



SPORT AND GENDER

EMPOWERING GIRLS
AND WOMEN



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1 CONTEXT: GENDER, DEVELOPMENT AND SPORT

“A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centred sustainable development.”

– Mission Statement, Beijing Platform for Action
Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995

1.1 | GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Gender is a social construct that outlines the roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a particular society believes are appropriate for men and women.¹ The assignment of these roles and adoption of these traits can create gender inequities — differences between men and women that systematically favour one group to the detriment of the other.²

Gender equity is a term used to describe both the principle and practice of fair and equitable allocation of resources to, and opportunities for, men and women. Gender equity eliminates discriminatory practices that are barriers to full participation for either gender. The practice of gender equity does not necessarily mean that everyone is treated in an equal, or identical, manner. Identical treatment is unlikely to yield equal opportunities for men and women within existing power structures. Instead, gender equity means changing responses to, and treatment of, men and women to ensure that gender is a neutral factor when accessing resources, rights, and opportunities.

Gender differences between men and women do not necessarily imply inequity. Additionally, both men and women may experience adverse effects as a result of restrictive gender roles. However, globally, women are particularly disadvantaged by gender constructs which prevent them from fully realizing their rights, accessing resources,

and harnessing opportunities. Consequently, this chapter is focused on the empowerment of girls and women. Empowerment in this sense refers to the process through which women gain the confidence, strength, and in some contexts the information and skills, needed to make strategic choices to improve their lives.

Globally, evidence of gender inequity includes the widespread preference of sons over daughters, limited education and work opportunities for girls and women, and high levels of physical and sexual violence against girls and women.³ More subtle forms of discrimination are arguably equally problematic and include gender stereotyping and institutional discrimination. Some cultural traditions that favour men over women, and the subsequent cultural practices that perpetuate that discrimination, lead to social exclusion.⁴

Gender inequity varies significantly, in both degree and in the forms it takes, from country to country. Some countries have made significant progress in reducing inequities through targeted actions to change gender norms, legislate and protect human rights, and ensure access to education, health and other services. However, disparities that affect women are widespread in every region of the world and are a significant obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Because gender norms are often intimately entwined with other power relations⁵ related to class, race, sexuality, nationality, religion, and other social divisions,⁶ they can be difficult to change. Furthermore, gender norms are not fixed — they evolve over time, vary substantially from place to place, and are subject to change. To achieve development objectives, they must include specific efforts to transform inequitable gender structures so that girls and women, as well as boys and men, can benefit equitably. This fact was underscored in the 1980s when development terminology moved away from discussing “women in development” and adopted the term “gender and development,” with the aim of investigating gender sensitive strategies that include men *and* women. This change in methodology led to international research, the establishment of NGOs, and international recognition for a gender-sensitive approach to development.

The importance of gender equity — particularly for girls and women — is reflected in all significant development goals, the MDGs in particular. Three of the eight MDGs specifically address girls and women:

- MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education (i.e., ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling);
- MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women; and
- MDG 5: Improve maternal health.

Women are also primary players in the attainment of:

- MDG 1: Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger;
- MDG 4: Reducing child mortality; and
- MDG 5: Combating HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Gender is often a contributing factor to poverty and women throughout the world are at greater risk than men of living in extreme poverty. On average, women globally earn only slightly more than 50% of what men earn.⁷ Women's greater risk of poverty is perpetuated, in part, by unequal access to education. Globally, boys are more likely than girls to attend school and women make up two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults.⁸ These disparities have important health consequences. Largely because of their relative poverty and powerlessness in society, girls and women are more likely than boys and men to experience sexual violence, be involved in sex work, contract HIV and AIDS, and be vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health threats. Without adequate access to reproductive health care, women are also more vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies and death or disability from childbirth. They are also unable to take the simple and often inexpensive precautions to protect their newborn children from common, yet preventable, diseases in infancy and their early years.

The inter-relationship between gender, poverty, education and health, demonstrates the need for all nations to address gender equity as a central part of their efforts to attain the MDGs. International efforts to confront gender inequity can have a positive impact. Since the 1979 adoption of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the status of girls and women has improved. In many regions, girls and women increasingly have access to education, the labour market, and governmental structures.⁹ Legal and economic reforms have also begun to remove some of the structural barriers to women's full social, cultural and economic participation.

Building on this progress is critical, as research has shown that empowering women and increasing gender equity produces tangible development benefits. These benefits extend beyond women to their families and, through their children, to the next generation. Increasing women's influence in household decisions and their education levels has been shown to significantly improve their children's survival rates, nutritional status, and educational attainment.¹⁰ Education is the single most powerful means for families to escape poverty over the longer term.¹¹

Gender equity can be achieved by enhancing women's influence and decision-making power in the household, the workplace, and the political sphere.¹² Ensuring that girls and boys, men and women have equitable access to education is one of the most powerful

means of doing this. Changing traditional socio-cultural norms involving gender is also critical and, therefore, engaging men and boys in efforts to reduce discrimination against women is important. Addressing stereotypes requires focusing on men and boys as well as working with women and girls. Enlisting male role models for boys, identifying male allies and establishing partnerships and initiatives designed to educate both men and women on the benefits of gender equity can help to improve understanding, communication and cooperation and lay a strong foundation for future development efforts.

Achieving gender equity and empowerment of women requires systematic and sustained attention in all policy areas. This practice is known as gender mainstreaming and it was identified in the Beijing Platform for Action as a key strategy to overcome gender disparities, alongside targeted activities for women. Gender mainstreaming aims to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women is the responsibility of all actors across all sectors and not the sole responsibility of gender specialists. Gender mainstreaming requires consideration of the contributions, priorities and needs of women, as well as men. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) notes that gender mainstreaming requires two actions:

- Integrating concerns about gender equality into the analyses and formulation of all policies, programs and projects; and
- Developing specific initiatives that enable women, as well as men, to formulate opinions, express their views and participate in decision-making across all development sectors.¹³

Gender mainstreaming does not mean that there is no need for specific activities focused on women. Specific activities for women remain crucial given the remaining gaps to gender equity and challenges to empowerment that women face in many areas.¹⁴

The State of Women Worldwide

- Of the world's one billion poorest people, three-fifths are girls and women.
- Of the 130 million children who are out of school, 70% are girls.
- Women make up only 16% of parliamentarians worldwide.
- Up to 50% of all adult women have experienced violence at the hands of their intimate partners.
- Each year, half a million women die and 18 million more suffer chronic disability from preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth.
- Globally, women make up nearly half of the 37.2 million adults (aged 15–49) living with HIV and AIDS.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, 57% of those living with HIV are female and in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, young women aged 15–24 are 3–6 times more likely to be infected than young men of the same age group.

Source: UNDP, Taking Gender Equality Seriously (2005)

1.2 SPORT AS A TOOL TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUITY AND EMPOWER GIRLS AND WOMEN

Sport is an integral part of the culture of almost every nation. However, its use to promote gender equity and empower girls and women is often overlooked because sport is not universally perceived as a suitable or desirable pursuit for girls and women. Existing social constructs of masculinity and femininity — or socially accepted ways of expressing what it means to be a man or woman in a particular socio-cultural context — play a key role in determining access, levels of participation, and benefits from sport.¹⁵

It is true in all countries that girls and women are less likely than boys and men to participate in sport, and sport continues to be dominated by males.¹⁶ It is a mistake, however, to assume that this is because girls and women do not wish to participate. Poverty, heavy domestic demands, safety concerns, lack of accessible transportation, inadequate sport and recreation facilities, and few opportunities for physical education and skill development frequently prevent women's participation in physical activity and sport. As well, socio-cultural norms and constraints preventing girls and women from being physically active, leaving home unaccompanied, or being seen by men outside their family, are additional barriers preventing girls and women from becoming involved in sport and physical activity. For example, even in the matrilineal society of Palau where women are already active in communities and families, sport is still seen as a male domain.¹⁷

At the same time, many international frameworks support women's participation in sport, with some national laws requiring equal access and opportunities for females.¹⁸ A small but growing body of evidence has also begun to establish sport as a viable tool for addressing gender equity on a broader scale. Research on sport, gender, and development indicates that sport can benefit girls and women by:¹⁹

- Enhancing health and well-being;
- Fostering self-esteem and empowerment;
- Facilitating social inclusion and integration;
- Challenging gender norms; and
- Providing opportunities for leadership and achievement.

Through structured sport programs, girls and women can become more physically active, benefiting their physical and mental health, including the reduced risk they will suffer from chronic diseases, depression and anxiety, and engaging in health risk behaviours. Sport can also be a powerful health information and education platform, connecting girls and women with the information, skills and strategies they need to reduce health risks in their lives, particularly in connection with their sexual and reproductive health.

