 annual reports, Sfd Programme 2016-2020 midterm reports, background documents, and MEL local workshop cases. These documents formed background knowledge on the different developments in terms of M&E and MEL and the processes that are in place when fulfilling these tasks. By analysing these documents, a better view could be created of what is known by the different participants of MEL and how it is being done. The workshops also ensured the respondents all had some form of interaction with M&E and MEL before starting the Learning Event.

#### 4.5 Respondents

The main form in which data was retrieved, was through conducting interviews. In order to conduct these interviews, choices were made in terms of who was to be interviewed. First, all participants had to be part in either the programming of the Sfd Programme 2016-2020 or the implementation of it. This since the research is about this programme so involvement herein was crucial. The second choice was to limit the respondents to the following criteria, namely '(partially) being part of Learning Event'. This was done as a certain level of involvement and knowledge of

MEL and the ToC was needed for this research, which was applicable for the people involved in the event.

The interviews were conducted through Skype, phone call, in real life and through submitting the topic list. This was dependent on the availability of the respondents prior, during and following the Learning Event. The choice was made to involve all the international partners, including the ones from Mali despite there being a potential issue with understanding one another as they spoke limited English. In order to deal with this struggle, the present interpreter was asked to help with the interview and conduct the interview in French, where the researcher's understanding of French was basic. This, however, was more troublesome than foreseen which led to the interviews being sent to both respondents and them answering the questions in French. All the other interviews were held in English as this was the language the research took place in and all respondents (except the Malian) felt comfortable in.

The following table gives an overview of the participants that were involved, the country and organisation they represent and the function they fulfil. Important to note is that the implementing partners working through ISA and KNVB WorldCoaches, work for their own NGO's in their respective countries whereas the implementing partners for Right To Play work within Right To Play offices. The roles of the respondents differ from country director to field facilitator regarding the implementing partners, whereas respondents from the organising partners all fulfil roles similar to that of a project manager.

*Table 1: Overview of the respondents' countries, their functions and their organisations*

Country	Organisation	Function
The Netherlands	ISA	Programme officer
The Netherlands	ISA	Project leader
The Netherlands	ISA	Project leader
The Netherlands	RTP The Netherlands	Programme leader
The Netherlands	KNVB WorldCoaches	Programme manager & development
Mozambique	RTP Mozambique	Field facilitator
Mozambique	ProSport	Project officer
Indonesia	FootballPlus	Women's programme manager
Burundi	RTP Burundi	Project officer
Palestine	RTP Palestine	Country director
Mali	ISA Mali	Programme coordinator
Mali	RTP Mali	Project officer
Kenya	Girls Unlimited	Co-founder
Kenya	TYSA & Tabasamu Africa Hub	Co-founder & co-director
Kenya	Orangelink	Country director

#### 4.6 Analysis of data

The interviews that were held conversing with the respondents, were recorded and completely transcribed. The only exception was one interview, where the recording material failed to record during the interview. In order to correct this, the knowledge from the interview was filled into the topic list by the researcher, then e-mailed to the respondent who answered the questions with their added

remarks and opinions on the topics. The interviews with the Malian participants were conducted by sending them the topic list and them answering the questions in written form. In order to avoid any misunderstanding and for them to understand what was asked of them, a short introduction was held by the researcher in French during the Learning Event. Their responses were translated into English by the researcher. During the observations, the researcher would note down what was being said, the context in which this was placed and when it happened. These remarks were then worked out in 'field notes'.

All the data was then entered into the Nvivo coding software. Here, the data was analysed through open, axial and selective coding (Boeije, 2009), as the information was segmented fairly clearly and the topics that were relevant for this research were clear through the broad literature review and theoretical framework. During this process, the open and axial phases were done conjointly as, as codes were created they were automatically placed as sub codes under the corresponding main codes according to their relation to these concepts. This was possible through the structure created by the literature review and theoretical framework. This background ensured enough knowledge was present on the topics that were needed for the fruition of this research and in basic terms what shape this would take. Most of the data was coded within this process, however, some of the respondents talked much about topics that were of no value to this research thus were left out of the analysis spectrum. By keeping the main question and sub-questions near, it could be established which data could be excluded from the analysis as they would not add value to these questions, for example going very in-depth into their daily activities in their organisations. Following this, selective coding was done where the main and sub codes were identified that were needed in order to answer the research question. Specifically, within the selective coding, but also throughout the entire coding process, theoretical sensitivity (Boeije, 2009) was used in order to create a better understanding of what was meant in each key point made. The codes not included in this were left out of the further analysis of this research. Here, also the relation between the different topics and codes were identified and highlighted. In appendix 9.2, the code tree can be observed.

In order to maintain anonymity for the respondents, they have been named firstly according to their involvement in the programme, secondly numbered randomly within their group:

- P: programme partners, referring to the Dutch partners of the consortium, ranging from P1-P5.
- E: experienced implementing partners, referring to partners that have been included in the first group to make the switch from the traditional form of M&E to MEL, which emerged within the SfD Programme 2016-2020 nearly two years ago, ranging from E1-E6.
- B: beginning implementing partners, referring to the partners that have only made the switch from M&E to MEL since the Learning Event in June, by when they were already interviewed, ranging from B1-B4

The only exception to this is the partner from Palestine who, despite only being involved recently within the programme, showed such a greater understanding of the concepts that he was also classified as an experienced respondent.

#### 4.7 Reliability and validity

When considering the reliability of a research, Boeije identifies this as “the consistency of the measures used in social research” (2009, p. 169). For the scope of this research, the semi-structured interviews took place according to a topic list that was used in all interviews, adapted to Dutch participants and international participants. Small differences were made depending on the role of the respondent in relation to MEL, the extent of their experience and the flow of the interview, however this created the necessary insight and contrasts needed to form some of the arguments. Validity, according to Boeije, is about “being specific about what you set out to assess. This is dependent on the use of the correct measures” (2009, 169). This was controlled as much as possible by choosing the right methodological approach for this research and the right measures for data collection. Also, triangulation was implemented as several methods of data collection were chosen for the purpose of this research (Bryman, 2012). Three types of validity can then be considered, the first being face validity. This entails that others have observed the construction of the research and the elements considered in order to observe it as a whole. The thesis supervisor took the first step in reviewing this, followed by the internship supervisor – as he has written several reports and theses already, fellow students and the second thesis supervisor. Second, the researcher ensured internal validity through the confidence in the description and explanation of the undertaken actions and choices made throughout the process of the thesis. This also included the interviews, where less ideal situations might play a role in issues surrounding the validity of the data. These could be but are not limited to: the desire to create socially optimal answers, difficult interview settings, potential language barriers, unknowingly leading to answers. The researcher has ensured to take steps to avoid these situations. The third type of validity involves external validity. This refers to the extent to which this research is generalizable “beyond the specific research context” (Boeije, 2009, p. 180). As mentioned previously, the aim of this research is not to come up with a generalizable statement on the experiences of everyone involved in the SfD field or in development contexts in terms of MEL. The researcher understands that this research does not have the capacity to do so and thus strictly encompasses the experiences of the respondents involved. However, it does provide tools and insights that can be of significant value for others that are interested in possible experiences that people involved in this area might be having, or insights into different angles for approach that can be used to bring some of these issues to light.

#### 4.8 Role of the researcher

For this research several aspects of the researcher are identified in this section, and any potential biases from the researcher will be eliminated as much as possible and otherwise stated. The researcher is a student at Utrecht University,



doing this research as master's thesis. The researcher is a Peruvian female that has been brought up in the Netherlands, so is familiar with international contexts.

Some of the foreseen possibilities for biases have been identified and are laid out in this section. Firstly, the researcher works as an intern for ISA, creating many more opportunities to retract data from this organisation than the other organisations. However, since ISA is the leading organisation concerning MEL it is reasonable to assume most problems with it occur within this organisation or they are informed of it, leading to the position of the researcher to be of substantial value as the problems occur within reach. Also, the researcher had an assignment for ISA that had to do with MEL and the event mentioned above, which might lead to premeditated answers. Since the involvement in the event was strictly in terms of logistics, this is not considered to have caused problems but can have aided in the contact with (potential) respondents and their willingness to participate in this research. However, it could also have led to the respondents giving socially desirable responses. In order to avoid this, the researcher made clear that this research is being done for her study and their results will be anonymised. Another possible barrier is the fact that the research is being done for both ISA (as a client) and Utrecht University (as a research institute), whereas both institutions work together on the topic of MEL for the SfD Programme 2016-2020 as well. Additionally, since not all interviews could be held in real life, some had to be done through Skype or through e-mail. Using these methods has some disadvantages, as you have to deal with network connection and potential differences in understanding.



## 5 Results

The following chapter depicts the results that were retrieved from conducting the interviews, the participative observation in the Learning Event and the document analysis. The results will be presented according to the following topics: Sport for Development Programme 2016-2020; Theory of Change; Monitoring & Evaluation – and Learning; and Moving Forward. These themes were chosen according to the data that was analysed and in relation to the research question and the sub questions. The results will depict the meanings given by the respondents to the different topics and how this influences their – and their partners’ – work in terms of the Sfd Programme 2016-2020.

### 5.1 Sport for Development Programme 2016-2020

The first topic that will be discussed in this analysis is the context of the Sfd Programme 2016-2020. This programme has a wide scope, being implemented in several different countries with different implementing partners in each country, being described by E1 as a ‘Sport for Development family’. As this research is about the Sfd Programme 2016-2020, the respondents’ knowledge of this programme and of its work was examined. This was important in order to establish a baseline of their knowledge. The level of ownership felt by the different respondents will also be highlighted, as this also highlights the background for the context in which they work.

To begin with, an uneven playing field among the respondents from the implementing organisations in terms of the knowledge they have on the programme they are implementing can be observed. It is important to note these differences at the beginning as it is probable they will amplify throughout the different topics. Several respondents had little to no knowledge on the way in which the programme is set up. B1, for example, mentioned:

*“I just found out about two months ago that there’s actually three organisations and it is together, which is KNVB WorldCoaches, ISA and RTP I think? [...] I just know that the three organisations are trying to do sports for development, but I don’t know exactly what, or details.” – B1*

There was even some unease with B3 when he wasn’t able to provide more detail about the programme than solely that there had been projects combined with the three organisations, saying:

*“I did not go deeper on that because I don’t want to lie to you. It is only what I know up to now.”*

The unawareness of these respondents may partly be explained by their position in the implementing organisations as they had little interaction with other aspects of the programme, such as the Learning Event. When asking some of the more experienced partners, the responses were different.

