

# Sports Sector Philanthropic Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Evidence of Global Inequalities

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## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating consequences for the sporting sector with cancellations and postponement of sporting events and activities globally. There are dire predictions pertaining to the economic impacts of the pandemic on the sports sector, including the inability of specific sports codes and more locally-based sports clubs and federations to survive. Despite the challenges faced, the sports sector has emerged as a major contributor to efforts to fight the pandemic as well as provides assistance to those most impacted but least likely to respond effectively to the pandemic. The philanthropic efforts of the sports sector are discussed in this paper, these include fundraising efforts, procurement and donations of personal protective equipment (PPE), the use of sports facilities (including stadiums as health facilities and to house the homeless) and assets (such as airplanes to transport PPE and health personnel), and the involvement of sports personalities in educational and awareness-raising efforts. Additionally, new sporting activities are emerging as athletes/players compete online to raise funds. The gaming industry was viewed as one which was linked to but separate from sports. Both have now become fundamentally intertwined. A global, a critical assessment of which sports organisations, clubs and individuals have been prominent in being able to provide assistance reveal inequalities that are also critically examined here. Specifically, biases in relation to geographical locations (with Europe and the United States of America (USA) clearly dominating in terms of sports events/

activities and sports organisations/ businesses that can respond to the pandemic, even assisting others, while in the rest of the world sports enterprises are struggling to survive) and the prominence of specific codes of sports (especially athletics, soccer, American football and baseball) are discussed. The paper concludes that as the sports sector re-emerges, it is imperative that the philanthropic culture is sustained and inequalities are addressed.

## **Introduction**

The sports sector has been no exception to the devastating consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on several economic sectors worldwide (Gilat & Cole 2020; Mann, Clift, Boykoff & Bekker 2020; Nicola, Alsafi, Sohrabi, Kerwan, Al-Jabir, Iosifidis, Agha & Agha 2020; Olagbaju, Awosusi & Shaib 2020; Toresdahl & Asif 2020). Due to this pandemic, some of the world's major sporting events such as athletics, golf, basketball, tennis, rugby, boxing, snooker and cycling have either been cancelled or postponed (Gilat & Cole 2020; Nicola *et al.* 2020; Toresdahl & Asif 2020). For instance, Gilat & Cole (2020), Mann *et al.* (2020), Nicola *et al.* (2020) and Parnell, Widdop, Bond and Wilson (2020) state that in response to COVID-19 and at an effort to protect the health of the athletes, mega-events such as the Australian Formula One Grand Prix, the Euro 2020 tournament and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics have been postponed. In addition to events being affected, sports organisations and facilities have also been severely impacted. In this regard, sporting clubs and facilities, parks, gyms, sports venues and organisations have had to close their operations due to COVID-19 regulations (Drummond, Elliott, Drummond & Prichard 2020; Gilat & Cole 2020; Ozili & Arun 2020; Shaw, Kim & Hua 2020). Despite the challenges faced within the sports sector, it has emerged as one of the major contributors to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sports sector has always been associated with philanthropic efforts including fundraising efforts; supporting various projects and programmes link-ed to education, environmental awareness, and health and well-being; and supporting communities and individuals in need. These efforts associated with sports teams, associations/ federations, clubs and individual athletes and players reflect the general perception that sports are linked to positive outcomes and support social cohesion efforts. These philanthropic activities also result

in substantial media coverage (especially focusing on the established teams and leagues as well as the internationally profiled superstars), which has economic benefits associated with marketing, brand awareness and reputation building. Thus, philanthropic efforts associated with the sports sector benefits the sector and stakeholders and well as recipients. Philanthropic efforts are also associated with Corporate Social Investment (CSI)/ Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals that are based on the premise that doing good can benefit business enterprises.

