

women 2000 *and beyond*



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Women, gender equality and sport



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Introduction

"Bicycling has done more to emancipate women than any one thing in the world"

—Susan B. Anthony, suffragist, 1896

Women's participation in sport has a long history. It is a history marked by division and discrimination but also one filled with major accomplishments by female athletes and important advances for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Among the many remarkable achievements are those of Helene Madison of the United States of America, the first woman to swim the 100-yard freestyle in one minute at the 1932 Olympics; Maria-Teresa de Filippis of Italy, the first woman to compete in a European Grand Prix auto race in 1958; Nawal El Moutawakel of Morocco, the first woman from an Islamic nation to win an Olympic medal for the 400-metre hurdles at the 1984 Olympics; and Tegla Loroupe of Kenya, who in 1994 became the first African woman to win a major marathon.¹ Women have taken up top leadership positions in sport, such as Presidents and Secretaries-General of National Olympic Committees. More and more women have also taken up employment opportunities in all areas of sport, including as coaches, managers, officials and sport journalists.

These achievements were made in the face of numerous barriers based on gender discrimination. Women were often perceived as being too weak for sport, particularly endurance sports, such as marathons, weightlifting and cycling, and it was often argued in the

past that sport was harmful to women's health, particularly their reproductive health. In 1896, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, stated: "No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks."² Such stereotypes fuelled gender-based discrimination in physical education and in recreational and competitive sport, sporting organizations and sport media.

The benefits for women and girls of physical activity and sport

Although many of the clinical trials and epidemiological studies in health research have excluded women, the data available suggest that women derive many health benefits from an active lifestyle.³ The health benefits of women's participation in physical activity and sport are now well established. Participation in sport and physical activity can prevent a myriad of noncommunicable diseases which account for over 60 per cent of global deaths, 66 per cent of which occur in developing countries.⁴ For girls, it can have a positive impact on childhood health, as well as reduce the risk of chronic diseases in later life.

For older women, it can contribute to the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, which account for one third of deaths among women around the world and half of all deaths among women over 50 in developing countries.⁵ Physical activity also helps to reduce the effects of osteoporosis, which women

have a higher risk of developing than men.⁶ Participation in physical activity aids in the prevention and/or treatment of other chronic and degenerative diseases associated with aging, such as type-2 diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, osteoporosis and cardiovascular abnormalities. It also helps in the management of weight and contributes to the formation and maintenance of healthy bones, muscles and joints. Physical activity can reduce the incidence of falls among older women.

An important role of physical activity in the life of older women lies in prolonging independence. Much of the physical decline that was presumed an inevitable consequence of aging is now thought to be the result of inactivity. While no one can guarantee that exercise will prolong life, it can enhance the quality of life for older women who value their independence.⁷

The benefits for women and girls with disabilities are also well established. It has been noted that sport provides a double benefit to women with disabilities by providing affirmations of self-empowerment at both personal and collective levels.⁸ Apart from enhancing health, wellness and quality of life, participation in physical activity and sport develops skills such as teamwork, goal-setting, the pursuit of excellence in performance and other achievement-oriented behaviours that women and girls with disabilities may not be exposed to in other contexts.⁹

Participation in sport and physical activity can also facilitate good mental health for women of all ages, including the management of mental disorders such as Alzheimer's disease.¹⁰ It can promote psychological well-being through building self-esteem, confidence and social integration, as well as help reduce stress, anxiety, loneliness and depression. This is particularly important as rates of depression among women are almost double those of men in both developed and developing countries.¹¹ Adolescent girls in particular are vulnerable to anxiety and depressive disorders and are significantly more likely than boys to

have seriously considered suicide by the age of 15.¹²

In addition to improvements in health, women and girls stand to gain specific social benefits from participation in sport and physical activity. Sport provides women and girls with an alternative avenue for participation in the social and cultural life of their communities and promotes enjoyment of freedom of expression, interpersonal networks, new opportunities and increased self-esteem. It also expands opportunities for education and for the development of a range of essential life skills, including communication, leadership, teamwork and negotiation.

Inactive adults can rapidly improve their health and well-being by becoming moderately active on a regular basis. Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits and it is never too late to gain benefits.¹³

The benefits of women's participation for sport and society

In addition to benefits for women and girls themselves, women's increased involvement can promote positive development in sport by providing alternative norms, values, attitudes, knowledge, capabilities and experiences. The contributions of women, particularly in leadership positions, can bring diversity and alternative approaches and expand the talent base in areas such as management, coaching and sport journalism.

