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Alena Ulrichova
aulrichova@usfca.edu

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Igniting a New Legacy:
The Olympics and Sustainable Development at the Tokyo Olympic Games

Alena Ulrichova

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Professor Brian Komei Dempster
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Abstract

With a decreasing number of cities bidding to host and organize the Olympic Games, we see that various places find the prospect of embarking on this mega-event project less appealing and lucrative than in the past. Moreover, in looking at the history of the Games, we recognize a troubling pattern: money is often spent irresponsibly and does not bring any benefits to citizens even though their tax payments and state lottery contribution are used as main source for funding the Olympics. In order to shift this trend, the movement towards the global call for sustainability—as presented mainly by the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiative—offers promise for the future. First, this call put pressure on the International Olympic Committee to take significant changes into consideration with a focus on practices that are ethical and fair in terms of funding and sustainability. The upcoming Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games is the ideal place to implement these procedures. In particular, these upcoming games can integrate farmers from lower-middle income countries from the Asia Pacific region into the process of food procurement which, in turn, benefits multiple stakeholders: farmers will improve their livelihoods and situations; the International Olympic Committee will improve its image and legacy on a global scale; and the athletes will enjoy a larger variety of responsibly sourced food.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Sustainability, Lower-middle income countries, Organic Farming, Olympic Games, Food-supply chain

Introduction

The Olympic Games have been viewed for a long time as a beacon of noble principles and high-minded ideals. Nevertheless, there have been many controversial events throughout the modern history of the Olympics. The 1936 Olympic Games became entangled with the image of Hitler and Nazi regime; the 1972 Munich Olympic Games involved an attack by a Palestinian terrorist group that resulted in the murder of members of Israeli Olympic team and delegation; and the Salt Lake City 2002 Winter Games erupted in a corruption scandal. These are just three examples demonstrating that all that glitters is not gold.

Lately, there also has been much debate regarding the Olympics and its contribution to the development of less developed countries. The most recent Olympic Games in Brazil—an upper-middle income country according to GNI per capita¹—left Brazilians with a bitter aftertaste.² The people of Brazil were promised large investments that would enhance the quality of their lives. That should be the ideal that drives all Olympics: the Games are an opportunity to improve infrastructure, create jobs and boost tourism.³ Instead, thousands of Rio de Janeiro's residents were involuntarily moved from their homes because of the construction of the infrastructure which was meant to serve them or, even worse, because of construction of new high-income housing for the richest.⁴ Similar problems have occurred in other Games as well. The London 2012 Organizing Committee was planning to allow tenants from social housing to apply to move into the Olympic Village after the end of the games. The units were meant to be available for affordable prices—rent was supposed to be 30 percent lower than the market rate. Due to the lucrative location and lack of support from the

¹ The World Bank, "World Bank Country and Lending Groups," accessed April 29, 2019, <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>.

² Dom Philips, "Rio hoped for a post-Olympic boom. Instead it is still mired in crisis" *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/rio-hoped-for-a-post-olympics-boom-instead-it-is-still-mired-in-crisis/.

³ Andrew Zimbalist, *Circus Maximus: The Economic Gamble Behind Hosting the Olympics and The World Cup*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 57.

⁴ Andrew Zimbalist, "The Economic Legacy of Rio 2016," in *Rio 2016* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017), 223-225.

government, however, the idea of affordable housing waned and the revenues for developers became the primary focus. In the end, only one-third of the housing was labeled as "affordable" as opposed to the promised half.⁵ It seems that in the end, the Olympics serve mostly those who have power and money.⁶ And this issue is even more visible in developing countries, where the stratum of those who need promised investments the most is significantly larger than in developed countries. Every four years, organizing committees of the Olympics have an opportunity to do something about this. Observing repetitive evidence of their failures raises alarms and brings needed attention to the issue.

There is still room for optimism, however, for the potential of the Olympics to change lives in a positive way. Several times Olympic-related projects have resulted in the redevelopment of contaminated sites and wastelands into recreational and residential areas such as in Barcelona in 1992, Sydney 2000 and others.⁷

As a student-athlete with a degree in Sustainable Agriculture, I propose a possible way to reverse this negative trend and move towards a promising future. The 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo is a fascinating case study in which organic farming, sustainable development, athletics, and Asia Pacific Studies intersect. By including farmers from lower-middle income countries in the Asia Pacific region into the food-supply chain of the Olympics, we can strengthen the ability of the Olympics to promote sustainable development which, in turn, benefits the farmers, athletes, citizens, organizers, stakeholders, and others.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games is worthy of special attention due to both political and geographic factors. Japan is a highly developed country in the Asia Pacific region

⁵ Dave Hill, "What's happened to 'affordable' housing on London's Olympic park?" *The Guardian*, July 8, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/davehillblog/2015/jul/08/whats-happened-to-affordable-housing-on-londons-olympic-park>.

⁶ See for example work of Mike Raco focusing on urban development in the sake of the 2012 London Olympic Games. Raco argues that private firms are gaining contractual rights to public projects leading to non-transparency and therefore tension with public interests. Mike Raco, "The privatisation of urban development and the London Olympics 2012," *City*, 16:4, 458, doi: 10.1080/13604813.2012.696903.

