

Volume 1. Edition 1. March 2013.

# Journal of Sport for Development



## Advancing the Evidence Base of Sport for Development: A New Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed Journal

**JUSTIN RICHARDS<sup>1</sup>, ZACHARY KAUFMAN<sup>2</sup>, NICO SCHULENKORF<sup>3</sup>, ELI WOLFF<sup>4</sup>, KATIE GANNETT<sup>5</sup>, KATJA SIEFKEN<sup>6</sup>, GASPAR RODRIGUEZ<sup>7</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>University of Oxford, UK, <sup>2</sup>London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK, <sup>3</sup>University of Technology Sydney, Australia, <sup>4</sup>Brown University, USA, <sup>5</sup>Grassroot Soccer, South Africa, <sup>6</sup>Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, <sup>7</sup>Vera Solutions, Kenya*

We are pleased to release the first edition of the Journal of Sport for Development (JSFD) and we would like to take this opportunity to briefly describe its origins and objectives. In doing so, we endeavour to clarify for researchers, implementers, funders and policy-makers how we believe JSFD fits into the expanding sport for development (SFD) landscape.

It is widely accepted that the United Nations International Year of Sport and Physical Education (IYSPE) in 2005 was an advocacy success and sparked a mass expansion in the SFD sector.(1) This built on several previous international resolutions that recognised recreational play as a human right and emphasised the social potential of sport.(2-9) Over the last decade, SFD has enjoyed widespread and international growth, in terms of resources, constituents, and public awareness.(10) During this period several entities have attempted to define and demarcate the SFD sector. We believe that establishing a common definition is a critical step towards unifying a diverse range of stakeholders, many of which separately articulate the role of sport for social change and peace. However, we prefer to view these areas as integral parts of the sector and have adapted a previously described broad and inclusive definition for SFD:

*The intentional use of sport, physical activity and play to attain specific development objectives in low- and middle-income countries and disadvantaged communities in high-income settings.(11)*

JSFD was conceived in November 2011 when a series of independent conversations between members of the editorial team reached similar conclusions. As researchers, we were frustrated by the paucity of published evidence supporting the positive rhetoric that continued to fuel the

growth of SFD programmes. It appeared that the sector had not adequately responded to the recommendations in the literature reviews commissioned during the IYSPE and had failed to generate enough contextually relevant high quality SFD research. (12-16) Despite this, from our collective experiences with SFD programmes we were aware that evaluation processes in the sector had evolved substantially since 2005. So then the question became: where were the data and evaluation outputs? When we began disseminating the findings from our own academic work, it became evident to us that there were no peer-reviewed journals exclusively publishing research related to SFD. Additionally, we noted that many SFD practitioners lacked access to the few subscription-based journals that had been publishing SFD-related research.

JSFD aims to fill this gap by providing a multi-disciplinary research focal point for researchers, implementers, funders and policy-makers. Our objective is to examine, advance and disseminate evidence, best practices, and lessons learned from SFD programmes and interventions. We aim to publish both quantitative and qualitative studies that can better inform the SFD sector. This includes evaluations, theoretical frameworks, intervention design papers, and studies assessing the context of SFD programmes. In doing so, we hope to highlight successful results, but also contribute to improving impact by publishing evaluation findings from SFD interventions that failed to achieve their desired outcomes. We believe that JSFD will provide an important forum for critically examining why some initiatives do not live up to expectations. Only well-designed studies will allow us to move beyond the current rhetoric and towards a sound evidence base for SFD interventions.

In its initial stages the journal is scheduled for biannual release. After this first edition, we will make manuscripts available online at the time that they are accepted for publication. Papers published online will also be included in the next full volume of JSFD. In doing so, we intend to provide an important avenue for the timely dissemination of programme evaluation findings and the outputs of a growing number of researchers taking an active interest in SFD.

The editorial team is committed to producing a practically focussed journal that promotes the values of academic rigour in SFD research and evaluation. We believe our peer-review process is a key feature that sets us apart from other SFD platforms and ensures the quality of evidence published in JSFD. To this end, we are interested in research that critically evaluates SFD practice rather than purely seeks to verify the utility of active stakeholders or the sector as a whole. JSFD is receptive to a wide range of SFD research objectives and categorises these under seven broad themes:

**Disability** – development, access, inclusion, and human rights of persons with disabilities;

**Education** – educational developmental and other social outcomes for youth;

**Gender** – gender equity, gender norms, and empowerment of women;

**Health** – physical, mental, and social well-being of all people;

**Livelihoods** – economic and vocational opportunities for disadvantaged people;

**Peace** – reconciliation and peace-building between people and communities in divided societies;

**Social cohesion** – community-building and social inclusion of diverse populations.

JSFD embraces the diversity of the SFD sector in its authors, reviewers and audience. The editorial team recognises that publications in this sector have previously been confined to a relatively small group of prominent individuals and institutions. We aim to promote original contributions from a broader scope of researchers and implementers. To date, we have received 27 submissions from authors in 13 countries, and these have been appraised by reviewers of 16 different nationalities. The manuscripts published in this first edition include a global review as well as contributions from research conducted in Nicaragua, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Sweden. Given that a substantial proportion of SFD resources are directed

towards low- and middle-income countries, JSFD hopes to provide a platform for researchers from these countries to play a more central role in establishing and examining the sector's evidence base. Through the peer review process, we aim to not only screen research quality, but also to build the capacity of SFD authors in the scholarly reporting of programme evaluations and research.

Since many practitioners, evaluators and researchers around the world (particularly in resource-limited settings) lack access to subscription-based journals, we established JSFD as an open-access journal. This ensures that all published articles are publically available online at no cost. Unlike other open-access journals and subscription journals that offer an open-access option, JSFD does not ask or expect authors to pay for the cost of publication. We minimize publishing costs by relying on capable volunteers, publishing only online, and utilizing low-cost technologies.

As an editorial team, we recognise that our determination to establish SFD evidence and the processes of generating this are not without controversy.<sup>(17)</sup> There is also ongoing debate regarding the need to develop programme theory to guide SFD implementation.<sup>(18)</sup> In contrast, among many SFD advocates there are pervasive undercurrents that discredit rigorous evaluation. Several of these stakeholders believe that research and evaluation are unnecessary academic exercises that waste valuable programme resources on outcomes that they postulate are impossible to measure. We believe that JSFD is an ideal platform for informed discussion and critical reflection on these topics and other issues that arise in the sector. Indeed, it is through facilitating these debates that we believe JSFD can contribute to bridging the gap between the diverse range of stakeholders contributing to SFD programmes.

Finally, in a period of increasing austerity in countries that have typically provided the bulk of funding for the SFD sector, we believe its sustainability is closely tied to effective evaluation. We adapt a common mantra from academia in suggesting that SFD organisations must “evaluate or perish”. Only by applying rigorous research methods will the SFD sector establish adequate evidence to streamline its approach and survive broad contractions in foreign aid budgets. At a practical level, this should weed out the “briefcase NGOs” that move from one trend to another at the whim of potential funders but to the detriment of the supposed beneficiaries. We hope that a deeper commitment to rigorous research and evaluation will promote the evolution of the SFD sector and make effective interventions more durable in the changing landscape of international development.

**References**

1. Beutler. Report on the Year of Sport and Physical Education (2005) - Sport for a Better World. 2006, UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP): Geneva.
2. United Nations General Assembly. Declaration on the Rights of the Child. 1959, United Nations: New York.
3. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). International Charter of Physical Education and Sport. 1978, UNESCO: Paris.
4. Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989, United Nations: New York.
5. United Nations General Assembly. Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly - 48/10 International Year of Sport and the Olympic Ideal. 1993, United Nations: New York.
6. United Nations General Assembly. Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly - 52/21 Building a Peaceful and Better World through Sport and the Olympic Ideal. 1997, United Nations: New York.
7. United Nations General Assembly. Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly - 59/10 Sport as a Means to Promote Education, Health, Development and Peace. 2004, United Nations: New York.
8. United Nations Women. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - Article 10(G) & 13(C) 2003, United Nations Women: New York.
9. United Nations Enable. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - Article 30.5. 2006, United Nations Enable: New York.
10. R. Giulianotti. The Sport for Development and Peace Sector: An Analysis of Its Emergence, Key Institutions, and Social Possibilities. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 2012. 18(2).
11. Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDPIWG). *Harnessing the Power of Sport for Development and Peace: Recommendations to Governments*. 2008, SDPIWG: Toronto.
12. P. Donnelly, S. Darnell, S. Wells, J. Coakley. The Use of Sport to Foster Child and Youth Development and Education in Literature Reviews on Sport for Development and Peace. 2007, Sport for Development & Peace International Working Group (SDPIWG): Toronto.
13. D. Zakus, D. Njelesani, S. Darnell. The Use of Sport and Physical Activity to Achieve Health Objectives, in Literature Reviews on Sport for Development and Peace. 2007, Sport for Development & Peace International Working Group (SDPIWG): Toronto.
14. J. Larkin, S. Razack, F. Moola. Gender, Sport and Development, in Literature Reviews on Sport for Development and Peace. 2007, Sport for Development & Peace International Working Group (SDPIWG): Toronto.
15. P. Parnes, G. Hashemi. Sport as a Means to Foster Inclusion, Health and Well-Being of People with Disabilities, in Literature Reviews on Sport for Development and Peace. 2007, Sport for Development & Peace International Working Group (SDPIWG): Toronto.
16. B. Kidd, M. MacDonnell. Peace, Sport and Development, in Literature Reviews on Sport for Development and Peace. 2007, Sport for Development & Peace International Working Group (SDPIWG): Toronto.
17. S. Nicholls, A. Giles, C. Sethna. Perpetuating the 'Lack of Evidence' Discourse in Sport for Development: Privileged Voices, Unheard Stories and Subjugated Knowledge. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 2010. 46(3): p. 249-264.
18. F. Coalter. *Sport-for-Development Impact Study - a Research Initiative Funded by Comic Relief and U.K. Sport and Managed by International Development through Sport*, Department of Sports Studies, Editor. 2010, University of Stirling: Stirling.

# GIZ/YDF and Youth as Drivers of Sport for Development in the African Context

CORA BURNETT<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Johannesburg, Department of Sport and Movement Studies, South Africa*

*Corresponding author email: corab@uj.ac.za*

## Abstract

The 2010 FIFA World Cup attracted key development agencies to the African continent such as GIZ, which created a Youth Development through Football (YDF) programme for implementation in ten African countries. With a critical mass of participants in South Africa (40,344 youth between 7 and 25 years old) and nine other African countries (41,307 similar youth participants), an inside-out approach ensured optimal delivery in collaboration with multiple stakeholders from a variety of sectors. A social impact assessment conducted in 2011 revealed changes at the overall objective level. The S•DIAT (Sport-in-Development Impact Assessment Tool) was utilised, which followed a pre-post comparative design and mixed-method approach with purposive sampling. This paper is based on qualitative data obtained through structured interviews and focus groups. A total of 21 managers, 51 participants and 51 of their significant others were interviewed, while 231 research participants took part in 36 focus group sessions. Most Significant Changes (MSC) were evident in the lives of peer-educators who received training, earned an income and experienced upward social mobility, despite slight improvements in their overall employability status. Social benefits were recorded but relatively high expectations of gaining access to a sustainable income did not materialise and the implementing youths' socio-economic vulnerability posed a threat to programme and institutional sustainability.

## Introduction

The academic discourse around Sport for Development (SfD) has for several years, focused on legitimising the body of knowledge with an increase in academic rigor and a comprehensive scientific base (1-6). A myriad of local and regional studies (7-11), as well as the global mapping of research (12), contribute to a growing evidence base in this field of scientific inquiry. This is partly due to the international engagement of the United Nations (13) and key international stakeholders such as the IOC (International Olympic Committee), which signed an agreement with the UN, and FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), which supported Sport for Good initiatives across a plethora of practices and stakeholder engagement (14-15).

There is a lack of understanding and clarity of conceptual frameworks as research is conducted from very diverse disciplinary perspectives and in different contexts (16). In addition to conceptual and scientific papers, a theory-practice articulation is pursued at various forums such as the Next Step Conferences, the sportanddev web-based virtual communication and across a range of highly profiled deliverables (12, 15-17). Nicholls, Giles and Sethna argue that the "lack of evidence" discourse might be traced to the "unheard stories and subjugated knowledge" from local constituencies at the receiving end of sport for development initiatives (18). It is the absence of the "local voices" and community uptake that necessitate a more inclusive approach and global-local collaboration to understand local effect and impact (7).

**Keywords:** Sport for development, Africa, GIZ/YDF, peer-educators, role models.

As the first wave of constituting a body of knowledge (7, 13) reaches some maturity, research communities also focus on stakeholder engagement at various levels of sport for development phenomena – from policy development, strategic partnership formation, and finding common ground for implementation and impact assessment. Stakeholders such as corporates (Social Corporate Investment initiatives), government agencies, development agencies and the Non-Government (NGO) sectors have unique yet interrelated interests in the sport for development sector (7, 16). Stakeholder engagement within the sector is seldom the focus of research, as increased research endeavours focus on communicating and disseminating localised development dynamics and effects. A typical study in this vein focused on localised experiences of beneficiaries such as a study on the Homeless World Cup (19).

Multi-levelled stakeholder engagement and meaningful strategic partnerships are also evidenced in the work of John Sudgen (20) where the government sector and community-based agencies collaborate with an international NGO (Football for Peace) to bring about peaceful co-existence in Israel. It is often NGOs with high levels of agency that provide widely recognized models such as: MYSA in Kenya, Go Girls in Zambia, the Magic Bus in India (2) and Grassroot Soccer with a local or regional footprint (21).

From the Comic Relief’s investigation of Sport for Development work, it is evident that multi-stakeholder involvement is essential for sustainable and grassroots-level delivery (12). The engagement of and partnership with the government sectors were thus a key component for legitimacy, access and integrated delivery of services and products (22). Affiliation to various forums and agencies and making inroads into the development of policies and practices for co-delivery of Sport for Development initiatives, seem to be a second wave within this movement.

The building of strategic partnerships and increased networking laid the grounds for another trend (23). It is during the contextualisation of sport for development work where the initial neo-liberalism (24) has made way for inquiry into social capital (25), critical pragmatism (20) and post-modernist frameworks, allowing local agency to surface. Grounded theory development constitutes an identifiable third wave that is also recognizable in increased networking, sustainable practices, ideology transfer, methodological innovation and strategic research (researcher-stakeholder collaboration) in this field (26-27). It is within this context of network formation that Mintzberg (28) critically reflected on three distinct development

approaches, namely i) the top-down government planning approach, ii) the inside-out indigenous development approach, and iii) the outside-in ‘globalisation’ approach.

The top-down approach is often followed by international and national level development and government agencies where programmes are developed (outside the implementing context) and then delivered in a relatively uniform way. This rather autocratic approach ensures relative coherence and standardised deliverables evidenced in a “splash and ripple” implementing model (20, 22). The inside-out approach is mostly followed by foundations and corporates in search of local NGOs that could deliver sport for development programmes “on their behalf”.

The delivery model could be described as a “plant and grow” approach where sport for development philosophy and strategic imperatives are directive for implementation such as sport-specific (e.g. football or basketball) or thematic (HIV/AIDS prevention or life skill programmes) (7-8). The third approach mostly starts with a local NGO (such as MYSA in Kenya) addressing real issues and could be described as a “spark and flow” process (2, 12).

These types of approaches are distinguishable but in reality, diverse and hybrid models emerge especially if local NGOs provide the downward or outward implementation of externally developed programmes, in addition to what they might already have had on offering (7).

Sport for development initiatives and stakeholder engagement should also be understood against the colonial past and in the aftermath of the establishments of independent governments (29 - 31). It is against this context of post-Colonial poverty and multi-stakeholder engagement that the GIZ/YDF (Deutsche Gesellschaft for Technische Zusammenarbeit)/Youth Development through Football) programme should be understood. The following combination of approaches were followed, namely the inside-out model of implementation (recruiting, capacitating NGOs and spreading the sport-for-development philosophy) and top-down delivery model (development of a toolkit for standardized and quality delivery of thematic programmes) (30).

As such the programme spearheaded sport for development with diverse NGOs on the African continent.

In-depth impact assessments were undertaken by independent academics, directed by well-designed indicators and supported by a monitoring and evaluation system. This paper reports on the qualitative “quality of life” and “community development” fields that translate into four indicators, reflective of local realities and community-level uptake.

This research followed a strategic directive of addressing challenges, supporting good practices and ensuring evidence-based recommendations for optimal programme effect in terms of deliverable social impact (30). Different levels of analysis relates to multi-levelled stakeholder engagement, strategic partnership formation and programme delivery in diverse contexts with the focus on sustainability and identification of the Most Significant Changes (MSC) as programme-related social impact (7, 30).

**GIZ/YDF as Key Strategic Partner**

GIZ implemented the Youth Development through Football (YDF) as a supranational programme in partnership with SRSA (Sport and Recreation South Africa) and mainly NGO partners and networks in ten African countries. The German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the European Union (EU) funded the project that forms part of the German-South African FIFA World Cup 2010. The project commenced in 2007 and aimed to spread the philosophy and build operational capacity across a wide spectrum of stakeholders. In the initial pre-2010 FIFA World Cup phase in South Africa, the programme had as key deliverables, to spread an excitement, awareness and engagement of this mega-event within a Pan-Africanist philosophy (31). Advocacy for South Africa and Africa as host country and continent, main events and tours were undertaken such as the Peace Caravan (also called Caravanamani) across the Great Lakes Region in Eastern Africa (32).

In July 2011, 40 344 boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 25 years, benefited from and were supported by YDF projects in South Africa and 41 307 in other partner countries in Africa. Through training offered, a further 12 389 participants (in South Africa) and 29 730 (in other African countries) were reached (although this figure is under-reported due to non-completion of required training data-sets to be completed by trainers) (30).

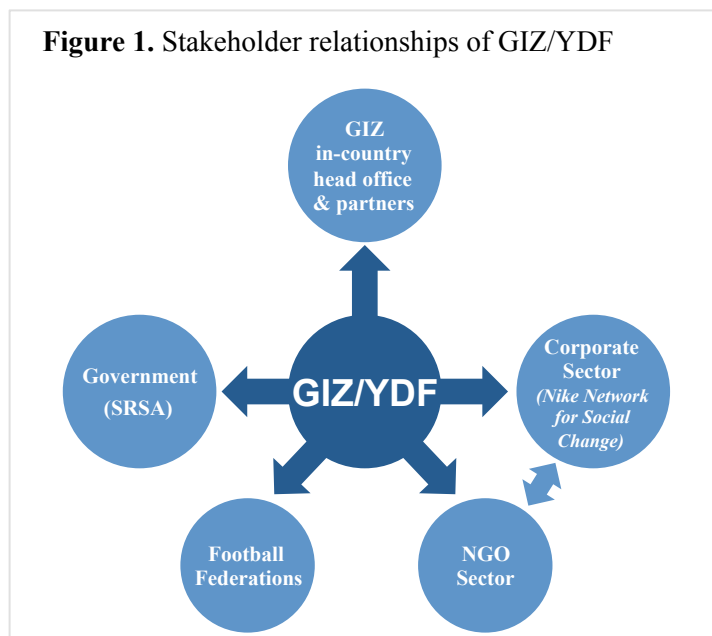
SRSA emerged as the key government partner and close collaboration was established between the two head offices in Pretoria. The drive for a change in ideology and methodology guided the initial recruitment of delivering

partners, first in five Southern African countries (i.e. South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Zambia), followed by five “other” African countries.

Regional (in-country) partners and networks were recruited and formal agreements signed to provide delivery channels and broaden service-level agreements for optimal local ownership that should develop into a sustainable and traceable legacy. Existing GIZ in-country head offices were mainly influential in Lesotho (facilitating the collaboration between the Lesotho Football Federation, NGOs and government sector for life skills training and HIV/AIDS prevention), and Zambia (featuring a similar profile with partners in the field of environmental care and water conservation). The absence of a strong NGO-partner with substantial ‘reach’ within the country, along with strong local links with the Namibian National Football Association made them a key partner for the implementation of life skills to young football players.

Collaboration with Nike South Africa (a key strategic corporate partner) was instrumental in forming the Sport for Social Change Network (SSCN). Currently this network has 42 members from Southern African Countries who are co-funded by Nike South Africa and GIZ/YDF for sport for development initiatives. The following diagram displays the stakeholder engagement and positionality of GIZ/YDF, relative to that of SRSA, GIZ in-country head offices, sport federations and the NGO-sector.

**Figure 1. Stakeholder relationships of GIZ/YDF**



From this diagram it can also be concluded that GIZ/YDF has been a key driver in bringing diverse stakeholders together to deliver sport for development programmes, as well as life skill programmes to the football fraternity (e.g. football federation and affiliated clubs). Most significantly is the civic society engagement and the inclusion of the NGO-sector that has experienced high levels of marginalisation from the government sector, which mostly funds their own top-down programmes through schools and sport club structures in communities.

The SSCN network has the potential of developing into a

representative movement for the NGO-sector in Southern Africa with constituted ownership. Networks as strategic partners inevitably offer positive opportunities to build sustainable capacity from an outside-in approach and delivery through existing in-country structures. Engaging with the Ghana network (with NGO and government partners), as well as the Western Cape network (mostly constituted of NGOs) is a strategy for developing local capacity and reach. The following two tables provide an overview of the GIZ/YDF partners and sectors in Africa, with the South African partners in Table 1 and “other” African partners in Table 2.

**Table 1. GIZ/YDF Partners in South Africa**

**Partners in Different Provinces of South Africa**      **Stakeholder Sector**

Gauteng: Altus Sport, Dona’s Mates, Ndlala Ntombazana, Mokopane Academy of Sport South Africa, Social Development Agency (SASDA), Play Soccer South Africa & SA Cares for Life	NGOs
Western Cape: Yabonga Children’s Project, Amandla Ku Lutsha, Oasis, New World Foundation, Football4Hope, Arise, Soccer4Hope, African Youth Events Promotions (AYEP) & West Coast Community Foundation	
Eastern Cape: Umzingisi, African Footprint for Hope & Invomvo	
Northern Cape: Agang Youth Centre	
KwaZulu-Natal: Umgungundlovu Sport Academy, Phindivuye, Ecofuture & Sportstech	
Free State Province: Mangaung University of Free State Community Partnership	
Limpopo: African Youth Development Fund	
North West Province: Leseding Community Development Project	
Mpumalanga Province: Scouts Association South Africa (SASA) & Siyakhula Youth Health and Development Organization. Multiple provinces: Grassroots Soccer & Conquest for Life	
SRSA (Siyadlala, Community Mass Participation Programme)	Government (SRSA)
Western Cape Network	NGOs & Government
SAFA Moteo & Early Bird Football Club	South African Football Association
Volkswagen SA & Nike SA (Sport for Social Change Network)	Corporate Sector

**Table 2. GIZ/YDF (contractual) Partners in “other” African Countries**

Country	Partners	Stakeholder Sector
Botswana	SEDYE	NGO
Lesotho	Kick4Life	NGO
Namibia	Namibia Football Association	National Sport Federation
Mozambique	Lurdes Mutola Foundation & GIZ head office	NGO, GIZ Health & GIZ Education
Zambia	EduSport, Breakthrough Chiparamba Sports Academy & GIZ/YDF network, GIZ head office	NGO GIZ (Water and Sanitation)
Swaziland	Swaziland Social Transformation Network, National Football Association of Swaziland	Network (NGOs) National Football Association
Kenya	Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), Society Empowerment Project (SEP), Moving the Goalposts, Vijani Amani Pamoja (VAP) & Kesofu	NGOs
Rwanda	YDF-network, Esperance	NGOs & Government Sector
Ghana	Play Soccer Ghana, ACRO & UNHCR, Ghana YDF-network	NGOs, Government sector & Sport Federations

In 2009, the partnership base was significantly broadened and the outside-in strategic approach was well-established (28). High profiled NGOs such as Moving the Goalposts, VAP and MYSA (Kenya) and Esperance (Rwanda), as well as a regional network in East Africa was established and earmarked for ‘capacity building’. The capacity building also took place in the development of a module on Life Skills through Football, followed by other modules with local content (e.g. the Health and Hygiene project in Zambia, Gender and Violence Prevention). From the two tables, it is evident that a majority of the support for sport for development programmes is focused on South African NGOs.



With the structuring of the SSCN and multiple partnerships between civic society structures (NGOs), football associations, the corporate and government sectors, a strategy for sustainable delivery is followed.

Upon the fulfilment of contractual agreements with NGOs outside South Africa, GIZ/YDF expanded its reach by focusing on resource development and training. South African based NGOs were involved in offering training to other organisations with Soccer for Hope (Western Cape Province), Umzingisi (Eastern Cape Province), Altus Sport and Dona’s Mates (Gauteng Province) and took leadership roles. It is against these dynamics that research was conducted.

The research design offers a synthesis between different methodologies prevailing in evaluation and anthropological research practices for determining social impact according to a pre-post design. The paper will predominantly report on four indicators in recognition of the influential role of youth and community-based organisations (NGOs). It will be substantiated by qualitative data captured through interviews and focus groups (9, 13) during site visits to seven African countries and 10 leading NGOs during the first five months of 2011.

**Methodology**

The S•DIAT (Sport for Development Impact Assessment Tool) (7, 12) was utilized in a Participatory Action Research framework. Local representatives received training in the particular tool and assisted in representative and purposive sampling, as well as with the logistics and access to research participants. These trainees assisted in the actual data collection by serving as translators and were also consulted in the interpretation of results. In this way, socio-cultural and linguistic barriers were overcome whilst local knowledge and narratives could be accurately mediated.

The triangulation of methods and involvement of local researchers provided the reciprocal agency and meaningful communication between researchers and research participants. Local voices became the privileged voices as advocated by researchers who want to bridge the knowledge gap (18).