Sport can help increase self-esteem by giving girls and women opportunities to learn new skills, engage in positive relationships, acquire achievements, engage in volunteer service

and receive public recognition. By providing women and girls with a voice in program design and decision-making, training, and opportunities for leadership and advocacy, sport programs can also empower and help equip them to take greater control over their own lives.

Sport programs can help to reduce the social isolation and exclusion that many girls and women experience, particularly those that cannot attend school and live in poverty. Sport programs can provide girls and women with safe places to gather, help them to build social networks, offer social support, and connect them to health, education and employment information, services, and opportunities that can help to address their marginalization in society.

Sport programs can enhance the empowerment process by challenging gender norms, reducing restrictions and offering girls and women greater mobility, access to public spaces, and more opportunities for their physical, intellectual and social development. By involving families, community leaders, and boys and men in gender education, changes to gender norms can benefit men and women alike. Sport can also provide girls and women with powerful role models, leadership skills and experience that they can transfer to other domains such as their family life, civic involvement, and advocacy. All of these beneficial effects are self-reinforcing, and may also make sporting opportunities for girls and women more sustainable over time.

In spite of the benefits, the successful implementation of sport programs aimed at gender equity involves many challenges and obstacles. Not only do girls and women have limited time available for sport, but there is often little value placed on sport activities for girls by their families, by girls themselves, and by their communities. To overcome these challenges, and to convince key stakeholders about the benefits of sport programs for gender equity and empowerment, evidence to support the benefits must be documented.

1.3 LIMITATIONS OF SPORT TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Sport comes with its own risks. Because female athletes and sport participants are subject to the influence and control of predominantly male coaches, teachers and officials, there can be a risk of harassment and sexual abuse. Policies and procedures to protect girls and women and ensure they have safe spaces in which to train and compete, are critical.

The Female Athlete Triad is a syndrome affecting many high-performance athletes and some very physically active girls and women. It can involve eating disorders, delayed or interrupted menstruation, and osteoporosis (low bone mass). This syndrome is usually

caused by self-imposed or externally driven pressure to maintain an unrealistically low body weight.²⁰ Participation in sporting activities where physical appearance is an important factor may increase the risk of developing this syndrome. On the other hand, engaging in “non-feminine,” or non-traditional, athletic activities that emphasize mass, power, and positive self esteem, appears to offer some protection against the development of anorexia and bulimia nervosa.²¹

Despite the risks associated with sport and the complex challenges inherent in its use to address gender inequity, sport can be a catalyst that liberates girls and women. Sport can empower girls and women within their communities, provide positive health and welfare outcomes, and ultimately transform gender norms. Sport can lead to a more egalitarian world by unleashing the productive, intellectual and social power of women.²²

Sport programs provide girls and women with valuable opportunities to interact and socialize with one another in a constructive way.

Handicap International -
Sport and Leisure Activities
for Children with Disabilities,
Bangladesh



1.4 SPORT, GENDER EQUITY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Millennium Development Goals, have become the guiding framework for all development efforts. The MDGs explicitly address the need to promote gender equity and empower girls and women. The ways in which sport can contribute to the achievement of the MDGs related to gender equity and empowerment of women are outlined in Table 4.1.

TABLE 4.1 SPORT, GENDER EQUITY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL	CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT
1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of transferable life skills leading to increased employability through sport participation and coaching • Connection to community services and supports through sport-based outreach programs • Access to employment and small business supports, and jobs, through sport programs and production of sport equipment • Reduced risk of diseases that can cause or aggravate poverty through access to health information
2. Achieve universal primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives and support for girls to enroll in school • Enhanced school attendance and academic achievement • Alternative education opportunities through sport-based community education programs for girls who cannot attend school • Erosion of stigma preventing girls with disabilities from attending school
3. Promote gender equality and empower women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved physical and mental health for girls and women • Increased opportunities for social interaction and friendship • Increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and sense of control over their bodies • Enhanced access to health information • Access to leadership opportunities and experience • Positive changes in gender norms giving girls and women greater safety and control over their lives • Empowerment of women and girls with disabilities through sport-based opportunities to acquire health information, skills, social networks, and leadership experience
4. Reduce child mortality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved education and access to health information for young mothers, leading to improved health and well-being of their children • Lower rates of high-risk adolescent pregnancies in some contexts • Reduction in child deaths and disability from measles, malaria and polio as a result of sport-based vaccination and prevention campaigns aimed at women • Lower likelihood of female infanticide due to reduced stigma and greater community acceptance of female children
5. Improve maternal health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access for girls and women to reproductive health information and services • Increased fitness levels to speed post-natal recovery
6. Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria, and other diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced risk of HIV infection as a result of sport programs aimed at prevention education and empowerment of girls • Reduced stigma and increased social and economic integration of girls and women living with HIV and AIDS
7. Develop a global partnership for development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global sport and development partnerships and increased networking among governments, donors, NGOs (sport and gender-focused), and sport organizations worldwide to advance Sport for Development and Peace knowledge, policies and programs

1.5 INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR SPORT AND GENDER

The use of sport to advance gender equity is underpinned by international and regional frameworks designed on one hand to promote gender equity and the empowerment of girls and women, and, on the other, to promote the right of all to participate in sport and physical activity and their ancillary benefits.

Global objectives on gender equity and empowerment of women, endorsed by the Member States of the United Nations, are found in a number of international human rights documents, including the:

- Charter of the United Nations;
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- UN Millennium Declaration; and
- 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Access to sport is essential to attaining the rights and freedoms set out in these international human rights documents. The importance of access to sport and physical activity is highlighted in the 1978 UNESCO International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Regarding equitable access of women to sport, article 10 of CEDAW,²³ calls on State Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women to ensure equal rights with men in the field of education. The article emphasizes the need to ensure the same opportunities for active participation in sports and physical education.²⁴ Article 13 of the Convention reiterates the importance of taking all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in economic and social life and to ensure the same rights for women and men — in particular the right to participate in recreational activities and sports.

The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted as an “agenda for women’s empowerment” at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. With policy recommendations to governments and addressing the issue of women and sport, it calls for:

- the provision of accessible recreational and sport facilities by educational institutions;
- the establishment and strengthening of gender-sensitive programs for girls and women of all ages in education and community institutions; and
- the creation and support of programs in the education system, workplace and community to make opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity available to girls and women of all ages, on the same basis as they are made available to men and boys.²⁵

In support of growing recognition of the development power of sport, in recent years, the UN General Assembly adopted a number of Resolutions which paid special attention to the development power of sport, emphasizing its particular role in attaining gender equity.^{26,27,28}

The UN Commission on the Status of Women has also recognized the important gender empowerment potential of sport, and has called on Member States to ensure equitable access to sport for women and girls.²⁹ In 2005, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the principal global policy-making body on gender equity, undertook a ten-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. This review specifically addressed sport and physical activity, calling on governments, the United Nations system and civil society to encourage women to practice regular sport and recreational activities. This review highlighted the still significant gap between gender equity policies and their implementation, underscoring the need for effective mechanisms to ensure follow-through and accountability.³⁰

Ensuring gender equity within the world of sport itself is considered an important means of enhancing sport's potential as a tool for advancing gender equity and empowering girls and women. Since 1994, World Conferences on Women and Sport have assessed progress and defined priority actions to increase the involvement of women in sport. While not legally binding, these declarations, principles and calls for action provide important guidance to governments and sport bodies. The Brighton Declaration of 1994 arising from the first World Conference in Brighton, UK, paved the way by creating an informal working group on women and sport, and calling for a sporting culture that values and enables the full involvement of women in every aspect of sport.³¹ Declarations from subsequent conferences in Windhoek, Namibia (1998), Montreal, Canada (2002) and Kumamoto, Japan (2006):

- Called for the promotion of sport as a means to realize broader goals in health, education and women's rights.³²
- Recognized that realizing these goals involves a variety of actions including information and advocacy campaigns and the integration of sport into community development projects.³³
- Expressed participants' commitment to building a collaborative network to realize gender equality in and through sport.³⁴

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) plays a central leadership and policy-setting role in the world of sport.³⁵ In 1995, the IOC established a Working Group on Women and Sport (elevated to the status of a commission in 2004), which monitors the participation of women in the Olympics and their representation in decision-making. In 2004, the Olympic Charter was amended to include a specific reference to the need for action on women and sport.³⁶

