

Thematic Paper: **Disability Inclusive Physical Activity and Sport in the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals**

GPcwd¹ Task Force on Physical Activity and Sport²

1. Physical activity and sport³ are integral to sustainable development.

The United Nations has repeatedly reaffirmed the importance of physical activity and sport as integral elements in realizing development goals.⁴ Social rights to participate in physical activity and sport are also firmly embedded in the international human rights law framework, included as the right to participate in sport, recreation and play.⁵

2. Physical activity and sport must be inclusive of persons with disabilities and all historically marginalized groups.

Groups who are at risk, excluded or marginalized must be included in all aspects of the development agenda.

A balanced development framework must reflect comprehensive human rights standards for civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights and must apply these standards without discrimination on the basis of disability or other status. The post-2015 development agenda must therefore include physical activity and sport, decent work, health care, adequate housing, participation in development and other decision-making, and fair institutions of justice for persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

3. Physical Activity and Sport in the SDGs.

The promotion of inclusive physical activity and sport within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) generates numerous socioeconomic benefits for society. The following SDGs are particularly pertinent to disability inclusion in the context of physical activity and sport:

Inclusive Physical Activity and Sport:

- **Support poverty eradication;**
- **Promote health** and the prevention of non-communicable diseases;
- Help achieve quality, **inclusive education** by making sport and physical education accessible to all learners;
- **Advance gender equality**, including the empowerment of girls and women with disabilities;
- **Promote sustainable cities** and human settlements;
- **Facilitate peace** and non-violent societies; and
- **Develop human capital** and human potential of all people.

- End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
- Promote health and the prevention of non-communicable diseases;
- Achieve quality education through values-based learning;
- Promote gender equality, including the empowerment of girls and women;
- Promote sustainable cities and human settlements;
- Contribute to peaceful and non-violent societies; and
- Develop human capital and human potential.

SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

It is well established that poverty and disability are inextricably linked and that both have a direct impact on health, well-being and development outcomes.⁶ Physical activity and sport play an important role in poverty elimination by helping to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups, reduce social vulnerability, support the empowerment of vulnerable or at-risk populations and enhance self-esteem along with physical and mental health. This, in turn, serves to foster independence and economic opportunity, which is essential for reducing poverty among vulnerable groups.

Governments recognize the important link between sport and development and the need to ensure that disability inclusion is prioritized in sport for development policies and programs.⁷ Where physical activity and sport are utilized in supporting development goals, it is important to ensure that persons with disabilities—who are among the poorest of the poor—are able to participate:

- Physical activity and sport can help reduce health care costs and increase productivity, key issues in emerging economies, and therefore, they must be accessible to persons with disabilities;⁸
- Development messages targeted to youth and adults through sport and recreation platforms (e.g. health messages, voter information) must be accessible for persons with disabilities;⁹
- Educational outreach through school sport and community recreation should include and be accessible to children with disabilities.¹⁰

SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Addressing the social and environmental determinants of health for persons with disabilities and the entire population is an important dimension of ensuring inclusive, economically productive and healthy societies. The right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health cannot be attained without due attention to physical activity and sport.

There is now global recognition that physical inactivity is a major driver of ill-health and impacts health conditions that can accelerate or aggravate disability. And all too often, persons with disabilities encounter a variety of barriers that inhibit participation in physical activity and sport. Research discloses the following:

- Lack of understanding and unfounded assumptions about the health of people with disabilities result in exclusion of people with disabilities from health promotion and disease prevention programs.¹¹
- Health promotion interventions such as physical activities are beneficial for people with disabilities, and yet, health promotion activities seldom target people with disabilities, and many experience multiple barriers to participation.¹²
- Increases in diabetes, cardiovascular diseases (heart disease and stroke), mental illness, cancer, and respiratory illnesses, observed in all parts of the world, will have a profound effect on disability.¹³
- Non-communicable diseases in rapidly developing regions are on the rise and will result in an upward trend of

disabling conditions.¹⁴

- Physical inactivity is one among several factors contributing to increases in non-communicable diseases and resulting disability.¹⁵
- At all stages of childhood and adolescence, participation in physical activity and sport has profound impact on overall growth and development and is an essential element of quality of life in childhood.¹⁶

In sum, disability inclusive sport and physical activity have numerous benefits for the health of persons with disabilities, including mitigating disabling health conditions, preventing secondary or aggravating disabling conditions, acting as a component of a rehabilitation program, and serving as a facilitator of self-esteem and mental health.