The participation of women and girls in sport challenges gender stereotypes and discrimination, and can therefore be a vehicle to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In particular, women in sport leadership can shape attitudes towards women's capabilities as leaders and decision-makers, especially in traditional male domains. Women's involvement in sport can make a significant contribution to public life and community development.

Inequalities and discrimination: constraining women in sport

The positive outcomes of sport for gender equality and women's empowerment are constrained by gender-based discrimination in all areas and at all levels of sport and physical activity, fuelled by continuing stereotypes of women's physical abilities and social roles. Women are frequently segregated involuntarily into different types of sports, events and competitions specifically targeted to women. Women's access to positions of leadership and decision-making is constrained from the local level to the international level. The value placed on women's sport is often lower, resulting in inadequate resources and unequal wages and prizes. In the media, women's sport is not only marginalized but also often presented in a different style that reflects and reinforces gender stereotypes. Violence against women, exploitation and harassment in sport are manifestations of the perceptions of men's dominance, physical strength and power, which are traditionally portrayed in male sport.

A number of critical elements have been identified for challenging gender discrimination and unequal gender relations, and establishing an enabling environment for gender equality and the empowerment of women, in many different areas, including women and sport. They include improving women's capabilities, through education and health; increasing their access to and control over opportunities and resources, such as employment and economic assets; enhancing their agency and leadership roles; protecting and promoting their human rights; and ensuring their security, including freedom from violence.

The role of men and boys in challenging and changing unequal power relations is critical. In recent years, a stronger focus has developed on the positive role men and boys can and do play in promoting women's empower-

ment in many different areas, including in the home, the community and the labour market. The current dominance of men in the world of sport makes their involvement and contributions to achieving gender equality in this area critical.

This publication explores the power of sport and physical education to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It examines persistent inequalities and challenges to equal participation and benefits for women and girls, as well as ways to address them. Examples of good practices are provided in all areas. The report outlines recommendations for action in the areas of research, policy and operational activities.

The United Nations human rights and sport for development and peace framework

"The practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental right for all."

—UNESCO International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, article 1

A rights-based understanding of sport and physical activity has been present since the founding of the United Nations. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out a framework of rights and duties and recognized that "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure . . ." (article 24); "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality . . ." (article 26); and "Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community . . ." (article 27).¹⁴

Sport and physical activity were first specifically recognized as a human right in the International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, adopted in 1978 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Charter states: "One of the essential conditions for the effec-

tive exercise of human rights is that everyone should be free to develop and preserve his or her physical, intellectual, and moral powers, and that access to physical education and sport should consequently be assured and guaranteed for all human beings.”¹⁵

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, also supports the notion of sport and physical education as a human right. In article 29 (1), States parties agreed that the education of the child shall be directed to “the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”.¹⁶

The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 marked a significant step forward in the policy framework on sport for people with disabilities. The Convention affirms the right of persons with disabilities to participate in mainstream and disability-specific sporting activities at all levels and to have equal access to training, resources, venues and services. It also affirms the right of children with disabilities to have equal access to recreation and sporting activities, including those in the school system.¹⁷ The specific focus on equality between women and men and women with disabilities in this new Convention will benefit women and girls in sport.¹⁸

Over the past decade, there has been a growing understanding that access to and participation in sport and physical education is not only a right in itself, but can also be used to promote a number of important development goals through facilitating democratic principles, promoting leadership development, and encouraging tolerance and respect, as well as providing access to opportunities and social networks. All areas of development can be influenced by sport, including health, education, employment, social inclusion, political development and peace and security.

Sport has the potential to contribute to the achievement of each of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in unique and

creative ways. Women play an integral role in the achievement of every MDG, and every MDG is vital to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

In 2002, the Secretary-General convened the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace to encourage a more coherent approach to the use of sport-related initiatives in the pursuit of development goals, particularly at the community

level, and to promote the use of sport as a recognized tool in development. The Task Force report *Sport as a tool for development and peace: Towards achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals* provides an overview of the growing role that sport activities play in many United Nations policies and programmes and summarizes the lessons learned. The report concludes that sport programmes must

Sport and the MDGs

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Providing development opportunities will help fight poverty. The sport industry, as well as the organization of large sporting events, creates opportunities for employment. Sport provides life skills essential for a productive life in society. The opportunity to acquire such skills is often more limited for women, making their access to sport of critical importance.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education. Sport and physical education are an essential element of quality education. They promote positive values and skills that have an immediate and lasting impact on young people. Sport activities and physical education generally make school more attractive and improve attendance.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. Increasing access for women and girls to physical education and sport helps build confidence and promotes stronger social integration. Involving girls in sport activities alongside boys can help overcome prejudice that often contributes to social vulnerability of women and girls.

