



A WINNING COMBINATION: EDUCATION AND SPORTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This joint publication reflects a number of contributions. A first draft was developed by Heather Bourbeau (FHI 360), and additional content was provided by Emma Wagner (Save the Children), Mary Joy Pigozzi (EAC), Michael Cacich (EAC), Lynn Mortensen (FHI 360), and Jade McCulloch (EAC).

Education Above All joins its Educate A Child programme and Save the Children in thanking the contributors for their valuable input and collaboration on this important piece.

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FOREWORD

Each one of us finds our own individual pathway in the world. A pathway that begins in childhood. Looking back, that pathway is filled with memories, with joy and sorrow, with successes and, yes, some failures, too. For all of us, games played an important role in our lives when we were children. For many, physical activities and, possibly, competitive sports remain important parts of our lives. Education was also a part of our lives, and for some it still is, providing among other things, additional opportunities to meet and get to know others and other ways of life and living.

For these reasons, it is especially meaningful to be part of this publication that addresses the importance of both education and sport and, in particular, the nexus between the two. We have always known, the importance of the mind and body relationship in sports. Now, the importance of the mind and body relationship in education, and learning in particular, is becoming increasingly recognised. This publication is an important step in broadcasting the need to further enhance these critical relationships and in showing the many ways in which they are manifested.

Children in less privileged circumstances are often among those who have fewer opportunities to succeed in either education or sports. This important publication from the Education Above All's Educate A Child programme and Save the Children demonstrates, in no uncertain terms, the criticality of integrating education and physical activity to further the wellbeing, healthy development, and learning of all children who have the right to follow the best possible pathway to their future.

Mary Joy Pigozzi

Executive Director

Educate A Child

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ACRONYMS

CHANGE!	Children's Health, Activity and Nutrition: Get Educated!
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DPO	United Nations Department of Peace Operations
EAA	Education Above All Foundation
EAC	Educate A Child
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IRC	International Rescue Committee
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MONUC	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAY	Physically Active Youth Programme
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMIT	United Nations Integrated Mission in East Timor
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall benefits of both education and sports, individually, to children and society at large, are well recognised. However, there is a growing body of experience and literature demonstrating that education and physical activity (including play) are intricately linked. When combined, they can have a profound multiplier effect on student well-being and learning. Education and sports both foster the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for success.

When children participate in sports and physical activities as part of their education, students are learning and integrating key life skills and attitudes related to teamwork, fair play, respect, cooperation, and tolerance. These skills and attitudes provide the necessary foundation for greater academic achievement as well as social inclusion and social cohesion in local communities and the larger society. By integrating education and sports in the design and implementation of education initiatives, learning and skills development can be introduced or reinforced inside the classroom and on the sports field.

Both education and sports also provide avenues for improving knowledge and skills that are important in maintaining good mental health. When used in combination, we believe these outcomes can be enhanced.

Sports and physical activity can help children improve their cognitive development and academic performance, help to reduce disruptive behaviour and improve learning skills such as concentration, motivation and engagement. Changes that occur in the brain as a result of physical activity and movement are associated with improved information processing, memory, retrieval, and improved attention span, all processes used in learning acquisition.

Education Above All Foundation's (EAA) Educate A Child programme and Save the Children, an international NGO collaborated on this report. The aim is to illustrate that when physical activity and

sports are purposefully designed and included in educational settings or sports are used as a platform to promote education, the positive benefits to the individual and society can be profound. We support the engagement of children in a wide range of educational and sports activities (including play) to improve not only conventional academic outcomes, but equally ensure their social, physical, and emotional well-being. A review of experience and research indicates:

- Education and sports provide opportunities to learn key life skills;
- Education and sports programmes can foster a sense of belonging and acceptance;
- Education and sports can provide opportunities for improving knowledge and skills that are important in maintaining mental acuity and health;
- With its broad popular appeal, sports can bring children, adolescents and the wider community together, and provide a forum for dialogue on development challenges;
- Physical activity and movement positively impact brain development and learning, especially during the early years of development;
- Protecting children and young people is at the heart of any development intervention, including education and sports programmes.

At the international policy level, education and sports are important drivers of many UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 3 Good Health and Well-Being; SDG 5 Gender Equality; SDG 10 Reduced Inequality; and SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. As the global community works to achieve the SDGs, innovative and multi-sectoral approaches, such as integrating education and sports, can enhance outcomes across multiple sectors.



Photo Credit: © UNHCR/Jesuit Refugee Service/Irene Galera

Sport for Protection programmes aim to bring many benefits, including social cohesion within refugee communities in Chad.

WHY AND WHY NOW?

The timing of this paper builds on the momentum of the recent Summer and Winter Olympics, Commonwealth Games, the Transforming Education Summit, and the 2022 FIFA World Cup and forthcoming global sporting events in 2023. The Education Above All Foundation (EAA), through its Educate A Child (EAC) programme, and Save the Children, an international NGO, see this as an opportune time to shine a spotlight on the complementarity of education and sports, and their ability to contribute to improved learning outcomes as well as enhanced physical and mental well-being.

It is important to establish a precedent for future education, sports, and other global events. This will serve to highlight the important beneficial effect of both education and sports. In addition, education and sports contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent a broad programmatic effort to improve the lives of people globally.

Even before the COVID-19 school closures, there were over 59 million children out of school at the primary level around the world. Globally due, in large part, to population growth and an increase in conflicts, the number of children out of school at primary school age has remained around this level for more than 10 years. (UNICEF, 2022)

Before COVID-19, the world was already facing a learning crisis, with nearly 60 per cent of ten-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries suffering from learning poverty – meaning they were unable to read and understand a simple story. Across the world, 250 million children – including many of the most vulnerable – are not learning basic literacy and numeracy skills even though half have attended school for at least four years. (UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2013/2014, pg. 18)

The COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures and disruptions, which have exacerbated existing

inequalities in education, have impacted even more children, sharply deepening the learning crisis. Particularly in low-income, fragile and conflict-affected countries with weak education systems, the pandemic has compounded the education inequalities and discrimination faced by so many children. Simulation models based on the latest available data and evidence indicate that the pandemic has likely caused a sharp increase in global learning poverty, to an estimated 70 per cent. In the face of huge challenges, teachers and children have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptation, but the pandemic has had a devastating impact on student learning and well-being. (UNICEF, 2022)

The Education Above All Foundation, established in 2012 by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, has the aim of building a global movement that could contribute to improving the human, social and economic condition of the world's most marginalised through the provision of quality education. With a focus on those affected by poverty, conflict, disaster and discrimination, EAA champions the rights of children, youth and women to empower them to become active members of their communities and realise their potential through quality education access and achievement.

Aiming to trigger significant breakthroughs and a material difference in the lives of children who have no access to primary education, Educate A Child (EAC), a global programme of EAA also launched in 2012, has been helping millions of out of school children (OOSC) all over the world to overcome the access and retention barriers blocking their path to education. Since 2012, EAC and its partners have reached over 11.2 million OOSC at the primary level in 56 countries. With the long-term goal of ensuring OOSC successfully complete a full course of quality primary education, EAC strives to achieve individual

Definition of 'sports' used in this report

For this report, 'sports' are considered any physical activity that is a form of active play or active recreation and that contributes to physical fitness, mental well-being, and social interaction. Sports can be an individual or group activity. It can be organised or casual, competitive or not, unstructured or rule-bound, and includes indigenous sports and games.

(UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2004)

and social outcomes for these children, their communities and a more sustainable world for all.

Save the Children combines extensive programmatic experience in education with advocacy capacity to push for every child, particularly those most impacted by poverty and inequality, to participate in a safe, inclusive, and quality education. Save the Children principally focus on foundational literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning. In 2021, Save the Children worked across 80 countries reaching 12 million children directly through educational programming, including adaptive responses to COVID-19 school closures. This included reaching millions of children experiencing humanitarian crises in 77 countries. In addition, through Save the Children's role as co-lead of the Global Education Cluster, they helped coordinate responses with national and local organisations that reached 20 million children in 2021.

EAA/EAC and Save the Children operate with the belief that it is important to engage children in a wide range of educational and sports activities. Doing so improves not only conventional academic outcomes, but also ensures their social, physical, and emotional well-being.

This report seeks to illustrate that when physical activity and sports are included in educational settings, and when sports is used as a platform to promote education or other development objectives, the positive benefits to the child are significant. By shining a light on this issue, we wish to encourage additional emphasis on creating and fostering more programmes that take advantage of this winning combination. By building on the shared outcomes and enhanced effects of combining education and sports, we can support improved student learning, skills development and emotional well-being.

The Globally-Recognised Rights to Education and Sports

In 1948, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory.” (United Nations, 1948)

More than 30 years ago, the UN Convention on the

Rights of the Child, the world's most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, acknowledged the right of every child to compulsory and free education and to “take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates” (Article 28). It further states that an education “shall be directed to development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (Article 29); with the right to rest and play and recreational activities (Article 31). (United Nations, 1989)

From the twentieth century on, a number of international agreements have encouraged a greater role of sports in education and overall development. For example, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) recognises that:

“Every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport, which are essential for the full development of his personality. The freedom to develop physical, intellectual and moral powers through physical education and sport must be guaranteed both within the educational system and in other aspects of social life.”

