



Engaging women and youth in sports has proven to boost self-confidence, resilience, leadership skills, and mental health<sup>(1)</sup>. These positive effects can ripple through communities, fostering inclusivity and challenging social norms that limit opportunities based on gender or age.

If it is used with the right intention to achieve life skills objectives, in an appropriate setting and by qualified educators, sport can contribute to building a culture of peace within communities<sup>(2)</sup> and be a powerful **leverage for girls, women and youth inclusion**.

As acknowledged by the United Nations, investing in young people's human capital generates virtuous cycles that can lift individuals, families and societies out of poverty, reduce inequality and help build more resilient and peaceful societies<sup>(3)</sup>. **Sport represents a cost-effective and universal tool** to reinforce human capital:

- It promotes physical health, mental well-being
- It fosters social and life skills such as teamwork, leadership, and discipline
- It offers opportunities for youth engagement and education, reducing delinquency and enhancing social cohesion

However, **despite consensus** among scholars, field actors, sport governing bodies and international decision makers, **sport remains underutilized** in policies and programs designed to promote equality and building stronger, more inclusive communities. A large majority of young people around the world don't participate in structured sport activities. When it comes to young and adolescent girls, as well as women, social norms often discourage them from engaging in sports. However, this is not the only factor. The lack of female role models among coaches and in leadership positions within sport organizations, is also recognized as a key barrier to girls' participation in sports. Furthermore, links between the number of female coaches and female leaders also exist.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Deriving from direct observations and sharing of challenges and best practices by actors on the field - as part of our bottom-up approach - the recommendations outlined hereafter are intended to support all practitioners and stakeholders willing to implement high-impact programmes fostering inclusion and living together.

<sup>(1)</sup> World Health Organization

<sup>(2)</sup> Peace and Sport, Sport as a tool for building peace, November 2022

<sup>(3)</sup> World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results. UN DESA/POP/2024

<sup>(4)</sup> World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results. UN DESA/POP/2024

<sup>(5)</sup> WHO Fact Sheet - Physical activity - June 2024

<sup>(6)</sup> France 24 It's the Women's World Cup, so where are the woman coaches?

<sup>(7)</sup> #SIGAWomen Summit on Female Leadership in Sport 2023

<sup>(8)</sup> UNESCO Change the Game

## KEY FIGURES

**16%**  
of the global  
population

1.2 billion people  
are aged  
15 to 24 years<sup>(4)</sup>

**80%**  
of adolescents  
(aged  
11-17 years)

do not meet  
recommended levels  
of physical activity

**85%**  
of girls  
vs. 78%  
of boys

do not meet WHO  
guidelines on physical  
activity<sup>(5)</sup>

Only  
**12**  
of the 32  
participating

national teams were led  
by female head coaches<sup>(6)</sup>  
at the 2023 FIFA Women's  
World Cup

Only  
**24**  
of 206 National  
Olympic  
Committees

are chaired  
by women<sup>(7)</sup>

Female  
coaches are  
**4**  
times

more likely to remain in  
their jobs when female role  
models are present in  
the organization<sup>(8)</sup>



## Testimony from the field

Before I didn't encourage the girls that much... I considered them as weak. This is the education that I received. My coach was acting like this, so when I became an educator, I applied the same methods. But now I realized that in this way, we discourage girls to participate in sport. We make them leave. Now, I am no longer like that. I understood that we must treat and support girls and boys equally.

*Male educator - Togo*



## The Champion for Peace's view

I want to get involved where I know I will have a real impact. Global campaigns, if they are not adapted to the local context and followed by concrete actions, will not change things, nor convince decision-makers to invest in peace through sport.

*Aya Medany, Pentathlon - Olympian, Member IOC, Member of the Egyptian Parliament*

# 1. SUPPORTING ROLE MODELS

Role models are vital to the smooth and impactful implementation of programs.

**ATHLETES:** they bring unparalleled potential to inspire and drive change. Through their notoriety, athletes have an exceptional capacity to raise awareness on social issues affecting communities and influence decision makers.

**To fully harness their impact:**

- Engage athletes in ways that align with their interests and preferences
- Provide the necessary support for their active participation
- Avoid using them merely for "photo-op" appearances

**EDUCATORS:** they are the program's pillars. They play a foundational role in the programs' success by: empowering beneficiaries with knowledge and guidance; building trust and ensuring local community buy-in; bearing a key part of the impact measurement processes.

**To amplify their contribution:**

- Provide comprehensive training and tools enabling them to lead education sport-based session that go beyond sporting performance and instil peace values
- Acknowledge their status as Peace Educators with official certifications validating their knowledge and skills
- Ensure their practices and behaviours reflect the program's values and objectives
- Support the sustainability of the organizations they are involved with



### KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS:

- **Actively include female role models to inspire participation among girls and women and ensure equal opportunities for all**
- **Engage additional role models and influential figures, such as journalists, to support the cause**

# 2. CREATING SAFE SPACES

Safe spaces are key to ensure program's buy-in from the communities and a lasting impact. Safe spaces are environments where:

- Programs' personnel (educators, volunteers...) is trained and able to provide a **welcoming and secure atmosphere** for all participants
- Beneficiaries and their families can socialize, build connections, and form a strong community support network
- Young people have opportunities to access constructive alternatives to anti-social behaviours



### KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS:

- **Leverage the unifying power of sports to unite the community and deliver community-building activities**

# 3. INVOLVING FAMILIES

Engaging families and caregivers in sport-based programs has a twofold impact:

- **Promoting inclusion:** helps address and reduce cultural or traditional reservations about girls and women participating in sports
- **Enhancing impact assessment:** Strengthens evaluation processes, particularly for programs involving children, by incorporating family insights



### KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS:

- **Actively involve families and caregivers at every stage of the program, especially during the design phase, as they are best positioned to provide valuable insights into local needs, aspirations, and constraints.**