

One Win Can Lead to Another

The opportunities and challenges posed by mega sporting events to promote gender equity

By Women Win

France, the home of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup (WWC), is also home to The Olympique Lyonnaise football club. Founded in 1899, this is an institution that has an impressive historical gravitas in European football. The type of impressive that would make the world admire their dominance (of their men's teams) and potentially give them license to forgo much attention on the women's game. Yet, Lyon has done anything but that. They have invested in their women's team since the 1970s, when it was founded. Today, they are one of, if not the strongest, women's clubs in the world, having won sixteen French Division 1 Feminine titles and five Champions League Women's titles. Lyon attracts top talent from around the world, including the likes of U.S. National Team member, Megan Rapinoe, and reportedly pays their women's team players upwards of \$200,000 USD annually (four times the average salary of a professional female player in the United States.)

The profile of women's football is progressing, not just for the passionate female players and coaches who have always pushed, but for the mainstream. Lyon is just one example of this. In this edition of the WWC, global growth is evident with new teams such as Jamaica, Chile, Scotland and South Africa are making their debut performance. In the past year, FIFA released their first comprehensive Women's Football strategy. Grassroots girls' programmes are sprouting up all over the world, including in places where there is practically no legacy of girls' and women's sport. For example, the Diya Women's Football Club has been supporting growth of the sport not just in big cities like Karachi, but also in remote areas such as Tharparkar. In the Belameling refugee settlement in rural Uganda, girls and women are learning the game thanks to the vision and commitment of the Community Psychosocial Support Organisation.

The progress of the women's game has not come easily or continuously. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the pioneers who have fought with their bodies, their jobs, their reputations to enable us to be where we are today – people like Moya Dodd, Felicite Rwemarika, Mary Harvey, Eudy Simelane and the late Marbella Ibarra – a coach and grassroots activist for girls'/women's football in Mexico who was murdered last year.

The evolution of the women's game has an ebb and flow characteristic to it, often advancing during high-profile events and situations and rolling back in some manner when the spotlight isn't on. The top-ranked team in the world (U.S.) is embroiled in a lawsuit against their national governing body (U.S. Soccer) for equal pay. The Canadian and Afghanistan national women's teams have both unveiled massive sexual harassment cases with male coaches and administrative staff. In fact, if you look at the Olympique Lyonnais team photo, almost all the coaches are men – a far too common scenario reflecting a lack of women in leadership positions across the board (coaches, football companies, boards of directors, etc.) Not to mention, most girls in the world still will never play sport, including football, and experience the documented host of benefits that come from that experience.

Women Win is a nongovernmental organisation with the mission of advancing the playing field that empowers adolescent girls and young women to achieve their rights through sport and play. For more than a decade, we have focused not only on expanding girls' access TO sport, but more importantly, investing in the social benefits that occur through participation at all levels of sport. Our work has impacted the lives of over 3 million girls in more than 100 countries.

We recognize that major sporting events, like the WWC *can* be powerful levers to shift gender norms and address most pressing issues of inequality in society, especially when it's a women's-specific or mixed-gender event. It's not a coincidence that 73% of the French population believes women's football promotes gender equality in society¹. However, mega sporting events are only an opportunity, not a promise, to make positive changes in the lives of girls and women. Actually, the reverse can be true. There is a documented history of men's mega-sporting events jeopardizing women's rights. For example, there have been reported increases in sex trafficking during this (American Football) Super Bowl to satiate the appetites of the massive influx of male spectators. According to a report published by the Pathway Project, domestic abuse increases by an average 38% when the England (men's) football team loses.

Leveraging mega events to improve gender outcomes is a complex affair and requires incredible intention to strategy, programme design, partnership building and evaluation. Women Win has experienced this first-hand with our One Win Leads to Another (OWLA) programme. This programme was developed in partnership with UN Women and funded by the International Olympic Committee with support from the Sweden Postcode Foundation, originally as part of the legacy of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. The goal of the programme was a reduction in harmful gender stereotypes and related behaviours. In order to achieve that goal, we aimed our efforts at two outcomes:

1. High-quality sports programmes instil a gender equality perspective for adolescent girls and boys
2. Powerful sustainable national and regional partnerships expand to promote change to empower girls

A core activity of the programme was the OWLA curriculum- a nine-month programme that addresses issues of personal, social and economic empowerment in adolescent girls – and is embedded within sports programmes. The programme provides life-skills training to adolescent girls (leadership, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention, economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights) within a sport context – and creates safe spaces for girls to become themselves. It is composed of 40 sessions to be delivered weekly. In the first hour, the girls play sports and strengthen their connection with each other through team work, developing other life skills that will be further discussed and deepened in the second hour, when they participate in explicit life-skills sessions conducted by a trained female facilitator.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/767068/women-s-football-and-gender-equality-france/>

Once girls “graduate” from the first year, those who demonstrate interest and exhibit exceptional leadership qualities are invited to become ‘champions. Champions participate in thematic sports camps during the second year, in which they further develop their leadership skills as they related to five competencies (voice, vision, self-confidence, taking action and global mindedness). Champions also participate in digital storytelling workshops, where they gain additional skills to reflect on and share their personal stories of resilience and empowerment.

In addition to the implementation of the OWLA curriculum with a targeted 2,500 girls, we focused a great deal on institutional capacity building. Specifically, we identified and trained a gender and sport ‘centre of excellence’ called Empodera and hosted numerous training-of-trainer experiences for other NGOs interested in the programme, as well as teachers in schools throughout Brasil through an online platform and trainings at the National Youth School Games. Lastly, we leveraged the momentum of the Olympic Games to deepen the impact of the programme, by finding opportunities for girls to attend sporting events as a group, interact with athlete role models and even participate in speaking roles at the Opening and Closing ceremonies. Beyond the transformational experience of the Olympic Games on the girls, we also leveraged the opportunity to gain international media attention for the programme and the power of sport to address gender inequality.

