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THE ROLE OF SPORT IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sport (CABOS)

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THE ROLE OF SPORT IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

An discussion paper for the 2008 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting prepared by the Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sport (CABOS)

Sport has the power to inspire young people and to engage them in a way that little else can. It provides a common language around the world and can help to build bridges and break down barriers between countries, communities and young people themselves. There are many good examples from across the Commonwealth that show how sport can be used to tackle key health issues such as HIV/Aids, improve educational attainment and achievement, develop leadership and citizenship and lead to greater social inclusion and conflict resolution.

This paper captures the benefits that sport can bring to the lives of young people and the profound impact it can have. Using clear evidence and examples, it reinforces the value of investing in the future of our young people throughout the Commonwealth.

It is important to be clear from the outset that young people are not a homogenous group, each will grow and develop in their own way and at their own pace; they will be influenced by a vast array of differing circumstances, experiences, cultures and environments that surround them. Evidence has shown that social class, home environment and economic status all contribute to a young person's likelihood to participate in physical activity¹ and therefore to reap the benefits. The level of participation of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds has been shown to be limited compared to their higher socio-economic counterparts. So too are the personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and disability intrinsic in the propensity to participate. Inevitably the impact that sport can have on young people is not in question but the nature of the impact will vary from individual to individual.

Sport can have, and indeed evidence confirms, an impact on young people from an early age in a variety of ways and contexts including contributing to their long-term health, improving their life chances through better success in education and through volunteering and leadership; improving their sense of 'self' through confidence, self-esteem and attitude; encouraging social cohesion and fostering inclusion. So too does it instil in them the values of fairness, responsibility, team work, communication and problem solving skills.

While a definitive relationship between sport and educational attainment remains somewhat challenging to document, schools in England with a sport specialism have been shown to achieve a sharper improvement in results than maintained schools, and tend to perform relatively better than non-specialist schools, both over time and at a given point in time². Sport can act as a vehicle for learning in ways that are more appealing and engaging to young people while pedagogical approaches that use the values of sport can elicit improvement in the behaviour, attitudes, concentration and ultimately the learning of young people³. The evidence of physical activity per se having an impact on educational attainment is less clear though a previous report of three longitudinal studies emphasises that 'academic performance is maintained or even enhanced by an increase in a student's level of habitual physical activity'⁴.

Many young people themselves report that they feel better able to concentrate in class after a period of PE/sport⁵, that sport has an effect on improving their general behaviour, their attendance and general attitude.

¹ Stathi, A, Middlesex University & Dagkas S, University of Birmingham (2007)

² Ofsted (2005)/YST (2008)

³ Raising your Game; Youth Sport Trust (2007)

⁴ Shepherd (1997)

⁵ YST/Know the Score 2008

Case study

The Sky Living for Sport programme – United Kingdom

This is a school-based intervention aimed at young people aged 11-16 who are having difficulties with, or are disengaged from, school life and through robust evaluation⁶ it continues to show real improvement in the areas of behaviour and attitude, reported by both teachers and pupils alike. It shows:

- Improved attitude toward non-project staff; reported by 51% of teaching staff, with a further 21% saying this was true to some extent.
- Improved attitude toward other young people; reported by 60% of teaching staff, with a further 23% saying this was true to some extent.
- Improved attitude towards learning; reported by 53% of teaching staff, with a further 31% saying this was true to some extent.
- Increased self-confidence; reported by 65% of teaching staff, with a further 17% saying this was true to some extent.
- Improved social skills; reported by 62% of teaching staff, with a further 25% saying this was true to some extent
- Improved behaviour of the young person; reported by 66% of teaching staff, with a further 16% saying to some extent.
- Improved behaviour around the school, reported by 38% of teaching staff, with a further 30% saying to some extent.

Sport is a language that knows no boundaries and the benefits of social development can be derived no matter the circumstances (notwithstanding unique local circumstances of course). Examples have been seen throughout the Commonwealth of the power of sport in harnessing the best in young people, in changing attitudes, fostering understanding and breaking down cultural barriers. From programmes in India which change attitudes and increase participation to the Dreams + Teams programme⁷ which fosters greater international understanding, many ways have been found of using sport to great effect in developing young people.

Case study

Development of 'Meena' Cartoon – Asia

Across South Asia, the creation of a 'Meena' cartoon was undertaken with the help of focus groups and other activities that included over 10,000 young people. In the future millions of children across India will be exposed to this new cartoon which aims to promote participation in sport as part of a healthy lifestyle and demonstrates that girls can be active and take on leadership roles. Already several studies over the last decade have shown Meena's effectiveness as a tool for behaviour change. Evidence shows⁸ that after exposure to Meena materials there has been a shift in young people towards being more 'gender-fair', as well as becoming more 'expressive, imaginative, spontaneous and bold'. Identification with the character has been strong, with 87% of girls and 86% of boys reporting they had practiced what Meena does.

