

SPORTS AND GENDER

Gender is a socially-constructed roles of and relationships between men and women. Gender concerns men and women, including conceptions of both femininity and masculinity and does not mean focusing solely on women or females, but rather on the inequalities between males and females, and should not be confused with feminism or women's studies.

Keeping Sports Alive Uganda; 'gender equity in sport' aims at using 'sport for gender equity and personal development'. This shift is as a result of the massive effect and power of football in the community and in the lives of community members and this can be illustrated as follows;

- **Women's and girls' health and well-being**
Sport and physical activity has a positive impact on health. Involvement in regular physical activity enhances physical and mental health and well-being, including among women and girls.
- **Reproductive health and illegal drug use**
Female athletes are less likely to exhibit risky sexual behavior. For example, in our interactive discussions with girls who are sports persons and those that are not, we were able to note that, sports girls have one sexual partner and were more likely to use contraception than their counterparts who did not participate in sports. We were also able to find out that, female athletes are less likely to consume drugs (such as alcohol, marijuana, etc.) than non-athletes.
- **Gender-specific disorders**
Current research indicates that regular physical activity may decrease or slow down the onset of osteopenia and osteoporosis in women. Regular physical activity coupled with a calcium-rich diet can increase bone mineral density, reducing the risk of developing bone disorders and fractures among older women. Strong evidence supports the role regular exercise can play in controlling levels of fat, reducing the risk of lung and breast cancers.
- **Women's and girls' self-esteem and self-empowerment**
Girls and women who participate in sport and physical activity demonstrate higher self-esteem as well as improved self-perception, self-

worth, self-efficacy. These improvements are associated with enhanced feelings of accomplishment, perceptions of improved physical appearance and commitment to exercise. Involvement in organised sports activities helped to enhance girls' sense of agency, self-empowerment and personal freedom.

- **Social inclusion and social integration of women and girls**

Access to safe spaces becomes increasingly confined, restrictive, enclosed and domestic as girls in developing countries reach adolescence. Evidence from sport programmes shows that, sport activities can allow women and girls access to safe social spaces in which they may exercise control and ownership.

Keeping Sports Alive Uganda could use football as a platform to engage with one another, mentor each other, as well as develop friendships and strengthen relationships. This shall enhance social cohesion and encourage social interaction among young women and girls.

- **Challenging and transforming gender norms**

The relationship between sport and gender is often more on the transformative potential of sport to challenge or alter gender norms. Although the participation of women and girls in sport remains largely imbalanced when compared to participation among men and boys, consistent and continued participation of women and girls in sport has had a major impact on achieving gender equality in the community especially in urban areas.

Girls' participation in the KSA-Uganda football programme appears related to the way male football players perceive their roles. Boys are observed to have adopted a positive and supportive attitude towards their female counterparts participating in the programme. Participation in the programme has become synonymous with being aware of gendered roles and norms.

- **Opportunities for women's and girls' leadership and achievement**

Sports programmes provide women and girls with opportunities to develop leadership skills. The KSA-Uganda provides opportunities for participants to compete and train, as well as participate directly in developing the organisation and overseeing governance.

The girls' football programmes, the provision of possibilities to develop specialised skills in coaching, refereeing, training, league organisation as well as access to information on health and peer education is of great value to the participants of these programmes. Exposure to competing internationally is seen to add a boost to public recognition of the skills that women and girls can develop through sport.

- **Promoting gender equity through sport**

KSA-Uganda, based on experiences from various interventions, on promoting gender equity through sports, has noted gender equity can be promoted through sports in this way;

Claiming space

The provision of designated spaces for women's and girls' sport activities can have practical benefits but also a symbolic character, especially if these areas are public. In general, access to community areas is primarily granted to men and boys. Women and girls should frequent these community spaces and should be allowed to do so under no specific conditions. Experience shows that by women and girls claiming public space, the community may become slowly accustomed to seeing women and girls sharing public space with men and boys.

- **Access to resources, structures and leadership**

Besides infrastructure, sports programmes for women and girls have shown to require organizational structure as well. Sports programmes that assure women and girls active board membership in leading positions, equity, financial means, participation in decision-making and strategic planning are likely to be more successful in producing lasting change in the self-perception and self-confidence of female participants in such programmes.

Successful sport programmes for women and girls have shown to have paid careful attention to categories of sports, such as: sport vs. games; contact vs. low-contact vs. non-contact sports; mixed vs. single-sex sports activities; team vs. double vs. single sports; etc. Careful consideration of these aspects can help to establish female sports participation and its integration into everyday life.