SDG 3, target 3.4: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and wellbeing

Recommendation: We strongly recommend that physical activity be recognized in the targets and all indicators be disaggregated by disability.

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Physical activity can foster healthy child development, life-long health, social cohesion, and increased productivity and performance in school and daily life.¹⁷ Children with disabilities too often experience double discrimination: they are excluded from school and excluded from participation in sport and physical activity inside and outside of schools. Research discloses that:

- Weak or non-existent physical education requirements for children generally result in little or no physical activity for those with disabilities.¹⁸
- When physical education is required, children with disabilities are often excused from attendance by their schools on the basis of a doctor's note, rather than provided with adaptive physical education by their schools.¹⁹
- Children with disabilities today are less active than their peers.²⁰
- According to a study in Canada, children with disabilities are 4.5 times less likely to engage in physical activity.²¹
- Children and adolescents with disabilities have a higher prevalence of obesity compared to their peers without disabilities, increasing risk of secondary conditions.²²
- For girls with disabilities, the barriers to physical activity and sport are even more pronounced because they face multiple layers of discrimination stemming from being female, living with a disability, possibly living in poverty or coming from a minority or indigenous community, and confronting the negative social norms associated with girls across all forms of physical activity.²³

Children with disabilities are systematically excluded from participation in all forms of physical activity and sport, with consequences across the life course.

International human rights law specifically recognizes the right of children with disabilities to play and to participate in recreation, leisure and sporting activities in the school system.²⁴ This includes access to playgrounds and other child-specific sport, recreation and play venues in the community as well as adaptive physical education in schools.²⁵ Disability inclusion requires that:

- Education policies promote inclusion in all aspects of education for children with disabilities;
- School policies support the provision of opportunities and programs for quality physical education and sport;

- Schools have accessible, safe and appropriate spaces and facilities for physical education and sport;
- Schools and communities provide opportunities for children with disabilities to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities;
- Schools and communities support the provision of appropriate instruction, training and resources for persons with disabilities to participate in sport and recreation.

SDG 4, target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

SDG 4, target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the marginalized, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations

SDG 4, target 4.a: Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

Recommendation: We strongly recommend that physical education be included in the targets and disaggregated by disability.

SDG 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Although more than one billion persons worldwide experience some form of disability,²⁶ within this group, women experience higher prevalence of disability²⁷ and disproportionately high rates of poverty.²⁸ Moreover, women living in poverty are more likely to become disabled due to inadequate access to health care, poor living conditions, malnutrition and health-endangering employment.²⁹ Accordingly, women and girls with disabilities experience discrimination because they are women (gender inequality) and because they are disabled (disability inequality). In the context of physical activity and sport:

- Studies show that 93% of women with disabilities do not participate in sport or physical exercise.³⁰
- Women make up only one-third of athletes with disabilities in international competitions. Many countries still refuse to enter women in these competitions.³¹

Physical activity and sport can help to enhance girls' and women's health and well-being, foster self-esteem and empowerment, facilitate social inclusion and integration, challenge gender norms, and provide opportunities for leadership and achievement. Research affirms the benefits of participation by girls and women with disabilities in physical education and sport:

- Improves physical and mental health;
- Creates opportunities for social interaction and friendship;
- Increases self-confidence, providing girls and women with disabilities with a sense of control over their bodies and their lives;
- Provides incentives and support for girls with disabilities to enroll in school, enhancing school attendance and academic performance;
- Helps girls and women acquire transferable life-skills leading to increased employability;
- Empowers girls and women with disabilities to acquire health information, skills, social networks, and leadership experience; and

People with disabilities face many obstacles in their struggle for equality. Although both men and women with disabilities are subject to discrimination, women with disabilities are doubly disadvantaged by discrimination based on gender and their disability status.³²

- Supports development of decision-making skills that empower women and girls to become leaders in the workplace, in the home and in all areas of community life.

The empowerment of women and girls with disabilities can be promoted through recreation and sport-based opportunities, enabling them to acquire health information, skills, social networks, and leadership experience. Equally, gender norms that intersect with disability discrimination can be challenged and eroded by facilitating the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in physical activity and sport.

SDG 5, target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

Recommended Indicator: Number of laws and policies recognizing the right of women and girls with disabilities to participate in education, sport and other social initiatives.