In the context of the unprecedented disruptions to socio-economic activities triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic including sports and travel, the sports sector has risen to the occasion; being involved in several philanthropic efforts including raising funds to curb the spread of the virus and assist businesses and individuals severely impacted by pandemic-related disruptions, procurement and donations of PPE, the use of sports facilities (including stadiums as health facilities and to house the homeless) and assets (such as airplanes to transport PPE and health personnel), and the involvement of sports personalities in educational and awareness-raising efforts. New sporting activities are also emerging as athletes/ players compete online to raise funds.

In the above context, this study undertakes a critical assessment of which sports organisations, clubs and individuals have been prominent providing philanthropic assistance, and how these reveal inequalities within the sports sector. Specifically, spatial biases and the dominance of specific sporting codes (and superstars associated with these codes) are examined. The next section provides a brief overview of philanthropy and the particular role it plays in the sports sector. The third section focuses on key philanthropic responses that are emerging in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is followed by a section on the geopolitical inequalities characterising sports philanthropy during the pandemic and finally, recommendations as well as concluding remarks are forwarded in the conclusion section.

## **Philanthropy and Sports**

From the richest companies to the richest celebrities and athletes, philanthropy is an activity that is highly practised and encouraged throughout society. Usually practised by more affluent individuals and organisations, philanthropy can be defined as the act of supporting different services and projects, founded by non-governmental organisations, by the spreading of financial resources

(Maurrasse 2020). A simpler way of understanding this is ‘private giving for public purposes’ (Barman 2017: 1). Recipients of these monetary donations include but are not limited to charities, health and social welfare organisations, non-profit groups and any other type of organisation that aim to mobilise resources to improve society and the situations of individuals in that society (Dobrof 1998 cited in Croucher 2017). However, besides monetary forms, philanthropy can also take the form of blood and organ donations, assisting with disaster relief campaigns and/or creating and participating in educational and social awareness programmes such as efforts to address gender-based violence (Croucher 2017).

Over the years, the sporting industry has grown to such an extent that it is now largely business orientated. Therefore, businesses in the industry must include a CSR plan which, as a result, becomes a form of sports philanthropy. Ratten and Babiak (2010) assert that due to there being increasing concern globally over social and environmental issues, many organisations in the sports industry have tried to reinforce their commitment to socially responsible causes. Thus, by practising philanthropic activities, athletes, sports teams and sports organisations could improve their social position in their community. A good example of sports philanthropy is the ‘LIVESTRONG’ campaign founded by professional cyclist Lance Armstrong to help those affected by cancer. Meyer and Meyer (2017) state that this campaign involved physical participation such as walking, marathons, cycle races, triathlons and other physical activities that are funded by organisations with the aim of raising awareness and/or financial support for cancer research and those impacted by cancer. The ‘LIVESTRONG’ campaign is also a good example of how a philanthropic initiative can be compromised because of the reputation of a key sports personality. After Lance Armstrong’s reputation was damaged as a result of the doping scandal, the ‘LIVESTRONG’ campaign has faded away.

A significant amount of sports philanthropy was found to take place in the USA as the country is one that feeds of sports. Large sports organisations such as the National Football League (NFL) have a long history with United Way (Ratten & Babiak 2010), a non-profit organisation that ‘advances the common good by creating opportunities for all’ and focuses on providing education, income and health as they view it as the building blocks for a good quality of life and a strong community (United Way 2020). Linked to this, the National Basketball Association (NBA) has founded the NBA Cares campaign which aims to bring awareness and provide solutions to various social issues

(Ratten & Babiak 2010). The passion for all types of sports has led to a variety of philanthropic campaigns across the world. This is substantiated by Bunds (2017), Palmer and Dwyer (2019) and Palmer (2020) all of whom give the example of Sport Aid which is a global fundraising event that combined humanitarian aid, sports and united millions of people across five continents in a marathon to assist with famine relief. It was also shown that in the United Kingdom (UK), the Macmillan Cancer Support raised £3.5 million and data collected in 2016 from Australia showed that sports-related philanthropic causes raised AUD\$ 1.3 billion (Palmer 2020; citing, McGregor Lowndes *et al.* 2017).