Regional inter-governmental bodies have also contributed frameworks and targets for gender equity within sport and for the use of sport as a tool to promote gender equity and women's empowerment more broadly. Notable examples include:³⁷

- The Council of Europe recommendation 1701³⁸ on discrimination against women and girls in sport, calling for combating sexual abuse in sport.
- The African Sports Confederation of Disabled (ASCOD) policy on disabled women's and girls' participation in sport and recreation.³⁹
- The Asian Women and Sport Action Plan 2001 developed by the Asian Working Group on Women and Sport to expand equal opportunities for women and men and girls and boys to participate fully in sport.⁴⁰

Despite such widespread global recognition of the important empowerment potential of sport for women and girls, and sport's specific role in attaining the goals of gender equity, the recent UN report on women, gender equality and sport, *Women 2000 and Beyond: Women, Gender Equality and Sport*, found that the extent of discrimination against women and girls in sport demands further action and successful strategies and programs must be scaled-up and expanded.⁴¹

2 EVIDENCE: USING SPORT TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUITY AND EMPOWER GIRLS AND WOMEN

2.1 | ENHANCING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

Health issues for girls and women are diverse and complex, with important differences for those living in developed and developing countries. Non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and obesity are a growing problem in both the developed and developing world. Cardiovascular diseases (heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke) currently account for one-third of deaths among women around the world and half of all deaths in women over 50 in developing countries. Diabetes affects more than 70 million women in the world and this figure is projected to double by 2025.⁴²

Infectious diseases such as HIV and AIDS, diarrheal diseases, perinatal infection, malaria, and tuberculosis continue to rank among the top 10 killers of women in developing nations. Mental health issues are also a concern because they are one of the key contributors to the global burden of disease and disability. Women in developing nations are twice as likely as those in developed countries to suffer from depression. Addressing these issues is central to placing girls and women on an equal footing with men and advancing development overall.

Preventing non-communicable disease through physical activity

The health benefits of physical activity are well-established for men and women. Regular activity improves quality of life, lowers risk of disease, and offers numerous psychological and social benefits. Physical inactivity is linked to increased risk of death and disability and reduced quality of life.⁴³

These findings are discussed in Chapter 2, which notes that physical activity is one of three primary factors (along with nutrition and non-smoking) that influence individual and population risks of chronic, non-communicable disease worldwide, such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes.⁴⁴

As discussed in Chapter 2, obesity is closely linked to cardiovascular disease and is on the rise worldwide. Regular physical activity, combined with adequate diet, is one of the most effective means of controlling mild to moderate obesity and maintaining a healthy body weight in women.⁴⁵ Even modest physical activity, along with dietary changes, can prevent more than half the cases of non-insulin dependent diabetes.⁴⁶ Physical activity, particularly strength or resistance exercises, can also prevent and delay the onset of osteoporosis, a disease that disproportionately affects women (80% of all cases) causing bones to become fragile and more likely to break.⁴⁷ Physical activity can also help those affected to manage the disease.⁴⁸

There is further evidence to suggest that regular physical activity can help prevent cancer, in particular decreasing lifetime risk of lung and colon cancer⁴⁹ and breast cancer in women.⁵⁰ For the latter, 1–3 hours of exercise a week over a woman's reproductive lifetime can reduce the risk by 20%–30%, while four or more hours a week can reduce the risk by almost 60%.⁵¹

Encouraged by the health benefits of sport and physical activity, and recognizing that girls and women do not have the same access to these outlets as boys and men, governments are increasingly turning their attention to strategies to improve female access to sport and physical activity.

The government of South Africa developed a white paper on sport that includes the creation of a national strategy and organization for women and sport, Women and Sport South Africa (WASSA). WASSA's mission is to develop a culture in which all girls and women have equal opportunities, equal access, and equal support in sport and recreation at all levels and in all capacities. WASSA aims to establish a culture where women are decision-makers, administrators, coaches, officials, and participants in sport and recreation and where they can develop and achieve their full potential to enjoy the benefits of sport and recreation.

In recognition of the health benefits of physical activity for women, the Government of Hungary enacted sports legislation in December 2000 to ensure equal opportunities for men and women, and boys and girls, to choose and participate in sport, contribute to sport leadership development, and receive funding for different sport programs. Under this law, all sport organizations, foundations, federations and committees were required to increase female participation to 10% by November 2001, 20% by November 2002, 30% by November 2003 and 35% by November 2004.⁵²

Recognizing the importance of physical activity for older women, the Government of Egypt has actively promoted their participation by establishing 37 sports centres for women over 35 years of age. Each centre is used by approximately 150 women who enjoy basketball, volleyball, table tennis, and other recreational activities.⁵³

Improving access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services

The sexual and reproductive health of girls and women is a particular challenge. Fifty percent of all adults worldwide living with HIV and AIDS are women.⁵⁴ This statistic is even higher in sub-Saharan Africa, where, in 2007, almost 61% of adults living with HIV were women.⁵⁵ Women's biological vulnerability to contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections is often exacerbated by existing social perceptions about their roles. Many women, and particularly girls, face a significant risk of sexual coercion (20% of women globally are sexually abused before the age of 15).⁵⁶ Women and girls with few assets of their own, or limited options for earning an income, may be compelled to exchange sex (inside and outside of marriage) for survival. Early marriage and childbearing are also concerns. Over the next 10 years, an estimated 100 million girls (or one third of adolescent girls in developing countries) will marry before they are 18 years old.⁵⁷ Similarly, 14 million adolescent girls become mothers every year, over 90% of them in developing countries.⁵⁸ Childbearing, particularly early childbearing and the close spacing of children, presents risks — approximately 1,600 women and more than 10,000 newborns die daily from preventable complications during pregnancy and childbirth.⁵⁹

Girls and women need access to information about their bodies, protective aids, and supports and strategies that are context appropriate to help them avoid unsafe sexual practices and preventable illnesses. Access to information on relevant health issues and supports that enable self-care, prevention, and treatment is limited due to:

- Uneven access to education;
- Limited, costly, or non-existent health promotion and health care services;
- Social taboos that discourage women (particularly unmarried girls) from obtaining information on their sexual and reproductive health;

- Fear of disclosing sexual activity (voluntary and involuntary) due to the stigma and negative consequences which may result from transgressing community and family norms; and
- Social norms that discourage open discussion of sexual violence or hold women responsible for their victimization.

The use of sport as a health information and education platform is particularly important for girls entering adolescence and confronting choices, challenges, and risks in connection with sexual activity, pregnancy, and HIV (these issues are explored more thoroughly in Chapter 2). In developed nations, sport participation has been linked with delayed sexual activity and reduced risk of teen pregnancy. However, the circumstances of girls in many developing nation contexts are very different because they often do not have the same level of personal control over their sexual activity. Higher risk of sexual violence, family pressure to marry early, and gender norms emphasizing submission and obedience to men leave girls vulnerable to early, unwanted and unsafe sexual activity. In societies that discourage discussion of sexual matters with girls, lack of information on sexuality, reproductive health and HIV and AIDS increases these risks.

Sport offers multiple avenues to address these health challenges and can promote good health for girls and women. It can provide an important venue to share critical health information and education and a safe and neutral space where women can discuss sexual and reproductive health issues and strategies to address them. As noted in Chapter 3, the use of sport for these aims requires sport facilitators, such as coaches, teachers and peer educators, to be well-trained and informed on health issues. Well-trained and informed sport facilitators are uniquely positioned to convey accurate and appropriate health information and referrals. They can approach sensitive topics in an age-appropriate and culturally appropriate way, and they can use their counselling skills to provide effective support to girls and women who ask for guidance in dealing with specific issues, including sexual abuse and HIV and AIDS.

Peer education and support are particularly effective when working with adolescents. In 2002, the EduSport Foundation created the *Go Sisters* program in Zambia to address the needs of adolescent girls from disadvantaged communities. These girls tend to receive little support from their families or communities to stay in school and they face increased health risks due to their gender and socio-economic status. Adolescent girls are also the least knowledgeable of any group in Zambia when it comes to HIV and AIDS. This, in addition to gender socialization that encourages girls to be submissive to males, makes it difficult for them to abstain from sexual relationships or to negotiate protected sex. *Go Sisters* provides adolescent girls with sport, leadership, health and coach training,

equipping them to become peer educators and role models. After training, they use their new skills by training other peer leaders and designing and delivering programs in their schools. Programs provide girls with a forum to discuss issues such as healthy lifestyles, HIV and AIDS, gender equity, and protection from abuse. Activities vary by school but may include sport leagues, tournaments with different themes, discussion workshops, leadership camps, aerobics, exchanges with other project sites and community service.