*“The Sport for Development Programme is a programme organised by three organisations, ISA, Right To Play and KNVB, that is implemented in 6 countries – Kenya, Indonesia, Burundi, Mali, Palestine and Mozambique. It is financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme aims to establish vital communities in the places that it works.” – E2 (translated from French)*

The more experienced partners show a much wider and fuller understanding of what the programme is about and what it entails as they have been more informed through their involvement in the programme. They are aware of the involvement of the three different organisations as a partnership, as well as the implementing areas, where the funding is coming from and what the role of their organisation is within the broader spectrum. This does not, however, mean there can't be misconceptions about the partnership and the aim of it, as illustrated by the following remark:

*“I know the partnership is on Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning. They are, however, very well aware of the impact they are having, although the context of the programme is not always related to. We came up with the Theory of Change that all the organisations are trying to achieve and through this partnership we are able to monitor and evaluate through our activities to see if we are in the right direction and to see if MEL is really helping [...] so I believe the partnership is based on the Theory of Change and on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning.” – E6*

Despite the ToC and MEL being important aspects of this programme and several events have been organised around these topics, this is not the aim of this programme. However, the focus on this within the partnership can lead people to perceive that the programme is about the ToC and MEL only and not perceive its true aim.

The above-mentioned remarks depict the different views and understandings of the implementing partners. When asking the programme partners about the programme and the partnership, information was given not only on the way it is set up but also on the background and on the focus of the different organisations in the countries.

*“Since 2012, or maybe 2011, ISA has been taking the lead in writing a proposal that was submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and it followed, the result was the first Sport for Development Programme 2012-2015 together with RTP and KNVB WorldCoaches and now we are in the second Sport for Development Programme 2016-2020 which is a follow-up on that.” – P3*

*“We work in some countries all together, for example Mali, where all three programme partners have interventions [...] and in some countries it is just one or two of us but always trying to work complementary together, which is sometimes easier said than done” – P5*

### 5.1.1 Ownership Sport for Development Programme 2016-2020

One aspect that can influence one's involvement and inclusion in a programme, is the ownership they feel of this programme. The respondents were asked how they felt this was the case for them and their partners within the SfD Programme 2016-2020.

The minds of the respondents are divided in terms of how they consider ownership is felt by the implementers. This is also dependent on the context that is considered. P2, for one, thinks they have limited ownership, in the context of the structure of the programme.

*"They were involved in this Theory of Change, which is nice, but it is also, you know, it is quite a distance, not only geographically but also in terms of the structure of the programme"*

According to B4, however, local implementers do not only consider the project as their own, they are also encouraged to do so.

*"They are encouraged to take this as their own project"*

The extent to which they are involved happens to different extents depending on the possibilities at hand.

*"I think it is very much, sometimes a lot, sometimes not so much. Sometimes we really consult them [...] and sometimes that process discussion just takes really long, that you just start doing something" – P5*

This shows that the way the local implementers are involved depends on the specific circumstances, and that they are not automatically included in the process. The desire to do so is very much present. The other side of this comment is how involved the implementers feel. This ranges depending on experience and other factors, but one respondent commented the following:

*"They are the ones that need to decide if they want to change something, I would say. I am just the girl giving them the report. [...] I try not to really put my opinion, I just let them put their opinion" – B1*

This respondent mentioned how they did not think anyone was truly interested in what she had to say but had also never involved themselves more into it. This shows that a lack of involvement, maybe due to little communication on the topic, might lead to implementers thinking they are not to have ownership on the project and are fully subjectable to the desires of the programme partners.

Ownership can also not simply be imposed on the people involved. According to E6, if there is need for the project, they will take ownership of it.

*"If the need meets the ownership, then it is very easy to own the process."*

This is very important to consider if the ownership is desired to take further steps into the sustainability of the programme. E3 mentions how the first steps towards this have already been taken.

*“We still have to do a lot to make sure that when we hand over the programme, or parts of the programme, to the partner that the partner is actually ready to take it on its own.”*

One of the key aspects that needs to be considered by the different partners within the SfD Programme 2016-2020, is its sustainability. Therefore, they need to ensure that everything is in place once parts are taken over, so that all the effort that has been put into the programme does not fall apart and can continue to create the desired impact.

### 5.1.2 Summary

Overall the programme partners’ understanding of the programme is quite extensive, which can be expected as they are involved in the setting up, the managing and the checking up of the programme. The difference between the implementing partners and the programme partners in terms of their knowledge is not very surprising, however the extent of this can have serious implications for the programme if local partners are not even aware of the context of their work. E1 talked about the programme functioning as a sort of ‘Sport for Development family’, but this is far from being a family. If the implementing partners are hardly aware of each other’s existence and of work being done by the programme, not only within their country but also outside of it, speaking of a family is somewhat farfetched. This does, however, not take away the beauty of the idea of creating a family feeling within this context, where the partners can relate to one another and build on each other’s expertise. The perception of the level of ownership is quite divided. It is important to ensure this ownership is felt throughout the programme in order to maintain a level of sustainability, for now and for the future.

## 5.2 Theory of Change

When discussing the ToC, several topics came to light that were of essence for this research. These will each be explained in this section. The SfD Programme 2016-2020’s goals and final objective are formulated through its ToC. The understanding of the ToC can differ significantly between persons, which is also portrayed through the comments of the respondents. B1, for one, had never heard about a ToC before. Other than that, in general everyone was familiar with the ToC, although every person described it in their own way. B2 mentioned having talked about it once before and having created the following understanding.

*“People will ask: how can you guarantee that sport is bringing this development in the communities, in the lives of the people? And I think this is what the Theory of Change deals with or tries to explain. What are the indicators, what are the proofs that we can give to people that this sport is bringing changes in the lives of the people in the community?”*

B2 here presents the ToC as a way in which the work being done can be proven to have an impact. It acts as a measurement of the changes that are desired. P5 described a similar understanding, although she focuses on the desired change that is portrayed within the ToC:

*“I think really simply a Theory of Change is the way you as an organisation or a partnership believe that you can create a change in the community with whatever goal is sort of, with whatever ambition or whatever you are trying to change in the community, so your idea of this is what I want to change and these are the steps that need to be done to get there.”*

The aim of a ToC is indeed to portray the goals of its programme and the steps needed to get there. The way in which it is used, however, truly depends on the person, their own preferences and the way their own organisation works with it. For some of the respondents, they feel the ToC is fully integrated into their daily activities and programmes whereas for others it is a concept that comes around whenever it is time for evaluation to happen.

*“Activities are set based on the objectives. They are developed based on this. And they are monitored based on what you fore set as a goal to reach, to obtain. These are things that are interconnected. From the beginning, from the planning, from need assessment, up to evaluation.” – B4*

The use of the ToC is very dependent on the context in which it is placed. When talking about the concept as a working document to look at, the interaction with it is limited.

*“I think being really honest, but I think for most people that is how it is being used [...] it gets brought out of the drawer on moments of planning. So it is a reference point [...] But it is not something I look at weekly [...] that is a document you look at twice a year. So a document you look at once in the beginning or end of the year to prepare your year plan and when you are writing your reports” – P5*

A common process among the respondents, is the internalisation of the ToC. This way, they use the ToC throughout their daily activities, but not as a concept in its entirety or as a document but take out the parts that are relevant at that moment. This ensures an aimed approach of the concept, as is needed, so that the effectiveness of it is increased.

*“So basically, how I use it is that, I mean it is fully in my head so to say, so I know where I am when we talk about this programme, what we want to achieve. So that is always in the back of my mind” – P2*

### 5.2.1 Meaning Theory of Change

The previous section describes the general knowledge and use of the ToC among the respondents. Each person, however, attributes their own meaning to all aspects of life, such is also the case in terms of the ToC. This section will illustrate these different meanings.

Not one person will interpret the ToC the same as another, as every person makes their own interpretation according to the influences they have around them and the knowledge they obtain. Despite this, the ToC is described similar by most respondents.

*“Personally, the Theory of Change is a roadmap, a road map that has a beginning and an end” – E3*

*“A Theory of Change for me is sort of a guideline that sort of presents or shows you what different type of steps an organisation or a programme in itself undertakes to realise their impact” – P2*

Here, E3 and P2 have described their meaning of the ToC to be as a sort of guiding tool in order to reach their goals. This is also how B3 uses the ToC.

*“The Theory of Change, for us, we use it as a guide” – B3*

The ToC describes the steps to be taken and explains what follows in the sense of the programme. E3 had a fine description of this process and the function of the ToC continuing on the previously mentioned roadmap, namely:

*“Along that road you have certain stops and stations where you move from one to another and the role of the Theory of Change is that it actually clarifies the way of how to move from one station to another. So it is more of a logical sequence of how we develop our interventions starting from basic activities to their outputs and then how these outputs contribute to the outcomes set in the Theory of Change. So it is more of a roadmap that sets the targets for the intervention.”*

There is a certain necessity from the respondents to have this guidance in the form of the ToC.

*“Having a Theory of Change is really necessary because it also influences how you design and how you plan your programmes and how you plan your implementation [...] if you are working without a Theory of Change it can be difficult to keep track of what you are doing” – E6*

One important aspect to consider when using the ToC, is that it is not something that can be adapted or achieved at once. It is a process that the people involved need to go through in order for it to be achieved. This is an important realisation as it can avoid disappointment within the ToC, as mentioned by E1.

*“I have to be honest to myself that it is a long-term thing to achieve, so then to reduce disappointment. Because sometimes you think you are not doing good if you don't achieve anything in one week. So first is self-realisation that the Theory of Change is a long-term thing” – E1*

*“So this is not a process to say that it is off one event or two events and then the programme ToC is adapted and accepted by organisations [...] it is really a journey that has to be taken with a lot of care, a lot of support and a lot of understanding. But not everyone will take it wholesome” – E5*

Another key aspect of the ToC in the meaning it has to the participants, is that it is a reference or framework that you use when needing some guidance. The respondents describe this being particularly useful when being ‘lost in details’.

*“Sometimes you can lose yourself into details. So whenever you do that, you can always go back, okay, what was the framework, where did we ever come from. So that’s when it is useful” – P1*

The use of the ToC as a reference point not only aids when being lost, but also in terms of changing perspectives.

*“When in doubt, when you feel you are not sure, you refer to the Theory of Change to sort of refresh your objectives and refresh your activities, also refresh your thinking if times have changed too.” – E5*

This last emphasis, of whether the thinking might be out of place after some time, was also emphasised during the Learning Event by several participants, where the facilitator of the event stated that the ToC that was made up several years ago might not be the ToC that is needed now. This flexibility in the ToC also attributed meaning to several of the respondents as it created many possibilities rather than having a set logical frame with no room for change.