Goals 4 and 5: Reduce child mortality and improve maternal health. Sport can be an effective means to provide women with a healthy lifestyle as well as to convey important messages on a wide range of health issues.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Sport can help engage otherwise difficult-to-reach populations and provide positive role models delivering prevention messages. The most vulnerable populations, including women and girls, are highly responsive to sport-targeted programmes. Sport can also effectively assist in overcoming prejudice, stigma and discrimination.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability. Sport is ideal for raising awareness about the need to preserve the environment. The interdependency between the regular practice of outdoor sports and the protection of the environment is clear.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development. Sport offers diverse opportunities for innovative partnerships for development and can be used as a tool to build and foster partnerships between developed and developing nations to work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Source: Adapted from International Year of Sport and Physical Education (2005). *A year of sports*. Available from http://www.un.org/sport2005/a_year/mill_goals.html

be based on the “sport for all” model, ensuring that all groups are given the opportunity to participate, particularly those who gain additional benefits, such as women, persons with disabilities and young people.¹⁹

In 2004, the General Assembly adopted resolution 58/5, “Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace”, which invited Governments, the United Nations, the specialized agencies, where appropriate, and sport-related institutions to work collectively so that sport and physical education could present opportunities for solidarity and cooperation, in order to promote a culture of peace and social and gender equality and to advocate dialogue and harmony. It recognized the power of sport to contribute to human development and proclaimed the year 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education.

The International Year aimed to facilitate better knowledge-sharing among different key stakeholders, raise awareness and create the right conditions for the implementation of more sport-based human development programmes. It provided a unique opportunity to use the power of sport to mobilize individuals, organizations and local communities, drawing together diverse groups in a positive and supportive environment. During the International Year, over 100 international initiatives and thousands of local projects were undertaken by Governments, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. An unprecedented amount of media attention was accorded to the issue of sport and physical education. The notion of “sport for all” was emphasized and the principle of non-discrimination was upheld as a fundamental human right.

In 2006, Secretary-General Kofi Annan presented the United Nations Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace, which was included in his report on “Sport for Development and Peace: the way forward”.²⁰ The

action plan serves as an initial road map for a three-year period to expand and strengthen partnerships, sport for development and peace programmes and projects, as well as advocacy and communications activities. The plan calls for the development of a global framework to strengthen a common vision, define priorities and further raise awareness to promote and mainstream easily replicable sport for development and peace policies. It also calls for promoting innovative funding mechanisms and voluntary arrangements, including the engagement of sport organizations, civil society, athletes and the private sector.

Policy/normative frameworks on women, gender equality and sport

“States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of women and men, the same rights, in particular . . . [t]he rights to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life.”

—Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [article 13]

Within the established framework of human rights and sport for development and peace, a number of United Nations intergovernmental and treaty body processes, as well as other international and regional processes, have specifically addressed some of the critical gender equality issues in sport and physical education. Global and regional policy/normative frameworks on women, gender equality and sport have been developed.

These policy/normative frameworks have laid the foundation for a just and equitable world of sport for women and men. They have also recognized the power of sport as a catalyst for social and economic development. Imple-

mentation of these commitments has begun in all regions, and has resulted in real and tangible progress for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. However, the implementation of the frameworks continues to be constrained by gender-based discrimination in all areas and at all levels of sport and physical education.

United Nations intergovernmental processes

The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, provides important policy recommendations on women, gender equality and sport. The Platform calls for the provision of accessible recreational and sport facilities by educational institutions, the establishment and strengthening of gender-sensitive programmes for girls and women of all ages in education and community institutions, and the creation and support of programmes in the education system, workplace and community to make opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity available to girls and women of all ages, on the same basis as they are made available to men and boys.²¹

The Commission on the Status of Women, the principal global policymaking body on gender equality, addressed sport and physical activity in its review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In agreed conclusions 1999/17 (I) on women and health, the Commission called on Governments, the United Nations system and civil society to encourage women to practise regular sport and recreational activities, which have a positive impact on women’s health, well-being and fitness throughout the whole life cycle, and ensure that women enjoy equal opportunities to practise sport, use sport facilities and take part in competitions.²²

The outcome of the five-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action rec-

Sport and the Beijing Platform for Action

Under the critical area of concern on **education**, the Platform calls for Governments, educational authorities and other educational and academic institutions to provide accessible recreational and sport facilities and establish and strengthen gender-sensitive programmes for girls and women of all ages in education and community institutions and support the advancement of women in all areas of athletics and physical activity, including coaching, training and administration, and as participants at the national, regional and international levels.

