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# “People Still Believe a Bicycle Is for a Poor Person”: Features of “Bicycles for Development” Organizations in Uganda and Perspectives of Practitioners

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**ABSTRACT**

Bicycles have been hailed by The UN and NGOs for use in social and economic development (Yang & Wu, 2015). However, there is a lacuna of research exploring the value of bicycles for development outside of Europe and America (Sengers, 2016). Specifically, there is a lack of research on the structure and perspectives of bicycles for development (BFD) organizations. This study draws on 19 semi-structured interviews with BFD organizations in various regions of Uganda. We found that: (1) BFD organizations exist along a spectrum; and, (2) the meanings ascribed to the bicycle was unstable and context dependent. We conclude by suggesting that while bicycles are considered useful for a range of development purposes, perspectives on their usefulness vary—as inequalities commonly associated with sport for development are evident in the BFD movement too.

## Introduction

*“[Bicycles] provide crucial mobility access to markets, healthcare, schools... [and] employment opportunities” (Starkey and Hine, 2014, p. 3) commissioned by UN Habitat and Overseas Development Institute.*

Bicycles have been acclaimed by The United Nations and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as an innovative and effective response to socioeconomic barriers in the Global South especially (Yang and Wu, 2015), with reports highlighting that bicycles can be used as a sustainable mode of transportation (Dora, et al., n.d.). Bicycles in this context have also been employed to increase access to education, have been given to health care workers and have been used as entrepreneurial tools to contribute to individual and community economic growth<sup>1</sup>.

Although the bicycle has been valorized as a transformative object, there is limited research that explores the features and perceptions of the bicycle as an international development tool. The study we describe in this paper was designed to help fill this gap. Our focus in this case was on Uganda, a country that has a range and variety of what we are calling ‘bicycles for development’ or ‘BFD’- related programmes. We recognized that our study is relevant to broader understandings of the post/colonial deployment of international aid in Uganda and elsewhere in a context where various non-state actors frequently “congregate to promote market-oriented approaches to development” (Authors, 2010, p. 319). Therefore, our goal was to explore the various ways that bicycles have been utilized for development purposes, the perceptions of people involved, the structure of organizations and the network of BFD. To this end, we devised the following four research questions that guided our study: *(1) what are the characteristics of*

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<sup>1</sup> Organizations such as Coop Africa, Bicycles Against Poverty, Bicycles for Humanity (B4H) and Ride 4 Women have donated bicycles for education initiatives. The UN has delivered bicycles for health related development initiatives <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=32366#.WOvjklPytbU> along with other organizations such as Coop Africa, FABIO, Bicycles Against Poverty, B4H, Bikes Not Bombs, Maternity World Wide and World Bicycle Relief. Bicycles have also been donated for job development, microfinancing and entrepreneurialism from B4H, Bikes Not Bombs, Coop Africa, Ride4Women and World Bicycle Relief.

*the various organizations involved in BFD in Uganda (i.e., how are they structured and what are the goals and missions of these organizations); (2) how is the bicycle being used as an international 'development' tool; (3) what assumptions about bicycles underlie their utilization for development purposes; and (4) what are the perspectives of those involved in such bicycle-driven development on their work and industry?*

The four research questions are highly interconnected and our findings pertaining to each question are best understood in relation to findings for the other questions. For example, findings from our first question led us to begin to portray the complexity of the BFD movement – especially the variety of organizations that are part of this movement and the structure, features and aims of these organizations as they exist in Uganda and/or through their interactions with those in Uganda (recognizing that grassroots and international organizations exist together). Our second and third questions build directly from the first, as an understanding of the structures, features and aims of organizations allowed us to better contextualize claims about the role that bicycle can and does play in international development work, and the range of ways that the bicycle is used as a development tool. Finally, findings pertaining to our third and fourth questions, that focused on perceptions of bicycle-driven development work and the BFD industry both informed findings from questions one and two (as comments from these interviewees aided our attempts to sketch out what BFD in Uganda looks like (i.e., the organizations themselves and international development work using bicycles).

By considering these together our aim is to offer a textured portrayal and assessment (by BFD practitioners) of the movement as well as a foundation for our own reflections in the movement and its contributions (in our discussion and conclusion sections). We see this as a necessary first step in an agenda of research on BFD that is in its initial stages, and hopefully a

departure point for future research that will dig deeper in any number of areas that we allude to in our conclusion and others will undoubtedly identify.

By focusing specifically on the Ugandan context and by using post/colonial theory as a guide—while also considering perceptions of the bicycle as a form of development and perspectives of those involved in development on BFD – we aim here to complement a previous and wider ranging study of BFD that drew on Latour’s new materialist approach to understanding the range of human and non-human associations that enable and constrain BFD work (see Authors, in press). This other study was especially concerned with understanding the global movement of the bicycle itself and the frictions encountered during BFD-related transitions in and through Canada, the US, South Africa, India, the UK, and Sierra Leone (as well as Uganda). The study reported in this paper concentrates on the highly context-dependent experiences with, and meanings ascribed to, BFD in regions of Uganda, while attending to the range of inequities commonly associated with donor-recipient relationships in international development work – referring specifically to how the neoliberal principles that underlay such relationships exacerbated some donor-recipient issues, and how urban and rural, class-based and gender-related inequities were also pertinent.

In what follows then, we contextualize and describe our attempts to answer the research questions outlined above through our study of BFD in Uganda. We begin with a review of relevant literature pertinent to post/colonialism, international development and neoliberalism, and bicycles in the sport for development and peace movement. We then, in our methods section, offer background on the setting for the study, including a necessarily abbreviated, but crucial, overview of information about Uganda’s politics, geography and history. This is followed by an outline of our methods for data collection, and a report on our study findings. We then discuss

our findings in relation to key literatures, and outline what we see as key contributions from the research. This paper's conclusion includes an outline of future areas for study regarding bicycles and development.

## **Literature Review**

### **Post/colonialism and Sport for Development and Peace**

Post/colonialism was a guiding concept for our study, particularly in helping us think more critically about the global distribution of aid (in our case, bicycles or bicycle-focused donations). The implementation of development projects in Africa by those outside of the continent has oftentimes been understood as a neocolonial endeavour – which was why a post/colonial analytic lens would benefit any study of BFD, based around international donors, and in this study, Ugandan-based recipients of aid. Our usage of the term post/colonialism follows Carrington (2015), who employed this terminology—and the use of the '/' between 'post' and 'colonialism' to signal the “ambivalent tension between the surpassing of formal colonial governance and the continuance of neocolonial relations” (p. 113). Carrington (2015) further explained how post/colonial theory can be used to scrutinize the “self-professed claims of Western superiority and universal progress” (p. 107), and how colonialism can be understood as a series of encounters, ideologies and plural phenomena that structure multiple overlapping and interacting histories.

Sport for development and peace (SDP) scholars have examined how sport has been employed from the Global North to 'improve' the Global South, guided by post/colonial perspectives. Forde (2015), for example, effectively summarized issues of concern when he

noted that SDP “projects typically position the Global North as a benevolent and civilizing force, and the Global South as the passive, deficient, and grateful recipient of aid” (p. 960).

Recognizing the growing body of research that highlights how SDP can be understood as a potential neocolonial endeavor (e.g., Darnell, 2007; Forde, 2015; Author, 2014b; Giulianotti, 2004; Author, 2012 and many others), post/colonialism is also broadly relevant to thinking about the broader context for our research – which is to say, we were attentive to the post/colonial history of Uganda as we considered potential power imbalances embedded within BFD. We discuss this history in our methods section.

