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## THE ROLE OF SPORTS AS A DEVELOPMENT TOOL

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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
The Transformational Power of Sport .....	3
Sport as a Vehicle for Development and Peace .....	4
Physical Education .....	5
Humanitarian Response .....	6
Reconciliation and Peace Building .....	6
Rehabilitation and Integration of Persons with Disabilities .....	7
Advocacy and Social/Policy Change .....	7
Awareness Raising and Education .....	8
Economic Development .....	8
Pitfalls and Possibilities: Promoting Responsible and Effective Programming .....	9
Conclusion .....	12
Appendix I .....	13
Training and Capacity Building .....	13
Athlete Development and Support .....	13
Material Support .....	13
Direct Implementation of Sports Activities .....	13
Facilitation of Partnerships .....	13
Appendix II .....	15

## **Executive Summary**

Sport has the capacity to transform the lives of individuals.<sup>1</sup> It bolsters physical, psychological, emotional, and social well-being and development. At the same time sport plays a significant role in cultures and communities around the world. These factors alone justify investment in sports programming. But there is also a growing understanding that sports programs merit support because they are powerful vehicles for achieving broader goals, particularly in advancing development and peace agendas.

The development community has typically marginalized sport, viewing it as a relatively low priority among a host of needs and goals. Recently, though, an international movement has taken root that recognizes that sport does not have to compete with other development priorities but can instead be a powerful means for addressing them. The United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank, governments, the International Olympic and Paralympic Committees, non-governmental organizations, and corporate entities have banded together to think strategically about sport for development and peace. At the field level, dozens of programs have been harnessing the power of sport for physical education, humanitarian response, reconciliation and peace building, rehabilitation and integration of persons with disabilities, advocacy and social/policy change, awareness raising and education, and economic development.

Much work must still be done to fully link the international movement to practitioners in the field and to bring the sport and development sectors together. Carried out wisely, however, sports programming has the potential to play an important role in fostering development and peace.

## **The Transformational Power of Sport**

Both formal studies and a wealth of anecdotal evidence have demonstrated that participation in sport has countless benefits for individuals. Among the most obvious positive outcomes are improvements in physical health, such as weight control, strength building, increased flexibility, enhanced coordination and motor skills, improved cardiovascular health, and pain reduction. People who are physically active often tend to develop healthier lifestyles and better eating habits.

A second, but no less important, beneficial aspect of sport is the impact that it has on psychological and emotional healing and well-being. Sport provides a positive outlet for

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<sup>1</sup> This report will rely on the definition of sport put forth by the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace: “Incorporated into the definition of sport are all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. These include play; recreation; organized, casual or competitive sport; and indigenous sports or games.” This definition is broad enough to encompass the wide range of needs and interests of individuals and communities around the world, whose desire and ability to participate in sport is influenced by their varied cultural traditions, age, gender, physical ability, and numerous other factors. By maintaining a broad definition of sport, we increase possibilities for participation, particularly by marginalized groups, and for developing programs that are appropriately tailored to the populations and communities involved.

stress and aggression. Participation in sport can help alleviate depression or anxiety. Physically active people also often experience enhanced self-confidence and improved self-image. There is also evidence that participation in sport improves concentration and mental functioning.

Beyond what it contributes to physical, psychological and emotional well-being, sport also plays a significant role in healthy social development and interaction. Sport helps people learn how to set and achieve goals through discipline and hard work. It nurtures the development of decision-making and leadership abilities, while teaching people to manage both success and failure. People who participate in sport have the opportunity to improve their communication skills and gain valuable experience in collaboration and teamwork. Sport brings people together who might not otherwise have a chance to meet and allows them an opportunity to share their experiences and work together toward a common goal. These social skills and experiences are readily transferable to other aspects of life and may improve a person's ability to succeed as a student, employee, community member, or advocate for a particular cause. Sport also provides an alternative to risky or anti-social behavior, creating sufficient structure, discipline, and incentive to keep some people away from drugs, violence, or criminal activity.

### **Sport as a Vehicle for Development and Peace**

The use of sport to promote peace and development is not entirely new; the Olympics are a historic example of sport used for a higher purpose. However, until recently, sport has remained on the sidelines of mainstream humanitarian and development programming, considered a luxury in the context of other development objectives. Now, though, there is a growing understanding that sport does not have to compete with other priorities but can actually be a means for addressing them. The United Nations Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace affirmed this notion, concluding in its 2003 report that “sport offers a cost-effective tool to meet many development and peace challenges, and help achieve the MDGs [the UN’s Millennium Development Goals].”