⁷ Holger Preuss, "Investments and the reconstruction of a city: burdens and opportunities" in *The Economics of Staging the Olympics: A Comparison of the Games, 1972-2008* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004), 84.

surrounded by many lower-middle income countries.⁸ This makes Japan a potential leader in the development movement. An event of such importance as the Olympics provides favorable circumstances for lower-middle income countries to improve their status. In particular, people who own and work on small-scale farms situated mostly in rural areas can provide valuable services at the Olympic Games.

In order to demonstrate the validity of this proposal, my research will center around these questions:

- 1) **How can the inclusion of farmers from lower-middle income countries into the food supply chain for the Olympics improve their well-being and benefit various stakeholders?**
- 2) **In turn, how can the Olympics become a leader in and site of sustainability?**
- 3) **What goals—focused on health promotion, improving the Games’ image, and advocacy of farmers—will help measure success, and what are the benefits of and challenges to achieving them?**

The primary goal of this research is to show that sustainability efforts in the Olympics can be supported by drawing on a critical resource: farmers from lower-middle income countries. Specific requirements for food procurement, including uncontaminated products, will ensure the best organic food production.

Power Structure of the Olympics

To evaluate the feasibility of this proposal, one must first examine the organizational hierarchy of the Olympics and, in particular, those in leadership positions who can implement such changes. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is the most obvious place to start.

⁸ Lower-middle income economies are those with a GNI per capita, calculated using the World Bank Atlas method, between \$996 and \$3,895. The World Bank, "World Bank Country and Lending Groups," accessed April 29, 2019, <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>.

The IOC has grown since 1894 from a tiny organization with no employees into a grand non-governmental organization employing more than 500 people. This expansion has been connected with the dramatic change in management of the organization and also broadening the task-portfolio that the IOC has.⁹

As an organization, the IOC has moved from a small body of administration with only one stakeholder in the IOC itself “to a form of governance that has to take into account a diverse network of stakeholders who began exerting their influence during the last century and who, since the 1980s, have enjoyed substantial financial resources. These new stakeholders affect the management of the IOC, which must ensure its partners’ strategies and operations are aligned with its own.”¹⁰ Every piece of this network is essential, and the Olympic Games cannot be organized without any stakeholders involved. Since 2010, there has been a total number of twenty-four stakeholders in the Olympic system. Within this group, the main stakeholders are the IOC, the Association of National Olympic Committees, governments, sponsors, and media.¹¹

This wide and interlinked structure makes it challenging for the IOC to propose any changes to food supply chain especially because sponsors, who may be the main suppliers at the Olympics, likely will not agree to lose their profits to the farmers from lower-middle income countries who would replace them. The recent withdrawal of McDonald's from the sponsorship program of the IOC, however, provides a new niche that may provide new opportunities.

⁹ Jean-Loup Chappelet, “From Olympic Administration to Olympic Governance,” *Sport in Society* 19, no. 6 (July 2, 2016): 739, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2015.1108648>.

¹⁰ Chappelet, “From Olympic Administration to Olympic Governance,” 739.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 748.

Funding the Olympics

In addition to getting various stakeholders, especially sponsors, on board, the IOC must contend with the complex issue of funding. Regarding the financing of the Olympic Games, money flows from different sources: the city, the state and the federal governments, and the private sector. The IOC, as a patron of the Games, contributed to the London 2012 Olympic Games nearly 1,4 billion USD.¹² To put this amount into perspective, the total cost of the London 2012 Games was estimated at 14,6 billion USD.¹³ That means the IOC's contribution approximately covered only 10 percent of the expenses. That 1,4 billion USD came to the IOC from sponsors and media contracts and was thus later redistributed to the Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (OCOG) which is further responsible for the whole process from planning to the implementation of the plan at Games time.¹⁴

With all this in mind, sponsorship of the Olympic Games becomes complicated and resonates with various ethical concerns: while the support of sponsors is crucial for the economic survival of the IOC, is the IOC able to carry out actions not aligned with sponsor interest? More particularly, with the IOC-promotion of sports for a healthy lifestyle, how controversial is the fact that one of the biggest sponsors of the IOC is Coca-Cola and until 2018 it was McDonald's?¹⁵ And with the recent shift of the IOC towards sustainability, how much do they care where the sponsors' business take place?

These issues must be also weighed with other funding streams and other relevant parties and priorities. Another source of funding present is through government and/or state lottery subsidizing via the National Olympic Committee (NOC) which is, in the case of each

¹² "IOC Annual Report 2017: Credibility, Sustainability, Youth," The International Olympic Committee, accessed April 4, 2019, 108, https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document_Library/IOC-Annual-Report/IOC-annual-report-2017.pdf.

¹³ Andrew Zimbalist, "The Economic Legacy of Rio 2016," 213.

¹⁴ "Organising Committees for the Olympic Games," The International Olympic Committee, accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.olympic.org/ioc-governance-organising-committees>.