### **International Development, Neoliberalism and Sport**

Author (2012), drawing on Kidd (2007) and Black (2010), offers a working definition of international development as processes designed with the stated intention of ‘improving’ the life chances and well-being of populations throughout the world, but particularly in countries considered to be low-income. These interventions are known to come in the form of large scale and top-down development efforts and/or small scale and bottom-up ones. For example, Black (2017) discusses how top-down and bottom-up organizations “refer to the *actors and the level of analysis* emphasized by development thought and practice” (p. 9) that are known to be co-dependent and integrative, within an implicit organizational hierarchy of “‘bottom-up’ development typically subordinate to the ‘top-down’ assumptions and practices” (p. 7). Moreover, development discourses have commonly portrayed the Global North as superior and dominant, and the Global South as somehow inferior, as noted by Forde (2015) and Nicholls, Giles and Sethna (2010).

Lindsey (2016) acknowledges that there has been an overall lack of research that seeks to understand how development projects might be perceived differently by those who hold a range



of social positions in relation to the projects. He addressed how SDP is subject to contextual influences across different localities within countries, recognizing the need to explore macro-level issues in conjunction with local perspectives. Relatedly, Darnell (2012) speaks to how SDP projects are nested in power relations that are representative of global inequalities.

Such discussions of inequality and SDP in the current moment need to be considered in relation to SDP and neoliberalism. Here, neoliberalism refers to policies and ideologies that are based around the use of a market rationality and private business approach to social, cultural and political matters – and a view of economic globalization as a driver of the sort of development-driven progress noted earlier. Authors (2009, drawing on Wallace 2004) discuss how SDP NGOs have come to operate as trojan horses for global neoliberalism, by opening global flows of information and commodities through new circuits of cooperation and collaboration that stretch across nations and continents. Connecting these global flows to international development, Lindsey (2016) noted that “global neoliberal policies have forced the rolling back of African states, [as] national governments commonly lack the resource capacity to directly provide universal services” (pp. 9-10). By aligning with neoliberal systems of governance, some SDP NGOs have been criticized for applying market-solutions that do not effectively target historical and social inequalities (Authors, 2009). In our research for this article, we were attentive to how market-oriented, international development driven solutions (or perceived solutions) to Uganda-based problems were operationalized and understood by local BFD stakeholders – and also the range of relationships that differently positioned BFD NGOs had with donors.

### **Bicycles in Sport for Development and Peace**

In recent years, sociologists of sport scholars have studied a range of issues related to SDP. This includes the research noted above concerning neoliberal market approaches to SDP

(Author, 2010; Authors, 2009), along with other work on heteronormativity in SDP (Chawansky, 2015; Carney and Chawansky, 2016), race, post/colonialism and SDP (Darnell, 2007), gender and SDP (Author, 2014a; 2014b), and SDP's geopolitics (Darnell, 2007; Author, 2014a; 2014b).

Despite these strides in SDP-related scholarship, work on the bicycle within the 'SDP movement' has been conspicuously absent, aside from Marchesseault's (2016) doctoral work (described below). This is surprising in light of increasingly widespread claims about the bicycle's contributions to society and the economy, including claims about the bicycle's role in decreasing transport-related social exclusions, enhancing health and increasing an individual's access to employment opportunities and participation in social life (Kenyon et al., 2002, as cited in Van der Kloof, Bastiaanssen, and Martens, 2014).

This is not to suggest that there was not some evidence to stand behind such claims. Bicycles have been studied as a mode of transportation that can increase access to key services and markets, and there has been evidence that the bicycle can be "vital for poverty reduction and rural economic and social development" (Starkey, n.d., para. 1). Based on an ethnographic study of participants in a sport for development and peace programme within post-genocide Rwanda, Marchesseault (2016) highlighted how the Rwandan cyclists who were recipients of aid were also active agents that created their own life narratives within a post-conflict nation. Although Marchesseault also found that hierarchies within the organization were messy and complex, and that structural forms of inequality were present as well – he emphasized the meanings participants ascribed to the bicycle, which in the context of post-conflict Rwanda, revealed that the bicycle was a tool of resistance.

There is also compelling historical research on bicycles and gender – that speaks to both the freedom that the bicycle allowed and symbolized for many women, as well as how women's

bicycling bodies were medicalized and controlled (Vertinsky, 1994), and how traditional gendered roles and barriers to access led to unequal access for many women (Seedhouse, Johnson, and Newbery, 2016).

Such historical findings were echoed in Porter's (2011) study of transportation in Sub-Saharan Africa, which included an outline of how particular cultural discourses led to restrictions around the use of bicycles by women – such as stereotypes of promiscuity associated to women who cycle in these setting, with mobility leading to increased vulnerability of sexual and other attacks. Porter also noted that “ownership and use is widely male dominated as a result of economic and/or sociocultural factors” (p. 75).

We kept these findings in mind when thinking about how class and gender influenced why BFD NGOs in Uganda distributed bicycles to specific populations and how this impacted the utilization of the bicycles in various communities. At the same time, we were broadly attentive to how bicycles were used and understood by those associated with BFD, and the extent to which the structure and organizational perspectives of BFD NGOs were associated with particular understandings of and ways of ‘doing’ development.

### **Methodology and Methods**

This research is situated within a critical interpretivist paradigm – meaning that the research is based on the assumption that social reality is rooted in tensions and conflicts that are bound by material, cultural and historical contexts – all of which influence how individuals make and assign meaning (Neuman, 2003), and, in turn, how knowledge is constructed and reconstructed (Burke, 2016). We note this as background for this study, as we attended to the contexts where BFD work took place, as well as to the meanings that those working in the BFD movement ascribed to their own situations and activities.

Before elaborating on what methods were employed to guide our research questions, in the section that follows, we provide a necessarily abbreviated history of Uganda along with contextual information about Uganda's socio-political context. Note that contextual information is also offered throughout the results and discussion, as a way of explaining and locating particular findings.

### **History of Uganda**

We begin with comments from Kiakara\*<sup>2</sup>, the founder of a beneficiary BFD organization, Mityana Open Troops Foundation (MOTF), who explained how tribes vary in structure and size in Uganda, with Buganda as the largest tribe located in Central Uganda. He discussed how in present day the government has power over tribal leaders, a power that can be traced to structural changes associated with colonial rule. Bøas (2004) notes that Uganda “remains a deeply troubled and divided country in which cultural, political and economic divisions from the pre-colonial past, exacerbated by colonial and post/colonial projects, still have to be overcome” (p. 285).

In 1894 Uganda underwent colonization by the British (Tushabe, 2008). The Buganda interacted with the colonial government and coordinated settlement areas for the British in Entebbe, which proliferated the growth and development of Southern and Central Uganda. The colonial government strengthened the construction of difference between the regions by recruiting the central and southern ‘elite’ from Buganda, while regarding the North “as a reservoir of labour from which the colonial administration recruited men to the army and the police force” (Bøas, 2004, p. 285). Bøas (2004) explained that although Northern Acholiland was marginal before colonial rule, colonialism perpetuated these existing divisions. In this context, the regional and ethnic division of labour deepened the construction of difference

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<sup>2</sup> \*Pseudonyms used for research participants

between northern and southern Ugandans and reinforced social class divides – divisions between parts of the north and other regions in Uganda that remain relevant today. Additionally, the colonial government deepened the construction and embodiment of gender roles by “promot[ing] and adopt[ing] policies and practices that encourage[d] men to join the military, obtain an education, and locate work outside the home, which has resulted in women and girls being solely focused on domestic responsibilities” (Authors, drawing on Tushabe, 2008).

Although Uganda attained independence in 1962 (Atkinson, 1994 as cited in Gauvin, 2013), political turmoil persisted. In the 1960s, Uganda saw “border closures and economic crises” (p. 4) followed by a lack of employment and economic liberalization in the 1990s (Chilembwe, 2017). Although there is some evidence to suggest that Uganda is ‘on its way’ to halt poverty by 2040, and that the Gini effect (a statistic representing wealth distribution used to measure inequality) has decreased from 2009-10 to 2013-14 (Economic Development Policy and Research Department, 2014), this does not undermine the point that “Africa’s position in the international economic arena was significantly diminished by [...] European colonization and the [...] neglect of transportation infrastructure by post/colonial authorities” (Njoh, 2006, p. 28).