There is evidence to suggest that programs like *Go Sisters* can have a positive impact. In the period 2002–2006, *Go Sisters* trained 5,474 girls as peer leaders. These leaders provided sport and health education activities to an additional 56,132 girls. *Go Sisters* program participants now speak openly and knowledgeably about issues that affect them, including early marriage and reproductive health. *Go Sisters* staff report that participants experience fewer early pregnancies (i.e., under age 16) than non-participants. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are being developed to more systematically capture these positive impacts,⁶⁰ but the early results are promising.

In the Kilifi District in Kenya, *Moving the Goalposts* Kilifi uses football as an outreach tool to tackle gender disparities in health, education and employment. Football games and tournaments provide a safe space for girls and young women to meet, build positive social relationships, and access health and leadership training. A peer educator visits each football team during tournaments and provides reproductive health education through dramas and videos. Topics include menstruation, HIV and AIDS, decision-making, and girl-child rights. Peer educators record questions that arise during the sessions for follow up visits, and project staff are creating a resource manual to address common questions and concerns.⁶¹

National governments have also begun to use sport as a platform to deliver health information and services to women. In Ghana, the Ministry of Education and Sports views sport as a means of promoting health and improving productivity and a vehicle for disseminating community health messages. Gender-based Sport for Development programs are seen as ideal vehicles for disseminating health-related messages and educating girls and women about health issues, including HIV and AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, and maternal and child health. In Palau, the national government and the Palau National Olympic Committee work together to offer regular sport activities for girls and women to promote gender equity and improve maternal health. In its monthly Walk and Run event, the government works with doctors to provide clinical services, family planning information, and other health services to women and families.

Improving maternal health

Increased physical activity levels, combined with access to reproductive health information and services, can improve the health of women during pregnancy and the health of their newborn infants. Benefits of moderate physical activity during pregnancy include: prevention and reduction of cardiac stress, gestational diabetes,⁶² backache, and pain in the hands and feet; strengthening of pelvic muscles; reduction of premature deliveries and caesarean sections; more flexibility and pain tolerance; weight gain control; and increased self-esteem.⁶³ According to the nurse who leads an *Aerobics for Pregnant Women* program established in 1994 in Zimbabwe, physical activity for pregnant women can contribute to heightened physical and mental well-being: “[T]he aerobics for pregnant mothers has been very important. The mothers tell us about a lot of the benefits of aerobics such as substantially reducing their time of labour. All our mothers are now taking up aerobics because it’s easy and fun. It’s just music and dance. It’s good for the women to get together — they make friends, they share experiences.”⁶⁴ Group exercise programs such as the *Aerobics for Pregnant Women* program can also help create lasting social networks which may provide women with outlets to share experiences and discuss sensitive issues, including post-partum depression.

Fostering mental health and well-being

When it comes to mental health, there are many similarities between women and men in the overall prevalence of disorders, but women and girls experience different patterns and symptoms.⁶⁵ During adolescence, girls have a much higher prevalence of depression and eating disorders, and engage more in suicidal ideation⁶⁶ and suicide attempts than boys.⁶⁷ In adulthood, the prevalence of depression and anxiety is much higher in women, while substance use and anti-social behaviour are higher in men.⁶⁸

Many studies indicate that gender-based differences contribute significantly to higher rates of depression and anxiety among women and girls.⁶⁹ Rates of depression for women are almost double those of men in both developed and developing countries. Frequent exposure of low-income women to events such as illness and death of family members, imprisonment, job insecurity, and unsafe living and workplace conditions, places them at greater risk of depression.⁷⁰ In China, for example, psychological disorders have been linked to arranged marriages, unwanted abortions, problems with parents-in-law and an imposed nurturing role.⁷¹ Additional evidence, although not as extensive, strongly links depression, anxiety, stress-related syndromes, substance use and suicide to gender-based violence.⁷²

The International Society of Sport Psychology indicates that sport can contribute to women's health by:

- Reducing anxiety;
- Decreasing mild to moderate depression;
- Reducing neuroses and anxiety;
- Reducing various types of stress; and
- Producing a beneficial emotional effect.⁷³

Sport participation is also associated with lower rates of suicidal thoughts among adolescent girls in developed countries^{74,75} although it is not clear whether this is true in developing countries.

Sport programs for women can provide critical opportunities for social support that can reduce loneliness and help relieve stresses and anxiety in their lives. In contexts where formal mental health services are scarce or inaccessible due to distance or cost, the availability of informal frontline programs that can provide social support and other inexpensive forms of mental health promotion, are critical.

2.2 FOSTERING SELF-ESTEEM AND EMPOWERMENT

The empowerment of girls and women involves the increased ability to make strategic life choices in contexts where this ability was previously limited. A necessary precursor to empowerment, self-esteem is defined as a person's overall self-appraisal and feeling of self-worth. Self-esteem is essential to mental health and well-being (low self-esteem can be a contributing factor to health risk behaviours such as drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse, suicide, early and unsafe sexual activity, teen pregnancy, and anti-social behaviour).^{76,77}

Self-esteem and empowerment are critical issues for girls and women because gender stereotyping and gender norms often lead to feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence. With limited mobility, uneven access to education and employment, and few economic assets, girls and women often lack a sense of personal worth and value. This further reduces their chances of feeling competent, being assertive, and feeling secure, safe, and connected. Together, these perceptions and feelings can cause women to feel disempowered, lacking the strength and confidence to embrace goals and possibilities, and to make the choices necessary to realize them.

Self-esteem and empowerment are often cited as significant benefits of sport participation. In a majority of studies, researchers found a strong link between physical activity and self-esteem in all age groups.⁷⁸ (Chapter 3 examines in greater detail the attributes of sport programs that contribute to heightened self-esteem.)

Evidence suggests that girls and women who participate in sport and physical activity, in both developing and developed countries, also derive benefits related to other constructs associated with self-esteem, including self-perception, self-worth, self-efficacy, self-empowerment, and enhanced personal freedom.⁷⁹ Research also points to the importance of engaging girls in sport at an early age, because self-esteem can decrease during adolescence for both boys and girls. This period of transition is also often characterized by reduced physical activity and sport participation, and increasingly restrictive gender roles for girls in both developing and developed countries.⁸⁰

Qualitative research has shown a positive relationship between sport participation, self-esteem and self-empowerment in high-income countries. A comprehensive American study found that girls and women who participated in sport or physical activity before going to university displayed greater levels of self-worth, physical competence, and body image.⁸¹ Furthermore, girls in Norway who participated in a sports program reported enhanced levels of confidence, success, and mastery. Girls' narratives also noted "a feeling of belonging" and a sense of "being seen and confirmed."⁸² Participation in sport has also been shown to strengthen the ability of adolescent girls to challenge sexual pressure from men.⁸³

Two studies provide observational support for a positive relationship between sport participation and self-empowerment. Impact analysis from the *Ishraq* program in Egypt⁸⁴ and the Mathare Youth Sports Association's (MYSA) *Girls' Football Program*⁸⁵ in Kenya suggest that sport for girls plays a significant role in enhancing self-empowerment, self-esteem, and personal freedom. In addition, focus group responses from females who participate in *Moving the Goal Posts* Kilifi's programming indicate that participation in football has significantly increased levels of self-esteem.⁸⁶

In rural communities in Egypt, sport is considered appropriate for boys but not girls. Girls play traditional games up to the age of 10 or 11 but, with the onset of puberty, their movement becomes much more restricted. The *Ishraq* program was established in 14 villages in Egypt to develop girls' skills, increase their self-confidence, build their citizenship and leadership abilities, and raise their expectations for the future. Through this program, girls receive a general introduction to physical activity using traditional games, body movement and basic information on hygiene, nutrition and health. Life skills sessions are held on topics such as first aid, environmental awareness, reproductive health, marriage, pregnancy and motherhood, family planning, and violence against women.

Program research and evaluation show that before participating in the program, girls looked down on themselves. They felt that they had no mobility, no access to education,

and few friends in comparison to their brothers and male counterparts. After participating in the program, both their own self-perceptions and the way they were perceived by their families changed dramatically. Participants report experiencing greater status in their family, becoming more involved in family decision-making, and understanding their own rights more clearly (e.g., a right to education and health for themselves and future daughters). Most participants now have a stronger basis from which to counter family pressure for early marriage and, in some cases, have been able to extend their education and delay marriage. Although empowerment is often hard to measure, many *Ishraq* program graduates are mobilizing and organizing their own projects with local girls. In many communities, graduates continue to meet regularly and discuss issues relevant to their lives.⁸⁷

U-Go-Girl is a program delivered by Sports Coaches' Outreach (SCORE) in South Africa. *U-Go-Girl* encourages female participation by introducing girls to historically male-dominated sports, developing girls' and women's sports clubs, and ensuring female representation on sports committees.⁸⁸ Through sport leadership and assertiveness training workshops such as those delivered through *U-Go-Girl*, girls can become more confident and better able to express themselves.