⁶ IYS/Sky Living for Sport Year 1-3 Combined Report (Jan 2007)

⁷ Dreams and Teams is a British Council programme that uses sport to develop Young Leaders, enhance their citizenship skills and promote intercultural understanding

⁸ Meena Impact Study, Pakistan (2007)

The ability of sport to act as a tool to bring people together can be used to tackle the most challenging of circumstances. This enables sports development programmes to bridge social and ethnic divides. As a result, sport can be a powerful tool to promote peace, both symbolically at the global level and very practically within communities, and prevent conflict.

If used in appropriate contexts and applied effectively, sport can act as an ideal forum for promoting social integration and fostering tolerance. These core values are the same as those necessary for lasting peace. In post-conflict environments in particular, this can work to reduce tensions and stimulate social dialogue.

The psychological benefits from playing sport can help to address the trauma of flight and the distress resulting from displacement for young people affected by conflicts. Targeted sports programmes within communities and regions can serve as positive and productive activities for child refugees and internationally displaced young persons. Such programmes can also play a unique role in the rehabilitation of young people affected by conflict

Sport can also encourage international, national and community exchange amongst young people. Sports participation provides a focus for social activity, an opportunity to make friends, develop networks and reduce social isolation, so it is well placed to support the development of social capital. The development of sports programmes have shown that social divides and differences can be set aside to attain a greater goal. The evidence from Mathare, Nairobi, is compelling and emerged out of local demand from young people. The Mathare Youth Sport Association is one of the largest youth organisations in Africa today.

Case study

Mathare Youth Sport Association (MYSA) – Kenya

Soccer development is the core activity and, with 17,000 members, it is regarded as the largest soccer development programme in Africa. However, soccer also acts as an entry point to a comprehensive and ambitious programme which, via membership involvement and a strong emphasis on mutual self-help, aims to produce 'responsible citizens'. A strongly ethical approach to soccer is at the centre of a complex, integrated and inter-dependent programme which contains compulsory environmental/community work, peer leadership/coaching, gender equity, educational scholarships, the provision of two community libraries and the provision of food and support for street children at Nairobi juvenile court. An extensive HIV/AIDS education programme is delivered by peer educators via group discussions, lectures and street theatre (drama/arts/puppetry). These peer educators are also mostly coaches and leaders involved in delivering the wider programmes.

The programme has given young people a new focal point that has created a basis for identity building, dignity and self-respect⁹. For the females too, research has shown that the programme provided girls with a 'public identity' something which most girls in Mathare do not possess¹⁰. In breaking down barriers and facing prejudices, the MYSA programme not only provides the space and ability for girls to participate but also enables the boys to face their prejudices.

⁹ Hognestad & Tollisen (2004)

¹⁰ Brady, Martha, and Arjmand Banu Khan, *Letting Girls Play: The Mathare Youth Sports Association's football program for girls*, Population Council, New York, 2002

Case study

Healthy Lifestyle Project - Trinidad and Tobago

This national initiative uses sport in order to make communities more child-focused, child-friendly and safe. It provides vulnerable and at-risk young people with creative, structured and safe recreational spaces where they can increase their knowledge on children's rights, HIV prevention and life-skills whilst engaged in positive, interactive and fun physical sports and games. Ultimately it aims to end the cycle of violence and abuse to which many of these children and young people are exposed to as well as bringing children and members of the community together to foster a better environment in which children are raised, protected and cared for. The bottom-up and participatory approach, involving children alongside other community members, representatives of town councils and government representatives enhances its sustainability.

The skills and values that young people learn from participating in sport undoubtedly have a significant and lasting long term impact on their lives from childhood into adulthood. The fact that many skills gained through sport are transferable beyond the sporting context is central to their value to individuals. Evidence suggests¹¹ that transferable skills developed through sporting contexts, such as team working, communication and problem solving can be carried throughout a young person's life at school, and beyond into adult working life.

Take the example of young people and volunteering. Sport offers the perfect vehicle for voluntary activity, often through coaching, mentoring, leading or even equipment handling and administrative support. This activity has shown that it instills in young people many of the skills and abilities that they will need in their working lives and sports volunteering allows them to learn these. The evidence¹² shows how young volunteers themselves believed they had improved their personal development skills such as leadership skills (87.5%), their communication skills (80%), organisational skills (65%) and had increased confidence (85%) as a result of their volunteering activity. Teachers and coaches too reported a clear benefit to the young people around their personal development skills.

¹¹ Coalter (2001)

¹² Institute of Youth Sport; Community Volunteering through Step into Sport Tracking Study (July 2005)

Case study

Youth Education Through Sport Programme (YES) – Southern Africa

This programme is aimed at facilitating youth development through sport and recreation. It empowers young people to be leaders through active participation in peer education activities using sports as a draw. It has three linked components: peer education, community projects, and sport. The peer education component includes a ‘‘Kicking HIV and AIDS Out’’ project, a community based initiative driven by young people with the support of facilitators. Through the community projects component, young people are engaged in income-generating activities such as making balls and sports uniforms which are later sold to clubs through the YES structures. There is also a pilot initiative to sensitise parents and guardians attending sports gatherings as spectators on the YES programme and to survey whether they communicate with their children on HIV/AIDS.

