

Sport and Play in Early Recovery

Swiss Academy for Development

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The Swiss Academy for Development

The Swiss Academy for Development (SAD) is a centre of excellence for development through sport and play established as an operating foundation in 1991 in Biel/Bienne, Switzerland. It uses sport and play to empower disadvantaged and marginalised children and youth in Switzerland and internationally to become engaged, healthy, educated and employed citizens and to build their fundamental life skills and environmental awareness.

SAD operates the International Platform on Sport and Development (www.sportanddev.org) – the largest knowledge hub, learning resource and networking platform in this sector – and it implements its own projects and offers consultancy services (assessments, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation as well as applied research).

Working at the interface between humanitarian aid, peacebuilding and development, SAD promotes physical and psychosocial health (e.g. Iran, Lebanon, South Sudan), early childhood development (e.g. India, Nepal), formal- and non-formal education (e.g. India, Nepal) and entrepreneurial thinking as well as economic development (e.g. Myanmar, Egypt). The organisation has also expertise in using sport and play in peacebuilding (e.g. Sri Lanka) and integration (e.g. Hungary, Switzerland).

Sport and Play in Early Recovery

SAD considers sport and play to be a practical, and cost-effective methodology in early recovery. Applied in a structured and systemic way, complemented by other humanitarian and development interventions such as incoming generating and livelihood activities, it promotes self-sustaining nationally owned and resilient processes for post-crisis recovery and nurtures integrated solutions at the interface between humanitarian assistance, social and economic development as well as ecological sustainability.

Early recovery, as defined by UNDP, is focussing on the immediate lifesaving needs of a population, but also contributes to longer-term objectives and more resilient communities. It lays the ground work for longer-term development work beyond the immediate emergency.

Successful early recovery results in sustainable, locally driven and owned solutions fostering resilience, as well as the restoration of basic services, livelihoods, shelter, governance, security and the rule of law, environment and social dimensions, including the reintegration of displaced populations.

Sport and play can contribute to early recovery in following ways:

- **Provide safe spaces:** In emergencies, it is paramount to offer “safe spaces” for affected population to provide safety, protection, resilience, and hope – in short to ensure dignity.

Sport and play programmes can offer a safe, structured and friendly environment in early recovery settings as basis to respond to the needs of the disaster survivors and provide adequate support to achieve a range of humanitarian and development objectives. More specifically, sport and play-based interventions allow for periods of respite through offering purposeful recreational activities; and they help restore the well-being of individuals, stabilize and rebuild communities.

- **Improve psychosocial well-being:** Psychosocial sport and play programmes in early recovery settings aim to restore social well-being and psychological health through group-focused practices, tailored to fit the contexts of local culture, traditions, needs and resources. They use community resources in order to rebuild the coping capacities of individuals and communities. Such interventions can enhance resilience, provide trauma relief, facilitate emotional and social stabilisation and the acquisition of new skills and abilities in people affected by crisis.
- **Foster social integration, cohesion and peaceful co-existence:** Sport and play can provide a useful way of creating an environment in which people can come together to: work towards the same goal, show respect for others and share space and equipment. These aspects are necessary ingredients to foster social (re-) integration, social cohesion and peaceful co-existence.
- **Support economic development and emergency employment:** the sport and play methodology can be used to build or enhance life and technical skills of affected young people needed for employment. Combining sport and play with entrepreneurship programs have proven to be successful in various fragile contexts ranging from South Sudan to Myanmar. In the longer-term, sport can also be a tool to develop local markets.
- **Promote health and education:** Promoting access to health, nutrition and HIV/AIDS services, raising awareness about health related issues that may emerge or increase after a crisis (e.g. substance abuse) but also improving physical health are fundamental issues in early recovery settings. Re-storing access to schools and / or alternative education are other key topics that can be facilitated through sport and play based interventions.

Benefits and Limitations of Sport and Play Interventions in Early Recovery

Sport and play interventions can be a catalyst in early recovery settings and promote sustainable recovery and development. The methodology assumes that human beings are playful and are willing and able to learn and adapt even when facing the worst conditions.

It is a powerful tool that is relatively cost-effective, engaging, fun and motivating; it has convening power, facilitates dialogue, appeals to children and youth, reflects the needs of child and youth development, and fosters life style changes and integrative solutions.

There is more and more evidence for the positive impact sport and play can have if it is applied in a systematic and structured manner; and it is complemented by other interventions. Sport and play alone, certainly, cannot ensure early recovery, development, create peace or solve complex social problems.