Whilst these major sports corporations and personalities are helping to improve their communities, it must be noted that these philanthropists have created a ‘win-win’ strategy that also provides them with either a financial, political or social capital benefit (Babiak, Mills, Tainsky & Juravich 2012). ‘While some leaders of sports organisations believe that “doing good is the right thing to do”, others believe that “doing good is good business”’ (Mintzberg 1984 cited in Ratten & Babiak 2010: 484). In this regard, evidence indicates that executives of some major sports corporations discovered that their philanthropic endeavours benefitted their teams by either saving money, creating marketing opportunities and improving their reputation or community image (Trendafilova & Babiak 2013 cited in Thornton-Lugo, Wooldridge & Rupp 2017). Certain philanthropic campaigns also have underlying religious purposes. It was found that the LIVESTRONG organisation, mentioned above, gained such a high attraction and popularity as it was founded on ‘muscular Christian ideals of sports and physical activity’ and placed emphasis on their altruistic ideals and moral values (Meyer & Meyer 2017). Furthermore, Thornton-Lugo *et al.* (2017) state that sports organisations who invested in philanthropic activities gained an increase in viewership due to word of mouth as spectators and supporters had positive responses towards their philanthropic acts and passed on this information. Therefore, whilst the philanthropic endeavours carried out by sports organisations and personalities is commendable, consideration needs to be given that it is also motivated by pragmatic, traditional business, outcomes such as ‘countering negative media scrutiny, to be good corporate citizens worthy of desired tax breaks and subsidies from government (to build or refurbish stadia, build access roads)’ (Ratten & Babiak 2010: 484).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, sports philanthropy was evident in relation to other disease/pandemic relief campaigns. Athletes from various

sporting codes made and continue to make their individual contributions to important health sector initiatives. For instance, Rhonda Rousey, a professional MMA fighter, has created a foundation that contributes money and other resources, in conjunction with Didi Hirsch, towards helping those with mental health issues (Roling 2016). Furthermore, Brazilian footballer Neymar aided during the Ebola outbreak whilst American footballer Eli Manning, has built his own children's clinic in Mississippi which provides outpatient care to over 75000 children each year (Roling 2016). Sports philanthropy also has a crucial role in helping Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to create global health campaigns such as those to help with combatting the spread of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which results in the causation of the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) (Banda 2017). It is further asserted that sports settings proved to be helpful environments where information about the virus can be spread to educate on and promote positive individual and community behaviours that decrease situations that lead to infection (Banda 2017).

## **Philanthropic Responses to COVID-19**

Sports personalities as well as organisations have been actively involved in efforts aimed at assisting with the fight against COVID-19 (Leng & Phua 2020). Research shows that since the outbreak of this pandemic several sports personalities, clubs and organisations have contributed vastly in form of monetary support towards relief funds, food for the needy during lockdown periods, PPE as well as spreading awareness and motivating society to work with governments in combating the virus (Leng & Phua 2020; Rakshit & Veeravalli 2020).

## ***Support for the General Public***

In many parts of the world, sports personalities, agencies and organisations have been at the forefront of different initiatives to assist at different levels and help the vulnerable and less fortunate individuals and communities to fight the COVID-19 pandemic (Golden 2020; Keohane 2020). Golden (2020) and Keohane (2020) state that some of the biggest sports personalities have united to not only raise funds and food supplies but also awareness for relief during this pandemic. One of the main examples of this, which has gained media

attention has been the charity golf event called The Match: Champions for Charity, between two Professional Golfers Association (PGA) stars, Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson as well as two NFL quarterbacks, Peyton Manning and Tom Brady where \$20 million was raised for COVID-19 relief initiatives (Ehrmann 2020; France-Presse 2020; Gamble 2020). Gamble (2020) adds that this match was much needed by fans during this pandemic as it was not just entertaining but also fulfilling seeing these legends compete against each other. What is also interesting is how sports personalities have exposed themselves to participate in events that are outside their fields. This is evidenced by Peyton Manning and Tom Brady, who are not golf players but still chose to participate in a golf event to raise funds.