A nascent international movement is growing around the use of sport for development and peace, as evidenced by some of the following key events:

- In 2001, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) announced it would use sport to promote economic and social development.
- Also in 2001, created a new position, Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Sport for Development and Peace, and tapped former Swiss president, Adolf Ogi, to fill the post. Ogi is charged with identifying opportunities to use sport within UN programs and to build partnerships between the UN and sports institutions.
- In 2002, Mr. Ogi and Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, convened the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace to

discuss experiences and lessons learned and make recommendations regarding the use of sport by UN programs.

- In February 2003, the first International Conference on Sport and Development passed the “Maggingen Declaration,” affirming delegates’ commitment to sport for development and peace and calling on others to support the movement. Numerous other international conferences have moved the discussion forward. An International Working Group will spend the next four years identifying best practices and guidelines for sport for development and peace.
- On November 3, 2003, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 58/5 encouraging governments to use sport to advance their development and peace and declaring 2005 the “International Year of Sport and Physical Education.”
- The International Olympic and Paralympic Committees have both made commitments to support the use of sport for development and to improve the lives of people living in the most disadvantaged regions of the world.

At the field level, donor agencies, international and indigenous humanitarian and development organizations, national and local governments, sports ministries and federations, Olympic and Paralympic Committees, leagues and clubs, schools, and individuals have generated a host of creative and effective ways to leverage the power of sport. The categories below represent six of the primary areas in which sport is used to advance a broader development agenda:<sup>2</sup>

### **Physical Education**

Experts around the world have concluded that physical education is a critical component of a child’s overall education. It can improve body awareness and help a child develop healthy habits at an early age. There is also evidence that participation in physical education improves concentration and performance in academic courses. Furthermore, such classes provide an opportunity to address broader health and safety issues and ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, have an opportunity to participate in sport.

In spite of its known value, physical education routinely falls to the bottom of the priority list of governments and schools systems working within limited budgets. A study published by the International Council of Sport Science and Physical

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that some programs fall into two or more areas. Furthermore, these categories are not fixed and might be otherwise defined by different practitioners. It should also be noted that the organizations and programs mentioned in this section are included for illustrative purposes only. Their presence in this report does not indicate an endorsement of their activities, as information was gathered through informal research rather than a formal evaluation. Furthermore, it should be understood that this report refers to only a small sampling of the dozens of organizations and projects around the world that use sport to work for development and peace.

Education (ICSSPE) determined that the marginalization of physical education is nearly universal.<sup>3</sup>

- √ As part of a comprehensive program in Romania, Special Olympics is providing professors and students in physical education with a curriculum on how to coach individuals with learning disabilities.

### **Humanitarian Response**

In the wake of war, disaster, or humanitarian crisis, sports programs can play an important role in relieving stress, healing emotional wounds, restoring a sense of normalcy, and creating an opportunity for healthy social interaction. In camps for refugees and internally displaced persons, where people are away from home and often have little to occupy their time, sports activities can be a welcome break from the monotony of day-to-day life and a rare opportunity to have fun. As in other settings, sports activities have the added benefit of gathering people together and can be used as an opportunity to conduct public education activities.

- √ Through its global SportWorks program, Right to Play works with refugee children, former child combatants, and other particularly disadvantaged young people to help put them on a path to healthy development. The project fosters three key factors in the well-being of children: resilience, a meaningful connection to adults through the coaching relationship, and a sense of safety and security through regular activity.

### **Reconciliation and Peace Building**

Because it is a common language that can bridge cultural, ethnic, and geographic divides, many initiatives use sport to promote the reconciliation of communities or nations in conflict. Programs may operate at a local level, creating ethnically mixed teams or clinics, for example. They may also operate on a national or regional level, promoting the interaction of people from different locations. Sport also plays a role in international diplomacy, helping establish communication within civil society that sometimes paves the way for political dialogue.

- √ MercyCorps, with support from USAID, has managed to overcome political barriers in order to bring together people from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan in the Ferghana Valley Youth Basketball League.
- √ Playing for Peace, a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC, has used basketball to bridge divides between Catholic and Protestant children in Northern Ireland and children from numerous racial backgrounds in South Africa. Often times, these programs provide children their first opportunity to interact with children from outside their own communities.

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<sup>3</sup> See summary of study by K. Hardman and J. Marshall at [www.icsspe.org](http://www.icsspe.org).

- √ Search for Common Ground, a Washington-based non-profit dedicated to transforming the world's approach to conflict, set up a Football for Reconciliation Project in Burundi in 1999. The project held the first soccer tournament in an ethnically divided district and today continues to hold a soccer tournament/ weekend camp every four months and an evening dialogue once a month.