The following samples and methods were implemented for data collection and triangulation:

The following individuals were interviewed:

- 21 managers or decision-makers and 48 implementers (e.g. coaches and peer educators),
- 35 high/secondary school participants and 16 primary school participants, and
- 51 significant others (e.g. family members and close friends).

Decision-makers and managers were asked a set of structured questions to establish how the programme is implemented, managed and delivered, as well as its observed effects as it relates to the intended and unintended consequences of the sport for development intervention and stakeholder engagement.

In addition to the qualitative aspect of programme delivery, implementers were interviewed about their own experiences as recipients of the intervention and how it contributed to “change” in their own lives and that of their participants’ lives. For them and the participants, the non-directive controlled interview technique provided a framework for capturing live-experiences in terms of the most significant changes as related to the GIZ/YDF-related effect.

This portion of the impact assessment went beyond a typical impact assessment and entailed the collection of 121 in-depth comprehensive case studies where significant others, friends and team members of a particular “case” (e.g. coach, administrator or participant) were interviewed.

Focus group research participants:

- Network members (Ghana, n=13; Western Cape, n=6; Rwanda, n=10),
- 112 implementers (73, 65.2%) males and 39 (34.8%) females), and
- 90 high/secondary school participants and 101 primary school participants.

Focus group participants were collected according to differential (break) characteristics by separating groups in terms of gender, age and programme participation.

Whereas implementers and network members were a (gender and age) mix, participants were separated according to age-division participation and programme-representation was ensured if there were multiple interventions.

In most cases, participants firstly completed the questionnaires (not included for this paper) and were then selected for focus group participation up to a maximum of 10 members per session. More “talkative” participants were selected and the nominal group technique employed to ensure that all members were awarded the opportunity to contribute equally during discussions.

Ethical considerations required all research participants to sign a consent form and in the case of school children, permission was obtained from the principal, along with the presence of a teacher during data collection. All case studies have been sent back to the research participants and life stories were only selected for publication (under a pseudo name) once the participants were able to examine it and grant permission to do so. However, extensive observation was not possible in the given time frame and set schedules.

Though the comprehensive data sets cannot be optimally reported due to the publication parameters, the most significant themes and narratives will be reported as expectations are (partially) met, needs addressed, good practices and challenges identified. This will be followed by recommendations for optimal effect and effective implementation. Social effects (intermediate impact) and longer-term impact observable at different levels (macro-, meso- and micro levels) will be reported with the focus on sustainable change at all levels of engagement (30).

**Results and Discussion**

The four indicators underpinning the overall objective of the GIZ/YDF programme focus on how youth are included as drivers in social and economic development in South Africa and other African partner countries. The first indicator in this regard, refers to the training offered for implementing the GIZ/YDF toolkit. It entails different manuals with a core model on football coaching integrated with life skills, as well as short modules of choice.

**Toolkit Training and Delivery**

The indicators monitor the number of youth being trained and implementing programmes, across a spectrum of life skills, HIV and AIDS focused programmes and sport coaching.

The aim of the first indicator states that ‘1000 youths (should) be trained in the YDF toolkit and for 1 000 youths to be implementing the programmes’. Across the spectrum of implementing parties, 1 820 youths were involved in the delivery of tool-kit modules.

The training of coaches mainly focused on knowledge and skills for programme implementation and did little to improve the implementing youths’ chances of career advancement or their employability outside the sphere of programme implementation and coaching. However, several NGOs could earn funding for having qualified as “master trainers” and offer training (on contract from GIZ/YDF) to other coaches and implementing partners in their communities. A coach from Zambia explains:

*‘I am now a volunteer and earn no money except when I facilitate a workshop. I presented six workshops for two to three days and earned 30 000 Kwacha (6 USD) per day. I also get a travelling allowance when I do workshops. I present a workshop maybe every three months. At the matches that we play every weekend, I get food.’*

The remuneration and access to food is deemed as highly beneficial. During focus group sessions, the income-generating opportunities were highly valued. Most coaches and peer-educators are temporarily employed per contract from funding partners or paid for services rendered (as explained in the narrative). The VAP coaches indicated that some of them hold two or three contracts according to the programmes or services delivered as contractual deliverables between the NGO and funder. This leaves them economically vulnerable and many engage in informal trading to make ends meet. Several coaches from Kenya were trading in second hand clothing, whilst a young coach from Lesotho borrowed “start-up” money for her small business from Kick4Life. This indicator is thus inevitably linked to another one that focused on socio-economic empowerment.

**Socio-economic Empowerment**

This indicator states that ‘at least 60% of youth implementers should be exposed to opportunities (i.e. networks), sport-related experiences and training that will enhance their employability to be realised in the long term’.

This particular indicator can only be measured in a more longitudinal study as employment opportunities in the sport sector in developing countries are relatively scarce and transference of skills to other sectors still needs scientific documentation and analysis for conclusive results.

During the research, most peer-educators were positive about the training that they had received and their exposure in participating on different forums (especially prior to and during the 2010 FIFA World Cup). They were less optimistic that they will obtain permanent employment in the long run. Being a coach, administrator and even an owner of an NGO, the opportunities for sustainable income generation are relatively bleak in the context of poverty. Especially in the field of sport coaching, players cannot afford to pay membership fees and are thus highly dependent on sponsorships and free services.

Against the background of severe poverty and lack of material resources to afford school fees (as reported by many peer-educators in Kenya and Zambia), the general educational levels of peer-educators are relatively low. In all the interviews with peer-educators it was evident that many in Kenya and Zambia found themselves trapped as a coach (earning a meagre stipend), but did not have the financial means even 'to pay for the release of school results'. In one case, a student from Livingstone (Zambia) completed his final school year in 2001 but could only save enough money to pay for the release of his results in 2011.

A common motivator for peer-educators in Lesotho (Kick4Life) was that they could earn access to a scholarship to complete their schooling. During focus group sessions, it was clear that most peer-educators did not complete their schooling or possess post-school qualifications. This situation is relatively worse for young coaches from Esperance (Rwanda) where some youth are responsible to

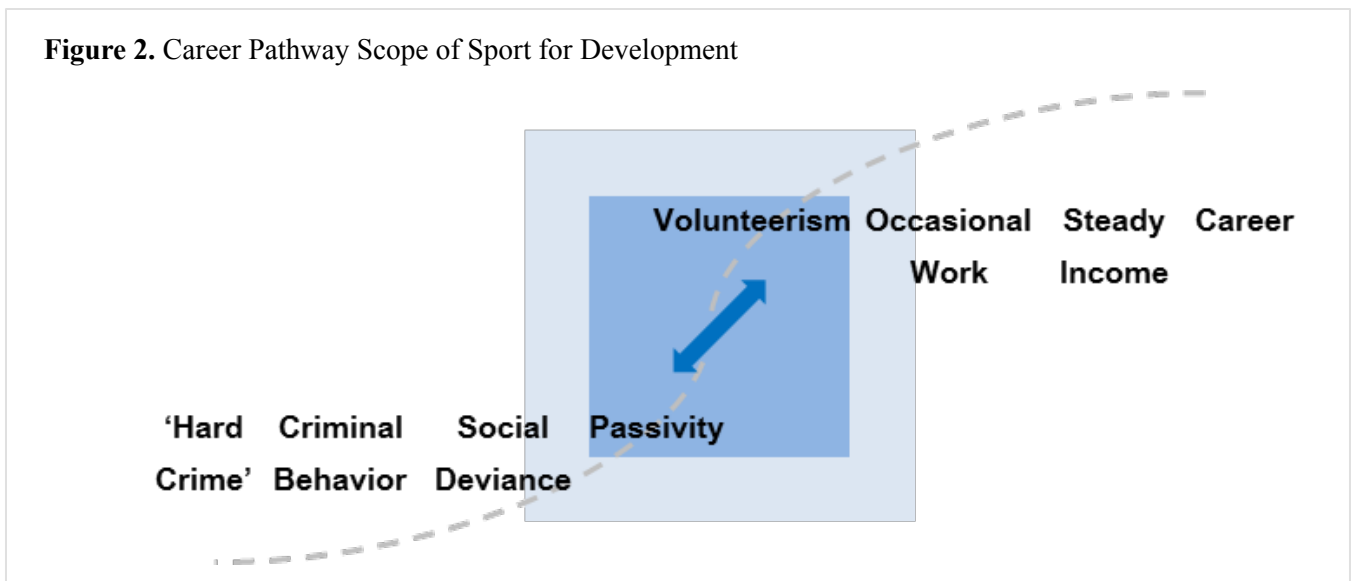
earn their sustenance when living with foster families. A young boy from the rural areas had to leave school and 'sell air time for cell phones' for his foster parents in Kigali.

Due to high levels of unemployment, a relatively large proportion of implementers were older coaches who had been involved as "volunteers" in various roles of delivering community sport. In the context of extreme and chronic poverty, youth and older citizens view NGO ownership or "working" for one as a viable option in the absence of formal employment. From the interviews and focus groups it was evident that there were high expectations of finding employment or at least an opportunity to earn a regular income.

Two coaches in Orange Farm (Gauteng Province) have been volunteering for more than ten years, have two children but cannot afford to marry or live together because they would have to support their households and extended families to survive. This scenario is well-known in impoverished communities where HIV and AIDS-related deaths have forced people to leave their children (known as Orphan and Vulnerable Children or OVCs) to care for themselves (20).

The following figure indicates how volunteerism is seen as a pivotal force to help youth lead a productive life compared to their counterparts that might have slipped into a deviant life style.

Figure 2. Career Pathway Scope of Sport for Development



Volunteerism in the African context of poverty translates into “paid volunteerism” as coaches and peer-educators generally receive a small stipend for implementing programmes or providing their services under contract from funders such as GIZ/YDF. For many being able to earn a small income is considered as “being employed”, it is also status-conferring in communities. As indicated in Figure Two, the alternative of being unemployed and not engaging in any type of community work would result in youth who are inactive, unengaged, or have too much free time, which causes young men to engage in anti-social types of behaviour.

Recommendations offered for reducing the socio-economic vulnerability and retaining the services of peer-educators, include the request to offer (additional) training in sport administration, event and project management to develop more competencies that could enhance their employable status. During focus group sessions, many implementers also identified a need for attending courses in computer literacy, driving skills (and a driver’s licence), internships, scholarships (for the completion of schooling or post-school training), and work-related placements within or outside the sports sector.

It is also for this reason that ‘accredited training’ and training that ‘could build a CV’ are highly acclaimed. Interview data obtained from significant others of peer-educators and coaches confirm perceptions of parents that youth should be able to find employment. A peer educator in Botswana explained:

**‘I am very much pressured by my parents to find a job. When I coach, they like me doing something for the community...it is not serious...it is not proper work.’**

A mother of a coach in Kenya (from VAP) had the same opinion when she indicated that her son is coaching and working long hours for the NGO but only ‘gets little money’. In Rwanda (Esperance), Lesotho (Kick4Life) and South Africa (Umzingisi) the parents of implementers are relatively desperate for them to earn a steady income. It is also the one factor that was a threat to the retention of implementers. Sustainable service delivery is threatened if peer-educators or coaches had to leave to find employment, whilst it might be considered as desirable according to the strategy of “youth empowerment”.

### **Youth to Increase Institutional Capacity and Sustainability**

The third indicator states that ‘at least 60% of partner organisations acknowledge that the youth contribute to the institutional capacity and sustainability of programme delivery’. It is noted that 18 of the 21 managers who were interviewed, confirmed that peer-educators are the main contributing factor to institutional capacity. This viewpoint was also held by significant others who acknowledged the youths’ contribution as key to the very existence of community-based organizations. Peer-educators and local coaches are needed because they are meaningful bearers of local knowledge and ensure that programmes are needs based and community-driven. All current leaders of NGOs were once implementing members and have been nurtured for such positions by founding members or mentors.

Some options exist for employment in the NGO sector as evidenced in Edusport (Zambia), Kick4Life (Lesotho), Esperance (Rwanda), MYSA (Kenya), Soccer4Hope and Yabonga (South Africa) where actual pathways were created. Given the economic vulnerability of most organisations, however, the possibility of offering youngsters a career within the existing structures is not an option.

The inside-out approach followed by GIZ/YDF allowed for implementing partners to maintain local ownership. In some instances, there was initial resistance to the Toolkit training as most partners already had their curricula and resource material. They negotiated the utilization of the toolkit as a resource by integrating it into their existing delivery framework. This indicator should be viewed in relation to the next one that is reflective on the role of youths as potential agents of change.

### **Youths Recognised as ‘Drivers’ for Social Change**

This indicator states ‘that at least 60% of youth report that they are recognized as catalysts for social change (e.g. role models, provide leadership, change power relations, and address local needs)’.

During the focus group sessions, all implementers were positive about the elevation of their personal status in the organisation, club, programme and/or wider community. Most of the peer-educators said they felt a ‘special calling to be a role model to the youth’.

Another widely reported experience relates to the peer-educators being recognised by parents and teachers as significant others of their participants. For peer-educators (mostly unemployed youth) being greeted as ‘coach’ is emotionally rewarding and status conferring. Similar findings were reported by various researchers conducting impact assessments in local settings (7-11).

In one of the organisations that is a partner of the Western Cape network, all the implementers were HIV positive and they felt empowered to be ‘open about our status...people come to us with all the questions and they would also tell us about themselves or others who are also HIV positive’ (focus group response). They have found a calling and have become a valuable source of knowledge and support in their communities.

Special recognitions also afforded to ex-elite players as in the case of the Namibian Football Association where several coaches are recognized due to their own career performances, or as in the case of one young coach living among his players in an impoverished township - ‘being a father figure to these boys is very valuable to us (single parent mothers) as most of the boys grow up without having a father as a role model’ (interview significant other of a young male participant). A similar case presented itself as a coach from the Western Cape network explains:

**‘Currently I am a role model to the guys (players). I am like a father to 110 kids. I have to look after them and take their minds away from their home circumstance. Most are abused children. Many of them do not want to go home.’**

Special recognition that school-going peer-educators receive, often give them a purpose in life as expressed by a mother of a girl offering the Reading and Writing Programme of Altus Sport (an NGO in the Gauteng Province of South Africa):

**‘She loves teaching other children and I can see that it is important. We (as a family) appreciate what she is doing in the community – caring for children and helping them.’**

The peer-educator is acknowledged as a person who is valued in the community, and this brings the recognition to the family or household as people who are doing meaningful and selfless work for the community. In the African context of poverty such altruistic work is an integrated component of a collective consciousness and ethic of care.

The GIZ/YDF programme is indeed comprehensive in scale (reaching about 81, 651 participants in ten African countries). The inside-out approach (28) evidenced by forming strategic partnerships with the NGO-sector and other networks (such as the Sport for Social Change Network co-funded by Nike South Africa) contributes to an extensive reach. The development of “toolkit modules” (including life skills, gender education, health and hygiene, violence prevention and environmental care) afforded NGO employees the opportunities to earn income as master trainers for their implementing parties. With this strategy, the focus is on enriching existing programmes and institutional capacity building. In this way GIZ/YDF is indeed a significant force in offering sport for development in African countries. The strategic partnerships with government (Sport and Recreation South Africa) and national sport associations (e.g. Namibian Football Association) aim to leave a legacy once the programme comes to an end.

The implementing youth are the community-based drivers of behavioural change, and the most significant benefit for them is to be recognized as role models in their communities (7). This is particularly status-conferring as social capital is vested in the trusting relationships that they have with their participants. Young men who act as programme implementers are acknowledged as father figures to vulnerable youth, whereas they also demonstrate high levels of resilience, agency and self-worth. For many of these “paid volunteers” who receive a small stipend according to contractual agreements, sport for development work has become a way of life in contexts of poverty where opportunities for upward social mobility are scarce.

## Conclusion

Some of the knowledge gaps remaining in the current sport for development body of knowledge relate to multi-stakeholder dynamics and power relations at different levels of engagement (1). From the analysis of issues relating to the status and empowerment of youth as part of the NGO-sector, development agencies are challenged to address real issues for programme sustainability and youth development through sport. This might be a highly contested issue for youth acting as peer-educators and programme implementers, who are most often unemployed and socio-economically vulnerable. The trainings that are provided to them are most often narrowly focused on knowledge and skills for specific programme implementation that do not contribute to improve their employability status.

However, if they would receive accredited market-related training that would aid them to find stable employment, the sustainability of an organisation and a particular programme might be negatively affected. NGOs are particularly vulnerable and dependent on contracts for their sustainability. Furthermore, a high turnover of human resources (in this case peer educators or coaches) threatens sustainable and quality service delivery (30). A good practice in this regard is observed when out-of-school (unemployed) youth can contribute their services and reciprocally qualify for bursaries or scholarships to pursue a career – inside or outside the sports fraternity.

The GIZ/YDF programme is indeed comprehensive in scale (reaching about 81, 651 participants in ten African countries). The inside-out approach (28) evidenced by forming strategic partnerships with the NGO-sector and other networks (such as the Sport for Social Change Network co-funded by Nike South Africa) contributes to an extensive reach. The development of “toolkit modules” (including life skills, gender education, health and hygiene, violence prevention and environmental care) afforded NGO employees the opportunities to earn income as master trainers for their implementing parties. With this strategy, the focus is on enriching existing programmes and institutional capacity building. In this way GIZ/YDF is indeed a significant force in offering sport for development in African countries. The strategic partnerships with government (Sport and Recreation South Africa) and national sport associations (e.g. Namibian Football Association) aim to leave a legacy once the programme comes to an end.

The implementing youth are the community-based drivers of behavioural change, and the most significant benefit for them is to be recognized as role models in their communities (7). This is particularly status-conferring as social capital is vested in the trusting relationships that they have with their participants. Young men who act as programme implementers are acknowledged as father figures to vulnerable youth, whereas they also demonstrate high levels of resilience, agency and self-worth. For many of these “paid volunteers” who receive a small stipend according to contractual agreements, sport for development work has become a way of life in contexts of poverty where opportunities for upward social mobility are scarce.

**References**

1. Coalter F. Sport clubs, social capital and social regeneration: ‘Ill-defined interventions with hard to follow outcomes’. *Sport in Society*. 2007; 10(4):537-559.

2. Coalter F. Sport-for-development: Tactics are more important than strategy. Paper presented at the International Conference on Sport for Development and Peace. *Sport as Mediator between Cultures*. Wingate Institute for Physical Education and Sport, Israel; 15 – 17 September 2011.

3. Jarvie G. Sport, development and aid: Can sport make a difference? *Sport in Society*. 2011; 14(2):241-252.

4. Coakley, J. Youth Sports: What counts as “positive development?” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 2011; 20(10):1-19.

5. Giulianotti, R. Sport, peace-making and conflict resolution: a contextual analysis and modelling of the sport, development and peace sector. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2011; 34(2):207-228.

6. Spaaij, R. (2009). Personal and social change in and through sport: Cross-cutting themes. *Sport in Society*, 2009; 12(9):1265-1268.

7. Burnett C. Sport for/in Development: a paradigm shift towards holism. Paper delivered at the ISSA (International Sociology of Sport Association) World Congress for the Sociology of Sport, Havana, Cuba; 12 – 15 July 2011.

8. Kay T. Developing through sport: Evidencing sport impacts on young people. *Sport in Society*. 2009; 12(9): 1177-1191.

9. Liebmann S, Rookwood J. Football for Peace? Bringing Jews and Arabs together in Northern Israel. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sport Studies*. 2007; 1(1):11-18.

10. Sugden J. Critical left-realism and sport interventions in divided societies. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2010; 45(3):258-272.

11. IDS (International Development through Sport). Sport for Development: an impact study. 2011 (cited 2011 November 23). Available from: <http://www.uksport.gov.uk/>

12. Cronin Ó. Comic Relief Review. Mapping research on the impact of Sport and Development interventions. Manchester: Comic Relief; 2011.

13. Beutler I. Sport serving development and peace: Achieving the goals of the United Nations through sport. *Sport in Society*. 2008; 11(4):359-369.

14. Lemke W. Fostering Grassroots Sport for Development and Peace. Keynote presentation by the Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General. Playthegame 2011 International Conference. Bringing change to the heart of sport. German Sport University, Cologne; 3-6 October 2011.

15. Jennings LB, Parra-Medina DM, Hilfinger DK, McLoughlin K. Toward a critical social theory of youth empowerment. *Journal of Community Practice*. 2006; 14(1/2):31-55.

16. Kidd B. A new social movement: Sport for Development and Peace. *Sport in Society*. 2008; 12(9):1177-1191.

17. Giulianotti, C. Sport, transnational peacemaking, and global civil society: Exploring the reflective discourses of “sport, development, and peace” project officials. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. 2011; 35(1):50-71.

18. Nicholls S, Giles AR, Sethna, C. Perpetuating the ‘lack of evidence’ discourse in sport for development: Privileged voices, unheard stories and subjugated knowledge. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2011; 46(3): 249-264.

19. Sherry, E. (Re)engaging marginalized groups through sport: The Homeless World Cup, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 2010; 45(1):59-71.

20. Sugden J. Community and the instrumental use of football. Anyone for Football for Peace? The challenges of using sport in the service of co-existence in Israel. *Soccer in Society*. 2008; 9(3):405-415.

21. Peacock-Villada P, DeCelles J, Banda PS. Grassroot Soccer resilience pilot program: Building resilience through sport-based education in Zambia and South Africa. *New Directions for Youth Development*, No. 116: DOL, 10.1002/yd.241; 2007.

22. Houlihan B, White A. The politics of Sport Development: Development of Sport or Development through Sport? London: Routledge; 2002.

23. Geys B, Murdoch Z. Measuring the ‘bridging’ versus ‘bonding’ nature of social networks: a proposal for integrating existing measures. *Sociology*. 2010; 44(3): 523-540.

24. Hayhurst LMC, Wilson B, Frisby W. Navigating neoliberal networks: Transnational Internet platforms in

sport for development and peace. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2011; 46(3):315-329.

25. Darnell SC. Power, politics and “Sport for development and peace”: Investigating the utility of sport for international development. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 2010; 27: 54-75.

26. Atherley KM. (2006). Sport, localism and social capital in Rural Western Australia. *Geographical Research*. 2006; 44(4):348-360.

27. Beaudoin CE. News effects on bonding and bridging social capital: An empirical study relevant to ethnicity in the United States. *Communication Research*. 2001; 38(2): 155-178.

28. Mintzberg H. (2006). ‘Developing leaders? Developing countries?’ *Development in Practice*. 2006; 16(1): 4 – 14.

29. Meredith M. The state of Africa. A history of the continent since independence. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers; 2011.

30. Burnett C, Hollander, WJ. GIZ/YDF Impact assessment and annual report. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg, Department of Sport and Movement Studies in collaboration with GIZ/YDF; 2011.

31. Cornelissen S. Crafting legacies: the changing political economy of global sport and the 2010 FIFA World Cup. *Politikon*. 2007; 34(3):241-259.

32. YDF (Internet). Tired but happy: Caravanamani’s closing ceremony took place in Kigali. Pretoria: YDF Newsletter; March 2009. Available from: <http://www.za-ydf.org/>

# Sport for Development Programs for Girls and Women: A Global Assessment

MEG G. HANCOCK<sup>1</sup>, ALEXIS LYRAS<sup>2</sup>, JAE-PIL HA<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Louisville, Department of Health & Sport Sciences

<sup>2</sup> Georgetown University, Department of Government

<sup>3</sup> University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Department of Health, Human Performance, & Sport Management

Corresponding author email: [meg.hancock@louisville.edu](mailto:meg.hancock@louisville.edu)

## Abstract

A number of researchers along with international sport and humanitarian institutions have advocated the need to leverage the positive impact sport can have on individuals, cultures, and societies. Girls and women, in particular, are underrepresented in social, political, legal, and educational positions in countries around the world. The United Nations (UN) suggests that national and international agencies provide girls and women equal access to sport. Access to sport has the potential to promote physical and mental health, social integration, self-esteem, and skill development. Using a framework of sport for development (SFD) theory and programme objectives set forth by the UN, this study identified trends in sport for SFD programmes for girls and women. Through content analysis, the researchers identified patterns in sports and activities, programme objectives, and intended programme impacts. The number of SFD programmes, objectives, and intended impacts identified in this study suggests that the abundance of policies supporting sport and women's development is a step forward in the quest for global gender equity and the achievement of various Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). More research is needed to discern under what conditions these programmes assist in the achievement of MDGs and improve the positioning of girls and women in countries around the globe.

## Background

In 1978, the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the International

Charter of Physical Education and Sport (1) (referred to hereafter as the UNESCO Charter) in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UNESCO Charter promoted sport as a contributor to lifelong education and as a conduit for achieving social needs through the development of sport programmes, coaches, and facilities. National and international governing bodies were encouraged to promote universal participation in physical activity and sport with the belief that sport, as a common language, has the potential to promote peace, respect, and friendship. Finally, the UNESCO Charter was one of the first documents to specifically identify sport as a human right. That is, access to physical activity and sport should be assured and guaranteed for all human beings (1).

Historically, however, women in countries around the world have had limited access and opportunity to participate in sport (2). As such, girls and women may be denied the physical, social, emotional, and relational benefits of sport participation (3). Inability to participate in sport and physical activity is perceived to inhibit development and contribute to a "weaker position of women and girls in social, political, economic, legal, educational, and physical matters" (4)(p5). Recognising the imbalance of women's participation in sport and its potential consequences, the International Working Group on Women and Sport (5) welcomed 280 delegates representing 82 countries to the First World Conference for Women in Sport (1994) and crafted the Brighton Declaration (6). The Declaration aimed to: (a) ensure all girls and women were afforded opportunities to participate in sport while promoting a safe and supportive environment; (b) increase involvement of

**Keywords:** Sport for Girls and Women, Sport for Development Theory, Content Analysis.



women in sport at all levels and in all functions; (c) validate the knowledge, experiences, and values of women and their contribution to the development of sport; (d) publicly recognise women in sport in an effort to create role models for building a healthy nation; and (e) promote the intrinsic value of sport and its role in personal development (6).