According to Golden (2020) and Keohane (2020), athletes have united in initiatives such as raising money for COVID-19 relief funds, namely, the Centre for Disaster Philanthropy, donating towards assistance with anxiety and other mental issues as a result of the pandemic as well as launching funds to assist those who are financially less fortunate. To raise as much money as possible, fans have also been urged to donate and by doing so stand the chances of winning items such as jerseys signed by their favourite athletes (Golden 2020). More than 100 of the biggest athletes have formed the Athletes for COVID-19 initiative, where they donated signed memorabilia for auction where proceeds will go to the Centre for Disaster Philanthropy (Keohane 2020). Furthermore, according to Keohane (2020), Manchester United's Marcus Rashford has raised approximately £150 000 in efforts to feed children. Manchester United also collaborated with Manchester City in making a £100 000 donation towards food banks which have lost food donations from match days (Keohane 2020). Keohane (2020) reports that in Switzerland, the tennis star Roger Federer and his wife donated \$1 million for vulnerable Swiss families. Keohane (2020) adds that the star also took to his social media platforms to encourage millions of his followers to join in supporting families in need. Similarly, Elkins (2020) reports that American basketball star, Kevin Love encouraged his Instagram followers to support their communities by reaching out to and assisting those in need. Fundraising campaigns for the National Health Service workers as well as individuals whose livelihoods have been affected by the unexpected job losses have been started by several English footballers, rugby and cricket players (Keohane 2020).

Sports personalities have also been utilising their social media platforms to educate people about COVID-19 as well as to encourage and

inspire people with goodwill and consideration content (Ditloholobolo 2020; Keohane 2020). In South Africa, sports stars such as the Springbok rugby captain Siya Kolisi launched the Kolisi Foundation with his wife which is aimed at providing food parcels to families within poor communities in the country (Ephraim 2020). In the same spirit the local South African football club, Baroka Football Club also pledged to donate food parcels across various communities within the province of Limpopo (Dlala 2020). Moreover, Ephraim (2020) states that Matthys Beukes, a South African mountain biker, is said to be on a 1000 km cycling challenge around his property in attempts to raise funds for COVID-19, a relief initiative called the Humanitarian Empowerment Fund which assists West Rand and Elsies River communities which are poor communities in the Western Cape. Other initiatives across South Africa include an initiative by the adventure swimmer Adrian van Westenbrugge who swam 36 km in his pool while live on Facebook and raised R150 000 for the Clothing Bank Hunger Relief Drive (Ephraim 2020).

### ***Support for the Health Sector***

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed severe strain on healthcare systems worldwide (Nicola *et al.* 2020). The healthcare systems in developed and developing countries are experiencing major challenges, from shortages in testing, medical supplies such as ventilators, protective gear such as N95 face masks, hospital and clinic beds and bed space; to expensive healthcare costs and problems with accessing poorer and rural communities (Price 2020). As a result, the health sector has called on governments, major businesses, celebrities, athletes and any individuals and groups willing and able to assist with supplying these crucial resources during this time. Fortunately, some of the biggest names in the sporting industry have answered the call by donating to fund research, pay for PPE and help victims of COVID-19.

Many sports orientated businesses have contributed significantly to help their healthcare systems. Ye and Blatte (2020) provide a few examples as follows: the Brooklyn Nets has partnered with the Chinese government to donate one thousand ventilators to New York City; in addition, the famous athletic brand Nike has donated \$10 million toward COVID-19 first responders and other relief efforts and it was reported that the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Montler, a luxury sportswear brand donated a sum of €10 million towards the construction of a new hospital in Lombardy, Italy.