(International Charter of Physical Education and Sport - UNESCO, 1978, p3)

The International Olympic Charter notes that one of its fundamental principles is “blending sport with culture and education.” (Olympic Charter, 2020)

The Global Compact on Refugees also recognises the important role that sport can play in social development, inclusion, cohesion, and well-being, in particular for refugee children. The Compact encourages participation in physical activity and sports as important health-promoting measures and advocates for using the power of education and sport in fostering respect and understanding, as well as combating discrimination, (United Nations, 2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has used sports and play programmes to encourage young people, particularly girls and young women, to attend school in refugee camps

across the world. (United Nations, 2018)

The international development community has long recognised the value of sports and education for children, youth and society at large. Further documentation of the individual benefits of education and sports is enumerated in the next section.

The Recognised Individual Benefits of Education and Sports

Education and sports, individually, are important for the social, physical, intellectual, and emotional well-being of children and society more broadly. These benefits are well documented and briefly highlighted below.

a. Benefits of Quality Education

Education involves the holistic development of the individual, which includes cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development. Education, and learning in general, happens in schools and outside the classroom, continues throughout one's life, and yields benefits to both the individual and society as a whole.

The immediate benefits of early childhood, primary and secondary education are well-known. These include learning the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy, social relationships, and emotional skills development necessary to maintain good mental health.

In the longer term, education can benefit the individual by contributing to better long-term health and economic outcomes, better life choices, decreased inequality, reduction in crime and the psychosocial impact of conflict, improved resilience and social cohesion, and reduced early marriage. (WHO, 2020; EAC and R4D, 2015; World Bank, 2011, Oxfam, 2019; Berkley, 2004; UNESCO, 2011; UNSDG, 2020; GPE, 2017)

Quality, safe, inclusive education also benefits the larger society by improving general population health and livelihood outcomes, increasing gender equality, and driving greater political participation and global citizenship. Education can lead to local action on global issues such as climate change, racism (and other forms of discrimination) and economic vitality. Education can shape values,

attitudes, skills and knowledge, promoting positive changes in society (OECD, 2018). Who has access to education, the content and how that education is delivered are central to social stability, equity, and economic progress. Education can provide a balancing force in a global community where economic and social disparities are apparent, and also provide safety and protection in emergency and forced displacement contexts. On the other hand, when education is used to perpetuate discrimination and harmful cultural norms it not only limits potential but can be damaging to society.

Extensive literature exists on the economic, social, health, and other benefits of education to the individual and society, which include, for example:

- The private average global rate of return to one extra year of schooling is about 9 per cent a year and very stable over decades; (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018)
- Education can make communities less vulnerable to climate shock; and (EAC, R4D, 2015)
- Universal girls' education would practically end child marriage, more than halve infant mortality, and drastically reduce early childbearing, overcoming some of the main drivers of gender inequality. (GPE, 2021)

The economic returns to education are even higher for disadvantaged groups and low-income countries. For example,

- A dollar invested in an additional year of schooling, particularly for girls, generates earnings and health benefits of USD\$10 in low-income countries and nearly USD\$4 in lower-middle-income countries. (Education Commission, 2016)
- Investing in out of school children can increase GDP by up to 7 per cent in poor countries. (EAC, R4D, 2013)
- 171 million people can be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills. (UNESCO, 2016)

EAA's EAC programme commissioned research on the consequences of not educating all children.



Primary school children participate in the EAC/EAA-UNHCR Sport for Protection Initiative in Chad.

The research found that it is more expensive to not educate a child than it is to educate that child. When children do not benefit from primary education, they will earn significantly less income over their lifetimes. This economic loss is far greater than the cost to achieve universal primary education in developing countries. In some countries, the economic loss due to OOSC exceeds a full year of national average economic growth. The economic cost of OOSC tends to be highest in countries that have experienced slow growth in the past decade, suggesting that providing a quality primary education for all could contribute to reducing economic inequality between and within countries. (EAC and R4D, 2013)

A study of 20 countries showed that the estimated economic gain from achieving universal primary education exceeds the estimated increase in public spending required to enrol those children in primary school (EAC and R4D, 2013). The researchers concluded that “Until Universal Primary Education

is achieved in countries where progress has stalled, out of school children will continue to represent an unconscionable underinvestment in human capital and a costly barrier that prevents nations from reaching their full economic and social potential.” (EAC and R4D, 2013)

The Chronic Poverty and Education Policy Guide produced by the Chronic Poverty Advisory Network concludes: “Education policies and programmes that succeed in reaching and teaching children from chronically poor backgrounds are associated with faster and more equitable economic growth, more inclusive and cohesive societies, and social transformations, including greater gender equity.” (CPAN, 2017)

b. Benefits of Sports

Physical education, sports, play and sports-related activities can help children develop healthy, active lifestyles, and help prevent non-communicable diseases (WHO, 2018). For people with chronic



conditions or disabilities, physical activity can be critical to maintaining their muscle strength, improving their stamina, controlling swelling and pain, and helping them have physical independence. (CDC, 2022)

Regular physical activity has been shown to help children manage their weight better, have stronger bones, muscles and joints, reduce their risk of type-2 diabetes, lower their blood pressure, have more energy, feel more relaxed, sleep better, and improve their levels of serotonin and endorphins, as well as decrease stress hormones. All of these benefits can lead to healthier states of mind. (Mayo Clinic, 2022)

Physical activity and movement are also important in ensuring good mental health and play a direct role in brain development and learning. The benefits of sports and physical activity can be further enhanced through school-based nutrition and wellness interventions that target student diets and help respond to childhood obesity or malnutrition. (Barnes et al., 2021; Garden et al., 2020)

Recognising the important benefits that physical activity provides, the World Health Organization (WHO) has developed frameworks and guidelines for all age groups. This includes the recommendation that children aged 5-17 years get a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity each day (WHO, 2010, 2017, 2018, 2020). They also recommend that adolescents participate in structured physical activity in schools and communities. Yet a 2019 WHO study found that more than 80 per cent of school-going adolescents globally did not meet current recommendations of at least one hour of physical activity per day (based on data from 1.6 million 11-17-year-old students from 146 countries). (Guthold et al., 2020)

Separately, education and sports have been shown to benefit individuals and society at large. How these two disciplines are interlinked and can enhance their impact is discussed in the next section.

THE EDUCATION AND SPORTS NEXUS

The benefits of both education and sports, individually, are well known. However, research and anecdotal experience suggest that education and physical activity are intricately linked, and when combined, can have an increased effect on student well-being and learning.

The UN has, over the last several decades, stressed this important inter-relationship and stated explicitly how sports contribute to education:

“Sport is recognised as an integral part of quality education and can be used to mobilise and educate individuals, especially youth, and communities. Physical education has been found to increase school achievement, improve school attendance and retention and contribute to social and personal development. Sport is a ‘School for Life’ where individuals can acquire fundamental values and social skills such as respect, discipline, fair play, confidence and tolerance.”

(United Nations, 2008)

When physical activities and sports are included in educational settings, and when sports are used as a platform to support education or other development objectives, outcomes can be mutually reinforcing. There are positive outcomes when education and sports are purposefully implemented in combination with each other.

a. Foster the Development of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes for Personal and Societal Success

Education and sports provide opportunities to learn key life skills, including teamwork and cooperation, focus, and discipline. These are important skills in mastering an academic subject, sporting activity or achieving other life goals. Important information and skills can be introduced or reinforced and applied inside or outside the classroom, on or off the field. Some illustrative examples follow.

Sports and physical activity at school can help children develop self-agency, self-confidence, and leadership skills, and feel more empowered as they practice new skills and work with others towards achievable goals, and create better relationships with teachers and adults (UNICEF, 2019). This can also have a ripple effect throughout their

communities. For example, the Mighty Metres running programme for primary-school children in South Africa worked in underserved communities to provide more regular exercise. They reported positive impacts related to pro-social behaviour, i.e., improved school attendance, fitness levels, social recognition, independency and identification. School principals voluntarily committed their schools to the programme, which takes place on school premises and during school hours. The programme gave medals and certificates to students, whose parents shared their accomplishments with their larger social circles, which further boosted children’s confidence and self-esteem. A report on that programme notes that: “in addition to being more alert in class, the improved self-esteem and pro-social behaviour stemming from taking part in Mighty Metres are positive aspects that relate to positive experience beyond school hours and perceived to enrich children’s personal lives.” (Burnett, 2014)

Participating in sports or other physical activities offers students new opportunities to interact, engage, and learn from one another. Studies have also shown that students who participate in school-based or extra-curricular physical activities are more committed to their studies and participate in more school activities. (Fredricks and Eccles, 2006)

The organisation Right To Play uses play as a primary teaching tool to engage students and improve learning outcomes. Their Enhancing Quality Education through the Power of Play project builds the capacity of teachers to integrate play-based learning into the teaching process. An external evaluation of the programme in six countries (Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Mozambique, Palestine and Tanzania) found that students’ life skills, including collaboration, self-esteem, confidence, and communication skills, improved through the programme for participating students. (Right To Play, 2022)

As schools are places where children naturally gather and spend large parts of the day, they provide an opportunity for developing important life skills. The “Jones Framework,” adapted from CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), groups life skills into three interconnected domains: (1) cognitive skills; (2) emotional competencies; and (3) social and interpersonal skills. In addition to cognitive development,

schools can provide an opportunity to learn and practice social and interpersonal skills that include “understanding social cues, interpreting others’ behaviours, navigating social situations, interactively positively with peers and adults, and other prosocial behaviour.” Jones notes the important role of the school culture and context, appropriate laws and policies, and the community and the teachers in determining outcomes. (Jones and Bouffard, 2012)

“Schools are an important context for children’s social and emotional development. In classrooms and other school settings, children and adolescents need to have skills managing negative emotions, being calm and focussed, following directions, and navigating relationships with peers and adults.”