The Brighton Declaration requested governing bodies and institutions responsible for the implementation of sport to comply with equality provisions set forth by the UNESCO Charter, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (7). Similar to the UNESCO Charter (1), the Brighton Declaration (6) explicitly suggested the use of sport as a potential instrument for achieving human rights with specific emphasis on access, equity, and equality for girls and women in sport.

The impact of the Brighton Declaration was immediate. Nearly 200 national and international organizations adopted the Declaration, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (7). Viewed as the preeminent international sports organisation in the world, the IOC quickly established the Working Group on Women and set targets for female membership on National Olympic Committees and the IOC (4, 7). In addition, the IOC updated the Olympic Charter, added more women’s sports programmes to the Olympic games, and created seminars on women’s sport held in locations around the globe (7).

Seizing the momentum created by the Brighton Declaration, the 1998 Windhoek Call for Action (8) (referred to hereafter as The Call) continued to emphasise the development of equal opportunities for girls and women to participate in sport. While this call to action reinforced tenets of The Declaration, it also implored policy makers and practitioners to consider the contribution of sport to “women’s development as a whole and to women’s empowerment” (7 p10) while advocating the need for programmatic and political sustainability. The Call stressed greater cooperation and coordination between national and international governing bodies and agencies. Furthermore, The Call (7 p468) reflected a sensitivity to difference, a growing awareness of the specific needs and desires of women from different countries and, in particular, a greater understanding of the lives and problems of women in the developing world.

Unlike the UNESCO Charter and the Brighton Declaration, The Call forwarded practical recommendations for advancing women in sport and women’s equality around the

globe. Some of these recommendations included: (a) developing action plans and objectives to implement and monitor principles of the Brighton Declaration, (b) collaborating with non-sport entities to further women’s advancement and access to sport, and (c) working with governments to develop appropriate legislation, public policy, and funding by providing evidenced-based impact analysis of sport participation on girls and women (8).

The impetus for the Brighton Declaration was the promotion of equity in sport for women (7). The Windhoek Call for Action (8), however, added a new educational dimension for the use of sport by forwarding it as a contributor to women’s development and empowerment (4). The awareness and action generated by both documents has had far-reaching social, political, and cultural implications for the role of sport participation in the development of girls and women around the world.

For example, in 2000, the United Nations established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) designed to eradicate poverty, hunger, and disease as well as to promote gender equality, health, education, and environmental sustainability on a global scale (9). Several MDGs – universal education, gender equity, maternal health, child health, and combating HIV/AIDS – relate directly to girls and women (9). To achieve the MDGs, the United Nations, UNESCO, and national governing bodies advocated the use of one particular human right – sport – to achieve another – gender equity. The United Nations encouraged governments and sport-related organizations to create and implement educational partnership initiatives to help achieve MDGs (10).

**Sport as a Tool for Development**

Culturally and socially, sport has dualistic qualities. Sport can divide people and countries by promoting racism, nationalism, discrimination, corruption, drug abuse, and violence (11-16). Numerous scholars and practitioners, however, believe that sport can serve as a conduit for advancing social change (4, 12, 16-22) through values of democracy, justice, and human rights (23, 24). Sport has the potential to resolve social problems including deficiencies in education, the spread of disease, poverty, inter-ethnic conflict, and gender inequities (10, 12, 14, 21, 22, 23, 24). Furthermore, policy-makers and practitioners continue to advocate for the social, physical, and psychological benefits gained through participation in sport, which are especially important for the development of girls and women (2-4, 26-34).

In girls, research has shown sport promotes physical fitness, helps control weight, and reduces stress and anxiety (26, 30), while providing opportunities for peer-to-peer social interaction beyond family networks (3, 4, 14, 26). Multiple studies have shown that playing a sport improves confidence, enhances self-esteem, improves body image (2, 27-33) and lowers depression rates (35). Through sport, girls have the chance to develop leadership and negotiation skills, and to serve their peers as leaders (4, 14, 26). Sport and recreational activities can also promote education, which can enhance female empowerment (4, 13).

The objectives set forth in the Brighton Declaration, Windhoek Call for Action, and UN Millennium Development Goals resulted in a proliferation of educational sport for development (SFD) programmes for women around the world. It is unclear, however, if and how SFD programmes for women are contributing to gender equity and women’s development and empowerment. Given the resources (e.g., economic, human, social, political) applied to these programmes, it is important to understand the objectives and impacts of women’s SFD programmes.

Though national and international organizations advocate the use of sport for development, little research (see 22, 56) has been conducted to explore the content and outcomes of any SFD programme, let alone those for girls and women. Several theoretical frameworks (e.g., feminist theory, new social movement theory, resource mobilization) can be employed to analyze sport policy and practical intentions as it pertains to equity and women’s development. Few frameworks, however, actually assess sport praxis – the relationship between theory and practice – and provide evidence-based outcomes aimed at achieving social change and development (22, 36-40).

**Sport for Development Theory**

Lyras (15, 21) advanced a Sport for Development (SFD) theory grounded in empirical evidence from the field that advocates an interdisciplinary approach (12, 21, 22, 37, 41). SFD theory explores the attributes and procedures that can increase efficiency in the initiation, management, assessment, and effectiveness of educational sport programmes. More specifically, SFD theory was designed to address the gap between theory and practice by using scientific procedures to assess three components – content, process, and outcomes – of sport for development programmes.

Content refers to the types of sports (individual and team) and educational themes (e.g., health, relationship building,

conflict resolution, environmental awareness) used in sport for development initiatives. According to the United Nations (14), activities should be fun, engaging, and interactive. Because sport has been identified as a way to build understanding and to promote tolerance and social integration, playing games native to an area or culture can be especially effective (13, 19). Programmes should also reflect cultural needs if they are to engage and sustain participation (14).

Assuming programmes reflect the social and cultural needs of a community, identifying programme content can (a) provide researchers with specific information about the needs and concerns of a group of women and (b) help practitioners tailor educational information to meet the needs of participants. Additionally, collecting basic demographic data about the participants and programme activities (e.g., sports, programmatic themes, discussion topics) can help researchers and policymakers determine which programmes offer services that promote the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Process examines organizational structures including policies, staffing structure, programme agenda and practices such as the delivery of programme activities (14, 21, 22). Meier (4) suggested the implementation of a sustainable sport project, which promotes gender equity, requires the consideration of specific socio-cultural and socioeconomic parameters including the access to and control over resources, dynamics of power, and different gender roles. Training instructors and coaches is vital to ensuring a safe and healthy educational environment; women should also play key roles (e.g., coordinators, instructors, coaches, mentors) in the implementation of the programme (14). Furthermore, programmes should connect with a range of stakeholders (e.g., community organizations, financial sponsors, health practitioners) to provide the most up-to-date educational information. Connecting with outside stakeholders may provide ideas for additional resources and programming (14).

According to the SFD theory, the content and process should promote organizational change, utilise problem-based learning, and aim for the transfer of knowledge to community-based action (21). For example, 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking was established in 1999 to “improve the lives of disadvantaged women in Nepal”(42). The non-profit organisation provides training and instruction for women by women. Women trained in the programme can be hired as porters and trail guides for visitors wishing to explore the Himalayas. For many of the women in this

programme, it is the first time they have received compensation for work; they have access to education and health benefits, which increase their quality of life. Participants can use the skills from the programme and attribute them to other situations outside the mountains. However, little is known about individual participants before they matriculate into the programme or after they leave. Success stories are passed along through word of mouth; there is no scientific monitoring and evaluation process to determine the impact of the programme on local women or the community.

Finally, SFD theory suggests programmes should employ long and short-term monitoring and evaluation plans to measure the impact, or outcomes, of the educational sport experience across time and space (21). Evidence-based outcomes are critical to creating and adjusting policy and programme curricula, as well as the decision-making process. Moreover, defining and measuring outcomes are vital to determining if a programme is achieving intended objectives and impact. The sport for development theory framework establishes sport as a social practice that has the potential to be reproduced and adjusted over time (43). Without accurate measures, it is difficult to determine (a) if a programme is having the intended impact and (b) if and how programmes should change. Therefore, viability, validity, and sustainability of sport for development programmes are questionable for individual programmes as well as the collective impact across programmes.

SFD theory can serve as a framework based on the programmes and initiatives for girls and women that can be compared and contrasted. First, the theoretical framework provides clear objectives for assessment. Second, the objectives can be explored within the context and conditions of SFD programmes. Finally, identifying SFD programmes for girls and women that are in accord with these objectives can yield practical information for establishing and disseminating best practices to current and future programmes.

In summary, the abundance of policy supporting sport and women’s development is a step forward in the quest for global gender equity and the achievement of various Millennium Development Goals. Despite the plethora of humanitarian efforts, the effectiveness and application of policies and sport for development programmes are still questioned, and gender issues still exist around the globe. Identifying SFD programmes for girls and women and determining how those programmes are delivered can (a) provide a picture of common concerns and issues for

women around the globe; (b) help researchers, practitioners, and policymakers determine if policy is informing practice; (c) identify current and potential barriers for programme implementation; and (d) offer insight into how evidence-based practice might influence public policy. Sport for Development Theory is an important tool for examining SFD programmes across the globe and can potentially serve as a framework to assess the process, content, and components that lead to development as defined by the UN MDGs. SFD theory is being utilised as a theoretical and programme development blueprint of the Sport for Development Global Initiative (SFDGI), a project that aims to (a) map and assess existing SFD programmes, tools and resources across the globe, (b) create an interdisciplinary framework and community, and (c) initiate and establish the International Sport for Development and Peace Association (16, 17, 21, 44-45) . One of the objectives of the SFDGI is to assess existing sport programmes and initiatives that aim to promote inclusion and gender equality. Therefore, the questions guiding this research are:

1. What SFD programmes exist for girls and women?
2. What sports and activities are utilized?
3. What are the major programme objectives and intended impacts?
4. What global patterns exist?

**Method**

Data were collected from four Internet databases (Beyond Sport, The International Platform for Sport and Development, Ashoka – Sport for a Better World, Ashoka – GameChangers) between August 2009 and June 2010 (44-45). The Internet databases were a collection of SFD programmes submitted for award recognition (i.e., Beyond Sport and Ashoka) and/or for information-sharing purposes. Databases yielded 1,033 sport for development programmes (44, 45, 46). Purposive criterion sampling resulted in a sample of 440 programmes, or 42.5% of all programmes, specifically targeting girls and women. Of those programmes, only programmes with complete profiles (N=376) were included for analysis. Researchers employed content analysis to observe the trends and different practices of SFD programmes around the world. Content analysis refers “to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (47 p453).

Variables identified for analysis included programme country, target group, sports and activities, programme objectives, and intended impact of programmes. Data were analyzed deductively and inductively. Programme objectives and intended impacts were deductively coded in accordance with the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) International Working Group (known hereafter as The Group). The Group (36) suggested that sport activities would have the most benefit in the following areas:

- Individual development (e.g., self-efficacy, skill development)
- Health promotion and disease prevention
- Promotion of gender equality
- Social integration and the development of social capital
- Peace building and conflict prevention/resolution
- Post-disaster/trauma relief and normalization of life
- Economic development
- Communication and social mobilization
- New programmatic categories were added through inductive analysis, which allowed new patterns and themes to emerge (47).

New programmatic categories were added through inductive analysis, which allowed new patterns and themes to emerge (47).

Additionally, Green (19) suggested SDP programmes can be categorised by the manner in which sport is used as a vehicle to deliver these programme curricula: social inclusion, diversion, and sport as a hook. Social inclusion programmes are designed for a specific population to increase the number of participants from a specific population, as well as the diversity of participants in a given sport (19). Diversion programmes “require an activity that is attractive enough to divert participants from anti-social behaviors”(19 p135) such as gang involvement, drug and alcohol abuse, and risky sexual behaviour. Programmes employing a “hook” do so by using sport to attract participants followed by the provision of services such as career counseling, access to healthcare, and tutoring (19).

To ensure interrater reliability, two researchers coded each programme independently based on the aforementioned criteria. The programmes were sorted into corresponding categories by the raters. Raters agreed on 94% of the programmes, indicating a high level of interrater reliability. When raters disagreed on programme variables, differences were resolved through discussion, which resulted in 100%

agreement.

**Results**

Of the 376 programmes analysed, 123 were found in Europe, 101 in Africa, 68 in North America, 55 in Asia, and 29 in Australia. Overall, the top three primary programme objectives included were individual development (n=109), social integration and the development of social capital (n=54), and the promotion of gender equity (n=49). Of the eight SFD programme objectives identified by the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (36), all were represented (Table 1). In addition, a new category – equipment and facilities – emerged. Programmes in the “equipment and facilities” category included the development of (a) sportswear designed to meet the requirements of various religious and cultural groups; (b) mobile playing facilities such as basketball courts; (c) mobile equipment such as goals for soccer, field hockey, and goal ball; (d) equipment adapted for athletes with disabilities. An “other” category was also added to include objectives that were unclear or did not specifically relate to sport for development programmes.

**Table 1.** Breakdown of programme objectives

Type of Activity	# of Programs
Individual development	109
Social integration and the development of social capital	54
Promotion of gender equity	49
Health promotion and disease prevention	44
Communication and social mobilization	39
Other*	30
Equipment and Facilities*	21
Economic development	19
Peace-building and conflict resolution	10
Post-disaster trauma relief	5

*\*programme objectives not previously identified by the UNOSDP*

Common programme content included health education (e.g., maternal health, HIV/AIDS, alcohol/drug abuse, nutrition), social inclusion (e.g., equality, breaking down stereotypes, accessibility, citizenship), and personal development (e.g., increased self-esteem, life-skills, leadership). Nearly two-thirds of the programmes (n=216) used social inclusion to attract participants. Other programmes used sport as a hook (n=99) or a diversion (n=61). A summary of most popular sports, programme objectives, and use of sport by continent is listed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Most popular sports, programme objectives, and use of sport by continent

<i>Continent</i>	<i># of Programs</i>	<i>Most Popular Sports</i>	<i>Programme Objectives</i>	<i>Use of Sport (# of programs)</i>
Europe	123	Soccer (67)	(1) Individual Development	(1) Inclusion (216)
Africa	101	Dance (32)	(2) Health Promotion	(2) Hook (99)
North America	68	Soccer (65)	(1) Individual Development	(3) Diversion (61)
Asia	55	Running (30)	(2) Social Integration	
Australia	29	Basketball (31)	(1) Individual Development	
		Soccer (18)	(2) Social Integration	
		Soccer (31)	(1) Individual Development	
		Cricket (18)	(2) Gender Equity	
		Basketball (16)	(1) Individual Development	
		Running (9)	(2) Health promotion	

Overall, soccer (n=139), general fitness (n=83), dance (n=29), and basketball (n=28) were the most popular sport activities. In total, 53 different sports were used in SFD programmes. Many SFD programmes for girls and women also combined traditional sport (e.g., soccer, basketball) and nontraditional sport (e.g. cultural dance, double-dutch), as well as cultural activities including storytelling, music, and art. Eighty-one percent of all programmes in this study were created after 2001 and nearly 62% (n=271) of the programmes were founded between 2006 and 2009. Additionally, while we did not set out to assess monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes, it was noted that very few SFD programmes for girls and women mentioned using scientific M&E processes to determine the actual impact of programmes over time. This finding underscores the absence of substantial scientific evidence in SFD programming for girls and women (4). Furthermore, it strengthens the argument for evaluation. Policy makers and practitioners can utilise this evaluation data to maximise the intended positive impacts of Sport for Development programmes.

**Discussion**

The use of sport for the development and empowerment of girls and women is undeniably supported by international (UN, UNESCO, IOC) and national governing bodies as evidenced by the proliferation of SFD programmes around the world. Identifying programme content as it pertains to how a programme is delivered was a primary focus of this study. Content refers to the types of sports (individual and team) and educational themes (e.g., health, relationship building, conflict resolution, environmental awareness) used in SFD initiatives. This study utilised Sport for Development Theory as an important tool for examining

SFD programmes across the globe.

As results illustrate, SFD programme content was delivered primarily through sport as a tool for social inclusion. Social inclusion programmes offer a safe sporting environment, which allow girls and women the freedom to socialise and express themselves through movement and physical activity (4, 48-50). This is particularly important in communities with strict cultural or religious practices. As such, SFD social inclusion programmes were prevalent in Asian, African, and eastern European countries. Creating an environment that addresses the needs of community members shows an awareness of the “interconnectedness of issues relating to race, ethnicity, gender, and physicality” which is “essential if opportunities for all to participate are to improve” (51 p137).

Sport was also used as a “hook” to attract participants. This approach may be particularly relevant to communities in need of educational programming (e.g., HIV/AIDS, reproductive practices, mental health, self-efficacy, skill development). Programmes utilising the hook were prevalent across continents represented in this study, but may be effective in communities in which women may have a baseline knowledge of and access to sport. As cautioned by Hargreaves (7), “sport has no relevance to the lives of the majority of women for whom poverty, malnutrition, and disease are a way of life” (7 p465). Thus, an SFD programme attempting to “hook” participants through sport may be ineffective in such communities. The most popular sports in SFD programmes included soccer, general fitness, dance and basketball. As the world’s most popular game, soccer is also one of the most accessible in terms of space, equipment, and cost. Activities like general fitness may include running, calisthenics, or cultural games. Like soccer,

general fitness and dance activities are often low cost and require limited equipment and space. Programmes incorporating dance may also help carry on important cultural heritage for some communities. Activities such as dance may be important for communities who welcome the assistance of Western countries, but also seek to retain their cultural heritage.

The intended outcomes of SFD programmes analysed in this study focused on individual development, social integration and social capital, and gender equity. Programmes promoting individual development employed curricula designed to help participants become healthier (e.g., physically, mentally) while also learning a new practical skill. Studies (2,4) have advocated for programmes to include individual development as it promotes integration and the development of social capital. However, socio-cultural barriers have the potential to inhibit the participation of girls and women in sport programmes, which can negatively impact efforts toward gender equality and inclusion.

Though gender equity was identified as one of the top three programme objectives in this study, the majority of programmes (77%) are girls and women only. According to Hall, the “discourse about women and sport, on a practical level, is now about integration versus separation” (43 p330). While there are benefits to separate environments, there are also drawbacks. Separate environments may recreate -- if not escalate -- social divisions between men and women and between groups of men and groups of women (48). Using Allport’s (54) framework of intergroup contact, Lyras and Hums (55) suggested an inclusive setting as an end goal for sport for peace and development programmes. Studies have shown cross-group interaction promotes communication, tolerance, and understanding (2, 12, 13, 19, 22, 39, 45, 49, 52, 53). However, in some countries and for certain populations of women, cross-group interaction is not permissible (52). Therefore, it is vitally important to SFD practitioners to understand the culture and needs of girls and women in a community before developing or implementing an SFD programme.

The Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations have advocated for special programmes targeting girls and women citing gender equality and the empowerment of women as critical factors in the eradication of poverty, hunger, disease and sustainable development (34). Although the above organizations indirectly advocated that encouraging women and girls to participate in SFD programmes in a separate environment is more effective

than in a combined environment, it is impossible to draw such a conclusion from the findings of the current study. Therefore, future research is needed to explore which programme environment (mixed group vs. single-sex environments) is better to guarantee gender equality. It is not clear how SFD programmes facilitate the growth of social capital, gender equity, or other intended outcomes. As such, there is still little known about the actual impacts (physical, psychological, social, cultural) of SFD programmes around the world.

Moreover, a paramount concern brought forth by the dearth of evidence on the actual impact of SFD programmes is that of collective impact. Rather than assess programmes based on their primary impact (e.g. individual development, social integration, etc.), perhaps programmes should be evaluated more holistically and in relation to the cyclical linkages between individual programme components and their collective impact. In other words, how might individual development lead to social integration? How might social integration lead to gender equity? And how might gender equity promote individual development? Thus, more research is necessary to measure intended impacts versus actual outcomes.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This study has several limitations. First, this study identified 440 programmes for girls and women around the world. Of those programmes, 271 were established between 2001 and the present day. Some of the programmes are located in sub-Saharan Africa, while others take place on urban playgrounds in Sydney, Australia and New York City, USA. The key similarity among all of the programmes is that they all have access to technology, primarily the Internet. Therefore, it is unclear how many programmes exist in locations around the world that do not have access to the Internet. Recent research reminds us that the Internet is perceived to be “an integral part of the competitive neoliberal environment that protects and promotes the interests of business savvy NGOs that are often better positioned to leverage relationships through online network” (56 p316). Such a statement also implies that groups who are not well versed in technology or groups without technological access are at a “notable disadvantage, especially in terms of mobilizing funding and building partnerships” (56 p316).

Second, content analysis provides only a broad overview of trends from programmes listed on four Internet databases. The methodology does not provide in-depth information

about individual programmes. By utilising SFD theory, academics and practitioners can develop a better understanding of programme content, process, and outcomes.

In other words, there is more to learn about programme delivery. What topics are covered, how, and by whom? Have women living in the communities in which these programmes are delivered been included on the decision making process about programme content and delivery?(4) It is important to have a better understanding of the manner in which SFD programmes are meeting the needs of girls and women around the globe.

Finally, this study did not identify if and how the programmes were monitored and evaluated. In other words, just because SFD programmes for girls and women exist, does not mean they are contributing to the growth and development of women and girls or to the Millennium Development Goals. Several researchers (2, 4, 14, 22, 36, 39, 53-57) suggest the importance of monitoring and evaluation plans. Such plans can be used to improve curricula, programme delivery, and sustainability. Currently, the International Working Group on Women and Sport offers tool kits and resources for the development of women and sport across the globe (5).

**Conclusion**

In summary, the abundance of policy supporting sport and women’s development is a step forward in the quest for global gender equity and the achievement of various Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations, the Brighton Declaration, the Windhoek Call for Action, and a myriad of other national and international organizations call for the development of programmes designed to empower women and promote health, education and gender equity. However, barriers exist between the creation and implementation of policy. First, and most significantly, much of the research on the benefits of sport has been conducted in developed Western countries. Still, governments, corporations, private donors, and nongovernmental organizations contribute valuable resources to SFD programmes (36, 39). For example, this study identified 440 SFD programmes for girls and women in countries around the world. Programmes aimed to promote individual development, health, gender equity, and social integration. Sport was used as a tool for inclusion and as a hook to attract participants to specific programmes. Little, however, is known if these programmes are achieving the goals set forth by member countries of the United

Nations. Therefore, monitoring and evaluation processes are critical to understanding the collective impact and sustainability of SFD programmes, particularly those targeting girls and women. It is vital to include girls and women in the design of programmes to ensure they are meeting the needs of individual communities (36). Moreover, SFD programmes must strive to ensure that girls and women are in stronger social, political, economic, and educational positions in all countries around the world.

*Note: The first author of this manuscript was authorized to use the database, the research design and methodology of the Sport for Development Global Initiative (Lyras & Wolf, 2009) to assess the existing landscape of Sport for Development Programs for Girls and Women across the globe.*

**References**

1. UNESCO, editor. International Charter of Physical Education and Sport. General Conference; 1978.
2. Bailey R, Wellard I, Dismore H. Girls' participation in physical activities and sports: Benefits, patterns, influences, and ways forward. Canterbury Christ Church University College, 2004.
3. Brady M. Laying the foundation for girls' healthy futures: Can sports play a role? *Studies in Family Planning*. 1998;29(1):79-82.
4. Meier M. Gender equity, sport, and development. Biel/Bienne: 2005.
5. Sport IWGoWa. Resources. International Working Group on Women and Sport; 2012 (cited 2012 April 12, 2012); Available from: <http://www.iwg-gti.org/resources>.
6. Brighton D, editor. The Brighton declaration on women and sport. First World Conference on Women: Women, Sport, and the Challenge of Change; 1994; Brighton, England. Available from <http://www.iwg-gti.org/conference-legacies/brighton-1994/>
7. Hargreaves J. The 'women's international sports movement': Local-global strategies. *Women's Studies International Forum*. 1999;22(5):461-71.
8. Windhoek CfA, editor. The Windhoek Call for Action. The Second World Conference on Women and Sport; 1998; Windhoek, Namibia. Available from <http://www.iwg-gti.org/conference-legacies/windhoek-1998/>

9. United Nations GA. 55/2: United Nations Millennium Declaration. New York: United Nations, 2000.
10. United Nations GA. Sport for development and peace: The way forward. In: Nations U, editor. New York: United Nations; 2006.
11. Chalip L. Towards social leverage of sport events. *Journal of Sport and Tourism*. 2006;11(2):109-27.
12. Lyras A. Characteristics and Psycho-Social Impacts of an Inter-Ethnic Educational Sport Initiative on Greek and Turkish Cypriot Youth. Storrs: University of Connecticut; 2007.
13. Sugden J. Teaching and playing sport for conflict resolution and co-existence in Israel. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2006;41.
14. United Nations GA. Sport for peace and development: Towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. New York: United Nations, 2003.
15. Lyras A. The Doves Olympic Movement Project: Integrating Olympism, Development, and Peace. In "Sport for Development, Peace, and Social Justice". In: Schinke RH, S. , editor. *Fitness Information Technology: Fitness Information Technology*; 2012.
16. Lyras A. Olympism in practice: Psycho-social impacts of an educational sport initiative on Greek and Turkish Cypriot youth. *The International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance Journal of Research*, 2012; 7:46-54.
17. Davis-Delano LR, Crosset T. Using social movement theory to study outcomes in sport-related social movements. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2008;43(2):115-34.
18. Doll-Tepper G. Sport and Olympism: Common issues, threats and opportunities analysed by academic research. Berlin, Germany, 2008.
19. Green BC. Sport as an agent for social and personal change. In Girginov V (editor), *Management of Sport Development*; Oxford, UK: Elsevier; 2008; p 129-146.
20. Jarvie G. Sport, social change, and the public intellectual. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2007;42(4):411-24.
21. Lyras A. Sport for peace and development theory. European Association of Sport Management; 2009; Amsterdam, Netherlands.
22. Lyras A, Welty Peachy J. Integrating sport-for development theory and praxis. *Sport Management Review*. 2011;14(4):311-26.
23. Harvey J, Rail, G., & Thibault, L. Globalization and sport: Sketching a theoretical model for empirical analyses. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*. 1996;20(3):258-77.
24. Harvey J, Horne, J., & Safai, P. Alterglobalization, global social movements, and the possibility of political transformation through sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 2009;26:383-403.
25. Magglingen D, editor. *The Magglingen Declaration*. Sport and Development International Conference; 2003; Magglingen, Switzerland.
26. United Nations GA. /5: Sport as a means to promote education, health, development, and peace. New York: 2003.
27. Allender S, Cowburn G, Foster C. Understanding participation in sport and physical activity among children and adults: A review of qualitative studies. *Health Education Research*. 2006;21(6):826-35.
28. Bailey R. Evaluating the relationship between physical education, sport, and social inclusion. *Educational Review*. 2005;57(1):71-90.
29. Bruening J, Dover K, Clark B. Preadolescent female development through sport and physical activity: A case study of an urban after-school program. *Research Quarterly for Exercise & Sport*. 2009;80(1):87-101.
30. Jones D, Jones P. Model for success: The impact of a grant-funded program on an inner-city girls' basketball team. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, & Dance*. 2002;73(5):22-6.
31. Seefeldt VDE, M.E. Youth sports in America: An overview. In: *Digest PsCoPFaSR*, editor. Washington, D.C.: President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports; 1997. p. 3-14.
32. Tracy TD, A. Adolescent sport, recreation and physical education: experiences of recent arrivals to Canada. *Sport , Education, & Society*. 2005;10(2):211-38.