Experiences of the first author and lead researcher for this study in Uganda aligned with such claims, as it was clear that transportation infrastructure varied drastically throughout the country—such that, the Northern and Eastern roads had large pot holes and were deemed ‘impassable’ when it rained; the Central region had paved roads and the construction of a new highway from Entebbe; and the Western region (President Museveni’s birthplace—the incumbent president since 1986) had paved roads and signage stating partnerships with the UN and UNAID to develop highways. These variations in development reflected the unequal distribution of wealth across the nation.

Of particular relevance to this research is that bicycles were introduced in Uganda by the colonial government in 1903 and were originally a marker of prestige. However, with the introduction of the automobile, the upper class rapidly abandoned the bicycle – as the bike came to be seen by some as a ‘tool for the poor’ (Kayemba, 2013). Additionally, the stereotypes that some people hold about the bicycle are thought to have slowed the development of cycling infrastructure in Kampala (Auchapt, 2013).

### **Data Collection**

This research is a part of larger Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded study and collaboration between the University of British Columbia, York University and the University of Bath. The aim of the broader study is to, among other things, consider the role of the bicycle within the SDP movement and to further understanding the role of, and issues around, the use of bicycles as development-promoting technologies. Local context matters immensely for this work, which is why data collection for this project has taken place across a range of countries. The questions addressed in this article were developed specifically for this study in Uganda, and our analysis hinged on knowledge of various within-country features of Uganda’s geography, culture and politics.

Through the BFD SSHRC grant, ethical approval was received by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia, York University’s Ethics Board and the Research Ethics Committee in Mbale Regional Referral Hospital, Uganda, in addition to the research licenses from the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology.

The first author did the preliminary online search for BFD organizations and sent a recruitment email to BFD organizations in Uganda. The fourth author followed up with each organization and confirmed their interest in our research and determined their availability and

arranged the interview times and locations. The consent forms and ethics protocol were reviewed with all interviewees and each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity.

In order to conduct this research, the first author travelled to Uganda from October to the November 2017 and conducted semi-structured interviews with nineteen individuals associated with 10 organizations involved with BFD. This included founders, employees, volunteers and mechanics. Additionally, the websites and documents of these and three other NGOs doing BFD work in Uganda were explored as a way of gathering organizational information, and data pertaining to how BFD NGOs portray their activity.

Interviewees were asked about the bicycle's utilization as an international development tool, their involvement with BFD, the structure of their associated BFD organization and the successes/ barriers they have faced in relation to BFD. Following an interview guide, the semi-structured interviews took place in a variety of locations that were contextually specific to the individual/ associated organization, such as in office spaces or outside people's homes.

For 8 interviews, the fourth author of this paper was present, and was integral in this project. She was an encultured informant (Collison Guilianotti, Howe, and Darnell, 2016), as she understood the national landscape, provided cultural knowledge, was not connected to the BFD NGOs, yet organized the interviews with the BFD organizations. Additionally, having an encultured informant who is from and lives in Uganda as a crucial member of the research team from the inception of the project until the writing of the project (and is a co-author on this article) was crucial in sensitizing members of the team not as familiar with Uganda to the range of local issues and power dynamics issues in and around the research locations. This was especially helpful as we attempted to follow through in our aim of adopting a culturally sensitive and less

hierarchical approach to carrying out the project within Uganda while representing the issues and people in this study.

The third and fourth author of the paper connected over a decade ago, when they previously collaborated on a research project related to SDP in Uganda. The encultured informant also assisted with multiple interviews, which meant that the informant spent multiple days with the first author and developed a strong relationship, which allowed them to approach the research more collaboratively. In addition to facilitating conversations and addressing language barriers during the interviews, the encultured informant provided cultural and historical information while traveling to the interview, on the drive back or during the interview.

Throughout the research process, the first author kept field notes—of settings, reflections on interviews and interactions, and reflexive observations—to interrogate and acknowledge how experiences and social position influenced analysis – recognizing that “subjectivities inform all stages of the research process, including the gathering [and analysis] of ‘data’ from the field” (Thorpe & Olive, 2016, p. 133).

Smith and Sparkes (2016) also highlight how “interview talk can reveal the sociocultural dynamics of human life” while illuminating “the ways in which societies and cultures shape personal experience, meaning, decisions, values, motivations [... and] generate insights into the context in which people live” (p. 108). With this in mind, in our analysis we attended to how social and cultural factors may have shaped (and are shaped by) experiences with, and the meanings ascribed to, the bicycle.

The interviews were transcribed, and the transcribed documents were sent out to the interviewees for member-checking, with the intention of allowing for reflexive elaboration and enhanced understanding of co-constructed findings. Palmer (2016) highlighted how member-



checking “engages [in] a process of iterative consent and speaks to the self-reflexive nature of culturally responsive relational ethics” (p. 322).

The data collected throughout this research was analyzed through thematic analysis, which Braun, Clarke and Weate, (2016) discussed as an analysis of “people’s experiences in relation to an issue” to “identify patterns in people’s (reported) practices or behaviors related to, or their views on, a certain issue” (p. 193) to determine common ways an issue or topic is represented. Thematic analysis was an active process, involving “recursive, reflexive process of moving forwards (and sometimes backwards) through data familiarization, coding, theme development, revision, naming and write up” (Braun et al., 2016, p. 196). Thematic analysis allowed us to explore patterns that emerged in relation to: a) the relative differences and similarities of the NGOs involved in the movement and interviewed in this research; b) how the bicycle was used as a development tool; and c) the perspectives of people involved in the movement.

### **Overview of Organizations**

As a way of understanding the global movement of BFD, it was crucial to explore the relative differences between (and shared features of) the organizations involved in this movement, and how these features may be context-dependent. These features were especially relevant for us as we attempted to explain key findings. Among other things, Table 1, below, demonstrates how some organizations were domestic (i.e., community-based) whereas others were international – and how some donated bicycles, and others received bicycles. The relevance of the categories we have chosen to feature in the table, discussed in more detail below, will become especially evident as we report the results – since the ‘International’ and ‘Domestic Community Based Organization’ designations were highly relevant as we came to consider how

members of these organizations described their experience with international development dynamics, and the ‘Bicycle Distribution method’ was key also as it correlated with the structures and mandates of each organization.

These organizations agreed to have their identities public, in order to more widely disseminate the BFD work that they are doing in Uganda. The names of organizations and basic details of the organization are also included here as a reference point reading of the results section. Note that all participants throughout this research have been anonymized to protect their personal identities.

**Table 1: Overview of organizations**

<b>Organizations</b>	<b>International vs. Domestic Community Based Organization (CBO)</b>	<b>Bicycle Distribution method</b>	<b>N of people interviewed= 19</b>
<b>Amuru Village Health Team</b>	Domestic CBO	Freely received bicycles (Bikes Not Bombs and Bikes 4 Life)	3
<b>Bicycles Against Poverty (BAP)</b>	International (donor) /Domestic (distributor)	Sold bicycles (micro-financing)	2
<b>Bikes Not Bombs</b>	International (donor)	Freely distributed bicycles	0
<b>Bicycles 4 Humanity</b>	International (donor)	Freely distributed bicycles	0
<b>Bikes 4 Life</b>	International (donor)	Donated recycled bikes	1
<b>FABIO</b>	Domestic CBO and local distributor	Co-found bicycles with beneficiaries	2
<b>Hope for Humans</b>	Domestic CBO	Freely received bicycles (Bikes Not Bombs/ UOH)	2
<b>Kadama Widows Association (KWA)</b>	Domestic CBO	Freely received bicycles (Comic Relief/ World Bicycle Relief)	2
<b>Kara-Tunga</b>	Domestic CBO	Purchased bicycles for rental/ tourism (Bicycles 4 Humanity [B4H])	1

<b>Mityana Open Troops Foundation (MOTF)</b>	Domestic CBO	Bicycles to be sold (P4P)	1
<b>Pedals 4 Progress (P4P)</b>	International (donor)	Bicycles sold globally to ‘developing’ nations	1
<b>Union of Hope (UOH)</b>	Domestic CBO and local distributor	Received donated bicycles and money (Wheels 4 Life, Bikes 4 Life, B4H), and distributed bicycles to local organizations.	4

For clarification, the community-based-organizations (CBOs) referred to here are beneficiary organizations, such that some employees and volunteers from these CBOs received bicycles, while others did not receive a bicycle but helped to distribute bicycles. Additionally, there were some organizations, such as FABIO and Union of Hope, that were beneficiary organizations that donated the bikes they received to smaller local organizations, such as village saving and loan associations (more commonly known by the acronym VSLA, which are self-organized groups of individuals who act as a community bank for their group’s members). These BFD organizations in Uganda (and most likely elsewhere) had a range of features, and varied in structure—as some were grassroots-oriented, while others operated in a more top-down fashion – although all promoted initiatives (that themselves varied across and within organizations) that utilized bicycles as a development tool. These features and their relevance are explored in more depth in the results section.