The Mathare Youth Sports Association's *Girls' Football Program* in Kenya provides another compelling example of the use of sport to empower girls. The football program offers girls the opportunity to learn football, play on football teams, and compete internationally in the Norway Cup. Girls also participate with boys in leadership training, community service and informal education sessions on health and other topics. Responses by female participants in a MYSA study indicated that, in addition to having fun, making new friends, and getting fit, they were acquiring new skills and self-confidence. In the words of one participant: "I have learned how to have my own principles and not to be blown and tossed around by the wind. Before playing football, I was fearful. Now I am not because I am used to mixing with people and I know what is good and what is bad."⁸⁹

2.3 FACILITATING SOCIAL SUPPORT AND INCLUSION

The combined interaction of traditional, cultural and gender norms and poverty often results in girls' and women's social isolation, severely constrained education and employment opportunities, and general exclusion from mainstream community life.

Differential access to public spaces by males and females begins in childhood and is exacerbated in adolescence when girls' physical mobility is curtailed by cultural norms and conditions that determine where it is safe or acceptable for them to go.⁹⁰ Parents tend to restrict girls' mobility more than boys' to keep them — and their reputations — safe. This significantly narrows their public life.⁹¹

A recent mapping exercise of safe spaces for girls in Kibera, Kenya (the largest informal settlement in Africa) found that less than 2% of an estimated 76,000 girls had a place they considered safe in which to meet friends (outside of school) or family for a few hours a week.⁹² Boys were far more likely than girls to report that they had a place outside of home or school in which to meet same-sex friends (47% versus 13% for girls).⁹³ Although security risks for both boys and girls are more pronounced in poor regions such as Kibera, gender exacerbates this risk, causing girls to face compounded challenges.

Social structures and safety issues are an important factor limiting the participation of girls and women in education and employment. For Mayan girls in rural Guatemala, there is a dramatic decline in the proportion of girls going to school as they get older — from over 75% attending school at age 10 to 13% at age 16.⁹⁴

The exclusion of girls and women, however, is not limited to education and employment, and can extend to other areas of life. While the specific elements and dynamics of female social exclusion vary significantly across countries and communities, key contributing factors can include:

- Lack of employment opportunities for girls and women;
- Low awareness of, and inability to access, rights and entitlements;
- Sexual maturation leading to changes in how girls regard themselves and how they are treated by their families and communities;
- Lack of safe public spaces;
- Tolerance of gender-based violence, including rape;
- Increased domestic workload in adolescence and adulthood;
- Difficulty in travelling safely — even to school, market, etc.;
- High dropout rates for girls — with those remaining in school losing their friends and peers;
- Pressure for early marriage or liaisons as livelihood strategies; and
- Family resistance to female relatives spending significant time outside the home.

Sport can give women and girls access to safe and sanctioned public spaces, allowing them to gather, develop social networks that extend beyond their families, discuss problems, and enjoy freedom of movement on a regular basis. While literacy programs, sewing classes or other pursuits might also provide these benefits, sport also offers opportunities for physical and leadership development that other activities do not. Because sport, in most contexts, retains a predominantly masculine culture, it also offers opportunities to challenge and gradually shift gender norms that underpin and reinforce the social exclusion of girls and women.

In Afghanistan, under the Taliban, women and girls were largely confined to their homes unless accompanied by a male relative. With the change in regime, women are now looking for ways to gradually re-emerge in a society that still remains highly segregated and often unsafe. Apart from schools and universities, there are few socially sanctioned places for women to gather. Sport is being used as one way to create such spaces. The *Sport for Women* project operates a Women's Park (Bagh-e-Zanana) offering up to 10,000 women and girls opportunities to participate in educational and recreational activities and enjoy supervised sport activities. Through sport and play, women and girls can enjoy freedom of expression and movement, learn new skills and support each other.⁹⁵

In post-apartheid South Africa, football programs provide girls with opportunities to participate on teams that help them to build social skills and a network of friends. Friends mentor one another and offer support, making public spaces feel more inclusive.⁹⁶ Developing skills and competencies such as self-discipline, self-control, independence, leadership, and communication reduces feelings of exclusion and allows girls and women to participate more openly and equally in the community. In fact, the public participation by girls and women can challenge and change expectations about their roles and capabilities.⁹⁷

MYSA's *Girls' Football Program* in Kenya did not initially incorporate safety concerns into programming. However, when girls identified lack of safety as a barrier to participation, program staff took steps to improve security travelling to and from the program and during practices and games.⁹⁸ Gender training was implemented to sensitize staff and selected participants to gender discrimination issues. As a result, changes have been made to the program to make it a more hospitable, safe and welcoming environment for girls — including revising work responsibilities among girls and boys to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes.⁹⁹

The opportunity to travel and participate in an international competition, the Norway Cup, was viewed by many *Girls' Football Program* participants and their parents as a significant benefit. By providing female participants greater mobility and the opportunity to broaden their horizons, encounter new people and build their skills and knowledge, MYSA has helped to build their aspirations. When asked to imagine their future, female participants talked about wanting more equal partnerships with their future husbands than their mothers had had, as well as greater opportunities for their own children. These comments demonstrate that programs such as *Girls' Football* can create an expanded sense of options and possibilities in the lives of girls.

Success in using sport to foster greater social inclusion for women and girls requires that programs address a number of key issues. While each community setting is unique and requires its own assessment and response, a number of issues tend to arise in most contexts and merit particular attention. Sport programs for girls and women are encouraged to:¹⁰⁰

- Include gender equity as an explicit program objective;
- Provide equal opportunities for boys and girls in programs (e.g., playing time, travel opportunities, access to educational workshops and events, leadership training, etc.);
- Develop explicit guidelines or codes of conduct governing behaviour of boys and girls (with appropriate enforcement);
- Ensure awareness of gender stereotypes and be careful not to reinforce these through language, behaviour, program materials, division of labour, decision-making processes, etc.;
- Select and develop appropriate role models for girls (e.g., coaches, officials and staff);
- Provide a range of activities and services, in addition to sport, to attract and retain more girls and encourage the approval and support of their parents;
- Implement sustained outreach and strategies to accommodate girls' domestic responsibilities and mobility restrictions;
- Give girls a strong voice in programs and maintain a flexible approach to participation to ensure their needs are heard and met;
- Find ways to protect the safety and reputations of participating girls and women;
- Encourage and develop girls' self-expression, decision-making and leadership capacities; and
- Encourage mutual respect, cooperation and support between male and female participants.

Similarly, it is important for development-based projects and programs that aim to increase gender equity to include sports as a component of their programming.

2.4 CHALLENGING GENDER NORMS

Challenging gender norms refers to efforts to change culturally defined expectations about male and female appearance, roles, activities, relationships, and behaviour. Most societies have stereotypical gender norms which influence how men and women are viewed. For example, many societies believe that women should be gentle, submissive and caring while men should be strong, daring and unemotional. Some societies believe that football is for boys, while dance is for girls. Gender stereotypes can be restrictive and harmful to men and women because they discourage individuals from expressing who they really are, which can prevent them from realizing their full human potential. Penalties for transgressing these norms can be extremely severe. This is often especially true for girls and women because there is so much at stake when existing power structures favouring women's submission are challenged.

Gender norms do change, however, and sport can be used as a means to change them, in part because sport itself is so heavily identified with the masculine domain. Typically, boys and men are more easily socialized into organized sport than girls and women — and many of the values associated with highly competitive sport overlap with attributes traditionally associated with men (e.g., competitiveness and aggression). In addition, more sport celebrities and role models are male and the physical attributes of athletes (e.g., muscular appearance, strength, power) are more typically associated with the masculine ideal. Finally, resources for male sport are far more plentiful and readily available than for female sport.

For all of these reasons, the very existence of female athletes can raise questions about deeply embedded notions of masculine and feminine roles. Girls are as likely as boys to adhere to gender stereotyping and therefore may have concerns about their own gender identity and how they will be perceived socially if they participate in sport. Girls and women who do challenge gender norms often face a difficult journey,¹⁰¹ but one that can be highly rewarding in terms of their own personal development. Individual girls and women who challenge gender norms also help to create greater opportunities for others. Participation in sport offers girls and women opportunities to alter their own and others' perceptions about their capabilities and the range of roles they might assert in their community and in society. By calling into question the norms governing their own lives, girls and women can also call into question the roles governing their male peers. This way, they can help to establish a different understanding of the capacities of both genders, gradually reshaping the relationships between men and women in society.