33. Tracy TE, S. Gender and race patterns in the pathways from sports participation to self-esteem. *Sociological Perspectives*. 2002;45(4):445-6.
34. United Nations PF. Negotiating culture: Promoting gender equality and empowering women. In: UNFP, editor. *The State of the World Population 2008*. New York: UNFP; 2008.
35. Boone EML, B.J. Game on: Diminishing risks for depressive symptoms in early adolescence through positive involvement in team sports. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*. 2006;16(1):79-90.
36. Beutler I. Sport serving development and peace: Achieving the goals of the United Nations through sport. *Sport in Society*. 2008;11(4):359-69.
37. Chalip L. Toward a Distinctive Sport Management Discipline. *Journal of Sport Management*. 2006;20:1-21.
38. Coalter F. Sport-In-International Development Assistance: Accountability or Development? Conference Papers -- International Studies Association. 2007:1-12.
39. Coalter F. Sport-in-development: A monitoring and evaluation manual. UK Sport; 2008. p. 1 66.
40. Scraton S, Flintoff A. Introduction. In: Scraton S, Flintoff, A., editor. *Gender and sport: A reader*. New York: Routledge; 2002. p. 3-6.
41. Thibault L. Globalization of sport: An inconvenient truth. *Journal of Sport Management*. 2009;23:1-20.
42. Clark L. 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking. 2010 (cited 2010 November 25); Available from: <http://www.3sistersadventure.com/>.
43. Hall AM. The discourse of gender and sport: From femininity to feminism. *Sociology of Sport Journal*,. 1988;5:330-40.
44. Lyras A. (2010). Measuring Success: Sport for Development and Peace Monitoring and Evaluation. Keynote presentation at the Power of Sport Summit, International Association of Sport for Development and Peace; 2010; Boston, MA, USA.
45. Lyras A. & Wolff, E., Sport for Development Global Initiative: Strategic planning concept map. Unpublished Manuscript; 2009; Louisville, USA.
46. Lyras A, Wolff E, Hancock M, Selvaraju U. Sport for development global initiative. *North American Society for the Sociology of Sport*; 2009; Ottawa, Canada.
47. Patton MQ. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. 3 ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage 2002.
48. Sugden J. *Sport, sectarianism, and society in a divided Ireland*. London: Leicester University Press; 1995.
49. United Nations GA. *The millennium development goals report 2009*. 2009
50. Hargreaves J. *Sporting females: Critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports*. London: Routledge; 1994.
51. Walseth K. Bridging and bonding social capital in sport: Experiences of young women with an immigrant background. *Sport, Education, and Society*. 2008;13(1): 1-17.
52. Wray S. Connecting ethnicity, gender and physicality: Muslim Pakistani women, physical activity, and health. In: Scraton S, Flintoff, A. , editor. *Gender and Sport: A Reader*. New York: Routledge; 2002. p. 127-155.
53. Walseth K. Bridging and bonding social capital in sport - experiences of young women with an immigrant background. *Sport, Education & Society*. 2008;13(1):1-17.
54. Allport G. *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley; 1954.\
55. Lyras A, Hums MA. Sport and social change: The case for gender equity. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*. 2009;80(1).
56. Hayhurst L, Wilson B, Frisby W. Navigating neoliberal networks: Transformational internet platforms in sport for peace and development. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*; 2011; 46(3); 315-329.
57. Kaufman ZA, Spencer TS, Ross DA. Effectiveness of sport-based HIV prevention interventions: A systematic review fo the eviudence. *AIDS Behavior*. 2012. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10461-012-0348-1?LI=true#page-2> . Accessed 9 Dec 2012

# Sport-for-Development Events and Social Capital Building: A Critical Analysis of Experiences from Sri Lanka

NICO SCHULENKORF<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) Management Discipline Group*

*Corresponding author email address: nico.schulenkorf@uts.edu.au*

## Abstract

Most of the ‘evidence’ that sport and event projects contribute to positive social development in divided societies remains anecdotal. In answering the call for empirical evaluations, this paper investigated the role of a sport-for-development project in contributing to intergroup development and social capital building between disparate communities in ethnically divided Sri Lanka. Thirty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with various stakeholders after the weekend-long Intercultural Sports Meeting (ISM) project in rural Sri Lanka, assessing participant experiences, behaviour, and attitudinal changes. Findings suggest that socially focused short-term initiatives have the potential to be a source and a vehicle for inter-community development; they can provide much needed excitement, animation and vibrancy. However, to contribute to sustainable social benefits sport events ought to be used to grow and leverage a nested sport-for-development program instead of being featured as a stand-alone exercise. In fact, the ability of short-term interventions to create social capital needs to be critically assessed and claims about events’ lasting contributions to social capital should be treated with caution.

## Introduction

Around the world, government agencies and NGOs have become increasingly conscious of the possible role that sport, events, and leisure activities play in reducing social barriers, subduing inter-community strife, building capacities, and helping to give a semblance of normality to

otherwise divided and intermittently violent societies. The 2006 United Nations Report of the Secretary-General titled Sport for Development and Peace: The Way Forward (1) outlines that world leaders have now realised that sport activities not only contribute to creating physical wellbeing, but they “can foster peace and development and can contribute to an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding” (p2).

Despite the strong theoretical and anecdotal support highlighting that sport and event programmes can have a positive impact on communities, little empirical evidence supports this claim – particularly in relation to culturally or ethnically divided societies (2-4). The social and cultural experiences generated through participation in sport-for-development (SFD) projects still need to be explored to determine if and how they can contribute to building bridges between disparate groups. Empirical socio-managerial investigations are needed to identify how decision makers can strategically use such programs as a tool for social capital and peace building.

This paper responds to the call for empirical evidence by investigating the ability of an inter-community SFD project to enable social capital building in the context of an ethnically divided society. In particular, the social experiences at a youth sport project in rural Sri Lanka are examined and the link between project experiences, sport management and wider social community outcomes is highlighted. The paper forms part of a larger study that investigated the role of sport events in contributing to social development between disparate communities.

**Keywords:** Sport-for-Development, Inter-Community Events, Social Capital, Divided Societies, Qualitative Research

### Social Capital

Research on social capital dates back to the early twentieth century and its roots are well embedded in the Durkheimian, Weberian and Marxist traditions of classic sociology. Hanifan (5) in one of the earliest studies on social capital referred to it as good will, sympathy, fellowship and sociability. Since then, much debate has surrounded the social capital concept, which for substantive and ideological reasons does not have one clear, common, undisputed meaning or definition (see 6, 7).

Inevitably, social capital is accumulated through interactions: interactions between individuals, between individuals and groups, and between groups (8, 9). When focusing on inter-community relationships and social development, the definition suggested by Baum, Palmer, Modra, Murray and Bush (10) is valuable. It states that social capital is “the building of healthy communities through collective, mutually beneficial interactions and accomplishments, particularly those demonstrated through social and civic participation” (p251). This definition highlights the importance of participatory processes and cooperation needed to achieve positive social outcomes within and between groups.

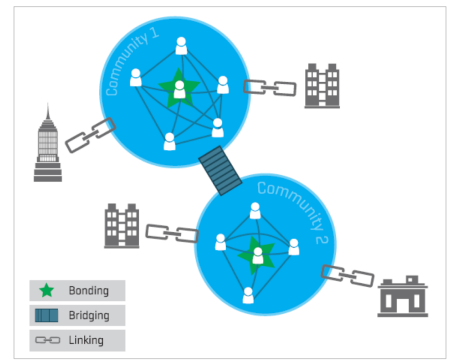
The modern debate around social capital derives from three main theorists: Bourdieu (11), Coleman (12) and Putnam (13-15). Although there are significant differences in their understanding and use of the concept, Coalter (16) argued that as a common element, social capital refers to social networks based on norms and values that enable people to trust and cooperate with each other, and through which groups can obtain different types of advantage. While Bourdieu views social capital as positional good and an “exclusive property of elites, designed to secure their relative position” (17), for Coleman social capital has a more neutral meaning and refers to social structures and relationships which facilitate actions. He sees social capital as a resource that can be generated – but also exclusively limited – through networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust, and social norms (18). Putnam on the other hand values social capital as a public good, which requires participation as a core element to bind groups and communities together. As Coalter (16) suggested, Putnam views the civic engagement in joint activities as an important element for the creation of social capital, as it improves the effectiveness of communities in achieving desired social, cultural and/or socio-economic outcomes.

### Components of Social Capital

Putnam (13-15) proposed two main components of social capital, bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Bonding refers to the value assigned to intragroup connections or social networks between homogeneous groups of people. While the intra-community concept of bonding social capital is often of great value to group members, an entire ‘closing’ of the group to outsiders may actually be ineffective for its overall development. For example, a group that focuses entirely on bonding social capital (e.g. the Klu Klux Klan) is inward looking and tends to reinforce exclusive identities (19). The expansion to wider circles can be described as bridging social capital, which happens between communities and extends to individuals and groups that are more removed. The bridging element of social capital tends to be weaker but more diverse and inclusive of people of different backgrounds. According to Mattsson (20) “bridging social capital is based on an emotional process where trust is generalised and mediated through social norms and directed towards other people that we do not know very well”.

Recently, authors have questioned whether a distinction between bonding and bridging is sufficient to capture the value of different types of social capital; a third component linking social capital has since been advocated (21, 22). Linking refers to the relationships of individuals and groups with people in positions of influence within formal institutions. It is the idea to draw resources, ideas and information from these formal institutions into communities or groups, in an attempt to ‘getting things done’ and leveraging valuable assets. More colloquially, the key point of linking social capital is that “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know” (22). Linking with trustworthy and supportive people in positions of institutional power may thus help to avoid bureaucratic problems, and secure essential political and/or financial community support. The interplay of bonding, bridging and linking social capital is visually displayed below.

Figure 1. Components of Social Capital



*Fresh Spaces for Social Capital*

Governments, policymakers and communities have begun to look into different ways in which social capital can be created and advanced. It has been argued that in addition to traditional social institutions (i.e. churches, community centres, schools etc.) ‘fresh spaces’ for social encounters and networking are required (3, 4). Fresh and proactive spaces could, for example, be recreational activities comprising inter-cultural music programs, youth camps, club activities, special events, or SFD projects, as overall positive feelings are associated with leisure experiences (23-25).

Looking at sport participation among Dutch immigrants in the Netherlands, Verweel and Anthonissen (26) analysed social capital building in multicultural sport clubs and revealed four key dimensions of social capital benefits: the development of social and emotional skills (e.g. honouring agreements); reciprocal service provision (offering help and receiving advice or support in other areas); forming social relationships (including confident and open discussion of ethnic boundaries and differences between people); and social participation (which can lead to learning about one self and others, which can then enhance social acceptance). However, other social capital research from the Netherlands warns us that sport does not automatically provide bridges for disparate communities; sport may in fact serve as a locus for intergroup division (27, 28). For example, members of marginalised groups have used sport clubs as an outlet in which they exclusively confirm their ethnic identity through homogeneous activities.

In relation to these findings it is important to acknowledge that sport per se is not necessarily a social good. For example, Kidd (29) argued that in and of itself, sport is of no intrinsic value: it is neither naturally good nor irrevocably bad. Similarly, Sugden (30) suggested, “it is like all collective human endeavours, a social construction which is malleable according to the social forces that surround it”. This means that the success of sport in ‘doing good’ and creating social capital depends on the context and the management of a supportive (social, cultural, political, resource and sport) environment.

When looking at the available research on sport and social capital it becomes obvious that most studies have been conducted in club environments within highly developed countries. There is a dearth of empirical studies that look at the generation of social capital around SFD initiatives in a developing world context and only anecdotal evidence

suggests that active involvement in SFD can help people to establish new friendships, networks or links, which add to the overall stock of social capital. Hence, the organisation of – and participation in – sport projects may provide a superordinate goal for people and groups (31). In Wartburton’s (32) words, “one way forward is through new forms of collective action which are based less on the shared characteristics of specific groups and more on coalition building, networks and alliances between different groups who recognise a common cause” (p35). SFD projects may well present such a common cause.

Investigating the potential of sporting events in facilitating social relations and social development, Misener and Mason (23) suggested that short-term interventions can also provide ‘fresh spaces’ that bring communities together through participation, planning, volunteering and spectating. However, no empirical investigation was conducted to support these claims and the question remains what role short-term initiatives (e.g. sporting events or SFD projects) can truly play in the creation of social capital.

Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that the production and utilisation of social capital depends to a certain degree on the quality and resource content of the social relationships and networks. For example, for disadvantaged communities in the developing world there are often limited opportunities of ‘getting things done’. In other words, community members may create strong social and cultural bonds with each other but the potential of turning strong social ties into tangible material benefits are restricted. People may lack financial resources or technical knowledge that people from the Western World may take for granted.

In the context of a divided society another significant challenge for development workers and management staff is the design of initiatives and activities that attract communities from all sides. One such opportunity is presented by SFD projects, which provide a rich testing ground for social experiences, intergroup development and the contribution to (or reduction of) the stock of social capital.

**Method***Context and Setting*

As a result of the historic developments and international influences, Sri Lanka is an ethnically, religiously, linguistically, and geographically diverse society. Of the 21 million people living on the island 74 % are mainly

Buddhist Sinhalese who speak Sinhala, 18 % are Hindu and Christian Tamils who speak Tamil, and 7 % are Indian and Sri Lankan Moors – generally labelled and referred to as ‘Muslims’ in Sri Lanka – who speak either Sinhala, Tamil and/or English (33, 34).

Intergroup relations within multi-ethnic Sri Lanka have been fraught with difficulties for several decades. The Tamil minority has been distrustful of the country’s unitary form of government, believing that the Sinhalese majority would abuse Tamil rights (35). In the 1970s, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) were formed to fight for self-sovereignty in the north-eastern regions of Sri Lanka, which are considered the areas of traditional Tamil settlement. Seeing themselves as the acting representative of the Tamil people, the LTTE’s violent demands culminated in a civil war that lasted from 1983 – 2002 and resulted in over 70,000 casualties (36). In north-eastern Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers managed to establish a de facto state with its own military, police, schools, laws and courts.

In 2002, the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE entered into official negotiations aimed at solving the country’s ethnic and political divides. While the LTTE withdrew from active peace talks after six rounds in April 2003, a cease-fire agreement remained in place. However, the agreement was constantly violated by both parties, which resulted in the Sri Lankan Government withdrawing from it and returning to a full-blown civil war in January 2008. Fourteen months later, the Government was able to announce victory over the Tamil Tigers. However, until today civil society in Sri Lanka is still suffering heavily from the social, economic, and political consequences of the civil war.

Against the background of a deeply divided society, interviews for this study were conducted in western Sri Lanka from January until April 2007. At that point in time, the LTTE controlled 15% of the island and claimed another 20% as their traditional homeland.

*Organisational Philosophy*

The Asian German Sports Exchange Programme (A.G.S.E.P.) is an NGO which has been conducting inter-community SFD programs with the social aim of improving relationships between estranged Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka since 2002. In steady co-operation with local community groups, A.G.S.E.P.’s vision is to ‘contribute to the re-establishment of peace’ in the divided country (37).

For this paper the experiences created at A.G.S.E.P.’s 2007 Intercultural Sports Meeting (ISM) project were investigated. The project’s effect on intergroup relations and the stock of social capital available to the three disparate Sri Lankan communities Marawila/Nattandiya (Sinhalese, western Sri Lanka), Anamaduwa (Sinhalese, north-western Sri Lanka) and Nilaveli (Tamil and Muslim, LTTE controlled north-eastern Sri Lanka) was also explored. The ISM can be described as a sportplus project (see 38). It reached 150 young Sri Lankans between the ages of 6 and 16 years, who came together for a multi-sports event project that offered cricket, football and volleyball games, creative sports, swimming clinics, and a variety of cultural performances over a long weekend in January 2007. All sport activities were staged in the multi-purpose sports venue Peace Village in the rural fishing village of Nattandiya. Importantly, the ISM formed part of an established and nested SFD program orchestrated by the Marawila/Nattandiya communities. Under a ‘Games for Peace’ umbrella – and with significant support by the German aid agency Friedensdorf International (Peace Village International) – the communities engaged in regular sport and physical activity programs with the intention of deepening existing relationships and networks. On the other hand, ‘highlight events’ such as the ISM looked at a widening of participation and programme scope. They were used to showcase the SFD programme and its related initiatives to a wider cross-section of a host community, including potentially new participants, family members, sponsors, government bodies and sport associations.

*The Sport-for-Development Project*

The Guest of Honour and the Minister for Nation Building in Sri Lanka, Mr. Dassanayake, officially opened the ISM. After a number of cultural performances and welcome speeches, the children were split into ethnically mixed groups that engaged in different sport activities. Cricket and football were chosen for their potential in team-building and co-operation; creative sports, arts and crafts promised to allow for the expression of talent and interest in ‘something new and different’; and swimming sessions had the educational advantage of teaching the children a new skill - water having become associated with danger for a large proportion of the Sri Lankan youth after the Tsunami disaster in 2004 (39). Further, cultural performances and dance shows provided a special flair during the evening programme, which led into nights of music and dancing at the Peace Village complex. The organisers tried to provide for both structured sport activities and free time for the

children to play with each other and enjoy the company of their old and new friends. Importantly, at all structured activities competition was played down to avoid potential conflicts, and to preserve the fun and enjoyment aspects of the games.

*Research Design and Analysis*

This research employed a case study approach (see 40) to examine people’s social experiences and the ISM’s role in developing intergroup relations and the building of social capital. Thirty-one semi-structured interviews conducted after the completion of the ISM sport project. In cooperation with A.G.S.E.P. and the ethnic communities, key individuals from the communities and main program stakeholders were identified for the initial round of interviews. Further interview respondents were accessed through the use of a snowball sampling technique (see e.g.41). The combination of community representatives previously known by A.G.S.E.P. and the snowball method resulted in access to a variety of interviewees, ranging from local fishermen to high profile Members of Parliament. The wide range of local voices helped to provide a well-rounded representation of voices of the local population. However, a certain desirability bias needs to be acknowledged here, given that the majority of interviewees came with the intention of supporting the SFD initiative in the first place.

Table 1. Interview Respondents

Event Stakeholder Type	Number	Ethnic Background
Community/Participants	9	5 Sinhalese, 2 Muslim, 2 Tamil
Organisers	5	3 European, 1 Sinhalese, 1 Tamil
Volunteers	4	3 European, 1 Muslim
Spectators	4	2 European, 1 Sinhalese., 1 Tamil
Government Ministries	3	2 Sinhalese
LTTE Official	1	1 Tamil
Sports Associations	2	2 Sinhalese
Aid Organisation	1	1 Sinhalese
Media	2	1 Sinhalese, 1 Muslim
Sponsor	1	1 Sinhalese
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>14 Sinhalese, 5 Tamil, 4 Muslim, 8 European</i>

The interviews were conducted between January and April 2007 and lasted between 35 and 120 minutes. They included questions on the social impacts experienced over the weekend; the relations and behaviour between people at the SFD program; and the potential influence on a common spirit or attitudinal changes between people and groups. In cases where the respondents’ English proficiency did not

allow adequate responses, a local Sinhala and Tamil speaking interpreter assisted them. The computer software used to support the qualitative analysis was NVivo, which assisted the researcher in storing, integrating, indexing, and coding the large amount of data collected.

**Findings**

The ISM event weekend provided a space for collective action and resulted in different socio-cultural experiences for participants, spectators and other event stakeholders. Their experiences were grouped under eight themes: Socialising, Comfort, Reciprocal Support, Networking, Learning, Cultural Celebration, Attitudinal Differences, and Management Tensions. The individual themes are presented below, drawing on representative comments from interview respondents who were given pseudonyms to guarantee a confidential yet personal presentation of findings.

*Socialising*

The category of Socialising includes elements of fun and entertainment, inclusive interaction and shared experiences. With its different types of sports and creative activities the ISM programme was successful in enabling people from disparate communities to participate, meet ‘others’ and celebrate together. Organiser Tom remembered:

*[It was] a really positive consequence that [people] were working and playing together: there were Tamils and Muslims and Sinhalese and they were engaged in creative work, painting on a big paper, playing football, swimming together... that’s a really, really big achievement considering the political situation in our country.*

The sport project was described as a vehicle for active participation with an interesting combination of Sri Lankan and international sportspeople. While international volunteers came from different European countries, members of the participating Sri Lankan communities came from different parts of the island to be part of the event.

Facility manager Shanto highlighted that the event also allowed for a contribution of groups from rural Sri Lanka who are often not given the opportunity to actively participate, exercise and socialise. He argued that, “especially young people from these areas who have talent and like sports, but who normally don’t get a chance to show it, they could participate in the event”. Shanto went on to say that active performance and socialising contributed to a rise in participants’ satisfaction and happiness, and the emergence of first friendship ties.

*Comfort*

The theme 'Comfort' includes feelings of confidence, trust and safety in dealing with other individuals, groups and institutions. In 2007, a latent danger of terrorist attacks was prevailing at special events in Sri Lanka and there were warnings by the Sri Lankan Government and Foreign Ministries about participating in large public festivals and gatherings. However, at the small-scale ISM event in rural Nattandiya respondents were not too concerned with potential risks. Volunteer Katrin explained:

It was a very safe event, because of the location of the Peace Village. It's far away from a big city. And there is no one disturbing the activities; it's a little bit away from other people from the villages, too. So the children can feel safe here.

The location of the Peace Village assisted in achieving feelings of safety and an increase in people's comfort. At the same time, the project offered participants and supporters a welcomed escape from their daily routines, which was particularly interesting for the Tamil and Muslim community members, many of whom came from the war-torn north-eastern parts of Sri Lanka. Volunteer Axel recalled:

*The children from Nilaveli came out of a really troubled area and were playing together with all the kids and having fun in the pool. It was something very special for them and I could see they had a good time and forgot the hardships of daily life.*

Axel's observation was supported by volunteer Anita, who confirmed that "for a couple of days [the children] could play and swim and be together without any worries about their home town [or] about the war". Axel felt that the children quickly established a form of trust and confidence in dealing with their peers and group leaders, irrespective of their socio-ethnic background. On the other hand, there is the argument that a contribution to trust cannot be mistaken for the establishment of full trust among ethnic groups that have been engaged in civil war for over 25 years. Jayo, a Government representative, explained:

*I saw that in between all the people... there was some kind of a trust. I don't say it's 100%. But some kind of a trust, that's why I say it was more or less a confidence building or trust building exercise.*

*Reciprocal Support*

The theme 'Reciprocal Support' includes elements of helpful intergroup cooperation as well as physical assistance and emotional encouragement. At the ISM, the mix of people from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds was experienced positively by most of the respondents. Feelings of solidarity and intergroup camaraderie existed, which became obvious through the many small gestures and signs of goodwill. For example, Kumi from Marawila remembered one Sinhalese supervisor suggesting to a Muslim boy, who arrived without proper equipment: "OK, I have a vehicle, I go and bring you a pair of shoes and some running shorts... I go back to my house and I take stuff from my sisters or brothers."