*“What I like about the Theory of Change versus for example a log frame is that it is a lot more dynamic. So it is a lot more about this is what we believe will work, and these are our assumptions, but we know that working in a local context, things can change. So we are not going to tie down every single little thing in the whole entire programme because we need that room to be flexible, to jump in the opportunities or jump in the challenges when needed” – P5*

In order to be able to achieve a ToC, clarity is identified as playing an important role, especially for the implementing partners.

*“For us working at the field level, clarity is very important: making sure that we deliver on what we promise. So clarity is very important in terms of what we want to achieve on the level of outcomes, outputs and what are the activities that are associated with each of these outputs.” – E3*

When working in the field, the respondents deal with many other people. These people are sometimes directly involved with the ToC and sometimes involved more with the implementing aspects of programmes. When being asked how the ToC is understood and assimilated by other people involved, clarity was mentioned again. Here clarity related to the sense of the mutual understanding on the concept and how it is formulated. E3 identified several criteria that were of influence on this understanding:

*“That is also mandated by people’s interest, so it depends at what level of the organisation structure you sit. So that informs how much you are actually interested to know about the Theory of Change and how much do you interact with the Theory of Change when you do your work.”*

Position, or hierarchy, and interest are seen as key influencers into the understanding one may have of the ToC. This will be considered further in the following section, where the challenges regarding the ToC are discussed.



Meaning can be added, but also withdrawn, to the ToC by possible imposed use of it through 'higher powers'. P5 identifies that having a ToC is often a requirement when applying for funding, which can lead to a feeling of having to have it for the donor's sake rather than for their own benefit.

*"A lot of times in very big calls for proposals, it is just a requirement that you have it. So a lot of organisations and a lot of partnerships develop these documents that aren't the most practical, and don't really say that much" – P5*

The abstract nature of the ToC often also creates a negative experience among the respondents.

*"So it is sort of a really difficult, abstract document sometimes. That I sometimes, if I am being very honest, feel that is more donor-driven than 'this is what we really need as an organisation'. So it is more of a policy document that it is as, 'hey I need this'" – P5*

This respondent even puts the use of the ToC as a whole into question, as it may not be the right tool for organisations to use. This negative influence, and the hint to a more pressured use of the ToC, adds much to the meaning associated with the ToC in an undesirable manner.

### 5.2.2 Challenges Theory of Change

Despite experiencing such widespread, generally positive, meaning in terms of the ToC, the respondents do face some challenges when considering the use of it in a general context.

One necessary realisation is that the ToC is a long-term process. This can be positive when considered as it provides a framework that different people can work with over a longer period of time. However, when this is not the case, as E1 mentioned in the previous section, it can create disappointment. The challenge here is to use it as a long-term commitment where the work is done from the base upwards and that it is acceptable if no progress is seen in the first few months.

The ToC creates a wider framework within which the people involved in a programme can work. This does, however, not mean that everyone included in the programme, from youth to coaches to staff, necessarily need to know about the ToC. This creates a challenge as to what do you communicate and to what extent. A balance needs to be achieved in order not to impose thinking and ensuring the impact is achieved through bottom-up implementation.

*"I think that is a delicate balance between having a Theory of Change that is predetermined and at the same time how do you implement that without imposing it on the people. I think that is for me the most important learning point of this Theory of Change [...] if you use that framework, directly that, then we shall be imposing our thinking within the organisations, and that to me is not really a desired process to do that" – E5*

The third challenge with the ToC is that of combining the abstract aspect of it with specific discussions among stakeholders and partners on the effect of the ToC. This

is experienced as difficult as the concept that is talked about is abstract in itself, so gaps might occur between what is being done in practice and the ToC. When comparing the ToC to a logical framework, P2 said the following:

*“Then it is easier to check, then you can have discussions ‘okay did we do this, yes, did this happen, yes.’ But a Theory of Change is more abstract and broader, so you cannot really do the specific check”*

Formulating goals for a ToC can also be challenging for the partners. According to E3, international development organisations tend to formulate very ambitious goals and outcomes for programmes, which is challenging as in practice these might then need to be adapted.

*“As we start working with these programmes, we learn that we need to be more adaptable to the context and situations where we work. So, I don’t want to say lower the ceiling of our expectations, but formulate our outcomes in a way that it sounds more real, that it actually reflects the change that we are achieving at community level”*

Although the ToC does give some room for changes to be made, this is still a challenge that is faced throughout the process of implementing a programme and using the ToC for it.

Finally, challenges are also experienced in ensuring the ToC is understood by local partners.

*“It is also very difficult to translate a Theory of Change, [...] it is really difficult to explain this Theory of Change to the local partners.” – P5*

In the previous section, E3 noted that position and interest might play a role in the understanding of the local partners. P2 adds to this idea, stating there is a difference between the local, implementing partners and the Dutch programme partners.

*“If I would ask our southern colleagues, ‘okay what is the ToC of this programme’, I don’t think they can fully present it or explain what it is. And the Theory of Change is also, I think, quite a western sort of concept, and of course these development organisations, they always talk about the Theory of Change. But a Theory of Change is also quite abstract, and the organisations we work with are more practically oriented. So in that sense, how do you create this full understanding of the Theory of Change [...] Sometimes there is a bit of a gap with this theoretical note of ‘yeah this is indeed in line with a Theory of Change’, and maybe that is more our task to make sure everything we do together is in line with this Theory of Change”.*

This shows that a difference in understanding is assumed to be present among the implementing partners.

### 5.2.3 Theory of Change Sport for Development Programme 2016-2020

The SfD Programme 2016-2020 has its own ToC. This ToC is known by some of the participants, whereas several are also not informed of this. The ToC, according to E2:

*“The SfD Theory of Change is the chain of results that the programme will generate. It gives the logics between the interventions, the results (output, outcome, impact) and the actors involved (youth, coaches, communities, CSO’s) on a national and international level” (translated from French)*

The knowledge on the ToC once again varies depending on the respondent’s position within the programme. Notably, the respondents that were interviewed after the Learning Event mentioned how the event had contributed vastly to their knowledge on the ToC for the SfD Programme 2016-2020.

*“I think that I have accumulated better knowledge in terms of what is actually meant in terms of the different terminologies” – E3*

The respondents showed very mixed feelings about this ToC, ranging from some very positive aspects to stating several difficulties that are experienced with it.

*“So what I like about the Theory of Change is also that you don’t have to do all things in every community” – P5*

*“The difficulty of the Sport for Development Programme is that it is a programme in 8 countries, with 3 different partners, it is sort of 3 different ways of working and with that we also, but we want to have one comprehensive Theory of Change regardless of the countries and the organisations that we work with and I don’t know if that is realistic” – P2*

*“The Sport for Development Theory of Change is very big, it is almost utopian. The way it is framed now, is a bit too broad for concrete implementation” – P4*

The big issue that comes to light when discussing the SfD Programme 2016-2020’s ToC, is that several respondents experience it as vague and not specific enough on what it actually wants to achieve, preventing the practical use of it. Due to this, it seems that the respondents would rather not use this framework or use other documents, in order to give them a more concrete view. This also creates difficulties when attempting to share the ToC with partners in the ministry according to P3.

*“It is difficult to show this Theory of Change to other people within the ministry because they would say ‘oh this is kind of complicated’”*

Several opponents feel that the necessary step in creating such a ToC is the adaptation of it to the context of each country.

*“Make the translation between the kind of general Theory of Change [...] that Theory of Change needs to be adapted to the different contexts” – P3*

The adaptation of the ToC is key in ensuring it can truly be applied to the specific context. This is already done implicitly by focusing on certain aspects of it during the implementation and the capacities there are. Through capturing these capacities prior to the implementation it creates a better awareness of the context the partners can work in that has been established by the people involved.

The capacity of the SfD Programme 2016-2020 is another aspect that is experienced as challenging within the ToC. Ensuring this ToC is achieved, some find, is too ambitious within the possibilities for the programme.

*“I think it is a little bit too ambitious for the available resources for the project” – E3*

The final challenge of the ToC of the SfD Programme 2016-2020 that is posed by the respondents is the difficulty in dealing with so many stakeholders and thus also desires. The different pillars have been created to accommodate for these wishes and each partner uses their own expertise in the different pillars, however tensions still arise through it. This is especially the case for the fifth pillar of business development, and it causes a form of divide between the wishes of the programme partners and the wishes of the MFA.

*“You have a programme run by three Sport for Development partners and they work in a different way, so obviously there is always some tension involved [...] the ministry also has its own agenda, that also plays a role within the Sport for Development Programme [...] we have to kind of include trade but at the same time we still all think that it is more about development” – P3*

#### 5.2.4 Link Theory of Change & Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning

According to the respondents, the ToC and MEL, are intricately linked. P3 remarks on this:

*“They are linked, and they are really linked. It is difficult to tear them apart.”*

When discussing how this is the case, E2 mentions that the ToC functions as a reference for doing MEL.

*“If we do Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning and we find that we do not link it to the Theory of Change, we need to ask ourselves what the attainability of our objectives is.” (translated from French)*

One of the respondents formulated this intricate relationship between the two into a very visual example.

*“You know the radar we use for the aircrafts. Yes, if the radar fades, that aircraft will not land properly [...] So the radar plays a critical role in the whole aviation. So when you look at the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning process, it is like a radar. [...] and if you look at the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning without the vision and the Theory of Change, then what is the basis. So they are very related. The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning helps the Theory of Change to operate and become alive” – E5*

Here, the ToC is perceived as the journey the airplane makes, including the landing as the eventual impact that is aimed for. MEL is seen as its radar, the process that shows you where you are heading and what lies ahead, and what can be done about it. This example shows the essence of the link these two concepts have. As is stated in the example, one cannot function without the other. If MEL is done without the larger framework such as the ToC, there is no sense of direction or the aim of the programme. If the ToC is implemented without any form of MEL linked to it, there is no way of checking that the goals are actually being achieved.

At the moment, however, within the SfD Programme 2016-2020, the respondents feel that this relation is not yet used to the extent it could be.

