

## Sport: Catalyst for a Better, Stronger Recovery 2022 Report of the Secretary-General

### Summary of Highlights and Key Messages

At a time of acute needs stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts, the 2022 Secretary-General Report argues that sport can be an important catalyst of countries' efforts to "build back better". Sport is uniquely well-placed to help address pandemic-related increases in mental health challenges, out-of-school and work youth, inequalities, social malaise, unrest, violence, and physical inactivity.

The Report recommends ways to apply sport and physical activity to rebuild solidarity within and between countries, deliver concrete benefits to people in the short term, while generating societal change in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### Delivering sport in the pandemic

While the pandemic has made it a challenging time to practice and finance sport, particularly at the grassroots level, the Report highlights pandemic-related innovations and trends that offer the potential to scale up impact.

Pandemic restrictions renewed our appreciation for the importance of physical activity, leading to a pent-up demand. Acute post-pandemic needs sharpened the intent of stakeholders to harness sport to improve lives. Governments are integrating sport and physical activity in their Covid-19 recovery plans and sustainable development strategies. Bi-lateral and multi-lateral development organizations are increasingly incorporating sport as part of their technical assistance toolkit.

Through the pandemic, we learned the power of sports to respond to crisis. Rising to health threat and challenges of social isolation, many grassroots and professional sports clubs helped maintain vital social connections, providing COVID-19 information along with psychosocial support and on-line access to sport. Athlete advocates also stepped up to help save lives and promote continued physical activity.

The pandemic accelerated learning, establishing powerful new ways to deliver sport for development and peace. Through trial and error, organizations developed on-line sports that enabled them to bring in new participants, tap new audiences, and integrate into youth culture. Confronted by the digital divide, stakeholders got creative. Peru, for example, employed a "Sports Truck", an adapted mobile stage with its own sound equipment, generator, sports materials, to lead outdoor, socially distanced activities including dance, fitness, and sport.

#### Maximizing sport as catalyst

The Report offers lessons and examples that illustrate how sport can be a catalyst for:

#### Social inclusion, empowerment, and anti-discrimination



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Sport can be catalytic when it is shaped to improve people's opportunities, confidence, and sense of belonging in the short run, while laying the ground to change mindsets and build inclusive societies. Women's and girls' participation in sport, for example, can boost confidence and self-esteem while challenging gender stereotypes and influencing the behaviour of men and boys.

With intentional approaches, sport can expedite changes in mindset. In Indonesia, for example, close to 20,000 teenage boys made the "Pledge2Respect", completing a programme that combines football and a curriculum about positive masculinity. Women and girls in their communities reported a change in the behavior of boys that made them feel safer and respected.



Source: Global Giving  
<https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/education-through-sports-girls-tanzania/donate/>

**Addressing Poverty and Inequalities** - The pandemic has left many millions at risk of dropping out of education, particularly in the developing world.<sup>1</sup> Given the role of education in enabling upward mobility, the result threatens to have a dire impact for years to come. Sport-based interventions have proven effective at making school more attractive to children and young people, promoting the value of education, and contributing to educational outcomes.

The pandemic pushed 205 million additional people into unemployment, leaving disadvantaged communities ever further behind<sup>2</sup>. Sport-based programmes can help to develop and improve the soft skills of disadvantaged individuals to enable them to gain and retain suitable employment. Development of the sports industry, itself, can also be a powerful way to generate employment and contribute to economic growth in poor communities. Sports-based approaches can generate a "virtuous cycle", building networks of local entrepreneurs, while increasing an area's attractiveness to tourism. A growing sports industry, for example, could provide productive employment opportunities for young people in Africa, helping to catalyze inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

**Improving mental and physical health** - The impact of sport and physical activity can have immediate impacts on people's well-being, while serving as a catalyst to lower the cost of health care and reap the benefits of a more productive, active population.

The pandemic led to a renewed urgency to address the dangers of physical inactivity and the global mental health crisis. Emerging data indicates a decline of 41 per cent in physical activity since the start of the pandemic. Lockdowns activity contributed to a 200 per cent increase in mental health conditions reported amongst youth. The WHO estimates that regular physical activity can translate to a 30% reduction in obesity, depression, and other mental health conditions, helping to prevent up to 5 million deaths a year<sup>3</sup> COVID-19 recovery presents an opportunity to rebuild stronger physical education



Source: <https://www.projects-abroad.org/projects/volunteer-sports-coaching-schools-tanzania/>

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/sport-and-anti-doping/fitforlife>.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO <https://en.unesco.org/themes/sport-and-anti-doping/fitforlife>

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine UK, The Role of Physical Activity and Sport in Mental Health [https://www.fsem.ac.uk/position\\_statement/the-role-of-physical-activity-and-sport-in-mental-health/](https://www.fsem.ac.uk/position_statement/the-role-of-physical-activity-and-sport-in-mental-health/).

and activity systems that reach under-served populations.

**Confronting the Climate Crisis** - No sector can “build back better”, without addressing the pressing climate crisis. Sport can play a catalytic role by using its universal platform to raise awareness, influence behaviour, and generate action to combat climate change. By lowering its own carbon footprint and proactively adopting sustainability standards, the highly visible sports industry can lead by example, with a ripple effect, in other sectors.

### **Enabling sport as a low-cost, high-impact tool**

**Financing** -The paradox of sport means that those with access to the largest pool of players (grassroots sports) have the fewest resources. Community-level actors implementing sport for development and peace are often dependent on public and corporate funding. Many lack the personnel to monitor and scale up good practices and meet donor requirements. As pandemic restrictions continue to ebb and flow, community sports remain short on resources, particularly in countries unable to provide public financing. Dwindling resources for grassroots sport can have compounding social and economic impacts, particularly at a time when it is needed to help repair the damage COVID-19 wrought to our health, well-being, and social fabric. Stepped up public and private investment targeted to grassroots sport and clear public health guidelines are essential to meet post-pandemic needs.

**Partnerships** – Given the community-level nature of most sport for development and peace initiatives, SDG impacts and lessons learned are often not aggregated or applied to improve programming or scale up what works. The report recommends that governments, supported by the UN and other entities, “adopt measures to strengthen national and local government collaboration with grassroots entities implementing sport for development and peace, including to build enabling partnerships, strengthen local capacities to monitor impacts, and scale up what works in a sustainable manner.”



*Inclusive Sports – Together Foundation, Copyright: CHUEN CHEE WAA, source <https://together-foundation.org/category/inclusive-sports/>*

The 2022 Secretary General Report, Sport: Catalyst For a Better, Stronger Recovery can be found at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/sport-development-peace/unsg-report2022.html> <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/18, the Report draws on the contributions of 17 Member States, 7 UN entities and 81 public and private entities, including community groups, universities, businesses, and sports leagues. To inform the Report, the UN organized the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on The Role of Sport in Addressing Inequalities in April 2022. 125 participants attended from 24 countries.