In relation to **health**, the Platform calls for Governments to create and support programmes in the education system, workplace and community to make opportunities to participate in sport, physical activity and recreation available to girls and women of all ages on the same basis as they are made available to men and boys.

In the critical area of concern on **power and decision-making**, the Platform notes that the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in the areas of art, culture, sport, the media, education, religion and law have prevented women from having a significant impact on many key institutions.

In relation to the situation of the **girl-child**, the Platform calls for Governments and international and non-governmental organizations to promote the full and equal participation of girls in extracurricular activities, such as sport, drama and cultural activities.

Source: United Nations (1995). *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 4-15 September 1995*. New York (United Nations publication. Sales No. 96.IV.13). Critical Area of Concern B, Education and training of women, Strategic Objective B.2, para. 83 (m). See the Critical Area of Concern C, Women and health, Strategic Objective C.2, para. 107 (f); Critical Area of Concern G, Women in power and decision-making, para. 183; and, Critical Area of Concern L, The girl-child, Strategic Objective L.4, para. 280 (d).

ognized the need for gender equality in sport and physical education. It called on Governments and regional and international organizations, including the United Nations system, to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls in cultural, recreational and sport activities, as well as in participation in athletics and physical activities at the national, regional and international levels, such as in access, training, competition, remuneration and prizes.²³

The understanding that sport programmes can be an important vehicle for promoting gender equality has continued to advance, particularly since the establishment of the International Year of Sport and Physical Education. In 2006, the General Assembly, for the first time, specifically invited Member States to initiate sport programmes

to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.²⁴

United Nations treaty bodies

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides binding obligations for States parties on eliminating discrimination against women and girls in the area of sports and physical education. Article 10 calls for States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education, including ensuring the same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education. Article 13 calls for

States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on the basis of equality between women and men, the same rights, including the right to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life.²⁵

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has also reminded States parties, in its general recommendation No. 25 on temporary special measures, that temporary special measures, such as positive action, preferential treatment or quota systems, should be implemented in the areas of sports, culture and recreation. The Committee further emphasized that, where necessary, such measures should be directed at women subjected to multiple discrimination, including rural women.²⁶

Other international and regional policy frameworks

Other processes have also contributed to global and regional policy frameworks on women, gender equality and sport. International bodies that have been particularly active in developing such frameworks include the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education, the International Olympic Committee, the International Paralympic Committee and numerous groups and networks, such as the International Working Group on Women and Sport, WomenSport International and the International Association of Physical Education for Women and Girls.

International processes

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) plays a central leadership role in the world of sport, and its policies set standards in international, regional and national sporting events and procedures. In 1994, it requested that the Olympic Charter be amended to include an explicit reference to the

need for action on women and sport. This is reflected in the current Charter, adopted in 2004, which states that one of the roles of the Committee is to “encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women.”²⁷

In 1995, the International Olympic Committee established a Working Group on Women and Sport, which was elevated to the status of a Commission in 2004. The Women and Sport Commission, which meets once a year, monitors the participation of women in the Olympics as well as their representation in decision-making. The Commission organizes quadrennial IOC World Conferences on Women and Sport to assess progress made in women and sport within the Olympic Movement, define priority actions and increase the involvement of women.

The International Working Group on Women and Sport, an independent coordinating body of government organizations, aims to be a catalyst for the advancement and empowerment of women and sport globally. It was established in 1994 at the First World Conference on Women and Sport, held in Brighton, United Kingdom, organized by the British Sports Council and supported by the International Olympic Committee. At this conference, the Brighton Declaration was adopted and endorsed by the 280 delegates from 82 countries representing Governments, NGOs, National Olympic Committees, international and national sport federations, and educational and research institutions.