## *Sports Sector Philanthropic Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Additionally, sporting brand Bauer Hockey has shifted its business function of making helmet visors to producing and supplying medical face shields for first responders and medical professionals (Mueller 2020).

Individual athletes and players around the world have rallied to support to fight the virus. Two of the world's largest football players, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo contributed \$1 million each towards the fight against this pandemic (Keohane 2020). Lionel Messi's donation was given to the Hospital Clinic in Barcelona and was specifically allocated for the treatment of victims of the virus as well as for research purposes (Keohane 2020). Cristiano Ronaldo helped to fund the supply of PPE for hospitals in Lisbon and Porto in Portugal and it is also reported that several English athletes from a variety of sports divisions have founded fund-raising campaigns and have made monetary donations to the National Health Service workers in England (Keohane 2020).

According to Nicola *et al.* (2020), the healthcare systems in the USA have been under immense pressure due to its fractured healthcare policies and non-compliant governments. Fortunately, the philanthropic efforts by sports organisations and personalities have assisted significantly. Mueller (2020) lists a few examples, namely, ice hockey captain of the Sabres has donated five thousand masks to hospitals in western New York City, several athletes in the NBA have donated food packages to help feed hospital workers that are in the front lines trying to stop the virus whilst basketball players have funded hundreds of testing kits and PPE for health departments in various states. In addition, Mueller (2020) goes on to state that baseball player Carlos Correa has donated over \$500 000 in medical gear to Houston and has also assisted further to ensure that once the circumstances are controlled in that city, all reusable and new PPE and medical equipment will be donated to hospitals in Central America. Famous NBA player Stephen Curry took a different approach and used his stardom and platform to host Dr. Anthony Fauci - the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases - where he did a question and answer session on Instagram Live which helped to create awareness and educate over 50 000 viewers (Rogers 2020).

### ***Support for Sports Employees***

The cancellation and postponement of events as well as the closure of sports facilities has had devastating impacts on a range of employees within the sports sector, this includes cleaning and maintenance staff, coaches, caterers, etc.

whose jobs and livelihoods were impacted. The sports sector has recognised this and those who can are responding accordingly to assist their colleagues. Golden (2020) reports that top athletes have stepped forward to help sports venue workers. According to Golden (2020) and Wimbish (2020), several teams and players have offered to assist arena and stadium workers who are paid by the hour and are currently not receiving any compensation due to the postponement of games. In this regard, sports personalities such as the all-star baseman Freddie Freeman, New Orleans Pelicans rookie Zion Williamson and the Houston Astros star George Springer pledged financial assistance to affected employees as well as assistance through the programmes such as the Atlanta Food Bank, the Giving Kitchen as well as the Salvation Army (Golden 2020; Wimbish 2020). The Miami Heat owners donated \$1 million towards a fund for assisting part-time workers at the club and the Major League Baseball also donated \$1 million towards emergency food services while all their players pledged a further \$1 million for ballpark workers (Keohane 2020).

Barcelona's Lionel Messi and his teammates further took 70% pay cuts during this period to cover the salaries of the club's permanent employees. Furthermore, Cleveland Cavaliers's Kevin Love pledged to donate \$100 000 to event staff who have lost their earnings during the lockdown (Keohane 2020). Gary Benson who is the New Orleans Pelicans owner gave \$1 million for the establishment of the Gayle Benson Community Assistance Fund, while the De Vos family who are the Orlando Magic owners established a \$2 million compensation fund for the Orlando Magic, Amway Centre, Orlando Solar Bears and Lakeland Magic game-day employees (Keohane 2020).

