

## Chapter 7

# Advancing Gender Equality through Sport

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**G**ender equality is one of the fundamental principles of the Commonwealth. It is a key factor in eradicating poverty, increasing inclusion, and eliminating discrimination and violence against women. Gender equality underpins major development goals, including ensuring education for all, improving child and maternal health, and combating HIV and AIDS. It is also a key factor in enhancing democracy and peace. There is a well-established tradition of using sport to address issues of empowerment for girls and women, and it can act as a powerful mechanism to challenge social attitudes that legitimise unequal female treatment.

### 7.1 Policy priorities

The Commonwealth's work on gender equality and equity is framed by the Millennium Development Goals. Gender is the explicit focus of Goal 3, 'Promote gender equality and empower women', and is also recognised as an underpinning factor across all aspects of development that the MDGs address. Gender is recognised as particularly important to the MDGs relating to poverty and hunger (MDG 1), universal primary education (MDG 2), child mortality (MDG 4), maternal health (MDG 5), and combating HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6).

The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005–2015 recognises that global phenomena impact differently on women and men and provides the framework within which the Commonwealth contributes to advancing gender (Commonwealth Secretariat 2005). It focuses on four areas for action:

- I. *Gender, democracy, peace and conflict* addresses the impacts of conflicts on women and girls, who are particularly vulnerable in such situations, and promotes a human rights-based approach to citizenship and peace education that is geared particularly towards young people.
- II. *Gender, human rights and law* addresses discrimination and opportunities at all stages of life and ensures the maintenance

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of rights from one stage to another linked with the achievement of the MDGs and poverty eradication strategies.

- III. *Gender, poverty eradication and economic empowerment* mainstreams gender equality into programmes and processes for poverty eradication and creates enabling environments for women, including social protection and access to education and training.
- IV. *Gender and HIV/AIDS* promotes reproductive and sexual health and rights, halting the spread of HIV and AIDS, and addressing the social and economic impact of the pandemic, in particular on women and girls.

Within the Commonwealth Secretariat, ‘gender equality and equity’ is a cross-cutting programme area and mainstreaming gender issues is a priority focus.

## 7.2 How sport can contribute

Sport has several contributions to make to gender policy priorities in the Commonwealth. It can be used to support the overarching issues of gender inequity and female empowerment and also applied as a tool within more specific aspects of policy, such as improving education and health outcomes for girls and women.

There is a particularly well-established tradition of using sport to address issues of empowerment for girls and women. Sport is widely used in this capacity across Commonwealth member countries and in diverse contexts. In countries where gender equity is well established as a goal and supported by appropriate policy frameworks, sport-based programmes commonly concentrate on challenging attitudinal constraints through the empowerment of individuals. Sport programmes of this type often aim to raise girls’ and women’s confidence and self-esteem through the opportunities that sport provides to gain new skills, enhance physical competence, and develop communication skills through interaction with others taking part (Lindgren et al. 2002).

Sport is also used to address female empowerment in contexts where gender inequity is strongly entrenched and women and girls are formally discriminated against in legal, welfare and religious structures (Brady et al. 2007). This may apply to the population as a whole or to particular cultural groups within it. In these contexts, providing opportunities for girls and women to take part in sport

can itself be an important and visible way of challenging social attitudes that legitimise unequal treatment of females. Sport can be a particularly powerful mechanism for this because taking part in sport directly confronts ideas of women's physical weakness and frailty that underpin popular conceptions of female 'inferiority'.

Sport is used in more targeted ways to address particular aspects of disadvantage for girls and young women that are recognised as development goals. Many programmes directly consider issues of gender equity within their activities by delivering teaching on human rights and equality to girls and women who have been brought together to participate in sport. The experience of participating together in activities away from the domestic environment can also give young women experiences of working together collectively that help build female solidarity (Kay 2010). Programmes support female empowerment through activities directed to education and health, for example, through encouraging attendance and achievement at school, and by delivering education on nutrition and hygiene, sexual health and fertility, and HIV and AIDS education.

Although sport can be used to successfully challenge gender inequity it is important to recognise that sport is not immune from the realities women may face in the wider society in which the activity takes place. Sport can make valuable and important contributions to gender policy priorities but in some circumstances may expose girls and young women to increased risk and possible harm. Ensuring sport-based approaches include appropriate mechanisms to safeguard participants and limit the potential of gender-based violence is critical in maximising contributions to gender policy priorities.

Table 7.1 sets out how sport can be used to support the Commonwealth's gender equality policy priorities.

