RACHAEL DAVID

SPORT AND DEVELOPMENT ARTICLE ON SPORT AND EDUCATION

24 January 2019 celebrated the First International Day of Education. Indeed UNICEF’s definition of education emphasises health, life skills and participation in society while its description of the role of sport emphasises inclusion, enjoyment and improved self-esteem. Sport is seen as fostering some of the same benefits as education such as healthy child development, participation and of course life skills such as respect, tolerance and cooperation. SDG4 calls for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Can sport contribute to this goal and if so, how?

One of the key roles of sport is as a unifying force. It mobilises people and communities. Examples of this are ubiquitous. From Mandela’s Invictus to Drogba Diplomacy to the scores of organisations on the sportanddev.org platform uniting youth from all walks of life, different abilities and geographical regions. In these examples, respect for one another and for those in authority as well as for the rules of the game and cooperation (even when one disagrees) is crucial to building tolerance and peace. If we think of the classroom where subjects such as mathematics, science, geography, etc are taught by a qualified teacher and the pitch/court where the rules of the game are explained by a qualified coach, all participants/students are on a level playing field. Thus we see inclusion and equitable quality education at work. Moreover, when we incorporate sport in schools, community centres and learning facilities, we see that the synergy between sport and education provides its participants with the physical, mental, emotional and psychological impetus to grow, prosper and contribute positively to their environment.

Tangible evidence of this is seen in programmes implemented by the Malalo Sports Foundation (MSF), located in the Copperbelt region in Zambia- an organisation that I am proud to have worked with as an online volunteer. Among MSF’s Lines of Work is using sport as a way to form an alliance with schools to reintegrate students who have dropped out, encouraging youth who have completed their secondary studies to enrol in vocational schools, providing education scholarships for those who cannot afford to attend school and building a centre of excellence to combine sport and education. A few years ago the organisation held vocational classes for women, teaching them how to sew as well as giving them classes in information technology. Many of these women went on to set up their own businesses and have become successful and self-sufficient.

Another organisation that is a beacon in the way of sport for social good is Soccer Without Borders (SWB)/Futbol Sin Fronteras, which uses football to engage girls in the sport and teaches them life skills. I have also had the privilege of volunteering with them in Granada, Nicaragua. I recently spoke to Co-Founder and Executive Director Mary McVeigh who said that SWB’s programmes have had an incredibly positive impact by way of school engagement. She revealed that the SWB Oakland, California participants were significantly less absent and had higher self-efficacy than their non-programme peers, while in Nicaragua in 2017, there was a 97% academic pass rate among participants. In Nicaragua, SWB also directly provides resources to support
educational outcomes including school supplies, uniforms and school fees for scholarship recipients.

SDG4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Suffice it to say that both Malalo Sport Foundation and Soccer Without Borders are two examples where sport contributes greatly to achieving this goal. In both cases as in many other such organisations and programmes, participants reap not just the physical health benefits but the psychological and emotional benefits of feeling included, connected and safe, as well as having these sport programmes serve them exceedingly well in an educational capacity. 24 January, the International Day of Education has passed. 6 April, the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace will soon be here. We as advocates, educators, officials, athletes, spectators and programme participants need to demonstrate even more how closely aligned sport and education are and, though we may celebrate each on different days, the job of using sport to achieve SDG4 continues every day.