Finally, and although there are many differences between the BFD organizations (that we also discuss in our results) in this study, the organizations often had similar overarching goals – at least as stated in their formal mission and visions statements, and as discussed in interviews. Typically, these included a focus on some combination of health, social, community and economic development. The specificities of how these goals ‘came to life’ through the actions of

the organizations will be elaborated on in our results, where we explore how the bicycle was used as an international tool – since disparities between stated goals and actual outcomes can exist.

## **Results**

In this section we outline key findings, with particular attention to: the characteristics of the BFD organizations that were part of the study; ways that the bicycle appeared to be used as an (international) development tool and the range of meanings associated with bicycles in different contexts, and; the perspectives of members of BFD organizations on their work and industry.

What will become evident is that the findings were highly interrelated. That is to say, we found that once we learned about the characteristics of and contexts for the work of BFD organizations, we were better positioned to understand how and why bicycles were being used in particular ways (i.e., as a development tool) and the reasons for some of the perspectives of interviewees who work in BFD. In general terms then, the findings shed light on how ‘context mattered’ when it came to understanding the themes that emerged across the quite diverse set of organizations the first author spent time with in Uganda – and that views of the bicycle as positive, negative, useful, exclusive, a ‘tool of the poor’ and so on (all views reported in our findings), can be at least partially explained by attending to the features and contexts associated with these organizations.

### **Characteristics of the BFD Organizations – And How Context Mattered**

The organizations had similarities and differences in the ways that they were structured (e.g., top-down or bottom-up; domestic or international), where they were located (e.g., urban or rural, environmental and regional location—north, east, west, mountainous, etc.), and their goals

(e.g., community-focused, health-focused, equity-focused, and/or economic focused). We also saw patterns across the categories noted above – which is to say, certain organizations, with particular sets of goals, seemed to be more likely to be structured in particular ways, and exist in certain social, cultural and geographical contexts. Having said this, we will also show that some organizations were complex and multi-featured – and not as easily categorized.

We also learned how the patterns identified for our results must also be understood in relation to a highly complex and dynamic BFD movement. The one element that all of the organizations had in common, as we will show, was a vision of the bicycle as a tool or catalyst for a development aim of some sort – whether it be gender equity, education, economic development, transportation, sustainability, or some combination of these.

#### ***Bottom-up, Domestic, and Community-Focused: The Community-Based BFD Organization***

We begin by highlighting that the organizations involved in this research were structured in ‘bottom-up’ or ‘top-down’ fashions. In previous research, Black (2017) discussed how there is often a hierarchical relationship between top-down and bottom-up organizations – and that there were a set of features associated with each kind of organization (e.g., whether they were domestically or internationally based, and the kind of relationship they had with local communities). Our findings align with Black’s in this regard, although the organizations we studied had particular features that are substantively relevant to Uganda and to the (sometimes) unique roles that bicycles play as technologies of/for development.

In fact, all seven of the domestic organizations included in this study were ‘bottom-up’ in orientation, and that these organizations described themselves as ‘community-based’ – meaning that they began in response to community-specific needs, and most often originated in their communities. ‘Bottom-up’ BFD organizations refers here to organizations that were local,

community-based, small scale and grassroots. It also referred to organizations that adopted an approach to development that was focused on working with and “privilege[ing] the perspective of the historically subaltern groups” (Black, 2017, p.9) to address poverty, inequality and marginalization. The following organizations existed within this category: Union of Hope (UOH), Amuru Village Health Team (VHT), Kadama Widows Association (KWA), Mityana Open Troops Foundation (MOTF), Hope 4 Humans, First African Bicycle Information Organization (FABIO) and Kara-Tunga.

None of these organizations distributed bicycles without assistance from established partnerships with actors in the Global North (i.e., all projects had multiple stakeholders). Therefore, these organizations – what we will refer to hereafter as community-based organizations (or CBOs) – distributed bicycles either on behalf of international organizations (using their connections in the community to enable distribution), or ‘in their own name’ – while still being enabled by contributions from international donors. As we will see later, the relationships between donor and recipient organizations varied in quality and type, although, these recipient groups were always somewhat reliant on aid in this hierarchical relationship.

There was also a range of organizational sizes amongst these CBOs. For example, FABIO and UOH worked with multiple communities and at times held more power in their relationships with their international partners, as they had local knowledge and determined where and how their bicycle projects played out on the ground (compared to other smaller scale CBOs whose projects were often chosen, initiated and facilitated by international organizations).

These CBOs typically shared the objectives of making a more equitable society by addressing poverty, gender inequality, and marginalization – as compared to the international organizations, that often had a broader mandate, and focused on economic development,

education and health. As these organizations were more community-focused, they typically had a smaller staff and volunteer base (especially when compared to the international BFDs). Although the CBOs had fewer staff members, the large community connections these organizations had were crucial for their projects. For example, the CBOs often connected with VSLAs as project beneficiaries who became actors in their communities that challenged the local perceptions of bicycle usage.

Importantly, as much as these organizations originated in their communities, they were also sustained by their communities – which was a key difference between CBOs compared to international BFD organizations. Mukisa\*, the founder of UOH, highlighted how the project “has become something for people that is owned by people”. UOH facilitated and gave BFD projects to the community to lead—i.e., UOH partnered with 15 VSLAs, each made up of 30 women, in the rural community of Apach. Mukisa\* believed that through participation and a sense of ownership, community members would feel motivated to sustain the projects. Similarly, FABIO had a small office staff but worked with established community structures (i.e. VSLAs, schools, Village Health Team groups [VHT], etc.) in various regions—for community activism and engagement.

As these organizations were domestically based, respondents also discussed how they worked with(in) local government structures. These CBOs discussed how they filled a gap by addressing a social need that was thought to be the responsibility of the government, but that was not being addressed by the government. Some organizations received funding from the government to support the bicycle-related objective of helping vulnerable youth with their education (i.e., supporting transport to school) — an investment that was seen and justified as an indirect way of also supporting the economy of the country. Other organizations signed a

memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the government to stipulate the organization's role (to raise money and gather bicycles for distribution) and the government's role in the project (to provide monitoring, supervising, reporting, and connections to communities and beneficiaries who are active patients at the health centres).

There were other financial considerations at the local level – namely, selling the bicycle and setting up bicycle workshops. For example, FABIO used to distribute bicycles freely, but switched to co-funding, where beneficiaries now pay a percentage for the bicycle, and the organization subsidizes the rest. Additionally, some local organizations had established, or were in the process of establishing, a bicycle maintenance workshop to help finance their organizations/ projects, and/or to economically support the community by providing employment opportunities (i.e., providing bicycle mechanic training to community members and youth). These were also seen as 'sustainable strategies' to economically support the community, with the broader goal of decreasing reliance on transient, inconsistent or short-term international funding. As Natukunda\* at FABIO explained: “[O]ne of the reasons we are establishing a bicycle centre, we want to find a more sustainable way of making money, other than depending. That's why we are going to do it very independent from this organization, it will be purely profit making, but it will be also supplementing the work of this organization.”