From SAD's two decade long experience in implementing sport and play programs with children and youth in crisis contexts, a range of success factors for such interventions have emerged:

- Sport and play based interventions deem to be most successful if they aim at a) equipping children and youth through sport and play with the tools and life skills necessary to develop resilience and their full potential as human beings. This helps them cope with crisis and recovery; and b) creating short- to long-term opportunities for children and youth in the areas of health, education and employment.
- Programmes have to be developed through a participatory approach and in close collaboration with local organisations and agencies. Through integrating strong capacity building elements into such collaborations, the sustainability of interventions can be improved. Capacity building can range from strategy and organisational development to training coaches in sport and play. Applying sport and play successfully in disaster contexts takes more than simply rolling a ball on the pitch.

- Experience shows that programmes tend to be more successful if they are inclusive (e.g. actively recruit the less-powerful or mobile members of a community; meet the needs of all community groups), flexible (especially in crisis settings needs of participants often change quickly), use local resources (e.g. engage coaches from local communities, use traditional sport, use local materials to produce sport equipment, etc.) and are sensitive to local culture, traditions and gender relationships.
- It is critical that all parties involved in the sport and play intervention agree on a well-structured, planned program, based on clear objectives and indicators. The long-term sustainability has to be considered from the outset.
- Success of sport and play programs depends on placing emphasis on the rehabilitative and recreational aspects of sport and play, rather than on the sport itself.
- It is key to ensure that in all sport and play based programs all children are kept safe from harm, abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect (*child safeguarding*).
- While primarily focussing on children and youth, sport and play programs in early recovery settings need to interact with the children and youths' families and communities as well as the wider political, security, social and economic environment and respective actors.
- The physical space for sport and play activities is a crucial aspect to take into account in the planning and implementation of such programmes. Space for sport and play activities must be allocated with the participation and 'buy in' of the local community and in crisis situations form the international partners temporarily acting on the ground.
- Monitoring and evaluation (if possible applied research) of such projects is essential to gauge how effective a programme is in meeting its intended aims. From SAD's experience, this embraces to discern the components of effective interventions, contribute to the emerging evidence base, and promote the sharing and exchange of knowledge and reciprocal learning.

Resources and Examples

A selection of resources from SAD:

- <http://www.sportanddev.org/> offers background information, case studies and tools showing the role sport can play in early recovery as well as other areas including education and health. Of particular interest is:
http://www.sportanddev.org/en/learnmore/sport_and_disaster_response/
- Evaluating Psycho-Social Sport Programmes: A Pilot Study Using Photo Monitoring in the Context of the Project „Sport and Play for Lebanese Children and Youth Affected by Conflict“: <http://sad.ch/en/publications/16-evaluating-psycho-social-sport-programmes>
- Moving Together – promoting psychosocial well-being through sport and physical activity: <http://sad.ch/en/publications/329-moving-together-promoting-psychosocial-well-being-through-sport-and-physical-activity>
- Helping Children Overcome Disaster Trauma Through Post-Emergency Psychosocial Sports Programs: <http://sad.ch/en/publications/26-helping-children-overcome-disaster-trauma-through-post-emergency-psychosocial-sports-programs>
- Psycho-social sport programmes to overcome trauma in post-disaster interventions: <http://sad.ch/en/publications/22-psycho-social-sport-programmes-to-overcome-trauma-in-post-disaster-interventions>
- Sport and Development : A summary of SAD's experiences and best practices (includes relevant case studies)

- Sport and Play for Inter-ethnic Dialogue among Children and Youth in Sri Lanka:
<http://sad.ch/en/publications/183-sport-and-play-for-inter-ethnic-dialogue-among-children-and-youth-in-sri-lanka>
- Sport and Play for Traumatized Children and Youth: *An assessment of a pilot-project in Bam, Iran*: <http://sad.ch/en/publications/23-sport-and-play-for-traumatized-children-and-youth>
- Women on the Move – Trauma-informed interventions based on Sport and Play:
<http://sad.ch/en/publications/330-women-on-the-move-trauma-informed-interventions-based-on-sport-and-play>

A selection of case studies

- Comprehensive mental health needs assessment in Bam, Iran:
Building an evidence base for sustainable action and the strengthening of local structures:
<http://sad.ch/en/projects/completed/103-mental-health-needs-assessment-in-bam>
- Sport and games for traumatised children and young people in Bam:
<http://sad.ch/en/projects/completed/105-traumatised-children-and-young-people-in-bam>
- Sport and Play for Inter-ethnic Dialogue among Children and Youth in Sri Lanka:
<http://sad.ch/en/projects/completed/111-interethnic-dialogue-in-sri-lanka>
- Youth empowerment in Lebanon - Component I: Sport and play for Lebanese children and young people affected by conflict: <http://sad.ch/en/projects/completed/97-youth-empowerment-in-lebanon-i>
- Women on the move
Sport & play-based psychosocial interventions for traumatized women in South Sudan
- <http://sad.ch/en/projects/178-women-on-the-move>

Video material:

- South Sudan: <https://vimeo.com/132183358>
- Iran: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRPNh-LMLJ4>;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPCXDbOUgyE>
- Sri Lanka: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bl7aF2bACRQ>