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REVIEW ARTICLE

CONTRIBUTION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT IN PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND HEALTH

Contribution of Physical Education and Sport in Promotion of International Peace and Health

Sanjeev Sakia

Asst. Prof. Dept. of Physical Education RSGDC, Lalitpur (U.P.)

Sport as a universal language can be a powerful tool to promote peace, tolerance and understanding by bringing people together across boundaries, cultures and religions. Its intrinsic values such as teamwork, fairness, discipline, respect for the opponent and the rules of the game are understood all over the world and can be harnessed in the advancement of solidarity, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

Sport programmes permit encounters on neutral territory and in an environment where aggression can be controlled, regulated and transformed and hence facilitates rapprochement and reconciliation between opposing parties.

Many UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies have used and continue to use sport programmes to achieve their objectives. In post-conflict situations, sport programmes are systematically used by UN peacekeeping operations and UN country teams as a “door opener” to rebuild trust by bringing together former opponents, and to re-integrate child soldiers and ex-combatants into the civil communities.

Although sport alone cannot stop or solve an acute conflict, it represents a flexible and cost-effective medium for post-conflict relief work and peace building as well as conflict prevention.

It is known that fitness and wellness makes an individual physically fit, mentally stable and helps becoming a good citizen. Fitness helps individual achieve satisfactory level of strength, endurance and flexibility. It further improves the confidence and energy level. One feels more energetic and fresh for the whole day. It also leads to sound sleep followed by more relaxed body which leading to mental satisfaction and social stability. Body becomes more resistant to general ailments. Fitness improves efficiency of heart and lungs by improving cardio-respiratory fitness. It helps in maintaining normal blood pressure of the body. In nutshell, we can say – fitness and wellness helps to achieve the aim of physical education i.e. – “All round development of personality of the individual.”

Culture consists of the behaviour that individuals develop as a result of living in a particular group. It is a way of life and a product of our social inheritance. Our culture consists of our ways of living, eating habits, thoughts, customs, traditions, morals, art, literature, religion, games and sports and many other aspects of life. Our modern culture is not a product of sudden change or development, but has been evolved over centuries of the past. It is therefore a sort of reflection of our past. Therefore, games and sports of modern times are also indicators of the primitive times. Such activities have been passed on to us by our ancestors and are therefore our cultural heritage.

History of physical activities of man is as old as civilization itself. Most of the activities of primitive men were of physical nature and were aimed to secure means of existence. Activities included running, jumping, fighting, fishing and wrestling etc.

Our modern culture is a mixture of many cultures of the ancient world. Many countries of the world have contributed in its evolution through their thoughts and practices. In this respect, contributions of early Egyptians, Greeks, and countries of the west cannot be forgotten. Most of the games and activities of today are the outcome of the contributions of these countries.

We can say that games, sports and other physical activities of modern times are not a creation of modern thought and practice, but are a legacy of our ancient culture. We have simply modified these games and activities to refine them and suit our convenience. In fact the cultural heritage of the past shows us the methods of surviving in this changing world.

Sports and Health is one of the five Thematic Working Groups of the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDP IWG). The Thematic Working Group focuses on the following outlined in the draft Action Plan:

- Preventing and Managing Non-Communicable Disease
- Preventing and Managing Infectious Disease
- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Enhancing Mental Health
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

The Thematic Group on **Sport and Health** has not officially been activated. The SDP IWG Secretariat encourages Member States to come forward with proposal to chair the thematic.

These three strategic priority areas and the associated recommendations may be challenging for some governments to pursue due to a scarcity of resources and also due to the jurisdictional division of responsibility with provincial/state, local governments for education and other matters. It is assumed that governments will seek partnerships wherever possible to leverage the resources necessary to advance the objectives cited below. It is also assumed that, where governments do not have direct jurisdiction, they may use their convening power, shared-cost partnerships and other forms of influence to promote positive action by other levels of government.