Effective initiatives aimed at challenging gender norms must also involve boys and men. Because boys and men are necessary allies in the struggle for greater gender equity, gender mainstreaming cannot occur unless men are willing and equipped to incorporate gender analysis into what they do. This is particularly true in governments where implementation of gender equity measures often significantly lags behind relevant policy and legal frameworks.

The sports arena provides an opportunity to reach out to men and boys on issues related to stereotypical attitudes and gender-based discrimination and violence. The broad participation of men and boys in sport, as both athletes and spectators, provides a powerful forum for educating and informing males on a variety of issues, including violence against women and girls, and for breaking down entrenched attitudes and stereotypical behaviours.¹⁰² Male athletes who speak out on such issues can be particularly effective as role models.¹⁰³ In 2005, top football teams from Barranquilla, Bogotá, Cali, and Cartagena in Colombia supported White Ribbon Day, the International Day for the Elimination

of Violence Against Women. The teams displayed campaign placards in their stadiums before their championship matches to raise awareness about all forms of violence against women.¹⁰⁴

Sport programs also offer important opportunities to provide boys and male youth with role models who actively support gender equity. These models reinforce equity in the expectations they communicate to program participants, and model appropriate behaviour in their relations with girls and women. As part of their *Unite for Children, Unite for Peace* campaign, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and UNICEF launched a football coaching manual, “Coaching Boys Into Men,” during the 2006 World Cup. Recognizing that coaches can play a unique role in addressing issues of violence and discrimination, particularly against women and girls, the manual provides advice to coaches on how to talk to young athletes about tolerance and teach them that violence does not equal strength.¹⁰⁵

Specific gender roles and stereotyping levels affecting women need to be analyzed in each unique cultural setting. This analysis will inform choices that are made about the degree to which, and how, sport programs can challenge these norms.¹⁰⁶ Approaches that fail to acknowledge deeply held views and severe social consequences for perceived gender transgressions can cause harm to program participants and can further discourage support for sport opportunities for women and girls. In general, gradual approaches to building consensus around incremental change are more successful than sweeping ones. Gradual approaches also offer minimal risk to participants. For consensus building to occur, outreach and dialogue with community and religious leaders, teachers, parents and male family members, and other stakeholders, is needed.

For Egypt’s *Ishraq*, the sport component of the program provided an unprecedented and challenging intervention. Workshops delivered through the *Ishraq* program familiarized sports promoters with curriculum content and equipped them with the skills and tools needed to conduct classes. Orientation meetings held with parents and community members over a period of three months built acceptance of the proposed sport activities for girls.

In Pakistan, the *SportWorks* project jointly led by international humanitarian organization Right To Play and the Insan Foundation Pakistan, uses sport and play to provide leadership and participation opportunities for refugee Afghan girls and women. The project provides play activities for Afghan refugee boys and girls that build skills around communication, conflict prevention, and leadership. Key lessons learned from this project included the need to secure support from local leaders and the community.

Local leaders and community members were initially opposed to the project. However, once they were convinced it did not violate their religious and cultural beliefs, they became supportive. Project staff engaged in extensive outreach to families, because many of them were not accustomed to allowing their children, especially girls, to attend school or play outside the home. As a result of systematic efforts to build trust and gain community support, the project has grown from 1,500 participating children in 2002 to over 5,000. Of the participating children, 70% are girls. Coaching has opened up otherwise unavailable leadership opportunities to women and there is a strong female presence at all levels of the project, with most of the leadership being women. Both male and female children are now permitted, and even encouraged, to play. A positive sport culture that is welcoming to girls and boys alike has been established in the Afghan community.¹⁰⁷

Education to change gender norms can contribute to changing images, attitudes and stereotypes; greater respect for women's rights; and reducing gender-based violence.¹⁰⁸ While the research on how sport provides opportunities for the continual re-negotiation and construction of gendered norms and roles is limited, the convening power sport can provide a forum in which to actively contest and challenge conventional notions of gendered play.¹⁰⁹

Gender norms cannot be changed over a short period of time. When the MYSA *Girls' Football Program* created a girls' football league over 15 years ago, it involved more than simply setting up a program for girls: MYSA staff negotiated extensively with parents and communities; schedules were adjusted to accommodate domestic responsibilities in the girls' lives; mobility had to be assured, and strategies implemented to overcome other constraints. Fifteen years later, the MYSA *Girls' Football Program* has significantly changed gender norms, including the ways girls perceive themselves and the way their community responds to them. The competence, skill and ability demonstrated by the girls on the playing field have changed negative views about females playing sport. By engaging in and being successful in a traditionally male dominated sport, the women's team has been able to transcend cultural barriers.¹¹⁰

It is difficult for adolescent girls to take on new roles through sport and to challenge existing norms unless they have support from their male peers and are free from harassment. Despite some concerns about male peer behaviour in MYSA, many of the female participants viewed their male counterparts favourably in comparison with male peers who did not participate. They felt they could count on male MYSA members to be more respectful and even to protect them from harassment from other boys. Male MYSA members, while initially sceptical of including girls, came to see them as capable players. In general, their perceptions expressed a mix of empathy, genuine concern and care, and somewhat patronizing and even sexist attitudes. By exploring the differing perceptions of male and female MYSA members, the program is able to

continue to address gender issues and foster an environment that increasingly invites girls to safely explore less traditional roles through sport.¹¹¹

The *Espérance*¹¹² program was established in Rwanda by the Youth Sports Association Kigali to promote reconciliation and lasting peace, gender equity, and awareness of human rights and health issues — through the establishment of football clubs. Under *Espérance* rules, football teams must have equal numbers of male and female players and only girls can score goals, so teams can only win by valuing and supporting their female team members. On many occasions, however, *Espérance* staff arrived in villages only to be told that there are no girls or young women interested in playing football. In fact, many girls and young women in rural Rwanda love football, but they lacked opportunities to play or even attend matches as spectators because it was not considered appropriate in their villages. By showing community members the benefits of football — for girls and boys — *Espérance* staff have changed attitudes throughout Rwanda. Girls now play on football fields throughout the country and an increasing number of players' mothers, sisters and grandmothers of players are attending games as spectators.

In the case of *Ishraq*, when local girls reached puberty, brothers often monitored their behaviour and restricted their mobility. As a result, although local youth centres had always been officially open to girls and boys, in practice only boys used them. *Ishraq* staff chose to use these centres for program activities to help shift community perceptions. Engaging parents, brothers, and community leaders facilitated the acceptance of *Ishraq's* sport activities and the use of the centres by girls. Securing these spaces for use by girls as well as boys — at separate times — was a significant community achievement. Discussions about the common misconceptions about girls and sports, and the benefits of fitness, helped families and communities understand the important role sport could play in their daughters' and sisters' lives. *Ishraq* also instituted a *New Visions* program for boys to encourage the girls' brothers, and other young male relatives, to think and act in a more gender-equitable manner. This helped to foster greater acceptance of more mobility for girls.¹¹³

2.5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP AND ACHIEVEMENT

Sport offers girls and women important opportunities to acquire skills and develop their leadership capacities. Currently, there are many barriers preventing women from assuming leadership positions. This is reflected by the persistent worldwide under-representation of women in positions of power and decision-making.¹¹⁴ Domestic workload — including childbirth and caring for children and elderly parents — can limit the flexibility and time

available to women to exercise leadership roles outside the home. Low education levels relative to men and socialization that discourages girls and women from perceiving themselves as potential leaders are also significant barriers.

The world of sport itself has traditionally had a strong male bias at the leadership level. In local, national and international contexts, women are still significantly under-represented in decision-making and as leaders in sporting bodies and institutions. This under-representation extends across the spectrum of sport activity including coaching, management, media, commercial sporting activities such as sales and marketing, and in bodies responsible for local, national, regional and international level events.¹¹⁵ Despite this traditional lack of female representation, sport programs can offer girls and women important opportunities to develop their leadership capacities. Sport programs can provide strong female role models, offer an expanded sense of possibility, and enable girls and women to acquire leadership skills and experience as sport team leaders, peer educators, coaches, officials, mentors, supporters, and organizers.