This positive helping attitude continued throughout the project. Jayo reported: "I saw Tamil students who could not swim well. And then there were Sinhalese students who were more confident in swimming. They were spontaneously trying to help them to learn...! There was some kind of a cooperation and assistance". Similarly Tom, who helped out as a group coordinator during some creative handicraft sessions, stated that there were "many situations where children from Anamaduwa or supporters from Nattandiya were helping kids from Nilaveli or vice versa, to make these friendship bands". On the other hand, Tom also remembered a moment that left him disappointed:

*At the end of the weekend the kids from Nilaveli were sitting in their bus and they wanted to leave and wave Goodbye, and the kids from Anamaduwa were standing next to us but didn't wave back to them. I don't know why that happened; I can only guess that they had less knowledge about the importance of this sign...*

*Networking*

The theme 'Networking' includes elements of advancing individual and intergroup connections, and establishing professional contacts. International organiser Mark considered the organising around a number of events related to the 'Games for Peace' campaign as a valuable opportunity for locals and internationals to "form new social relationships. I won a lot of contacts in Sri Lanka while working at the events. Actually, I won a lot of friends". During the ISM, Muslim community member Waahid also experienced friendships and networks developing between the accompanying teachers, who "exchanged their addresses [and] were talking in Sinhala and Tamil, with hands and feet, and for a long time they were sitting together and they

were having chats. So, I believe that if this goes on like this, a bridge will be built!”

Similarly, Jayo was visibly moved when talking about the positive social impacts that the event had created. He remembered:

*The day when the groups had to leave each other, I saw, you know, the children were crying, hugging each other, kissing each other. And that was one of the most sensational events. And that showed me that, you know ... through the sport you can make a network of friends.*

This display of affection and friendship is seen as a strong indicator of the event’s success in having contributed to emotional links between the children and communities. When considering that in the Sri Lankan culture emotions are generally controlled when meeting previously unknown people, the hugging and kissing of ‘others’ is certainly a powerful social intergroup response. In some instances the emotional engagement of people led to subsequent invitations to visit each other. This suggests that at least a number of inter-community relationships lasted beyond event borders; however, follow-up studies are required to substantiate the claims for ongoing connections.

### Learning

The theme ‘Learning’ encompasses the development of specific sport skills; the expansion of intercultural perspectives; and the social aspect of dealing with individual weaknesses and/or group defeat. Firstly, children and youth groups had the opportunity to learn swimming techniques. This proved to be of great value to the locals, as Sugi from the Tamil Nilaveli community confirmed by saying, “The swimming pool is very important. Because, you know, there was the Tsunami and we wanted to learn how to take care of ourselves. With the knowledge of swimming we now can take care of ourselves!”

Secondly, the young Sri Lankan participants learned how to deal with victory and defeat in sport contests (in a friendly context, at least). Didi from the organising team described the importance of this valuable experience in minor competition:

*The children were able to celebrate, but they also learnt to digest defeat, as did the trainers, the coaches, the schools and so on. What sport brings for the society in a positive way is to accept defeat, and stand up after the defeat on the following day! Start again, train again, improve the skills, try to win, lose again, stand up on your feet, and so on and so on.*

Didi felt that accepting defeat is particularly important for children living in an ethnically divided country like Sri Lanka, where admitting defeat against ‘others’ is still a taboo. Jayo supported this view, saying that in “a country where a battle is going... no party is willing to accept losses. In the case of sport, here, the losing party has learned to accept losing as well. That is some new feeling and an important experience for us”.

### Cultural Celebration

Comments under the theme ‘Cultural Celebration’ were expressed around respecting and appreciating cultural traditions and customs. In Sri Lankan society, following traditions is an integral part of daily life; for example, at the ISM many participants were wearing their traditional clothing, school uniforms and headscarves. A traditional welcome ceremony was staged for visitors and tourists, which included performances by the famous Kandy Dancers. The international participants enjoyed the cultural variety presented, as Arndt explained:

*I really like to meet other cultures and celebrate with people from other cultures... They have totally different points of view about nearly everything: life, maybe religion, food, music, whatever, you know. It’s totally different to the Europeans – that’s the reason why I said the event was really interesting for me.*

At the end of the first day the different ethnic groups and the international volunteers engaged in an inter-cultural event night where they learned about different dance moves and theatre performances. European spectator Katja argued that all participants and particularly the dancing performers had the invaluable opportunity to showcase their talent to a wider inter-ethnic audience. They remembered that “we learned about [each other’s] traditions and it was a really good experience for both sides to show their customs... And [the adults] could show the kids that they are proud of what they’re doing.” The cultural program resulted in great appreciation and a joint celebration, where groups engaged in combined cultural performances. A very excited Didi explained that the performances allowed Sri Lankan people to “find unifying connecting points with the others”, as they came to realise that their cultures have common elements and rituals.

### Attitudinal Differences

Comments themed under ‘Attitudinal Differences’ refer to varying levels of affect, enthusiasm and engagement



towards the social sport theme, as well as differences in attitudes towards the sport event organisers, participants and spectators. Shanto remembered that leading up to the project, some community members – who were not directly involved – spoke negatively about the organisers: “There were stories spreading that [a school] principal was saying: ‘[They] are showing our children to rich tourists and they are getting money from Germany and we get nothing!’” Although Shanto perceived the principal to have been drinking at the time he made this statement, he believed that there is a potential for externally supported events to create feelings of angst, uncertainty or jealousy among parts of the community.

From an internal perspective, Tom explained that at times he got upset with some community representatives, supervisors and volunteers. While some of them actively ‘lived’ a peaceful togetherness and encouraged others to interact and participate, others only went as far as doing their job and did not actively advance social development:

*There were some disharmonies, I would say. For example the swimming teacher: he was there to show some children how to swim. But he only swam around alone in the pool; he had a look at the children, so that they don't get under the water, that was good, but I asked him if he wants to show some boys or girls how to swim, but he didn't want to and he said: “Naa, they want to play and that's enough”.*

The German volunteer Axel, who expressed his disappointment with the attitude of some political VIP guests, voiced a similar argument. He felt that “the chief guests did not have any relationship with the children... They come there, they see the cameras and they only think of their own popularity.”

#### *Management Tensions*

‘Management Tensions’ refer to organisational issues that occurred around the ISM project and the wider ‘Games for Peace’ campaign. Arguably, on a strategic level, A.G.S.E.P. did not communicate and cooperate close enough with the supporting Ministry of Sport, which according to Mark resulted in a lack of understanding regarding the organisers’ main values and goals:

*We thought they (the Ministry) knew what we (A.G.S.E.P.) wanted to do with this event. But we didn't explain well enough what our goals and objectives were. [Probably] they saw it as just another sport event and did not put as much heart into it as we did.*

The communication issues and socio-management tensions resulted in lost opportunities to grow and leverage the event benefits. Some of the event attendees and stakeholders “noticed that participation of supporters and families was low, which was a bit disappointing”. Respondents discussed the reasons for the low number of event spectators and Arndt suggested that a lack of promotion and advertising might have been a significant factor, as “maybe not so many people knew about the ISM, its purpose and value.” Other voices were raised that some locals may not have found the focus on proactive civil peace building to be relevant or powerful enough.

#### **Discussion**

The main purpose of the ISM project was to enhance intergroup relations and contribute to positive social development between participating Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities. This section discusses people’s socio-cultural experiences and the project’s management approach, and critically investigates how these constituents influenced relationships and the social capital available to the disparate groups.

First, the ISM provided opportunities for entertainment and interaction and allowed communities to socialise. Locals were able to participate in active community life by taking up positions in the organising team, as volunteers, supporters, attendees or participants. Misener and Mason (23) had pointed towards these social benefits before; however, around the ISM an ethnically mixed stakeholder group including members from disparate rural communities had the chance to a) share their experience with each other, b) contribute to the innovative idea of peace-building through sport, and c) celebrate with newly made friends. These social opportunities resulted in what Baum et al. (10) described as “mutually beneficial interactions and accomplishments” between people of mixed ethnic background.

The inter-community relationships established through social participation and exchange contributed to the bridging social capital that was created; new links to sponsors and government institutions relate to the linking component of social capital. Clearly, a starting point was created and first important intergroup contacts were facilitated through the inter-community project; in other words, there is a contribution to the stock of social capital available to communities. However, it is too early to claim that the project was able to create strong social ties (see 42) or thick layers of social capital between people and their communities.

Follow-up research needs to examine the sustainability of weak ties, and the different opportunities of strengthening them. Unfortunately, funding constraints and the difficulty of accessing participants and stakeholders years after the event prohibited the assessment of these important factors.

Second, the ISM was thought to contribute to feelings of comfort, safety and confidence. The project was considered a promising source for the creation of comfortable and trustworthy relationships, where different factors such as the presence of an impartial organiser and the official endorsement from all communities contributed to feelings of generalised and institutional trust (see 43, 44). In particular, the safe location and the engaging leisure atmosphere of the ISM added to feelings of comfort, reinforcing Lederach's (45) argument that purposely designed sport projects have the potential to provide a locus of peace – even if only for a short period of time.

Considering the social context of the projects in Sri Lanka, the creation of a comfortable intergroup environment is a significant achievement. Meanwhile, we need to be careful not to interpret an increase in comfort level as a significant development of trust between communities. In fact, at this stage it seems too early to expect that the level of trust – and the stock of social capital – within the new inter-community sport network is sufficient to facilitate, for example, confident and open discussions of ethnic boundaries and differences, as highlighted by Verweel and Anthonissen (26). In the future, however, once generalised and institutionalised trust has been advanced through subsequent interaction, communities and sport organisers may have the opportunity to intensify and expand their social exchanges within and outside the project frame. Ongoing engagement may thus (re)produce stronger layers of bridging and linking social capital.

Third and fourth, the inter-community project facilitated opportunities to establish networks and reciprocity between groups and project stakeholders. The preparation phase and the weekend itself allowed organisers, participants and supporters to connect and share with previously unknown people (bridging), or intensify pre-existing friendships (bonding). These experiences concur with Verweel and Anthonissen's (26) dimension of 'reciprocal service provision' where overall, sharing with others is considered an important element of bridging social capital (13, 14, 43). Furthermore, a number of follow-up meetings and private invitations suggest that reciprocal relations and networks were continued post event. However, it remains to be seen if relationships and networks are actually sustained in the long-term, especially in a socio-economic environment

where communities are often resource-poor and technologically disadvantaged. For example, management knowledge in rural Sri Lanka is limited; opportunities for phone conversations or email contact is restricted; financial means for long-distance travel are scarce; and people in the Northern parts of Sri Lanka are challenged or even restrained in receiving official travel permits from the government. A systematic approach towards community capacity building is therefore critical if development agencies or 'change agents' are serious about achieving true social development and empowerment in disadvantaged settings (see 46).

To increase opportunities for everyone in the community, it will be important for participants and organisers to think strategically and facilitate steps towards a sustainable development of relationships and networks. In an attempt to maximise positive social experiences and create sustainable social outcomes, they may start to leverage sport projects or – in other words – create linking social capital through closer cooperation with governmental organisations (see 47). Here, a combination of 'highlight events' and a nested SFD project (such as A.G.S.E.P.'s 'Games for Peace' campaign) seems most promising in highlighting and managing wider social community issues, including intergroup development, educational initiatives and/or health campaigns (see e.g. 2, 48-50).

Fifth, 'Learning' represents the project's contribution to capacity building, as people can gain knowledge and skills in sport and culture. For example, during the ISM, participants were able to develop swimming skills. An earlier study conducted by Straubinger (39) had shown that after the Tsunami Disaster in 2004, water had become an element of fear and danger for a large proportion of the Sri Lankan youth. Therefore, learning swimming skills built an important and at times liberating experience for participants.

At the same time, supporting creative arts and drama classes at the ISM provided an alternative opportunity for children to express themselves freely in a favourable social environment. Theatre performances and paintings allowed children to share feelings of joy, but also of fear and pain. The sharing of such intimate experiences impressed participants, volunteers and teachers, and allowed them to share, understand, connect, and empathise with each other. Indeed, the findings suggest that being temporarily disconnected from the hardships of daily life was both psychologically and socially liberating. This implies that the conditions of different sportplus elements (e.g. downplay of competition and the focus on social and cultural values) and

context of the project (e.g. its locality and community support) are important success factors, not the use of sport per se (see also 29, 30).

Sixth, 'Cultural Celebration' is an area with particular relevance for inter-community sportplus programmes. The opportunity to showcase and celebrate one's culture and learn about other groups' traditions was considered an exciting experience and resulted in an increase in the appreciation of diversity. With a focus on inclusive activities, 'Cultural Celebration' may thus lead to an improved perception of equality between communities. Despite the fact that this change may be temporary, it seems particularly important for intervention programmes in a society where one of the main challenges is to deconstruct the relations of power and the politics that render some dominant (Sinhalese) and others marginalised (Tamils and Muslims). The potential long-term consequences of this change will have to be investigated in future research.

It must be recognised here that SFD programs do not automatically result in benefits for all those involved or affected by them. At the ISM, it was found that attitudes differed among individuals and groups. Proactivity and enthusiasm to engage with 'others' and with the 'Games for Peace' themes varied, which at times led to disagreement and tension. This suggests that at socially-focused reconciliation projects dedicated peace-activists can be left frustrated and disappointed with participants or stakeholders who focus predominantly on 'doing their job'. Such impacts can affect social dynamics before, during and beyond an event, which speaks to the importance of open and inclusive communication and strategic planning throughout the entire campaign.

Finally, pessimistic and judgmental comments about the programme organisers and participants suggest that parts of the community did not accept the idea of inter-community celebration; some may have found the focus on sport meaningless, while others perhaps rejected the idea of a Western change agent organising events in a developing country (see e.g. 51). This speaks to the limits of sport to bridge severe cultural and social divides, and the importance of empowering local sport event organisers through ongoing cooperation and a strategic transfer for power and responsibilities over time.

### Looking Back and Looking Forward

The term 'sport-for-development' has been used to describe a great variety of both short-term and long-term initiatives aiming to make a positive difference for disadvantaged

people and communities. To avoid confusion and an over-simplification of the term, it seems necessary to clearly define and acknowledge a project's character, duration, structure, and intended outcomes (see 50). Only critical analyses will prevent us from superficial and evangelistic sentiments, and will allow us to provide realistic assessments of sport projects' contribution to – and limitation in – creating social capital. In and of themselves short-term interventions such as sport event weekends may be limited in achieving lasting change in divided societies and this needs to be understood and acknowledged by communities, organisers and funding bodies. However, as indicated in this study, sport and event projects can play a role in starting a significant process; they may contribute to intergroup development and add to the stock of social capital. To develop this potential into lasting social benefits, organisers and communities need to engage in long-term cooperation and follow-up activities. In other words, short-term interventions may kick-start wider social outcomes such as reconciliation and peace only if positive impacts are maximised and benefits are leveraged. The findings and recommendations from this study will hopefully inform the strategies and guidelines of future SFD initiatives, which are to ensure that they reach their potential as vehicles for inter-community togetherness and build social capital.

### References

1. United Nations. Sport for Development and Peace: The Way Forward. Sixty-first session, Agenda item 49, A/61/373, United Nations General Assembly, 2006.
2. Chalip L. Towards Social Leverage of Sport Events. *Journal of Sport and Tourism*. 2006;11(2):109-27.
3. Nicholson M, Hoye R. Sport and Social Capital. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann; 2008.
4. Coalter F. A Wider Social Role for Sport: Who's Keeping the Score. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge; 2007.
5. Hanifan LJ. The rural school community centre. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 1916;67:130-8.
6. Sabatini F. An Inquiry into the Empirics of Social Capital and Economic Development [PhD]: University of Rome La Sapienza, Rome; 2005.
7. Robinson LJ, Schmid AA, Siles ME. Is social capital really capital? *Review of Social Economy*. 2002;60(1):1-24.

8. Dekker P, Uslaner EM. Introduction. In: Uslaner EM, editor. *Social Capital and Participation in Everyday Life*. London: Routledge; 2001.
9. Adler P, Kwon S-W. Social Capital: Prospects For a New Concept. *The Academy of Management Review*. 2002;27(11):17-40.
10. Baum F, Palmer C, Modra C, Murray C, Bush R. Families, social capital and health. In: Winter I, editor. *Social Capital and Public Policy in Australia*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies; 2000. p. 250-75.
11. Bourdieu P. The forms of capital. In: Richards J, editor. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press; 1986. p. 241-58.
12. Coleman JS. Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*. 1988;94(1):95-120.
13. Putnam RD. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; 1993.
14. Putnam RD. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster; 2000.
15. Putnam RD. *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster; 2003.
16. Coalter F. Sport Clubs, Social Capital and Social Regeneration: 'ill-defined interventions with hard to follow outcomes'? *Sport in Society*. 2007;10(4):537-59.
17. Field J. *Social Capital*. London: Routledge; 2003.
18. Portes A. Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 1998;24:1-24.
19. Skinner J, Zakus D, Cowell J. Development through Sport: Building Social Capital in Disadvantaged Communities. *Sport Management Review*. 2008;11(3): 253-75.
20. Mattsson M. Social capital supporting males - Findings from a community action research project in Sweden. *Neighbourhoods and Social Capital*; 29. April 2005; Ryde: Maquarie University's Centre for Research on Social Inclusion; 2005.
21. Molinas J. The interactions of bonding, bridging and linking dimensions of social capital: evidence from rural Paraguay. In: Isham J, Kelly T, Ramaswamy S, editors. *Social Capital and Economic Development*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publications; 2002. p. 104-18.
22. Woolcock M. *Social Capital, Civic Society and Poverty Reduction: Arrangements, Disagreements, Tensions*. Canberra: Address to ANU Staff Association, 2001.
23. Misener L, Mason DS. Creating community networks: Can sporting events offer meaningful sources of social capital? *Managing Leisure*. 2006;11(1):39-56.
24. Arai S, Pedlar A. Building Communities Through Leisure: Citizen Participation in a Healthy Communities Initiative. *Journal of Leisure Research*. 1997;29(2):167-82.
25. Arai S, Pedlar A. Moving beyond individualism in leisure theory: A critical analysis of concepts of community and social engagement. *Leisure Studies*. 2003;22, (July 2003):185-202.
26. Verweel P, Anthonissen A. Ethnic Diversity in Organised Sport: Development of Social Capital by Dutch Immigrants. *The Cyprus Journal of Sciences*. 2006;4(Summer 2006):109-28.
27. Krouwel A, Boonstra N, Duyvendak JW, Veldboer L. 'A Good Sport'? Research into the Capacity of Recreational Sport to Integrate Dutch Minorities. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2006;41(2):165-80.
28. Spaaij R. Sport as a Vehicle for Social Mobility and Regulation of Disadvantaged Urban Youth. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2009;44(2-3):247-64.
29. Kidd B. A new social movement: Sport for development and peace. *Sport in Society*. 2008;11(4):370-80.
30. Sugden J. Critical left-realism and sport interventions in divided societies. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2010;45(3):258-72.
31. Sherif M. Superordinate Goals in the Reduction of Intergroup Conflict: An experimental Evaluation. In: Austin WG, Worchel S, editors. *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co.; 1979. p. 257-61.

32. Wartburton D. A passionate dialogue: community and sustainable development. In: Wartburton D, editor. *Community and Sustainable Development: Participation in the Future*. London: Earthscan; 1998. p. 1-39.
33. Nesiah D. Sri Lankan Nationalism, Ethnic Identity and Community. In: Raman B, Sathiya Moorthy N, Chittaranjan K, editors. *Sri Lanka: Peace Without Process*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications; 2006. p. 53-90.
34. Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics. Sri Lanka: Statistical Abstract 2001. Chapter 2. In: Department of Census and Statistics, editor. 2001.
35. Dunung S. *Doing Business in Asia*. New York: Lexington Books; 1995.
36. Bilger A. *Kriegsangst im Urlaubsparadies*. Der Spiegel Online. 2006 16. Juni 2006.
37. A.G.S.E.P. Website. A.G.S.E.P. Profile. Marawila, Sri Lanka 2010 [29. August 2010]; Available from: <http://www.agsep.com/>.
38. Coalter F. The politics of sport-for-development: Limited focus programmes and broad gauge problems? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2010;45(3):295-314.
39. Straubinger B. *Water-Fear Study of the Trauma Relief Centre* (unpublished). 2005.
40. Yin RK. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications; 2008.
41. Denzin NK, Lincoln YS. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications; 2005. xix, 1210 p. p.
42. Granovetter MS. The Strength of Weak Ties. *The American Journal of Sociology*. 1973;78(6):1360-80.
43. Stone W. *Measuring social capital: Towards a theoretically informed measurement framework for researching social capital in family and community life*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2001.
44. Skelcher C, McCabe A, Lowndes V, Nanton P. *Community Networks in Urban Regeneration: 'It all depends on who you know'*. Bristol: The Policy Press; 1996.
45. Lederach JP. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. 5th ed. Washington DC: US Institute of Peace; 2002.
46. Schulenkorf N. The Roles and Responsibilities of a Change Agent in Sport Event Development Projects. *Sport Management Review*. 2010;13(2):118-28.
47. Woolcock M. The Place of Social Capital in Understanding Social and Economic Outcomes. *Isuma: Canadian Journal of Policy Research*. 2001;2(1):1-7.
48. O'Brien D. Points of Leverage: Maximising Host Community Benefit from a Regional Surfing Festival. *European Sport Management Quarterly*. 2007;7(2):141-65.
49. Schulenkorf N, Edwards D. Maximizing Positive Social Impacts: Strategies for Sustaining and Leveraging the Benefits of Inter-Community Sport Events in Divided Societies. *Journal of Sport Management*. 2012;26(5): 379-90.
50. Schulenkorf N, Adair D. Temporality, transience and regularity in sport-for-development: synchronizing programs with events. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*. in press.
51. Guest AM. The diffusion of development-through-sport: analysing the history and practice of the Olympic Movement's grassroots outreach to Africa. *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*. 2009;12(10):1336 – 52.

# Associations Between Sport Involvement and Youth Psychosocial Development in Sweden: A Longitudinal Study

STEFAN WAGNSSON<sup>1</sup>, CHRISTIAN AUGUSTSSON<sup>1</sup>, GÖRAN PATRIKSSON<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Karlstad University, Department of Health Sciences*

<sup>2</sup> *University of Gothenburg, Department of Food and Nutrition, and Sport Science*

This study was funded by Centrum för Idrottsforskning (Swedish National Centre for Research in Sports).

Corresponding author email: [stefan.wagnsson@kau.se](mailto:stefan.wagnsson@kau.se)

## Abstract

There is a widespread belief that organized sport can be used as a tool for positive youth development. However, phenomena such as parental pressure, binge drinking, doping, bullying and marginalization are also present within the sport milieu, with potential risks for negative outcomes to occur. The aim of the present study was to examine the longitudinal effects of organized sport involvement on indicators of youth psychosocial development over 24 months. Surveys assessing reported sport involvement and psychosocial development indicators were carried out at baseline (T1), 12 months (T2), and 24 months (T3). The results, based on self-reports of 920 youth, ages 10-18 years from Sweden, showed strong evidence of an association between baseline sports involvement and end line self-esteem (SE) ( $r=.15$ ;  $p<.001$ ), perceived physical competence (PPC) ( $r=.47$ ;  $p<.001$ ), and social competence (PSC) ( $r=.21$ ;  $p<.001$ ), reported grades (GRAD) ( $r=.13$ ;  $p<.001$ ) and alcohol use (ALC) ( $r=.10$ ;  $p=.016$ ). After adjusting for selection effects (i.e. dropping out of sport) and prior level outcomes, the effects of sport involvement on indicators of youths' psychosocial development used in this study, were in general negligible ( $\beta_{SE}=.05$ ,  $p=.20$ ;  $\beta_{PSC}=.05$ ,  $p=.20$ ;  $\beta_{GRAD}=.04$ ,  $p=.60$ ;  $\beta_{ALC}=.03$ ,  $p=.49$ ) except for PPC ( $\beta_{PPC}=.14$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The results of this study highlight the importance of using longitudinal studies that account for variances explained by prior level outcomes, socio-demographic variables and dropouts from sports.

## Background

Organized sports are highly valued in most Western societies and attract major portions of citizens in one way or another. In Sweden, nearly two-thirds of its youth are members of sports clubs, and almost 80% of their parents are voluntarily involved in the daily work of the clubs (1). This large involvement is due partly to the historically evolved and culturally embedded public notion that participating in sports contributes positively to youth psychosocial development (YPD) (2,3,4). The perception of sport as a positive vehicle for youth development is widely accepted in many cultures. However, this view has not been left unchallenged. Phenomena such as parental pressure, binge drinking, doping, anorexia, burnout, bullying and marginalization are also present within the sport milieu, introducing potential risks for negative developmental outcomes (5,6,7).

According to Bronfenbrenner (8), human development occurs through complex, reciprocal interactions (i.e., proximal processes) between an active human organism and people, objects and symbols in its immediate (micro) and more distant environment (meso, exo and macro). These interactions must occur on a regular basis over an extended period of time in order to influence human development. Long-lasting proximal processes are found in the context of organized sport, where youth continuously interact with peers and adults (e.g., coaches and parents) while learning new skills and performing complex tasks (8). This makes organized sport an arena in which great opportunities for youth development can occur.

**Keywords:** Children, Adolescents, Psychosocial Development, Organized Sport, Involvement

Previous studies on the effects of organized sport on youth psychosocial development have shown that youth participating in sports report significantly better characteristics on most developmental outcome when compared to non-participants (2,6). For example, sport participation is related to more happiness and well-being, lower rates of depression, higher levels of self-esteem, stronger perceived physical and social competence, and better academic performance (9,10,11,12,13,14,15). Importantly, the designs of the studies mentioned above (i.e., cross-sectional and retrospective) do not make it possible to determine whether differences between groups are caused by sport participation or whether they might be explained partially by selection processes or by differences regarding psychosocial characteristics established before beginning sport activities. Although still very sparse, there has been a growing interest in using longitudinal studies in this area to try and control for pre-existing differences and to sort out presumptive cause and effect relationships. In many cases though, the findings have been inconsistent. Some longitudinal studies support the popular belief that sport is a positive vehicle for youth development, showing that participation in organized sports can increase self-esteem and self-confidence, academic achievement and peer relations while reducing depression and social isolation (16,17,18,19). In contrast, other longitudinal studies have found no such effects using similar outcome variables (e.g., 20,21,22).