SDG 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

All segments of society must be empowered to participate in and benefit from development. This requires concerted efforts to reduce the entrenched inequality and discrimination that persons with disabilities experience around the world. The post-2015 development agenda must accommodate the voices of women, men and children with disabilities, remove obstacles to full participation in development by persons with disabilities, and ensure that anti-discrimination and equality measures are disability-specific, including in the context of physical activity and sport law, policy and programming. Moreover, efforts to reduce disability discrimination in sport and recreation are a requirement of human rights standards.³³ Specifically, people with disabilities have the right to enjoy equal access to sport (at all levels) and recreational facilities (such as swimming pools and playgrounds) and must be reasonably accommodated in exercising their rights.³⁴

SDG 10, target 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

SDG 10, target 10.3: Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and actions in this regard

Recommended indicator: Number of laws/policies specifically prohibiting discrimination in sport on the basis of disability.

SDG 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Providing access to public recreation, sport and play areas and promoting inclusive programming offer numerous development benefits to cities and human settlements.

For instance, policies that impact the mode of transport people use or that increase public space for recreational activities have the potential to increase sport and physical activity levels in the population and consequently provide significant health and social benefits. This is relevant in all types of countries and, in particular, in low and middle-income countries.

Ensuring that cities and human settlements are inclusive of persons with disabilities in the context of physical activity and sport:

- Confers health benefits and savings on health care and transport costs by promoting active transport to work (e.g. wheelchair ambulating, cycling and safe walking on accessible pavements) and other sport and physical activity strategies for the working population.
- Channels young people into healthy activities and provides platforms for behavioral risk reduction and health messaging, ensuring, for example, that local play facilities are accessible for children with disabilities;
- Facilitates access to green spaces for all;
- Expands social networks that make for strong communities; and
- Supports neighborhood revitalization, social cohesion and community identity.

International human rights standards recognize that people with disabilities (and other marginalized groups) have the right to access and use sporting, recreational and tourism facilities such as sport arenas, community centers, pools and recreational facilities.³⁵

Ensuring that cities and human settlements are inclusive of persons with disabilities in the context of physical activity and sport requires:

- Ensuring that persons with disabilities participate in decision-making in urban and town planning at the national and local level regarding facilities and programs for sport and physical activity;
- Adhering to universal design principles in planning;
- Adopting laws and policies that ensure accessibility in the design and operation of public accommodations offering physical activity and sport;
- Ensuring sport and recreational facilities are accessible and safe, especially for women and girls with disabilities

SDG 11, target 11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

Recommended Indicator: Number of recreational facilities accessible to everyone, including children and adults with disabilities.

SDG Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; provide access to justice for all; and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Effective governance for sustainable development requires public institutions in all countries and at all levels to be inclusive, participatory and accountable. Laws and institutions must protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and all persons must be free from discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of disability and other status. Inclusive and participatory governance are enablers and outcomes of development.

Laws and policies requiring mandatory physical education or promoting sport for all are often silent when it comes to addressing the right to access physical education and sport for persons with disabilities. Disability inclusion in sport, physical education and related social activities should be promoted and protected in law, policy and institutions of government. In particular:

- Development processes and government institutions must facilitate free, active and meaningful engagement of civil society and advocates and reflect the voices of men, women and children with disabilities and other groups.

- The right of persons with disabilities to participate in sport and physical education requires explicit recognition in national sport and development policies.
- Persons with disabilities need mainstream and disability-specific sport opportunities, accessible facilities and access to coaches trained in adaptive sport.

Beyond ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes, including in sport for development initiatives, physical activity and sport can play a role in fostering intercultural dialogue and peacebuilding.³⁶ The rebuilding and reintegration of societies after conflicts and humanitarian crises require that disenfranchised populations—and the most marginalized within them—are supported and that efforts are made to foster the resilience of people and communities. In this regard:

- Physical activity and sport are major resources for helping ex-combatants with and without disabilities to reintegrate into their communities.
- Physical activity and sport aid civilians, help children recover from trauma and rebuild community.
- Sport can help reduce the possibility of a return to arms for ex-combatants and lessen the vulnerability of children to militia and gang recruitment.
- Sport can help promote cooperation, solidarity, social inclusion and cohesion, gender equality and health in fragile and conflict-affected societies.³⁷

SDG 16, target 16.b: Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

Recommended Indicator: Number of laws and policies for sustainable development that support physical activity and sport for all persons.