### **Rehabilitation and Integration of Persons with Disabilities**

The use of sport in rehabilitation began in veterans' hospitals in Europe and the U.S. but today is practiced widely, including by organizations that provide rehabilitation services in war-affected and developing countries. In addition to promoting physical rehabilitation, sports programs can have a significant impact on the emotional healing and social integration of persons with disabilities. They allow people to come together, share experiences, and build camaraderie. Such programs may form the basis for self-help groups or larger advocacy initiatives.

The participation of persons with disabilities in sport can also lead to a shift in public perception about disability, focusing attention on ability and commonality, rather than disability and difference. To the extent possible, sports programs should encourage the integration of disabled and non-disabled participants. When such integration happens, many myths and prejudices are dispelled and barriers to inclusion pushed aside.

- √ Landmine Survivors Network (LSN) has established networks of landmine survivors in six mine-affected countries. Among many other activities, each network promotes participation in sports activities. LSN Jordan, for example, has a successful amputee swim team, while LSN El Salvador hosted a swimming event in which survivors taught other survivors to swim. LSN Bosnia has organized wheelchair basketball and sitting volleyball tournaments.
- √ Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation's (VVAFA) Sports for Life initiative in Kosovo trained a cadre of adaptive sports experts, supported numerous leagues and events, trained teachers to work with disabled students, and helped local communities establish disability sports advisory committees to oversee activities in their area. In Angola, Sports for Life has created a bridge from physical rehabilitation to emotional and social recovery through wheelchair basketball and amputee soccer leagues.

### **Advocacy and Social/Policy Change**

Because of their ability to bring people together, stimulate confidence and teamwork, and attract public and media attention, sports programs serve as a useful tool for promoting social or policy change. Disadvantaged groups, such as women or persons with disabilities, may have their first opportunity to gather and organize around sports events. Sport can help people find a voice, both



individually and collectively, that they then use to bring about change in their own lives and communities.

- √ In Egypt, Save the Children uses team sports, in addition to reproductive health and literacy training, to build girls' confidence and sense of opportunity so that they are better able to delay marriage until they are more mature.
- √ In Croatia, international disability advocates/athletes helped a town form a wheelchair basketball league. Municipal leaders involved in the project became so invested in the effort that they instituted broader reforms, including making the town more accessible for wheelchair users.

### **Awareness Raising and Education**

One of the most common uses of sport in the development arena is as a forum for conveying educational, public health, safety, environmental, or other messages. Sport may also be used to foster individual development and learning. Sports events may act as a magnet, drawing in people who can then be engaged in education sessions before or after an event. In some cases, learning and information sharing are interwoven with sports activities themselves. Celebrity athletes, coaches, teammates, or other respected individuals may act as spokespeople to increase the receptiveness of the audience.

- √ In Zambia, Family Health International partners with Youth Activists Organization (YAO), a group run by Zambian youth. The YAO's largest initiative is a camp that reaches out to 14 to 25-year-old boys and their parents. Through this program, a professional coach integrates HIV/AIDS prevention, family planning, and health messages into soccer training and competitions.
- √ Trevor Dudley, an Ashoka Fellow in Uganda, created a sports league that teaches children to play hard, work as a team, and set goals. The purpose of the project is to provide children with an alternative learning environment to that found in the schools, where rote memorization is the standard.

### **Economic Development**

Although it is an area that requires more attention and research, there is already plenty of evidence that sport can be used to spur economic development. The construction and rehabilitation of sports facilities and development of sport for entertainment create employment and marketing opportunities. The manufacturing of sports equipment also serves as a source of jobs. Furthermore, sports programs can be used as a training ground for a new work force, teaching skills that make young people more employable and productive.

- √ The International Labor Organization's (ILO) Youth Sports Programme works in partnership with governments and the sports sector to support the skills building and employment of young people. In Albania, the ILO, together with

the Albanian Olympic Committee and the UN system in Albania, sponsored a workshop that brought together key actors to discuss the relationship between sport and national youth policy. Workshop participants planned joint activities that would contribute to economic development and youth employment, including some that link sports events to the promotion of tourism.

## **Pitfalls and Possibilities: Promoting Responsible and Effective Programming**

The following issues merit particular consideration by donors and implementers alike as they work to build responsible and effective programs that harness the power of sport for development and peace.