(Jones and Bouffard, 2012)

The US-based Girls on the Run programme for 3rd - 8th grades, is an after-school physical activity-based positive youth development programme. It is designed to enhance girls’ social, psychological, and physical development. Research has shown that girls who participate in this programme have improved self-esteem, positive connections with others, body size satisfaction, physical self-concept, and commitment to physical activity. (Weiss, 2016)

b. Promote Greater Inclusion, Social Cohesion, and Peace

Children and young people from marginalised groups often encounter prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. In the face of such prejudice and discrimination, it can be difficult for these young people to feel good about themselves and see their identities in a positive light.

Education and sports programmes can foster a sense of belonging and acceptance through positive interactions with peers and others; improve equity and empowerment through skills development; and can be used to support the inclusion and empowerment of members of marginalised communities. These programmes ensure that all children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, ability, or

nationality, have equal opportunities in education and sports programmes. (UNICEF, 2019)

Research shows that while participating in organised physical activities in school or after school, members of marginalised groups can experience relational social inclusion. The benefits of this experience can include a greater sense of belonging, a more positive sense of self or identity, adopting values of mutual respect, and helping build trusting relationships among children’s peers. This serves to create an atmosphere of acceptance and cohesion. Moreover, through education and sports, members of dominant groups can change their perceptions, prejudices, and stereotypes about persons from marginalised groups. Organised physical activities can also provide suitable, safe spaces for marginalised groups to convene and participate in activities that address their physical needs. Research on participation by marginalised youth in sports clubs in Belgium revealed that these youth felt the clubs were environments where they could find “support, meaning, appreciation, security and caring.” (UNICEF, 2019)

The Goals for Peace (Goles por la Paz) programme in Columbia, incorporates homework, reading clubs and supervised learning spaces into its football training programme. These learning methodologies contributed to participants’ sense of purpose and belonging, and children showed more respect and better interaction with their teammates. The programme also successfully integrated girls and boys into the same teams. (Cárdenas, 2012)

One recent study looking at the relationship between physical education and social inclusion for refugees in Europe suggested that when students are involved in games and activities that were adapted from the students’ backgrounds, communication, interaction, and mutual respect can be bolstered. The report highlighted the importance of the awareness and capacity of teachers or coaches to facilitate communication and interaction between refugees and home country pupils. (Papageorgiou et al., 2021)

The social benefits of participation in sports are thought to be especially important for girls, given that many girls in different contexts, particularly during adolescence, have fewer opportunities than boys for social interaction outside family structures.



Photo Credit: © UNHCR/Jesuit Refugee Service/Irene Galera

Primary school children participate in the EAC/EAA-UNHCR Sport for Protection Initiative in Chad.

The participation of women and girls in sports challenges gender stereotypes and discrimination (Women Win; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2012; Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, 2018). Sports, in an educational setting, can foster inclusive practices and encourage the participation of marginalised students, including girls, improving their confidence and self-esteem (UNICEF 2019). In Mali, 96 per cent of teachers in schools with Right To Play programming make sure that girls' voices are heard every day in the classroom, compared with 70 per cent of teachers in non-Right To Play Schools (Right To Play, 2022).

As part of an EAC/EAA-UNHCR Sport for Protection Initiative in Chad, 16 young refugee women representing two-thirds of the facilitators, were trained to become certified sports facilitators. This type of inclusion opportunity serves to promote the empowerment of women in leadership positions within their communities and highlights the importance of gender equality for young girls, showing that women can play sports and engage in physical activity. This is particularly important in environments where female participation can be inhibited by social and cultural norms.

Sports can also contribute to child protection through the reduction of violence and risky behaviour (e.g., non-violent crime, substance abuse, and recidivism), and even reductions in gender-based violence. (UNICEF, 2019)

c. Improve Knowledge and Skills Important for Good Mental Health

Research from the United States found that stress affects a child's likelihood of exhibiting learning difficulties, such as problems with attentiveness, persistence, and flexibility. Stress can also lead to disruptive behaviours in the school environment, including arguing or having difficulty engaging with peers. Furthermore, it can lead to low self-esteem and loneliness (Milkie & Warner, 2011). Unaddressed stress can become toxic, resulting in damaging impacts on brain development and overall well-being. (INEE, 2016)

As a fearful, anxious, stressed, or traumatised child impacted by conflict, crises, or circumstance may not be ready to learn, physical activity can

significantly reduce the symptoms of anxiety (Anderson and Shivakur, 2013) and exercise (through physical education classes, sports or even physical activities at recess) has a positive impact on the symptoms of depression (Bergland, 2013). Research suggests that endorphins produced in the brain during exercise contribute to a general feeling of well-being. Regular physical activity improves levels of serotonin and endorphins and decreases stress hormones, which can lead to healthier states of mind. Physical activity can also boost the body's dopamine levels, which can improve mood. (Ratey, 2008)

Physical activity can help to reduce stress and may help students heal from trauma by working at the cellular level, as well as the social level. Physical activity changes the brain; it reroutes circuits, reduces muscle tension, and releases calming hormones. Exercise can reverse the bad effects of chronic stress on a young body. Physical activity supports affective regulation and concentration. It also releases tensions held within the body and releases chemicals that create feelings of joy and bonding. (Bergholz et al., 2016; Edgework, 2022; Ratey, 2008)

Trauma can involve actual or threatened death, violence, conflict, serious injury or sexual abuse that is witnessed or directly experienced. Trauma can disrupt the brain development of children and have long-lasting negative impacts on their physical and emotional well-being. It can also impact their academic performance, their executive functioning, and their behaviour inside and outside of school. Different traumas affect children differently and to varying extents. One study found that African American and Iraqi refugee youth experienced different impacts on cognitive functioning, including memory, processing speed, and verbal comprehension, from exposure to trauma. (Maynard et al., 2019)

An important part in the recovery from trauma is routine and stability. Schools can provide safe, stable and predictable locations for children to not only learn, but also recover and heal. The International Rescue Committee (IRC), for instance, has a Safe Healing and Learning Space programme for children and adolescents living in conflict and



Integrating sports into education programmes in Colombia has supported the enrolment and retention of children in quality primary education.



Primary students play basketball as part of the EAC/EAA-UNHCR Sport for Protection Initiative in Rwanda.

crisis settings. The programme offers traditional maths and reading lessons alongside social-emotional learning interventions to strengthen brain building, emotion regulation, and positive social skills.

Such programmes help children build and increase their resilience, gain a sense of positive group identity, and help them focus on the future. It may also help children who have trauma to overcome social isolation, become more socially active, and help establish and maintain social connections. (Bergholz et al., 2016; Ratey, 2008)

Similarly, when children meet for a sports or physical activity programme at the same time in the same place, it provides consistency, familiarity, and stability that can foster feelings of safety. This also extends to consistency in teams or groups, so

that even if there is rotation, children need a “home team” from which they can get support. (Edgework, 2022) The social groups and networks formed through sports programmes provide support for children whose regular support networks may have been disrupted or destroyed. (SAD, 2014)

While sports or physical activity alone is not sufficient to fully address stress and trauma, it can be an effective contributing intervention (alongside other mental health and psycho-social support programmes). When combined with teachable social-emotional skills learned in school, sports can have a profound multiplier effect on student well-being and learning. Integrating these interventions into the school setting can help students who might not otherwise be able to engage in organised physical activities.

An EAC/EAA-UNHCR Sport for Protection Initiative in Rwanda builds on experience utilising the power of sports to keep children and youth away from harmful activities. Comprising of a certified blended training for youths and later implementation of sport activities in school, the initiative served to enhance youths' protection and psycho-social well-being, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The training established a routine and structure for the youths, factoring in self-study and small group discussions (held in safe community centres where physical distancing measures were observed). Not only did the learning continue, but also youths were kept occupied, which helped restore a sense of normalcy and purpose at a time when many were feeling overwhelmed by the COVID-19 uncertainty. As lockdown restrictions were eased and educational and sporting activities resumed, the trained youths went on to implement protective sport programmes and promote meaningful sporting experiences for primary school children.

Research from South Korea found that compared with peers who only participated in physical

education classes, adolescents (particularly girls), who participated in sport-related extra-curricular activities, showed lower levels of aggression at school. (Park, Chiu, and Won, 2017). Lower levels of aggression can lead to better engagement with other students and with educators.

For some children, traditional school settings are not places where they feel comfortable sharing sensitive or personal information. However, sports and group physical activities can provide children and youth with a safe space for dialogue and discussion that they might not otherwise have. (UNICEF, 2019)

Save the Children's HEART programme uses the arts and play at school and in other learning settings to provide for overall learning and development. A diversity of arts activities includes drawing, painting, sculpting, music, drama, dance, and book making. These activities help support the development of fine- and gross-motor skills, emergent maths and literacy skills, communication, concentration, coordination, and problem-solving. While employed worldwide in a range of settings, its use in Mexico City is focussed on geographical districts most



Children take part in Save the Children's HEART programme in a camp for Syrian refugees, northern Iraq.