*“I feel that there is still some more work to be done into still having reflections on it, more often than not using also the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning cycle integrated into the Theory of Change” – E5*

### 5.2.5 Summary

This chapter has illustrated the different meanings, experiences and challenges attributed with the ToC, both in general and specifically for the SfD Programme 2016-2020. Among the respondents, a reasonable level of knowledge on the ToC can be observed, ranging from no knowledge to a very distinct and precise description of what it is and how it is to be implemented. A lot of value is given to the ToC, providing a form of guidance for most of the respondents, where they feel it adds to the impact a programme can have. It does, however, bring about its own challenges. Respondents identify several, including its complexity and the need for a long-term commitment. When discussing the SfD Programme 2016-2020's ToC specifically, the respondents seem more critical. Some positive attributes are experienced, however, mainly shortcomings are addressed, especially related to the vagueness and lack of establishing concrete goals and objectives. Finally, the link is made between the ToC and M&E and MEL. The respondents feel that one cannot live without the other and they are undoubtedly interlinked.

## 5.3 Monitoring & Evaluation – and Learning

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the ToC is very much so linked to M&E and MEL. This section of the chapter will examine the meaning that is attributed to this M&E and MEL and the experiences the respondents have had with this concept.

### 5.3.1 Meaning of Monitoring & Evaluation – and Learning

Unlike the ToC, all respondents were fully aware of M&E. Learning, as a concept within the SfD Programme 2016-2020, had not been discussed with all partners yet, however, some did have their own interpretation of what learning entails.

According to the respondents, M&E or MEL is essential in what they do. It is a tool that helps them have a critical view on their activities to ensure the goals are achieved. It is a way for them to see if they are going in the right direction or need to deviate in order to stay on track of achieving the goals. As B3 said, it is a weapon with information on your programme. With MEL, they ensure they are doing relevant work and able to work towards the objectives they have set.

*“To use the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning for us is to be sure to remain relevant, to work in a participative way to achieve our objectives with the main actors of the community” – E4*

*“Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning is an integral part of any programme and it should definitely not be implemented in silo’s” – E3*

This last remark by E3 notes that it should not be implemented in silo’s, thus implemented separately from the rest of the programme. It is a fundamental part and is also very much linked to the continuous work being done by the organisations.

When discussing what MEL truly attributes to them personally, the respondents mentioned several aspects such as getting a hold of what is happening and reflecting on this, keeping track of this process and ensuring adaptations are made where necessary. Value is also increased through knowing if they are doing a good job or if they need to improve something. It is basically the checking of the programme. This shows that this process, too, creates a sense of guidance for the respondents in what they do and how they need to act on this. This guidance, however, is formed through the actual interventions and activities that are in place, that then relates to this higher goal through reflection. Oftentimes this reflection happens by looking at the positive aspects of the programme, but it can also include shortcomings of the programme that need reflection in order for it to be adapted.

*“For me, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning is not about achievements, but also about gaps” – E6*

MEL is highly valued by the respondents. As stated it is an integral part of any programme working within the development field. The way in which organisations actually give way for this, however, impacts this view.

*“Monitoring and evaluation is one of the areas that organisations have to pay more attention to because that is the tool that proves that what we do is of a good value to the beneficiaries” – E3*

The shortcomings create a meaning that is not only positive related to the vast capabilities that MEL can have, but also a negative meaning due to the frustration created by the lack in capacity. Speaking more generally, the quote by E3 hints that not enough importance is given to doing it by organisations.

An important influence on the meaning attributed to MEL is the extent to which it is being implemented within the current capacity. Several respondents mention this in terms of the SfD Programme 2016-2020:

*“We are doing it, but then more sort of a light version” – P2*

*“I wouldn’t say that Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning is really exhausted to the fullest” – E1*

The fact that it is currently not operating at the level it could be, also has consequences in terms of the meaning ascribed to it. This signifies that the lack of knowledge of further aspects of the implementation of MEL may also distort the meaning they have of it, which can change positively when MEL is improved.

The extent to which it is applied can also have a positive influence on some the respondents, in case this is experienced positively.

*“I will always be doing Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning because I am also just really interested to see what is going on” – P5*

#### 5.3.1.1 *Monitoring & Evaluations versus Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning*

Within the meaning that these respondents attribute to M&E and MEL, some also make the distinction between the M&E that used to be done or is still being done in the scope of other programmes, and MEL which is the chosen ‘checking’ mechanism of this programme. E1 notes how MEL is more holistic. It is more of a process they go through rather than just noting down the numbers. P4 adds to this, stating that:

*“MEL is used more to see the impact that is being created, rather than the output”*

One positive aspect of MEL that was mentioned was that MEL is ‘more fun’. Features contributing to this include less restriction, room to be independent, flexibility, but also the coping with a new concept that at first might seem complex. The fact, however, that they find it fun to do means that they associate positive meanings to it and it creates a better environment for them to work in.

The traditional M&E brought about many negative feelings amongst the respondents, especially now that they have come into contact with MEL.

*“When people heard that there was a M&E coming in or there was an audit also being done, so you found organisations really panicked” – E5*

E5 feels this panic originates from a fear of failure, and that it will always be a part of the traditional form of M&E.

*“The fear of failure is based on the assumption MEL is for the donor, it is not for the people who are implementing on the ground. [...] the donor needs the information. But the most important person who needs that information is the person who gives that information”*

Through using the MEL system, rather than M&E, this fear has reduced, and the implementing partners look forward to doing MEL and taking the learnings from the process. Even if failures take place, the MEL system encourages the participants to use these as learnings for the future. P5, however, identifies that despite failures being used in the process of MEL, reporting on it is still a step that needs to be taken as there is still fear to report on failures.

*“We are all scared of a donor being disappointed about that” – P5*

This reduction of fear has led to the positive association with MEL as it done more for themselves. This was a big contrast, as several respondents felt that the traditional M&E was done for the donors.

*“This traditional thinking, the M&E, is all about collecting numbers and pleasing the donors [...] we were doing it for, only for the donors to see if we have reached our target and if we are really making changes in the big numbers they wanted” – E6*

*“The MEL brings for me very good understanding of ‘I am doing it for myself, I am doing it for my community, I am doing it to improve’” – E5*

This personal involvement in the process has ensured a preference for the MEL system over the traditional M&E. Several respondents even mention the desire to advocate for the use of it in other programmes and areas and including other stakeholders, in order to increase the knowledge on it by the people surrounding them and hopefully increase the use of MEL. This advocacy and desire to use the MEL process illustrates the high value that is attributed to MEL over M&E by the participants. Therefore the meaning it has to these respondents is that it can really aid a programme and is a better tool to use than the traditional M&E, and that it should be used in a broader scope than the Sfd Programme 2016-2020.

Everyone can do MEL. This remark seems so simple, but for the respondents this is a large improvement when comparing MEL to M&E. Previously, only one or two people in the implementing organisations would be involved in the process of doing M&E. Nowadays, with the MEL system in place, it is possible for any person within the organisation, be it a manager or a field officer, to use MEL to get a grasp of the work being done. It has become more manageable, simpler, more practical.

*“It has brought it from being more academic to a more practical way of doing it. You don’t have to be very high-level academician to apply it. It is something that everyone can do, even in the field” – E1*

Some respondents focus specifically on the learning and the impact this is having on the programme. One key remark made, is that learning is something that was always being done, just not explicitly. It is something that happened organically, not necessarily through conscious steps, but when implementers feel that something is not working, and changes are needed, they would always do that. The added value of MEL in this sense is then that it makes it explicit, thus creating a better grasp on it for the different partners and helps in sharing knowledge and improving the work.

*“Learning was always being done, implicitly. MEL now makes it explicit” – P4*

Difficulties, however, are experienced with the integration of this learning process according to E3.

*“I think organisations are still struggling to put in place an incorporation mechanism to make sure the learning is captured, it is documented, it is analysed and then it is used.”*



In making learning more explicit, a better understanding of how learning can be incorporated and applied is created, leading to changing – and improved – meaning created by the participants. The challenge, however, lies in process of putting this in place, which is complicated and to which there is no clear strategy.

### 5.3.1.2 Importance of Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning

The importance that the respondents attribute to M&E or MEL, also gives an insight into how the meaning they have of it is formed and what value they give it. In order to create a baseline, they were asked to scale the importance it has to them from one to ten. Overall, the respondents clearly found M&E or MEL to be extremely important, as it scored an average of 8,9. The respondents find MEL crucial for programmes as it is a way to ensure the quality of it. Using the example presented in section 5.2.4, MEL is as important to a programme as a radar is to an airplane.

The respondents state several reasons for MEL having such a vast level of importance for them. These range from personal meaning attributed to it, to accountability – both external and internal – and the length of the programme, where long-term programmes tend to find it more important than short-term emergency interventions. Some respondents frame it into a negative feature if no MEL is being done.

*“If you just do it and never know if that works well or not then you just waste money and time” – B1*

Here, the respondent quotes money as an aspect to take into consideration when failing in doing MEL. This is also related to future funding. The organisations that are involved in SfD tend to be very much dependent on funding. This means that they have to be very cautious of how their budget is being spent and have a certain accountability to uphold. This guarantees that it will always play a role when considering MEL, as this is the way in which accountability is ensured.

The stage of the programme and of the systems in place can also have a large influence on the importance associated with MEL. Consequently, P2 finds that MEL does not have a vast level of importance yet as M&E still needs to be improved:

*“If you look at it at the stage we are in now with the programme, I would say it is less important now because first we need to build a stronger case of this first part”*

This ‘first part’ refers to the traditional way of doing M&E. Despite finding MEL very important, the need to build it up properly from the beginning within the programme is there. Currently, there is no centralised system in place for doing M&E or MEL within the programme, which means that this is being done in a scattered manner. By building it up, there is less importance for MEL at this stage, however this will increase vastly once the foundation is placed properly. According to P5, nonetheless, this also brings about its issues as this ensures little can be done in both M&E and MEL as there is a constant battle between the opportunities:

*“I am sort of constantly trying to find a way of how can we do it properly versus how can we make sure we do something versus what is possible in the field” – P5*

A struggle can be found considering where to place the highest importance in terms of M&E and MEL. In the end, this struggle leads to nothing being put in place at all as there is a constant going back and forth between creating a system and running out of time thus having to come up with any form of M&E or MEL on the spot.

Moreover, in order to be able to create an idea of how well the respondents find they are doing in terms of M&E or MEL at the moment, they were also asked to rank this from one to ten. The result was a mere 6,7, with several respondents stating different reasons for this, noting that there is a lot of room for improvement.

*“We still have a lot of work to do with the capacity development of the people who can facilitate certain processes with the clarity, understanding and the inclusivity nature of MEL” – E5*

E5 mentions how capacity of the people that are involved is an issue, where also the amount of people involved is a problem. Another issue with the current way in which MEL is being done, is the fact that there is no centralised MEL system for the programme.