600 boys and girls from 5 provinces have been trained in youth leadership and peer education through sport, each of whom will then reach a further 30 young people each through their community YES clubs. Some 150 girls and young women have been trained to raise awareness and advocate on the importance of female participation in sport.

There are many factors at work in today’s society in shaping the characteristics of our young people throughout the Commonwealth. Life is changing at such a fast pace that the role of sport is having to keep up with and indeed in some circumstances to compete with the variety of opportunities available to young people. It is clear that these changes in our societies have a strong impact not only on the situation of adult people, but on the every day life of the young generation, their health and fitness status, their eating habits, their lifestyles and especially their behaviour patterns with respect to physical activity and sport involvement.

These changes make it all the more important for young people to have access to and to participate in sporting opportunities. With the rise in sedentary activities comes with it the potential of becoming overweight or obese. The World Health Organisation currently suggests that young people should participate in at least one hour of moderate activity every day and that in doing so, they can reduce the risk of health related problems in later life such as chronic disease.

There is a general acceptance amongst policy makers of the contribution that a lack of physical activity can have on increasing the risk of diseases that are linked to sedentary lifestyles, such as coronary heart disease, obesity, hypertension, osteoporosis and diabetes and which can have their origin in childhood¹³.

In an attempt to transform the way that young people think about sport and its link to healthy lifestyles, many schools across England in particular have demonstrated ways in which it is possible to build the foundations of a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age. Many have begun to use sport as a way of targeting and engaging young people who are overweight or at risk of becoming obese. Often the heart of the matter is in finding just the right activity to attract these young people and an acceptance by schools that is it no longer sufficient to simply offer ‘traditional’ sports and to believe that a one-size-fits all. Increasingly schools are tailoring and extending their range of sports provision in order to attract the maximum number of young people and targeting specific groups with potential health issues.

¹³ Bailey (1999)

Policy recommendations to Ministers

- Youth policies should include universal access to physical education and sport in schools in curricular and extra curricular time. This should include the necessary knowledge to ensure that young people understand the need for an active lifestyle.
- Youth policies should ensure that all teachers and coaches are supported with professional development opportunities to ensure they are equipped to deliver high quality programmes that provide a positive experience for all young people.
- Youth policies should provide sport and physical activity guidelines for community providers, including sports federations so that they can compliment and supplement provision in schools.
- Youth policies should be founded on research to determine the most important factors influencing participation of different child and youth target groups and develop national strategies and programmes to address these issues.
- Youth policies should include specific provisions to prevent the physical, psychological and sexual exploitation of young people participating in sport.
- Youth policies should ensure that young people have a voice in shaping youth sport strategies and involved in the implementation of any action plans.
- Youth policies should include provision for community play environments that are safe, clean, accessible, and encourage enjoyable physical activity.
- Youth sports policies should recognize the power of sport for development and target programmes at those groups that can most benefit from intervention and who are least likely to access other opportunities.
- Youth policies should draw together key departments at national and local level – education, health, sport, culture, law and order, social inclusion - to ensure an integrated youth sport strategy.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL	CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT
1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to services and supports for vulnerable children and youth e.g. orphans, former combatants, street children, unemployed/out of school youth • Opportunities for youth to develop transferable life skills and increase their employability • Access to employment and small business supports, and jobs, through sport
2. Achieve universal primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement and support for vulnerable children to enrol in school • Enhanced school attendance and academic achievement • Alternative education opportunities for children who cannot attend school
3. Promote gender equality and empower women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved physical and mental health for girls • More opportunities for social interaction and friendship • Opportunities to develop self-esteem, self-confidence, and a sense of control over their bodies • Enhanced access to health information • Access to leadership opportunities • Positive changes in gender norms affording girls and women greater safety and control over their lives
4. Reduce child mortality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved education and access to health info for young mothers, leading to improved health and well-being of their children
5. Improve maternal health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access for girls to reproductive health information and services • Delayed onset of sexual activity and higher-risk adolescent pregnancies (in some contexts)
6. Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria, and other diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to information on HIV/AIDS and its prevention • Positive role models and experiences that discourage high-risk health behaviours • Reduced stigma and increased social integration of children and youth living with HIV/AIDS
7. Ensure environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness of importance of environmental protection and sustainability • Child and youth participation in community action to improve their local environment
8. Develop a global partnership for development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global sport and development partnerships on behalf of children and youth, and increased networking among governments, donors, NGOs and sport organizations worldwide to advance sport for children and youth development knowledge, policies and programs.