There were obvious benefits of working in a mega-event setting. However, the context in Rio de Janeiro and Brasil more broadly during the Olympic Games added a layer of complexity and challenge to implementation. For instance, there was a rise in violence during the lead up to the Games and during the Games themselves, which made traveling to/from the programme a safety concern for girls, their parents and facilitators. Inflation due to the influx of money to the city made costs for basic things like transportation higher than anticipated. Furthermore, our negotiations with the Ministry of Education to implement the programme in schools fell apart before the first session event started due to a change in government and a resulting policy that ‘gender ideology’ could not be taught in schools.

Despite the difficulties, OWLA had a clearly transformative impact on the girls (and facilitators) who participated in the programme. Data collected during at the start and end of the programme through surveys and interviews revealed that:

- Girls increased their perception about being a leader (47% to 63%) and about the community being interested in what they have to say (27% to 34%).
- More girls recognized skills they are proud of (88% to 94%) and more girls strongly agreed with statements regarding standing up for themselves and saying “no” to their friends (42% to 50%, 51% to 64%).
- Knowledge regarding pregnancy prevention, STI prevention and HIV prevention all increased (85% to 91%, 56% to 65% and 46% to 63% respectively) and more girls know a place or person to discuss their sexual health (18% to 33%).

- Attitude and knowledge on menstruation changed: 45% of girls report they know how to keep healthy during their menstruation (compared to 27% before) and girls thinking that they have to avoid some activities while menstruating decreased from 38% to 31%.
- The number of girls feeling safe in the UVLO programme increased from 85% to 94%.

As a result of the programme's ultimate success, OWLA was funded in Rio de Janeiro by the International Olympic Committee for a subsequent three-year term. This version of the programme, in addition to the direct work with adolescent girls, is focused heavily on strengthening of institutions and developing and implementing a collective impact strategy with a cross section of actors interested in pursuing gender equity through sport work. The OWLA programme is being replicated in Buenos Aires, Argentina as a legacy of the 2018 Youth Olympic Games as well.

In an effort to reduce redundancy of our collective work as sport/development sectors, Women Win is keen to share our intense learning related to designing and delivering programmes in mega-event settings, with the caveat that we understand every context is unique. Our most poignant lessons from the experience are as follows:

Building Partnerships

- We must invest in local knowledge and expertise. True legacy and sustainability rely on entrusting and investing in local actors to co-design and take the work forward.
- Use the opportunity to support the leadership of women, in the programme and partnership, as a way to ensure the process of designing and implementing reinforces the intended equity outcome.
- Investing in partnership management is as critical as the programme itself in the fast moving and volatile environment that mega sporting events create.
- Be sure to clarify values, expectations, goals, timelines, and roles with distinct clarity. Revisit the health of the partnership often, not just when challenges arise.
- Find shared value and complementarity with other actors across sectors to amplify the work and ensure efficiencies
- Align the goals of the programme to Sustainable Development Goals and other global, regional, national, municipal efforts already in place.

Designing, Implementing and Evaluating Programmes

- Every context is different and requires unique consideration. There is no 'one size fits all' programme. Consider how to align the programme with the pronounced strengths and key gender equity challenges of the host city. For example, Rio de Janeiro has an incredibly sporting culture, which was an accelerator to all of the sporting aspects of the OWLA programme. However, the rates of gender-based violence in the city are significant, which became a focal point in the life skills development and messaging. Whereas Jordan, host to the 2016 FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup, has a very shallow legacy of female football, making the event itself a powerful catalyst for growth

of not just participation, but girls' and women's leadership in all aspects of the game, from officiating to sports medicine.

- Sustainability of programmes/growth requires multi-year commitment and strategic planning for what will happen after the circus leaves town. White elephants aren't just about buildings and infrastructure. Must take a "do no harm" approach and think about risks/impacts of exit.
- Develop a detailed risk analysis of the programme (and partnership) and mitigation strategy to address potential threats to your success. Make this a 'living' analysis that gets updated and adjusted as risks turn into realities.

The Sport Event(s)

- A massive influx of funding and attention that come with mega sporting events can provide a powerful opportunity for the development and growth of programmes aimed at gender equity in host country and globally. Use the opportunity to advance your existing strategies in these areas of social development and sport.
- Leverage the event itself as an accelerator to girls' growth and leadership, providing role models, speaking opportunities, excitement and fun. However, be mindful that the operating environment around this event can bring complications, like programme disruptions, higher costs of operating and complicated local politics.
- Use the event to raise awareness related issues of parity WITHIN the game/sport that is being played at the event. Consider participation equality but don't stop there – women's rights issues such as pay equity, leadership inclusion, sexual harassment, corporate sponsorship and media representation still require attention in most sport environments around the world.

The 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup has promised to be a powerful milestone for the evolution of women's football. As the opening whistle blows in stadiums around France, including in Lyon, the home of the historic football club that has managed to develop a world-class women's programme, it's a fine time to celebrate. France is, after all, one of the most developed women's football nations globally. But off the pitch, it's a country that the World Economic Forum ranks 57th in the world, because of issues related to economic and political inequity. As a matter of fact, France ranks 129th in the world for wage equity. It is our hope that practitioners of sport and social change, policy makers, multi-lateral agencies, national governing bodies of sport, companies and media celebrate AND go beyond the 'feel good' stories, and seize the moment to address structural gender inequity in the host country and around the world. Game on!