



Sport and Play for Traumatized Children and Youth

**An assessment of a pilot-project in Bam, Iran
by the Swiss Academy for Development (SAD)**

Valeria Kunz

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Managing Social Change and Cultural Diversity

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	5
<hr/>	
1 Introduction	6
<hr/>	
2 Conceptual Framework	7
2.1 Psychological trauma and disaster	7
2.2 Sport as a tool for psychosocial rehabilitation	7
2.3 Strengthening resiliency	7
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3 The Project 'Sport and Play for Traumatized Children and Youth in Bam, Iran'	8
3.1 Project background	8
3.2 Project goals	8
3.3 Project implementation	9
3.4 Project activities	9
<hr/>	
4 Monitoring and Evaluation Methods	11
4.1 Monitoring and evaluation concept	11
4.2 Monitoring and evaluation tools	11
4.2.1 Weekly reports of the coaches	11
4.2.2 Interviews with families	12
4.2.3 Questionnaires from the gender survey	12
4.3 Assessment of the monitoring and evaluation methods	12
<hr/>	
5 Experiences and Lessons Learnt from the Project	14
5.1 Children's and youth's interest in the sport and play activities	14
5.1.1 Participation	14
5.1.2 Motivation	14
5.2 Progression of physical and mental wellbeing	15
5.2.1 Observations of coaches	15
5.2.2 Observations of parents	16
5.2.3 Two examples	16
5.3 Social cohesion and social integration	17
5.3.1 Initial hostilities	17
5.3.2 Improvements	18
5.4 The role of the coaches	20
5.4.1 Relationship between coaches and children	20
5.4.2 Relationship between coaches, children and their parents	22
5.4.3 Coaching the coaches	24
5.5 Gender specific issues	25
5.5.1 The importance of infrastructural conditions	25
5.5.2 Gendered norms on behaviour and clothing	25
5.5.3 Sexually segregated classes	26
5.5.4 Other obstacles for girls' participation	27

6 Conclusion	29
7 References	31
Appendix	32
Appendix 1: Weekly Report – Questions	32
Appendix 2: Interviews with Families	33

Table of Figures

Table 1: Schedule of project activities (March 2005)	9
Graph 1: Parents' opinion towards the statement <i>"I noticed a change in his/her behaviour (attitudes, coping with daily life), since he/she has started to participate in the sport activities"</i> (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)	16
Graph 2: Parents' opinion towards the statement <i>„The participant (boy/girl) likes to go to the sport activities.“</i> (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)	16
Graph 3: Girls' and boys' opinion towards the statement: <i>"I usually share my private problems with my coach."</i> (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)	20
Graph 4: Girls' and boys' opinion towards the statement: <i>„If I could pick one out of these coaches, I would choose:"</i> (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)	20
Graph 5: Girls' opinion about the statement <i>„I feel more comfortable playing just with girls“</i> and boys' opinion about the statement <i>"I prefer to have only boys in my group."</i> (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)	26
Graph 6: Parents' opinion towards the statement <i>„I think male coaches should be able to teach girls as well.“</i> (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)	26
Graph 7: Girls' opinion towards the statement <i>„The two most important of the above mentioned aspects are:"</i> (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)	27

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1 Introduction

A natural disaster such as the earthquake that struck the city of Bam, Iran in the early morning of December 26, 2003 not only destroys infrastructure and buildings, but also affects individuals on a mental level and disrupts society as a whole. The first priority of humanitarian organizations after such an incident is to assure that the basic needs of the affected population are met. But apart from that, it has to go beyond mere material and technical interventions, as well, and think of ways in which to support the population in coping with the traumatic experiences each individual has made and in rebuilding social relations that have been torn apart. It is this psychosocial rehabilitation process, which is the foundation for healthy and sustainable development in the future.

Effective instruments on how to support a post-disaster rehabilitation process in the framework of humanitarian assistance are still being developed. Sport and play have recently gained attention as possible instruments for this purpose. The project “Sport and Play for Traumatized Children and Youth in Bam, Iran” of the Swiss Academy for Development (SAD) was a pilot project conducted in this field.

This report summarises the experiences gained and lessons learnt from the project in Bam, thereby trying to indicate the potentials and constraints of using sport and play as tools for the psychosocial rehabilitation of children and youth in a post-disaster situation. This could serve as a guideline and an inspiration for future projects in this field.



2 Conceptual Framework¹

2.1 Psychological trauma and disaster

When faced with a disaster, the experience of terror and helplessness in people is identical all around the world, whatever the cultural background. That such experiences result in psychological trauma for many of the affected individuals is therefore a common consequence after a disaster event. In the face of such a serious threat to life, the person's response is often one of intense horror, fear and/or helplessness or in children, the response often involves disorganised or agitated behaviours (WHO 2005).

Although psychological trauma is widely recognised by the international community as one of the terrible consequences of disasters, there is still an ongoing debate on how to address this issue in the context of humanitarian assistance. In particular, the use of Western models of mental health interventions and psychopathology to help mass victims of disasters in non-Western contexts has come under critique. Their effectiveness in other cultures has been questioned, since they often cannot meet the moral and spiritual needs of the affected population. Moreover, when it comes down to creating mental health services in the field, it is clear that putting a psychologist or a psychiatrist behind each victim is financially not feasible in the context of humanitarian assistance, with scarce resources that have to cover the basic needs of the population, in the first place.

2.2 Sport as a tool for psychosocial rehabilitation

Under such circumstances, using sport and play as instruments to support psychosocial rehabilitation from post-disaster trauma, especially of children and youth, could serve as an interesting alternative. Sport and play are activities, which are very popular all around the world, and can therefore be used in various forms and in different cultural contexts. Moreover, sport can offer a form of collective support of a group, through which many individuals are helped in a cost-effective way.

Sport has positive impacts on both the level of the individuals and the group/community level of society. This makes it an ideal instrument for

the psychosocial approach to overcome post-disaster-trauma. The psychosocial approach points to a non-medical model of rehabilitation, which addresses the resolution of stress or trauma, both on the individual and on the community level, via activities that attend to social and psychological issues in gentle and non-intrusive ways. These activities include a focus on community empowerment, based on the respect of local culture and traditions, and helping the individual through helping the community by supporting collective resiliency.

2.3 Strengthening resiliency

The experience of trauma does not necessarily result in a psychiatric illness and in many respects, an individual's normal coping mechanisms are enough to recover from the traumatic experiences. This adaptation process is often referred to as resiliency and can be described as an inner strength, responsiveness and flexibility that either enables individuals to withstand stress and trauma completely, or helps them to be able to recover to a healthy level of functioning more quickly after a traumatic event. Instead of focusing on the vulnerability and psychopathology of the affected populations, their capacity to draw from their own mental and moral resources is thus emphasised.

The use of sport and play by psychosocial sports programs draws on a natural predilection of children to play for the uses of assisting recovery from trauma and the support of existing strengths. Sports and play activities can assist children and youth to non-verbally access, express and resolve the myriad of issues they face, by giving them a less confrontational means to address problems that they often do not have the intellectual or emotional capacity to deal with otherwise. As children's problems primarily manifest socially and behaviourally during and after a major disaster, sports can be a neutral and safe “ground” in which to gain stability. Especially team sports could also be a very attractive tool to create and foster team spirit and social cohesion, to strengthen mutual trust, to learn accepting rules and discipline, to promote social integration, and - in the end - to bring back a sense of normality into their shattered lives.

¹ This section is based on the publication: Henley, Robert (2005): Helping children overcome disaster trauma through post-emergency psychosocial sports programs. Working paper published by the Swiss Academy for Development, Biel/Bienne.

3 The Project 'Sport and Play for Traumatized Children and Youth in Bam, Iran'

3.1 Project background

On the 26th of December 2003, a devastating earthquake struck the city of Bam, Iran and its surroundings. The historic citadel of Bam, an ancient Silk Road city, mostly constituted of mud brick constructions, was almost entirely destroyed in the earthquake. Around 30'000 inhabitants died, similar numbers were injured and over 75'000 became homeless.

A worldwide appeal for help was issued by the United Nations and by the Iranian government and several national and international humanitarian aid organisations started their work to address the urgent needs of the affected population and to facilitate a smooth transition from the immediate rescue and relief phase to a medium and long-term reconstruction and recovery phase. The survivors of the earthquake were relocated to homeless camps, where they were accommodated in prefabricated housing units. Those who had no financial means to find an alternative were living there until the camps were gradually dissolved in early 2006. The living situation was often precarious in these camps, the space for each family being very restricted and equipped with very basic infrastructure.



The most serious consequence of the earthquake was not the destroyed homes and infrastructures of the residents but the terrible experiences and losses they had to suffer. The earthquake has disrupted lives, families and social bonds and has led to emotional scars and psychological traumas. There is hardly a family without any members lost in the earthquake. The most vulnerable group of the population in such times of crisis are children and youth. Official numbers state that 6'500 children have become orphans due to the earthquake. All children have suffered losses among their family members and friends and have lived through terrible experiences during the earthquake. Many of them were hurt and a significant number will remain permanently disabled. Displaced into the homeless camps, they were torn out of their familiar environment and had to live in precarious living conditions, without anything to do. For them, the project 'Sport and Play for Traumatized Children and Youth in Bam, Iran' was designed.

