Wholesome growth

Sports has a unique power to attract, mobilise and inspire. By its very nature, sport is about participation and stands for human values. It’s also key to healthy living rubbing off it’s positive effects on mental health, stress level and moods, writes VVSN Rao

There is no doubt that sports has historically played an important and diverse role in virtually every society. However, formal recognition of the value of sport with regard to development and peace is far more recent. Even United Nations has recognised the potent value of sports as tool to expedite development and bring peace in strife torn areas. UN has taken the several steps over the years to make sports as an integral part of human activities for development and peace.

Some of these activities include: Recognising sports and physical education as fundamental human rights; Right of women and girls to participate in sports is affirmed; Every child’s right to play becomes a human right.

The unique role of sports in eliminating poverty and promoting development has been acknowledged by the Commonwealth Heads of Governments. UN General Assembly has revived the tradition of Olympic Truce 1993 after the Moscow Olympic crisis. UN has even appointed a special adviser on sports and development.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities enters into force, reinforcing the right of people with disabilities to participate on equal basis in recreation, leisure and sports activities.

PROMOTION AT VILLAGE LEVEL

In India also many initiatives have been taken to make sports and physical fitness as an integration part at every walk of life. For example: Government of India had launched a unique scheme called Special Area Games Scheme to tap the natural talent available in abundance in rural, tribal, coastal and hilly areas of the Country.

Government of India has recently introduced PYKKA Scheme to cover all villages and Block Panchayats under sports
programme as a larger version of Special Area Games Scheme.

It has introduced Right to Education Act (RTE) making sports facilities compulsory in all schools.

Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, government of India has already circulated the exposure draft on National Physical Fitness Programme for School Children to introduce integration of sports and physical education with regular school curriculum and give marks for sports and physical fitness.

**SPORTS FOR ALL**
The state of Haryana has also circulated the draft on Right to Play Act. As part of Sports For All and Sports For Development Programme of Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, government of India, PYKKA is being launched to cover 10 per cent of Gram Panchayats and Block Panchayats every years to cover the entire State in 10 (Ten) years. So far 40 per cent coverage could be achieved. As a part of the PYKKA Mission, village Volunteers are being trained as Kridashrees and Physical Education Teachers are being trained as Master Trainers to carry forward the programmes under PYKKA Scheme. The PYKKA Scheme is attracting large number of village population irrespective of age and gender and it is having positive effect on the youth to keep away destruction activities and to join the main stream of the development.

**IN TOTALITY**
In support for sports for development and peace is rooted in the recognition that sport possesses unique attribute that enables it to bring particular value to development peace process as it has:

Sports Universal popularity - as participants, spectators or volunteers are attracted to sports more than any other activity. This transcends race, religion, caste, creed, and community, socio-economic and political boundaries.

Sport’s ability to connect people and communities: Sport’s value as a social connector is one of its most powerful development attributes. Sport is inherently social process bringing together players, teams, coaches, volunteers and spectators. Sports creates extensive horizontal webs of relationships at the community level and vertical links to District, State and National level, Sports Associations, and other Organizations for funding and other forms support. These community sports networks are an important source of social net-working, helping to combat exclusion and fostering community capacity to work collectively to realise opportunities and address challenges.

The finest example is the famous Khassi Tournaments being organised in the tribal area to popularise Hockey and Football and many such Khassi Tournaments have given World class players to the country. However, they continue to work in isolation without any Government support.

Best values of sports -Sports reflects fair play, teamwork, cooperation, respect for opponents, positive social relationships, collaborative action and mutual support. Sports can help to unify people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Sports as a communication platform – This has emerged not only as a mass entertainment but has also become of the most powerful and far-reaching...
communication tool for far-flung areas.

Sports as a tool for development and peace - There are very few areas where sports cannot be used as platform for public education social mobilization or as a programme vehicle to strengthen individual capacity and improve lives. It can be used to promote health and prevent disease, strengthen child and youth development and education, foster social inclusion, prevent conflict and build peace, foster gender equity, enhance inclusion of persons with disabilities, and promote employment and economic development thus improving the quality of life.

Sports is a powerful means of promoting physical and mental health - essential ingredients for better quality of life.