*“Each of the programme partners collect data in their own way. I didn’t see any unified practice in terms of collecting data” – E3*

### 5.3.2 Mutual understanding with Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning

When doing MEL, it is important that the different people involved in this process either have the same understanding or are aware of the differences in understanding, as well as be able to indicate the understanding of the people they are working with at specific moments.

Firstly, E3’s point that was mentioned previously about the position and level of interest playing a role, is also applicable within this context. The influence of one’s position was also noticed by several other respondents. B4, for example, mentioned how every person involved does have their own capacity to create some form of understanding MEL, however this cannot be in the same way as these are people who work in different levels.

*“At every level, every affected staff of volunteer, they have their level of understanding the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning. They can appreciate, they have that capacity”*

Steps are taken in order to work towards a mutual understanding of the partners that are involved. This can be in the form of M&E training sessions or discussions on the tools that are to be implemented. Agreeing on tools and methods to be used prior to the start of a programme can also help in order to create a baseline of understanding. This can, however, not ensure there is a complete, equal level of

understanding among all partners. Challenges and misinterpretations are still experienced among the respondents.

*“Either we don’t know how to translate that into how to do it, or they just lay it into my lap like ‘hey do something with this’. [...] Or we have different understandings of MEL” – P5*

When dealing with aspects of a programme such as M&E or MEL, over time the process might become natural. This, however, does not mean that people that are new to the programme have this same understanding. Assumptions end up being made which can complicate the process.

*“We tend to forget sometimes that you assume a lot when it comes to M&E. So if I want to talk about life skills, I already assume that somebody knows what life skills are” – P2*

When dealing with so many different types of stakeholders, it is impossible to create a fully equal understanding among all. The realisation, however, that different factors are of influence and taking steps to minimise this can come a long way in ensuring at least no misunderstanding is formed, and if possible a general level of common understanding.

### 5.3.3 Experiences with Monitoring & Evaluation – and Learning

The experiences shared by the respondents alternate greatly. Some experience many positive aspects of MEL whereas others’ experiences are overshadowed by negativity. P3 describes M&E as oftentimes feeling like an island, as it is an aspect of programmes that is less practical and thus sits aside from much of the daily work that is done. MEL is a part that not everyone necessarily likes doing, despite the importance they attribute to it.

*“It is extremely useful and needed, although it can be really boring” – P1*

The lengthy processes and the difficulty in retrieving the data, especially in less remote places like Indonesia, are identified as key factors that make MEL less enjoyable. Also, the lack of follow-up on data is a major area of frustration.

*“It creates resistance in me and other partners as well, that we can bust our butts to collect data, but nobody does anything with it. So why would I do all of that if it is just going to sit in a drawer” – P5*

The origin of this is identified as lack of capacity, a problem that also arose in the previous section. Capacity in this sense relates to different aspects, such as time, energy, man hours and systems in place. Here the struggle between doing at least something and doing the right thing resurfaces. The lack of capacity ensures MEL can’t be done properly, and if the first steps are taken, the follow-up is close to non-existent.

Dependency can also play a key role in how implementing partners act and are involved in a programme.

*“They have their own interests in communicating good results. That will be the case with any organisation receiving funds” – P1*

One of the implementing partners discussed their own view on this issue, which is widespread among implementing organisations.

*“It is very hard for them to say no, because they need funds. So, and it is never enough. So then that poses a risk when every donor comes by, they will always accommodate to them” – E1*

The issue, additionally, is that organisations will firstly agree to the terms of a donor for funding as they are in so much need of it, and only afterwards focus on what is actually asked of them.

### 5.3.3.1 Sport for Development Programme 2016-2020

When looking specifically at the SfD Programme 2016-2020, the respondents had several different types of experiences. This section will illustrate some of these particular experiences.

At times, experience tells that it is difficult to grasp the concept of MEL, creating struggles for some of the partners that are involved with it. P2 mentions how he is sometimes struggling with this concept, and then has to introduce it to his partners to whom it is also not always just as clear.

*“If you ask me ‘what is MEL?’ Then I am really struggling with this question, what is it exactly, I have an idea [...] I struggle with it, but I also see that the partners, when I try to introduce it and discuss it with them, that they struggle with it as well”*

In terms of generalisation of the data, the experience is that this is not possible in the scope of the programme as it is being organised now. The main issue for this is the fact that there is no general guideline for doing MEL, and everyone thus needs to ‘wing it’. This leads to every partner, be it a programming or implementing partner, to use different ways of monitoring and evaluating data.

*“This makes it very hard for the partners to know what they need to measure and how they can best measure it” – P4*

These struggles, if not handled correctly, can cause knock-on effects further down the road. Just as when building a house, if the foundation is wonky, the house will not last.

In the case of the SfD Programme 2016-2020, lack of capacity also plays a key role in adding to the experiences of the respondents. Especially the programming partners raised this as a difficulty within the work.

*“Each of us has a function or has a job description that MEL is maybe 10% of. So every time you get a MEL question, you go, pfew, do I have time for this” – P5*

The limited capacity of the respondent has a significant influence on how they feel they can act when issues arise relating to MEL. This will have a negative impact as

it is such an important aspect of their work but they cannot realise it to the level they could with more capacity.

In the process of discovering this new MEL concept, a turning point has been experienced. One where, according to P1, instead of coming up with a concrete functioning system on how to do MEL, suddenly there was a shift towards focusing on how MEL should be done.

*“I think the aim was there to improve MEL, but I think we kind of got lost in the MEL cycle” – P1*

This disorientation causes the process to take much more time than needed, which leads to months going by where nothing concrete is being done, reaching an evaluation moment to then realise there is no additional data and everything then needs to be arranged in the last minute. Frustration is one of the biggest emotions experienced during this time, as the respondents know that this could be improved, but the complexity of it creates this environment.

The cooperation between the partners within the MEL being done in the Sfd Programme 2016-2020 is also identified as an issue. P5, for one, discusses how there is little to no linkage between the different actions that are taken, especially in terms of creating feedback for the implementing partners.

*“There is no feedback loop. And then there is this happening on a sort of bigger scale, co-creation level, and they don’t interconnect”*

This creates a one-way street where the implementing partners give the partnership data but receive little in return and will therefore potentially not see the point in gathering the data.

#### 5.4 Moving Forward

As such a broad group of respondents was involved in this research, much value could be created by gaining insight on what they felt would potentially benefit the Sfd Programme 2016-2020 significantly.

One overlapping comment was that the collaboration of the different stakeholders, both programme partners as implementing partners, in the creation of the different documents for the Sfd Programme 2016-2020, should be acknowledged.

*“Sometimes when we look at the top page of that document, you only see KNVB, you see only the Dutch consortium. But we don’t see the input and acknowledgement from other stakeholders that have been a part of the process” – E5*

Also, the inclusion in the process of fulfilling the documents, for example the Midterm Report, needed more attention according to B2.

*“Can we see the final version of the midterm report before it is sent?”*

Despite the different implementing partners being very much involved in creating these reports, they are left out once they provide the data. If they were to be more

included, they could also gain experience and insights in these stages of the process, as well as create a bigger ‘family feeling’ where they are all involved.

#### 5.4.1 Theory of Change

The point made in the previous section, also applies when looking more specifically at the use of the ToC in analysis and reporting contexts.

*“I think it is better if we can also practice that, also locally, before we forward, submit our reports [...] when we do the consolidation of the report, we don’t really consider the Theory of Change as part of the report. It doesn’t come out so clearly. [...] maybe we can already practice that in our, in-country level, that we still, also, so that the Dutch partners can also see how we understand it.” – E1*

Here it is clear that the implementing partners would like to be more involved in learning how to understand and use the ToC further, however, feel they are not given the change.

The ToC has been described very general in nature. This creates a good base to work from, however, according to several respondents, ensures that it needs to be adapted to apply to the specific contexts.

*“It needs to be specified for each country and target group” – P1*

Especially when looking at the future a ToC for each separate country would thus need to be developed to ensure the ToC is used to the best of its ability.

E3, however, feels the ToC technically is good the way it is, and that the main focus lies in the gathering of additional resources, as the programme is too ambitious for the currently available resources.

*“It is about joining efforts for the different partners in this intervention to mobilise and source additional resources to support the implementation in order to expand the project that will lead us to achieve these great outcomes and goals set in that Theory of Change”*

In order to make the ToC more approachable, E3 finds that creating indicators aligned to each section would be beneficial for the understanding as well as the checking of the ToC.

*“There should be a certain amount of indicators associated with the outcomes, so [...] it becomes easier for different organisations to align their programmes to these indicators because these indicators become measurable”*

#### 5.4.2 Monitoring & Evaluation – and Learning

In terms of M&E and MEL, the respondents were much more critical on what they thought would aid the programme in improving the MEL being done and how this should take form.

According to E3, the first improvement that needs to be made, is the investment of resources.

*“I think that if there is going to be an intention within the programme to develop MEL there has to be an investment of resources. MEL doesn’t happen naturally”*

What is currently lacking, according to some respondents, is a common strategy for doing MEL among the different partners and to process the data.

*“There needs to be a template for doing MEL, as well as a standard for the data that needs to be collected” – P4*

The implementation of a systematic approach to MEL would hereby also benefit the programme, through the formation of set tools and frequencies of undertakings.

*“I think in the MEL we could do it in a more systemic way, using a set of tools that are established, doing it in a more frequent way. But then there are also some conditions for that, there is also a certain frequency of activities” – P3*

Ensuring a system is in place for doing MEL, is key to ensure that a common strategy can be realised among all the different stakeholders as it becomes a clearer process where everyone knows what they need to do. According to E5, this can take the form of a MEL guide. The problem with creating this common strategy, is that it should be the starting point of a programme.

*“When we do monitoring and evaluation work, it is very important that we set maximum clarity from the beginning” – E3*

For the SfD Programme 2020-2024 sequel it is therefore instrumental to the success of MEL that these steps are taken. It is important as well that the MEL system is integrated fully into the programme, says E5.

One of the most important aspects when improving the MEL system in place, is ensuring the right tools are being used. Several respondents mentioned that it helps to start simple. Practicality, limited number of tools, simple information being gathered – no more than 3 questions for example. The key message from P5 regarding this was:

*“Think less, do more. And take the whole process into account. So, less planning with a lot of different parties, just keep it super simple”*

Then, it is also important to create a system for the MEL process, as well as analysing and reviewing data. Several ideas emerged in this topic, for example the creation of an indicator scheme. Using a system in a consistent manner ensures that, over time, the data becomes somewhat generalizable. In order to ease the data processing, P1 suggest a central database where all the data can be entered.