Photo Credit: © Claire Thomas / Save the Children



Refugees holding balloons taking part in Save the Children's HEART Programme in Bihac region, Bosnia.

heavily affected by poverty and community-based violence. During HEART activities, children are able to express themselves, communicate, and share their feelings, ideas, and experiences with their peers and teachers. The evaluation study showed multiple instances of children's improved management of stress and resilience. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, the results indicate positive correlations, while not assuming causality.

In 2011, Save the Children and The Arsenal Foundation, the charitable arm of the Arsenal Football Club, formed a unique partnership to improve the lives of thousands of children and young people living in the world's most challenging places. Working as one team, Arsenal and Save the Children launched 'Coaching for Life' – a unique football coaching model that combines expertise in football coaching and child protection. The programme was designed to build children's resilience, physical and mental health, and overall well-being. The programme operates in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, where coaches from the community are trained to teach six resilience-building modules, using football as a vehicle for communicating and developing skills. These

modules are not taught in a classroom but on football pitches.

Results from an independent evaluation showed that Coaching for Life was effective in improving children's well-being (both mental and physical), enhancing their communication skills and helping them to build relationships. It also helped to increase their resilience. Playing football was shown to be a key factor in these improvements. The evaluation suggests that the programme is particularly effective for children who are not part of regular and structured learning opportunities where they engage with peers. There was a significant improvement in resilience and well-being for children who were out of school at the start of the programme (25 per cent) compared to those attending school. These differences were not observed in the control group, suggesting that this was a direct result of taking part in the programme.

d. Physical Activity and Movement Directly Support Brain Development and Learning

While the benefits of physical activity on our well-being are commonly understood, what is less likely to be recognised is the important role of



Photo Credit: © Claire Thomas / Save the Children

physical activity and movement directly on brain development and learning. Physical movement can positively impact the brain by increasing blood flow, oxygenation, growth of nerve cells in the brain's centre of learning and memory (the hippocampus), density of the neural network, and brain tissue volume. Each of these are associated with improved information processing, memory, and retrieval, as well as improved attention. (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010)

Exercise improves learning in three distinct ways:

1. Optimising one's mindset to improve alertness, attention, and motivation;
2. Preparing and encouraging nerve cells to bind onto one another, the cellular basis for logging in new information; and
3. Spurring the development of new nerve cells from stem cells in the hippocampus helps with processing and retaining new information. (Ratey, 2008)

Research has also shown that participation in sports or physical activity can improve concentration levels

and alertness, particularly if the physical activity is sustained over the longer term (Bailey et al., 2009; Ratey, 2008; Haverkamp et al., 2020). Concentration and alertness are critical skills for academic achievement.

Research shows a positive association between school-based physical activity, academic performance, improved school attendance and retention among school-aged children and adolescents. Researchers in the Czech Republic found that adolescents who participated in sports or other leisure activities performed better on education-related outcomes, including school engagement, handling school-related stress, and academic achievement (Badura et al., 2015). In the United States, a school district introduced an early morning exercise programme, Zero Hour, which led to a boost in participants' reading ability and improvements in other subjects. (Barile, 2022)

A United States Department of Health and Human Services meta-review of literature examining the link between school-based physical education and play-based learning programmes with academic outcomes from 10 countries showed:

- Positive associations between general physical activity and academic performance in half of the studies;
- Positive associations between extracurricular physical activity and academic performance in all of the studies, with grade point averages increasing in more than half of the studies; and
- Decreased high school dropout rates when students participated in extracurricular sports activities. (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010)

In Pakistan, children taught by Right To Play trained teachers scored 10 per cent higher on standardised tests than children with no Right To Play trained teachers (Right To Play, 2021). In Namibia, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sport integrated sport for development programmes into national curricula for secondary schools. A study on the Physically Active Youth Programme (PAY) in Namibia in 2003 showed that 76 per cent of young people who participated in the programme passed their Grade 10 examinations, compared with the national rate of 54 per cent. Further, 76 per cent of participants passed their Grade 12 exams compared to only 40 per cent nationally. (Kidd, 2008 and PAY Namibia, 2016)

“Physical education is a field that advocates a holistic approach to human development. This approach emphasises that the mind and body are one entity, and that anything that happens to one will affect the other. Physical educators therefore believe that the “whole child” comes to school to be educated and that this requires both mental and physical training.”

(Sibley and Etnier, 2003)

The relationship between physical activity and mental functioning is of particular interest because such a large portion of the school day is spent working in the cognitive domain. Incorporating more physical activity into the educational setting can have profound impacts on a child’s brain development, academic achievements, social engagement, and sense of self. With classroom-based physical activity, students improve their concentration, reduce their disruptive or fidgety behaviour, improve their motivation and engagement in learning, and improve their academic performance (CDC, 2022). Incorporating short bursts of physical activity in the classroom, particularly if punctuated throughout the school day, can have profound effects as it helps children recharge and return to structured learning with greater attention.

Sports is an effective way to incentivise many children and youth to engage in educational programmes. Due to their popularity, sports can also be a way to engage children who have dropped out, never enrolled, or do not attend school, as a way to bring them into the educational system. Sports act as the “hook” to bring students who might otherwise be unwilling or unable to engage with traditional, formal educational approaches (Dudfield & Dingwall-Smith, 2015). A comprehensive 2019 review of sports for development (S4D) initiatives found they can increase student engagement in education, including those most at risk of leaving school (UNICEF, 2019). In Azerbaijan, especially in rural areas, principals reported an increase in attendance by 15-20 per cent after the introduction of Right To Play programming in schools. (Harry Cumming and Associates, 2007)

Children aged 0-6, in particular in many crisis-affected settings, do not have access to early childhood development (ECD) programmes or often do not receive the stimulation, play and early learning opportunities from their caregivers to ensure healthy development. Lack of ECD programmes and other kinds of multi-sectoral services, such as health and nutrition, and limited knowledge and capacity of caregivers on simple approaches to promoting children’s development and physical and mental well-being, compromise a child’s development. As a result, babies and

young children fail to build and maintain important brain connections, find it difficult to form essential relationships with their caregivers and peers, and can thus have long-term negative consequences impacting their learning, development, behaviour and health.

In response to this challenge, many organisations, including those involved in the Moving Minds Alliance, are prioritising interventions and advocacy to highlight the need and effective practices in delivering play-based activities for young children affected by crisis. For example, Save the Children uses its Building Brains (birth to 3 years) and Ready to Learn (age 4-6) “Common Approaches” (evidence-based programmes which can be implemented at scale) across more than 29 crisis-affected countries. Both approaches address inequity, and promote early learning and the social-emotional development of young children through the use of play, while also ensuring their protection.

Social and emotional programming in the early school years (pre-primary and early primary) has also been shown to improve children’s social and behavioural outcomes, as well as the culture and climate of their schools. (Kahn, 2017)

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), a three-year-programme (2017-2020) targeted 90 kindergartens in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It supported the professional development of teachers and school principals in the use of the Ready to Learn programme, while simultaneously supporting caregiver and community engagement. An overall end-line IDELA score, which measures emergent literacy and numeracy and social-emotional skills, improved by 10 per cent compared to the baseline, which is remarkable considering the closure of kindergartens due to the pandemic in the final year of the project. Over 93 per cent of interviewed parents reported feeling more engaged in their child’s learning either at home or at the kindergarten. (Save the Children, 2020)

e. Sport as a Platform to Inform and Address Development Challenges

Because of its broad popular appeal, sport can bring children and adolescents, as well as the wider community, together and provide a forum

for dialogue on development challenges. This can include, for example, discussion on sensitive issues such as the right to education, including for girls; the rights of children with disabilities; sexual and reproductive health; race and ethnicity.

UNICEF defines “Sports for Development” as “the use of sport, or any form of physical activity, to provide both children and adults with the opportunity to achieve their full potential through programmes that promote personal and social development.” (UNICEF, 2019)

Programmes that use sports or physical activities combined with important health-related information have been particularly effective. These programmes help children and youth learn and share critical hygiene, health, and fertility lessons with their peers and extended families. (Kay and Dudfield, 2013)

In Tanzania, a sport-based peer education programme for HIV/AIDS proved to be an effective way to impart HIV/AIDS information to at-risk children in Dar es Salaam. The programme used peers as coaches to develop football skills and share information, skills, and attitudes related to HIV/AIDS education. Participating children were better informed about, and more likely to adopt, safe behaviours than children who had only participated in national school programmes. (Maro et al., 2008)

In Zambia, a girls-only football league run by the organisation Futebol dá Força provides sexual and reproductive health and rights lessons before each match in an effort to decrease risky sexual behaviour. Every game includes one lesson for the girls only (before the game), followed by a lesson for the community spectators. Findings suggest that these programmes improved participating adolescent girls’ sexual health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour. (Duffey et al., 2019)

Several literature reviews of “Sports for Development” interventions have highlighted a wide range of beneficial outcomes from this approach, including positive identity, empowerment, academic competence, relationships, communications skills, self-regulation skills, leadership, social responsibility, enjoyment, resiliency, and sports competence (Whitley et al, 2018). A systematic review of life-skills development through sports programmes

targeting socially vulnerable youth showed those programmes can develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills. (Hermens, Neil et al., 2017)