While CBOs worked most often with community members and local governments, international funders were also often involved. For example, funding came through interorganizational signed MOUs (such as UOH and Wheels 4 Life), international partnerships (FABIO and their European connections) and successful grant applications (KWA and Comic Relief for their bicycle project; Hope 4 Humans for organizational sustainability). As we will see



in the next section though, predominantly ‘top down’ and international BFD organizations had features that were often quite distinct from those of CBOs.

***Top-down, International and Economics-focused: The International BFD Organization***

The organizations in our study that fell into the ‘international BFD organization’ category were: Bikes 4 Life, Pedals 4 Progress (P4P), Bicycles Against Poverty (BAP), Bikes Not Bombs, Wheels 4 Life and Bicycles 4 Humanity. Representatives of the first three organizations were interviewed, whereas the latter three organizations exist in Uganda—and were spoken about by CBOs or other international organizations as partner organizations—but were not interviewed.

We found that, typically, these international BFD organizations were structured hierarchically, beginning with the founder of the organization, a board of directors, a few main employees, and a large number of volunteers that helped with the packaging and distribution of bicycles to BFD recipients in Uganda and/or other nations.

The key feature of this type of organization then was that it operated in a ‘top-down’ fashion. Practically speaking, this was significant for the BFD organizations we studied because it meant that the wealthier and more globally powerful organizations (i.e., those that had a large donor base) that were based in the Global North generally set up projects or established partnerships to distribute bicycles for less powerful recipients in the Global South. This is not to imply that there was necessarily any – or any uniform kinds of – exploitation that took place as a result of this top-down way of doing BFD. Indeed, in many cases these international organizations collaborated with, and were also highly integrated with, local organizations, and the support offered in local contexts would not be possible without these international BFD organizations. Indeed, and although these organizations are presented in two overarching categories, they actually exist more along a spectrum (especially in regard to whether they are

top-down or bottom-up). Having said this, the differences between these organizational types are still generally stark enough that these differences are also reflected in the perceptions of some BFD practitioners, as we will discuss later. In fact, in later parts of this results section we outline perspectives of organizations on the BFD industry and note viewpoints on sometimes disconcerting relationships in this top-down structure.

Although the CBOs were concerned with economic sustainability, they differed from the international organizations referred to here in the sense that the international organizations were guided by a business model on multiple fronts. Daniel\* from P4P, for example, said, “I had a very free market approach, that I find someone who’s gonna be in charge, this is your program, you’re gonna be responsible if you’re gonna be successful. It’s gonna be up to you to be successful”. Similarly, an interviewee from BAP highlighted how the organization created their own bicycle market in Gulu by importing bicycles and bringing them into communities to sell through micro-financing.

Interviewees commented about how the BFD organizations were helping the poor by providing the beneficiaries with an opportunity to participate in the economy. For example, Daniel\* from P4P highlighted that “[w]hen you can go into a small town and put 500 people on a bike you can fundamentally change the movement of goods and services.” In this way, the organizations had a business-oriented approach in how they ran their organization as well as an economic focus in their objectives on the ground.

### **Bicycles as an International Development Tool**

Interviewees representing all of the BFD organizations believed that they were filling a societal gap by enhancing mobility, and thus providing access to resources that reduce barriers posed by physical distance in the rural regions especially.

In particular, representatives discussed how their organizations focus on enhancing mobility through bicycles were decreasing health-related transport barriers, as bikes were useful for increasing access to hospitals and health centres. Interviewees further described how bicycles were often donated to increase the outreach of VHT members and Community Health Teams (CHTs) to sensitize communities about HIV/AIDS (and educate in ways that would decrease stigma associated with HIV/AIDS), and to encourage HIV/AIDS testing and health checks.

The bicycle was also discussed as a catalyst for educational development by reducing the length of travel to school and thus increasing school attendance and educational accessibility. Some bicycle donations were meant to provide children with transportation to school or for parents to transport their children to school. Additionally, through bicycle centres and workshops, BFD organizations provided youth with bicycle-related education, in conjunction with other forms of vocational skills trainings.

Other organizations promoted economic development and saw bicycle donations as a strategy for ‘making individuals entrepreneurs’, so they could contribute to the national economy. This form of development was often connected to agriculture, the main source of income for many of the beneficiaries in rural Uganda. For example, Charles\* from Bikes 4 Life noted that travelling to the market allowed people to sell their crops at a higher price, which increased their income. He speculated that this could positively impact the beneficiary’s long-term health and wealth.

Although these organizations described the important ways these bicycles are used for BFD, there were problems associated with BFD as well, diverse meaning associated with bicycles and bicycle use, as we discuss below.

### **Perceptions of Bicycle for Development: Practitioner Perspectives**

### ***The Meaning of the Bicycle and BFD: Unstable and Contextual***

[T]he image of the bicycle really changes when you go from the rural areas into town where people really aren't farmers and (A) might look down on farmers but also (B) the bikes that we provide it's really kind of like, oh that's a village bike, and it really is I mean that is really instrumental for being able to carry your crops and so well people in town will either want a sports bike, it's like once you move to town you either get a sports bike or you look down upon bikes in general (Brigette\*, BAP)

One of our key findings was that interviewees' perspectives on BFD and the bicycle were situated in, and shaped by, their social and geographic positioning. Put another way, we discovered that the meaning of the bicycle was unstable, as different people had different views on the bicycle's utility as a BFD tool – and on the status of the bicycle more generally – in different places and different contexts (as the opening quotation from Brigette\* suggests), and that these meanings/ perspectives also changed overtime.

### ***Views on the Origin, Brand and Type of Bicycle***

The historical context of Uganda and its regions need to be considered when thinking about the bicycles meaning(s). We found it intriguing that the 'local' bicycle in Uganda actually referred to bicycles imported from India. This was especially interesting because of the large Indian population in the nation following their return to Uganda in the 1980's and 90's, after President Idi Amin in 1972 ordered that they be expelled from Uganda.

Presently, many of the wholesale bicycle shops are owned by Indian men (because they have more capital to purchase containers of bikes), and these 'local' bicycles were discussed as readily available in central Uganda. However, outside the central region, the bicycle shops were typically owned by Ugandan sellers and they sold fewer bicycles (because of the difficulty transporting the bicycles to rural areas and the lack of capital to purchase wholesale quantities), and instead were more focused on repairs and/or spare parts. Therefore, there were fewer bicycles available for purchase in the Northern or Eastern regions.

It is also relevant here that interviewees suggested that people had preferences for what type of bicycle would be most useful in their local environment. In Kadama, a district in Eastern Uganda, one participant noted that the “sports bicycle, it can’t work in, with our community since [in] our community the roads you can see, they are rough” (Miremba\*, KWA). This and other interviewees spoke more highly about the Buffalo bikes (which were donated and constructed specifically by WBR), because they could transport people or heavy weights for agriculture and permit movement through the poor infrastructure of their environment. Additionally, according to Ochieng\* of UOH, in Northern Lira, the Avon brand (imported from India) or Chinese imported bicycles that were most attractive because:

...they feel that type of bicycle is very strong because for people who does businesses and more especially the women that you can find them carrying a whole sack of cassava. [...] Those are the types, it’s there but that one is for leisure [referring to the mountain bike] people fear that one because getting their spares is not easy. (Ochieng\*, UOH).

In contrast to Ochieng\*, Thomas\* of Kara-Tunga acknowledged how mountain bikes would facilitate tourism in Eastern Karamoja, while recognizing also that “at the moment, the mountain bikes are very scarce”. With these different perspectives in mind, it was unsurprising that interviewees of CBOs discussed features of bicycles that did, or did not, align with their community’s environmental and social needs – and therefore whether the donated bicycles they received were especially useful, or less so.

### **The Social and Symbolic Meaning of the Bicycle**

One of the most striking findings of this research had to do with the social meanings associated with the bicycle. Below, we report findings on this topic – referring specifically to the range of meanings associated with bicycles across different contexts.