*“If you really want to collect data in a good way, you need a good digital platform”*

E3 reinforces this, as he feels that the SfD Programme 2016-2020 could truly benefit from automated processes in order to reduce human errors. He also

encourages the use of data visualisation, as this can benefit both the internal partners as the sharing of MEL to external partners.

*“All of the quantitative data that is gathered from all the partners in this programme could be put into a dashboard that is visual, where all of the partners can access that dashboard and actually see the results.”*

The respondents also had recommendations regarding the wider spectrum of the MEL system and what could aid in the comprehension of MEL. Firstly, the increase of local capacity is deemed necessary in order to be able to increase the use of MEL.

*“That is for me the gap that still needs to be addressed moving forward, so that the sports for development organisations have more people involved in it” – E5*

Another aspect that could improve the use of MEL within the programme, but also towards external parties, is the sharing of experiences and advocating for MEL.

*“A community of MEL experts in the countries where we are operating in and they could really be a resource for the sports for development organisations that are there in the country that can benefit from that process” – E5*

Creating this community ensures an improved sharing of the experiences, especially when given a platform to do this. This thus creates a knowledge base on MEL that can be used to explain the added value MEL has to other organisations that might be struggling with their own systems in place. A systematic approach to the sharing of these experiences is very important and according to B2 could take form in different ways.

*“This sharing between the partners should be, I think, more regular [...] maybe in an online forum. [...] maybe in a period of 6 months [...] maybe a Skype call with all partners after sharing documents on how they proceed in their own projects”*

Finally, some respondents feel that the use of third parties can aid the SfD Programme 2016-2020, either in the gathering of the data or in the processing of it.

*“MEL needs a third eye, or someone else who is not part of the implementers and the organisation” – E6*

*“You need an educational partner who is helping you actively analyse, collect and evaluate that data. And not just the process, because the process we could have done, but we need, I believe, we need man hours and we need attention and time to look at the data objectively” – P5*

The need for a good system in which the data is not only recovered, but also analysed, is high in this programme. This last recommendation might aid this considerably, however, is hard to realise as one needs to get into a long-term commitment with an educational partner to do this.



## 6 [Analysis](#)

The previous chapters have outlined the existing literature, the chosen framework, the methods that have been chosen and the results that emerged from the interviews and observations. These have all created a valuable insight into SfD, the SfD Programme 2016-2020 and the role that M&E or MEL and a ToC can play in this. This chapter will analyse the results using the theoretical framework and the literature review.

### 6.1 [Context: unknown](#)

This research has illustrated that in general, the amount of knowledge held by the implementing partners is truly dependent on the concrete interactions they have had with the SfD Programme 2016-2020. Some had no knowledge of the context of their work in the broader scope of the SfD Programme 2016-2020. According to Weick (1995), this limited knowledge has to do with the position taken by individuals, which also influences their interpretation of events and experiences. Such exclusion or limited interaction was described by the programme partners as not being a conscious choice in their communication, simply the lack of need for informing partners more on this, when considered from a neo-colonialist perspective. The SfD Programme 2016-2020 is already a programme funded by a Western donor in a Southern context. This one-way investment, as described by Nkrumah (1965), already increases the gap between the rich West and the poor South, as the investment arises from a Northern agenda, which in this case is the Dutch MFA agenda. By unknowingly limiting the knowledge and involvement of the implementing partners on the programme, this might lead to the gap being increased. Important to note, however, is that the partners that have been involved for a longer period of time are much more included in and aware of the processes. This can benefit their stance in the programme, but still several issues are highlighted where they feel they can have more say in. Looking specifically at inclusion in the reporting using the ToC, if more room and support were given in this area to local implementers, it could be very beneficial for all partners as the increased comprehension of the ToC means the implementing partners have an increased responsibility on this thus changing the role of the programme partners to one of a process supervisor

In terms of the consequences these experiences have on the meaning that is created within the programme, it is clear that restricted or poor understanding and inclusion limit the sense they can associate with it. One of the key properties identified by Weick (1995) in sensemaking is the constant shaping and reacting of the sense created by an individual. If there is no experience to add to the senses from, or it remains limited to the same sort of experience, then the partners cannot develop the sense they associate with the programme, but also with the ToC and MEL, further. This is especially the case for the respondents that were not even aware of the context of the SfD Programme 2016-2020, who were thus missing a vast deal of information from which sense and meaning could be created.

## 6.2 Imposed actions or intrinsic motivation

Throughout the research, several accounts have been made of situations where contrasts were identified between what the respondents felt as beneficial to the programme and their involvement in it, and what was experienced as to some extent imposed by the programme requirements. This was experienced in discussions on both the ToC as M&E and MEL.

In terms of the ToC, it is very clear that it is partially experienced as an imposed concept, with several respondents questioning the need for it and others acknowledging its guidance value throughout the programme. The fact that donors will explicitly ask for a ToC at the time of application for funding already ensures that an organisation, or partnership, needs to have this in place. This is applicable at least at this moment, relating to Mulgan's (2016) remark how civil society adopts ideas without critically considering them and possibly choosing the most 'fashionable' approach at that time. This trend in increased use of the ToC can indeed be seen throughout the SfD field, however, claims cannot be made in terms of how critical donors are in adopting a ToC. In this case, however, the funding organisation for the SfD Programme 2016-2020 also has its own ToC as a base for the programmes and projects that they work for and what they aim to achieve.

When considering M&E and MEL, this contrast can also be observed. One of the difficulties with M&E, according to Burnett (2015), is that it is more often than not enforced by (Western) donors. This dominance receives a vast amount of criticism from Southern partners as they are hardly involved in the decision making and analysing processes. The results show that this was indeed experienced as such by the respondents when referring to M&E. MEL, on the contrary, brings change into this process and overcomes this imposition of having to do M&E as the donor wishes, giving them much more flexibility in terms of how and when to do MEL, as long as a certain amount of data is at least retrieved. Therefore, the switch made within the SfD Programme 2016-2020 has a highly beneficial impact as it ensures more ownership is created among the local implementers as they are included explicitly in the process of monitoring, evaluating and learning in order to, firstly, improve their own lives, and secondly, report to the programme partners and the donors.

Improvement in development, Frey says, can only be achieved once domination disappears (Levermore, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial that ways are found to ensure that the programme is taken wholeheartedly by the different partners, especially to ensure its sustainability. Considering the ToC, questions can be asked on whether it is the right concept to use for this programme or just one being imposed by the donor. The results, however, show that despite this feeling it is still accepted as a useful guiding tool within the programme, with some need for adaptation in order to make it more practical. Furthermore, the use of MEL instead of M&E has been an important step towards this, however, work still needs to be done to ensure it reaches its maximum ability.

### 6.3 Tickling the senses

This section identifies how the ToC and M&E, or MEL concepts are considered intrinsically by the respondents. Firstly, it is important to note that more included all partners are in the different processes, the more ownership and knowledge they can have of the programme, thus enabling the opportunity to develop the sense they give to the concepts of ToC and M&E or MEL. In general, similar values and meaning were attributed to these concepts, where some respondents showed a more critical view on them than others.

One of the recommendations was more interaction among the partners concerning MEL and the development of it throughout the programme. The respondents identified a need for this sharing of experiences, as it could increase their understanding of the concept. According to Weick (1995), this is a part of the sensemaking process. Individuals do not associate meaning to an object or concept as isolated from others. Social interaction also plays a key role in sensemaking, where events such as the Learning Event but also the exchange of experiences and ideas can add to the sense attributed to the ToC or MEL. This was clear during the Learning Event, as after the event all the participants appeared to have a much clearer view of what these two concepts entailed and what could be done with it – referring to the completion of the midterm report. Additionally, the exchange of ideas and experiences can ensure that the respondents remain up-to-date with the developments concerning MEL, but also the ToC, ensuring that the meaning they associate to it can be shaped by using as much information as possible.

The extent of the meaning attributed to the ToC was very varied. Most implementing partners that were well informed about this concept added important meaning to this concept. This was contrasted with the more critical view of many programme partners, where the value was acknowledged but the issues concerning the complexity of the Sfd Programme 2016-2020 in combination with the ToC that is in place was dominant in their discussion. The programme partners are more often exposed to the ToC and its position within the Sfd Programme 2016-2020 than the implementing partners, which explains their more critical stance. Moreover, the meaning associated to the ToC can also create negative experiences. This is especially the case if partners are not given the chance to create their own, added meaning of it. The results show that, to some extent, assumptions were made on the capacities of local implementers in terms of their comprehension of the ToC. Irrespective of there being valid reasons for it or not, excluding these partners from the process automatically gives them a disadvantage and inhibits the development of their own sensemaking.

When considering the ToC concept with MEL, the results show that these two are undoubtedly linked to one another, a notion that was also identified in the literature. This confirms the discussions through an empirical nature.

## 6.4 The Good & The Bad

The literature considered there are both positive and negative aspects concerning the ToC and MEL, or M&E. This section will illustrate how the results shed light on some of these aspects.

The ToC is described in the literature as a concept that illustrates both the long-term goals of a programme and the different steps that need to be taken in order to achieve this goal. The results show that this is also how the partners experience it. Furthermore, the respondents mention the bonus of having the ToC as a guidance of where they need to go. This aspect adds positively to the value of a ToC as described in the literature. As mentioned previously, however, several challenges are also faced that have also been identified in the literature. Mulgan (2016) criticises the ToC by identifying that little debate exists on the good and/or bad aspects of the ToC approach. Sharrock (2017) discusses how the ToC might be too simplistic when applied in the real world, in order to fully support a programme. The results confirm this argument, as they evidence the general and unpractical aspect of the ToC, and how it needs to be adapted to the local contexts. This step, according to the respondents, will help in making the ToC more applicable and usable for the SfD Programme 2016-2020, overcoming the barrier as described by Sharrock. A proper, functioning MEL system can also aid in this process. When the ToC is made measurable and indicators are created for the different outputs, outcomes and impacts, it ensures its practicality. This also explains the intricate relation between these two approaches, and therefore energy needs to be put into developing these side by side rather than two standalone concepts.