While sports cannot be expected to be the catalyst for peace, programmes that purposefully combine education and sports have been shown to create conditions that foster peace and protection. Particularly when there are historic conflicts between ethnic minorities and majority groups, research shows that sports can help build trust. (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2015. IAGSDP, 2022. UN Secretary General, 2020)

In the wake of civil unrest, the government of Côte d'Ivoire launched the National Programme to Develop and Promote Peace Education. These programmes, implemented through the organisation Peace and Sport, used judo, rugby, and athletics to reinforce social ties and dialogue among various communities from 2008-2015. In addition, these programmes also combined sport with literacy classes, academic support, and activities around environmental protection and HIV/AIDS prevention. Over 2,000 people and 800 children and youth were impacted. (Peace and Sport, 2018)

In Burundi, Right To Play is working with the Ministry of Education to integrate active, play-based methodologies into teaching practices. As a result, 83 per cent of children in Right To Play programmes increased their peacebuilding and conflict resolution skills compared with 47 per cent in non-Right To Play programmes. (Right To Play, 2019)

There is evidence that sports can support children and youth, particularly those who were involved in armed conflict, as sports offer a structured and socially-acceptable way to reintegrate back into their communities. Sports help these children and youth move from a context that normalised violence towards one in which peaceful cooperation is fostered. (Dyck, 2011)

Studies from Sierra Leone showed that sport in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) camps was helpful in reducing violence among male youths, promoting constructive interactions between the ex-combatants and neighbouring communities, and building social networks. The physical activities were part of an integrated approach with school, vocational training, and counselling. (Dyck, 2011)

These examples of programmes that have fostered the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes beyond those of a particular game itself, offer strategies and interventions that have succeeded. A better way to network and share ideas would help expand these programmes to more children, communities and countries.



Photo Credit: © Education Above All Foundation

Purposeful after school activities offer children in Colombia more structure and learning opportunities.

**EDUCATION AND
SPORTS AS DRIVERS OF
THE UN SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. ”Quality education is not only an end in itself but also a means to achieving a broad development agenda, as called for in the 2030 Agenda: Sustainable Development Goals. One cannot talk about achieving many of the SDGs without equitable access to education, which is the foundation for lifelong learning, improved quality of life, and decent work. Quality education contributes directly to the goals of addressing poverty reduction and reduced inequalities, health and nutrition, economic growth and labour market opportunities, as well as peacebuilding and the promotion of democratic institutions.

“Sport is also an important enabler of sustainable development. We recognise the growing contribution of sport to the realisation of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives.”

(United Nations, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development A/RES/70/1, paragraph 37)

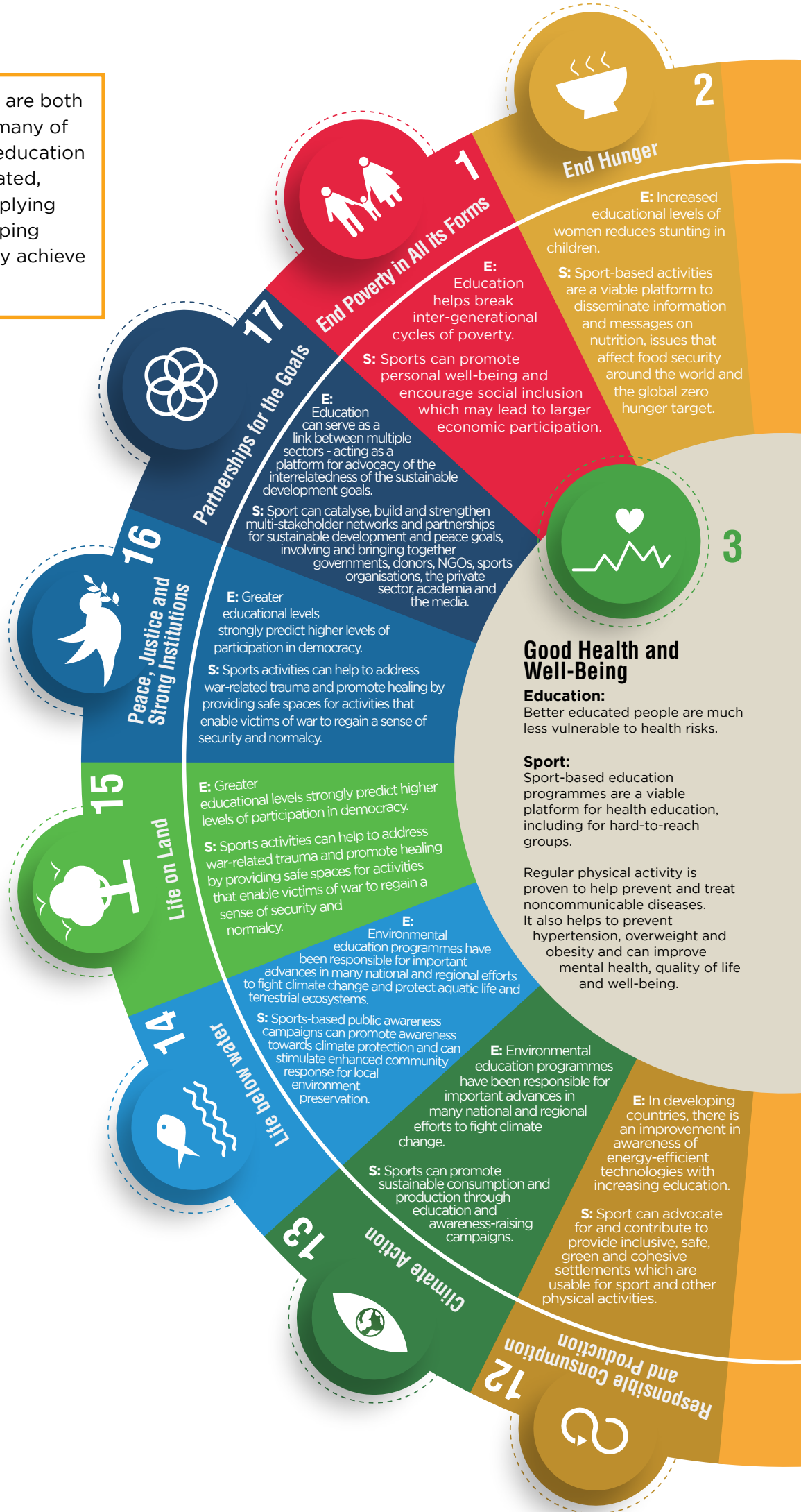
For example, the following SDGs are reliant on access to quality education:

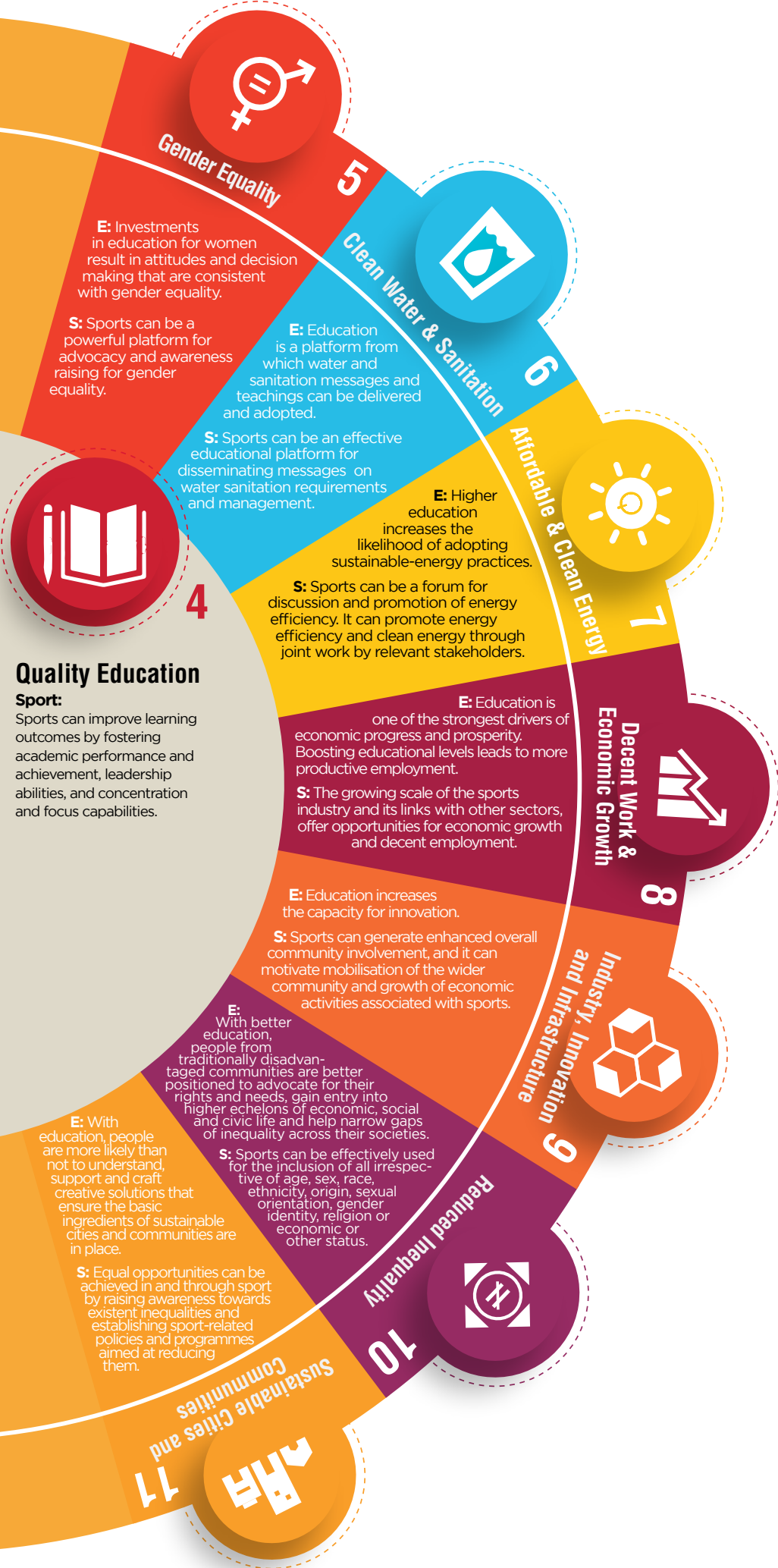
- **SDG 1:** the elimination of poverty and prospects for a better economic future;
- **SDG 3:** improved health;
- **SDG 5:** gender equality;
- **SDG 8:** decent work and economic growth;
- **SDG 10:** reduced inequalities; and
- **SDG 16:** peace, justice and strong institutions.