#### ***The Bicycle as a ‘Sign of Wealth’ and ‘Tool for the Poor’: Regional Differences***

In some context, the bicycle was a signifier of having wealth and prestige – and in others, it was known as ‘a tool for the poor’. In rural areas, it was generally accepted that the bicycle provided access to resources, was a sign of wealth/ prestige, and was a tool that built respect from community members. For example, the VHTs (which in this research were all male) discussed how the bicycle built their status, made them “a person of class” (Akiki\*, Amuru) and a community leader. The males in these cases (but not the females, interestingly) discussed how the bicycle was associated to ‘strength’ in the home and in the community. This was perhaps connected to conceptualizations of masculinity related to the perception that the male should be the breadwinner, which the bicycle facilitated by providing mobility and increasing productivity.

In contrast, it was noted that in urban areas the bicycle often had a negative association as it was known as a ‘tool for the poor’ (Kayemba, 2013). Natukunda\* from FABIO noted this when she explained that she “grew up in the central part of Uganda, which is looking at cycling, especially for women differently [i.e., not as positively] as compared to this [Jinja/ Eastern] part of Uganda [which is more rural, and lower income]” (Natukunda\*, FABIO). This understanding spoke to the distribution of wealth throughout the country as people in the central region had cars, whereas in the rural areas the bicycle was one of the only modes of transportation (as it was not as common for people to own vehicles).

### ***“Those bicycles are for the sick people”: Varying Perspectives Bicycle’s and Health***

Bicycles were sometimes viewed as a signifier of wealth/status (or lack of wealth/status), there were also unstable perspectives associated with the utilization of bicycles for health development. As previously discussed, the bicycle was most commonly referred to as positively impacting the health of people within communities—i.e., it made health-related work easier, increased community outreach, and eased transportation for health care workers. Bicycles also

began to change people's negative perspectives of HIV/ AIDS because the opportunity to potentially receive a bicycle motivated them to get checked for the virus (because when bicycles were donated to that specific population, hospital records were checked to verify that the beneficiaries had HIV/AIDS), and if they were positive, to take their medication. Miremba\* from KWA explained that the bicycle really helped men to get tested for HIV/AIDS because they too wanted a bicycle—and men had more stigma towards the virus than woman. Therefore, these initiatives could work to decrease stigma in the community, encourage individuals to get checked and normalize the experiences of those with HIV/AIDS.

However, at the same time that the bicycle was described positive for individuals and the community, it was also discussed that owning bicycles known to be donated to those with HIV/AIDS could be stigmatizing. Consider the following comment from Abbo\* of UOH:

The challenge they have is the community member now knows that those that have the bicycles, are these ones affected by HIV? Eh? Those are the ones within the community who have the disease. Now one day there's a child who was born HIV positive. [...] She was playing with the rest of the children, her friends within the community, when those children started telling, 'eh you're HIV positive, now your home is people who have bicycles. Those bicycles are for the sick people, eh?' (Abbo\*, UOH).

This issue of stigma was especially evident when the bicycles were branded, and the community knew that those bicycles were donated to that specific population. Namazzi\*, of KWA, described how beneficiaries of KWA who received the Buffalo Bicycles from WBR, sometimes has bad experiences: "they talk bad words on us, whom got the bicycles. Sometimes they say eh, at first, they were saying those people who got those bicycles, they're the ones having AIDS" (Namazzi\*, KWA).

### ***Barriers to Changing Perspectives on the Bicycle***

FABIO highlighted the challenges of trying to change perspectives on the bicycle. Interviewees in this organization noted that politicians and major stakeholders held the belief that

bicycles were ‘for the poor’, and that there was no (political) reason to incorporate bicycles into policy planning— as such planning would apparently represent ‘backward thinking’ (Pojani and Stead, 2015). Natukunda\*explained:

[W]e still have challenges of attitude towards the bicycle usage in Uganda. People still believe a bicycle is for a poor person and that is it. So, we still have that challenge. Even the policy makers themselves, although they are slowly accepting, [the] majority of them think, how can we talk about a bicycle at this area? We should be talking about cars, different models, so we have attitude and we have also culture barriers, especially for women. (Natukunda\*, FABIO).

Although FABIO succeeded in inspiring a non-motorized transport (NMT) policy, Natukunda\* highlighted the perceptions of the bicycle held by people in power, which made it difficult to incorporate NMT into the national policy. She explained that ‘developing countries’ are “moving from cars to bicycles” and that FABIO has been trying to make politicians and people in Uganda “see a bicycle as a trend”. By borrowing ideas from other countries (i.e., the organization’s European partnerships), FABIO intended to alter the mindset of politicians—and hoped that this altered perception would transcend into civil society so that the perception of the bicycle as a tool for the poor would be changed.

As previously mentioned, there were differences in road infrastructure which impacted how the bicycle was understood in different regions. The more urban areas in Central and Western Uganda had better infrastructure, which made it easier for vehicular movement. In the rural regions, though, many roads were dilapidated because of a lack of funds towards infrastructure development. In these rural environments, bicycles were more common and especially useful, as they may have been able to move through dirt roads with more ease than a car. Additionally, throughout the country there was a lack of bicycle parking or distinguished bicycle lanes, which could make cycling dangerous.



FABIO was the only BFD organization that worked in the urban context and had political connections. This domestic CBO looked to challenge and change macro-level issues of road safety and bicycle perceptions. This was in contrast to overarching claims from some international BFD organizations that were not as context-focused and seemed to be more oriented around promoting their BFD organization – as would be expected in the business model adopted by these BFDs.

### **Various Discourses on how Bicycles can be a Tool for Empowerment**

Although interviewees generally shared the belief that bicycles could ‘empower people’, empowerment was understood in a variety of ways. While there was general agreement that empowerment was facilitated by the freedom to be mobile – there was also a gendered aspect to empowerment. Organizations that donated bicycles to groups of females discussed how the bicycles gave them mobility to participate in society, move to their gardens and the market, and attend social events. Another empowerment discourse was associated with ideologies of neoliberalism, in the sense that the *individuals* were empowered to become autonomous actors in their own lives to ‘cycle out of poverty’ by becoming entrepreneurs and participating in the economy. Each of these empowerment modes will be discussed in more depth throughout this section.

#### ***“That is development”: Female Empowerment and the Bicycle***

Some organizations specifically chose females as their target beneficiaries and created projects with the implicit goal of empowerment. The intentions of these BFD organizations were to provide bicycles to women for social integration and economic participation; specifically, with the objective of creating a more gender equitable society. For example, Mukisa\* highlighted why he chose to work with women:

I had to choose to work with women because I feel like a woman has many major primary roles in a home. Where you find a home is empowered that means the woman is the one who is strong and taking lead, in businesses, in organizations. (Mukisa\*, UOH).

Pertinent to note here is that the rural areas of Uganda are rooted in traditional values and are structured patriarchally—especially in the rural North (Branch, 2013). Therefore, these female focused programs highlighted issues of women’s (im)mobility with(in) the gendered structures of society that these BFD organizations sought to respond to or change.

Most of the organizations were aware of females’ positions (i.e. concentrated in domestic roles) in the contexts where the bikes were being distributed – which was why they donated bicycles to females in the first place. Natukunda\* of the CBO FABIO explained the underlying assumption that bicycles would ease work for females:

[B]ecause the women are responsible for most of the work, especially in communities in these rural communities. Women are supposed to take children to school, women are supposed to fetch water, women are the ones that go to the garden. Although it is the men to sell the output from the garden, but it is the women to go to the garden and grow this plant and whatever crops! (Natukunda\*, FABIO).

The multiple domestic roles that are relegated to the women, in the context that Natukunda\* refers to above, is part of the patriarchal structuring. So, by donating bicycles, these organizations were orienting their work around the belief that bikes may make work easier and more equitable for women in rural Uganda, and that the bicycles may alter this societal structuring.

