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## Empowering girls and women through sport and physical activity

**Ravi V Gola**

### Abstract

Girls and women face obstacles when it comes to empowerment, whether it is cultural, socioeconomic, political or religious. As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Moldova, I tried to help the girls and women in my community overcome some of these obstacles by promoting female participation in physical education and sports. Primary obstacles were the poor insulation and heating in the gymnasium, which prevented girls and women from participating in sports and physical education from October-April. Working with a Let Girls Learn (LGL) grant allowed us to repair the condition of the gymnasium, add additional sports teams and clubs to the school, and introduce girls to opportunities in sports through a lecture series. As a result of the interventions, more females participated in physical education classes and sports.

**Keywords:** Girls, women, through, physical activity, physical education

### Introduction

In recent years, sports and physical activity as a strategy for the empowerment of girls and women has been gaining recognition worldwide "Sports is a dynamic and fast-growing sector with an estimated macro-economic impact, and can contribute to the Lisbon objectives of growth and job creation. It can serve as a tool for local and regional development, urban In recent years, sport and physical activity as a strategy for the empowerment of girls and women has been gaining recognition worldwide "Sport is are more likely to attend school and participate in society. When women and girls can walk on the playing field, they are more likely to step into the classroom, the boardroom, and step out as leaders in society

Girls and women face a disproportionate number of life Challenges, which reduce their ability to achieve their full potential. Gender-based discrimination, as well as different degrees and forms of inequalities increase for girls during adolescence. Women believe that sport and physical activity is an effective strategy in working towards this shared goal. Experts agree that sport and physical activity involvement can potentially offer a wide range of life benefits for girls and women. The International Platform on Sport and Development, a platform dedicated to the thematic field of sport and underscores the role of sport in promoting gender equity. The platform cites a number of benefits for physically active girls and women. Sport involvement can play a significant role in promoting the physical and mental well-being of girls and women fostering opportunities for their leadership and achievement, initiating social inclusion social integration of girls and women, and challenging gender norms.

Empowering Girls and Women through Sport and Physical Activity is an impact assessment and research publication, which focuses on the effect of sport and physical activity programmes on the lives of girls and women around the world and how these programmes are developed.

Physical activity can empower individual girls and women. Involvement in sport and physical activity can, for example, build life skills, confidence and body awareness and may create social networks, which result in dramatic positive life changes for participants. We have seen that involvement in sport and physical activity can positively change existing gender norms and help girls and women move into public spaces. Moreover, sport and physical activity programmes provide opportunities to bring communities together and help realize development.

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### **Different Programmes**

Women believe that sport and physical activity programmes aimed at empowering girls and women should be grounded in a women's rights based approach. This means that addition to engaging girls and women in sport and physical activity, programmes must provide girls and women with information, life skills, resources and services aimed at advancing their life positions. We consider the empowerment and autonomy of girls and women and the programmes. We seek to empower girls and women and their communities.

### **Key Components of Successful Sport and Physical Activity**

Based on our research we recommend three key components of successful sport and physical activity programmes aimed at empowering and advancing the position of girls and women. These include

#### **Life Skills Education**

##### **Female Coaches, trainers and referees**

##### **Safe Spaces**

All our programme partners and many of those in our affiliated network work to ensure high quality programmes that are grounded in women's rights based approach and that have shown potential to be sustainable. And measures to provide life skills education, to develop and insist on female coaches, trainers and referees and to ensure safe spaces.

#### **Life Skills Education**

Sport and physical activity programmes can be used as a platform to provide girls and women with life skills education. Life skills education for girls and women taking part in sport and physical activity is an integral part of sport curriculum. These programmes recognize the importance of providing girls and women with knowledge and skills necessary to enhance the quality of their lives.

Depending on the specific needs and life circumstances of participants, life skills education can range from health education sessions, addressing basic personal hygiene and or HIV/AIDS to discussion groups, which teach and encourage decision-making, leadership skills and financial literacy. Life skills education also involves educating girls and women about their reproductive rights. Life skills education is usually provided in spaces girls and women find familiar and where they feel safe, such as spaces and facilities within their schools or on sport fields, as a part of practice time. In many cases, the life skills education sessions are in the form of peer education, meaning that the facilitators and educators of the life skills sessions are sport participants in the same age group and from the same background as the girls taking part in the sessions.

##### **Female Coaches, Trainers and Referees**

Female coaches, trainers and referees are crucial to ensuring the success of sport and physical activity programmes aiming to empower girls and women. Prioritizing female coaches, trainers and referees creates leadership opportunities for girls and women. Who are coaches some sport programmes later recruit them as staff members who are given responsibilities ranging from organizational management and administrative duties to organizing tournaments and supervising teams. In the long term, with the appropriate technical training to develop their skills, these girl and women are strong candidates for influential positions in traditionally male dominated sport governing bodies. Female coaches, trainers

and referees are very important as role models for girls and women. Girls and women who have strong female role models may be encouraged to stay positive and to protect and take better care of themselves. Moreover, female coaches, trainers and referees play an important role in assuring that girls and women feel safe and that their specific needs are met. Many coaches and trainers with Women have spoken with say that girls and women feel more comfortable conveying their needs to female coaches. Trainers and referees rather than male ones. For example, if a girl has menstrual pain and is unable to practice she is likely to feel more at ease communicating her situation to a female rather than male.

##### **Safe Spaces**

Sport and physical activity programmes provide girls and women with the opportunity to convene in public spaces around a common interest. In this way girls and women are given the chance to assert their independence outside their homes, to build strong social networks and to increase the likelihood of their participation as active citizens within their communities and beyond. Restricting girls from moving beyond the home or areas around the home has traditionally functioned as an important safety component. In order to ensure that girls and women enjoy the positive benefits offered by sport and physical activity involvement. Participants and their families must feel comfortable and secure to attend regular sport and physical activity practice outside the home area. Addressing safety concerns should be important priority of all sport and physical activity programmes that seek to empower girl's women, when the families of participants are supportive of their decision to take part in sport and physical activity, and then they are more likely to enjoy trainings with ease and free of stress

##### **Conclusion**

Gender inequality was considered the most fundamental of the many gender issue present in the community. Once we had decided to focus on improving gender equality, through physical activities and we involved the community in choosing specific areas to be addressed and identifying the resources that were available such as school playgrounds for hosting sporting events, classrooms for community workshops, and government support. In this way the entire community was involved in action plan

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