3.2 Project goals

Most importantly, the project aimed to support the psychosocial rehabilitation process in the homeless camps in the earthquake-affected area of Bam. By means of sport and other game-based activities, children and youth were offered a pastime structure that could serve as a stable social background, help to channel emotions, frustration and aggression, improve mental and physical wellbeing and promote values such as teamwork and fair-play that are the basis for a peaceful environment. Furthermore, it was planned to combine the sport and play activities with other educational inputs, such as health education (e.g. drug- or HIV/AIDS prevention).

In short, the primary goals of the project are the following:

- To improve the physical and mental wellbeing of the participating children and youth.
- To provide useful leisure time activities that also promote norms and behaviours important for coping with daily life.
- To promote basic values through team sport activities, thereby laying the foundations for peaceful and respectful social cohesion and social integration (including gender equality).
- Provide a platform for the information and discussion of health issues (including drugs,

violence, HIV/AIDS, hygiene).

- To give the parents/relatives some relief and time to be on their own.
- Capacity Building and empowerment of local coaches and project staff.
- To measure scientifically the impact of sport and play activities on psycho-social well-being of involved children and youth to inform similar future projects.

3.3 Project implementation

The sport and play activities were initially implemented locally through the Czech partner organization People in Need (PIN). In August 2004, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Iranian dedicated authority, the Bam affected area-Task Force (TR). The suggestion of starting two sport centres in the homeless camps was fully agreed by the TR. After an assessment of the situation, the camps Amir Kabir and Shahid Rajaie were chosen for the project activities, both entirely lacking psycho-social support for the children and youth. Two protected warehouses were organised for the sport and play activities to be run. As a third place for the activities, the village of Baravat, distanced 10 km from Bam, was chosen, also strongly affected by the earthquake, and equally lacking external support for the resident's psychosocial rehabilitation. The sport federation in Baravat was enthusiastic about the project and allowed to conduct the afternoon activities in the Baravat stadium, which had only been partly damaged by the earthquake.

3.4 Project activities

All three locations were equipped with sports tools such as football gates, table tennis tables, rackets, mattresses for gymnastic etc. Professional and experienced sports coaches were chosen out of the local population. In order to manage the project locally, Jaleh Saboktakin, a talented young Iranian woman was recruited. By the end of October 2004, all three centres were opened and activities began. The project stimulated a big interest in the children almost immediately, with many joining every day.

Over time, around 300 girls and boys from 6 to 18 were participating in the activities. They were divided into the different groups according to age,

gender and sport interest. In particular, popular sports such as football, volleyball, basketball, gymnastics, karate and table tennis were offered by the coaches, initially in twelve different courses.

A monitoring and reporting system was introduced, which helped to identify which classes were popular among the children and which not. Therefore, the initial schedule was changed several times and activities that were not well visited were cancelled. This concerned the boys' volleyball, basketball and ping-pong classes, because a majority of the boys was rather interested in playing football, as well as the girls' volleyball class in Baravat. The following table shows the program activities as they were presented in March 2005:

Location & Time	Activity
Baravat	
Sun, Tues, Thurs, 14-16h	Gymnastics for girls
Sat, Mon, Wed, 14-16h	Teakwondo for boys
Sat, Mon, Wed, 14-16h	Ping-pong for girls
Sun, Tues, Wed, 14-16h	Football for boys
Amir Kabir	
Sun, Tues, Thurs, 14-16h	Volleyball & ping-pong for girls
Sat, Mon, Wed, 14-16h	Football for boys
Shaid Rajaie	
Sat, Mon, Wed, 16-18h	Basketball for girls
Sat, Mon, Wed, 14-16h	Volleyball for girls
Sun, Tues, Thurs, 14-16h	Football for boys

Table 1: Schedule of project activities (March 2005)

The children and youth were so fond of the common activities that they often asked for other activities besides the official timetable. Thus from January 2005, several trips and picnics in the countryside, as well as sporting competitions were organised for them. Through sponsors, sport outfits and shoes were obtained and distributed within the different teams, which was appreciated by the children and strengthened their identification with the project activities.

Over the course of 2005, daily recreational activities were expanded to include information and

education on health, nutrition and drugs, as well as conflict management and violence prevention programmes. In parallel to this, workshops were offered to further educate coaches on sport didactics and psychosocial issues.

The first phase of the pilot project was extended for two more months than it was originally planned - until the end of May 2005. Due to the success of the project and the expressed wishes by the coaches, the children and their families, it was decided that the project activities will be continued beyond this first phase and several options on how to continue the project after the contractual withdrawal of PIN, were taken into the consideration. The best option was that the Swiss Academy for Development (SAD) will continue to implement the project directly through the local project manager Jaleh Saboktakin. She had been involved with the project almost since the beginning and was able to manage the project activities very successfully until March 2006. In August 2005, the camp administration claimed one of the warehouses back that was used for the sport activities. The warehouse of the other camp contained further space and it was thus decided to organize a minibus, with which the children were transported between their home camp and the warehouse of the other camp.

From December 2005 on, the camps were gradually being dissolved and most families were moving back to Bam or nearby villages. New perspectives for the project activities to be continued were thus identified. The aim was to transfer the project into

local structures and to place it under independent, local management in the course of the year 2006, in order to ensure its long term sustainability. After a transitional period, in which the management capacities of the local team were strengthened, a complete handing over of the project responsibility took place. A local project management team, consisting of the motivated coaches and supported by Tahere Habibollahi (the former assistant of the project manager) will be independently leading activities with the children and youth in the long run. An arrangement with local authorities was made and thanks to their support, one of the warehouses was donated to the project. In addition, a plot of land was contractually ensured for the warehouse to be constructed in a poor district of Bam. It was also decided that the warehouse should provide the women and girls in the area an opportunity to do sports, in the first place. While it is culturally accepted for boys to do sports and play in public, it is generally not culturally accepted for girls to do so. They are thus dependent on doing sports in enclosed infrastructure. For the boys in Baravat, the existing taekwondo and football activities will be carried on by the same coaches. Moreover, almost all female coaches are ready to carry out activities with girls at the new location of the warehouse in Bam. With Nestlé Iran, a donor could be found to ensure the financial means to cover all running costs of the project for some future time, as well. The opening of the new sports centre was celebrated with an inauguration ceremony on June 11th, 2006, which state representatives, the Bam Task Force, the city major, the media and the Bam sports federation attended.



4 Monitoring and Evaluation Methods

4.1 Monitoring and evaluation concept

In general, the purpose of monitoring and evaluation is the measurement and assessment of the performance of a project. It can help an organisation to extract, from past and ongoing activities, relevant information that can be used as a basis for re-orientation and future planning, and to demonstrate results as part of accountability to key stakeholders (UNDP 2002:5).

The purpose of the monitoring and evaluation of the pilot project in Bam was to determine the contribution sport and play activities have made towards the psychosocial rehabilitation process of the participating children and youth. Such a rehabilitation process is complex and involves rehabilitation on the level of the individual, of social relations (groups, families, friendships), and of society as a whole, which all are mutually dependent and influenced by a variety of factors (culture, politics, socioeconomic development, etc.). Moreover, rehabilitation is not a linear process that will restore the pre-disaster situation of the society, but it is rather a long-term, open-ended social process. An evaluation of the project "Sport and Play for Traumatized Children and Youth" must therefore be seen as being embedded into such a complex post-disaster rehabilitation process. Moreover, the project being a pilot project in the field of psychosocial rehabilitation through sport and play, it would not have made sense to stick to some predefined goals and to just measure the impact of the project with regard to these goals.

In the light of these considerations, it was decided to conduct an impact evaluation with ongoing project monitoring. Such an ongoing project monitoring provides flexibility to capture the many facets of rehabilitation in this context while allowing the process of the project and its goals to evolve. Monitoring and evaluation was thus integrated into the project and conducted in a participatory manner to examine what functioned and what not and, most importantly, why some strategies have led to success and others not. Integration allowed the local project manager, who was working clo-

sely together with the involved coaches, children and parents, to adapt the monitoring system in order to make it more useful and accurate for the context. Insights gained out of a recognition of the potentials and constraints of the sport and play activities, which were identified by the monitoring system, informed project activities to further improve their impact.

4.2 Monitoring and evaluation tools

The main tools used in the evaluation were the weekly reports of coaches and the family interviews. The findings were triangulated with results from a gender survey questionnaire undertaken beforehand. These sources of data are described below.

4.2.1 Weekly reports of the coaches

The weekly reports of the coaches² are the main source of information among the monitoring and evaluation tools of the project.

At first, daily reports about the situation in each class were written by the coaches themselves. In Baravat sport centre, the reporting started in the beginning of November 2004, in Amir Kabir and Shahid Rajaie by the end of November 2004, due to the later start of the activities. The results from the daily reports were weekly summarized. But after 6 weeks, it became clear that the daily reporting was too demanding for the coaches and hence did not provide the expected results. In January 2005, the reporting system was thus changed into oral weekly reports, which proved to be more effective.

For the once-a-week report, the coaches had more time and could therefore give more detailed descriptions about their observations concerning psycho-social issues, not only on the children's sport performance. The weekly reports took the form of a structured interview (see appendix 1), held by the project manager Jaleh Saboktakin, with mostly open questions, plus a table to collect some quantitative data (number and age of participants, injuries, material broken/lost, etc.). The open questions covered issues such as the general atmosphere, group dynamics, individual troublemakers, children that they perceived as suffering from trauma, the relationship between the coach

² Unfortunately, the reports of one coach are lacking, namely Reza Ramin, coach of boy's taekwondo class in Bavarat. He was already holding this class successfully before the earthquake and therefore, the project management did not consider it necessary to ask for a weekly reporting of him. This is a pity, though, because he seemed to have established a very good relationship with the boys of his class and it would have been interesting to get more information on this.

and the children, changes in the children's behaviour, measures taken by the coach, etc.