The female beneficiaries that were interviewed also highlighted how the bicycle ‘empowered’ them. For example:

Another development I can see in those bicycles, the way these ladies are using them in their businesses, now some are, they carry their basket, tomato baskets take to the markets, they carry their sweet potatoes, their food to the markets. That is development. (Miremba\*, KWA).

Additionally, Abbo\*, a beneficiary of UOH, acknowledged how the bicycle allowed her to mobilize groups of women (including older women) to meet for their VSLA meetings, which highlighted individual and community empowerment for these women.

Although these responses represent how female beneficiaries embodied the intended empowerment of the bicycle projects, the organizations still faced challenges when distributing bicycles to this population because it was up to the women to overcome community members' perceptions of them, while at the same time demonstrating to others their abilities to be resourceful and entrepreneurial.

***“Is financing a bicycle the best way to leverage change?”: The bicycle and economic empowerment***

The second empowerment discourse driven by these organizations was to encourage the beneficiaries to use their bicycle to facilitate financial empowerment, increase their participation in the economy and drive themselves out of poverty. Bridgette\* from BAP highlighted how the bicycle “is an income generating tool and it’s an opportunity for people in the most deep rural areas to get access to different places [...and] there’s a lot of autonomy” (Bridgette\*, BAP). Other organizations had similar visions; according to Daniel\* at P4P, the bicycles made the beneficiaries more productive as “the average recipient that gets one of my bikes has a fifteen percent rise in income the first week they have the bike, just ‘cause they can get to where they need to go” (Daniel\*, P4P). Other interviewees made similar comments, saying things like the “bicycle is like a kind of revenue” (Adroa\*, Amuru VHT).

Some founders and employees of BFD organizations (both CBO and international) believed that when the bicycles were sold, instead of given freely, an increased sense of ownership by the beneficiaries would develop. Additionally, these participants believed that

when the beneficiaries contributed to the bicycle (i.e., offered some form of payment for the bicycle), it was more likely that they would care for it better, contributing to long term use and sustainability. Daniel\*, for example, whose organization (P4P) was international, but also with domestic distribution responsibilities, outlined how his organization distributed bicycle containers “to people who are responsible with ‘em” (Daniel\*, P4P).

Interestingly, an interviewee from BAP questioned whether micro-financing potentially excluded some beneficiaries who could benefit from a bicycle. We found this particularly interesting because out of the three organizations that sold bicycles (FABIO, BAP and P4P), only BAP questioned whether they were being exclusionary through their distribution method. Bridgette\* from BAP stated how “it’s hard just in general to think about is financing a bicycle the best way to leverage change” because “it’s pretty costly but then I think that there’s a lot of financial empowerment” (Bridgette\*, BAP). Similarly, Bennett\* highlighted some tension between the clients and the organization:

You know when you think about being an NGO, serving a client base to improve their lives, our goal would not be to have 100% repayment. I mean that would tell me that we’re not meeting, we’re not reaching the clients who need us the most. Right? So, we wouldn’t, we don’t expect perfect repayment because [those are] the clients who are struggling and who stand to benefit the most from the bike loans. (Bennett\*, BAP).

Therefore, distribution methods can produce financial tension since micro-financing may, on one hand, provide personal financial empowerment – and, on the other hand, may exclude and further marginalize community members by not giving them the opportunity to participate in BFD in the first place.

The conversation here demonstrated that although the beneficiaries seemed to embody the empowerment intended through the distribution of bicycles from these BFD organizations, there may be a lack of critical analysis by these organizations—as some of them sought to alter

individuals' lives without addressing the larger social structuring of gender roles and why people were impoverished in the first place.

## **Discussion**

In the following discussion, we provide a brief overview of the main findings and connect them to pertinent literatures.

### **Sport and Development Organizations:**

The above results highlighted how the BFD organizations we studied had similar mandates and organizational goals; however, they sometimes approached their projects differently, varied in size, interorganizational networks and global prominence. In particular, we found that domestic CBOs were more focused on local/ community needs, whereas the international organizations were concerned with global issues and economic growth (a point which will be returned to below). We also found that all of the CBOs that took a bottom-up approach and all of the international organizations took a top-down approach.

These findings align with those outlined by Black (2017) in the sense that the bottom-up actors expressed that their organizations were designed to address inequitable social structures, in culturally respectful ways, while being especially concerned with the sustainability of the project. Black (2017) also discussed how SDP actors at various levels perceived that they 'needed each other' more than other actors in global development, addressing how the relationship between top down and bottom up is symbiotic; while recognizing that "very obviously, [it is] an unequal symbiosis, with top down actors and interests routinely predominating" (p. 14). The findings of this research similarly demonstrated that unequal power relations were ever-present – although the balance of power in different phases varied. We found, for example, that top down actors had the power to initiate a BFD project and were

necessary to facilitate success, but that some of the bottom-up CBOs determined how the projects would play out on the ground. In this way, both types of organizations relied on each other to carry out the BFD projects and each type of organization held power at different points in their relationship.

The different organizations also had different perspectives about the bicycle and its utilization as an international development tool— with CBOs focusing on community development efforts (i.e. decreasing HIV/AIDS, providing health access, female empowerment), and the international organizations being more concerned with adopting strategies to ‘make a more equitable society’ or ‘increase standard of living’ (with the underlying objective of economic growth). It was mostly through partnerships with CBOs that international organizations indirectly addressed local initiatives. Black (2017) highlighted that SDP activities are focused on immediate, practical and individualized development objectives that are less attuned to transforming social structures. Like Black (2017), we found that BFD projects captured these same kinds of development objectives, as overarching claims made by practitioners that one could use a bicycle to ‘cycle out of poverty’ insinuated that a bicycle could help the beneficiaries change their social and financial position—especially, the organizations that focused on donating bicycles to women to make mobility accessible to foster entrepreneurs. Also, like Black (2017), we found that BFD practitioners were not always well positioned to address (or even consider) the social barriers that may contribute to social exclusion in the first place, which left a gap in transforming the current social order. For example, the CBOs often lacked decision-making power or adequate influence beyond the local community context – while international organizations were not always privy too (or necessarily incentivized to be privy to) what was happening locally. This is why, in ideal circumstances, international

organizations (with more wealth and greater access to bicycles to distribute) partner with local organizations, that have power on the ground to address the local issues.

These larger international BFD organizations also shared similarities with international aid organizations, as both dealt with concerns about interorganizational competition in the global environment that they worked in (Chouliaraki, 2010). We found that some organizations have begun to, or are considering, branding their bicycles, to increase their organization's recognition and to market themselves as their bikes move through communities across the nation. The focus and desire to brand the bicycles speaks to the competitive neoliberal milieu in which these organizations co-exist, and how, through branding, international donor organizations (re)produce the global in the local. These BFD organizations then (re)produce neoliberal globalization, because they foster "an environment where various non-state actors congregate to promote market-oriented approaches to development" (Author et al., 2010, p. 319). BFD organizations do so by encouraging individuals to become actors upon themselves to increase their productivity and participation in the market—without addressing the social factors that may contribute to why the participants of BFD initiatives are impoverished in the first place. Additionally, these BFD organizations were also concerned about marketing their product to obtain funding, and clients, in a competitive environment where they are eager to ensure that their organization endures.

This critique is similar to other scholars that have criticized SDP NGOs for the application of market-solutions that do not effectively target historical and social inequalities (Authors, 2009). Coalter (2010) addressed this 'new paradigm for development', marked by NGOs linking sport to the politics of civil society and development to fill the lacuna created by a neoliberal state – where NGOs are then needed to encourage community participation, facilitate social development and strengthen democracy. These findings aligned especially well with

Coalter (2010) in this case, as we found that those that we interviewed from large-scale BFD international organizations, in most cases, offered some critique of national governments for leaving gaps in social provision – but seemed to have limited or no reflection on the fact that by filling these gaps they may be (re)producing the reduction of state responsibility. This might well be considered a form of ‘ironic activism’ (Authors’, 2009) – as existing inequalities seemed to be in some ways perpetuated. Consider also here that, although the donations of bicycles to and within communities have increased community and economic participation, there are still privileged groups that maintain a position of power “over others through social negotiations, making development a key site of political practice and critical inquiry” (Darnell, 2010, p. 57).