Elite sport can play an important role in this process by providing high-profile role models and advocates for women in sport. Watching female athletes participate in high-profile sporting events, such as the Olympics, can transform male and female perceptions of the capacities of girls and women. Through their achievements, elite female athletes dispel the misconception that sport is not biologically or socially appropriate for females. An Olympic medalist or world champion stimulates national pride, unity and a sense of accomplishment. When the athlete is female, she provides a visible demonstration of what is possible for women to achieve. Nawal El Moutawakel, the Moroccan hurdler who won the gold medal in the inaugural women's 400 m hurdles event at the 1984 Summer Olympics, was the first Muslim and African female Olympic champion. Her medal was a huge breakthrough for sporting women in Morocco and other Muslim countries. Similarly, Deng Yaping, a Chinese table tennis player who won 18 world championships and four Olympic gold medals before retiring, is an icon and role model for millions of Chinese girls. Both these women made huge strides for women in sport in their countries and beyond. Both women have gone on to be strong advocates for women and sport.

Female coaches, peer educators and sport program staff offer girls and women visible proof that women can excel and lead in society. These women also fulfill a teaching function, imparting advice and lessons on leadership and — perhaps more importantly — demonstrating the characteristics of effective leadership through their own example. For this reason, it is important for sport programs to ensure they develop and provide high quality female role models for girls and women in their programs.

While male athletes, teachers, coaches and staff can positively affect the development of both girls and boys, the absence of a strong mix of female and male role models can only serve to reinforce stereotypes about men's leadership capacity at the expense of women. The need for more female sport role models was highlighted by a survey in Lusaka and Kabwe that showed that 61% of the girls questioned could not think of a sports idol at all, and only 19% of those who named a sport role model mentioned a woman. On the other hand, 87% of boys questioned could think of a favourite sports figure, but none mentioned a female athlete.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, 26% of girls who did cite a sports idol mentioned someone from their personal environment rather than a national or international figure.¹¹⁷

In addition to providing role models, sport can be a highly effective platform for teaching girls and women leadership skills and providing them with leadership experience that they can apply in other domains such as employment, civic leadership and advocacy.

MYSA's *Girls' Football Program* offers specialized training and development in coaching, refereeing, training, and organizing the league. A leadership-training program for boys and girls aims to create a group of leaders who will eventually organize and run the program. Training includes communication, decision-making, team building, group dynamics, and conflict resolution. Both the coaching and referee training program have seen an increasing number of girls participating. Several girls have progressed to leadership positions as project managers, coaches, and referees, and at least one girl is appointed to each of MYSA's governing councils.¹¹⁸

Peer leaders in the *Go Sisters* project in Zambia receive training in first aid, leadership, coaching and facilitation. As a result of this training, peer leaders are well-positioned to become role models, providing valuable volunteer services within their communities that earn them the respect and admiration of children, their peers and adult members of the community. Programs like these can help girls and young women who have experienced setbacks to turn their lives around.¹¹⁹

Moving the Goalposts Kilifi also provides girls with opportunities to develop leadership and decision-making skills, opportunities to which they would otherwise have little access. Sport and leadership training, focusing on the development of coaching skills and participation in league organization, is a central component of the program. In 2005, female participants refereed all the organization's football matches.¹²⁰ Because of their achievements, Kilifi girls are recognized as special both in their district and nationally.¹²¹

Your Life, Your Health — Make it Right! is a Caribbean program involving female netball players under 16 years of age. At netball tournaments, players are provided with leadership

training so that they can serve as role models and lead dialogue and decision-making about health issues within their own communities. The program provides a forum for discussion, led by empowered girls and young women who aim to be future leaders.¹²²

To effectively build leadership capacity in girls and women, however, it is important that the sport movement itself do a better job of facilitating the equitable participation of women in senior leadership positions at all levels. Women are still grossly under-represented in this respect, mirroring their widespread under-representation as leaders in most aspects of society.

Recognizing the lack of women in leadership positions within sport, the International Olympic Committee established targets and urged all National Olympic Committees (NOCs), international and national sport federations, and other sport organizations of the Olympic movement to ensure that at least 20% of decision-making roles were held by women by 2005. A subsequent former evaluation found that 64% of NOCs had taken special measures to recruit women, 62% had achieved the targets by December 2005, and that more work was needed to increase women's participation at other levels, including locally.¹²³ The benefits cited by women themselves included increased influence within their NOCs, increased participation of women in leadership training; more frequent appointments of women to other committees, and greater profile of women in sport over all. NOC Secretaries-General indicated that women were among the most active Executive Committee members.¹²⁴ While gender targets can be highly controversial, they have proven effective in this case. It is therefore important to make effective use of incentives and supports, as well as sanctions, in order for them to both achieve their intended goal and minimize any accompanying backlash.¹²⁵

Some national governments have also begun to encourage greater participation of women in sport leadership positions. Women and Sport Botswana (WASBO), a sub-structure of the Botswana National Sports Council, was launched on November 3, 2000 with the following call for action:

- All development programs should reflect the development of women and the girl child;
- All decision-making bodies (such as Executive Committees) should have at least two women as members;
- A minimum of 20% of the budget should be channelled to the development of women and the girl- child;
- All training programs (technical and managerial) should have at least 30% women participants;
- All national delegations to international events must include 30% female representation;
- All national sporting facilities should have child-care facilities; and
- Guidance and counselling must be provided to female athletes.¹²⁶

The early results from of this call for action are notable. At the 2006 World Conference for Women and Sport held in Kumamoto Japan, Botswana had the largest country delegation (other than the host, Japan) with more than 20 women participating.

Women and Sport South Africa, the national strategy launched by South Africa in 1996, is aimed at empowering women to be actively involved in all spheres of sport and recreation. In particular, WSSA targets governmental and non-governmental agencies in South Africa to develop a culture where all girls and women have equal opportunities, equal access, and equal support in sport and recreation at all levels and in all capacities, as decision-makers, administrators, coaches, officials, and participants.¹²⁷

In response to the low numbers of women employed in sport and the need for gender-sensitive programming, the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in Saint Lucia is adapting materials from an existing sport administration program to provide skills training to women in the field of sport administration and to create opportunities for more women to be employed in this field.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

The individual experiences of girls and women are unique. Although girls and women are often discussed as a group, the realities they face as individuals are influenced by a multitude of diverse determinants. These determinants vary greatly from country to country and can include regional environment, economic and socio-political climate and cultural context. Within countries, social determinants including access to income, education and healthcare, as well as familial and personal experiences, all contribute to the diverse realities that girls and women face. It is therefore erroneous and misleading to make sweeping recommendations for governments to apply in all situations. Although care has been taken to ensure that the recommendations presented here can be applied to a broad range of contexts, it is important for governments to consider the specific contextual challenges at hand when developing and implementing policies and programs aimed at influencing gender norms through sport.

3.1 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Embed gender equity in a broader government agenda, mainstreaming it across the full range of government policy and program areas, consistent with the protection and enforcement of fundamental human rights.

Sport and gender policies adopted without such a commitment and without a comprehensive and systematic approach to eradicating gender inequities and promoting human rights are likely to have only a limited impact.

Recognize the benefits of sport for girls and women, by formally designing national sport policies to target the advancement of gender equity, empowerment, and improved quality of life for girls and women.

Sport can be an excellent strategy to address gender inequities but the goal must be understood and formally acknowledged before policies and programs can be established to harness sport's power.

Reinforce policies with appropriate legislation, regulations and funding for sport programs that promote gender equity.

Policies are only the first step in addressing an issue — legislative, regulatory and program approaches are needed to bring policies to life.

Optimize the use of sport to advance gender equity by applying a gender lens to all sport policies and programs to ensure that they are not being distorted by gender stereotypes, inequities or discrimination.

Imbalances in male and female access to sport funding, programs, facilities, training, decision-making, and leadership positions are all indicative of structural gender biases in the sport system. Systematic efforts are needed to identify and correct these biases.

Examine gender equity policies and initiatives with a focus on sport opportunities — to find additional ways to use sport to empower women and girls.

Officials responsible for gender equity may not be aware of sport's potential to help them meet their objectives. Proactive efforts by Sport for Development proponents within governments, and external advocates, can help identify ways in which sport can be used to advance government gender equity objectives and be integrated into existing initiatives.

Involve women and girls in policy development and planning.

Women need to have a greater voice in sport policy decisions that affect them. Women can play a critical role in helping to design measures that increase their participation in sport and physical activity, and harness sport as a tool to improve gender equity. The resulting policies and programs are more likely to be relevant and effective if they

include the perspective of girls and women. Policy-makers who take this approach are also more likely to encourage participating sport, municipal and community-based organizations to adopt a similar approach and engage women and girls in their own decision-making processes.