¹⁵ "IOC and McDonald's Mutually Agree to End Worldwide TOP Partnership," The International Olympic Committee, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.olympic.org/news/ioc-and-mcdonalds-mutually-agree-to-end-worldwide-top-partnership>.

particular country that hosts the Olympics, the main part of the OCOG. This means that citizens of the country contribute significantly to the budget of the Olympic Games through their taxes or money spent in lotteries.¹⁶ In the case of the London 2012 Games, the public sector assembly financed by the government prepared a budget for the Games which accounted for 15,2 billion USD including money from both government and lottery.¹⁷ This number shows that citizens are the biggest sponsors of the Games, which makes them the most eligible to question the feasibility of the Games. This eligibility is, nevertheless, not carried out, as showed in the case of urban development projects prior the 2012 London Games. Public interests were suppressed by corporatization. Contracts for urban development were closed with private companies. Because of commercial confidentiality, it was impossible for the public to gain any power and/or role in decision-making.¹⁸ The London case is just one example showing how poorly are defined and addressed public needs.

Looking into the feasibility of the Olympic Games in greater detail, one sees the tremendous difficulties involved. Andrew Zimbalist challenges the massive promotion of hosting the Olympic Games led by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) towards municipal or state governments.¹⁹ The author explains that the outcome of hosting the Olympic Games is negative in almost all cases and areas. Andrew Zimbalist also enlists costs related to the organization of the Olympic Games, and on the other hand challenges promised benefits both within short and long-run.²⁰ These assertions stand in stark contrast to

¹⁶ Chapelet, "From Olympic Administration to Olympic Governance," 744.

¹⁷ James Kenyon and Clive Palmer, "Funding and sponsorship; the commercial impact of the 2012 London Olympic Games – some considerations," *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies* 2, no. 1 (December 2008): 29.

¹⁸ Mike Raco, "The privatisation of urban development d the London Olympics 2012," *City*, 16:4, 458, doi: 10.1080/13604813.2012.696903.

¹⁹ Andrew Zimbalist is a Robert A. Woods Professor of Economics at Smith College. Zimbalist obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. at Harvard University. Zimbalist has consulted in Latin America for the United Nations Development Program, the U.S. Agency for International Development and numerous companies. He has consulted in the sports industry for players' associations, cities, companies, teams and leagues. For more information and Zimbalist's publication see Zimbalist's Bibliographical Information at Smith's college website: <https://sophia.smith.edu/~azimbali/biography1.html>.

²⁰ Andrew Zimbalist, "The Short Run Economic Impact," and "The Long Run Economic Impact" in *Circus Maximus: The Economic Gamble Behind Hosting the Olympics and The World Cup*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 35-74.

optimistic statements accompanying the bidding campaigns led firstly by the IOC and secondly by governments saying that hosting the Olympic Games will bring many benefits to the city or country not only in terms of economy but also in less tangible spheres such as national spirit and mood, quality of life, sustainability, social inclusion etc.²¹

In contrast to these IOC claims, and supporting the adverse economic outcomes of the Olympics, we can turn to a study prepared by the National Olympic Committees of Austria, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland. The report states that the majority of citizens of these countries rejected potential bids for hosting the Olympic Games because they feared the high costs and also a violation of human rights and sustainability threats.²² Less support from the local population decreases the probability of cities making a bid for candidacy because, after all, citizens are the ones who pay the most. Therefore, with a decreasing number of candidate cities, the IOC is losing its leverage, the image of the Olympics is being damaged, and there is a need for some sort of reform of the bidding process and selection of the host city.²³

Citizens have reason to be worried based on what has happened before. Prior to the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, thousands of Brazilians expressed their concerns regarding protests and riots.²⁴ This concern arose due to bad management of the building process, poor working conditions for builders, corruption behind building contracts and bad relocation of resources when billions of dollars were promised to improve the quality of life for Brazilians in terms of infrastructure. By the end of the Olympic Games, Brazil was left with debt caused by short-sighted investments without any benefits for the people of Brazil.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Olympic Agenda 2020: The Bid Experience," Austrian Olympic Committee, German Olympic Sports Confederation, Swedish Olympic Committee, Swiss Olympic Association, June 2014, 4.

²³ The number of bidders from last five bidding rounds: 2012 – 5 bidders, 2016 – 4 bidders, 2020 – 3 bidders, 2024 – 2 bidders, 2028 – sole bidder. "Bids for Olympic Games," Wikipedia, accessed March 24, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bids_for_Olympic_Games.

²⁴ Dom Philips, "Thousands join the anti-Olympic protest in Rio before Games begin," *The Washington Post*, August 5, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/08/05/thousands-join-anti-olympic-protest-in-rio-before-games-begin/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3eaab5c70fec.

Both the unreasonable redistribution of public money and resulting protests present further evidence that change of some sort is necessary. The funding from the public that should be invested in meaningful projects—in particular, those that support the inclusion of farmers into the food-supply chain of the Olympics. Up to the present, citizens were paying for the construction of the Olympic venues, which barely brings any profits after the Games’ closing ceremony. The reason behind this is a lack of interest from private investors to invest their money into something that is not likely to bring any future profit. It is expensive to maintain these venues and again, citizens of the host country are those who are paying for the Games in most cases.²⁵

There is a demand for sustainability and responsibility from the public. One recent example is the controversy surrounding the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo. The citizens of Tokyo protested against costly replacement of the 56-year old Olympic Stadium prior to the 2020 Olympic Games.²⁶ Learning a lesson from past Olympic Games such as those in Athens in 2004, when opulent constructions built at a huge expense is now being abandoned and falling into disrepair, the citizens of Tokyo call for investment that brings not future costs paid from their pockets but preferably future revenues.²⁷ Responsible spending based on considerate projections should be approached as an important principle of sustainable development since it focuses on the future of the project as well.

