

Promoting Sport in Development
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All around the world, sport is improving health – both mind and body. It is teaching important life lessons about respect, leadership and cooperation. It is promoting equality for all and bridging divides among people.

UNICEF is now incorporating the power and potential of sport, recreation and play into its work in countries around the world. We are developing partnerships with all sectors of society, from governments, to the sports world, to civil society in all its diversity, to get girls and boys on to sports fields and playgrounds, and to educate children and their families about the benefits of physical activity.

Furthermore, the benefits of sport are more than just physical. Sport provides an effective means to help achieve goals in health, education, HIV/AIDS, child protection and child development. In the spirit of the 2004 European Year of Education through Sport and the upcoming 2005 International Year of Sport and Physical Education, we will continue to encourage these efforts around the world.

Globally, there are many challenges to promoting Sport for All in developing countries.

First, is children's time. In many countries, children must contribute to the survival of their families. It can be difficult to find time to play, yet this must be carefully encouraged as it is not only important for their healthy development, it is their basic right.

Second, programmes must be inclusive and emphasize sport for *all*. Special focus needs to be placed on gender equality, the participation of disabled children and youth, the inclusion of orphans and vulnerable children and providing access to sport within marginalized and hard-to-reach communities.

Third, physical education programmes should be seen as a fundamental part of quality education but is increasingly marginalized within schools.

Fourth, we need to know more on the development impact of sports initiatives. Intuitively, we know sport works. We now need to back these anecdotes with solid evidence. For example, does sport in schools help increase attendance rates?

A fifth challenge is that many countries around the world are devastated by conflict and other social divisions. At the same time, sport programmes can be a powerful means of bridging these divides.

Sixth, infrastructure and equipment costs can be very high, which is of particular concern as our aim is to reach the poorest communities.

Finally, there is a danger that sports will be viewed as a luxury, making it difficult to mobilize resources.

To meet these challenges, we need to work in partnership. We need to help governments to develop comprehensive strategies to ensure that the right of every child to play is realized. This means encouraging Ministries to work together and mobilize resources. It means engaging National Sports Associations, youth organizations, the private sector and civil society to actively support these initiatives.

Our vision is clear. We see schools providing physical education as part of their daily curriculum and spaces where children out of school can safely play and spend their time. We see teachers trained in physical education and parents, young people and other community members trained as coaches. We see our children growing up healthy, committed to family and friends, prepared for the workplace and the responsibilities of citizenship.

We challenge the world to share this vision and to reclaim children's right to play.