Invest in building the capacity of women and sport organizations to ensure women have an adequate voice.

Currently, women may face barriers which prevent them from contributing to policy development processes. To be consulted in a meaningful way, women need to have an organized voice and the capacity to engage sport organizations and governments at all levels. Government investment in women and sport organizations at the national and sub-national level can help to ensure this capacity. This investment can build valuable resources and allies when it comes to developing sport programs for women and girls and sport-based approaches to enhancing gender equity.

Avoid generalized (one-size-fits-all) approaches to policies and programs concerning women and sport.

Girls and women make up 52% of the population. They present enormous diversity in terms of age, health, education, social and economic circumstances, and needs. It would be unrealistic to treat girls and women as a single target group. Policies and programs need to differentiate between different groups of girls and women and provide relevant tools, programs approaches, and indicators of success.

Ensure an equitable allocation of resources for girls' and women's sport in relation to sport for boys and men.

Because sport for men and boys enjoys far greater government support and resources in most countries, it is recommended that governments establish explicit timetables and targets to ensure more equitable allocation of resources over time.

Require publicly funded sport organizations and sport programs for girls and women to establish and enforce anti-harassment and sexual abuse policies, training and procedures to protect girls and women in sporting situations.

These policies and procedures should be made public, communicated to all organization staff, members, and program participants, and reported on annually.

Ensure that government sport funding policies aim to create an equitable balance of men and women in leadership roles in sport organizations.

Governments often provide substantial financial and other support to national and sub-national sport bodies. This support gives governments important leverage when

it comes to ensuring that sport organizations and institutions reflect the interests and aspirations of men and women equitably. Governments could consider making public funding for sport organizations contingent on these organizations making systematic and steady progress toward more balanced representation of men and women in leadership positions, according to agreed upon targets and timetables.

Encourage sport organizations, municipalities, and community-based organizations that offer sport programs to build gender equity into their programs.

This can be done by developing policies, program guidelines and resources that require, motivate or help organizations to:

- Develop gender equity policies, procedures and goals that will improve operations and attitudes within the organization;
- Establish hiring and recruitment practices that will increase the number of women participating at all levels of the organization;
- Offer women and men equal opportunities for professional and leadership development;
- Collect organizational and program statistics by gender (sex-disaggregated data) to support gender equity goals (e.g., statistics on participants, athletes and leaders as a way of determining patterns and trends and progress against organizational and program gender equity goals);
- Develop or enhance support services that help remove barriers limiting female participation (e.g., child care for program participants, travel subsidies, free uniforms);
- Improve awareness of the programming needs of girls and women and increase the number and variety of programs available to them;
- Ensure that informal education, sport and other types of training, competition and travel opportunities for girls and women are equivalent to those offered to boys and men; and
- Engage in sustained outreach and recruitment to ensure balanced male and female participation in co-educational programs and to maximize women's and girls' participation in female-only programs.

Ensure the necessary research, monitoring, and evaluation frameworks are in place to attain gender equity policy goals in sport.

Collecting gender-based data on sport funding, participation, athletes, and leadership is an important means of determining whether national sport policies and programs are resulting in an equitable distribution of resources, and equitable sport participation and competition opportunities for males and females.

Research the sport programming needs and interests of girls and women.

This is necessary to increase the number, variety and relevance of programs.

3.2 PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish programs to actively promote female participation in sport.

Mass promotional and advertising campaigns can help instill positive public attitudes toward girls and women in sport, when supported by coordinated efforts and programs at the local level. Promotion efforts should take into account and, where necessary, address myths and misconceptions about the negative impact of female participation in sport (e.g., harm caused to female reproductive organs or “unfeminine” activity). The use of high-profile female sport ambassadors and role models can also be effective in promoting female participation.

Ensure that existing sport programs introduce or enhance gender equity and empowerment.

Existing sport programs can be redesigned with gender equity objectives in mind. This approach will allow governments to build on successful programs, prevent duplication, and facilitate mainstreaming.

Incorporate mandatory physical education into primary and secondary school curricula and ensure that gender sensitivity is a mandatory component of physical education teacher training.

Schools are the ideal way to reach large numbers of girls and equip them early in life with the information, skills and confidence necessary for lifelong physical activity and enjoyment of sport. Physical education teachers must be trained not to reinforce stereotypes that inhibit girls’ physical and sport development. Teacher training should impart an understanding of the true differences in how boys and girls approach and experience sport so that they can ensure a mix of activities and sports that are equally relevant and enjoyable for boys and girls.

Invest in community-based sport programs for girls.

Seventy percent of the 130 million children who are not attending school are girls. Clearly, these girls cannot benefit from school-based sport programs. Disadvantaged by low education and often socially isolated, they are most likely to benefit from the educational, social support and empowerment benefits of well-designed Sport for Development programs.

Invest in sport facilities, equipment and spaces that are suitable for, and accessible to, girls and women.

Too often community sport facilities are inaccessible to girls and women because of distance, safety concerns, lack of proper shower and change facilities, or tendencies to give men and boys priority in their use. Programs that can be delivered in proximity to places where women typically gather (e.g., religious institutions, markets, and washing facilities) are more likely to be successful in attracting women and girls. Measures requiring

publicly supported facilities to provide equitable access for male and female sport activities and participants as a condition of government funding are also useful. Ideally, women need to be involved in the planning of such facilities and the needs of girls and women should be taken into account before sites are chosen and facilities constructed.

Establish programs to recognize the achievement of girls and women in sport.

Social and cultural barriers to female participation in sport are an ongoing barrier to participation and to women's and girls' access to other opportunities for personal health, development and quality of life through sport. High-profile national awards and recognition programs for female athletes and girls and women involved in sport can help to change public attitudes and enable more women and girls to take advantage of the opportunities sport offers.

Empower girls and women by appointing women to lead national and local sport initiatives.

Placing women at the head of national and local sport initiatives sends a powerful message to sport organizations, local communities, and girls and women that they can be effective leaders. Seeing women in leadership roles communicates the message that sport is equally the domain of men and women.

Adopt the following best practices in all sport programs for women and girls:¹²⁸

Adopt a female-centred approach. Learn directly from participating girls and women about their needs and interests and tailor the program accordingly. Systematically seek input from girls and women into program design and implementation. Recognize the economic circumstances, and household and family responsibilities that result in heavy workload and time constraints, and then adapt programs to accommodate these.

Provide programs in a female-friendly space. Offer programs in areas where girls and women are safe from both physical and emotional danger, free from all forms of harassment and can enjoy a forum for self-expression that is not hindered by male domination.

Ensure a safe environment. Enable safe transportation to and from the program, avoid activities after dark or those that require participants to travel home in the dark, and take measures to protect girls' and women's reputations.

Offer a supportive environment. Accept participants for who they are, allow them to make mistakes, recognize their personal progress and achievements, and give them the flexibility to enter, exit and re-enter the program without blame or shame.

Obtain parental, family and community permission. Educate parents and community leaders on the benefits of girls' involvement in the sport program prior to launching. Because female movement in a community is often restricted by cultural norms and traditions, obtaining parental or family approval and support will help girls and women to participate. Brothers are often a key figure in girls' involvement.

Provide female role models. Recruit positive, enthusiastic, and encouraging girls and women as coaches, referees and officials. Developing a talented pool of female leaders is an urgent need in most countries because few females occupy such positions.

Use peer age grouping. Offer girls and women programs with their peers. Too broad an age range makes it challenging to meet very diverse needs.

Offer flexibility in the choice of clothing and music. Girls and women are often self-conscious about their bodies and can suffer from a negative body image. Social and cultural norms may also make some forms of sport clothing unacceptable in certain contexts, as well as certain kinds of music. Allow participating girls and women to choose their own appropriate clothing and music. Where uniforms are required, allow participants to help select a uniform that they are comfortable with or to modify the uniform as necessary, to conform to local conditions governing comfort, modesty and respectability.

Work with women in sport organizations to develop best practices to help address common safety issues for girls and women in sport.

These insights should be communicated to municipalities, sport organizations and community-based organizations delivering sport programs. Simple, easy-to-use resources can be developed to help ensure that programs offer a safe and supportive environment for girls and women.

Include monitoring and evaluation frameworks in programs from the outset and develop and disseminate appropriate best practices and tools that are specific to women and sport programs.

To overcome the challenges girls face in accessing sport and play, gender analysis in program design and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of Sport for Development and Peace programs are needed to document the evidence of the value of sport as a tool for development and a means of gender equity, as well as identify risks that women and girls might face as part of participating in the project and recommend preventive measures.

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