The weekly reports were meant to serve as a means of monitoring, by which problems within the project activities could be identified and addressed in an adequate manner. It made sense therefore, that the weekly reports were not filled in by the coaches individually, but together with the project management. This provided more detailed answers, on the one hand, because the interview-situation allowed the interviewer to ask more detailed questions, if necessary. On the other hand, the once-a-week meeting between the coaches and the project management facilitated a better mutual exchange between both parties: in-depth discussions about the observations and problems the coaches have faced during the week could be held, and input or feedback could be given to them by the project manager.

4.2.2 Interviews with families

A second source of data from the monitoring and reporting of this project are the structured interviews with some of the participants' families about their attitude towards the project and its perceived benefit on their children (see appendix 2). The interviews were conducted, collected and translated into English by Jaleh Saboktakin in March 2005. Five family members were interviewed at each location. They were chosen by the project manager, according to her personal knowledge of the families. She focused on families whose children she perceived as traumatized or having difficulties at

home for several reasons (e.g. drug addiction of the parents, impoverished female-headed households, etc.). Most interviewees were mothers, partly because traditionally, they bear most of the childcare duties and partly because of socio-cultural norms, rendering an interview-situation between the project manager (a young woman) and male family members difficult.

4.2.3 Questionnaires from the gender survey

In the context of another research project by SAD, titled "Gender, Sport and Development", additional questionnaires were elaborated for the coaches, parents and children involved in the project in Bam. This research project aims at analysing the significance of sport for development cooperation, with a special emphasis on gender-specific aspects and concentrates on the experiences made in sports projects in three different regions of the world: Iran, Northern Caucasus and Zambia³. The data gained out of the interviews in Bam were therefore very valuable for the research. On the other hand, the questionnaires from the gender survey did also provide new information that could inform the project activities, especially in regard to gender-specific issues. Some of the information gained out of the questionnaires will therefore also be included in this assessment.

4.3 Assessment of the monitoring and evaluation methods

The internal monitoring and evaluation tools of the project focused on the observations of the coaches and the parents.

Implementing culturally sensitive questionnaires with the participating children and a control group, while being a direct means of assessing effect, went beyond the time and resources afforded to this project. Moreover, if this method was used, children would then have been urged to participate over a longer time-span in the programme, in order to assure enough continuity for the measurement of a possible effect of the activities. However, it was an important principle of the project to keep participation open for all interested children and not to impose any participation requirements (such as continuous participation).

The weekly-reports of the coaches serve as a source of collective data on the atmosphere in the class, the team-spirit, etc. as well as providing some observations of individual trouble-makers, or mentally absent children. The interviews with some of the parents of the participating children do also provide information on the development of individual participating children. However, they reflect their parents' opinion and must be interpreted cautiously: answers might be forged, since many parents answered in the way they thought they are expected to, i.e. in a more positive way than the truth.

The results of the gender survey questionnaire were included to provide answers given by the children themselves. However, the questions asked in this framework were focused on gender issues, rather than on the physical and mental wellbeing of the children and for most questions, there were pre-set answer categories, which did not allow for much in-depth questioning.

Additional information for this assessment was provided by conversations and reports of the local project manager Jaleh Saboktakin and the Swiss project coordinator Niklaus Eggenberger-Argote.

It can be argued that the most important source of data for the assessment of the main aim of the project, i.e. direct data on the children's psychosocial development, remains rather fragmented. However, existing sources of data taken together reveal interesting insights into the potential of sport to contribute to the wellbeing of children and youth in a post-disaster context that can inform future projects in this field.



³ A publication of the findings of this research project is planned for the second half of 2006. For further information, please contact Marianne Meier (meier@sad.ch)

5 Experiences and Lessons Learnt from the Project

In the following chapter, the experiences made and the lessons learnt from the project in Bam will be summarised. In the first section, the interest of the children and youth in the project according to their observed participation and motivation is assessed. The second section presents some observations on the progression in the physical and mental wellbeing of the participating children and youth on an individual level. In the third section, the assessment will move to the group-level, analysing the social cohesion and social integration among the children and youth. A fourth section will be entirely dedicated to the role of the coaches, which seems to be crucial for the success of a sports project. In a last section, some gender-specific aspects of conducting such a sports project in the Iranian context will be assessed.

5.1 Children's and youth's interest in the sport and play activities

5.1.1 Participation

In order to reach as many children as possible, advertisement for the project was made in local schools in the area of Bam. The number of participants was growing every day, until it reached a steady average of around 300 girls and boys, aged 6 to 18, which participated in the project activities at all three locations. On average, around twenty children were participating in every class. There was no account of individual continuity in participation, but out of the coaches' statements can be concluded that most of the children and youth joined the classes regularly, except when there were holidays, exams at school, etc. But since the project was open to all children and youth interested, new participants could join and previous participants could quit the activities whenever they wanted.

Maryam Moghadami's gymnastics class for girls in Baravat was very popular, as well as boys' football classes at all three locations (which is not surprising, considering the huge popularity of football in Iran). However, some of the initial classes had to be cancelled after some weeks, due to a lack

of popularity: the boys' volleyball, basketball and ping-pong classes were all cancelled, because a majority of the boys was rather interested in playing football, as well as the girls' volleyball class in Baravat, which was not well visited, either.

5.1.2 Motivation

From the beginning on, the children's interest in the project and their enthusiasm about sport and play activities were enormous. Some of the children came to the classes directly from school, without even taking time for their lunch, or they were waiting in front of the warehouses hours before the lessons began. The coaches had difficulties in ending the classes, sometimes, because the children were so eager to continue. The boys in fact often did continue playing together outside after the class. The project manager even observed how some of the children brought cloths from home to clean the dusty training mats before the beginning of the classes by themselves.

When asked about their motivation for the sport and play activities in October 2005 in the gender-survey, all of the 50 children in the survey fully agreed with the statement *"Sport and play activities are very important for me"* and 96% of them agreed with the statement *"I am usually looking forward to go to the sports and play activities"*. Interestingly, 54% of the interviewed children did not agree with the statement *"The main thing is to have fun"* – a source of motivation that we would generally expect when children do sport and play. But in their situation, it seems that being able to do sport and to play has a more serious importance than "just" doing it for fun. The statement by Yeganeh Sheiki, coach for the girls' volleyball class in Shaid Rajaie supports this:

"As they are telling me now, this centre has become their second house and they are much dependent on coming to the class. They are saying that they are gaining peace and relaxation here. These things give me a new energy to go on with the work!"

(WR 30/04-05/05/2005)⁴

When the children came back to the classes after the centre had to be closed due to religious

holidays at the end of March 2005, they told the coaches how much they had missed it:

"They were telling me the days the centre is closed they really don't know what to do and they are just expecting it to be opened."

(Mahdi Vaezi, boys' football class in Amir Kabir, WR 03-07/04/2005)

"They were coming and saying that they missed the class very much and when it was closed, they didn't know how to fill their free time and to gather their friends to play."

(Masoumeh Moghadami, girls' and boys' ping-pong class in Baravat, WR 03-07/04/2005)

5.2 Progression of physical and mental wellbeing

To assess the main aim of the project, the improvement of the physical and mental wellbeing of the participating children and youth, the observations of the coaches and parents were utilized.

5.2.1 Observations of coaches

The coaches' statements concerning the corresponding questions in the weekly reports (e.g.: *"Did you have any children that were mentally absent [depressed, very sad, traumatized, etc.]? If yes, how many? How did you deal with them? How did they develop during the week?"*) were not answered in great detail. There are various possible explanations for this. One could be that the question is posed in a too specific way for a post-disaster context, in which mental problems are rather generally widespread. Since the questions ask for specific children which were mentally absent, the coaches' answer to them is mostly "no". However, in their answers to other questions, observations pointing to mental problems are mentioned, but they are apparently considered too "normal" or too widespread to be made explicit. The following statement made by Mahdi Vaezi, coach of the boys' football class in Amir Kabir seems to support this assumption:

"I think most of these children have some serious mental problems, because they are all either nervous or depressed... So far I think I couldn't succeed to be accepted as their coach or somebody they can trust or learn some-

thing from, but I will do my best for the next coming sessions."

(WR 31/01-02/02/2005)

All coaches described the children as being very nervous. This fits into the often observed disorganised or agitated behaviour as a typical reaction to traumatic experiences of children. However, the observation of the children's nervousness was mentioned by the coaches in the context of other questions and hence not directly attributed to issues like mental absence, depression or trauma. This could be an indicator that such diagnoses are not used in this socio-cultural context, or that they are socially stigmatised and hence not discussed. However, accounts of children being nervous diminish in the first half of the year 2005. The same coach states in the first week of May:

"We had nervous and depressed children, who are now much different from the first days."

(WR 01-05/05/2005)

Similar statements were made by other coaches, as well. Mentally or physically affected children were often made fun of by the other children, at the beginning. Through the team activities and integrative measures of the coaches, like appointing them their "coaching assistant" or giving them other specific tasks, these children could strengthen their self-confidence and were gradually respected in the group.