Public requirements for responsible spending of public funds is correlates with the recommendation of the IOC from its *Olympic Agenda 2020* calling for “the maximum use of existing facilities and the use of temporary and demountable venues where no long-term

²⁵ James McBride, “The Economics of Hosting the Olympic Games,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, last updated January 19, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/economics-hosting-olympic-games>.

²⁶ “Protesters march against Olympic stadium replacement plan,” *The Japan Times*, July 5, 2014, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/07/05/national/protesters-march-olympic-stadium-replacement-plan/>.

²⁷ Steven Bloor, “Abandoned Athens Olympic 2004 venues, 10 years on – in pictures,” *The Guardian*, August 13, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/gallery/2014/aug/13/abandoned-athens-olympic-2004-venues-10-years-on-in-pictures>.

venue legacy need exists or can be justified.”²⁸ Even though this recommendation is directly related to the evaluation of proposed projects from bid cities, the underlying purpose of the *Olympic Agenda 2020* is to provide guidelines as to how the Olympic Movement and its values adjust to overarching topics of today’s world—“respect for the environment, feasibility and sustainable development.”²⁹

The legitimate question is this: “Why would Japanese citizens allow—and even prefer—their money be used for the support of farmers from lower-middle income countries?” There are many reasons why developed countries should help those who are still developing such as the fact that developing countries' economies are fueling the global economy.³⁰ Also, with the often repeated threat of climate change and its consequences, investment into sustainable development projects should be supported worldwide and targeted especially towards developing countries since they often lack important resources. From a long-term perspective, we can see how this focus will benefit everyone: through preservation of natural resources and opportunistic utilization of ecosystem functions for current and future human needs.

Japan has a long tradition of developmental aid starting in 1954 when joined the Colombo Plan—regional platform for cooperation and realization of developmental aid projects in Asia Pacific region.³¹ In 1974, Japan established its own governmental agency—Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)—assisting with developmental processes in developing countries throughout the world.³² The commitment of Japan’s government to

²⁸ “Olympic Agenda 2020 – 20+20 Recommendations,” The International Olympic Committee, December 2014, 10, available online at https://stillmed.olympic.org/Documents/Olympic_Agenda_2020/pdf.

²⁹ “Olympic Agenda 2020 – 20+20 Recommendations,” The International Olympic Committee, 3.

³⁰ Jim Yong Kim, “Why Investing in Poor Countries Helps All of Us,” The World Bank, accessed April 30, 2019, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/why-investing-poor-countries-helps-all-us>.

³¹ *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Colombo Plan,” (accessed May 22, 2019), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colombo_Plan.

³² “History,” *Japan International Cooperation Agency*, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://www.jica.go.jp/english/about/history/index.html>.

developmental aid and its long history may prove that Japanese citizens are accustomed to the importance of developmental aid.

Sustainability and the Olympics

The Olympic Movement's contribution to sustainable development can be realized through a strong, collaborative partnership between the IOC and the United Nations (UN). The UN has played an important role in the improvement of people's well-being also known as 'development,' and most recently as 'sustainable development'. To achieve such development, in 2015, the UN introduced seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which further supplement Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) implemented in 2000. MDGs were focusing mainly on the reduction of poverty, HIV/AIDS, and illiteracy in the world. SDGs take these challenges further by implementing measures leading to prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future.³³ In the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where SDGs are described, sport was acknowledged as “an important enabler of sustainable development.”³⁴

In sync with this assigned role of sport, the IOC displayed determination to help to achieve 11 out of the 17 SDGs through sport.³⁵ Sustainable development was implemented into the IOC's Olympic Agenda 2020 as one of the three main pillars together with credibility and youth.³⁶

From these 11 SDGs, I will challenge the IOC's role in 4 of these: Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being; Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; Goal 12: Responsible

³³ “Promote Sustainable Development,” The United Nations, accessed April 19, 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/promote-sustainable-development/>.

³⁴ UN General Assembly, Resolution 70/1, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1 (October 21, 2015), 10, https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf.

³⁵ “Sustainable Development,” The International Olympic Committee, available online at <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/News/2017/06/2017-Sustainable-development-en.pdf>.

³⁶ “IOC Sustainability Strategy,” The International Olympic Committee, October 2017, available online at <http://extrassets.olympic.org/sustainability-strategy/3-1>.

Production and Consumption; Goal 13: Climate Actions. I will further provide possible improvement of the IOC's role in those SDGs through a central proposal: the inclusion of farmers from lower-middle income countries who farm in the sustainable regime into the food-supply chain of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. The reason behind the choice of these four particular SDGs is that they directly interlink sustainable agriculture with the Olympics.