OBJECTIVES

Working together with Members (Member State representatives) and Observers (experts, NGOs etc), the Sport and Peace Thematic Working Group aims to meet the following objectives:

1. Utilize available resources to identify issues and best practice approaches within the Sport and Health Working Group thematic.
2. Provide a forum for governments to benefit from each other's experience and share best practices with regard to sport and peace;
3. Support the implementation of the recommendations with regard to sport and gender which include the following strategic areas of priority: Preventing and Managing Non-Communicable Disease; Preventing and

Managing Infectious Disease; Enhancing Mental Health.

4. Sustain momentum with regards to government awareness and take-up in sport and health policy and programmes.

COMBAT HIV AND AIDS, MALARIA, AND OTHER DISEASES

- Sport programs can be used to reduce stigma and increase social and economic integration of people living with HIV and AIDS.
- Sport programs are associated with lower rates of health risk behaviour that contributes to HIV infection.
- Programs providing HIV prevention education and empowerment can further reduce HIV infection rates.
- Sport can be used to increase measles, polio and other vaccination rates.

Involvement of celebrity athletes and use of mass sport events can increase reach and impact of malaria, tuberculosis and other education and prevention campaigns

Globally, the most prevalent non-communicable or chronic diseases include heart disease and stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes. These and other chronic diseases are the major cause of death (60%) and disability worldwide, taking the lives of over 35 million people in 2005, including many young people and those in middle age. The total number of people dying from chronic diseases is double that of all infectious diseases, including HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

Because developing countries have relatively limited resources to devote to health care for people with chronic disease, prevention is the most cost-effective and sustainable way to address this health challenge.

Physical inactivity is the most common of all cardiovascular risk factors across countries. After tobacco use inactivity is the greatest contributor to mortality and morbidity from all causes. Physical activity is, therefore, increasingly viewed as the least expensive and most effective preventive "medicine" for combating the increasing worldwide problem of obesity and, with physical fitness, may represent the most effective strategy to prevent chronic disease.

The benefits of physical activity in relation to non-communicable disease are irrefutable. These include the primary and secondary prevention of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, hypertension, obesity, depression and

osteoporosis, as well as individual and societal economic benefits such as reduced health-care costs and increase productivity.

PREVENTING AND MANAGING INFECTIOUS DISEASE

Despite medical advances in prevention and treatment, infectious diseases remain a pressing health challenge in developing nations. As well, the advent of multi-drug resistant strains of infectious pathogens (such as staphylococcus, tuberculosis, pneumonia and others) has created a resurgent health challenge for developed countries.

Sport's universal popularity, its power and reach as a communication platform, and its particular appeal to children and youth make it an ideal vehicle to inform, educate and mobilize populations to fight disease.

While sport is equally well-positioned to inform and educate people about infectious and non-infectious disease, it is currently used most often in connection with infectious disease.

Moving beyond its traditional entertainment role, sport is now recognized as having enormous potential as an informal and educational platform for health and development messages targeted to youth and adults alike.

ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

- Participants, volunteers and coaches acquire transferable life skills which increase their employability
- Vulnerable individuals are connected to community services and supports through sport-based outreach programs
- Sport programs and sport equipment production provide jobs and skills development
- Sport can help prevent diseases that impede people from working and impose health care costs on individuals and communities

Sport can help reduce stigma and increase self-esteem, self-confidence and social skills, leading to increased employability

ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is defined by WHO as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to her or his community.

Exercise and, by extension, sport have long been known to produce beneficial effects on mental health, enhance self-esteem, help to manage stress and anxiety, and alleviate depression. In patients with psychiatric disorders, physical exercise has been shown to diminish clinical symptoms, especially for depression.

Regular participation in sport and exercise programs can play an important role in supporting the formation of self-concept in adolescents and building self-esteem and self-confidence in people of all ages. While investigations of the short-term effects of sport show that it largely results in positive mood changes, ongoing physical activity results in the same improvements to well-being, and improved perception of one's health status and a higher satisfaction with one's health.

Achieve universal primary education

- School sport programs motivate children to enroll in and attend school and can help improve academic achievement
- Sport-based community education programs provide alternative education opportunities for children who cannot attend school

Sport can help erode stigma preventing children with disabilities from attending school.

PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN

- Sport helps improve female physical and mental health and offers opportunities for social interaction and friendship
- Sport participation leads to increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and enhanced sense of control over one's body
- Girls and women access leadership opportunities and experience
- Sport can cause positive shifts in gender norms that afford girls and women greater safety and control over their lives

Women and girls with disabilities are empowered by sport-based opportunities to acquire health information, skills, social networks, and leadership experience.

REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

- Sport can be used to educate and deliver health information to young mothers, resulting in healthier children
- Increased physical fitness improves children's resistance to some diseases
- Sport can help reduce the rate of higher-risk adolescent pregnancies
- Sport-based vaccination and prevention campaigns help reduce child deaths and disability from measles, malaria and polio

Inclusive sports program help lower the likelihood of infanticide by promoting greater acceptance of children with disabilities.

IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH

- Sport for health programs offer girls and women greater access to reproductive health information and services Increased fitness levels help speed post-natal recovery.

ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Sport-based public education campaigns can raise awareness of importance of environmental protection and sustainability
- Sport-based social mobilization initiatives can enhance participation in community action to improve local environment.

DEVELOP A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT

Sport for Development and Peace efforts catalyze global partnerships and increase networking among governments, donors, NGOs and sport organizations worldwide.

The SDP IWG Report, "Harnessing the Power of Sport for Development and Peace: Recommendations to Governments", made the following policy and programmatic recommendations which Member States, with SDP IWG support, are encouraged to implement:

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement comprehensive strategies to increase physical activity levels in populations.
- Develop evidence-based strategies and take a holistic approach to understanding and promoting physical activity.
- Incorporate clear goals and targets in all strategies.

- Collaborate with key stakeholders to assess current physical activity and sport participation levels, trends and determinants when developing strategies.
- Incorporate lessons learned from successful experiences elsewhere.
- Make coordinated use of the full range of instruments available to promote physical activity.
- Give priority to strengthen national policies for physical education, physical activity and sport for all in schools.
- Target physical activity policies and initiatives to specific populations and tailor initiatives to respond to population needs.
- Develop strategies that address physical, social and environmental barriers to greater physical activity.

PROGRAMME RECOMMENDATIONS

- Take specific measures to raise awareness – within the government itself, among key sectors, and in the population – of the diverse benefits of physical activity and the risks and costs of inactivity.
- Develop guidelines on optimal physical activity levels and communicate them publicly.
- Facilitate and invest in the development of culturally relevant, community-level, physical activity and sport programs as an important means of encouraging more active healthy living.
- Provide persons with disabilities with opportunities and support to participate in sport and physical activities adapted to their physical and mental condition.
- Ensure that initiatives are sensitive to relevant local beliefs, in particular those on diet, physical activity, and body shape.
- Be aware of cultural norms with regard to gender that may, in some cases, prevent women and girls from being more active.
- Incorporate monitoring and evaluation processes into all initiatives from the outset to assess their effectiveness, continuously improve them, and help make resource allocation decisions.

- Maximize the effectiveness of programs to increase sport and physical activity participation by observing guidelines derived from successful programs.
- Target public messages aimed at increasing physical activity levels and tailor them for specific audiences.
- Make use of sport's potential as a communication and public education platform to influence health risk behaviour and prevent disease and in doing so, build on the lessons learned from programs to date.

Increase the impact of sport programs aimed at HIV and AIDS prevention by ensuring that they incorporate existing best practices.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that without access to sport and play a number of human rights are not fully attainable. The explicit mention of sport, play and physical activity in so many human rights instruments underscores the centrality of these activities to human health, development and well-being, and establishes a strong and compelling foundation for Sport for Development and Peace.

Because Sport for Development and Peace is an emerging movement, there is still much to be learned about the full potential of sport to advance development and peace goals and the best ways to do this. Monitoring, evaluation and research play a critical role in this process. While the lack of widely available evaluation tools specific to Sport for Development and Peace remains a challenge, skilled researchers from around the world have begun to build a credible base of evidence in support of sport's use as a development tool. This work, together with expanded research and knowledge exchange networks and processes for translating research into practical policy and program advice, will play a critical role in strengthening Sport for Development and Peace efforts in future.