SDG Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Persons with disabilities, their representative organizations, and the sport and recreation sector are key partners with governments and international organizations in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. In order for sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to foster the SDGs, particularly in developing countries, strategies of disability inclusive development must be adopted. International standards require that international cooperation, including international development programs, is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities, which includes facilitating and supporting inclusive physical activity and sport capacity-building, training programs and best practices. It also requires technical and economic assistance, including facilitating access to and sharing of accessible and assistive technologies in the realm of adaptive physical education and disability sport.

In order for the post-2015 development agenda to foster development for all, in whatever sphere, it is essential to ensure the quality, coverage and availability of data disaggregated by disability, income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts to support SDG monitoring. This will represent a significant improvement to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) framework and will help ensure consistency with international standards mandating the collection of data disaggregated on the basis of disability and other factors.³⁸

Data disaggregated on the basis of disability (and other relevant status) is essential for effective monitoring of the SDGs.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships

SDG 17, target 17.16: Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources in order to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, especially developing countries

SDG 17, target 17.17: Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships

We call for the recognition of all organizations working in sport and physical activity as contributors to sustainable development.

Conclusion

As recognized by the UN General Assembly, physical activity and sport are vehicles that can facilitate sustainable development, strengthen education, prevent disease, empower girls and women, and foster the inclusion and well-being of people with disabilities.³⁹ Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are integral to and essential participants in the post-2015 development agenda and the formulation and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Promoting inclusion and accessibility in physical activity and sport for persons with disabilities opens up participation for all and thus advances peaceful societies, health and other human rights.

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- 1 The GPCwd Partnership is a global multi-stakeholder coalition, representing more than 240 organizations, and provides a platform for collective action and advocacy to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities are included in and prioritized by both the disability and child rights agendas at the global, regional, and country levels.
- 2 The GPCwd Task Force on Physical Activity and Sport is made up of more than 90 organizations and is led by the Lakeshore Foundation, American College of Sports Medicine and the Institute for Human Centered Design.
- 3 The terms "physical activity" and "sport" are used in accordance with the United Nations' definition: "all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games". See United Nations Office of Sport for Development and Peace: <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/sport/home/sport>
- 4 See UN General Assembly Resolution 69/6, Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace, adopted 31 October 2014, at: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/6
- 5 See Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, art. 30(5); Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 31; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, art. 13(c).
- 6 See UN World Health Organization (WHO), World Report on Disability, 2011, at: http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en.
- 7 For example, Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Ghana, Mexico, Mozambique, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania and Zambia include disability as a priority in their Sport for Development policies and programs. See also United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, Sport For Development and Peace: Towards Achieving The Millennium Development Goals 1-2 (2003), at: http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/sport/shared/sport/pdfs/Reports/2003_interagency_report_ENGLISH.pdf.
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- 37 See United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, Sport For Development and Peace: Towards Achieving The Millennium Development Goals, 2003, 1-2 at http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/sport/shared/sport/pdfs/Reports/2003_interagency_report_ENGLISH.pdf.
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GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP
ON CHILDREN
WITH DISABILITIES

Thematic Paper: **Disability Inclusive Physical Activity and Sport in the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals**

GPcwd¹ Task Force on Physical Activity and Sport

List of Supporting Organizations (in alphabetical order)

Ability Society of Kenya
American College of Sports Medicine
Association D'Aide A L'Education De L'Enfant Handicape
BlazeSports America
Center for Inclusive Education and Disability Advocacy (Lagos, Nigeria)
Global Partnership on Children with Disabilities
Institute for Human Centered Design
International Disability Alliance
Kenya Sports Association or Visually Impaired
Lakeshore Foundation
Leonard Cheshire Disability & Inclusive Development Centre
Motivation
Society for Professionals with Visual Disability in Kenya
Special Olympics
Swiss Academy for Development
The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation
The Matthew Foundation
UNICEF

¹GPcwd Partnership

The GPcwd Partnership is a global, multi-stakeholder coalition representing more than 240 organizations, including international, national and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs); disabled people's organizations (DPOs); academia; young advocates; governments and the private sector. The GPcwd provides a platform for collective action and advocacy to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities are included and prioritized by both the disability and child rights agendas at the global, regional and country levels.

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