Moreover, M&E and MEL are significant tools to ensure the organisation of a programme can stay up-to-date on the progress of the programme and steer the interventions in order to reach the desired goals and objectives. The results confirm the added value of increased responsibility for the implementing partners, as noted by Holvoet and Renard (2007). The struggles identified previously in terms of imposing Western ideas, are also described by Win (2004), especially in terms of the pressure to ensure accountability, which when using M&E was also experienced by the implementing partners. This experience ensured negative aspects were associated within their meaning of M&E as they felt the work was being done under much pressure. The introduction of MEL within the SfD Programme, however, has reduced this pressure. The increase in responsibility in the MEL approach has enabled a more positive meaning to be associated with it as this way they are intrinsically motivated. Coalter comments how in general no proper system is in place in SfD organisations for doing M&E (Chalip & Heere, 2014). In terms of the SfD Programme 2016-2020, this is most certainly the case. Finally, Apgar et al. (2016) have stated that little empirical study is done on how to implement MEL systems, especially in terms of enabling stakeholders to reflect on the change processes. The experiences shared in this study and the meanings attributed to them have given a varied insight into what could be included in a MEL system, but also in some of the reasons for their remarks. Therefore, this study addresses the shortcomings as identified by Apgar et al..

## 7 Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

In this chapter, the conclusions of the research will be presented. Possible limitations of the research will consequently be highlighted, followed by recommendations made for the SfD Programme 2016-2020 and the partners involved in M&E and MEL for the programme.

### 7.1 Conclusions

The conclusion will first answer the separate sub-questions, after which the main question can be answered.

#### 1. *What is currently known about Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning (in SfD organisations)?*

According to the literature, M&E is a tool set in place in order to gather and analyse data on a project or programme, through which it is consequently evaluated according to previously set criteria. One of the key issues identified with M&E, is that its implementation is difficult to do, especially when wanting to do it well, which Coalter (n.d.) and Kay (2012) also note in the literature. Another issue illustrated by the literature, is the pressure created in terms of accountability for the implementing partners, or the South. Especially since the M&E formats are often developed by Western donors, questions are asked whether M&E can be applicable to the local context if it is not set up using this context. Luckily, a shift can be identified in terms of M&E. This top-down relation, where the donor develops a format that the recipient needs to uphold, is slowly shifting to a system in which recipients are included in the process and can have their say on how M&E should be done. One of the developments within this shift, is the creation of MEL. Here, additional to the traditional M&E – although including recipients – the learning aspect is added. Through adding this segment to the tool, the possibility for a platform emerges where all stakeholders can observe the process and learn and develop accordingly.

#### 2. *How does the Theory of Change concept combine with Monitoring & Evaluation?*

In order to answer this question, first the ToC needs to be clarified. In short, the ToC is a plan of what you want to achieve in the long term, how you want to achieve it and what steps are needed to achieve it. There are different aspects needed in order for a ToC to be used to its full capacity. Critics, however, mention that the ToC is too simplistic in its approach to be able to work in an actual programme, and that too little discussion exists on the positive and negative aspects of using a ToC approach.

When combining the ToC and M&E, the literature shows that these two reinforce one another, as the ToC offers a holistic approach to ensuring all aspects of a programme or project are included. This also involves the M&E of a programme. Essentially, in order to be able to check if a programme is achieving its ToC, M&E needs to be done. And for doing M&E, a larger concept is needed on which the

criteria for evaluation is based. This demonstrates that the ToC and M&E or MEL are dependent on one another and cannot be implemented separately.

3. *How do the participants of the Learning Event experience the Theory of Change and link it to Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning?*

In general, the respondents' experiences on the ToC are very positive. The main feeling associated with it, is that it gives them guidance in terms of the current position within the programme. Especially in moments of need, for example in changing environments or when being somewhat lost in the progress of a programme, the value of a ToC is really identified. They do, however, identify that it does have its shortcomings and controversies. The most noticeable herein is the fact that it is often a requirement from donors when applying for funding. This is considered a top-down approach, very much in the neo-colonialist perspective. When talking specifically about the Sfd Programme 2016-2020, especially the general and unpractical aspect of the ToC is considered a hindrance in using it. The adaptation of the ToC, where one is made for each country-specific context, is deemed desirable for the purpose of this programme.

These balanced experiences concern the application of a ToC as a concept in itself. When considered in combination with M&E and MEL the strong relation these two concepts have is acknowledged. Comments, however, are made on the application of these two approaches combined in terms of the Sfd Programme 2016-2020, as this is not at the level it could be.

4. *How do the experiences that the participants of the Learning Event have had with Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning, attribute to their meaning of Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning?*

The experiences of the participants have been very widespread, also depending much on the focus within M&E and MEL. When speaking solely about MEL it can be observed that the meaning attributed to it was almost exclusively in positive terms, to the extent that some partners are even hoping to advocate for MEL in other contexts and organisations. M&E, however, had a different response to it, also depending on the involvement of the partners. The partners that had not been introduced to MEL yet, described similar attributes and meanings as the experienced partners did with MEL. But for the experienced partners, the difference between the two approaches was vast. M&E was described as a traditional, top-down, stress-giving procedure whereas MEL was accepted wholeheartedly. Gaining this experience in MEL clearly had a constructive influence on their meaning of the concepts, partially due to the increased responsibility and freedom when implementing MEL.

When considering in specific the system of the Sfd Programme 2016-2020, the experiences are different. The lack of clarity in what data is required and what tools are to be used, are considered very disruptive to the whole MEL process, as well as the lack of follow-up on the data provided, among several other hindrances. This therefore also influences the meaning attributed to MEL in terms of the way it is organised within the Sfd Programme 2016-2020, but also in general terms.

This was clear when respondents would automatically phrase this when asked about the importance MEL had to them.

*5. How can the Monitoring, Evaluation – and Learning being done in the Sfd Programme 2016-2020 be improved?*

The respondents describe improvements on different levels of intervention that can aid the MEL system of the Sfd Programme 2016-2020. The key recommendation is that in any future process, the local partners need to be included in all sections of the process, from the implementation of MEL to the reporting on the ToC. This ensures ownership is created by the local implementers and they can develop the programme further. Including these stakeholders helps them as the programme partners, as their involvement ensures a wider base of knowledge on what is aimed to be achieved in the programme, which can then add to the sustainability, as well as the implementing partners as the trust and the ability to prove they are able to work on the different levels is desired.

The second recommendation is the formation of a clear, well-structured MEL system that includes a systematic approach to the use of the tools, the time frame in which activities are to take place and a template for the required data that is to be collected. Especially in case of a sequel of the Sfd Programme 2016-2020, it is important that this is established from the beginning.

The third recommendation is the creation of a sharing culture between the partners from the different countries. In order to avoid isolation and ensure the implementing partners can also learn from one another, not only from the programme partners, some form of platform or planning for the sharing of idea would benefit the understanding and knowledge the partners have on the developments concerning MEL and improve the way in which they can implement it.

Finally, some additional, minor recommendations were made. These included giving attention to tools, especially in the form of ensuring data can be visualised and automatic processes can be put in place. Increasing the capacity of the local implementers was also deemed beneficial to the programme, as well as including third party assessors to do the M&E, or educational partners to do the entire process and provide a report afterwards.

Finally, the main question will be answered.

***What meaning is given to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) by the participants of the Sport for Development (Sfd) Learning Event and how could this impact future use of MEL within the Sfd Programme?***

Approximately one and a half year ago, the Sfd Programme 2016-2020 entered a transition phase, where the switch was made from using M&E as an approach to gather and analyse data, to using MEL, where the learning aspect was to bring much added value to the different stakeholders involved. However, not all countries, and thus implementing partners, had been introduced to this MEL concept and how to use it yet when conducting this research. Therefore, the meaning attributed to both MEL and M&E have been considered.

The literature shows that, despite M&E being such a major part of the SfD field, it is still experienced as a difficult concept to grasp and especially to form a good working system on. An enhanced difficulty is created once the ToC approach is added into the equation. The ToC is an approach that incorporates the final goal of a project and all the steps needed to fulfil this goal. It is checked by using M&E or MEL, and MEL needs a framework, such as the ToC, in order to know the criteria that it ought to live up to. This therefore enforces the inseparable link between these two concepts, and the reason for discussing both to a greater extent. Furthermore, the literature shows that both concepts experience some controversies in terms of the possible top-down, imposed nature of having to apply them through Western ideologies. This last remark reinforces the neo-colonialist perspective that was used in this research. The other framework that was applied was Weick's (1995) sensemaking, in order to create a more comprehensive view of the meaning attributed to MEL.

The results show that, in general, the meaning attributed to MEL is very positive. M&E, on the contrary, enjoys a more unbalanced score. This difference has much to do with the shift from having little to no say in the process of doing M&E, to having a great deal of responsibility when applying MEL to the programme. This influences the meaning significantly, especially for the respondents that have had the chance to work with both forms. Despite this shift creating a very positive reaction, there are still several aspects in place, or lacking, to influence the experiences of the respondents in a negative way. The fact that there is no clear, set MEL system is suffered as very obstructive to the ability to realise M&E or MEL. Overall, the sense created on MEL is very positive, although still some work needs to be done in order to improve, in particular, the MEL being done in the SfD Programme 2016-2020.

The research also provides recommendations for future use of MEL, be it in this programme or in a sequel. Several recommendations were made, although some create a variety of options and opportunities from which the MEL system can be developed further. Firstly, it is important to create a functional, clear MEL system that is easy to use for all the stakeholders involved. Preferably, this needs to be made before the start of a programme, so that it can really encompass all aspects of it, including the ToC and its components. Secondly, the implementing partners should be involved in all parts of the programme and given the opportunity to use the ToC and the MEL in order to learn more about the relation between these two, learn about the decision-making components of this programme – at least in the areas they are involved in – and express their understanding and commitment to the programme. Finally, it would be beneficial to the SfD Programme 2016-2020 if the sharing of experiences in terms of MEL, but also the ToC, were to be encouraged and if possible facilitated. This can especially aid the implementing partners in their understanding of the concepts and the way in which these can be used. A platform or a planning in which this takes place can give structure to the sharing. Additionally, it ensures the knowledge on the experiences within MEL and the ToC are shared thus less room for making the same mistakes is created, as well as ensuring best practices are shared with all partners.



## 7.2 Limitations

In this section, the research process will be reflected upon. The focus lies on the advancement of the research, the research findings and the limitations of the research.

The Learning Event created the perfect opportunity for the researcher to interview all the international participants during their visit to the Netherlands, ensuring the interviews could take place face-to-face and thus give less room for error throughout the process. Additionally, the organising of the Learning Event ensured that the researcher already had an introduction to all the respondents. Several factors, however, influenced this chance, including but not limited to delay of flights, a very demanding schedule and the role of the researcher as responsible for logistical elements of the event, that at one point had to take preference over an interview.