In 2015, the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognised that, in prior initiatives, the United Nations developed several Action Plans on Sport for Development and Peace, the first of which was issued in 2006. The 2018 Action Plan seeks to “improve cooperation and coordination to create a common vision of the role of sport for development and peace, particularly relating to the 2030 Agenda.” (United Nations, 2018)

Education and sports are both important drivers of many of the UN SDGs. When education and sports are integrated, they can have a multiplying beneficial impact, helping countries more rapidly achieve several SDGs. Of particular note are SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being; SDG 4: Quality Education; SDG 5: Gender Equality; SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 10: Reduced Inequality; SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities; SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; and SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

Education and sports are both important drivers of many of the UN SDGs. When education and sports are integrated, they can have a multiplying beneficial impact, helping countries more rapidly achieve several SDGs.





Quality Education

Sport: Sports can improve learning outcomes by fostering academic performance and achievement, leadership abilities, and concentration and focus capabilities.

E: Investments in education for women result in attitudes and decision making that are consistent with gender equality.

S: Sports can be a powerful platform for advocacy and awareness raising for gender equality.

E: Education is a platform from which water and sanitation messages and teachings can be delivered and adopted.

S: Sports can be an effective educational platform for disseminating messages on water sanitation requirements and management.

E: Higher education increases the likelihood of adopting sustainable-energy practices.

S: Sports can be a forum for discussion and promotion of energy efficiency. It can promote energy efficiency and clean energy through joint work by relevant stakeholders.

E: Education is one of the strongest drivers of economic progress and prosperity. Boosting educational levels leads to more productive employment.

S: The growing scale of the sports industry and its links with other sectors, offer opportunities for economic growth and decent employment.

E: Education increases the capacity for innovation.

S: Sports can generate enhanced overall community involvement, and it can motivate mobilisation of the wider community and growth of economic activities associated with sports.

E: With better education, people from traditionally disadvantaged communities are better positioned to advocate for their rights and needs, gain entry into higher echelons of economic, social and civic life and help narrow gaps of inequality across their societies.

S: Sports can be effectively used for the inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, race, ethnicity, origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or economic or other status.

E: With education, people are more likely than not to understand, support and craft creative solutions that ensure the basic ingredients of sustainable cities and communities are in place.

S: Equal opportunities can be achieved in and through sport by raising awareness towards existent inequalities and establishing sport-related policies and programmes aimed at reducing them.

E: Education
S: Sports

Please see appendix on page 42 for further information

CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING

Protecting children and young people should be at the heart of any development intervention, including education and sports programmes. Protection, in this context, refers to the prevention of and response to violence, exploitation and abuse against children and youth. It involves keeping children and youth safe from physical, sexual and psychological forms of violence that can be perpetrated by various actors with whom a young person interacts in any setting.

Through both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda: Sustainable Development Goals, countries made commitments to end violence against children. The SDGs call for the end of abuse, exploitation and all forms of violence and torture against children by 2030. A number of articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are aimed specifically at protecting children, including, for example, 16 (right to privacy, honour and reputation), 19 (protection from violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation), 34 (sexual abuse and exploitation), 35 (abduction, sale or trafficking of children). (UN, 1989; UN, 2015)

“Safe to Learn” is a global initiative dedicated to “ending violence that happens while at school, on and around school grounds, while getting to and from school, and in online activity linked to a student’s school life. The Safe to Learn initiative also sees schools as an entry point to reduce violence in other areas of children’s lives. A Global Programmatic Framework & Benchmarking Tool, developed by UNICEF in collaboration with Safe to Learn partners, provides technical resources to assist in the design and monitoring of child protection interventions. (STL Global Alliance, 2020)

Integral to child protection is the training of coaches, facilitators and teachers in child safeguarding, promoting equitable gender norms, and supporting children to develop risk management and social and emotional competencies. These skills help prevent and respond to protection concerns in and around schools. In volatile environments, especially in conflict and post-conflict settings, teachers, facilitators and coaches administering education and sports programmes should be provided with additional support, both material and psychological. To facilitate this, Save the Children has developed the Safe Schools Common Approach Action Pack 4: Teachers and Children. Action Pack 4 describes opportunities to engage both teachers and children, separately and together, to ensure safety and protection in and around schools. Teachers are

critical duty-bearers in schools to contribute to ensuring emotional and psychosocial protection, physical protection, and a positive teaching and learning environment for students. Teachers also play a key role in supporting children to develop risk management and social and emotional competencies. Teachers are not only responsible for supporting children to develop such skills, but they themselves must be equipped with the related skills in order to do so. (Save the Children, 2022)

International organisations and national governments have instituted safeguards for children in sports. The International Safeguarding Children in Sport Working Group in partnership with several organisations established the following safeguards in 2014. (International Safeguarding Children in Sport Working Group, 2016) For all organisations providing sports activities, each should:

1. Have a safeguarding policy that is inclusive;
2. Have effective systems to process complaints or concerns, and support systems for victims of violence;
3. Have arrangements to provide essential information and support to those responsible for safeguarding children;
4. Have measures to minimise risk for children;
5. Have codes of conduct;
6. Perform appropriate recruitment and training;
7. Work with partners to ensure shared expectations on safeguarding; and
8. Implement monitoring and evaluation of sports organisations.

Government interventions and regulations exist to varying degrees globally, however, even in developed countries, the implementation of laws and the provision of training sessions to safeguard children has not been uniform or always mandatory. While international instruments, such as the International Safeguards for Children in Sport are available, no data exist to better understand which countries are adhering to these safeguards.

Educators, coaches, and trainers need to ensure a space is safe for children’s emotional and physical health. This means that children are allowed to express themselves without fear, judgment, or harm and they are able to physically enter the environment safely and participate fully.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When physical activity and sports are included in educational settings or sports are used as a platform to promote education or other development objectives, the positive benefits to the child can be greater than if each was delivered separately.

Research shows the benefits of a well-planned education and sports programme include improved physical and mental well-being, improved school attendance, increased academic achievement, better self-confidence and self-empowerment, greater cooperation, a sense of belonging, increased trust, a reduction of violence, improved hygiene, disease prevention awareness, and healthier lifestyles. By integrating education and sports in the design and implementation of new initiatives, learning and skills development can be introduced or reinforced and applied inside or outside the classroom, on or off the sports field.

When education is provided holistically, children are taught the social-emotional skills to better manage their mental health. Both education and sports, separately, provide avenues for improving knowledge and skills that are important in addressing anxiety, stress, and trauma. When used in combination, these outcomes can be enhanced.

Sports or physical activity, when provided in an educational setting, can help children improve cognitive development and academic performance, reduce disruptive behaviour; and improve concentration, motivation and engagement in learning. The relevant changes that occur in the brain as a result of physical activity and movement are associated with improved information processing, memory, and retrieval, as well as improved attention, maximising learning potential.

Sports, in its broadest sense, is universal, widely popular, appeals to children, and can bring students and communities together. While not a panacea for all issues, education that incorporates physical activity has a positive impact and can be used to help achieve broader goals in areas such as peacebuilding, health promotion and social inclusion.

Education and sports are both important drivers of many of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. When education and sports are integrated, they can

have increased beneficial impact, helping countries more rapidly achieve several SDGs, including improved health and well-being, social inclusion and cohesion, and more peaceful and prosperous communities and nations.

Effective Education and Sports Programmes:

- Ensure safe spaces for all students;
- Are culturally relevant;
- Engage stakeholders, including educational authorities, teachers, and family members;
- Have resources for teacher/coach/educator training and support. (UNICEF, 2019)

As the global community works to achieve the SDGs, it is important to incorporate innovative approaches, such as integrating education and sports, to enhance outcomes across sectors. The SDGs represent a broad programmatic effort to improve the lives of people globally, and each SDG is enhanced by a holistic systemic approach to achieving all of them together.