- **Maintain High Expectations.** Sport is a feel-good activity. Seeing children playing and enjoying themselves is heart warming and tends to elicit positive responses from observers. But the mere fact that a program utilizes sport as a tool, or that participants are having fun, does not mean that the program is effective or deserving of scarce resources. Implementers and donors need to carefully examine sports programs as they do other development activities to ensure that they have clearly defined objectives and plans that will lead to the fulfillment of those objectives, that they are cost-effective, and that they adhere to the highest standards of development practice.
- **Encourage Balance.** Elite sports programs and athletes have an important role to play in the overall development of sport. They supply role models and generate media coverage and funds that can be used to spark interest in, and support for, sports programs at the recreational level. But because elite or highly competitive sport has high entertainment value, and potentially economic value, it can be tempting to focus resources exclusively on these athletes and events. National governments, even those with very limited funds, may invest significantly in elite athletes because of the prestige that comes from winning international competitions. Also, there are often perks for officials who work closely with top athletes, such as paid international travel. Elite sports programs tend to be very expensive relative to the number of people that benefit from them. For all of these reasons, donors and implementers should be careful to maintain a balance between their support for elite and recreational sports programs and to ensure that, when they do support elite athletes, others are benefiting, too.
- **Be Intentional About Inclusion.** While sport has an almost unique capacity to bring people together, if not executed with great care, sports activities sometimes divide or exclude people. Because they have had less exposure to sport and therefore lack experience or confidence, or because social or cultural stereotypes and assumptions inhibit them, some groups of people are unlikely to participate in sports activities unless an active effort is made to involve them. This tends to be especially true of

women, girls, and persons with disabilities. In many places, ethnic, religious, or cultural divisions may also lead to the exclusion of some people from sport.

Ensuring that sports programs are inclusive necessitates that implementers treat participation as a process, not simply a desired outcome. Program planning should involve all key stakeholders, including potential participants, and should specifically address how to encourage the participation of women, girls, people with disabilities, or others who might typically be marginalized. This means taking into account which activities would be most interesting and appropriate for various groups of people, what times and locations would be most convenient, what types of special equipment or assistance might be required, whether or not special or separate training might be needed, and how to reach out to potential participants and get them involved. Likewise, in monitoring and evaluating programs, it is important to examine the participation, or lack thereof, of various groups and identify any ways in which a program may be unintentionally excluding people or simply failing to encourage their inclusion.

- **Plan for Sustainability.** While one-time events or clinics may have spark interest in sport or raise awareness of an issue, it should not be assumed that such programs will have a significant long-term impact or that they will naturally lead to long-term programs. For example, bringing in international athletes for a one-week exhibition tour may raise awareness and get some people interested in a sport, but without follow-up and assistance with building the capacity of local organizations to institute regular activities, the tour may have limited sustained impact. Even on-going programs and activities may not be sustainable if they are not carefully planned with that intent in mind. As with other types of development programs, sports programs are more likely to be sustained if the program design addresses issues such as which local actors will manage and implement programs, how to maintain participation levels, and how to ensure on-going funding.

Some programs are not meant to be sustainable; they are instituted to provide some particular service or benefit only on a short-term basis. For example, an organization might establish a recreational sports program at a refugee camp to provide youth some level of normalcy in the midst of a chaotic situation. When people return home and the camp is closed, the sports program may also end. Even if a program such as this is not sustainable, though, there may be certain elements that could be sustained. For example, coaches and referees might be trained and provided with basic equipment and support so that they can continue to organize activities after returning home. At the very least, implementers should anticipate that some benefits of a sports program might have a lasting impact on the attitudes and practices of individual participants. In designing programs, implementers should look for ways to help participants retain the benefits of their involvement and maintain healthy habits.

- **Beware of the “Stuff Phenomenon.”** Sometimes sports officials or participants hope that international donors will simply buy them new uniforms, shoes, and

equipment—or renovate their facilities—and leave. While equipment and facilities are often desperately needed, and while it may occasionally be the case that such material support is all that is required to stimulate participation in sport, donors and implementers should be very cautious about simply providing material support and walking away. If not incorporated into a broader strategy for increasing participation and for leveraging sport for particular ends, the provision of material support can end up being a waste of money, or worse still, creating harmful dynamics. Equipment may disappear into the hands of a few individuals or be sold on the open market. Facilities may be commandeered by a powerful few and unavailable to those people who lack political or financial influence. To avoid such outcomes is not entirely easy and it requires that stakeholders (including participants) be fully aware of, engaged in, and invested in the broader program strategy. Implementers/ donors have a special responsibility to ensure that less powerful or traditionally marginalized people participate and have access to donated resources.