Japan, thanks to its geographic position in the Asia Pacific region and political stability, is the ideal site to integrate farmers from lower-middle income countries into the food procurement chain. In turn, this will help the IOC achieve the SDGs and therefore improve the image of the Olympics. Furthermore, Japan's long-term involvement in developmental aid through JICA also implements several projects promoting sustainable agriculture in developing countries of the Asia Pacific region. In the Philippines, for example, JICA assists with the project called "Support to Increase Agricultural Income of Micro-Scale Rice Farmers through Improvement of Farming Management in Northern Luzon."³⁷ This project implements "training for petty farmers in rice and vegetable farming, production and use of organic fertilizer, and post-harvest work after teaching them how to calculate income and expenditure and make farming plans."³⁸

This sophisticated approach from JICA can be further developed via cooperation with the IOC. It would be beneficial to involve farmers from the Philippines in the food procurement process. Farmers would have ensured harvest purchaser in the IOC (or regional Olympic Games Organization Committee) for one or two seasons and therefore it would lessen their stress and helped them to focus on the training provided by JICA.

Similar ideas were presented in pre-game reports for past Games. In "Rio 2016 Sustainability Report," the Olympic Games are here described "as a means to initiate change

³⁷ "Japan's International Cooperation: White Paper on Developmental Cooperation 2016," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, accessed May 22, 2019, 125, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000282089.pdf>.

³⁸ Ibid.

in the Brazilian consumer market for sustainable products.”³⁹ The main goal of this initiative was “to provide Rio 2016’s food and beverage team with a framework to source and supply healthy and sustainable food, in addition to engaging with stakeholders and the government on the potential legacy for Rio de Janeiro and Brazil. The idea behind it is to use the Games as a catalyst for the improvement of the food sector—ensuring access to healthy and sustainable products, of ethical, safe and varied origin, which are accessible to all.”⁴⁰ The main recommendations proposed for Rio 2016 Games were “favor small producers in the provision of food supplies for the Games,”⁴¹ and “provide logistical support to small producers for direct supply of healthy and sustainable food.”⁴² These two recommendations can be fulfilled by above mentioned cooperation of third-party organization (such as JICA) and the IOC (or particular Olympic Games Organizing Committee). This paper proposes the Olympic Games as a mean of a higher promotion of sustainable production from the region to further motivate and benefit small-scale farmers. These solutions can lead to the development of lower-middle income countries together with potential benefits for organizers of these events.

Integrating farmers from neighboring lower-middle income countries can spread the message that the IOC is serious about its claims regarding SDGs and therefore bolster the image of the Olympic Games as a leader in the area of development. The international cooperation required to initiate and carry out the process of development in less developed countries would broaden the mission of the Olympic Movement. In this case, it could be Japan partnering with lower-middle income countries in the Asia Pacific region.

Nevertheless, the proposed solution is applicable not only within the Asia Pacific region but

³⁹ “Embracing Change: Rio 2016 Sustainability Report,” Rio 2016 Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, 83.

⁴⁰ “Embracing Change,” Rio 2016 Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, 83.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

elsewhere. The cooperation of the IOC and third-party organization helping with in-situ actions leading to the sustainable development can be applied universally.

On a broader level, this movement towards sustainability would spread the message that it is possible to build a peaceful and better world not only through gathering people during the Olympic Games itself but also through giving the opportunity to the suppliers from lower-middle income countries. In turn, this short-term opportunity may lead to sustainable and long-term development.

Food and Health at the Olympics (SDG3)

One primary area of focus should be health promotion, which is one of the main Olympic ideals. Sport, beyond a doubt, sends an obvious message that promotes the importance of physical health and activity to spectators. But what about other aspects of the Olympics which relate to health and have a large impact but are not as visible to spectators' eyes? Food is one of these, and it is closely related to sport. Athletes themselves rely on precise and balanced nutrition—its effect on their performance is crucial and therefore they may serve as an example of positive effects of a healthy diet.⁴³ Together with their impact on social media, athletes have the potential to be health-promoting ambassadors.

One of the side-effects of socio-economic development is an increase in the prevalence of overweight, obesity and related diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, strokes and some types of cancer.⁴⁴ A changing diet has been the phenomenon that accompanies development and globalization—the presence of fast-food chains have made citizens of developing and newly-industrialized countries to shift towards a diet with

⁴³ There are many studies elaborating on nutrition and sport performance. See e.g. G.L. Close et al., “New Strategies in sport nutrition to increase exercise performance,” *Free Radical Biology and Medicine* 98 (2016): 144-158, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.freeradbiomed.2016.01.016>.

⁴⁴ World Health Organization, “Obesity and overweight,” February 16, 2018, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>.

higher intake of fat, sugar, and salt. This diet leads to multiple diseases.⁴⁵ Lower- and middle-income countries of the Asia Pacific region which have experienced the socio-economic development are no exception. Between 20 and 33 percent of the adult population were overweight in 2007 in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand—countries presented as potential suppliers of food procurement for the Olympics in this paper.⁴⁶

Since 2018, McDonald's has not been one of the biggest sponsors of the IOC anymore. Its sponsorship was definitely raising many concerns with regard to the Olympic ideal of promoting health.⁴⁷ Elite athletes competing at the Olympics did not help the health-promotion of Olympic ideals either. Despite the assumption that world's most finely tuned athletes would eat healthy food with the highest possible nutritious value, even some of the most iconic personalities of sport such as Usain Bolt were portrayed by the press as eating an astonishing number of Chicken McNuggets per day.⁴⁸ Seeing this in the newspaper, we may get the impression that if an athlete's performance is that great whilst they eat McDonald's, it cannot be that bad for their own body either. Nonetheless, there is the other side of the story explaining why athletes do eat McDonald's at the Olympics and why it should not be seen as a good example of an acceptable diet.