⁴ The acronym ,WR' in the brackets after the citations means that the statement was made by the coach in the weekly report of the week between the following dates.

5.2.2 Observations of parents

Most parents interviewed in March 2005 did also observe an improvement in the physical and mental wellbeing of their children. Below are some statements to illustrate this:

“Before, she was very nervous and she was losing her temper over nothing, but now she is more calm and patient.”

“My son is very shy and before, he was hardly getting along with the others, but now he has made some friends there and he seems more brave to express himself.”

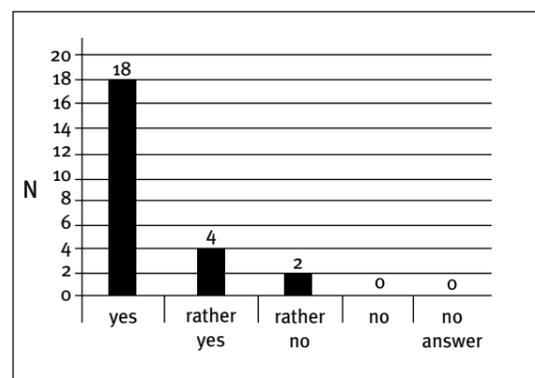
“Before, she was very depressed and now she has improved a lot; she is excited and she is getting along with her sisters better now.”

“She is more happy, that’s what I can see in her behaviour.”

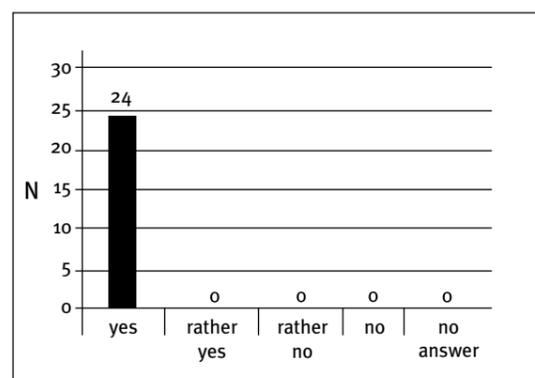
There is only one interviewed parent that feels pessimistic about the impact of the project activities on his/her son’s wellbeing:

“We had passed very hard days and my son is nervous like me, his brothers, everybody...I cannot see any changes...Our problems are much deeper than to be solved with sport things.”

Considering the often desperate situation of most families, it is remarkable, that there is not more than one such sceptical statement. Moreover, the overall positive observations of the parents were confirmed in the gender survey, again, as the following graphs for the corresponding questions show.



Graph 1: Parents’ opinion towards the statement “I noticed a change in his/her behaviour (attitudes, coping with daily life), since he/she has started to participate in the sport activities” (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)



Graph 2: Parents’ opinion towards the statement „The participant (boy/girl) likes to go to the sport activities.“ (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)

5.2.3 Two examples

Positive individual examples are mentioned by the coaches in some of the weekly reports. There is a boy in Mahdi Vaezi’s football class in Shaid Rajaie, for example, who lost his brother in an accident. One week later, he came back to the class and “he mentioned that the only way he could forget is to come to the centre to play with his friends” (Mahdi Vaezi, WR 07-12/05/2005).

Another very positive example is the case of a girl that had fallen from a roof during the earthquake and had suffered a great deal both physically and mentally from that experience. Because she developed so well during her participation in the ping-pong and volleyball classes in Amir Kabir, the

coaches mentioned her improvements recurrently in the weekly reports. Here are some extracts:

“[...] she has fallen from the roof and it has affected her memory, so she would prefer to play alone and not with anybody, so I talked to her and tried to be a friend of her and now she is coming to the class regularly and her mom said that she has been better from the time she has attended the class.” (Masoumeh Moghadami, girls’ ping-pong class in Amir Kabir, WR 08-13/01/2005)

“To me, it is a nice experience, because I am seeing the difference in the participants’ behaviour comparing to the first sessions, even there is one girl who has mental problems [the girl who had fallen from a roof] and now mostly when we come, she is sitting behind the door waiting for us.” (Afsaneh Sheiki, girls’ volleyball class in Amir Kabir, WR 08-13/01/2005)

One week later, Sheiki states:

“The improvement is obvious in the behaviour of that girl with mental problems and the happiness her mother showed made me happy too.”

In April, Masoumeh Moghadami says about that girl:

“She is now one of our good players and she has lots of friends (comparing to the first days when she was not getting along with anybody).” (WR 03-07/04/2005)

Apparently, the attempts of both coaches to integrate this girl into the classes, to give her more self-confidence and to be a trusted person for her, were crucial for this success. In May 2005, Moghadami describes how she let the girl take over some responsibilities in the class, thereby giving her more self-confidence and appreciation from the other participants:

“Our girl was present this week and she was helping me a lot and I can say as I have mentioned before, she has improved a lot comparing to last weeks.” (WR 08-15/05/2005)

“She has got some responsibilities, too, in order to give her more self-confidence” (WR 15-19/05/2005)

Also her mother has clearly observed an improvement. Interviewed in March 2005, she said:

“My daughter had some mental problems as she had fallen from a roof, but from the time she is going to the classes, she has changed a lot; she is trying to be more kind to her friends and she is helping me at home; even her grades at school have become better.”

5.3 Social cohesion and social integration

5.3.1 Initial hostilities

At the beginning, the coaches reported a hostile atmosphere in the classes. Both, boys and girls were physically and verbally aggressive, they hit each other and tore at each other’s hair, there were verbal attacks, and weaker participants were made fun of. It was thus very difficult for the coaches to control the children, in order to be able to conduct some activities with them. This aggressive behaviour is comprehensible, when the traumatic experiences of many of these children are taken into account. Moreover, it must be considered that most of these children were not used to doing sports in a group-setting and led by a coach, at all. Especially for most of the girls, this was something entirely new.

In their reports, however, the coaches did never directly link the hostility of the children to their traumatic experiences, but rather to factors such as the violent environment they grew up in, hostilities between their families or lack of attention:

“Like always, there is some conflicts; they have been grown up violently and it’s hard to change it” (Mahdi Vaezi, boys’ football class in Amir Kabir, WR 14-19/05/2005)

“Even when they are talking to each other, they are using rude words. Unfortunately, I noticed that the general atmosphere of this camp is like this and all the ones who are living here are not good to each other! Maybe the environment

has affected them to treat each other like this.”
(Ali Hossein Zadeh, boys’ football class in Amir Kabir, WR 29/05-31/05/2005)

“Some of these boys are suffering from lack of attention and that is why they are trying to cause problems to be in the centre of attention and to show themselves, to my experience, by giving them responsibility, they will change behaviour.”

(Ali Hossein Zadeh, boys’ football class in Shaid Rajaie, WR 12-16/06/2005)

Interestingly, it could indeed be observed, that the initial atmosphere was far less hostile in the village of Baravat than in the two camps. A reason for that could be the tough living conditions in the camps and the fact that families from different areas of origin were gathered there, torn out of their familiar social and geographical environment - in contrast to Baravat, where the children knew each other and a certain degree of social cohesion was already (or still) existing.

Other hostilities were attributed by the coaches to game-related competition (problems with loosing, fighting for the ball, smashing the ball around) or due to lack of equipment (too few mattresses in gymnastics, too few balls in football, too few tables in Ping-Pong):

“The violence is mostly obvious in the way they are shooting the ball...it is hitting the roof and walls strongly and sometimes it will cause the ball to be torn...I am trying to make the play calmer, but they are very energetic and want to release it in a way.”

(Mahdi Vaezi, boys’ football class in Amir Kabir, WR 10-14/04/2005)

Especially among younger children and in some of the girls’ classes, jealousy about the coach seems to be another important reason for hostilities:

“There were two who caused disturbance in the class for a reason like I am paying more attention to one of these two. It is not like this and I am always trying to treat them equally; I talked to them and they seemed to accept my words, although I heard that they restarted to argue af-

ter the class on their way back home.”
(Maryam Moghadami, girls’ gymnastic class in Baravat, WR 01-05/05/2005)

The fact that project participation was organised in a very open manner and newcomers could join the activities whenever they wanted, posed another challenge for the coaches in establishing team spirit. Many coaches perceived the participation of newcomers, who were often causing trouble, as a disturbance to the emerging cohesion and discipline among the regularly participating children in their classes. In some classes, this could be handled by separating the class into smaller groups and by making former participants responsible for the introduction of newcomers into the activities and into the team. However, there were cases, in which none of these strategies succeeded, and in which the problem of irregularly participating children causing troubles could not be solved otherwise than by excluding them from the class.

5.3.2 Improvements

In contrast to the initial situation, though, all coaches observed improvements in fairness and in dealing with aggression among the children and youth over the time. They learned to play together, to support each other to learn exercises or techniques or to include newcomers or younger children, instead of just grabbing the ball, making fun of weaker participants and insulting each other:

“What was interesting here [in Baravat] was that there was no entertainment or any other places for children, so when they came to the class they were just trying to grab the ball and play by themselves but now they are fond of playing with each other.”