One reason for these inconsistent results might be that most of the longitudinal studies have only considered the breadth of activities (number), leaving out intensity (quantity of time in sports) and duration (cross-year continuity), which are important developmental dimensions of structured out-of-school activities (20,23,24). Moreover, to our knowledge, only one study (22) has explicitly adjusted for selection processes related to attrition from sport, suggesting that previously observed differences may be due to less developed psychosocial characteristics among individuals dropping out of sports compared to those who stay involved. This is important to take into account in order to adjust for the unique effects of sports involvement. Otherwise there will be a risk of overestimating the effects of sports participation. Clearly, more longitudinal work is needed that ensures a high response rate, taking into account several dimensions of sports involvement while controlling for selection effects.

**Purpose of the current study**

In order to fill the gaps in the research done in this area, the main purpose of this study was to examine the potential

effects of organized sport involvement on indicators of YPD, considering three dimensions of sport involvement (breadth, intensity and duration) while controlling for selection processes. In this study YPD was measured by self-esteem, perceived physical and social competence, prosocial behaviour, reported grades, psychosomatic health, smoking and alcohol consumption. These indicators are often subject for inquiry in most studies done in this area (see 3 and 13 for an overview).

**Methods**

**Study Design**

The study employed a longitudinal cohort design, with three rounds of surveys (T1=baseline, T2=12 months, T3=24 months) including elements of retrospective questions (i.e., reported number of sports and years of participation before the beginning of the study). Although cause and effect relationships cannot be established fully, this design facilitates the identification of factors that precede change or non-change over time. It also allows for comparisons between cohorts and makes it possible to establish the sequence of events (25). Despite deficiencies (distortions and reinterpretations when recalling), retrospective questions made it possible to obtain information about each participant’s past sport participation, stretching the time-span for the analyses.

**Recruitment and Sampling**

Data was collected from pupils (10-18 years) residing in schools situated in the provinces of Värmland and Västra Götaland, located in the middle parts of Sweden. The sample was based on a three-step stratified sampling procedure. In the first step, schools were selected to provide equal distribution of primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools. Secondly, classes were chosen using simple randomization within each school level. Third, using Cohen’s (26) guidelines for estimating the sample size along with former noticeable problems with longitudinal designs concerning loss of cases over time (25), we decided to include 500 pupils in each stratum. Due to school administration problems at the end of the semester the total sample comprised 1358 pupils, nearly equally distributed over primary school (n=465), lower secondary school (n=439) and upper secondary school (n=454). Informed consent was obtained from both teachers and parents, along with informed assent from study participants. Ethics approval for the study was obtained from Karlstad University Ethic Approval Committee.

The starting ages (10, 13 and 16 years) were strategically chosen to minimize the dropout rate, as pupils usually change schools at 12 and 15 years.

**Participants and Procedures'**

*Note: 61 individuals started to participate in organized sports during the data collection, resulting in a total of 623 participants who sometimes were involved in sports at T1 to T3.*

A co-director of the project administered the questionnaire during school hours at T1, T2, and T3. The participation rate was quite high (T1=85%; T2=80%; T3=80%). In order to keep the sampling criteria constant across the study, only respondents with data from all three waves were included in the primary analysis. Consequently, 920 respondents were included in the final sample.

The mean baseline age of participants was 13.78 years (±2.40 years). Approximately 59% of study participants were male and 41% were female. The main reason for the sex imbalance was because boys dominated the high school programs/classes (i.e., technical and practical) that were randomly assigned to the sample. The vast majority of participants (90%) were of Swedish background. A large part of the sample was active in one or more sports at each time of measurement, but the participation rate decreased over time (61% at T1; 59% at T2 and 52% at T3). Participants who participated in organized sport did so for an average of 5.89 (±4.78) hours per week at T1, 6.21 (±5.27) hours at T2 and 6.54 (±5.83) hours at T3. In total, participants were involved in 45 different sports, with the greatest involvement in soccer (40%), equestrian (9%), ice-hockey (6%), floor-ball (5%) and golf (5%).

**Measures**

Socio-demographic variables. Since earlier research has shown significant associations between indicators of YPD

and demographic variables such as sex, age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) (27,28,29,30) we decided to consider those as confounding variables when analyzing the multivariate relationship between SI and YPD.

In order to reduce the length of the questionnaire, data concerning sex (T1), age (T1), ethnicity (T2) and socioeconomic status (SES) (T2) were collected at different waves. Ethnicity was dichotomized into Swedish and non-Swedish descent.

The determination of SES was based on i) parents' occupational status (POS) and ii) the possession of certain objects (OBJ) (e.g., weekend cottage, boat with sleeping possibilities). The values of POS and OBJ were standardized and summarized for each participant, creating a SES-index (M=49.02, SD=±13.16). Sport involvement. In order to consider the dimensions of breadth (number of organized sports), intensity (hours spent per week in organized sports) and duration (total number of years spent in organized sports), a sport involvement index (SI) was calculated at each wave (SIT1- SIT3). In order to create a composite SI index, participants were given 1 point for each sport (S), 1 point for every year (Y) and 1 point for every hour per week spent in organized sport (H). The equation for SI could thus be summarized as:

$$SI = \Sigma_S + \Sigma_Y + \Sigma_H$$

Mean SI scores were 11.49 (±10.11) at T1, 16.79 (±14.87) at T2, and 21.74 (±19.74) at T3 (see Table 1). The rationale for giving such importance to the number of hours spent in sports was based on Bronfenbrenner's (5) theoretical framework, which argues that the primary mechanism for human development is the interaction between organism and environment, which must be reasonably stable and predictable over time in order to be effective.

*Dropout from sports.* A dropout variable was created to control for selection effects out of sports.

**Table 1.** Mean Total Sport Involvement Scores at each Time Point (T1-T3) and Mean Scores in each Sub-category (Sports, Years and Hours).

Variable	Sports	Years	Hours	M	SD
1. Sport involvement (T1)	2.10	6.02	3.34	11.47	10.11
2. Sport involvement (T2)	3.07	6.99	6.73	16.79	14.87
3. Sport involvement (T3)	3.96	7.88	9.90	21.74	19.74

Note. *Sports*= Number of sports reported participating in before the beginning of the study (retrospective) and sports reported participating in at each time point. *Years*= Sum of years of sports participation before the beginning of the study (retrospective) and years reported participating in sports at each time point. *Hours*= Number of hours spent in organized sports per week at each time point.



This variable refers to individuals who discontinued their involvement in organized sport and did not attend any sport again during the study (T1-T3). In total 103 participants (17% of all sports participants at T1-T3) reported dropping out of organized sports.

*Self-perceptions.* A translated and modified version (a shortened nine-items and a one-item-one-pole-format) of Harter's (31) Self-Perception Profile for Children was used to assess self-esteem (e.g., "I feel sure of myself"), physical competence (e.g., "I do well at all sports") and social competence (e.g., "I have a lot of friends"). Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The reliability of Harter's scale has been well documented (32,33). This reliability held true for this adjusted scale, which showed good internal consistency across the three waves of data collection ( $\alpha$ -range .74 to .80 for self-esteem,  $\alpha$ -range .80 to .86 for physical competence and  $\alpha$ -range .80 to .82 for social competence). A 10-day reliability test-retest was executed showing a very strong stability for the self-esteem ( $rtt=.89$ ) and physical competence scale ( $rtt=.98$ ) and moderate stability for the social competence scale ( $rtt=.67$ ).

*Prosocial behaviour.* A translated and modified version (five items) of Carlo and Randall's (34) Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PTM) was used to capture moral aspects of youth development. The participants were asked about prosocial behaviours in different situations (e.g., "I usually follow rules that have been agreed on") and responded to items on a five-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ -range .69 to .71 cross the waves) and test-retest reliability ( $rtt=.74$ ) showed evidence that the scale was reliable and internally consistent.

*Reported grades.* At each time of measurement, participants were asked to write down their grades in three different subjects (mathematics, Swedish language and English) given in the former semester. Since scores are awarded first in the 8th grade in Sweden, only participants older than 15 years were asked to answer this question. The grading system in Sweden is divided into four categories: Fail, Pass, Pass with distinction and Pass with special distinction. Mean grades were calculated and used in the analysis.

*Psychosomatic complaints.* A modified five-items scale, adapted from "The Bern Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire for Adolescents" (35), was used to assess participants' psychosocial health. Participants were asked to rate the frequency of each psychosomatic complaint (e.g., headache, anxiety, trouble to sleep, stomach ache, back

pain) in the past six months (Never=1, Almost every day=5). Reliability coefficients across the waves were good, with  $\alpha$ -values ranging from .72 to .78. The youths' self-report scores presented good test-retest reliability ( $rtt=.79$ ).

*Alcohol and tobacco use.* Participants in 7th to 12th grade were asked to indicate how often they use alcohol and tobacco (Never, 1-2 times in the past six months, 1-2 times/month, 1-2 times/week, Almost every day). (Never=1, Almost every day=5 ...?) The test-retest reliability scores for alcohol ( $rtt=.81$ ) and smoking ( $rtt=.78$ ) imply a strong consistency when using this scale to assess youth risk behaviours.

### Missing value analyses

A missing value analysis was conducted when data was available, examining potential differences between participants from the final and the missing sample ( $n=458$ ) respectively. Results indicated that the final sample was slightly over-represented by younger people ( $M_{Missing}=13.48$  years,  $M_{Sample}=14.48$  years,  $t=4.33$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and people with Swedish descent ( $\chi^2=23.42$ ,  $p<.001$ ), while no differences were detected with respect to participants' sex or socioeconomic status. Moreover significant differences ( $t=-5.40$ ,  $p<.001$ ) concerning sport involvement were detected, indicating that people within the final sample were more involved in organized sports ( $MT1-T3=15.72$ ,  $SD=\pm 13.87$ ) compared to those in the missing sample ( $MT1-T3=10.70$ ,  $SD=\pm 9.99$ ). When comparing groups in terms of indicators of YPD at T1-T3, no significant differences were found in self-esteem, perceived physical and social competence, prosocial behaviour or reported grades, though differences were observed in psychosomatic complaints ( $M_{Missing}=2.43$ ,  $SD=.87$ ,  $M_{Sample}=2.23$ ,  $SD=.70$ ,  $t=4.62$ ,  $p<.001$ ), smoking ( $M_{Missing}=1.88$ ,  $SD=1.33$ ,  $M_{Sample}=1.53$ ,  $SD=.93$ ,  $t=4.60$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and alcohol use ( $M_{Missing}=2.32$ ,  $SD=.98$ ,  $M_{Sample}=1.96$ ,  $SD=.90$ ,  $t=5.05$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

### Data analyses

The data analyses were mainly conducted in three sets. First, in order to highlight cross-sectional comparisons between participants who never have been involved in organized sports with participants involved at some degree, the sports involvement index was divided into three categories (Never involved (SINI); Low involved (SILI), and Highly involved (SIHI)), with the latter two split on the median SI score.

A series of one-way ANOVAs followed by planned comparisons were then conducted to test linear trends associated with sports involvement and indicators of YPD. In line with earlier research, we hypothesized that significant trends would be observed between groups of sport involvement (SINI<SILI<SIHI) and the indicators of YPD used in this study.

Second, we investigated correlations between youths' SI at T1 and indicators of psychosocial development at T3. Third, a series of multiple hierarchical regression analyses were used to test the longitudinal effects of sport involvement on YPD indicators at T3, controlling for preexisting differences and sports dropout. Each prior level outcome variable at T1 (PLO T1) was entered in the first step together with socio-demographic variables. In the second step, the sport involvement variable SIT1 was entered. The dropout variable was entered in the third step to adjust for selection effects out of sports and to test the amount of additional variance of this variable on YPD.

In order to test for multicollinearity (i.e., whether the predictor variables in a regression model correlate too highly) collinearity diagnostics were undertaken (36). The variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to indicate multicollinearity, showing acceptable values for all variables included in the models (<10) (Max=1.78; Min=1.06). The effect size values ( $f^2$ ) of .02, .15 and .35 were interpreted as small, moderate and large, respectively (26).

## Results

### Sports Involvement Groups and Developmental Outcomes

In order to test for trends in developmental outcomes related to groups of Sport Involvement (SINI<SILI<SIHI), a one-way ANOVA followed by planned comparisons was conducted using cross sectional data at each point of measurement (T1 and T3). With the exception for prosocial behaviour, psychosomatic complaints and alcohol consumption, results showed a trend in the predictive direction between involvement groups at some point of measurement (see Table 2). (Self-esteem: FT1(2,917)=6.02,  $p=.014$ , FT3(2,917)=8.63,  $p<.003$ ; Physical competence: FT1(2,917)=185.15,  $p<.001$ , FT3(2,917)=135.02,  $p<.001$ ; Social competence: FT1(2,917)= 32.13,  $p<.001$ , FT3(2,917)= 11.51,  $p<.001$ ; Reported grades: FT1=2.72,  $p=.100$ ; FT3(2,917)=14.77,  $p<.001$ ; Tobacco use/smoking: FT1(2,594)=6.29,  $p=.012$ , FT3(2,594)=2.03,  $p=.154$ ).

### Univariable Analyses

Pearson's correlations (see Table 3) revealed that baseline sport involvement (SIT1) was positively associated with end line self-esteem ( $r=.15$ ,  $p<.001$ ), perceived physical ( $r=.47$ ;  $p<.001$ ), and social competence ( $r=.21$ ;  $p<.001$ ) and reported grades ( $r=.13$ ;  $p<.001$ ). A positive but weak correlation ( $r=.10$ ;  $p=.016$ ) was observed between SIT1 and alcohol use at T3.

No significant association was found between SIT1 and prosocial behaviour, psychosomatic complaints or smoking. These results indicate that sports involvement positively influences youths' self-perceptions and grades, but may increase alcohol consumption.

There was strong evidence of association between SES and SI in all waves ( $r=.24$  to  $.25$ ,  $p<.01$ ). There was also strong evidence of association between SI and sex ( $t=4.77$ ,  $p<.001$ , M<sub>Male</sub>=18.22, SD=±14.90; M<sub>Female</sub>=13.70, SD=±12.90) and ethnicity ( $t=2.03$ ,  $p<.05$ , M<sub>Swedish</sub>=16.67, SD=±14.43; M<sub>Non-Swedish</sub>=13.40, SD=±13.11). This indicates that being male, having a Swedish background, and belonging to families with higher SES is associated with greater sports involvement.

### Multivariate Analysis

Hierarchical regression analyses showed that baseline YPD outcomes strongly predicted YPD outcomes at T3 (see Table 4). Being a male predicted higher self-esteem ( $\beta=.14$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and perceived physical competence ( $\beta=.12$ ,  $p<.001$ ), less psychosomatic complaints ( $\beta=-.20$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and prosocial behaviour ( $\beta=-.12$ ,  $p=.002$ ). Older age predicted more psychosomatic complaints ( $\beta=.08$ ,  $p=.015$ ) and a higher frequency of alcohol consumption ( $\beta=.13$ ,  $p=.014$ ). Non-Swedish ethnicity predicted less perceived social competence ( $\beta=.10$ ,  $p=.003$ ) and less alcohol consumption ( $\beta=-.16$ ,  $p<.001$ ) in comparison to young people with a Swedish background. Notably, there was no evidence of SES predicting any of the outcome variables. After adjusting for dropout and baseline YPD outcomes, baseline sports involvement (SIT1) only predicted perceived physical competence ( $\beta=.14$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The variances explained when adding SIT1 to the model were rather small ( $\Delta R^2=2\%$ ).

A significant relationship between sports dropout and perceived social competence ( $\beta=.09$ ,  $p=.010$ ) as well as prosocial behaviour ( $\beta=-.11$ ,  $p=.005$ ) were observed, indicating a selection out of sport effect, meaning that young people with less favourable social characteristics withdraw from organized sports at higher rates than young people with more favourable characteristics.

**Table 2.** Mean Differences and Trends ( $SI_{Never} < SI_{Low} < SI_{High}$ ) in Youth Psychosocial Development Outcomes when Comparing Groups of Sports Involvement using Cross-sectional Data at T1 and T3.

Variable	T1					T3				
	n	M	SD	F (trend)	p	n	M	SD	F (trend)	p
Self Esteem				6.02	.014				8.63	.003
SI <sub>Never</sub>	113	3.69	.88			80	3.57	1.01		
SI <sub>Low</sub>	413	3.66	.86			418	3.60	.91		
SI <sub>High</sub>	394	3.90	.73			422	3.88	.75		
Perceived Physical Comp.				185.15	<.001				135.02	<.001
SI <sub>Never</sub>	113	2.20	.92			80	2.06	.95		
SI <sub>Low</sub>	413	2.57	.96			418	2.54	1.08		
SI <sub>High</sub>	394	3.57	.94			422	3.54	1.02		
Perceived Social Comp.				32.13	<.001				11.51	<.001
SI <sub>Never</sub>	113	3.28	1.06			80	3.49	.92		
SI <sub>Low</sub>	413	3.39	.94			418	3.50	.97		
SI <sub>High</sub>	394	3.83	.85			422	3.86	.81		
Prosocial Behaviour				2.50	.114				.58	.446
SI <sub>Never</sub>	113	3.38	.76			80	3.38	.75		
SI <sub>Low</sub>	413	3.50	.72			418	3.37	.76		
SI <sub>High</sub>	394	3.50	.70			422	3.45	.68		
Grades				2.72	.100				14.77	<.001
SI <sub>Never</sub>	47	2.59	.57			56	2.39	.55		
SI <sub>Low</sub>	90	2.72	.72			268	2.55	.66		
SI <sub>High</sub>	126	2.78	.67			273	2.75	.60		
Psychosomatic complaints				.49	.484				.50	.478
SI <sub>Never</sub>	113	2.13	.76			80	2.16	.91		
SI <sub>Low</sub>	413	2.22	.78			418	2.32	.86		
SI <sub>High</sub>	394	2.19	.78			422	2.23	.81		
Alcohol				1.00	.317				.21	.645
SI <sub>Never</sub>	76	1.80	1.07			56	2.18	1.15		
SI <sub>Low</sub>	230	1.60	.85			268	2.29	1.12		
SI <sub>High</sub>	291	1.68	.93			273	2.25	1.07		
Smoking				6.29	.012				2.03	.154
SI <sub>Never</sub>	76	1.58	1.20			56	1.86	1.48		
SI <sub>Low</sub>	230	1.36	.91			268	1.94	1.42		
SI <sub>High</sub>	291	1.29	.81			273	1.59	1.12		

Note. SI<sub>Never</sub>=Never involved in sports, SI<sub>Low</sub>=Low degree of involvement in sports, SI<sub>High</sub>=High degree of involvement in sports.

**Table 3.** Correlations between Baseline Sport Involvement (SI<sub>T1</sub>) and Indicators of Youths' Psychosocial Development

Variable	n	M	SD	r with SI at T1	p*
1. Sport Involvement (T1)	920	11.52	10.06	-	-
2. Self Esteem (T3)	920	3.72	.84	.15	.001
3. Perceived Physical Comp. (T3)	920	2.95	1.16	.47	.001
4. Perceived Social Comp. (T3)	920	3.69	.89	.21	.001
5. Prosocial Behaviour (T3)	920	3.41	.71	.00	.822
6. Grades (T3)	597	2.63	.63	.13	.001
7. Psychosomatic complaints (T3)	920	2.30	.85	-.02	.479
8. Alcohol (T3)	597	2.33	1.09	.10	.016
9. Smoking (T3)	597	1.81	1.34	-.07	.101

Note:\* Based on Pearson's Correlation.

As a consequence, the difference in prosocial behaviour between sports participants and non-participants increases over time. Dropout from sport also predicted an increase in smoking consumption at T3 ( $\beta=.11, p=.033$ ), indicating that involvement in sport may have a small protective effect that ends once youth decide to withdraw from organized sports.

**Discussion**

The main purpose of this study was to examine the associations between sport involvement (considering breadth, duration and intensity) and indicators of YPD in Sweden, including self-esteem, perceived physical and social competence, self-reported prosocial behaviours, self-reported psychosomatic health, and the use of alcohol and tobacco. Linear trend analyses revealed significant trends for groups of sport involvement (SINI<SILI<SIHI) and self-esteem, perceived physical and social competence, reported grades, tobacco use/smoking but not in relation to prosocial behaviour, psychosomatic complaints and alcohol consumption. These results support some of the previous findings from cross-sectional studies (i.e.,10,11,12,13) indicating that sport involvement have positive effects on youths' self-perceptions, grades and smoking habits. Moreover, correlation analyses showed significant positive associations between baseline sport involvement (SIT1) and end line self-esteem, perceived physical competence, and reported grades and alcohol use, but no evidence of association between SIT1 and end line prosocial behaviour or psychosomatic complaints.

After adjusting for dropout and prior level outcomes, however, we found that the effects of sport involvement on YPD indicators (with the exception of perceived physical competence) were negligible. These results bring support to some of the sparse longitudinal research done in this area (20,21,22).

As other researchers have pointed out, it must be emphasized that organized sports may have the potential to serve as a site for positive youth development, but this is not something that occurs automatically while being on the field or court (3). Intervention studies have shown promising results indicating that a coach-created, mastery-oriented motivational climate (e.g., receiving positive reinforcement from the coach when working hard, learning something new or helping others learn through cooperation) or using specially designed sport-based programs will significantly enhance the probability of youth learning life skills and developing positive psychosocial characteristics (2,37,38). Consequently, it is important not to take the effectiveness of organized youth sports for granted, potentially missing the opportunity to create an environment that promotes YPD in a more positive manner than observed in this study.

This study supports the conclusion that socialization environments such as the home and school—where children and adolescents spend most of their time—likely have greater influence on youth development outcomes than involvement in organized sports. Additionally, most youth participate in a range of different structured activities apart

**Table 4.** Multivariate Analysis of Effects of Baseline Sports Involvement (SI<sub>T1</sub>) and Drop-out from Sports on Indicators of Youths' Psychosocial Development at T3, Controlling for Demographic Variables and Prior Level Outcomes of each Indicator at T1 (PLO T1).

	Indicators of psychosocial development at T3																
	Self-esteem		Perceived physical competence		Perceived social competence		Prosocial behaviour		Grades		Psychosomatic complaints		Alcohol		Smoking		
	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	
Step 1																	
PLO T1		.51 <sup>c</sup>		.67 <sup>c</sup>		.54 <sup>c</sup>		.46 <sup>c</sup>		.76 <sup>c</sup>		.52 <sup>c</sup>		.50 <sup>c</sup>		.52 <sup>c</sup>	
Sex		.15 <sup>c</sup>		.13 <sup>c</sup>				-.10 <sup>b</sup>				-.20 <sup>c</sup>					
Age												.09 <sup>b</sup>		.14 <sup>b</sup>			
Ethnicity						.10 <sup>b</sup>								-.16 <sup>c</sup>			
SES																	
Total Adj R <sup>2</sup>		.31 <sup>c</sup>		.51 <sup>c</sup>		.33 <sup>c</sup>		.24 <sup>c</sup>		.59 <sup>c</sup>		.37 <sup>c</sup>		.38 <sup>c</sup>		.27 <sup>c</sup>	
Step 2			.02 <sup>c</sup>			.01 <sup>a</sup>											
PLO T1		.50 <sup>c</sup>		.60 <sup>c</sup>		.53 <sup>c</sup>		.46 <sup>c</sup>		.76 <sup>c</sup>		.53 <sup>c</sup>		.50 <sup>c</sup>		.52 <sup>c</sup>	
Sex		.14 <sup>a</sup>		.12 <sup>c</sup>				-.10 <sup>b</sup>				-.20 <sup>c</sup>					
Age												.08 <sup>b</sup>		.13 <sup>c</sup>			
Ethnicity						.10 <sup>b</sup>								-.16 <sup>c</sup>			
SES																	
SI <sub>T1</sub>		.06		.15 <sup>c</sup>		.07 <sup>a</sup>		.02		.03		.01		.03		-.03	
Total Adj R <sup>2</sup>		.31 <sup>c</sup>		.53 <sup>c</sup>		.34 <sup>c</sup>		.24 <sup>c</sup>		.59 <sup>c</sup>		.37 <sup>c</sup>		.38 <sup>c</sup>		.27 <sup>c</sup>	
Step 3			.01 <sup>c</sup>			.01 <sup>a</sup>			.01 <sup>a</sup>							.01 <sup>c</sup>	
PLO T1		.50 <sup>c</sup>		.60 <sup>c</sup>		.53 <sup>c</sup>		.47 <sup>c</sup>		.76 <sup>c</sup>		.53 <sup>c</sup>		.50 <sup>c</sup>		.51 <sup>c</sup>	
Sex		.14 <sup>c</sup>		.12 <sup>c</sup>				-.12 <sup>b</sup>				-.20 <sup>c</sup>					
Age												.09 <sup>b</sup>		.13 <sup>b</sup>			
Ethnicity						.10 <sup>b</sup>								-.16 <sup>c</sup>			
SES																	
SI <sub>T1</sub>		.05		.14 <sup>c</sup>		.05		-.01		.04		.01		.03		-.01	
Dropout						-.09 <sup>b</sup>		-.11 <sup>a</sup>								.11 <sup>a</sup>	
Total Adj R <sup>2</sup>		.31 <sup>c</sup>		.54 <sup>c</sup>		.35 <sup>c</sup>		.25 <sup>c</sup>		.59 <sup>c</sup>		.37 <sup>c</sup>		.38 <sup>c</sup>		.36 <sup>c</sup>	

Note: Adj R<sup>2</sup>=Adjusted squared multiple correlation; ΔR<sup>2</sup>=Change in squared multiple correlation; β= Standardized regression coefficients; Dropout=Participants who withdraw from organized sports and did not re-join during the study (T1-T3).  
<sup>a</sup>p<.05. <sup>b</sup>p<.01. <sup>c</sup>p<.001. With the exception of SI-values, only significant values are presented in the table.  
 Drop-out from Sports on Indicators of Youth's Psychosocial Development at T3,

from sports, which provide occasions for progressively more complex mutual interactions to take place, with potential developmental benefits as a result (8,11).

