

The Ways for Women Empowerment through Sports

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Abstract

The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), proposed gender mainstreaming as a key strategy to reduce inequalities between women and men. Gender mainstreaming, known also as mainstreaming a gender perspective, is "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies, and programmes, in any area and at all levels".¹ It is a call to all Governments and other actors to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs, so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively.² In other words, it is a call to place human relations, as manifested in their "male" and "female" roles, at the centre of all programming, action, and evaluation, instead of treating these as marginal, or even "ghettoised" phenomena. Gender mainstreaming thus underscores the principle that there can be no sustainable development as long as discrimination of one of the two sexes/genders exists. The injustice created by inequalities based on gender/sex discrimination threatens in the long run not only the discriminated gender but the entire society. *"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)**

Introduction

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 an average, women globally earn only slightly more than 50% of what men earn. 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. 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 Millennium Development Goals (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. Legal and economic reforms have also begun to remove some of the structural barriers to women's full social, cultural and economic participation. Achieving gender equity and empowerment of women requires systematic and sustained attention in all policy areas. This practice is known as gender mainstreaming and the gender mainstreaming requires two actions:

1. Integrating concerns about gender equality into the analyses and formulation of all policies, programs and projects; and
2. 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.

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.

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.

Importance of sports for Gender mainstreaming

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.

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. 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 sports. 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.

At the same time, many international frameworks support women's participation in sport, with some national laws requiring equal access and opportunities for females. 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:

- 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.

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. 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.

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.

This is the common phenomenon that 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. It is a mistake, however, to assume that this is because girls and women do not wish to participate. Globally, so many countries hampered by conservative culture that secludes its women and girls from society including India. The country's poor performance on women's empowerment and gender equality. 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. It is a mistake, however, to assume that this is because girls and women do not wish to participate. Globally, so many countries hampered by conservative culture that secludes its women and girls from society including India. The country's poor performance on women's empowerment and gender equality is also reflected in the gender

development index. That is, India is ranked 132 out of 148 countries on Gender Development Index as per the 2013 Global Human Development Report. Women in India are not encouraged to participate actively in sports. The conditions for Indian women to take up sports are subpar, especially at an international level. The resources to make successful Indian women's teams are readily available, but just need to be utilized. In this context, the Sports Council of India still advocates several policies in favor of sports and environment friendly activities with the constant co-operation from the people especially from the female participants. In the light of its policy of gender equality, Council attaches great importance to the promotion of girls and women.

In case of Kerala the picture is quite interesting. The state has consistently proved to be a mine of athletic talent throughout the history of organized athletics activity of the country. Unlike other Indian states, Kerala is the only state having better female participation in every domain such as social, economic, political and sports, in which the role of women in sports, games and physical activities in Kerala have attained greater attention from all over the world. Women athletes of Kerala, who raised their abilities to make the country in bigger. Tintu Luka, the third Indian woman to enter the semi-finals of an Olympics event, is their latest object of pride. The representative figures from the state include-MD Valsamma, PT Usha, Shiny Wilson, Mercy Kuttan, Rosa Kutty, Padmini Thomas, Philomina Thomas, Saramma, Tessymol, K A Beenamol, Anju Bobby George, Chitra Soman, Sinimol Paulose, Preeja Sreedharan and so on were received roll of honor at the national and international level. Out of the 16 Arjuna Award winners in the state, 14 are women. The medal hunting women athletes in Kerala, now-a-days, inspired a whole new generation of girls who ran barefoot in the hills.

The above pictures show the ability of Kerala women in Sports. The state is not in behind of sports. The ample oportunities and the encouragements are the threteninfg factors that hamper this development. From this we can understand that Kerala has produced a large number of medal hunting women athletes, mostly runners over the last three decades. In which most of them developed their career and professionalism from the tracks of Palakkad district in Kerala. Palakkad contributed much to the Indian sports and games ever since for India. The present culture of Kerala with its high profile in the socio-economic background is a real noticeable factor in development.

Gender discrimination continues to be an enormous problem within Indian society. Traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary status within the household and workplace. This drastically affects women's health, financial status, education, and political involvement.

Conclusion

The Gender equity and equality to great extent depend on the mantel strength of the people. In this connection apart from derived physical and mental well-being enjoyed by physically active girls and women, a well-designed sport and physical activity sport can provide a platform to enable positive life changes. The involvement of the women in sports will reduce their tension and give more confidence that will regularly raise their confidence. This situation needs a good background from the state itself. The prevailing cultural and social barriers stand as an obstacle in their development scenario. That situation should change. Then only the women with their spirit in sports can be regenerated.

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

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