(Masoumeh Moghadami, girls’ ping-pong class in Baravat, WR 08-13/01/2005)

“We have developed a good team spirit so far and it is working well; there is a sense of team play while they are practicing and playing – it has improved a lot, maybe not a big change to last week, but much from the first months!”
(Sara Amandadi, girls’ basketball class in Shaid Rajaie, WR 03-07/04/2005)

As indicated above, the two boys’ football classes in Amir Kabir and in Shaid Rajaie, in both of the camps, were the most difficult. There was a lot of fighting between the boys, especially between those of different areas of origin and between those of different age. Although the atmosphere remained rather aggressive in these classes, there was an improvement over time, in that the boys showed more respect towards the coaches and accepted the rules he set. For instance, they would apologise when they had insulted each other, upon the coaches’ notice.

Through learning to accept the rules of the game, the boys did hence gradually channel some of their individual aggression into a sense of competition on the team-level:

“This week it seems to be better, at least the struggles were among the teams and only a few of them were among the team members.”

(Mahdi Vaezi, boys’ football class in Amir Kabir, WR 12-17/02/2005)

“[The team spirit is] still not that good, they play more individually during the team play, but sometimes, after achieving a good score, they will shake hands with each other and it looks that the way they behave depends very much on the results of the play.”

(Mahdi Vaezi, boys’ football class in Amir Kabir, WR 05-10/03/2005)

Aggressive behaviour occurred mainly in a game-related way, for instance if the boys lost a game with their team. Although such reactions can be considered “normal” in relation with a competitive sport, the probability that they are escalating sooner into overt aggressive behaviour could be higher with boys in a post-disaster context. However, overall social cohesion improved a lot among the children and youth, and it even spread into their daily lives. They met outside of the sports and play activities and became friends. Statements like the following by Ahmad Bagheri, boys’ football coach in Baravat, were increasingly uttered by all of the coaches:

“The team spirit is very good; they have established a good and strong friendship and it is

not limited to these classes only.”
(WR 10-14/04/05)

“They have a good team spirit and if one of them is absent, they will go after him to know what has happened, so they are good friends to each other.” WR 19-23/06/2005)

Some of the participants formed groups in order to learn for the school exams together. Such processes were especially important in the two camps, where they often did not know other children and where families from different areas of origin often had conflicts. Through the sport and play activities, they got to know each other, recognised that they all faced similar problems and were provided with a platform where they could share their common interests and become friends.

This team spirit was strengthened through common external activities, such as competitions with other teams or a picnic in the country-side. Weeks ahead of the common picnic for the girls, the coaches reported how much they were looking forward to it:

“Their excitement for the picnic was the highlight for this week. Especially there are some of them whose parents are very poor and are unable to take them to any place for a trip or picnic, so they were very happy of this coming chance.”

(Masoumeh Moghadami, girls’ ping pong & volleyball class in Amir Kabir, WR 16-21/04/2005)



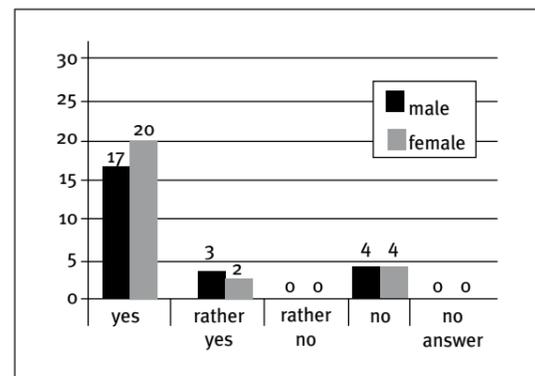
Very appreciated was also the distribution of sports clothes and shoes, which were provided by sponsors. This has served very practical purposes (e.g. in order to distinguish the two teams in a football match or to prevent being hurt while doing sports barefoot), but it also further strengthened their identification with the sports and play activities.

5.4 The role of the coaches

5.4.1 Relationship between coaches and children

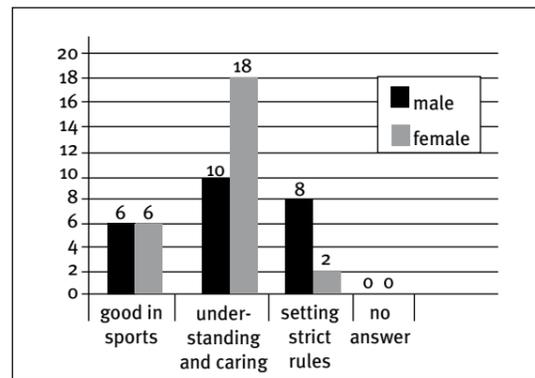
In almost all classes, a good relationship between the coaches and the children could be established. The coaches, as well as the local project manager became trustable persons for the children: the coaches were entrusted with their personal or familial problems, their fears and sorrows.

When asked about their relationship to their coaches in October 2005 in the gender-survey, 49 out of 50 children fully agreed with the statement *“My coach is like a friend to me.”* The statement *“I usually share my private problems with my coach.”* was fully agreed by 74% of the children interviewed in the survey:



Graph 3: Girls' and boys' opinion towards the statement: *“I usually share my private problems with my coach.”* (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)

When they had to choose what kind of characteristics they found most important for a coach, the features “understanding and caring about people” were the most often-mentioned. The distribution of answers is presented in the graph below:



Graph 4: Girls' and boys' opinion towards the statement: *“If I could pick one out of these coaches, I would choose:”* (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)

In this graph, a significant difference along the criteria of gender is visible. While the sports performance of the coach is equally important to girls and boys, more girls consider the feature “understanding and caring about people” important than boys and more boys expect a coach to be “respected and setting strict rules” than girls. The latter can be explained with the generally less-disciplined atmosphere in the boys' classes. A coach who is not respected and not setting strict rules would hardly be able to organise such a class and that apparently has also become evident to the boys themselves.

Again, there is a clear difference between the boys' football class in the village of Baravat and the ones in the camps. In Baravat, a relationship of trust and mutual friendship between the coach and the boys could be established very soon. The boys talk to the coach about their problems and he tries to help them. The coach went to talk to the parents of a boy, who was forbidden to attend the sports classes, for instance, or in another case of family problems, he went to talk to the father. And the boys even came to talk to the coach outside the class hours:

“All of them are trusting me as a good friend of them and they do even call me by my fist name (not in the class) and they will even come to the door of our house to talk about what they have faced or what they are suffering from.” (Ahmad Bagheri, WR 13-18/01/2005)

Evidence suggests that the sports activities themselves did enhance the development of a relationship of mutual trust between the coach and the boys, in this case. Bagheri was putting a lot of emphasis on the sports performance and an “effective” atmosphere. The boys apparently seemed to like that: they were very motivated to further improve their performance and they begged the coach to organise competitions for them, in order to match themselves with other teams.

The more hostile atmosphere in the boys' classes of the homeless camps made it much more difficult for the coaches to establish a trusted relationship with the boys. In order to organise the class in a disciplined way, the coaches had to focus on gaining the boys' respect first. A major obstacle for the establishment of a relationship of mutual trust were probably socio-cultural ideals of masculinity, according to which boys should not talk freely about their feelings and problems, especially not to adult men. As Ali Hossein Zadeh, boys' football coach in Amir Kabir has stated in one of his weekly reports:

“Boys are not like girls that when they find trust in someone, they will share their feelings with him.” (WR 19-23/06/2005)

If a natural disaster hits a rather patriarchal society like the one in Bam, boys are often expected to assume additional responsibilities. If they are deprived of accessing psychosocial rehabilitation due to socio-cultural norms and feel that they are expected to take on additional responsibilities, the mental pressure on them can be an enormous burden. Hence it is not surprising that in the few cases, in which boys were talking to the coaches about their personal problems, such feelings of pressure were the most often stated. Some boys were expected to take care of the family because their father had died or had been hurt in the earthquake; others had to work very hard in order to make a living for the family. Some boys even had to quit the sports classes, because they had to work instead.

If there is such a strong influence of socio-cultural ideals of masculinity, it is important to consider

that the male coaches themselves have gendered norms in their mind on how to deal with the boys. This could hinder the achievement of the project's aim to support the psychosocial rehabilitation, if the male coaches find it inappropriate to establish a close relationship with the boys, which would allow them to speak freely about personal problems. According to some coaches' statements, a certain reluctance to enhance the mutual exchange of more personal issues with the boys can be detected. It is important therefore, to address such gendered norms in the coaching of coaches and to make evident that such a mutual exchange can relieve the boys from the often enormous pressure on them and support their mental wellbeing significantly.