Athletes consuming McDonald's at the Olympics claim that the food at the Olympic village is boring or simply not tasty enough. Also, being a world-class athlete truly means that in the preparation for the best possible performance, one's diet needs to be strict, balanced, and healthy. But with the pressure, training and peak performance required to

⁴⁵ Ambady Ramachandran and Chamukuttan Snehalatha, "Rising Burden of Obesity in Asia," *Journal of Obesity* (2010): 2, doi:10.1155/2010/868573.

⁴⁶ Overweight is characterized by a body mass index higher than 25 kg/m². Asia Pacific Cohort Studies Collaboration, "The burden of overweight and obesity in the Asia-Pacific region," *Obesity Reviews* 8 (2007): 193, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-789X.2006.00292.x>.

⁴⁷ Mike Daube, "Inspiration far from ideals," *British Medical Journal* 345, no. 7865 (14 July 2012), p. 32, available online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23279266>.

⁴⁸ "Bolt's Beijing victory fueled by 1000 chicken nuggets," *ESPN*, November 4, 2013, <http://en.espn.co.uk/athletics/sport/story/254395.html>.

succeed at the Olympics, athletes simply feel that after months of restriction, they are allowed to cheat, especially when they are done with their performance at the Games.⁴⁹

Withdrawal of McDonald's from the IOC's sponsorship program provides an opportunity to significantly change the food procurement at the Games. It creates space for the IOC to close contracts with new catering providers that have different approaches—preferably sustainable sourcing, nutritious quality resulting in positive health impact, and last but not least—tastefulness. The IOC should grasp this opportunity and consider the choice of catering providers whose business is in compliance with Sustainable Development Goals which IOC seeks to achieve.

Sustainable agriculture may serve as a reasonable source of food for the Olympics. Yet it is necessary to stay objective in the comparison of products coming from sustainable versus conventional agricultural regimes in terms of health benefits. The widely spread assumption that “organic” food (i.e. coming from sustainable agriculture) automatically means healthier food than products from conventional agriculture must be analyzed carefully. From the nutrition point of view, the differences between organic and conventional agricultural products are marginal.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, conventional agriculture massively relies on pesticides, and these toxic residues are consumed by us when we eat with an accompanying increase in our risk of certain cancers, reproductive and endocrine systems disorders.⁵¹ What we put into the soil seeps into crops that are processed for human food or grazed on by animals which are later eaten by us.

⁴⁹ Joshua Partlow, “Olympic athletes are gorging themselves on free McDonald’s,” *The Washington Post*, August 12, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/olympic-athletes-are-gorging-themselves-on-free-mcdonalds/2016/08/12/.

⁵⁰ Alan D. Dangour et al., “Nutritional quality of organic foods: a systematic review,” *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 90 (2009): 682, doi: 10.3945/ajcn.2009.28041.

⁵¹ Leo Horrigan, Robert S. Lawrence, and Polly Walker, “How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Environmental and Human Health Harms of Industrial Agriculture,” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 110, no. 5. (May 2002): 449, available online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3455330>.

Also, the importance of sustainable agriculture lies in its direct connection to scarce resources—soil and water. Conventional methods of agriculture do not ensure fertile soil and sanitary water for future generations. Sustainable agriculture, on the other hand, has the potential to sustain these resources and deliver inclusive growth to countries. Therefore, it is one of the main pillars of SDGs.⁵²

The Image of the Olympics and Its Future (SDG 12, 13)

Promotion of health will support a positive image of the Olympics which, in turn, will reinforce one of the fundamental principles that defines the ambition of Olympic movement: “to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.”⁵³ However, with the Olympic Games and its focus on elite athletes at the center of the system and attention, we may find it difficult to understand the idea of Olympism articulated by Coubertin: “to participate, not to win.”⁵⁴ The reason behind this misunderstanding is that the vast majority of people do not find it as attractive to watch the competition of the sport elite because they feel too distant from the professional level of the sport.

Furthermore, “young people appear to be increasingly disinterested in the Olympic Games and competitive sport.”⁵⁵ This lower interest results in a limited audience and decreasing number of viewers who watch the Games and thus is “a major threat to the Olympic business model because, eventually, sponsors will become reluctant to spend large proportions of their advertising budgets on the Olympics, which will lead to a drop in television rights, etc.”⁵⁶

⁵² “Transforming Food and Agriculture to Achieve the SDGs: 20 interconnected actions to guide decision-makers,” FAO, 2018, 5.

⁵³ “Olympic Charter,” The International Olympic Committee, October 2018, 11, available online at <https://www.olympic.org/documents/olympic-charter>.

⁵⁴ Pierre de Coubertin, *Goodreads*, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7574249-the-important-thing-in-the-olympic-games-is-not-to>.