Athletes have even made this initiative more personal by donating to workers in arenas located within their own communities whose incomes have been discontinued (Golden 2020). In this regard, the Seattle Seahawks's Russell Wilson pledged one million meals through Food Lifeline, while Utah Jazz's Rudy Gobert donated \$500 000 for families in Utah and Oklahoma City which are his native France and Jazz game-day employees (Keohane 2020). Furthermore, teams such as the Bucks, Boston Celtics, Chicago Bulls, Dallas Mavericks as well as the Brooklyn Nets will continue to pay game-day/ night staff until the regular season is over and through the previously scheduled games (Wimbish 2020). Golden (2020) states that athletes pledge donation sums which their colleagues can also match, and thus raising enough to ensure that the affected employees are paid over longer periods. Furthermore, the likes of Zion Williamson, who is an American professional basketball player not

only pledged to cover the salaries of the Smoothie King Centre employees for 30 days, but also used his influence to encourage people to join together to relieve some of the load caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Cole 2020).

### ***Support for Sports Organisations***

Larger organisations also provide support for small local sports organisations. According to Locality (2020), Sport England Funds such as the Sport England Community Emergency Fund have been designed to offer instant funding to physical activity or sports affiliated community organisations whose operations have ceased or are facing financial challenges due to COVID-19. According to the Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council (2020), Sport England has made approximately £195 million worth of funding accessible to assist the sports and physical activity sector during this pandemic. Energise Me (2020) and the Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council (2020) elaborate that this package includes £20 million Community Emergency Fund, £5 million for existing Sport England partners who are currently facing financial challenges to bid into, £55 million to assist innovative ideas to help people keep active during lockdown restrictions as well as to help businesses adjust post-restrictions and lastly, £115 million which will be carried over into 2021/2022 to assist partners who are involved in sports and physical activity in England. Additionally, Laureus Sport for Good Foundation (2020) has launched a COVID-19 response fund as well as an online platform to disseminate learnings, knowledge and best practises during this period. This COVID-19 response fund is aimed at uniting the world's sports communities to assist vulnerable youth during this pandemic (Laureus Sport for Good Foundation 2020).

### ***Support by the Gaming Industry***

Lockdown regulations due to COVID-19 have resulted in an increase in the number of online gaming and related activities such as E-sports viewing as more people are now indoors (King, Delfabbro, Billieux & Potenza 2020). The gaming industry comprises a variety of divisions in which electronic sports (E-Sports) can be found. E-Sports, 'is an activity with the help of electronic technology that has some relevance to sport' (Papaloukas 2018). In the USA, the telecommunications company Verizon has found a 75% increase in online gaming activity ever since the start of lockdown in the country (Shanley 2020).

In Italy it was discovered that the popular game Fortnite increased internet traffic by 70% (Lepido & Rolander 2020). Furthermore, the leading gaming distributor Steam has seen a record-breaking 20 million active users and YouTube gaming and Twitch have had a 10% increase in viewership, respectively (King *et al.* 2020).

The gaming industry has developed itself into becoming recognised as a sports sector with E-sports taking the lead as the main focus. Papaloukas (2018) asserts that the growth of E-sports will take the limelight as a new contender in the Olympic Movement. Therefore, the philanthropic efforts of the gaming industry to help fight this pandemic needs to be highlighted in this Chapter. Social distancing has encouraged the creation of many campaigns that provide support during this time. As such, the gaming community has created the initiative ‘#PlayApartTogether’ that promotes gaming so people are able to socialise and reduce stress and anxiety whilst in quarantine (King *et al.* 2020). This initiative has also been endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), as it encourages its guidelines of social distancing (Maden 2020). Meanwhile, athletes have also taken to online gaming platforms to give back. Athletes from the NBA are participating in online basketball tournaments to raise funds for COVID-19 relief campaigns and it is gaining a significant amount of positive feedback (Russo 2020). Moreover, current and ex-players from the NFL competed in a one-day online Call of Duty tournament where each team was awarded money to donate to any COVID-19 charity of their choosing whilst the winning team received an additional \$5 000 that totalled to \$25 000 being donated to COVID-19 charities across America (Skarekrow 2020).