Recommendations

- **Widespread provision of quality education and sports programmes may contribute to improved mental health.** Both education and sports can provide opportunities for improving knowledge and skills that are important in maintaining mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the existing challenges of conflict and other crises in influencing mental health. Widespread provision of quality education and sports programmes build on the shared desired outcomes and multiplier effect realised when education and sports are combined.
- **Child protection and safeguarding must be ensured.** Protecting children and young people should be central to any development intervention, including education and sports programmes. Protection, in this context, refers to the prevention of and response to violence, exploitation and abuse against children and youth, and it involves keeping children and youth safe from physical, sexual and psychological forms of violence that can be perpetrated by various actors. Those

responsible for implementing education and sports initiatives should adhere to all international standards and protocols on child protection.

- **Educators, coaches, and trainers need to ensure a space is safe both emotionally and physically.** This means that children are allowed to express themselves without fear, judgment, or harm and they are able to physically enter the environment safely and participate fully. In order to create such an atmosphere, the training of coaches, facilitators and teachers must include issues related to child safeguarding, promoting equitable gender norms, and supporting children to develop risk management and social and emotional competencies – skills to help prevent and respond to protection concerns in and around schools.
- **Effective organisational capacity and funding are required.** These initiatives require the organisational capacity to address the needs of children and the community. This involves setting appropriate goals, accounting for the financial, human and material resources available, and considering the expectations of key stakeholders, including participants and educators. Funders and donors also need to ensure the right balance between accountability and the contextual needs and conditions under which programmes operate.
- **Children and facilitators need to be heard.** Throughout the design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of programming, all key stakeholders should be involved. In particular, the voices of children, young people, parents, facilitators and teachers should be heard to ensure appropriate ownership, contextualisation and monitoring of the programme.
- **More research in low-and middle-income countries is needed.** There is a lack of research on how sports can play a greater role in achieving educational outcomes, particularly regarding academic performance in low-and-middle-income countries. Additional research would serve to inform decision making about combining education and sports, with both enhancing outcomes across multiple sectors.

The Bottom Line

- **Learning through play and sports, including in the early years, is key.** Children aged 0-6 in many instances are not receiving the stimulation and early learning opportunities from their caregivers and/or from teachers/Early Childhood Education (ECD) facilitators they require. This can reduce their school readiness, leading to potential long-term impacts on their learning and well-being. Opportunities and environments that promote play, exploration and hands-on learning are at the core of effective ECD and pre-primary programmes.
- **Together, education and sports have positive learning and well-being outcomes.** Education and sports initiatives have the potential to contribute to positive educational, physical and mental well-being outcomes for individual students and societies at large. These include student engagement, attendance, overall enjoyment of learning, improved social-emotional skills, and social cohesion and peacebuilding. Greater recognition of the power held in the nexus of education and sports is needed to mutually reinforce success in reaching the SDGs, through an integrated approach.
- **Dialogue is a key element in shared understanding and setting goals.** Because of their broad popular appeal, sports can bring children and adolescents, as well as the wider community, together. This can provide a forum for dialogue on development challenges, including discussion on sensitive issues related to safe behaviours, discrimination and prejudice, and inter- and intra-communal violence.
- **Physical activity and movement positively impact brain development and learning.** The relevant changes that occur in the brain are associated with improved information processing, memory, and retrieval, as well as improved attention necessary for learning. There is evidence that shows a significant positive relationship between physical activity and cognitive functioning for individuals of all ages. In children, physical activity is associated with better cognitive performance, as measured

by IQ tests and academic achievement. If punctuated throughout the school day, physical activity helps children recharge and return to structured learning with greater attention.

- **Social benefits of participation in sports are thought to be especially important for girls.**

Often girls in many contexts, particularly during adolescence, have fewer opportunities than boys for social interaction outside the home and beyond family structures. Sports can offer an outlet for girls to express their knowledge and skills as well as practice social interaction with peers and the community.

- **Education and sports are important in mastering an academic subject or achieving goals.** Both can provide opportunities to learn key life skills, including teamwork and cooperation, focus, respect, tolerance and discipline. Important information and life skills can be introduced, reinforced and applied inside or outside the classroom, on the sports field, or off the field; with benefits both to the individual and society.

- **Pathways for increasing knowledge and improving skills necessary to maintain good mental health can be provided through education and sports.** Research and experience show that education and physical activity, including play, are intricately linked, and when combined, can have a profound multiplier effect on student well-being and learning. Regular exercise is associated with stress reduction and better mood, which may partly mediate associations between depression, stress, and health outcomes. Given the substantial amount of time children spend in schools, they are an important and powerful influence on children's development. This may include learning skills such as managing negative emotions and being calm and focussed. Sports or physical activity can be an effective contributing intervention in managing stress and trauma.

- **Integrated education and sports programmes can foster a sense of belonging and acceptance.** Positive interactions with peers and others can be used to support the inclusion

and empowerment of members of marginalised communities. Education and sports programmes can ensure that all children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, ability, or nationality, have equal opportunities in education and sports programmes.

Given these extraordinary upsides, governments, international agencies and institutions, civil society organisations, and private sector and philanthropic foundations need to be encouraged to place more emphasis on facilitating the combination of education and sports. By creating and fostering more initiatives and programmes that take advantage of this winning combination, children and communities can benefit from the shared outcomes and enhanced benefits of participating in both education and sports.

APPENDIX: SDG TABLE

SDG	How Education Contributes	How Sport Contributes
SDG 1: End Poverty in All its Forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher levels of education are associated with lower poverty rates.³ • Education helps break inter-generational cycles of poverty.³ • Higher levels of education are associated with higher rates of income and asset ownership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports can promote personal well-being and encourage social inclusion, which may lead to larger economic participation. • It can help educate and empower individuals with social and life skills for a self-reliant and sustainable life.
SDG 2: End Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is strong evidence that a mother's education improves her children's nutrition, especially as she seeks higher levels of schooling.² • Agricultural education and training raise agricultural productivity by developing producers' capacities.³ • Increased educational levels of women reduces stunting in children.³ • Increased vitamin intake for children.³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport-based activities are a viable platform to disseminate information and messages on nutrition, issues that affect food security around the world, and the global zero hunger target.
SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better-educated people are much less vulnerable to health risks.² • Higher educational levels for mothers lead to better child health.³ • Lower levels of mortality among mothers and infants are predicted by higher levels of schooling.³ • Greater levels of education among youth result in positive attitudes toward those with HIV and a reduction in risky behaviour.³ • Higher educational levels predict lower malaria transmission rates.³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular physical activity is proven to help prevent and treat noncommunicable diseases. It also helps to prevent hypertension, overweight and obesity and can improve mental health, quality of life and well-being. • Sport and physical activity reduce the risk of contracting non-communicable diseases by strengthening cardiovascular health in particular. Participation in sports can contribute to tackling and preventing obesity. • Sport encourages individuals to adopt active lifestyles. It has a positive impact on child and healthy adolescent development and well-being. • Sport-based education programmes are a viable platform for health education, including hard-to-reach groups. • Sport-based social programmes promote mental well-being for at-risk communities through trauma counselling and inclusion efforts. Sports can enhance mental health by delivering social, psychological and physiological benefits.

¹ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/17-ways-education-influences-new-17-global-goals>.

² [EAC_Education_and_the_SDGs_F_.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org/files/ckfiles/files/EAC_Education_and_the_SDGs_F_.pdf) (educateachild.org)

³ https://www.un.org/sport/sites/www.un.org.sport/files/ckfiles/files/Sport_for_SDGs_finalversion9.pdf.

⁴ Sustainable development begins with education: how education can contribute to the proposed post-2015 goals; 2014 (un.org)

⁵ 9789241514187-eng.pdf (who.int)

SDG	How Education Contributes	How Sport Contributes
<p>SDG 4: Quality Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education builds on itself, creating a greater capacity to educate others and nurture a culture that values learning.² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combined with a school curriculum, physical activities and sports are necessary for a comprehensive education. • Joint programmes with schools offer additional and alternative physical education and physical activities to support the full learning process and deliver holistic education. • Sports can improve learning outcomes by fostering academic performance and achievement, leadership abilities, and concentration and focus capabilities.
<p>SDG 5: Gender Equality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education enables girls and women to reach their full potential - in parity with men and boys - in their homes, communities, workplaces and institutions of influence.² • One additional school year can increase a woman's earnings by up to 20%, according to World Bank studies, and Plan International has shown that some countries lose more than US\$1 billion a year by failing to educate girls at the same level as boys. We also know that as the gap between the number of girls and boys narrows, so, too, do gender disparities in wages and employment.² • Investments in education for women result in attitudes and decision-making that are consistent with gender equality.³ • Higher educational levels are associated with delayed marriage, fertility and childbirth.³ • Lower literacy levels for disadvantaged minority women are associated with greater discrimination.³ • Countries with targeted pro-equity policies see improvements in gender outcomes. • Investments in education boost women's employment.⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports can be a powerful platform for advocacy and awareness raising for gender equality. • Sports can foster increased self-esteem and confidence of women and girls, empower them and develop skills needed to become equal participants and leaders in their communities. • Through sport-based programmes, women and girls can be equipped with knowledge and skills on health, how to live a healthy and active lifestyle, how to act in case they experience violence, employability, and leadership skills needed to progress in society. • Sports can provide safe and fair environments for women and girls. A safe playing area for girls is especially essential. • Sport can increase self-esteem among adolescent girls and provides opportunities for the advancement of girls in the face of gender-related barriers.

