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UN SPORTS AND DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

Sport is a catalyst for economic development. Individually, each of the various sectors of the sports economy can create activity, jobs and wealth. When several are combined together into a single strategy, it is possible to achieve additional economic gains because of the synergies that result. The local economic potential of sport is further enhanced when supported by national 'sport for all' strategies.

Securing Government leadership is essential to ensure that sport and physical education are incorporated into country development and international cooperation policies and agendas. Governmental commitment is also crucial to ensuring that the root causes of the issues that challenge human development are addressed, and sport is used as one of the tools for that.

The engagement of the UN specialized agencies, programmes and funds demonstrated the potential breadth and depth of sport to support the UN system in achieving development goals. The IYSPE 2005 will seek to engage Governments and the world of sport more deeply in sport-based development activities in order to ensure that this powerful and diverse element of civil society becomes an active and committed force in the global partnership for development.

Local development through sport particularly benefits from an integrated partnership approach to sport-for-development involving the full spectrum of actors in field-based community development including all levels and various sectors of government, sports organisations, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. Strategic sport-based partnerships can be created within a common framework providing a structured environment allowing for coordination, knowledge and expertise sharing and cost-effectiveness.

The Power of Sport

Sport and physical education play an important role at the individual, community, national and global levels. For the individual, sport enhances one's personal abilities, general health and self-knowledge. On the national level sport and physical education contribute to economic and social growth, improve public health, and bring different communities together. On the global level, if used consistently, sport and physical education can have a long-lasting positive impact on development, public health, peace and the environment.

Access to and participation in sport and physical education provide an opportunity to experience social and moral inclusion for populations otherwise marginalized by social, cultural or religious barriers caused by gender, disability, or other forms of discrimination. Sport and physical education can represent an area to experience equality, freedom and a dignifying means for empowerment. The freedom and control over one's body experienced in the practice of sport is particularly valuable for girls and women, for people with a disability, for people living in conflict areas, for people recovering from trauma.



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Sport and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Providing development opportunities will help fight poverty. The sports industry, as well as the organisation of large sports events, creates opportunities for employment. Sport provides life skills essential for a productive life in society.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Sport and physical education are an essential element of quality education. They promote positive values and skills which have a quick but lasting impact on young people. Sports activities and physical education generally make school more attractive and improve attendance.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Increasing access for women and girls to physical education and sport helps them build confidence and a stronger social integration. Involving girls into sport activities alongside with boys can help overcome prejudice that often contribute to social vulnerability of women and girls in a given society.

Goals 4 & 5: Reduce child mortality and improve maternal health

Sport can be an effective means to provide women with a healthy lifestyle as well as to convey important messages as these goals are often related to empowerment of women and access to education.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases

Sport can help reach out to otherwise difficult to reach populations and provide positive role-models delivering prevention messages. Sport, through its inclusiveness and mostly informal structure, can effectively assist in overcoming prejudice, stigma and discrimination by favouring improved social integration.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Sport is ideal to raise awareness about the need to preserve the environment. The interdependency between the regular practice of outdoor sports and the protection of the environment are obvious for all to realise.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Sport offers endless opportunities for innovative partnerships for development and can be used as a tool to build and foster partnerships between developed and developing nations to work towards achieving the millennium development goals. Goal 8 acknowledges that in order for poor countries to achieve the first 7 goals, it is absolutely critical that rich countries deliver on their end of the bargain with more and more effective aid, sustainable debt relief and fairer trade rules for poor countries -- well in advance of 2015.



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Sport and Education

Sport and physical education teach essential values and life skills including self-confidence, teamwork, communication, inclusion, discipline, respect and fair play. Sport and physical education also have psychological benefits such as reducing depression and improving concentration. Sport, physical education, play and recreation have a positive impact on child education. Physical education typically improves a child's ability to learn, increases concentration, attendance and overall achievement. Young people learn better when they are having fun and are being active. Within schools, physical education is an integral component of quality education.