Both of the questions of the gender survey discussed above (see graph 3 and 4) show that boys wish to have someone to share their problems with. However, as boys may feel too ashamed to talk to the coach about their problems directly, other forms of mutual exchange should be considered. For instance, a system of indirect reporting to the coach about the problems of other class participants developed in many of the boys' classes. While they did not often come to talk to the coach themselves, male participants told the coach if one of their friends had problems, so that the coach could go and talk to him. Mahdi Vaezi describes this for his boys' football classes in Shaid Rajaie and in Amir Kabir:

“They are not the type to speak and expose themselves freely, but they will tell me about their friends if they know that there is something wrong with them.” (WR 03-07/04/2005)

“They are not telling me directly anything about their own life and problems, but about each other, so I know lots of things about their lives without talking to them personally.” (WR 03-07/04/2006)

Also, the informal 10-minute group discussions at the end of every lesson about issues such as health, drugs, respect towards each other, fair-play, etc., which had been suggested by the project management, provided a good opportunity for

raising problems in a more general group setting, that many encountered individually. As Ali Hossein Zadeh stated:

“Not directly they come to talk to me about their problems, but generally, while I am talking to them, they are providing me examples of their lives for that case.” (WR 19-23/06/2005)

In the girls' classes, a good relationship between coaches and participants could be established much easier than in the boys' classes. The female coaches put a lot of emphasis on the mutual exchange and invented their own methods on how to involve every participant. Many female coaches suggested that the shy participants, who did not have the courage to speak about their problems openly, could send them letters, in which they were given the opportunity to express themselves. Yeganeh Sheiki, the coach of the girls' volleyball class in Shaid Rajaie established “friendship circles” as a part of every lesson, in which personal problems could be discussed either directly or indirectly in that she spoke about the issues raised in the letters in a general form. The coaches also actively searched the dialogue with girls, of which they felt that they were in trouble. The example of Masoumeh Moghadami, speaking to one of the girls in her ping-pong class in Baravat, gives a good impression for this:

“On Monday, I saw one girl sitting and not playing with the others. I sat down beside her and talked to her and she said that she had some fighting with her father. She seemed very nervous about it and she said that she didn't have anybody to advise her what to do. So, I talked to her and tried to explain to her that this is normal for her age and that she had to control herself little by little and I told her of my own experience. At last, she thanked me and told me that now, she was feeling better. It made me very happy!” (WR 12-17/02/2006)

The most often mentioned problems that were discussed between coach and girls dealt with fights they had with their parents or siblings or with the difficulties they faced at school. One girl did address her coach because she was ashamed of her over-weight and didn't know what to do

against it, another one because she was in love with a boy from the neighbourhood. Most of the issues raised by the girls are hence quite “normal” sorrows of girls in that age and not directly related to their traumatic experiences of the earthquake. But it seems that although they do not address that issue directly, it is already relieving for them to speak to a trustable adult person about their everyday problems.

Between the coaches and the girls, friendships are formed, which spread into their daily life, as well. For instance, when the girls of Masoumeh Moghadami's ping-pong class in Baravat had to prepare a presentation for an official holiday ceremony, she helped them for their preparations and went to see it:

“On Thursday, there was the ceremony at school that was directed by the girls for the memorial of teachers national day and I went to see it and it made them very happy.”

“One of them came to me and said that she doesn't think that she can speak in front of the audience during the ceremony. After the class, I took her aside, talked to her and tried to give her self-confidence for it and we practiced what she was about to read in front of the others.” (Both from WR 26-30/03/2006)

5.4.2 Relationship between coaches, children and their parents

As stated above, family problems were among the issues that were most often discussed between children and coaches. Nearly all of the families in Bam and its surroundings have lost members and belongings in the earthquake and for most of them, life after the disaster was a daily struggle to make a living. Physical disabilities and mental suffering, high rates of drug-consumption, poverty and the unfavourable living conditions in the camps made this struggle even harder and caused problems in the families, from which the children suffered a lot.

In a situation like this, the role for the coach as a trusted adult person besides the parents was very important for the children. Not only could the children approach the coaches with their problems and provide support in finding solutions to them,

but the coaches could also serve as role models for the children, providing them with guidance and orientation. Masoumeh Moghadami reports for instance, how the girls of her ping-pong and volleyball class in Amir Kabir often asked her “*whether something is a good thing to do or a bad thing to avoid*” (WR 11-16/6/2006). Sport can thereby support the spread of messages such as not to smoke or take drugs, to care about one's body and health, but also messages such as the importance of reliability, trust and respect for a good team spirit and for friendships in general.

The coaches could also serve as a relief for the parents and the families as a whole, which were often overstrained and helpless in how to assist their children in overcoming their traumatic experiences. This often led to tensions between the parents and their children. For instance because the parents expected good performance at school, and punished their children for bad grades by not allowing them to join the sports activities anymore. The coaches were able to act as mediators between parents and children, in such situations, in that they talked to the parents and explained to them that a weaker performance at school could be related to the mental suffering the children had undergone during the earthquake, or to their current living conditions and that the participation in the sports activities could help them feel better. Some coaches, such as Yeganeh Sheiki, coach of girls' volleyball class in Shaid Rajaie, found very pragmatic solutions to such family problems:

“[...] a mother came to the centre and started shouting at her daughter and beat her in front of the others! I stopped her and talked to her: she was angry because her daughter had got a very bad grade at school and she has hidden the exam paper, but her mother has found it! Finally, it became peaceful again. [...] I talked to the girl and she promised me to study from now on. She was saying that with five other sisters in a connex, it was very hard for her to study and so I offered her to arrange with some of her friends from the centre to go to their house and to study together, so that she can improve her concentration, too.” (WR 16-21/04/2005)

Because most parents came to realize that their children liked to go to the sports activities very much and that they did really initiate a change in their behaviour (see graphs 1 and 2), they respected the coaches in this role as a mediator between them and their children, as well. Mostly mothers of the girls participating in the activities did even come to the coaches to thank them for their efforts, to watch the training and to invite the coaches to their home. They also asked the coaches for educational support directly, as they realised that the coaches were respected by the girls a lot. Masoumeh Moghadami told about her ping-pong and volleyball class in Amir Kabir:

“One of the mothers came to me and said as her daughter is coming to the centre right after school, without having her lunch and she was worrying about her health and asked me to talk to her girl, because she would be listening better to me than to her!” (WR 29/02/-03/03/2006)

“Again, I had some mothers coming to me and thanking me for having the classes, but at the same time they were asking me to talk to them to pay better attention to their lessons [at school]”. (WR 05-10/03/2005)

On the other hand, children also asked the coaches to advocate something for them, if they did not dare to ask their parents themselves because they knew that their parents appreciated the efforts of



the coaches. For instance, many children turned to their coaches to ask their parents to get permission to join the sports or other external activities, such as the picnic.

For such a relationship of mutual trust and respect, it was a big advantage that all the coaches were recruited out of the local population and that they lived in the same places like the children and their parents. Like this, the coaches were more respected by the parents, they knew their situation and shared the same experiences and they could visit each other easily, also besides the project activities. It was this personal closeness that allowed the coaches to act as legitimate mediators, even when it came to intimate family problems, as the following example told by Ahmad Bagheri, coach of boys' football class in Baravat illustrates:

“This week, one of them came to me and talked about his father and the family problems he’s facing. As I knew his family, I tried to help him by talking to his father about it.”
(WR 07-12/05/2006)

5.4.3 Coaching the coaches

The importance of a thorough selection, education and continuing support of the coaches becomes evident when considering the key role the coaches play in supporting the children’s psychosocial rehabilitation and in providing relief to the parents in their educational and psychosocial support of their children. Selection and education of the coaches should not focus as much on their expe-

rience in sports coaching as on their motivation and ability to fulfil their role as a trusted adult person for the children, that they can turn to with their problems and sorrows, and that can help them to gain more self-confidence and trust into other persons again, experiencing fun in a group activity and forget their sorrows.

However, for the project in Bam, the aim of local capacity building was weighed higher than a professional psychological or social worker-background of the coaches. A larger number of such professionals did not exist in Bam, but only in the bigger Iranian cities. Due to a lacking residential and cultural proximity to the local population of such external professionals (there are often huge differences in mentalities between the urban and rural population in Iran), the project management decided to rather recruit local coaches, with experience in teaching sport and working with children. All of the selected coaches were thus sports teachers.

Given the limited psychosocial background of the selected coaches, the importance of an initial training of them was rather underestimated by the project management. An initial training led by an experienced Swiss expert was indeed planned for January 2005, but due to the Tsunami catastrophe, it had to be cancelled. It soon became clear, though, that the coaches were emphasising the sports performance aspect of the activities too much and that many of them neglected the psychosocial aims of the project. Therefore, ‘coaching of the coaches’ received much more attention in the course of the year 2005. Two workshops were held with them, in-depth discussions with the project manager took place and manuals⁵ were distributed. Thereby, most coaches were informed that the main aim of the project was not to enhance the children’s sports performance, but to support their psychosocial rehabilitation process and many of them were consequently fulfilling this task with much personal engagement and enthusiasm. There were two coaches, however, which could not identify in a sufficient way with this role and who therefore had to be dismissed. Tahere Habibollahi, an expert in the field of sport and development, who has led one of the workshops for the coaches, was also employed by the project management in August 2005 to provide continuing support for the

coaches and to relieve the project manager from some of her tasks.

Such a continuing support for the coaches and the project team is very important: The Bam-experience has demonstrated that the recruitment of local coaches and staff can greatly enhance the emergence of a relationship of trust between them and the children and their parents. But precisely due to the high responsibility the coaches bear for the success of the project, it should not be forgotten that as locals, they have experienced the traumatizing disaster as well and they are probably suffering from its consequences in the aftermath in a similar way as the participating children and their parents do. This adds to their ability to empathize with the children and parents, but it could as well become a problem, if the burden of having to deal with other persons’ problems while suffering from one’s own problems becomes too heavy. Therefore, it is important that the coaches get continuing support, not only concerning the project activities, but also concerning their own personal problems. A useful way to do this could be meetings among the coaches, in which they could talk about the activities, as well as about the possible personal problems they face.

On the other hand, having a new task in which they can do something for the children can also provide the coaches with a new sense of life and uplift them out of their loneliness and lethargy. As Masoumeh Moghadami, coach of girls’ ping-pong classes in Baravat and Amir Kabir expressed it:

“It is motivating me more and more to go on to create a nice place for these children.”
(WR 10-14/04/2005)

5.5 Gender specific issues

Sport is strongly related to the dimensions along which the society as a whole is structured. In Bam, like in every other socio-cultural context, gender is one of these dimensions which has a significant impact on beliefs about physical capacities, typical attributes and sexual differences, that all are reflected and reproduced within sport (see: Saavedra 2004, Meier 2005).