It has been argued that participation in multiple structured activities contributes to positive youth development through the exploration of a broad range of skills, interests and values, and being exposed to a diversity of people and experiences (23).

Studies that have investigated the patterns of adolescent participation in organized activities have found that participation in sports was more favorable than participation in no activity at all, but participating in organized structured activities (OSA) in combination with sports was most beneficial (21,24,39).

The results of this study highlight the importance of using longitudinal studies that account for variances explained by prior level outcomes, socio-demographic variables and drop-outs from sports, in order to draw appropriate conclusions. Results clearly showed that prior level outcomes predicted a large proportion of the variance in the outcome variables, indicating that the benefits attributed to sport involvement are likely to represent preexisting differences rather than true socialization effects through sports. In line with Bronfenbrenner's (8) bioecological model, other more distal contextual elements represented by sex, age and ethnicity were shown to predict changes in YPD outcomes. Interestingly, no associations were found in relation to participants' SES and YPD outcomes, which may reflect that social inequalities in Sweden are relatively small compared to other Western societies.

This study also emphasizes the importance of considering selection effects out of sports when investigating the effects of sports involvement. To our knowledge, only one study (22) has accounted for these aspects using a longitudinal design. Earlier findings have shown that the majority of children and adolescents dropout of organized sports for reasons not explicitly related to the sport's environment (e.g., they want to be with friends or spend more time on schoolwork or other leisure activities) (40,41). Although not that common, sport-related environmental reasons such as feelings of inadequacy, little sense of belonging, too much pressure to perform well and bad coaches are other notable reasons respondents said they dropped out of sports. As shown by other researchers (e.g.,42,43,44), negative developmental outcomes are related to many of these latter reasons, indicating that sport-related environmental factors may sometimes have a negative effect on indicators of YPD,

making youth want to withdraw from sports, thereby further increasing the psychosocial gap between sport participants and non-participants.

### Limitations and Future Research

There are some notable limitations in this study. First, it is important to emphasize that we only have highlighted some of a wide range of psychosocial developmental outcomes (see 13). The answer to the question of the effects of sport on psychosocial development depends on which outcome variables researchers investigate. However, since the selected outcome variables in this study are often found in literature dealing with the socialization effects of sports and are often included in the public discussion concerning youth development through sport, it is reasonable to argue that they can provide a good picture of the effects of organized sport on YPD.

The way we decided to code the SI score may have resulted in under-scoring participants who play many sports but change frequently, thus not playing for many years. In addition this study is based on self-reported data, which may have been subject to desirability bias. It is also important to stress that the settings that athletic youth face constantly change and depend on the type of sports performed (team or individual) and the quality of the relationships to coaches, peers and parents. Future research would benefit from studying what happens inside different sporting contexts in order to reveal the mechanism likely to mediate the association between sport involvement and youth development.

Moreover, trend analyses showed small but significant trends between groups of involvement in relation to self-perceptions, reported grades and tobacco use. Since we do not have retrospective data on intensity (hours/week), and since retrospective reports of duration may have been subject to recall bias, it must be emphasized that the design of the study does not rule out the possible explanation that group differences shown at T1 might be attributed to involvement in sports prior to their participation in the study. Even if we have used retrospective data to stretch the time span, it would be necessary in future research to use longitudinal studies with more than three points of measurements, preferably following youths into adulthood, in order to draw safer conclusions and perhaps reveal presumptive effects shown later in life.

## References

1. Patriksson G, Wagnsson S. Föräldraengagemang i barns idrottsföreningar (Parental involvement in children's sports) (FoU-report, No. 2004: 8). Stockholm: Riksidrottsförbundet (The National Sport Federation); 2004.
2. Coalter FA. A wider social role for sport: who's keeping the score? New York, NY: Routledge; 2008.
3. Ewing ME, Gano-Overway LA, Branta CF, Seefeldt VD. The role of sports in youth development. In: Gatz M, Messner MA, Ball-Rokeach SJ, editors. Albany: State University of New York Press; 2002. p. 31-47.
4. Kremer-Sadlik T, Kim JL. Lessons from sports: children's socialization to values through family interaction during sports activities. *Discourse & Society* 2007;18(1):35-52.
5. Coakley JJ. Sport in society: issues & controversies. London: McGraw-Hill Education; 2009.
6. Hellison D, Martinek T, Walsh D. Sport and responsible leadership among youth. In: Holt NE, editor. Positive youth development through sport New York: Routledge; 2008. p. 49-60.
7. Augustsson, C. Unga idrottares upplevelser av föräldrappress (Children and youth in sport - experiences of parental pressure). Dissertation. Karlstad: Karlstad University Studies; 2007:1.
8. Bronfenbrenner U. The Bioecological Theory of Human Development. In: Smelse NJ, Baltes PB, editors. International encyclopedia of the social & behavioural sciences Oxford: Elsevier; 2001. p. 6963-6970.
9. Fraser-Thomas JL, Côté J, Deakin J. Youth sport programs: An avenue to foster positive youth development. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy* 2005;10(1):19-40.
10. Findlay LC, Bowker A. The link between competitive sport participation and self-concept in early adolescence: a consideration of gender and sport orientation. *Journal of youth and adolescence* 2009;38(1):29-40.
11. Mahoney JL, Stattin H. Leisure activities and adolescent antisocial behaviour: The role of structure and social context. *Journal of adolescence* 2000;23(2):113-127.
12. Marsh HW, Jackson SA. Multidimensional self-concepts, masculinity, and femininity as a function of women's involvement in athletics. *Sex roles* 1986;15(7): 391-415.
13. Feldman AF, Matjasko JL. The role of school-based extracurricular activities in adolescent development: A comprehensive review and future directions. *Review of Educational Research* 2005;75(2):159-210.
14. Shields DLL, Bredemeier BJL. Character development and physical activity. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics; 1995.
15. Weiss MR, Smith AL, Stuntz CP. Moral development in sport and physical activity. In: Horn TS, editor. Advances in sport psychology Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics; 2008. p. 187-210.
16. Barber BL, Eccles JS, Stone MR. Whatever Happened to the Jock, the Brain, and the Princess? *Journal of Adolescent Research* 2001;16(5):429-455.
17. Daniels E, Leaper C. A longitudinal investigation of sport participation, peer acceptance, and self-esteem among adolescent girls and boys. *Sex Roles* 2006;55(11):875-880.
18. Marsh HW, Kleitman S. School athletic participation: Mostly gain with little pain. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* 2003;25(2):205-228.
19. Slutzky CB, Simpkins SD. The link between children's sport participation and self-esteem: Exploring the mediating role of sport self-concept. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 2009;10(3):381-389.
20. Brettschneider W. Effects of sport club activities on adolescent development in Germany. *European Journal of Sport Science* 2001;1(2):1-11.
21. Fredricks JA, Eccles JS. Is extracurricular participation associated with beneficial outcomes?: Concurrent and longitudinal relations. *Developmental psychology* 2006;42(4):698-713.
22. Spreitzer E. Does participation in interscholastic athletics affect adult development?: A longitudinal analysis of an 18-24 age cohort. *Youth & Society* 1994;25(3): 368-387.

23. Busseri MA, Rose-Krasnor LR. Breadth and intensity: Salient, separable, and developmentally significant dimensions of structured youth activity involvement. *British journal of developmental psychology* 2009;27(4):907-933.
24. Zarrett N, Fay K, Li Y, Carrano J, Phelps E, Lerner RM. More than child's play: Variable-and pattern-centered approaches for examining effects of sports participation on youth development. *Developmental psychology* 2009;45(2): 368-382.
25. De Vaus DA. *Research design in social research*. London: Sage; 2001.
26. Cohen J. A power primer. *Psychol Bull* 1992;112(1): 155-199.
27. Eisenberg N, Fabes RA, Spinrad, TL. Prosocial development. In: Damon W, Lerner RM, Eisenberg N, editors. *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Social, emotional and personality development*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley; 2006. p. 646-718.
28. Hagquist C. Health inequalities among adolescents-the impact of academic orientation and parents' education. *European Journal of Public Health* 2006; 17: 21-26.
29. Harter S. The self. In: Damon W, Lerner RM, Eisenberg N, editors. *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Social, emotional and personality development*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley; 2006. p. 505-570.
30. Kling KC, Hyde JS, Showers CJ, Buswell BN. Gender differences in self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin* 1999; 125: 470-500.
31. Harter S. *Manual for the self-perception profile for children*. Denver: University of Denver; 1985.
32. Granleese J, Joseph S. Factor analysis of the self-perception profile for children. *Personality and Individual Differences* 1993;15(3):343-345.
33. Harter S. *The construction of the self: A developmental perspective*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press; 1999.
34. Carlo G, Randall BA. The development of a measure of prosocial behaviours for late adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 2002;31(1):31-44.
35. Grob, A., Lüthi, R., Kaiser, F. G., Flammer, A., Mackinnon, A., & Wearing, A. J. Berner. Fragebogen zum Wohlbefinden Jugendlicher (BFW). (Bernese questionnaire of subjective well-being). *Diagnostica* 1991;37(1):66-75.
36. Tabachnick BG, Fidell LS. *Using multivariate statistics*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon Boston; 2001.
37. Weiss MR, Smith AL, Stuntz CP. Moral development in sport and physical activity. In: Horn TS, editor. *Advances insport psychology* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics; 2008. p. 187-210.
38. Petipas AJ, Cornelius A, Van Raalte J. Youth development through sport: It's all about relationships. In: Holt NL, editor. *Positive youth development through sport*. New York: Routledge; 2008. p. 61-70.
39. Linver MR, Roth JL, Brooks-Gunn J. Patterns of adolescents' participation in organized activities: Are sports best when combined with other activities? *Developmental psychology* 2009;45(2):354-367.
40. Butcher J, Linder KJ, Jones DP. Withdrawal from Competitive Youth Sport: A Retrospective Ten-year Study. *Journal of Sport Behaviour* 2002;25(2):145-163.
41. Patriksson G. Theoretical and empirical analyses of drop-outs from youth sports in Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of Sports Sciences* 1988 12;10(1):29-37.
42. Guillet E, Sarrazin P, Carpenter PJ, Trouilloud D, Cury F. Predicting persistence or withdrawal in female handballers with social exchange theory. *International Journal of Psychology*, 2002; 37 (2): 92-104.
43. Leff S, Hoyle R. Young Athletes' Perceptions of Parental Support and Pressure. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 1995; 24:2:187-203.
44. Lindner K, Johns, D. Factors in withdrawal from youth sport: a proposed model. *Journal of sport behavior*, 1991; 14:1:3-18.



# Physical Inactivity Among Adolescents in Managua, Nicaragua: A Cross-Sectional Study and Legal Analysis

KATHERINE ROCK<sup>1</sup>, CAROLINA VALLE<sup>2</sup>, GENEVIEVE GRABMAN<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pan-American Health Organization, Washington D.C., United States

<sup>2</sup> Pan-American Health Organization, Managua, Nicaragua

Corresponding author email: [rock.katherine@gmail.com](mailto:rock.katherine@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Obesity-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are a primary health concern in Managua, Nicaragua, in particular among women, and research has evidenced a recent trend in increasing obesity among Nicaraguan girls. A wealth of research has established the link between physical inactivity, obesity and NCDs. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) obligates signatories to provide women equal rights in the realm of sports and physical activity. This study examined whether (i) there exists an association between sex and physical inactivity among Nicaraguan adolescents and (ii) Nicaragua is in compliance with its CEDAW obligations to ensure gender equality in sports and physical activity.

Structured interviews were conducted with 100 adolescents (13-17 years) in public high schools in Managua. In addition, Nicaragua's legal framework was reviewed, with reference to physical activity. Secondary statistics related to participation in national sports and recreation programs were gathered, and informal interviews were conducted with individuals at relevant government entities.

Physical inactivity in the last month was more common among girls (78.8%) than boys (31.2%) (RR=2.52, 95% CI=1.62-3.93). More girls (90.2%) than boys (58.3%) reported facing barriers to physical activity than the boys (RR=1.55, 95% CI=1.20 - 2.00). The most common barriers to physical activity reported by girls were lack of access to fields and spaces, lack of appropriate equipment, and lack of parental permission. Girls reported preferring participating in physical activity in secure places like schools or gyms, while boys reported preferring informal,

public spaces.

Inequities in participation and barriers to physical activity may place Nicaraguan girls at increased risk of NCDs. Nicaragua has yet to achieve full compliance with its obligations under CEDAW. Promoting gender-sensitive programs, policies, and legislation to increase girls' participation in physical activity in Nicaragua will strengthen Nicaragua's compliance with CEDAW and help combat girls' risk of NCDs.

## Background

### Physical Inactivity and NCDs among Women and Girls in Nicaragua

Research indicates that physical activity significantly reduces the risk of diabetes, and contributes to weight control, an increase in lean muscle, and the reduction of fat (1). In addition, exercise cuts the risk of heart disease, and of dying from cardiovascular disease or stroke (1). Physical activity has also been shown to reduce the risk of breast cancer, colon cancer, and osteoporosis (1). On the other hand, physical inactivity is one of the primary risk factors for NCDs (2).

However, despite the multitude of benefits of physical activity, sedentary lifestyle is a growing problem worldwide, and in particular, among women. According to several studies, women are typically less physically active than men, an observation often linked to social factors (3-4). Latin American women specifically tend to have lower levels of participation in physical activity than their male counterparts (5-6).

Their levels of participation are influenced by cultural factors – specifically, a cultural understanding that sports and physical activity are “male activities” – which tend to be more influential in the early stages of the adoption of physical activity (5-6).

The issue of physical activity is particularly relevant for Nicaragua’s capital city of Managua. According to the Central American Diabetes Initiative (CAMDI), a cross-sectional study carried out by the Pan-American Health Organization in 2003 in Managua, NCDs have increased among adults in Managua by 15% from 1997 to 2002 (7). The CAMDI study also revealed that NCDs caused 45% of deaths and 67% of disabilities in 2003, and that 20% of respondents had high cholesterol and 9.1% had diabetes mellitus (7). In addition, the study showed that 65% of the respondents were overweight (BMI > 25), with 28% of those individuals also suffering from obesity (7).

Notably, a higher percentage of female respondents were overweight than male respondents (71% and 59% respectively) (7). Female respondents were also more likely to suffer from hypertension than male respondents (28.8% and 21.2% respectively) (7). Similarly, other research suggests a trend in increasing obesity not just among adult women, as demonstrated by the CAMDI study, but also among adolescent girls in Managua (8).

### **Legal Requirement of Gender Equality in Physical Activity**

Not only is participation in physical activity necessary for both sexes to combat NCDs, it is a human right guaranteed in international human rights law. Through international human rights treaties, governments agree to ensure their citizens certain rights and living conditions, and can be held to these obligations by other international actors. As such, when conditions in a country are substandard, international human rights law serves as an important tool to advocate for government action to improve such conditions (9).

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – to which Nicaragua is a party – provides that States Parties must ensure gender equality in sports and recreational activities (10). CEDAW specifically obligates signatories to: (i) achieve formal equality, or “equality on paper”, by eliminating discrimination in laws and policies relevant to physical activity; and (ii) achieve substantive equality, also known as “equality in reality” or “equality of results”, in the realm of physical activity (10-11). The CEDAW

Committee, the body charged with monitoring CEDAW compliance, has repeatedly stressed that the true indicators whether a country has achieved gender equality lie not in the measures a country has taken, but in those measures a country has achieved (12). Substantive equality is deemed to have been achieved when, in their day-to-day lives, women have the same access as men to the rights guaranteed to them on paper and are “enjoying their rights in various fields in fairly equal numbers with men” (13).

A critical element of the concept of substantive equality is that it may sometimes call for measures that treat women different from men if such treatment is necessary to achieve the result of men and women enjoying their human rights on an equal basis (11). CEDAW even lays out the specific measures States Parties should take in achieving substantive equality, such as: proactive measures to ensure the development and advancement of women (10); temporary special measures to accelerate de facto equality between men and women (e.g. participation quotas, financial stimulus, etc.) (10, 13); and measures to modify social and cultural habits with a view towards eliminating gender stereotypes (10).

A review of Nicaragua’s domestic laws and regulations reveals that, on the whole, Nicaragua has achieved the first requirement of CEDAW – formal equality, or “equality on paper” – in the realm of physical activity. None of the relevant laws or regulations – which include the Nicaraguan Constitution (14), the Law of Equality of Rights and Opportunities (15), the Law of Promotion of the Integral Development of Youth (16), the General Law of Sport, Recreation and Physical Education (the “Sports Law”) (17), the General Law of Education (18), the General Law of Health (19), and their related regulations – contains any language that is discriminatory towards women. In fact, some of these laws even contain language that proactively promotes gender equality. For example, the Equality Law states that government entities should take measures to “guarantee equality of opportunities in activities corresponding to the sports and cultural disciplines, directed at contributing to a healthy physical development... and entertainment of women and men...” and eliminate gender stereotypes (15).

However, whether Nicaragua’s above-mentioned legal and regulatory measures have been sufficient to achieve substantive equality, as ultimately required by CEDAW, cannot be determined by reviewing Nicaragua’s legal framework.

Rather, this can only be determined by examining whether women actually experience equality in the realm of physical activity in reality – i.e. whether there is close to equal participation in physical activity among males and females, and whether there are any barriers to access to physical activity which more heavily affect women than men (including gender stereotypes) (11-13). If women’s conditions are not equal to men’s, Nicaragua has not achieved full compliance with CEDAW, and must take further measures to ensure gender equality in this sphere.

**Objectives of the Study**

As discussed above, physical activity is critical in combating NCDs and is also a human right guaranteed to both sexes. Research shows that women are often less likely to participate in physical activity and that women in Managua are more affected by obesity and some NCDs than men (7). However, little research has explored the role of gender in the practice of physical activity in Nicaragua. While the Nicaraguan government has many entities relevant to the practice of physical activity – each of which has a fairly robust infrastructure to carry out programs – to date, it has not designed any studies, programs, or initiatives specifically aimed at promoting physical activity among women and/or girls (personal communications).

This study examined whether there is gender equality in Nicaragua in the realm of physical activity, and if not, why not (i.e. what barriers exist to equality). In doing so, this study sheds light on: (i) whether girls or boys are more at risk of NCDs; and (ii) whether Nicaragua is in compliance with its CEDAW obligations, or whether it must take additional measures to meet such obligations. Understanding gender’s role in the practice of physical activity will foster the design of gender-sensitive policies related to physical activity, thereby combating obesity-related NCDs in both sexes, and strengthening compliance with international law.

**Methods**

Three primary methods were used in this study. First, to examine the legal obligations applicable to Nicaragua in the realm of sports and physical activity, as well as de facto participation levels in sport in Nicaragua, researchers conducted legal and statistical research. This research included a review of international legal instruments applicable to Nicaragua related to the rights to sport and recreation, gender equality, health, and education. In this review, researchers focused primarily on CEDAW, the

General Recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, the CEDAW Country Reports submitted by Nicaragua, and articles and compliance monitoring tools related to CEDAW. The legal research also included a review of Nicaragua’s domestic laws, regulations, policies, and other documentation related to the rights to sport and recreation, gender equality, health, and education. Additionally, researchers reviewed plans, budgets, and participation statistics related to various national sports programs, leagues, facilities, and events.

Second, to better understand contextual issues related to the practice of sport and physical activity in Nicaragua, researchers conducted informal, semi-structured interviews with individuals at various Nicaraguan government ministries including the: Institute of Sports, Institute of Women, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Institute of Youth, Municipality of Managua, and National Athletic Federations. Researchers also conducted similar interviews with individuals at local and international non-governmental organizations in Nicaragua focusing on sports, gender, health, education, and youth issues. These interviews addressed a wide range of issues related to the practice of sport and physical activity in Nicaragua, including: government structure and funding; most prevalent sports and activities; participation levels; availability and conditions of facilities; gender and cultural issues; and barriers to access for both young males and females.

Finally, to further examine the role gender plays in the practice of physical activity among Nicaraguan adolescents in reality, researchers conducted structured interviews with 100 boys and girls (age 13-17 years) in public high schools within the municipality of Managua. This age group was selected because it is imperative to develop healthy habits related to physical activity early in life in order to sustain them into adulthood. Managua was selected because its population, and in particular the female population, had already been identified as being at risk for being overweight and for NCDs (7-8).

Interviews consisted primarily of close-ended questions, as well as a small number of open-ended questions to elicit more details about each individual’s experience. The questionnaires were prepared, taking into account the multi-level determinants of health model proposed by Dahlgren and Whitehead (20), the psychosocial determinants of health put forth by Norman and Sallis (21), and environmental factors considered in the Amherst Health and Activity Study (22).

The primary components of the questionnaire included: self-reported type and frequency of physical activity in the last month; personal beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes related to physical activity; support or resistance from family related to physical activity; environmental factors affecting physical activity; availability of resources related to physical activity; and cultural factors and stereotypes affecting physical activity.

Seven high schools, one in each of the seven districts of Managua, were selected using stratified sampling. Individuals were randomly selected from class registers, with a balance across each of the five grades. Subjects were ages 13-17, with a mean age of 15.1 years among girls and 14.8 years among boys.

In order to arrange and carry out the interviews, researchers worked in conjunction with the Departmental Delegation of Managua of the Ministry of Education of Nicaragua. The interviews were conducted one-on-one in empty classrooms or libraries within the high schools and transcribed by the interviewers. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Pan-American Health Organization, and consent was obtained from each participating high school and participant. Data analysis was carried out with EpiInfo and ANALYSIS programs (23).

**Results**

**Levels of Physical Activity**

During preliminary research, the following five different means of participating in physical activity in Nicaragua were identified: 1) informal physical activity (e.g. walking, running, or playing sports with friends, usually in the street or public neighborhood spaces); 2) organized neighborhood activities (e.g. a neighborhood sports team or recreational group); 3) organized school activities (e.g. sports team or dancing group); 4) gyms; and 5) physical education classes. Overall, 41 of the 52 girls interviewed (78.8%) reported not having participated in physical activity in the last month, while 11 of the 52 girls (21.2%) reported having done so. Fifteen of the 48 boys interviewed (31.2%) reported not having participated in physical activity in the last month, while 33 of the 48 (68.8%) reported having done so. More boys than girls reported participating in each type of activity (except for physical education classes), with the largest differences occurring in informal physical activity and organized neighborhood activities. Levels were similar in physical education classes, which are mandatory, and generally take place one to two times per week for one hour.

**Table 1. Self-reported participation in different means of physical activity**

Type of Activity	All N=100		Girls N=52		Boys N=48		RR	95% CI	p value*
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
<b>Participants</b>	100	100	52	100	48	100			
<b>Interested in Physical Activity</b>	83	83	46	88.5	47	97.9	0.90	0.81-1.00	N/A
<b>Physical Activity in Last Month**</b>									
Any	44	44	11	21.2	33	68.8			
None	56	56	41	78.8	15	31.2	2.52	1.62-3.93	<0.001
<b>Type of reported physical activity**</b>									
Informal	30	30	7	13.5	23	48.0	0.28	0.13-0.59	<0.001
Official Neighborhood Activity	9	9	2	3.8	7	14.6	0.26	0.06-1.21	N/A
Official School Activity	5	5	2	3.8	3	6.2	0.62	0.11-3.53	N/A
Physical Education Classes	98	98	51	98.1	47	97.9	1.00	0.95-1.06	N/A

\* Based on Pearson's chi square \*\*Self-reported participation in the last month

**Interests Related to Physical Activity**

Forty-six of the 52 girls (88.5%) and 47 of the 48 boys (98%) reported being interested in physical activity. The most popular activities among boys were soccer and weight-lifting, and among girls were volleyball, soccer, aerobics, and dancing. Interviewees were asked about which means of participating in extracurricular physical

activity appeals to them most. Boys preferred organized neighborhood activities, followed by informal activities and the gym (in equal amounts), with organized school activities as their last preference. Girls preferred organized school activities, followed by the gym and organized neighborhood activities. No girls preferred participating in informal activities.

**Table 2. Preferred means of participating in physical activity by sex**

Type of Activity	Girls Preference N=52		Boys Preference N=48	
	N	%	N	%
Informal	0	0	12	25.0
Official Neighborhood Activity	8	15.4	15	31.3
Official School Activity	28	53.8	9	18.8
Gym	16	30.8	12	25.0

**Barriers to Physical Activity**

Twenty-eight boys (58.3%) and 47 girls (90.4%) reported facing barriers to access to physical activity. Twenty-two girls (42.3%) reported as a principal barrier the lack of access to fields and spaces for physical activity, while seventeen girls (32.7%) reported the lack of appropriate equipment or materials. Fourteen girls (26.9%) reported the lack of parental permission, eleven girls (21.2%)

reported safety concerns, ten girls (19.2%) reported lack of athletic clothing, eight girls (15.4%) reported financial issues, and seven girls (13.5%) reported insufficient promotion of opportunities available. When it came to barriers faced by the boys, fourteen boys (29.2%) reported the lack of time as a barrier (primarily due to work outside the home), five boys (10.4%) reported financial issues, five boys (10.4%) reported lack of athletic clothing, and three boys (6.2%) reported the lack of fields and spaces.

