



Background

Since the year 2000, the United Nations (UN) has increasingly promoted Sport for Change or Sport for Development as a tool for achieving development goals.¹ In 2003, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution relating to *“Sport, as a means to promote education, health, development and peace”*. It calls on its Member States to use sport more intensively to achieve development goals.² Sport has been recognised as a key tool to support the achievement of a number of sustainable development goals, including Quality Education, Gender Equality, and Climate Action.³

The 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015 by the United Nations, states that *“sport is an important enabler of sustainable development”* and values *“the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives.”*⁴

Comic Relief defines Sport for Change as bringing about positive social change for individuals and communities through the intentional use of sport and physical activity.⁵ Sport has the power to bring diverse people together around a common interest. It provides social connection, develops skills, and improves mental and physical health. Engaging hard to reach groups in sport can help to challenge stereotypes, while bringing people together through sport creates opportunities to discuss challenging topics. Sport alone will not deliver social change, but combined with a broader project, sport can be used intentionally to achieve positive outcomes.

In order to ensure that Sport for Change programmes do not replicate conflicts in wider society or negative perceptions of certain groups, risks to all participants must be analysed and addressed, and safeguarding embedded throughout the programme. When delivered effectively, Sport for Change promotes harmony between groups and supports social and emotional development such as dealing with disappointment, managing emotions, being self-aware, and having positive friendships and relationships.⁶

Sport for Change supports Education for Sustainable Development's priority action area 4 *empowering and mobilising youth*⁷ by: promoting inclusion and participation; increasing confidence; centring and amplifying child and youth voice; and enabling them to influence societal change.

¹ <https://www.sportanddev.org/en/learn-more/what-sport-and-development>

² <https://www.sport-for-development.com/essentials?id=1#cat1>

³ Ibid.

⁴ https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2022/06/Thematic-Paper_Sport-and-YPF_FINAL.pdf

⁵ https://assets.ctfassets.net/zsfivwzfgl3t/22B4j4cUqHEty61hQn2kT9/f58620b8c8e77148652a6c0152d3397f/sport_for_change_booklet.pdf

⁶ See Link's Approach to Social and Emotional Learning: <https://linkededucation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Links-Approach-to-SEL.pdf>

⁷ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/toolbox/priorities#paa4>

About Link

Link Education is Scotland's leading international education charity, working to improve education for children and communities in some of the poorest rural areas of Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda, and helping thousands of people escape the cycle of poverty. We focus on enhancing teaching and learning in schools, as well as building life-skills and promoting inclusion for the most marginalised. Our vision is one where all children have access to good quality education, giving them hope and a strong foundation for a brighter future. We take both a top-down and bottom-up approach to transform education, supporting broad system and school-wide improvements while recognising the need for more tailored, localised support to overcome specific challenges.

Approach

Sport for Change offers a useful tool for delivering some of Link's project objectives, especially those which deal with attitudinal change and social and emotional learning, or which address issues which may be considered sensitive, such as sexual and reproductive health, or violence against women and girls.

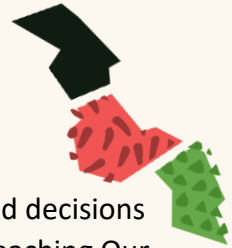
Where appropriate, we integrate Sport for Change approaches within our wider projects to support holistic solutions. In line with our partnership approach, we join together with experts in Sport for Change, combining our expertise in teaching with others' expertise in sport.

We aim to use sports which are popular with our participants, but also use this opportunity to challenge stereotypes, for example by getting boys involved in netball and girls in football.



Experience

REACHING OUR GOALS - MALAWI



Reaching Our Goals aims to improve adolescent girls' ability to make informed decisions about their future, better enabling them to lead the lives they choose. The Reaching Our Goals participants are currently enrolled in our TEAM Girl Malawi project, which provides accelerated learning and supports transition back into school, training or employment. Recognising that the girls who face the greatest barriers have the lowest attendance and are most likely to drop out of the TEAM Girl programme, we added a Sport for Change element in selected learning centres.

Facilitators at community-based learning centres were trained as coaches on Sport for Change, using a netball-based curriculum. With the support of community members, learners undergo sessions targeting life-skills, including rights and responsibilities; self-confidence and self-esteem; gender equality, gender-based violence, and child marriage. Empowerment training sessions focus on imparting knowledge for girls and boys to understand their rights and responsibilities, as duty bearers, and to effectively participate in project activities and events in their wider community. Adaptations are made to ensure that learners with disabilities are fully included.



Netball sessions emphasise cooperation, the importance of teamwork and valuing the contributions of all team members. They promote the message of being a “good sport” and congratulating others on their wins. The sessions support players to recognise that whilst they might not win, they did their best and gained something from the participation. The sessions also focus on developing problem-solving skills, setting and attaining goals together. Players bring issues that they face in their household or community and apply the principles of a netball game to find a solution.

Girls who participated in the netball sessions demonstrated improved social and emotional skills. There was a 14% increase in girls reporting improved self-confidence and self-esteem and a 20% increase in girls reporting improved confidence to challenge gender norms and stereotypes.⁸ Noticeable also, is the confidence gained by the learners who are now in a better position to demand their rights as well as report abuse. Facilitators also reported an improvement in their relationship with learners, their ability to understand their students' needs, and therefore how to support their learning more effectively.

This had a positive effect on girls' attendance at learning centres. Since the introduction of Sport for Change, attendance at community-based education increased, reaching 75% compared to 70% for non-participating centres.⁹ Improved attendance also resulted in a higher learner retention rate, with half of the participating centres achieving 100% learner retention. Both learners and facilitators noted that the introduction of the netball sessions motivated learners to attend more regularly and prevented dropouts.¹⁰

"Attendance was notably high on the days we were having netball sessions. A good number of them extended their regular attendance to [community learning centre]"
- Coach at Lodzanyama centre

"Both lessons and playtime were interesting to me [...] when we played netball, we were taken off our worries"
- Learner at Chauma community learning centre

CASE STUDY

Chifuniro is aged 21 and lives in Chauma village. Her dad died when she was a little girl and she was brought up by her mother. She now lives on her own and has two children to support. She survives by doing piece works for other families in the community.

She usually came to the community learning centre late due to the high household chores as well as the need to find food for her house as she is not married.

"Before Reaching Our Goals, I used to come late to school. I would find my friends already given exercises. I would not attempt on the exercise because I missed the lesson"

She joined the netball sessions at the time the Reaching Our Goals project was starting at the learning centre. She quickly became interested in the netball sessions. This led to an improvement in her attendance at netball sessions as well as community learning classes. Her academic performance improved, and she started doing well in her favourite subjects (English and Livelihoods).

She also said that she liked netball and some indoor games because it helps socializing with friends and learn other thing that are important to her life.

"Yes. With Reaching Our Goals, It's not just playing netball, you also learn other things that are important"

⁸ Reaching Our Goals Year 1 Report, June 2022

⁹ Reaching Our Goals Attendance Learning Paper, July 2022

¹⁰ Ibid.