5.5.1 The importance of infrastructural conditions

In Bam, which is a small city, where most people are very religious and rather traditional socio-cultural norms prevail, it would have been hard for girls to do sports and play outdoors. Most women in Iran practice sports indoors, in fitness centres or sports halls that are reserved for them at specified times. The exclusion of men allows them to put off their veil and to wear clothing, which is more comfortable for doing sports. In Bam, though, most of the sports infrastructure that would have allowed girls to do sports indoors had been destroyed by the earthquake and it was difficult for women or girls to gain access to the mostly male administered still existing or rebuilt infrastructure. For the girls in the homeless camps, there was basically no opportunity to do sports at all.

For the planning of the sports project in Bam, an important challenge for the inclusion of girls was thus to provide accurate infrastructural conditions. Those were set up with the two warehouses and the stadium in Baravat, which allowed the girls to participate in the sports activities and to put off their veil while playing inside. Additionally, it had to be assured that within these buildings, no one could see them from outside. The importance of this aspect can be illustrated with the statement of a boy in Mahdi Vaezi’s boys’ football class in Shaid Rajaie, who told the coach that he wouldn’t let his sister come to the centre again, unless proper curtains would be installed, so that nobody could watch them from outside (WR 01-05/05/2005).

Therefore, curtains were installed at every window and both, doors and windows had to remain closed during the girls’ classes. During the hot summer months, it was very hot inside the warehouses and not being able to open either windows or doors made it very uncomfortable for the girls to do sports inside. Although coolers were installed, the conditions remained fairly uncomfortable during these months and some classes even had to be cancelled for a while, due to the heat.

5.5.3 Gendered norms on behaviour and clothing

Since gendered norms do not only determinate women’s and girls’ clothing, but also what kind of



⁵ The manual titled „Discovering Resiliency“ was compiled by the NGO Mercy Corps in the framework of their training of teachers on how to cope with psychosocial problems of children and youth. It was translated into Farsi and made available for all coaches.

movements and behaviour is considered appropriate for them, the girls were very hesitant to participate in the sport and play activities, at the beginning. Although they were all curious and came to the activities, they were not used to doing sports, to run around freely or to laugh out loud. At the beginning, they didn't even dare to take off their veil and preferred to do sports with it, although no one could see them from outside. As Jaleh Saboktakin explains:

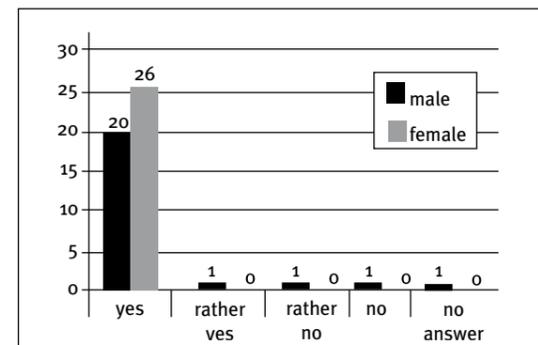
“Even at home, they wear the scarf! They are so used to it and it's very strange for them if you take them to the centre and say, okay, you can take off your scarf now! – Then they won't come to the centre.”

Since the most important thing for the project management was that the girls themselves felt at ease to participate in the activities, they didn't put any pressure on them to put off their veil or to wear more sportive clothing. But because many families were very poor and some children felt too ashamed to come to the sports activities in their shabby clothes and barefoot, some sports clothing, consisting of shorts and T-shirts, as well as some sports shoes were organized, which the children could wear during the sports and play activities. After initial hesitation, most girls got used to taking off their veil and wearing such sportive clothing inside the warehouses, when no one could see them from outside and no men were allowed to enter the place while they were playing. Still, most of them didn't dare to tell their parents about this clothing, because they were afraid that they would react by forbidding them to further join the activities. Whenever a man (for instance Niklaus Eggenberger-Argote, the project coordinator) wanted to visit the girls' activities, they would put on “proper” clothing, before he could enter.

5.5.3 Sexually segregated classes

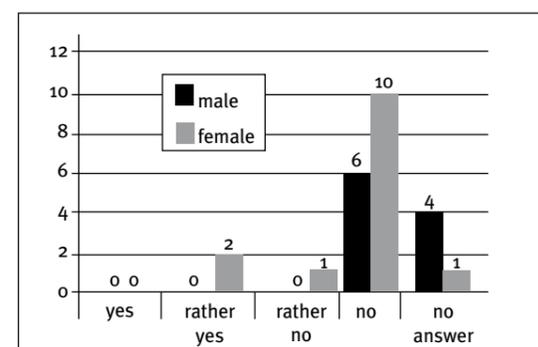
Having mixed classes, with boys and girls playing together was thus also impossible in this context. Therefore, the children were separated into girls' and boys' classes and the centres were reserved for either one of them at specific times. There was one class, however, in which boys and girls participated together: The ping-pong class in Baravat, led by the female coach Masoumeh Moghadami. This

class was visited by both, boys and girls, but they never mixed to play together. According to the local project manager, even the younger girls did prefer to play with other girls, only. This is also reflected in the gender survey, in which all of the 26 girls agreed with the statement “I feel more comfortable playing just with girls”, whereas for boys, there seems to be slightly less averseness to mixed classes.



Graph 5: Girls' opinion about the statement „I feel more comfortable playing just with girls“ and boys' opinion about the statement „I prefer to have only boys in my group.“ (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)

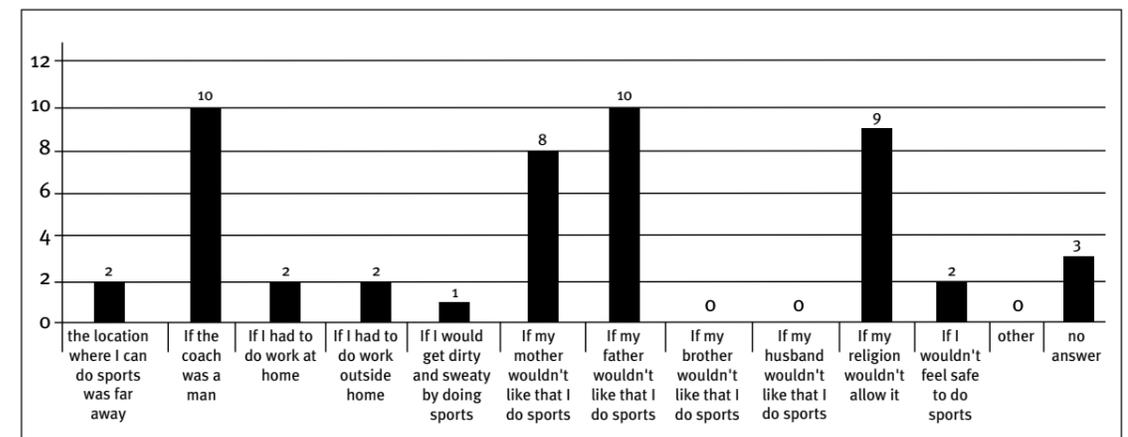
The female coach in this class was also well accepted by the boys. Female teachers for boys are also not unusual in Iran, especially at a younger age. However, as the following graph showing the parents' responses to the corresponding question in the gender survey is indicating, vice-versa, male coaches for girls would not have been accepted at all:



Graph 6: Parents' opinion towards the statement „I think male coaches should be able to teach girls as well.“ (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)

5.5.4 Other obstacles for girls' participation

When asked to name the two most important possible obstacles from a list, which would prevent them from joining the sports and play activities, in the gender survey, the girls' responses provided the following picture:



Graph 7: Girls' opinion towards the statement „The two most important of the above mentioned aspects are:“ (SAD-gender survey, October 2005)

Apparently, the norm that girls cannot be taught by a male sports coach is very much internalized by the girls. It would therefore not make much sense for a sports project to try to challenge this, but it would probably only lead to a decrease of participating girls. Therefore, the project in Bam did only engage female coaches for girls. Many girls also indicated that they would not participate in the sports and play activities, if their religion wouldn't allow it. The Bam-experience shows, though, that by providing adequate conditions (regarding infrastructure, location and organization of the classes), the girls will be able to come to the sport and play activities because religious and socio-cultural norms of their community are not violated and because the girls themselves can feel at ease there.

As indicated in the graph above, the parents' consent is an important precondition for the girls' participation, though. It is therefore crucial that the project is in close contact with the parents and other affiliate actors of the participating children. The experience of this project has shown that by

explaining the aims and benefits of the sports project, that it is not merely about doing sports, but about the development of life skills and values like respect, tolerance, responsibility, etc., the parents can be convinced to allow their children to participate.

Ideally, the project should therefore also try to meet the parents' concerns directly. For instance, worries about their children's performance at school were among the most widespread reasons why parents didn't want to let them participate in the sport and play activities. Future projects could therefore try to set up joint activities with the schools, plan the timing of their activities in a way that avoids overlapping with schedules at school and they could develop own instruments, through which the children's performance at school could be supported (e.g. through guided learning groups).