**Table 3. Reported barriers to physical activity**

Type of Activity	Girls N=52		Boys N=48		RR	95% CI	p value*
	N	%	N	%			
<b>Barriers Reported</b>	47	90.4	28	58.3	1.55	1.20-2.00	<0.001
<b>Specific Barriers</b>							
Lack of access to fields and spaces	22	42.3	3	6.2	6.77	2.16-21.2	<0.001
Lack of appropriate equipment/materials	17	32.7	2	4.2	7.85	1.91-32.2	<0.001
Lack of parental permission	14	26.9	2	4.2	6.46	1.55-27.0	0.002
Safety concerns	11	21.2	2	4.2	5.08	1.19-21.7	0.012
Lack of athletic clothing	10	19.2	5	10.4	1.85	0.68-5.01	0.22
Financial issues	8	15.4	5	10.4	1.48	0.52-4.20	0.46
Insufficient promotion of opportunities	7	13.5	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lack of time	9	17.3	14	29.2	0.59	0.28-1.24	0.16

\* Based on Pearson's chi square

*Environmental Issues*

Twenty-two girls interviewed (42.3%) reported a lack of spaces to participate in physical activity as a barrier, while three of the boys did (6.2%). Similarly, eleven of the girls (21.2%) reported safety concerns as a barrier to participating in physical activity, while two of the boys (4.2%) did. Twenty-one girls (40.4%) and fourteen boys (29.2%) reported believing that girls who play sports or engage in physical activity outside the home have a higher risk of assault. Twenty-five of the girls (48.1%) and thirty-six of the boys (75%) reported thinking that their neighborhoods are completely safe, and thirty-two of the girls (61.5%) and thirty-six of the boys (75%) reported thinking that sports facilities are completely safe.

*Lack of Family Support*

Fourteen of the female interviewees (26.9%) reported lack of parental permission as a barrier to participating in physical activity, while two of the male interviewees (4.2%) did. Eight girls (15.4%) reported that their parents think they could get into trouble if they engage in physical activity, while two of the boys reported this (4.2%). Thirteen girls (25%) reported that their parents worry about their safety and four boys did (8.3%). Eleven girls (21.2%) and twenty-two boys (45.8%) reported that their families facilitate transportation to opportunities for physical activity. Seven girls (13.5%) and twelve boys (25%) stated that their family members accompany them to sports activities. Seventeen girls (32.7%) and forty-two boys (87.5%) stated that their families understand the importance of their participation in physical activity.

*Lack of Resources*

Seventeen of the girls interviewed (32.7%) and two of the boys interviewed (4.2%) reported as a barrier difficulty securing athletic equipment necessary to participate in sports or physical activity. Ten of the girls (19.2%) and five of the boys (10.4%) reported as barriers the lack of appropriate clothing and shoes for physical activity. Eight of the girls (15.4%) and five of the boys (10.4%) stated as a barrier the lack financial resources necessary to engage in activities. Twenty-six of the girls (50%) and thirty-three of the boys (68.8%) reported that their parents purchase materials for them related to physical activity (e.g. shoes, clothes, sports equipment).

*Lack of Information*

Seven of the girls (13.5%) and none of the boys (0%) reported lack of promotion of activities as a barrier to participation in physical activity. Twenty-nine of the girls (55.8%) were aware of opportunities to engage in physical

activity if they wanted to, whereas thirty-four (70.8%) of the boys were. Fourteen of the girls (26.9%) reported being aware of facilities where they could engage in physical activity, while twenty-six of the boys (54.2%) were aware of such facilities.

*Personal Attitudes and Practices*

Both the boys and girls reported personal issues which affect their levels of participation in physical activity. Five girls (9.6%) and one boy (2.1%) reported discomfort with people seeing them engage in physical activity, while seventeen girls (32.7%) and eleven boys (22.9%) reported discomfort in extreme temperatures. Eleven girls (21.2%) and six boys (12.5%) reported fear of getting hurt. Fourteen boys (29.2%) and nine girls (17.3%) reported that they lack sufficient time to engage in physical activity.

*Gender Issues and Cultural Stereotypes*

Many interviewees, particularly the boys, reported holding beliefs that gender plays a role in whether one can or should engage in physical activity and sports. Five girls (9.6%) and sixteen boys (33.3%) reported believing that women do not play sports as well as men. Twenty-one girls (40.4%) and twenty-five boys (52.1%) reported believing that it is more difficult for women to engage in physical activity than for men. Three girls (5.8%) and fourteen boys (29.3%) reported believing that women who engage in sports or physical activity tend to be more masculine or lesbians. One girl (1.9%) and eighteen boys (37.5%) reported believing that women need to be taking care of the home instead of engaging in physical activity or sports. Seventeen girls (32.7%) and twenty-four males (50%) reported believing it is better for women not to engage in physical activity or sports while menstruating. Two girls (3.8%) and seven boys (14.6%) reported believing that exercise clothing is not appropriate for women. In addition, fifty-two girls (100%) and forty-eight boys (100%) reported having a male role model related to sports or physical activity.

**Discussion**

**Interview Trends: Gender Roles and Safety as Recurring Themes**

Reported physical inactivity in the last month among girls was high (79%) and girls were roughly 2.5-times more likely than their male peers to report physical inactivity in the last month. Girls were roughly 1.5-times more likely than boys to report experiencing barriers to physical activity.

It does not seem that the difference in participation levels can be attributed to differing interest levels, as the vast majority (89%) of girls reported interest in physical activity. Rather, the interviewees' preferences regarding and perceived barriers to physical activity shed light on the differing participation levels.

To fully explore the issues raised in interviews, it is important to first note that, in Nicaraguan public and private life, "machismo" and the values, beliefs, and social customs that go with it, are prevalent. Females for the most part still are expected to be submissive, dependent, and somewhat fragile or vulnerable. Their domain is seen as the home, where they are expected to take care of household chores. Women often get pregnant very young (the majority in their teens), have many children, and shoulder most of the child-rearing responsibilities themselves (28).

Men's domain, on the other hand, is seen as outside of the home. They are expected to be independent, strong, and dominant. Nicaraguan men also feel it is part of "being male" to express their sexual prowess how they choose, including being aggressive with females verbally and physically (28). It is extremely common for women to be harassed verbally or even physically in public spaces, while domestic violence is also prevalent (29, personal communications). This male aggression in public spaces creates a sort of cycle: men act aggressively towards women in such spaces, so men (who may act this way themselves), as well as women, often discourage the females in their lives from going out in certain places. This protectionism further relegates women and girls to the home (personal communications). While the barriers to physical activity have been addressed individually in this study, each occurs within the context of the culture of machismo and its accompanying gender roles, expectations, and perceptions.

For example, it is noteworthy that twenty-two out of fifty-two of girls reported that the lack of access to fields and spaces are a barrier to physical activity, while only three out of the forty-eight of the boys reported that issue as a barrier. On further questioning, many girls revealed that it is not the lack of existence of spaces that is a barrier; rather, it is that those spaces are not available to them because they are "boys' places". A number of the girls reported that they would simply never try to use those places because they know the boys would not let them, or they would get made fun of and harassed. Indeed, a few stated that this had actually happened to them. This barrier seems to be very much borne by the cultural understanding that men are dominant, and that public spaces are for men rather than

women.

Related to this and also of note is the fact that girls and boys had nearly opposite responses about the means through which they prefer to participate in physical activity. Girls reported strongly preferring to participate through an organized school activity, followed by the gym or an official neighborhood activity. No female interviewees reported preferring to participate in informal activities (which are usually in the street or public neighborhood spaces), whereas boys reported preferring organized neighborhood activities, followed by informal activities and the gym, with organized school activities being their last preference.

These different preferences can be explained by the particularities of opportunities for physical activity in Nicaragua. Schools and gyms in Nicaragua typically have more private and secure settings – most schools in Nicaragua are walled-in familiar settings to students, and gyms are indoors. On the contrary, organized neighborhood activities and informal activities tend to be in public settings (like streets and public fields). These spaces are often dominated by males and perceived as more appropriate for males, whereas women might encounter harassment or aggression by males in these spaces. Perhaps this explains why girls – who are accustomed to machismo behaviour and who reported safety concerns and greater perceived risk of assault associated with physical activity in public spaces – reported preferring more secure settings for physical activity. Boys, with fewer concerns related to safety and higher comfort levels in public spaces, prefer participating in their neighborhoods.

Our personal communications with officials and various stakeholders suggest that organized school activities are extremely scarce in Nicaragua, due to limited funding within the Ministry of Education for such activities. Similarly, private gyms are scarce due to limited resources to create the gyms, and limited resources of individuals to pay monthly fees. On the other hand, organized neighborhood activities are less scarce, often being funded by municipalities or the Institute of Sport. Informal activities – mainly "street sports", which require minimal resources – are extremely common and a large part of national culture. These issues reflect inconsistencies with supply and demand of spaces for physical activity that may partly explain lower levels of reported physical activity among girls.

Even if issues related to spaces were resolved, other barriers to girls' participation in physical activity would need to be addressed for girls to have more access thereto – most notably, lack of parental support and lack of equipment. More than one in four girls reported lack of parental permission as a barrier to participating in physical activity, compared to only two of the forty-eight boys. This difference again likely relates to the aforementioned gender role stereotyping and protectionism. More girls reported that their parents worry about their safety when they engage in physical activity and that their parents believe they might get into trouble while doing so. When more detailed responses were elicited, a number of girls stated that their parents preferred them to stay at home due to household chores and their concerns about gangs, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or the possibility that they would skip the activity and instead get into trouble or end up pregnant. A larger number of girls also reported a lack of materials and equipment as a barrier. More detailed responses revealed that getting athletic materials or clothing from parents is not out of the ordinary for males, but is rare for females.

Perhaps the most revealing responses were those related to beliefs about gender as it relates to physical activity. These responses evidenced that many participants, especially males, believed that women who engage in physical activity are less skilled than men, more likely to get injured, more likely to be masculine or lesbians, or are acting inappropriately in some way (e.g. because they should be taking care of the house, because menstruation prevents it, or because athletic clothing is inappropriate for women). Machismo-based beliefs about gender roles were evident in these responses. Awareness of these beliefs provides additional insight about the other issues reported by the girls, such as why they prefer private settings, why their parents give less support, why they experience difficulty in securing resources, why there may be a lack of promotion of female activities, and why they have their own personal reservations about participating in activities.

**Applicability of Lessons Learned to Nicaragua**

This study was only conducted among public high school students in the municipality of Managua, and cannot be generalized to all adolescents in Nicaragua. However, the issue of lower physical activity levels among Nicaraguan adolescent females as compared to adolescent males may be a national phenomenon. Statistics provided by the Nicaraguan Institute of Sports revealed male-dominant participation in 2010 state-sponsored programs. In major municipalities, 75% of students participating in athletics

were male; in rural community leagues, 90% were male; in neighborhood leagues, 75% were male; in student games, 64% were; and in the Nicaraguan contingent of the Central American and Caribbean Games, 69% are male (32). Government officials within entities relevant to sports and physical activity also reported, in personal communications, that sports and physical activity are still very much male-dominated spheres nationwide.

While this cross-sectional study was not designed to be nationally representative, there are important similarities between this study's participants in Managua public high schools and many adolescents nationwide. Roughly 60% of high school students in Nicaragua attend public high schools; 30% of Nicaragua's population lives in Managua, and roughly 60% of Nicaragua's population lives in urban settings (24). Moreover, many of the cultural issues examined here related to gender roles have been evidenced to exist country wide (25). As such, valuable lessons can be gleaned from this study to gain a better understanding of issues causing adolescent Nicaraguan females to participate less in physical activity than their male counterparts nationwide.

**Legal Issues**

While Nicaragua has achieved "equality on paper" in the realm of physical activity through non-discriminatory laws and regulations, the critical issue in assessing CEDAW compliance is whether a country has achieved substantive equality or equality in reality. One of the most straightforward ways to gauge whether substantive gender equality exists is to look at participation statistics of males and females (13). As explained above, fewer girls than boys in this study reported participating in physical activity than boys, and there are fewer adolescent females than males in state-sponsored sports and recreational activities nationwide. In assessing whether substantive equality exists, attention must also be paid to whether there is gender disparity at the point of access (11, 13). Again, more girls interviewed than boys reported facing barriers to their access to physical activity. CEDAW also specifically calls for an elimination of gender stereotypes that may affect women's access to their rights (10). Here too, the interviews highlighted numerous practices and beliefs based on gender stereotypes – namely that physical activity is unsafe or in some way inappropriate for women – which hinder girls' access to sports and physical activity. These issues reveal that Nicaragua's legal framework has not succeeded in bringing about substantive equality in Managua public high schools or in programs nationwide.



As such, Nicaragua must take additional steps to eliminate the specific barriers to girls’ access to physical activity and to promote equal participation, including: proactive measures to ensure the advancement of women; temporary special measures to accelerate the de facto equality of women; and measures to eliminate gender stereotypes (10). Through such measures, great progress can be made towards ensuring that girls can exercise their rights to physical activity on an equal basis with boys, thereby strengthening CEDAW compliance and promoting healthy habits at an early age for all Nicaraguans.

**Recommendations to Achieve Substantive Equality in Physical Activity**

In designing measures to achieve substantive equality, the CEDAW Committee has stressed that “one-size-fits-all” approaches are ineffective. Rather, to succeed in achieving gender equality, measures must be tailored to address the context and unique barriers to equality specific to an individual country (13).

In Nicaragua, measures to promote girls’ participation in physical activity must not just reflect the elimination of specific barriers thereto, but must also take into account the gender stereotyping underlying much of the inequity in access and participation. Changing beliefs about gender roles is an extremely complex process, as understanding of gender roles begins in early childhood and is built upon and reinforced at every subsequent life stage. For real progress, there must be consistent attention placed on gender role reframing in all age groups and sectors of Nicaraguan society. The government must set the tone through laws, policies, and plans that promote gender equality in all areas. Moreover, a multitude of other relevant actors – private and public schools, companies, non-governmental organizations, religious and cultural groups – must create educational programs, awareness campaigns, and other initiatives promoting gender equality. These institutions must also “walk the walk”, adopting equitable policies themselves and implementing consequences for the violation of these policies (31). While this process is complex and ongoing, below are recommendations that, if adopted, would be strong steps towards promoting gender equality in sport and eliminating the obstacles thereto.

To address the environmental issues that act as barriers to girls’ access to physical activity in Nicaragua – i.e., lack of spaces and safety concerns – it is critical that the relevant government actors (e.g., the Ministry of Education, Institute of Sports, and municipal governments) focus on identifying

and fostering spaces where girls feel safe and comfortable participating in physical activity. This can be done by:

- Educating against and consequences for the verbal and physical harassment of females in public spaces;
- Dedicating funding to create and maintain activities for girls at schools, where they prefer to participate;
- Ensuring girls are given access to existing facilities and spaces, through reserved times for females and/or the presence of security guards or local authorities to prevent exclusion based on gender;
- Ensuring activities include security measures, such as the engagement of parents, a security guard, or local authorities to ensure the girls are safe, comfortable, and free from verbal and physical harassment;
- Ensuring that coaches are aware of and trained on safety issues;
- Scheduling activities during the day time; and
- Ensuring a safe means of transportation is coordinated for all participants (27, 28, personal communications).

In order to address the lack of parental support for girls’ participation, including lack of support in securing materials, relevant actors should focus on educating parents on matters relevant to their daughters’ participation in physical activity. This can be done by:

- Educational campaigns for parents via schools regarding the health benefits of physical activity for girls and combating the gender stereotypes that can cause parents to be resistant thereto;
- Providing information about the importance of appropriate materials and equipment, and where they may find such materials at a low cost;
- Informing parents of safety precautions being taken; providing parents an opportunity to meet with organizers of activities;
- Eliciting parents’ input regarding proposed activities and giving them a voice in designing it; and
- Obtaining official parental permission via consent forms (27, 28, personal communications).

To combat boys' and girls' beliefs about the role of gender in physical activity, the relevant actors – particularly the Ministry of Education – should focus on educational programs for boys and girls. Due to the prevalence and deeply-rooted nature of these gender stereotypes, this step is extremely challenging. Yet, it is critical as the beliefs formed in childhood will likely persist into adulthood and be passed on to the next generation. To have an impact, it is important that these educational programs (a) promote values of gender equality in all spheres, beginning when children are young, (b) are consistent and ongoing, and (c) are accompanied by daily practice and enforcement of the principles of gender equality (31). These programs could include elements focusing on:

- Eliminating verbal and physical aggression towards females;
- Combating broadly-held beliefs that public spaces are for males and the home is for females; the benefits of physical activity for both sexes;
- The fact that physical activity is a right guaranteed to both sexes;
- Women's accomplishments in sports and other arenas;
- Female role models; and
- Concrete examples of ways to embrace gender equality in school and other spaces on a daily basis.

Consequences could also be implemented for students who do disrespect gender equality at school.

To further increase girls' levels of participation in physical activity, as well as lack of knowledge of opportunities and facilities available to them, the relevant government actors should take concrete measures to proactively promote girls' activities. These could include the following measures, many of which are endorsed by the CEDAW Committee as effective means of achieving substantive equality:

- Requiring statistics disaggregated by sex for government programs related to physical activity;
- Participation quotas in state-sponsored programs (e.g. required 50/50 participation in activities, or a designated percentage increase in female participation each year);
- Financial incentives and consequences for attainment or lack thereof of quotas; and

- Female-directed informational campaigns regarding available opportunities.

Similarly, to further address the issue of girls' lack of access to necessary resources (clothes, equipment, financial resources), relevant government actors should ensure that funding for girls' programs and materials is at least equal to that of boys (13).

In addition to these specific measures, in order to ensure that female participation in physical activity is prioritized by all relevant actors, the concept of substantive equality should be embodied in all relevant documents (laws, policies, training programs, and the like) and communicated to all relevant individuals. Specifically, the Sports Law (the most relevant document in terms of national programs and funding for physical activity), which currently does not contain any non-discrimination or gender equality provisions, should be amended to include such provisions, as well as any quotas and other measures adopted to promote female participation in physical activity.

Finally, given that the issue of physical activity for women involves many government actors – primarily the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Sports, but also the Ministry of Health, the Institute of Women, and others – there should be institutional strengthening to ensure this issue is taken on by all efficiently, effectively, and sustainably. The creation of a National Commission of Women and Sport, Recreation, and Physical Activity – currently being discussed in Nicaragua – would be a significant step towards increasing cooperation among government entities in this respect, and keeping this issue at the forefront of their operations.

## Conclusion

The interviews conducted in this study provided strong evidence that girls in the Managua public high schools are less physically active than boys. Similarly, statistics gathered revealed that girls participate in national programs related to sports and physical activity in fewer numbers than boys. The interviews helped shed light on the reasons behind girls' lower participation levels, revealing that girls in Managua public high schools face more barriers to physical activity than boys, namely: lack of access to fields and spaces, lack of appropriate equipment/materials, and lack of parental permission. These inequities suggest that Nicaragua has yet to achieve substantive gender equality in sports and physical activity, as required by CEDAW.

They also suggest that girls in Managua may be at greater risk of developing obesity-related NCDs than boys. The recommendations provided in study can be utilized to design gender-sensitive programs, policies, and legislation to increase girls' participation in physical activity in Nicaragua, including:

- Efforts to ensure safe and accessible spaces for girls to participate in physical activity;
- Efforts to garner parental support;
- Educational programs to combat gender stereotypes;
- Concrete measures (e.g., quotas) to increase and promote girls' participation;
- Documentation of the concept of substantive equality; and
- Institutional strengthening among relevant government actors.

Through such measures, Nicaragua will strengthen its compliance with its legal obligations under CEDAW and combat girls' risk of developing NCDs.

**Acknowledgements**

The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) provided funding to carry out the project. We would like to thank: the International Institute of Human Rights in San Jose, Costa Rica, which provided access to resources and guidance during the review of international laws relevant to this project, specifically CEDAW; the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education, which assisted in arranging the interviews in Managua high schools, provided the necessary information to select the interview sample, and provided insight into the governmental structure and national context relevant to physical activity; the Nicaraguan Institute of Sports, which provided statistics related to participation in physical activity nationwide, and insight into the governmental structure and national context relevant to physical activity; and the Nicaraguan Institute of Women, Ministry of Health, Institute of Youth, Municipality of Managua, National Athletic Federations, and various non-governmental organizations, particularly Soccer Without Borders, which provided insight into the governmental structure and national and cultural context relevant to physical activity.

**References**

1. The Center for Disease Control: Physical activity and health  
<http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/health/index.html> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
2. The World Health Organization: Chronic diseases and their common risk factors  
[http://www.who.int/chp/chronic\\_disease\\_report/media/Factsheet1.pdf](http://www.who.int/chp/chronic_disease_report/media/Factsheet1.pdf) (accessed on August 22, 2012)
3. Scharff DP, Homan S, Kreuter M, Brennan L: Factors associated with physical activity in women across the life span: implications for program development. *Women Health* 1999, 29:115-34.
4. Eyler AA, Matson-Koffman D, Vest JR, Evenson KR, Sanderson B, Thompson JL, et al.: Environmental, policy, and cultural factors related to physical activity in a diverse sample of women. *Women Health* 2002, 36:123-34.
5. Sherwood NE, Jeffery RW: The behavioral determinants of exercise: implications for physical activity interventions. *Annu Rev Nutr* 2000, 20:21-44.
6. Evenson KR, Sarmiento OL, Macon L, Tawney KW, Ammerman AS: Enviromental, policy and cultural factors related to physical activity among Latina immigrants. *Women Health* 2002, 36:43-57.
7. Pan-American Health Organization: Central American Diabetes Initiative, Managua, Nicaragua  
<http://www.paho.org/spanish/ad/dpc/nc/camdi.htm> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
8. Pawloski LR, Moore JB, Lumbi L, Rodriguez CP: A cross-sectional examination of growth indicators from Nicaraguan adolescent girls: a comparison of anthropometric data from their Guatemalan counterparts. *Annals of Human Biology* 2004, 31(6):647-659.
9. Cornell University Legal Information Institute: Human Rights, An Overview  
[http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/human\\_rights](http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/human_rights) (accessed on August 22, 2012)
10. United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm> (accessed on August 22, 2012)

11. Facio A, Morgan M: Equity or Equality for Women? Understanding CEDAW's Equality Principles. *Ala. L. Rev.* 2009, 60:1133-1169.
12. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: General Recommendation 24, Women and Health <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom24> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
13. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: General Recommendation 25, Temporary Special Measures [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/General%20recommendation%2025%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/General%20recommendation%2025%20(English).pdf) (accessed on August 22, 2012)
14. The Constitution of Nicaragua <http://www.constitution.org/cons/nicaragu.htm> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
15. The Law of Equality of Rights and Opportunities of Nicaragua [http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/\\$A1IDFACDD675534DACE0625744B0077C73F?OpenDocument](http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/$A1IDFACDD675534DACE0625744B0077C73F?OpenDocument) (accessed on August 22, 2012)
16. The Law of Promotion of the Integral Development of Youth of Nicaragua <http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/normaweb.nsf/b92aeea87dac762406257265005d21f7/10fa0619155a2e2a062570a1005811fc?OpenDocument> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
17. The General Law of Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity of Nicaragua [http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/\\$A11/DA4F1759D80AE0CD062570A100577B4B?OpenDocument](http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/$A11/DA4F1759D80AE0CD062570A100577B4B?OpenDocument) (accessed on August 22, 2012)
18. The General Law of Education of Nicaragua [http://www.mined.gob.ni/PDF07/Lev%20General%20de%20Educacion%20\(No.%20582\).pdf](http://www.mined.gob.ni/PDF07/Lev%20General%20de%20Educacion%20(No.%20582).pdf) (accessed on August 22, 2012)
19. The General Law of Health of Nicaragua [http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/\\$A11/FF82EA58EC7C712E062570A1005810E1?OpenDocument](http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/Normaweb.nsf/$A11/FF82EA58EC7C712E062570A1005810E1?OpenDocument) (accessed on August 22, 2012)
20. Dahlgren G, Whitehead M: Policies and strategies to promote equity in health. WHO Regional Office for Europe, in press.
21. Norman GJ, Sallis JF, Gaskins R: Comparability and reliability of paper- and computer-based measures of psychosocial constructs for adolescent physical activity and sedentary behaviors. *Res Q Exerc Sport* 2005, 76(3):315-23.
22. Sallis JF, Taylor WC, Dowda M, Freedson PS, Pate RR: Correlates of vigorous physical activity for children in grades 1 through 12: Comparing parent-reported and objectively measured physical activity. *Pediatric Exercise Science* 2002, 14:30-44.
23. Center for Disease Control, World Health Organization: Epi Info. Version 6.04d <http://www.cdc.gov/epiinfo/html/prevVersion.htm> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
24. United States Department of State: Background Note, Nicaragua <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1850.htm> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
25. Sternberg P: Challenging machismo: promoting sexual and reproductive health with Nicaraguan men. *Gend Dev.* 2000, 8(1):89-99.
26. International Women's Rights Watch (IWRAP) Asia Pacific: Applying the Principles of the CEDAW Convention <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/protocol/practical.ht> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
27. Population Council: Safe Spaces for Adolescent Girls <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/AYSRH/7.pdf> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
28. Women Win: International Guide to Designing Sports Programmes for Girls <http://guide.womenwin.org/> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
29. Tim Merrill: Nicaragua, A Country Study <http://countrystudies.us/nicaragua/29.htm> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
30. Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law: Human Rights Situation of Women in Nicaragua <http://hrbrief.org/2011/03/human-rights-situation-of-women-in-nicaragua/> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
31. Jivka Marinova (for the UN Division for the Advancement of Women): Gender Stereotypes and the Socialization Process <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/EP3-Marinova.pdf> (accessed on August 22, 2012)
32. Nicaraguan Institute of Sports. 2010 National Statistics.



# **Journal of Sport for Development**