Presently, COVID-19 is showing no sign of disappearing and with more individuals being confined indoors due to quarantine and social distancing rules, increased online gaming is definitely being viewed as a strong promoter of public health efforts (Businesswire 2020; King *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, with athletes and sports organisations joining in to provide sports entertainment whilst promoting a safe quarantine, the gaming industry has a high potential to become a booming sector, thus encouraging more philanthropic endeavours from within.

## **Evidence of Global Inequalities**

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## *Sports Sector Philanthropic Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic*

It is evident from the above discussions that the sports sector has made tremendous efforts to assist those impacted but are least likely to respond to the pandemic effectively. However, it is also evident that the majority of the efforts that are receiving global media attention are by the larger operations and mainly within first world countries. This is mainly because this is where sports personalities and corporation elites are located and they are in a better position economically to be able to provide assistance. In this regard, Europe and the USA are seen to be better positioned, while sports stars in other parts of the world do not have the privilege to assist as much. Savarese (2020) reports that unlike their counterparts in Europe (who have taken pay cuts), soccer players from Argentina and Brazil are fighting against pay cuts amidst forced cuts in other leagues within South America. Additionally, Colombian league organisers have reached out to the government to assist clubs by broadening certain economic policies (Savarese 2020). The examination of who is responding reveals inequalities of who can aid and who cannot. For instance, local sports teams are not able to help because they are also facing challenges as a result of this pandemic. The big sports codes and personalities can provide help because they essentially make more money. This reflects the geo-spatial economic inequalities of sports big businesses and sports activities. Jarvie (2011) explains that global inequalities in sports are due to social and historical processes which lead to social class being evident in sports where differences are noted in activities such as those that endorse social change in and through sports. Global inequalities are highlighted in this sector as sports are said to reinforce national, racial and social hierarchies which tend to work unevenly (Spaaij, Farquharson and Marjoribanks 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic has thus further exposed an unequal sports world. Continents such as Africa, for instance, have not been able to compete at that level. For example, while clubs within these areas have generously supported the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, in Africa none of the clubs have been able to provide as much assistance. For instance, Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates which are two of the highest-ranked football clubs in South Africa jointly with Multichoice were only able to donate 350 000 surgical masks, 100 000 N95 masks, 10 000 protective overalls, 100 000 gloves, 100 000 shoe covers and 10 000 wipes to the National Health Laboratory Services (Ditlhobolo 2020). The smaller Cape Town City Football Club donated 1 000 medical masks that were given to locals of the Khayelitsha and Hout Bay communities (Gibbs 2020). Furthermore, footballers such as Nigerian Joseph Yobo, Congolese Lamana

Lualaba, Egypt's Ahmed Hassan as well as Tunisia's Karim Haggui participated in the 'Stay safe for Africa' social media challenge aimed at raising awareness about the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 through videos performing 19 kick-ups using the hashtag #19KickupsAgainstCovid19 (SuperSport 2020). In India, individuals such as Diwakar Prasad who is a boxer and also employed with the Indian Railways in West Bengal, has spent the lockdown period recording passengers' destinations for efficient contact tracing and also ensures that social distancing measures are adhered by (Basu & Dua 2020). Due to the political economy of the sports industry, Africa (for example) has not been able to create elite sports organisations/ corporations and personalities. Therefore, there are much fewer sports sector organisations in continents such as Africa that can provide that support. Thus, the philanthropic responses to the pandemic show the geopolitical inequalities in terms of sports and the sports hierarchy globally.

