So You Want to Improve Youth Participation in Development?

Invest in Sport for Development: A Lao PDR Case Study
Sport is a valid, effective, but under-used approach for increasing youth participation in development.
Summary

Using sport to empower youth and children to have meaningful participation in development in their communities.

Low cost, high impact intervention

Neutral, non-threatening, platform

Children and youth want to participate because it’s fun
Context
Challenges

Very little infrastructure

Small and remote population

More than 50 languages

Limited human capacity

Limited market and technology access
Development Issues

Poor nutrition
Limited low land

Poor basic services
Limited local budget

Limited participation avenues
Vulnerability to disasters
What Do We Do?

ChildFund
Laos
Children should be protected and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Children in partnership to build a better future for children.

We support long-term development and children's rights.

Communities and partners to do this.
Nonghet

Nonghet is located in the Khouang province and works in 1969.

Cold in winter and hot in summer.
Nonghet is a district in Xieng Khouang province; ChildFund works in 12 partner villages.

Cold in winter and cool in Summer, mountainous
Majority of population is H’mong but also Khmu and Lao

Cultural and linguistic differences
Heavily UXO contaminated in areas
Limited opportunities for children to be seen and heard rather than seen and not heard
Poor quality, limited access (physical and cultural), not enough supplies, teachers, critical issues around language, education and health services.
water insecurity, takes time (specifically impacts on women and children), very few latrines (but changing), poor hygiene habits
Limited land through UXO contamination, high chemical use, limited small-scale farming, heavy focus on corn
Limited play opportunities, sport facilities and equipment, children have many responsibilities, lack of importance in schools.
Crucial protection issues; e.g., discipline in schools, drug/alcohol use, road safety, protection mechanisms.
Project Partners
Project Activities

Train and equip cadre of youth leaders across 12 villages to deliver regular sport and play opportunities in their villages.

Youth leaders deliver weekly sport and play sessions in their communities.

Train youth leaders to organize inter-village competitions and to use sport and play sessions to deliver key messages around child protection and child rights and open space for children to share their opinions on issues that affect them.

Youth leaders organize exchange events for children (competitions), supporting delivery of key messages.

Lao Rugby Federation delivers ongoing sport-specific training on and provides coach development support for youth leaders on a monthly basis.
Sport and Play are Working

Sport is a low cost intervention with the potential for high impact and broad participation.

Sport is fun; children, youth and even adults want to participate.

We have found sport to address a number of key barriers to meaningful youth participation in development.
Barrier to Youth Participation

Community engagement is defined by pre-existing experiences with development organisations (often unbalanced) and heavily influenced by government structures, both of which exclude meaningful youth engagement.

Sport Innovation
Existing community structures for communication of activities, needs and demands

Government
Parents
Duty bearers

Existing lines of communication

Youth  Children
Sport provides a neutral, youth-driven platform for communication of activities, needs, capacities and demands.
Sport Innovation

Sport provides a platform that sits outside of government and community experiences and so is neutral.

Opens space for youth to take the lead in shaping how sport can contribute to their development; potential to trigger positive, youth-driven change.
Incorporation of transferable skills into programming ensures that impact will be wider than sport and can support, more broadly, participation in development.

Youth leaders after a session on techniques for coping with anger and stress.
Barrier to Youth Participation

Using existing community structures, rather than duplicating structures, is seen as good development practice, but what happens when these structures are not flexible enough to be accessible to youth, particularly young women?
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**Sport Innovation**

Sport provides a neutral, non-threatening platform from which youth can identify and form structures that exert significant influence within their sphere. For example:

**Organizing events**
Organizing events

Fans cheer on their villages in a soccer tournament in celebration of Hmong New Year
Building Teams

ย้ามมักกั้มจิว

Youth leader-designed logo for the Namgonngoua Bulls Rugby Team
Delivering Key Messages

"Don’t Do Drugs"
Youth leader-designed banner at H’mong New Year Tournament
What About Girls?
How do we keep girls engaged?

Girls watch a men's soccer match at H'mong New Year Tournament.
Lao Rugby is averaging over 60% female participation in monthly activities.
Sport choice

Rugby is an unknown sport, with no gendered preconceptions surrounding participation.
Strong Female Role Models

COACHING STAFF ARE 75% FEMALE
Awareness events for girls in sport

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY TAG RUGBY TOURNAMENT
Result: Rugby is seen as ‘a girls’ sport
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Questions?