*Ensuring sport-based approaches include appropriate mechanisms to safeguard participants... is critical*

**Table 7.1 Sport and the Commonwealth's gender equality policy priorities**

<i>How sport can contribute</i>	<i>Considerations for policy formation and development planning</i>
<b>Promote gender equality and empower women (MDG 3)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport provides an environment where gender equality and empowerment can be promoted. Encouraging participation in sport is one way to challenge wider gender norms.</li> <li>• Positive messaging from female sports role models, including athletes, coaches, volunteers and local sports leaders, can also help to challenge gender norms.</li> <li>• Gender sensitive sport programmes, especially if based on peer leadership models, can give young women experience of carrying out leadership roles in their communities and participating in decision-making processes (Saavedra 2009).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote gender sensitive sport programming and sport provision.</li> <li>• Create safe spaces for girls and women to participate in sport and physical activity including carrying out leadership roles.</li> <li>• Strengthen mechanisms that safeguard and protect girls and women taking part in sport and physical activity.</li> <li>• Conduct gender-aggregated monitoring that clearly identifies female participation levels and monitors the number of women in governance and leadership positions within sport bodies and programmes.</li> <li>• Actively promote female sporting role models.</li> </ul>
<b>Gender, poverty eradication, economic empowerment and access to education (Commonwealth action area III and MDG 1)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport-based programmes that focus on female empowerment can make a measured but identifiable contribution to improving women's prospects. For example, sport programmes can help to improve women's employment prospects by linking additional training to girls and women's sports participation, for example in work-related areas like micro-finance (Kay et al. 2012).</li> <li>• Sport can provide both the 'hook' and 'space' for training and capacity building for girls and women.</li> <li>• When used in a targeted and intentional manner sport programmes can help engage and retain girls and young women in primary and secondary education (Nicholls 2009).</li> <li>• Sport events and activities can provide a space for economic activity and trade and be useful spaces to support and encourage women's entrepreneurship and small business.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link employability training and development opportunities to sport-based programmes focused on economic empowerment.</li> <li>• Signpost female sport participants to support, education and development opportunities.</li> <li>• Support targeted entrepreneurship and small business around sporting events and activities.</li> </ul>

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**Table 7.1 Sport and the Commonwealth’s gender equality policy priorities (cont.)**

<i>How sport can contribute</i>	<i>Considerations for policy formation and development planning</i>
<b>Gender, democracy, peace and conflict and gender, human rights and law (Commonwealth action areas I and II)</b>	
<p>Issues around protecting and promoting human rights, upholding the rule of law, democracy building and peace and conflict are complex and layered. Viewed through a gender mainstreaming lens contributions from sport must be made through co-operation with other strategies and interventions, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting young women to participate in sport programmes, which can develop their self-confidence, establish supportive networks and provide safe spaces for addressing gender-based issues (Brady 2005; Brady et al. 2007).</li> <li>• Establishing safe spaces through sport programmes that can provide girls and young women with opportunities to discuss and develop their understanding of gender equity and human rights (Brady and Khan 2002; Belawa 2005).</li> <li>• Providing leadership skills through sport programmes that can support young women’s roles as participants in democracy-building and conflict resolution.</li> <li>• As sport is attractive to boys and men, sport programmes can be valuable spaces for community interaction and gender workshops, for boys and parents. This can provide a platform to promote ideas of human rights and gender equity to wider social networks and address generational and male resistance to female empowerment (Kay et al. 2012).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen legislation and policy frameworks to address gender-based violence within sport and physical activity.</li> <li>• Implement initiatives to identify, develop and promote female leadership in sport and physical activity.</li> <li>• Include men and boys in gender sensitive programming within gender-based violence prevention.</li> </ul>

(Continued)

**Table 7.1 Sport and the Commonwealth’s gender equality policy priorities (cont.)**

<i>How sport can contribute</i>	<i>Considerations for policy formation and development planning</i>
<b>Gender and HIV and AIDS (Commonwealth action area IV)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport programmes that target female empowerment often include, or are linked to, training or discussion focused on sexual and reproductive health and HIV and AIDS (Saveedra 2009; Kay 2010). This is due to recognition that well designed, gender sensitive sport programmes can provide an effective space for health education, peer led discussions and for training young women to be active campaigners for sexual health and HIV and AIDS knowledge in their communities (Kay et al. 2012).</li> <li>• Existing research suggests that health knowledge given to participants in sport programmes is shared with other girls and women in families and communities (Kay 2009).</li> <li>• Sport can be used as an outreach tool for engaging hard-to-reach marginalised groups of young women and involving them in effective HIV/AIDS health education programmes (Clark 2006; Delvaa et al. 2010; Marco 2009).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport programmes constitute a means to deliver effective messaging and education on sexual health, including information on drug and alcohol consumption.</li> <li>• Utilise sport events and programmes for health messaging, awareness raising and education campaigns on HIV and AIDS.</li> <li>• Integrate HIV and AIDS health messaging and education, supported by appropriate expertise, into community sport initiatives targeting girls and young women.</li> </ul>