⁵⁵ Chappelet, “From Olympic Administration to Olympic Governance,” 749.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Besides the detachment of certain audience due to the elitist nature of the Games, another reason for decreasing young audience might be the transformation of preferred media platforms. 13- to 17-years old children are known as “Generation Z” and they are typically mobile-first generation.⁵⁷ This preference of mobile devices calls for the adaptation of ways that experiences are delivered to the audiences. The IOC is aware of the significance of mobile devices in Games broadcasting and therefore launched The Olympic Channel at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games focusing specifically on the audience using mobile devices.⁵⁸

Is a possible way for the IOC to get more attention from the younger generation through broadening the Olympic focus on sport to a broader vision of sustainability and development? It seems that the younger generation is aware of the urgent situation of global warming because it is closely related to their future and possible future of their progenies. Fortunately, the IOC is aware of the potential regarding engagement of the young generation into the sustainability mission, as can be seen in Tokyo 2020 President Yoshiro Mori's statement in Sustainability Progress Report.

With people from around the globe visiting Japan in 2020, we will experience what it means to respect diversity, accept one another, and overcome difference and become one with the world. In particular, through this experience, the young generation, who will be responsible for the future direction of humankind, will not only become stewards of a future society based on inclusion. But also gain a global perspective and turn their attention to the challenges of resolving a wide range of global issues such as climate change, natural resource depletion, loss of biodiversity, poverty and the wealth gap, and human rights.⁵⁹

Based on President Mori's statement, we can conclude that environmental sustainability is a topic that will get their attention.

Furthermore, athletes as significant personalities with a large impact on social media can play an important role in further promotion of environmental sustainability and the role

⁵⁷ “Gen Z: A Look Inside Its Mobile-First Mindset,” Think with Google, available online at <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/interactive-report/gen-z-a-look-inside-its-mobile-first-mindset/>.

⁵⁸ Andy Miah, “Media Change at the Olympics,” in *Sport 2.0: Transforming Sports for a Digital World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 150.

⁵⁹ Yoshiro Mori, “Statement from Tokyo 2020 President Yoshiro Mori,” in *Sustainability Progress Report* (Tokyo: The Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, 2019), 6.

of the Olympics in it. Social media posts showing consumption or support of products from sustainable agriculture with the added value of being produced in developing countries and therefore helping with global economic development of those would send a signal that these products are worth buying. Their impact might be significant especially within the younger generation using social media as a crucial source of information. Athletes do not necessarily have to take roaring actions and gestures. LeBron James, NBA superstar and one of the most famous athletes in the world, has been repeatedly reported riding a bike to the gym and back.⁶⁰ Small change in the life of an individual, but with a large impact—riding a bike to work is a good way of exercise and environment-friendly. LeBron James’ Twitter profile with nearly 43 million followers presents huge platform for him—and other athletes who participate in the Olympics—to promote the propagation of sustainability.

The Olympics as a Bearer of Sustainable Economic Growth (SDG 8)

Through the two-pronged focus of health promotion and advocating a positive image of sustainable development to the younger generation, the IOC can begin to fulfill its responsibilities as a leader in this area. At the same time, the IOC must tap into the potential of a particular group: farmers from certain countries, areas, and classes. Looking at developing countries which were successful in their transformation of economies and improved their status, we see a common pattern in which growth of agricultural productivity is followed by a relocation of “people and resources from agriculture towards manufacturing, industry, and services.”⁶¹ This shift usually leads to higher per capita income and reduction of poverty. Development of rural areas is therefore crucial in the striving of SDGs.⁶²

⁶⁰ Jason Gay, “The LeBron James Interview About Bicycles,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-lebron-james-interview-about-bicycles-1533561787?mod=e2tw>.

⁶¹ “The State of Food and Agriculture: Leveraging Food Systems for Inclusive Rural Transformation,” FAO, 2017, v.

⁶² Ibid.

According to the World Bank, 45 percent of the world population live in rural areas. In lower-middle income countries, the number reaches 60 percent.⁶³ Economies in lower-middle income countries have large shares of employment in agriculture—40 percent of total employment versus 28 percent in the world in general and 3 percent in Japan.⁶⁴ In the Asia Pacific region, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Vietnam are specified as lower-middle income countries.⁶⁵ Their levels of agricultural employment vary from 25 percent in the case of the Philippines to 50 percent in the case of Myanmar.⁶⁶

It is necessary to look at the Olympic Games as an opportunity for farmers from lower-middle income countries (but not only from those) to launch or innovate their businesses. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games and its requirements for food procurement present a unique opportunity for farmers to strengthen their position in the market through further interconnection within the Asia Pacific region. For Japan as an island and developed country, it is unlikely that Japanese agriculture itself can provide adequate food procurement for the Games. Its agricultural products import total was \$63.2 billion in 2017, which presents a market opportunity for farmers from the Asia Pacific region.⁶⁷

The entrance of agricultural businesses from lower-middle income countries into the food-supply chain of the Olympic Games would give them the opportunity to gain visibility and therefore improve their position in local and even international markets. Being a supplier for an event like the Olympic Games is a prestigious honor which, if used as a marketing tool, can lead to significant future profits. Furthermore, since the event is so huge and

⁶³ The World Bank, “Rural Population (% of total population),” accessed April 29, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=XN>.

⁶⁴ The World Bank, “Employment in agriculture (% of total employment),” accessed April 29, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=KH-ID-PH-VN-MM-JP-XN-1W>.