A lot of the parents' concerns about a participation of their daughters in the project activities did also refer to their safety. The post-disaster situa-

tion and the precarious and unfamiliar living conditions in the camps additionally increased the parents' fears that something could happen to their daughters. Many of the girls were hence not allowed to leave their small housing units in the camps and were just sitting in there, all day long. In order to shorten the girls' walking distance to the centre, the location of the sports activities should ideally be chosen as close as possible to their living places, or adequate means of transportation should be provided by the project.

In the camps, this was not a problem, since the warehouses were located nearby the housing units, in which the children lived. And when one of the warehouses had to be closed, a minibus was organised anyway, to transport the children from that camp to the warehouse in the other camp. In the village of Baravat, though, it was a problem, that some girls had to walk a long distance to the location of the project activities and their parents were afraid that something could happen. The girls' ping-pong and volleyball class was therefore moved to a girls' school, which was closer to most of the girls' homes. However, the new place turned out to cause even more problems, because it was in a bad condition and still under reconstruction. Some parents didn't want to let their girls join the class anymore, because they feared disturbances by the construction workers which were working there. In some of such cases, the coaches themselves could take measures to assure the participants' safety, as Maryam

Moghadami, coach of the girls' gymnastics class in Baravat did:

"One small girl came to me and mentioned because of the distance, she can not come alone, her parents are trying to stop her from coming; since her home was in my way, I told her that I will accompany her home and she can assure her parents about it."

(WR 30/01-03/02/2005)

But in general, such concerns should be taken seriously and be addressed by the project management, in order to guarantee the girls' safety and to content their parents. For the Bam project, the efforts of the project team seemed to succeed in this regard: In all cases, in which girls were forbidden to continue participating in the activities, the parents could be convinced to allow their daughter to join the classes again, by explaining them the aims of the project and by assuring them that the coaches and the project management would have an eye on the participants. This indicates the trust the parents had in the project team, but also their reliance in the relevance of the project activities for their children's wellbeing. This is very important for the children, as well, since they will receive support from their parents, if the parents realize that the project really has an impact on their children's behaviour and that they like to go there.

6 Conclusion

The project in Bam was a pilot project in the field of using sport as an instrument to support the post-disaster rehabilitation process of children and youth. Analyzing the data gathered through its monitoring and evaluation tools, it was found that sport and play have a positive impact on wellbeing and development of the participating children. All parents, coaches and members of the project management team observed significant changes in the children's behaviour and in their group dynamics that can be taken as indicators for an improvement in their physical and mental wellbeing.

Initial aggression and hostility was channelled through the sport and play activities into a cooperative team play. Through adequate measures by the coaches, weaker or mentally absent participants that were made fun of in the beginning could be integrated into the groups, thereby enhancing their self-confidence and wellbeing. The sport and play activities became an important part of the children's lives that brought them some stability into their shattered lives. Friendships emerged that spread into daily life. The activities were not only very much appreciated by the children, but also by their parents, who were relieved in their educational and psychosocial support of their children, thereby further stabilising family relationships.

The positive effects cannot be isolated to the use of sport alone. Our findings do rather suggest that the coaches and their efforts play a crucial role for the success of using sport as an instrument to support the post-disaster rehabilitation process of children and youth. Without coaches that are sensitive to the physical and mental wellbeing of the children in their class and that are able to take adequate measures in order to build a team spirit, which is not based on competition or individual performance, but on respect, tolerance and the inclusion of all children, sport would not lead to such clear positive effects. The coaches are not only responsible for the friendly atmosphere in the sports lesson, but also hold the role as a trustable person for the children and as an intermediate agent between them and their parents.

Their thorough selection, education and continuing support is therefore a crucial factor for the success of the project.

Therefore, probably the most important suggestion, which can be drawn out of the experiences in Bam for future similar projects, is to put more emphasis on the **selection, the coaching and the continuing support of the coaches**. An experienced professional should ideally be involved in all these processes, including the selection process of the coaches. In order to facilitate a trustable and close relationship with the children and their families, as well as in order to improve local capacity building and sustainability of the activities, the selected coaches should be recruited from the **local** population. They do not necessarily have to be professional psychologists or social workers, but they should be **motivated and able** to fulfil their role as a trustable adult person for the children, rather than being experienced in sports. A thorough participatory **monitoring and evaluation system** should be incorporated into the project activities from the beginning on, in order to trace problems and to find optimal ways in which to further improve the impact of the project activities.

To enhance mutual exchange and to build trust among the participating children and the coaches, several measures have proven effective in Bam. For the teambuilding of the groups, it was helpful to incorporate **other games** besides the scheduled sport into the lessons: In order for the children to "arrive" in class, to concentrate on the sports activities and to involve them into the group, various group-games were introduced by some of the coaches, at the beginning of every lesson. **External activities** besides the classes, like competitions with other teams or the picnic, were also very much appreciated by the children and helped to establish friendly relationships among the participants. Because it was possible for newcomers to join existing classes at any time, it was sometimes difficult to strengthen the team spirit among the continuously participating children. Good measures to **integrate newcomers** were to make several of the former participants responsible for introducing them into the activities and into the group, or to form smaller **sub-groups**, in which a team spirit could be established much sooner.



In order to establish a trustable relationship between the coaches and the children, several measures were applied that helped to improve mutual exchange. It was helpful, for instance, to offer the participants to write **letters** to their coaches, also anonymously, if they wanted. Thereby, even shy children, who didn't dare to address the coach directly, were offered a chance to tell him or her what was on their mind. For boys, hesitance to talk to their coaches about personal problems was further reinforced by socio-cultural norms. Letters didn't prove effective here, since they were considered "girlish things" by most of the boys. But forms of an **indirect mutual exchange** with their coaches did nevertheless emerge in the boys' classes: They mostly didn't approach the coach themselves to talk about their problems, but other boys of the class told the coach, if one of their friends had a problem, so that he could go and talk to that boy. A good measure for both, girls and boys, were also the "**friendship circles**" at the end of every lesson, in which the coach discussed a topic like fairness, mutual trust, health issues, etc. with the participants and addressed problems that many of them were facing individually in a more general group setting.

Where socio-cultural norms render participation for girls difficult, it is important to think of the **gendered aspects** of such a sports project. Our experience shows that, by taking adequate measures to ensure the girls' safety, to make them feel at ease in the sports infrastructure, and to convince their affiliates from the aims of the project, girls can be provided the opportunity to participate in the project activities and they will be able to enjoy them, as well.

There are certainly many more aspects, which could further improve the impact of sport in supporting the post-disaster rehabilitation process of children and youth. After having conducted and assessed the project in Bam, we hope that other organizations will be inspired to take use of the potential of sport and to gain further insights in how it can be best tapped to the benefit of the participating children and youth.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Weekly Report – Questions

Introduction:

Aim of the conversation is not to assess or qualify the coach or to know any intimate details or names of the children, but to get detailed and honest information about the impacts of the sports activities on the psycho-social well-being of the participants. So, it is about the activities and sport as an instrument to improve well-being of the children and not about you or how you are doing your work!

1. How would you qualify the “general atmosphere” within your class/classes this week choosing from 1 to 10 (1 being very negative and 10 being very positive) (did generally a hostile, aggressive, calm, friendly environment prevail, lot of tensions, arguing, struggling, nervousness, etc.)? Did something change compared to the week before?
2. What are the highlights of the week you have experienced? What do you particularly remember? What did affect you positively or negatively? What did emotionally touch or impress you during the week? (related to activities, participating children, parents, teachers, neighbours, yourself, others)
3. How would you assess the “team spirit” of the participants this week? Did you have the feeling that children were member of a “team” or rather “fighting each other”? (“together versus against each other”, “exclusive versus inclusive”). Has something changed compared to the previous week?
4. Did you have any particular participants causing troubles, problems (“trouble makers”) this week? If yes, how many? How did you deal with them? How did they develop during the week?
5. Did you have any children that were mentally absent (depressed, very sad, traumatized, etc.)? If yes, how many? How did you deal with them? How did they develop during the week?
6. Could you observe any hostile aggression, violence during the activities of this week (struggling, fights, etc.)? If yes, how did you deal with it?
7. Did some children share with you their personal problems? What did you do?
8. Did you provide some educational inputs this week? (Why to accept rules? What are rules for? Fairness in sports = fairness in life, respect of the opponent (shaking hands after the game) = respect and “fight” each other peacefully in the “real life”, dangers of drug misuse: healthy sportsmen do not use drugs, do not smoke). If yes, please shortly explain.
9. Do you have something to add? Something to mention in particular?

Number of participants: ____
 Age range of participants: from ____ to ____
 New participants (number): ____

Sport & recreation activities:	Duration (min.):	Comment:

Material broken/lost: ____
 Mentally absent participants: ____
 Trouble makers: ____
 Injured children: ____

Appendix 2: Interviews with families

1. Do you have the impression that your boy/girl likes to go to the sport activities? If yes, how do you notice it?
2. Since your boy/girl joins the sport activities, have you noticed a change in his/her behaviour, in his/her attitudes, in his/her coping with daily life, in his/her general well-being? If yes, in which sense? How does this “change” express itself?
3. What is the relationship between the families (parents, brother, sister, etc.) and the coaches? (Did/do they meet? Relation of friendship? Mutual support, help? Mutual assistance? Problems?)
4. Did your boy/girl ever talk about problems he/she faces with regards to the sport activities, the trainers, the “environment” of the activities?
5. Do you have something to add? Something to mention in particular?