It is also evident that most of the focus of sports organisations and personalities is to assist with the health pandemic, yet there is increasing literature (Gray II, Anyane-Yeboah, Balzora, Issaka & May 2020; Hooper, Nápoles & Pérez-Stable 2020; Patel, Nielsen, Badiani, Assi, Unadkat, Patel, Ravindrane & Wardle 2020) that shows that the health crisis is most noticeable where people are vulnerable because of living conditions associated with poverty, gender and racial inequalities and lack of employment opportunities. Sports organisations need to assist in addressing these systemic challenges that creates vulnerabilities and marginalises specific groups in society. Thus, the real test for sports and philanthropy will be what they continue to do to deal with the societal and economic ills in the world after the pandemic is brought under control. Whether or not they understand and internalise that a substantial proportion of their supporters are made poor and are victims of a global world and economies that create and sustain poverty, and elevate profit-making will guide future efforts. It is also important to note that some sports businesses (especially most of the large enterprises and clubs based in the USA and Europe) have not been immune to economic disparities but in many ways, as this discussion notes, reflects and benefits from these inequalities.

The disparate responses in the sports sector reflect inequalities and vulnerabilities as well. Some of the sports organisations/ businesses have the resources and capabilities to not only assist the general public and the health sector but also to accommodate the disruptions that employees are faced with in relation to losing jobs and not being able to work. They are better positioned

than others to have a comprehensive response and deal with the dire economic conditions that the world is currently experiencing. Most organisations, however, especially at local level do not have this economic privilege and are simply trying to survive, hoping for assistance from government, sports organisations and businesses that can afford to help, other corporations and sponsors, and the general public. Many businesses have already closed and individuals in the sports sector have lost their jobs with no assistance. This is worsened by the fact that government responses have prioritised assisting individuals in specific circumstances, for example, small service-orientated businesses. Many people who work in the sports sector, for example, coaches as well as professional and amateur athletes in selected sporting codes, may be self-employed and therefore not registered and are unlikely to benefit from government programmes. These individuals are also not part of sports companies and federations that can provide them with support as is seen in the USA and Europe. This again reinforces major sports inequalities in the world and within countries at different levels.

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter indicates that the sports sector has been involved in several philanthropic activities that have attracted global media attention. The main areas receiving philanthropic attention are donations (including procurement of PPE and food), fundraising efforts, and the involvement of sports personalities in educational and awareness-raising efforts pertaining to COVID-19. The sports sector, specific sports teams and organisations, and specific players (including retired sports personalities) are benefiting from participating in philanthropic activities which include increased exposure and marketing, brand awareness and improve reputation and image. However, inequalities are evident that reflect some parts of the world, sports codes/organisations and personalities are in a better position to provide assistance, and benefit from the exposure that philanthropic activities and gestures create. Specifically, in relation to geographical locations, Europe and the USA clearly dominate in terms of sports events/ activities and sports organisations/businesses that can respond to the pandemic, even assisting others, while in the rest of the world sports enterprises are struggling to survive. In terms of the prominence of specific codes of sports, athletics, soccer, American football,

motor sports and baseball dominate. These are sports codes with major leagues and a large fan base.

The global inequalities in sports have to be addressed. In this regard, it has been highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered different social injustice issues and inequalities such as racism. Therefore, it is vital that responses such as those by the sports sector are self-reflective to establish how various stakeholders may intentionally and unintentionally be underpinning inequalities. Furthermore, the motivations of the sports sector to assist needs to be more critically examined and where biases are revealed, ways in which they operate needs to change. It is of concern how many of the responses by corporations and personalities are associated with responsible parties/ agencies ensuring media publicity. In fact, in many instances, it appears as if the act of donating or providing support is staged to ensure media coverage and that publicity is maximised. This reinforces assertions made that the responses may be more aligned to getting media and branding leverage rather than doing what is right. Thus, it is critically important that research is undertaken to assess whether major sports companies and personalities continue to provide philanthropic support to deal with concerns that are bigger than the pandemic and more systemic. For example, comparisons in relation to the sports sector responses to the anti-racism protests linked to the Black Lives Matter movement will be interesting and important research. Philanthropy should not be overly opportunistic. The core focus should be to make a positive difference and be primarily geared towards improving the lives and conditions of those most impacted by the current pandemic. Additionally, as the sports sector re-emerges, it is imperative that the philanthropic culture is sustained and inequalities are addressed.

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