Finally, this research built on previous work by two of the authors of this paper (Authors, 2009), who identified a need to further explore the structuring, organization and perspectives of SDP NGOs – and the particular role that ‘new’ technologies played in the day to day operations of some of those in the sector. Although this study was about a very different kind of technology, we also found a range of reasons that it mattered that the bicycle itself – as a form of technology that was obviously central to BFD, and had some ‘new’ and older applications of the bike-as technology – was necessary for this form of development work, and why the bike mattered differently for different organizations. In this way, by understanding the features of these organizations, we also came to better understand the key role of a development-related technology across contexts (see also Authors, forthcoming).

### **Context of Development Matters: How Location, Class and Gender Matter**

As various organizations working in different regions of Uganda were included in this research, it became evident how the meaning of the bicycle was *unstable*, as people’s perspectives tended to vary depending on their location. Recognizing that the needs around



bicycles differ, Ugandan BFD CBOs determined the location of their bicycle distributions based on the social characteristics of the communities—with the class and gender of the beneficiary populations often determining how the bicycles were actually used.

Moreover, and responding to Porter's (2014) call for further study of affordability, accessibility and the socio-political environment for bicycle use in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, we focused on how bicycles entered and moved within communities through donations made by BFD organizations. In the Ugandan context, most of the organizations donated bicycles to people in the rural regions of the country— which was perhaps unsurprising, as bicycles have previously been studied as a mode of transportation to increase access to key services and markets, with evidence supporting that they have been “vital for poverty reduction and rural economic and social development” (Starkey, n.d., para. 1). However, as noted in the results section of this article, distribution methods produce various challenges—e.g., donating bicycles freely may limit the sense of ownership beneficiaries feel towards their bicycles, or alternatively, micro-financing can provide personal financial empowerment, but may also exclude community members who may benefit the most from owning a bicycle, but whom are unable to participate due to lack of financial capital.

One of our most striking findings here though relates to the different meanings we found to be associated with bicycles (in Uganda) in different contexts at different times. The research revealed, for example, that the bicycle could have negative connotations as well as positive ones – as respondents told us about the bicycle as a shared ‘village bicycle’, a tool for the poor, a signifier of illness (HIV/AIDS), and more. Our findings here offer some nuance to claims by Raballand, Macchi, and Petracco (2010; see also Starkey, n.d.; Starkey, and Hine, 2014) about how bicycles were understood and taken up in rural settings. We found, uniquely, that the

political climate and attitude of transportation in urban settings (as well as the class dynamics identified by others) are relevant factors.

Other key findings from this study that inform literature on the context of development pertained to the fact that many of the organizations donated bicycles only to women – with the specific goal of giving women the opportunity to participate more fully in society, and thus reducing gender inequality related to transport exclusion, and economic participation. These findings are related to Porter’s (2011) study in Sub-Saharan Africa, which discussed how cultural discourses constrained women’s use of bicycles, due to gendered stereotypes and that “ownership and use is widely male dominated as a result of economic and/or sociocultural factors” (p. 75). The findings of this research aligned with Porter (2011) as we also highlighted the importance of considering how the issue was not only one of access to bicycles for women, but also the barriers that impact how bicycles are used. Our study differed from Porter’s (2011) as Porter offered broader insights on the utilization of bicycles by females – while we explored development initiatives that were created to donate bicycles specifically to females, and the aims and complexities of this work. For example, we found that if women were given a bicycle through a BFD programme, not only did they use the bicycle in a variety of different ways, but they shared their bicycle with other females and together challenged the perceptions of women in their communities. In some respects, this is reminiscent of Marchesseault’s (2016) argument that recipients of aid in a development and peace programme used the bicycle to express their agency in post-conflict Rwanda. We also found that although BFD organizations may be reducing gender barriers to accessing bicycles, respondents noted how bicycle usage may also reflect extant gendered roles (i.e. males using their bicycles for work and agriculture and females using their bicycles for domestic and family duties). Specifically, by focusing on donating bicycles to

females, particular organizations were therefore reducing barriers to accessing bicycles – which we found to be useful for many women socially and economically.

### **Conclusion**

In many respects, this research began as a response to the UN Habitat’s commissioned report that claimed “[bicycles] provide crucial mobility access to markets, healthcare, schools... [and] employment opportunities” (Starkey and Hine, 2014, p. 3). This research offered important context and complexity to this rather sweeping statement, as we found that the meanings assigned to the bicycle shifted and were sometimes contradictory, depending on the context that the bicycle moved within and were understood in. In fact, by speaking to people who occupied different social positions, and who were directly involved in BFD in Uganda, we found that the way the bicycle was discussed was oftentimes aligned with the common way that the value of sport has been over-stated. It’s not that we found that bicycles were not useful, but a key finding here was that many BFD organizations thought that a bike could be used to solve a whole range of development issues—when it was clear from our study that the ‘bikes solves problems’ narrative was also fairly simplistic. That is to say, one of our findings was that BFD organizations donated bicycles in a neoliberal milieu that encouraged individual productivity, empowerment and economic participation – none of which necessarily target the root cause of the problems that these NGOs were trying to respond to.

While recognizing that traditional understandings of generalizability were not especially relevant to this highly contextualized project. We were, however, sensitive to *intersectional generalizability*—meaning respectfully working with communities to track “patterns across nations, communities, homes, and bodies to theorize the arteries of oppression and colonialism” (Fine, Tuck & Zeller- Berkman, 2008, p. 440). In light of the research goals and sensibilities, this

way of seeing the data helped us recognize how nuances that existed at the global and local were simultaneous and interconnected and reflective of global patterns that exist in other localities (Fine et al., 2008). We also acknowledge that this research may not be representative of other countries involved in the BFD movement – however, by exploring multiple regions (and contradictions) in one nation, and connecting the findings to patterns of SDP, post/colonialism and the neoliberal deployment of aid, we aimed to connect our findings to broader issues and patterns that extend well beyond Uganda, while having remained highly cognizant of, and accountable to, place.

Following Porter (2014), we call for more research that focuses on bicycles and looks at the socio-political landscape of transportation—as it is not only having access to a bicycle that impacts mobility, but also the environments in which people move. Specifically, we see value in further research into the contexts where BFD takes place, and also on other forms of SDP that rely on movement technologies to encourage individualized/ community development. We also see value in exploring how mobility-related research – and especially the voices of those working for domestic CBOs that use movement technologies to promote development – is (and is not) considered by policy makers who design environments for and promote cultural messages about a range of mobility options, including the bicycle.

Practical reflections that may lead to improvements in the work of these various organizations and other stakeholders in the movement include, that it is important to talk to people in the local communities that received aid about what bicycles would work best for them in their environment. The regional location of recipients determined the type of bicycle needed and how the bicycle was going to be used (i.e., Karatunga needed sports bikes for the North-Eastern mountainous Karamoja region, while KWA found that Buffalo bikes worked best for the

roads of their district and UOH was satisfied with local Indian bikes for a multitude of reasons). We also found, for example, that it was important to ensure that the local communities had access to a knowledgeable mechanic (and that individuals in the community were trained) and that the donation of spare parts could contribute to the longevity of previously donated bicycles. Various organizations also spoke about establishing a revolving fund, which could contribute to the sustainability of domestic CBOs and their BFD projects. According to Mukisa\* of UOH, a supplemental \$10USD donation with each bicycle would support the shipment and taxation costs, increasing the ease of delivery. Recognizing the significance attached to the bicycle amongst most of the interviewees, there is a need for the government and politicians to consider bicycle friendly policies that will enable bicycle accessibility and non-motorized transportation (including reduced taxation on imported bicycles and bicycle lanes). BFD organizations should think through considerations, such as these, that could contribute to project longevity, bicycle sustainability and local non-motorized transportation advocacy.

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