⁶ Invest in Women and Prosper -- Finance & Development, September 2017 (imf.org)

SDG	How Education Contributes	How Sport Contributes
SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education results in a greater likelihood of adopting technology.³ • Education is a platform from which water and sanitation messages and teachings can be delivered and adopted. • Education programmes often include the provision of WASH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports can be an effective educational platform for disseminating messages on water sanitation requirements and management. • Sports and sports facilities can contribute to targets on water and sanitation by respecting standards and recommendations. • Improvements in water quality by reducing pollution, dumping and waste can be promoted and realised in sports contexts such as aquatic and other sports events.
SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education increases the likelihood of adopting sustainable energy practices.³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports programmes and activities can support initiatives aiming at developing energy provision systems and ensuring access to energy. • Sports can be a forum for discussion and promotion of energy efficiency. It can promote energy efficiency and clean energy through joint work by relevant stakeholders. • Sports infrastructures can promote organisation models that adopt clean and sustainable energy use.
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is one of the strongest drivers of economic progress and prosperity.² • Studies have shown that each additional year of schooling raises average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth by 0.37%. • High educational levels are a major determinant of economic growth at the country level. • Out of school children represent a significant economic burden on country economies.² • Rates of return in the form of wage earnings increase with higher educational levels.³ • Changes in average educational attainment over time are associated with changes in economic growth.³ • Boosting educational levels leads to more productive employment.³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The growing scale of the sports industry, and its links with other sectors, offer opportunities for economic growth and decent employment. • Sports programmes can foster increased employability for women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, thus contributing to inclusive economic growth. • Sport-based educational programmes provide skills for employability and opportunities to enter the labour market for youth.

⁷ Education counts: towards the Millennium Development Goals - UNESCO Digital Library

⁸ K4D_HDR_The_Contribution_of_Education_to_Economic_Growth_Final.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)

SDG	How Education Contributes	How Sport Contributes
<p>SDG 9:</p> <p>Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education increases the capacity for innovation.³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders in sport that base their activity on the respect of human rights can spur to positively impact local and regional business when organising sports events. • Sport-based employment and entrepreneurship can contribute to create decent jobs for all. • Sports can generate enhanced overall community involvement, and it can motivate mobilisation of the wider community and growth of economic activities associated with sports. • Sports events can have long lasting effects on the population if they involve the population for their legacy. • Sports organisations and sports events, if they adopt adequate policies and procedures, can be an opportunity for capacity building, creating jobs, and for economic, social and environmentally sustainable development in general. • Sports tourism can create jobs and promote local culture and products. • Sport can promote the effective and responsible management of volunteers, helping to promote their participation in society and community engagement.
<p>SDG 10:</p> <p>Reduced Inequality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As more children, from across the demographic, geographic and cultural spectrum become educated, we are likely to see an improvement in a country's income inequality.² • And, with better education, people from traditionally disadvantaged communities are better positioned to advocate for their rights and needs, gain entry into higher echelons of economic, social and civic life and help narrow gaps of inequality across their societies.² • Higher education levels are associated with lower income inequality.² • Household wealth is an important factor in determining education levels.³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport is recognised as a contributor to the empowerment of individuals, such as women and young people, and communities. • Sport can be effectively used for the inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, race, ethnicity, origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or economic or other status. • Sports can promote equality and can serve as a platform to promote the value of diversity. Stakeholders in sports can amplify the message of equality and respect for diversity.

⁹ https://www.unicef.org/media/64366/file/sdg10_2pager_final.pdf

SDG	How Education Contributes	How Sport Contributes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Never entry” rates to school for children from disadvantaged backgrounds are higher.³ • Factors associated with disadvantage such as urban/ rural background and nomadic populations are strongly associated with lower educational levels.³ • Government investment in education is more regressive in lower-income countries.³ • A child’s access to education unlocks critical knowledge and opportunity often necessary to fully participate in society. 	
SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With education, people are more likely than not to understand, support and craft creative solutions that ensure the basic ingredients of sustainable cities and communities are in place.² • Good urban planning, efficient energy use, good water and sanitation management, social inclusion and other elements of well-working communities require people with knowledge and skills that are only available through quality education.² • Education enhances resilience to disaster.³ • Higher education levels may lead to lower carbon emissions.³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport contributes to making cities and communities more inclusive. • The popularity of, and positive attitude towards sport make it a suitable tool for tackling inequality. It can also tackle prejudice and intolerance by promoting tolerance and pro-social behaviour instead. • Sport can promote equality and can serve as a platform to promote the value of diversity. • Equal opportunities can be achieved in and through sport by raising awareness towards existent inequalities and establishing sport-related policies and programmes aimed at reducing them.
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased educational levels are associated with a higher probability of adopting sustainable climate practices.³ • Education enhances the ability of organisations to mobilize around sustainable practices.³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport can advocate for and contribute to provide inclusive, safe, green and cohesive settlements which are usable for sport and other physical activities. • Sport can raise awareness with regard to equal rights and inclusive settlements for people with disabilities, the elderly, women and girls, and other vulnerable groups and individuals.

SDG	How Education Contributes	How Sport Contributes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education raises the odds that people will use energy and water more efficiently and recycle household waste.² • Each additional year of education that a head of household received, a society is between 4% and 21.5% less likely on an annual basis to cut old-growth forest per household.² • In developing countries, there is an improvement in awareness of energy-efficient technologies with increasing education.² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports can help eliminate obstacles and barriers in the environment, transportation, public facilities and services. • Sport can enhance the sustainable development of cities through prioritising resource and energy efficiency, and by assessing policies and procedures with procurement standards labelling.
<p>SDG 13: Climate Action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher educational levels are consistently associated with a greater awareness of climate change and the ability to mitigate its impact.³ • People with less than a secondary education expressed concern for the environment compared to 37% of people with secondary education and 46% of people with tertiary education.² • Environmental education programmes have been responsible for important advances in many national and regional efforts to fight climate change.² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports can promote sustainable consumption and production through education and awareness-raising campaigns. • The incorporation of sustainability standards in the production and provision of sports products can contribute to sustainable consumption and production patterns. • Sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources can be enhanced in sports contexts. • Sports can encourage sustainable tourism and lifestyles as well as sustainable tourism products and services.
<p>SDG 14: Life Below Water</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be surmised that higher levels of education create more awareness about the importance of oceans and marine ecology for sustainable development. Understanding this connection better would require additional research.³ • Environmental education programmes have been responsible for important advances in many national and regional efforts to fight climate change and protect aquatic life and terrestrial ecosystems.² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports-based education programmes can teach children and youth about environmental sustainability and climate change. • Sports-based public awareness campaigns can promote awareness towards climate protection and can stimulate enhanced community response for local environment preservation. • Sports can help disaster recovery efforts through psychosocial support to affected individuals, especially children, by giving back a sense of normalcy, identity and belonging.

SDG	How Education Contributes	How Sport Contributes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports can promote clean air in sports events through awareness-raising campaigns, installation of air-pollution detectors and communication of results to the general public. • Sport, through collaboration among a variety of involved stakeholders, can make significant contributions to combat climate change.
SDG 15: Life on Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher educational levels are associated with greater environmental awareness.³ • Environmental education programmes have been responsible for important advances in many national and regional efforts to fight climate change and protect aquatic life and terrestrial ecosystems.² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport offers a platform for education and promotion regarding the preservation of terrestrial ecosystems. • Sports can promote awareness-raising campaigns on biodiversity, including the dangers of the illegal trade in wildlife. • Sport, through educational initiatives, can provide well-researched insights into the interactions between biodiversity and lifestyle choices by explaining the interrelatedness of food, consumption, culture and biodiversity conservation. • Sport in natural terrestrial settings can play an important role in ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. • Sport is associated with important values and proved to be an effective platform for values advocacy and education. • The environmentally friendly organisation of sports events, including the construction of sports facilities and infrastructure, can serve as a best practice model and provide sustainability assessment and recommendations on best practices to protect the ecosystem.
SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is an essential precursor to peace, tolerance and a healthy civil society.² • Studies have shown that people with secondary education are more likely than those with only primary education to show tolerance for people who speak another language.² • Greater educational levels strongly predict higher levels of participation in democracy.² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport can help to rebuild post-conflict societies and uplift affected communities and individuals by fostering the respect, protection and implementation of human rights. • Sports activities can help to address war-related trauma and promote healing by providing safe spaces for activities that enable victims of war to regain a sense of security and normalcy. • Sport can serve as a tool for supporting demobilisation and disarmament efforts as well as supporting the reintegration of ex-combatants, particularly former child soldiers, into their communities.

SDG	How Education Contributes	How Sport Contributes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those with higher levels of education are more likely to express greater levels of tolerance for other social groups.³ • Improving literacy and educational attainment is predicted to facilitate stronger and more inclusive democratic institutions.³ • Violent conflict depresses educational levels and leads to increases in educational inequality.³ • Lower educational levels and greater levels of inequality increase the risk of war.³ 	
<p>SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships are proven to be an effective way to achieve strong development outcomes.² • Education can serve as a link between multiple sectors - acting as a platform for advocacy of the interrelatedness of the sustainable development goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport can catalyse, build and strengthen multi-stakeholder networks and partnerships for sustainable development and peace goals, involving and bringing together governments, donors, NGOs, sports organisations, the private sector, academia and the media.

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