As the lead agency for sports-related activities within the United Nations, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has a key role to play in convening Governments to advance the cause of sport and physical education and to improve the general knowledge of the benefits of sport as a means to promote education in particular.

The skills and values learned through sport are especially important for girls, given that they have fewer opportunities than boys for social interaction outside the home and beyond family networks. Through sport, girls are given the chance to be leaders and improve their confidence and self-esteem. As girls begin to participate in sport, they also acquire new interpersonal links and access to new opportunities, allowing them to become more engaged in school and community life.

Giving young people with disabilities the opportunity to participate in physical education programmes at school and through community clubs is crucial given the additional benefits, among others, for social inclusion and self-esteem they receive from sport and physical activity.

Sport and Health

In 2002 the World Health Organisation (WHO) World Health Report indicated that mortality, morbidity and disability attributed to the major non-communicable diseases accounted for over 60% of all deaths, and unhealthy diets and physical inactivity were among the leading causes of these diseases. Sport and physical activity are crucial for life-long healthy living. Sport and play improve health and well-being, extend life expectancy and reduce the likelihood of several non-communicable diseases including heart disease.

Regular physical activity and play are essential for physical, mental, psychological and social development. Good habits start early: The important role of physical education is demonstrated by the fact that children who exercise are more likely to stay physically active as adults. Sport also plays a major positive role in one's emotional health, and allows to build valuable social connections, often offering opportunities for play and self-expression.

Recognizing the important links between sport, physical activity and health, in 2004 the WHO adopted the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health and a Resolution Health Promotion and Healthy lifestyles. Both documents emphasize the importance to start the practice of adapted physical activity early in childhood.

In 2004, the United Nations Joint Program on HIV/Aids (UNAIDS) was the latest United Nations system organisation to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to involve the world of sport more actively in fighting the epidemic.



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Sport and Disability

People with disabilities have a particular place within the global agenda of “Sport for Development”. The World Bank estimates 600 million or 10% of the world’s population are people with disabilities, with at least 500 million living in the developing world. These numbers continue to increase as a result of accidents, armed conflicts and a high incidence of untreated disease to name a few.

Sport can play a key role in the lives and communities of people with disabilities, the same as their peers without a disability. However, additional benefits include:

1. Socialization through sport is particularly valuable for people with disabilities as they often remain in the home environment, protected and guarded by their families. Participation in sport creates peer interaction, co-operative relationships and teamwork.
2. Sport can also play a significant role in reducing the focus on the impairment or disability of the person and places the focus on their abilities. This leads to empowerment and greater self-confidence that can be applied to other realms of life, for example employment.
3. Disability sport programmes serve to strengthen participants both mentally and physically, promote rehabilitation, and facilitate a capacity for self-help.
4. Sport can promote the inclusion of girls and women who experience double stigmatization.
5. By involving participants with and without a disability in the same programmes there is increased understanding and sensitivity about one another and it can assist with preventing social exclusion.

As the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace stated; “Sport can integrate people with disabilities into society, providing an arena for positive social interaction, reducing isolation and breaking down prejudice. Sports programmes for the disabled are also a cost-effective method of rehabilitation. They are highly therapeutic, improving motor skills and increasing mobility, self-sufficiency and self-confidence” (the UN Inter-Agency Task Force report “Towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals” can be downloaded here, PDF).

Additional information regarding the benefits of ‘sport for all’ is outlined in the following:

Note: By making use of the links below you will request a new window that takes you off the website of the United Nations. The United Nations is not responsible for the content of these sites.

- Magglingen Declaration (2003) see : www.sportanddev.org
- Decalogue on Adapted Sport (2003);
- UN World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (1982);
- UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Persons with Disabilities (1993);
- European Year of Persons with Disabilities (2003);
- European Year of Education Through Sport (2004);
- African Decade of Disabled Persons (2000-2009) see: www.africandecade.org.za
- Ongoing work by the United Nations to adopt a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Draft Article 24 ‘Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure and Sport’, see: www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/

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