⁶⁵ The World Bank, “GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$),” accessed April 29, 2019, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ny.gnp.pcap.cd?year_high_desc=true.

⁶⁶ The World Bank, “Employment in agriculture (% of total employment),” accessed April 29, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=KH-ID-PH-VN-MM-JP-XN-1W>.

⁶⁷ *Import value of foodstuffs to Japan from 2010 to 2017 (in trillion Japanese yen)*, Statistics Bureau Japan, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/649071/japan-import-value-foodstuff/>.

complex, the organizers often negotiate supply agreements in advance which would offer farmers stable and guaranteed profit for a certain time period.

The Olympic Games may serve not only as motivation for farmers since the profit outlook is stable but also as a carrier of innovative principles that promote sustainability. Innovations can improve productivity which is crucial for the improvement of life status of farmers. These innovations might include basic infrastructure, new technologies, and skills. All these can lessen the vulnerability of farmers to climatic shocks and increase their competitiveness in the market.⁶⁸ Innovations could be subsidized in case of technologies or learned as the case may be skills and knowledge under the patronage of the International Olympic Committee, local governments or supranational associations such as ASEAN. In text above is mentioned work in developmental aid presented by Japanese governmental agency JICA which presents a good example of how it could work.

Japan can learn from past cases in order to carry this out more effectively. It was an ‘Aspirational Standard’ for the London 2012 Olympic Games to ensure food products from organic sources. There was apparently no help, however, provided to farmers connected directly to the Olympic Games food procurement to get the certification allowing them to produce food within the organic specifications. Obtaining necessary certification itself is a mostly bureaucratic process which takes several weeks to months. However, the main obstacle for farmers to get the certification is that transition from conventional to organic/sustainable agriculture. That process may take several years because the soil (and therefore crops) needs to be unpolluted by substances abandoned in the organic regime. The same rule applies for animals, but here the process can be shorter because the food can be bought from organic retailers. The longevity of the transition is often one of the main reasons why are farmers reluctant to start the process. Since the city hosting the Olympic Games is

⁶⁸ “Transforming Food and Agriculture to Achieve the SDGs,” FAO, 2018, 16-17.

officially awarded the organization seven years prior to the opening ceremony of the Games, it means there is enough time to help farmers with the process of certification. Furthermore, candidate cities are encouraged by the IOC “to define [their] own objectives, long-term strategy, and vision from the beginning of the bid process and to look at how the Games can be a catalyst for development.”⁶⁹ That means that national governments can implement the plan for farmers into this long-term strategy. They can provide subsidies for the period of transition to motivate farmers to begin the process.

Other countries have done better to achieve these aims though with limited success. In the case of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, the Organising [sic] Committee promised prior to the Games that there would make an effort to help small local producers to obtain the certifications necessary to be recognized as producers within a sustainable agricultural system. This indicates that Olympic Organizing Committees realize the contribution to farmers’ development as an important long-term investment.⁷⁰ That said, there is no evidence proving that the Organizing Committee working at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games truly supported small local producers in their way towards sustainable agriculture.

Conclusion – Doing the Right Thing

With the upcoming Olympic Games in Tokyo, the IOC wields a unique opportunity to make a change in the world. Due to recent occurrences, the atmosphere is more than favorable. In 2015, the United Nations introduced SDGs calling for worldwide cooperation in the goal to reach zero poverty, protect the planet and ensure that peace and prosperity are provided for current and future generations. The IOC vowed to contribute to fulfilling these goals and implement the SDGs into its own strategy known as the Olympic Movement.

⁶⁹ “Factsheet: Legacies of the Games,” The International Olympic Committee, updated May 2016, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/>.

⁷⁰ “Embracing Change: Rio 2016 Sustainability Report,” Rio 2016 Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, 83.

However, many activities connected to the Olympic Games are in contradiction to SDGs and therefore the space for improvement is noticeable. To improve the role of the Olympic Movement in sustainability, it is important that the IOC and others broaden its scope from sport as just as physical activity to athletics for food procurement, farmer advocacy, and sustainability. These processes involve many stakeholders and provide multiple opportunities to apply practices of sustainable development that can create a stronger legacy than the Olympic Games themselves since the events last only a couple of weeks.

Having farmers from lower-middle income countries from the Asia Pacific region as food procurement sources for the Olympic Games in Tokyo is a sustainable development solution that benefits multiple stakeholders: the farmers themselves by improving their livelihoods and situations, the International Olympic Committee by strengthening the image and legacy of the Olympics on a global scale; and the athletes who can enjoy larger variety of responsibly sourced food. Moreover, one of the biggest food sponsors of the Olympics withdrew from their contract with the IOC, which has created new opportunities for new, better partnership that focus on compliance with SDGs. Without McDonald's taking the spotlight, the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee has a remarkable opportunity to find out what is requested.

Athletes can also serve as leaders and stewards for positive change beyond the realm of sports. Their influence on social media is important not only because it has an enormous impact on a wide audience, but because their wide platform allows for promotion of sustainably sourced food and spreading awareness amongst large number of younger generation followers and others. Together, with the support of the IOC, the dedicated work of farmers, and the support of stakeholders, all involved can significantly contribute to the legacy of the Olympics.

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