The Second International Working Group on Women and Sport World Conference on Women and Sport took place in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1998. The Windhoek Call for Action further developed the aims of the Brighton Declaration, calling for the promotion of sport as a means to realize broader goals in health, education and women’s human rights.²⁸ This idea was strengthened in the Montreal Communiqué

Resolution of the Second International Olympic Committee World Conference on Women and Sport

The resolution, adopted in 2000, calls for a number of strategies and actions to be taken by the International Olympic Committee, Governments and international organizations, including the United Nations system, such as:

- Meeting the 20 per cent goal of women in decision-making by 2005;
- Increasing scholarships and training for women athletes, coaches and other officials;
- Raising awareness about the positive influence of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on the development of physical activity and sport for women and girls;
- Urging the Commission on the Status of Women to recognize the importance of physical activity and sport to women’s and girls’ development at all stages of their lives;
- Raising awareness about the importance of quality physical education;
- Developing strategies and educational material to support physical education for girls;
- Implementing sexual harassment policies, including codes of conduct; and
- Working with the media to ensure a more accurate projection of women’s sport.

Source: International Olympic Committee (2000). *Resolution of the 2nd IOC World Conference on Women and Sport*. Paris, France. Available from http://www.olympic.org/common/asp/download_report.asp?file=en_report_757.pdf&id=757

The Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport

The Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport calls for:

- Equality in society and sport;
- Sport facilities that meet the needs of women;
- An increase in the number of women coaches, advisers and decision-makers in sport;
- Education, training and development programmes that address gender equality;
- Information and research on women and sport;
- Allocation of resources for sportswomen and women’s programmes; and
- Incorporation of the promotion of gender equality and sharing of good practices into governmental and non-governmental policies and programmes on women and sport.

Source: International Working Group on Women and Sport (1994). *The Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport*. Available from <http://www.iwg-gti.org>

adopted at the Third IWG World Conference in Montreal, Canada, in 2002, which recognized that the path to realizing these broader goals involves a

variety of actions, including information and advocacy campaigns and the integration of sport into community development projects.²⁹ The Fourth IWG

The Montreal Tool Kit—A Manual for Change

The Montreal Tool Kit was developed for the Third World Conference on Women and Sport as a reference manual containing 20 tools to help women activists working to increase women's participation in sports. The manual includes tools on advocacy and awareness-raising, such as "Creating an advocacy strategy" and "Non-sexist sport commentary for media"; tools for changing organizations, such as "Terms of reference for a Women and Sport Committee" and "Sample harassment policy"; tools for individual development, such as "Building a case for mentoring"; and other tools for action, such as "Measuring your success".

Source: International Working Group on Women and Sport (2002a). *The Montreal Tool Kit*. A legacy of 2002 World Conference. Canada: International Working Group on Women and Sport. Available from <http://www.canada2002.org/e/toolkit/index.htm>

World Conference, held in May 2006 in Kumamoto, Japan,³⁰ concluded with the Kumamoto Commitment to Collaboration, which expressed participants' commitment to building a collaborative network in order to realize gender equality in and through sport.³¹

Regional processes

Regional bodies also address gender equality issues in sport. For example, in 2005, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed recommendation 1701 on discrimination against women and girls in sport. The recommendation calls on the Committee of Ministers to promote women's sport and women's participation in sport; accord greater importance to school-based physical education for women and girls; conduct awareness-raising among officials in sport edu-

cation, women, young people and children in sport (3/2000).³³

In 2002, the African Sports Confederation of Disabled (ASCOD) established a policy on disabled women's and girls' participation in sport and recreation. The policy aims to increase the participation of women and girls at all levels of sport and recreation in order to achieve gender equality, and calls on the Confederation and its member nations to bear the duty of advising Ministers of Sport on ways to meet the targets set out in the policy.³⁴

In 2001, the first Asian Conference on Women and Sport, held in Osaka, Japan, led to the establishment of the Asian Working Group on Women and Sport (AWG). The Working Group developed the Asian Women and Sport Action Plan 2001, which sought to expand equal opportunities for women

the 2006 Doha Asian Games, and to include therein a special chapter on women with disabilities.³⁷

The Commonwealth Games Federation also promotes the role of women in sport as participants and as decision-makers. Regulation 6 of its March 2006 Constitution states that the Commonwealth Games retains its status as a leader in promoting gender equality, and that future programmes in sports will have a balanced participation and profile for males and females. Article 17 of the Constitution also states that both women and men shall contribute at least 20 per cent or two of the representatives on the Executive Board and on the Sports Committee and any other committees and commissions formed by the Executive Board.³⁸

Sport as a vehicle for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

"... [M]y trainers taught me to believe in myself... I was inspired and learned determination and discipline. Sports allow you to get to know yourself."

—Nawal El Moutawakel, the first Olympic gold medallist from Morocco (1984 Olympics —hurdles)³⁹

The relationship between gender equality and sport is not solely about

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