### 7.3 Case study examples

Many initiatives that use sport as a tool in development work have a strong gender focus. If well managed and supported by appropriate safeguard mechanisms sport programmes can provide secure, engaging spaces for girls and women to interact, and can also be useful sites to link in education and development opportunities. In many cultures sport is traditionally male dominated so encouraging female participation, development and leadership in sport is considered valuable in challenging gender norms and inequalities.

**GOAL – India**

Initiative	GOAL is a collaborative, multi-stakeholder initiative that links the private and NGO sectors. Launched in Delhi, India, the programme uses netball as a tool for individual development and social inclusion. It is implemented by the Naz Foundation India Trust and financed and supported by Standard Chartered Bank and volunteers. GOAL engages 14–19 year old girls and young women from low-income families and urban slums in an activity-based programme that teaches life skills; self-confidence, communication skills, health and hygiene and financial literacy. Some graduates of this programme go on to become Goal Champions, which involves being trained as leaders to deliver the curriculum and coach netball. The programme is being rolled out in other countries including Bangladesh, Indonesia and Nigeria. GOAL aims to involve 100,000 girls and young women by 2013.
Policy context	GOAL is a Standard Chartered Community Investment initiative run in partnership with local and international NGOs.
Further information	<a href="http://www.nazindia.org/goal.htm">www.nazindia.org/goal.htm</a>

**Empowerment of girls through sport – Bangladesh**

Initiative	This initiative supports social interaction amongst girls through sport, and provides a platform to challenge societal barriers to their full participation in community life and decision-making. In Bangladesh, playing sport increases the visibility of adolescent girls and provides opportunities for them to participate in physical activity and social interaction with peers that was previously unavailable. Community mobilisers provide community consultation and direct advocacy with family members, teachers and influential members of the community to sensitise decision-makers about the concept of adolescent girls participating in sport and highlighting the physical, social and psycho-social benefits of participating in physical activity. When members of the community see girls participating in sport and games, learning new skills and gaining a better understanding of their bodies the perception of what it means to be an adolescent girl changes. For the girls, having the opportunity to participate allows them to become more aware of their capabilities and explore their physicality in a safe and supportive environment.
Policy context	The National Child Policy approved in March 2011
Further information	<a href="http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh">www.unicef.org/bangladesh</a>

### She Got Power – Zambia

Initiative	National Organisation for Women and Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation (NOWSPAR) advocates for policies and legal frameworks that promote participation of women and girls in sport. The NOWSPAR ‘She’s Got Power’ programme is supported the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Women Win. The programme uses sport as a platform to engage girls to deliver a multi-pronged curriculum covering advocacy skills, health, self-awareness, gender-based violence awareness and financial literacy. The programme also engages sport stakeholders to adopt codes of conduct that provide a safe environment for girls and women and to undertake training. The programme provides examples of effective reflexive and decentralised policy frameworks supporting SDP and includes methods for linking sport and other policy domains relevant to social inclusion, employment and social capital.
Policy context	National Gender Policy (2000) and Anti Gender-Based Violence Act (2010)
Further information	<a href="http://www.nowspar.org">www.nowspar.org</a>

### The Pakistan Association for Women’s Sport (PAWS) – Pakistan

Initiative	PAWS is active in promoting the achievements of girls and women in physical education and sport and overcoming the challenges they face. Understanding of the values of PE and sport is improving and participation rates are increasing, alongside developments in most other Muslim countries. There is collaboration between the National Olympic Committee, provincial ministries and sports boards, and women do compete at national and international competition. The quadrennial Women’s Islamic Games held in Tehran from 1993–2005 offered ‘... a way of increasing participation of women and girls’. There are however concerns about the standards of current engagement of girls and women in the field of sport. Challenges include social and religious conditions, inadequate funding, poor training standards, organisation and facilities, no centre of excellence and lack of research studies that focus on improving future opportunities for girls and women.
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