Sports as a motivating factor: Sports consistently empowers, motivates and inspires individuals and their communities in a way that promotes hope and positive outlook for the future - ingredients that are essential to the success of all development and peace endeavours. The finest example is one child from Street Acrobat family (Baunsrani of Natua community) who, against all odds, went on to win National Gold Medal in Gymnastics and Diving Event in Swimming and went on to become Asst. Commandant under CRPF. Her success in life inspires her whole community to keep the Baunsrani tradition alive even after more than 20 years of her success.

BOOSTING THE SOCIETY
Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: Participants, volunteers and coaches acquire transferable life skills which increase their employability, vulnerable individuals are connected to community services and supports through sports-based outreach programme.

Sports programmes and sports equipment production provide jobs and skills development. For example, many tribal artisans make a living by producing low cost Hockey Sticks which are popular in tribal villages. Sports & Youth Services Dept. Govt of Odisha has recently taken up the manufacturing of indigenous Hockey sticks by forming SHG in such villages.

Sports can help prevent diseases that impede people from working and impose health care cost on individuals and communities. The finest example is that of Cricketer Yuvraj, who come back after fighting with fatal disease like Cancer.

It can help reduce stigma and increase self-esteem, self confidence and social skills, leading to increased employability.

School sport programmes motivate children to enrol in and attend school and can help improve academic achievement.

Sports based community education programme provide alternative education opportunities for children who cannot attend school. It can help erode stigma preventing children with disabilities from attending school.

Sports promotes gender equality and women empowerment. Sports helps improve female physical and mental health, and offer...
opportunities for social interaction and friendship.

Participation of women especially girls in sports leads to increased self-esteem, self-confidence and enhanced sense of control over one's body.

**STRENGTHENING WOMEN POWER**

Girls and women get access to leadership opportunities and experience. Gurubari Hembrom, hailing from a tribal bustee has excelled in javelin throw and now she is sports officer with Tata Steel. Sonam Joldon, Archer from Leh Ladakkh excelled in Archery and did his PhD from JNU and is now Lecturer in Srinagar University. Valena Valentina, national champion in Karate and Asian Games 2010 fourth position is the finest example of self confidence. Minoti Mahapatra who was the first sportsperson of Odisha to bag coveted Arjuna Award is deputy general manager in Rourkela Steel Plant and Rashmi Das, national gold medalist in Gymnastics and Diving is assistant commandant, Rapid Action Force of CRPF.

Sports can cause positive shifts in gender norms that afford girls and women greater safety and control over their lives.

Women and girls with disabilities are empowered by sports based opportunities to acquire health information, skills, social networks and leadership experience.

Sports reduces child mortality as sports can be used to educate and deliver health information to young mothers, resulting in healthier children.

Increased physical fitness improves children's resistance to some diseases

Sports can help reduce the rate of higher risk of adolescent pregnancies.

Sports for health programmes offer girls and women greater access to reproductive health information.

**MOBILIZATION INITIATIVES**

Sports based public education campaigns can raise awareness of importance of environmental protection and sustainability. Bihar Education Project took the help of Village Football Teams in deep interior villages in Ranchi District to introduce Adult Education Programme.

Sports based social mobilization initiatives can enhance participation in community action to improve local environment. It may be mentioned all the players who used to come for practice at Birsa Munda Stadium, Ranchi were asked to plant saplings during Monsoons and now the entire surrounding of the stadium has got more than one lakh trees provided oxygen not only to the players but also to all morning walkers.

**RESTRICTIONS**

Sports should be positioned as a highly effective tool in a broader toolkit of development practices, and should be applied in holistic and integrated manner with other developmental programmes. Further, any fortified field with boundary wall attracts organizers of Festivals, Exhibitions, Mela, etc for revenue generation, damaging the playing arena. Hence, it is imperative that strict instructions should be given not to use the playfield for any other non-sports events and it should be kept only for programmes related to Sports and Youth Services. In order to curb misuse and even encroachment of playgrounds, Govt of India has launched National Playfields Association of India providing financial assistance to state and Union Territory to enlist and protect playfields for their proper use.

Next Special Area Games Scheme of government of India, Ministry of You Affairs and Sports which gave hidden talent like Limba Ram and many others.

(The article is first in the series on rural sports in the country)