This role potentially also had an influence in terms of both the willingness and the openheartedness of the respondents in terms of answering the questions posed in the interviews. On the one hand, the established relationship might make them more inclined to participate and answer truthfully, whereas on the other hand the position of the researcher could be of influence, as an intern for ISA, causing them to give socially responsible answers. Despite steps were taken to avoid this, by ensuring anonymity and declaring the position of the researcher, the extent to which it did happen is unknown to the researcher, and the only way to ensure the truth was told is by checking everything that was said, either through conversations with other partners and implementers, or through conducting field research and seeing the occurrences and happenings. This research, however, was limited in the ability to do so.

For the purpose of this research, the participants of the Learning Event were considered as respondents. The implementing partners represented six countries, however, the SfD Programme 2016-2020 takes place in ten countries in total, meaning four countries were left out of the scope of this research. Although several of these countries are involved in the programme to a lesser extent – especially in terms of MEL – the research would include a more complete view if these countries were included. Despite this, the involvement of the six countries does provide a view on the different contexts that are to be considered and how experiences may vary depending on these contexts. Especially the varied experience in M&E and MEL due to the different involvement in it depending on the country was of high value.

The inclusion of the participants from Mali gave valuable insight into their involvement, however, was limited due to the alternative manner of data collection, where they were e-mailed the questions and asked to fill in to the greatest extent possible. Despite mentioning this, the answers were very concise, and the researcher feels their contribution could have been larger if the French comprehension was vaster or a good interpreter was used.

### 7.3 Recommendations

This section will illustrate recommendations identified by the researcher towards improving the MEL strategy in place, or future implementation of MEL, both within the SfD Programme 2016-2020 as to a wider spectrum. This section will illustrate the larger recommendations that emerge from the results. It does not include, however, all recommendations that were made throughout the study. If more insight is desired in terms of some of the minor recommendations, this can be observed in section 5.4 and in the conclusion of sub-question 5.

Firstly, the researcher encourages the programme partners of the SfD Programme 2016-2020 to jointly form a MEL strategy, preferably as soon as possible, but most certainly for the sequel of this programme. Throughout the study it has appeared that the different respondents do feel this is needed in order to improve the MEL that is being done, but also the experiences that the people have concerning MEL. By agreeing on the tools to be used, the frequency in which MEL will be done, a template that will be used with indicators to be followed, the entire process will become clear from the beginning for all parties involved, also in terms of what is expected of them. The ToC also needs to be involved in this process, in order to ensure these two go hand-in-hand and reinforce each other as they could do. Within the development of this strategy it is key to include the implementing partners, as they will likely be involved in extensive sections of this MEL system and would benefit greatly from observing the entire process.

As a second recommendation, the researcher would like to emphasise the need for the opportunity to share data, results, experiences and opinions with other implementing partners additional to the programming partners. This sharing of experiences was suggested as the partners felt there was much to learn from one another and it creates a connection between the countries, so that they can still be in regular contact with one another. The increased sharing of experiences is also likely to lead to improvements in the programme as they can not only learn from positive experiences, but from negative experiences as well so failures are less likely to occur in different places, once the knowledge on this is obtained. The context does, however, need to be taken into consideration when deliberating these claims. The sharing of experiences will furthermore emphasise the feeling of having a 'SfD family', which improves the image created on the SfD Programme 2016-2020.

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## 9 [Appendix](#)

### 9.1 [Topic lists](#)

#### 9.1.1 [Topic list partnership](#)

##### Background information

- Position respondent
- Country respondent
- What organisation do you work for?
- What work do you do for your organisation?
- What does your organisation do?
- How is your organisation linked to the SfD programme?
- What is the role of your organisation in SfD?

##### ToC

- Do you know what a Theory of Change is?
- What does the ToC mean for you? And for your (programme) partners?
  - o If yes, do you know what SfD's ToC is?
- What are the goals and ambitions of the SfD programme? What are the most important goals and ambitions of the SfD programme?
  - o Would you say these two are closely related?
- How do you ensure these goals and objectives are achieved?
- Do you think the ToC helps in achieving the programme's goals and objectives? How does the ToC help to achieve the SfD programme's goals and objectives?
- Do you use the ToC as a framework for discussion and reflection?
  - o If yes, with whom do you do this? (programme partners, implementing partners)

##### MEL

- What does MEL mean to you? What does MEL mean for the programme partners and the implementing partners?
- What are your personal experiences with MEL?
- What does your organisation do in general with MEL?
- What is your role in MEL?
- Why do you do MEL the way you do it now?
- How important is MEL to you?
  - o Scale 1-10 and elaborate
  - o How well do you think MEL is being done now?
    - Again scale 1-10 and elaborate
- Do you think MEL is necessary?
- What would it mean for you if you didn't do MEL anymore?
- Do you feel the way MEL is done should or could be improved for the SfD programme?
  - o If yes, in what way do you think would work for the SfD?

- How would you do MEL ideally?
- Do you combine MEL with the ToC? Does this link?

#### Data Collection

- Do you work in the field?
- If yes,
  - o Do you do data collection?
  - o How do you do data collection?
  - o What do you do with this data once you've retrieved it?
  - o How often do you collect data? (monitoring) -> how often do you evaluate on this?
- Are you in charge of other people?
- If yes,
  - o Do you do MEL together with these people?
  - o Do you tell them how to do MEL? Or do you tell them how they COULD do MEL?
- Do you feel there is a mutual understanding of what is being done in terms of MEL and why?
- Do you talk about the matters concerning MEL?

#### Possibilities for change

- Once MEL is done and changes seem ideal – what are the possibilities to ensure changes are made?
- Does this happen locally or on a more institutional level? On what levels can changes be made
- Is room given for change and learning from the results retrieved with MEL?
  - o If yes, at what level?
- How much ownership do local implementers have to adapt the programme if they see change is needed or desirable?



### 9.1.2 Topic list implementing partners

#### Background information

- Position respondent
- Country respondent
- What organisation do you work for?
- What work do you do for your organisation?
- What does your organisation do?
- Do you know what the SFD programme is?

#### ToC

- Do you know what a Theory of Change is?
- What does the ToC mean for you? And for your partners?
- If yes, do you know what the Sfd programme's ToC is?
- How do you use the ToC in your daily activities?
- Do you think the ToC helps in achieving the programme's goals and objectives? How does the ToC help to achieve the Sfd programme's goals and objectives?
- Do you use the ToC as a framework for discussion and reflection?
- If yes, with whom do you do this? (programme partners, south)

#### MEL

- What does MEL mean to you? What does MEL mean for the programme partners and the implementing partners?
- What are your personal experiences with MEL?
- What does your organisation do in general with MEL?
- What is your role in MEL?
- Why do you do MEL the way you do it now?
- How important is MEL to you?
  - o Scale 1-10 and elaborate
  - o How well do you think MEL is being done?
    - Again scale 1-10 and elaborate
- Do you think MEL is necessary?
- What would it mean for you if you didn't do MEL anymore?
- Do you feel the way MEL is done should or could be improved for the Sfd programme?
- If yes, in what way do you think would work for the Sfd?
- How would you do MEL ideally?
- Do you combine MEL with ToC? How does this link?

#### Data Collection

- Do you work in the field?
- If yes,
  - o Do you do data collection?
  - o How do you do data collection?
  - o What do you do with this data once you've retrieved it?

- How often do you collect data? (monitoring) -> how often do you evaluate on this? -> How often do you learn from this?
- Do you work with other people with doing data collection?
- If yes,
  - On what levels?
  - Do you do MEL together with these people?
- Do you feel there is a mutual understanding of what is being done in terms of MEL and why?
- Do you talk about the matters concerning MEL?

#### Possibilities for change

- Once MEL is done and changes seem ideal – what are the possibilities to ensure changes are made?
- Does this happen locally or on a more institutional level? On what levels can changes be made
- Is room given for change and learning from the results retrieved with MEL?
- If yes, at what level?
- How much ownership do you have to adapt the programme if you see change is needed or desirable?



## 9.2 Code tree

MEL in Sfd Programme	Changes	Included Stakeholders		
		Possibilities for change		
		ToC		
	Data	Collection	Regularity	
		Complexity Sfd		
		Evidence		
		Justification		
		Levels of involvement		
		Position-role		
		Process		
	Donors	Differences		
		Shifting agendas		
	ME-L	Balance		
		Consequences no ME-L		
		Conversations MEL	Sharing MEL	
		Different ME-L system		
		Effect of MEL		
		Evaluation		
		Experience		
		Importance	Actual position	
		Improvements in MEL		
		Inclusion of stakeholders		
		Integration MEL		
		Intrinsic vs imposed		
		Knowledge of MEL		
		Learning	Included stakeholders	
		Lost in MEL		
		Necessity for MEL		
		Problems with ME-L		
		Reasons current MEL		
Relationship programme & implementing org				
Role				
Sticky Europe				
Use of ME-MEL		ME		
	ME vs MEL			

			MEL
		Views	Mutual understanding - Resistance
			Partners
			Personal
	Organisation	Main task	
		ME-L	
		Personal occupation	
		Position	
		Programme adjustment	
		ToC	
	Ownership	Degree of ownership	
	Power-influence	Failures	
		Justification	
		Pressure	
		Unknown power	
	Recommendations	ME-L	Ideal situation
		ToC	
	SfD Programme	Combination SfD + org programme	
		Context	
		Cooperation	
		Partnership KNVB RTP ISA	
		Required data	
		Role organisations	
		Sustainability	
	Sports for development	Connection SfD general and ToC	
		Programme	
	Struggles		
	Theory of Change	Adaptation of ToC	
		Challenges ToC	
		Combination SfD + org ToC	
		Description ToC	
		Discussions on ToC	Stakeholders
		Divide North-South	
		Experiences-opinions ToC	Criticism-recommendations

			Personal meaning ToC	
			Positives	
			Stakeholders	
		Integrate ToC		
		Knowledge ToC	Improved knowledge ToC	
			SfD ToC	
			Stakeholders	
		No ToC		
		Opinion		
		Proof of effect		
		Purpose ToC		
		Reflection		
		ToC & goals	Common goal	
			Link to org's goals	
			SfD ToC	
		Use of ToC	Adaptation	
			Examples	
			Sharing ToC	
			Stakeholders	
			Type of data	
ToC - MEL				

9.3 Theory of Change SfD Programme 2016-2020

