

## Thoughts from the Sport and Development Field

*Author: Poul Hansen Head of Office, United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace*

Sport is being used worldwide to advance child youth development and education. Existing evidence shows that developmentally appropriate programmes for children can help ensure they receive the positive experiences and stimulation through sport, physical education and play that they need to take advantage of critical developmental windows and establish a foundation for success.

The integration of physical education and sport into school activities can build on children's early experiences by:

- Ensuring children develop their physical and motor capacities to lead active, healthy lives - a major protective factor in preventing non-communicable disease
- Providing children with opportunities to have fun and be active, reinforcing their desire to make physical activity a lifelong habit
- Helping children understand and overcome barriers to physical activity
- Informing, equipping and motivating children to make healthy lifestyle choices by integrating sport and physical activity with health education courses
- Improving children's relaxation, concentration and mood state in school - helping them focus and learn
- Attracting more children to enroll and stay in school to take advantage of opportunities for sport and play that they may not otherwise have

Community sport programmes provide children marginalized by poverty, gender, disability, family dissolution, ethno-cultural background, and conflict with

- Positive adult role models to inform and guide their choices
- Learning and skill-building opportunities that build the self-esteem and self-confidence necessary to their mental health
- Sport training and team experiences to help develop effective social and communication skills, build positive relationships, make friends, and find social support
- Opportunities to express their needs and interests and exercise leadership on the sport field and in their communities
- Life skills that increase their employability and chances of successfully transitioning into the labour market with opportunities for advancement
- Second chances for those engaged in delinquency, criminal gangs and armed conflict by offering a path to a positive alternative lifestyle

In response to this the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group was created in 2004, hosted by NGO Right To Play, to articulate and promote the adoption of policy recommendations to governments for the integration of sport and physical activity into their domestic and international development strategies and programmes. In 2008 SDP IWG mandate was renewed and was incorporated into the United Nations under the auspices of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace.

Within SDP IWG there are five thematics:

- Sport and Health
- Sport and Child & Youth Development
- Sport and Gender
- Sport and Persons with Disabilities

- Sport and Peace

Sport and Child & Youth Development thematic was the first to be launched in 2009 thanks to the funding and support provided by the United Kingdom.

While international momentum around Sport for Development and Peace is growing, more work still needs to be done. Governments need to be aware of the power of sport to help them meet their domestic development goals, and the importance of integrating sport into their development strategies and approaches. We hope that national governments will embrace the power of Sport for Development and Peace and seize the opportunity to make true policy change that will contribute to attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

For further information on SDP IWG please visit [www.un.org/sport](http://www.un.org/sport).