- **Prevent Corruption.** Sports programs are vulnerable to abuse by people who see an influx of resources as an opportunity to improve their own financial situations. To discourage corruption, programs should be carefully planned with all key stakeholders and maximum transparency should be maintained throughout the process. Budgets should be detailed and clearly tied to programmatic objectives. In some cases it may be prudent to provide only in-kind support, rather than direct grants. Rigorous monitoring is necessary to ensure that funds and materials are being used as planned. Any hint of corruption should be investigated and addressed immediately.
- **Discourage Destructive Behavior: Drugs and Violence.** For its many positive effects, sport also has the capacity to become a magnet for negative social behaviors, as well. Highly competitive athletes sometimes turn to performance enhancing drugs, a practice that must be prevented and punished with strict rules and clear consequences. Although they can be a forum for reconciliation and peace building, sporting events can also become a venue for violence and team rivalries can end up reinforcing social divisions. Programs need to be designed in such a way that activities are carried out on neutral ground, either geographically location or through the types of activities selected.
- **Invest in Monitoring and Evaluation.** Monitoring and evaluation is one aspect of sports programming that seems to present significant challenges to implementers across the board. While it is usually relatively manageable to report on simple outputs like the number of events conducted, materials produced, or participants involved, measuring the impact of such programs on individuals and society usually proves to be far more difficult. Nonetheless, there are efforts underway to design systems for monitoring and evaluating sports programs. Playing for Peace has partnered with the Harvard School of Public Health, Northeastern University, and University of Natal in South Africa to conduct short-term evaluations and a longitudinal study of its programs. Special Olympics has also partnered with

academic institutions, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Gallup, to implement surveys and studies. More such partnerships between implementing agencies and academic institutions should be encouraged. In general, monitoring and evaluation is an area that merits particular support from donors.

## **Conclusion**

Dozens of organizations and programs around the world have tapped into the power of sport to promote development and peace. Until very recently, though, such projects have tended to be sporadic and isolated. Over the past of the past few years, a movement has been building at the international level in support of sport for development and peace, bringing with it an unprecedented level of focus, coordination, and strategic thinking. The next step in this growth process is to fully link the movement taking place at the international level with practitioners and programs in the field—and to connect these actors on the ground with one another. At the same time, there also remains significant work to be done to bring the worlds of sport and development together, to help each understand the mutual benefits of this relationship. Finally, there is also room to work with private sector entities to bring them into partnerships that use sport to promote development and peace.

## **Appendix I**

While sports programs differ according to their objectives, they may also differ in approach. The following are some of the many ways in which organizations might choose to get involved in sports related programming. Implementers, partners, and donors alike should be clear on what approaches will be used and what the desired outcomes are. Donors should encourage innovation and creativity while at the same time ensuring that programming is appropriate to a given situation and set of objectives.

### **Training and Capacity Building**

- Train physical education teachers on-the-job or at the university level.
- Train teachers, health workers, family members, and mentors in PE and sport.
- Train coaches and referees.
- Conduct short-term workshops or training clinics for athletes.
- Develop curricula, rulebooks, training manuals and other materials for sports/physical education programs.
- Build the capacity of national and local organizations (e.g., National Olympic and Paralympic Committees, government departments, sports federations) to manage sports programs (may include assisting in the development of financial and administrative systems, strategic plans, personnel management, etc.).

### **Athlete Development and Support**

- Sponsor groups to use sports facilities or travel to training or competitions.
- Sponsor athletes or teams to train, compete, and/or participate in exchanges.

### **Material Support**

- Build or rehabilitate sports facilities and playgrounds.
- Provide sports equipment and uniforms.

### **Direct Implementation of Sports Activities**

- Put on sports days that expose new participants to the possibility of sport.
- Sponsor sporting events and league play.
- Organize sports activities in conjunction with educational/awareness-raising programs on HIV/AIDS, landmines, or other issues.

### **Facilitation of Partnerships**

- Develop public-private partnerships to support the design and implementation of innovative sports programming.
- Support National Olympic/Paralympic Committees and government sports departments to participate in international exchanges and conferences and to build partnerships with their counterparts in other countries.
- Create partnerships between academic institutions and practitioners to further research in the field of sport for development and peace.

## Appendix II

Further information on the use of sport for development and peace may be found through the following organizations and websites. Please note that this is only a small sampling of the many institutions working on these issues. However, the Sport for Development and Peace International Platform website ([www.sportanddev.org](http://www.sportanddev.org)) contains a more extensive list of programs and resources.

Abt Associates' Sport and Health Education Program (Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan)

[www.abtassoc.com/collateral/Sports.pdf](http://www.abtassoc.com/collateral/Sports.pdf)

Academy for Educational Development (AED)

[www.aed.org/Youth](http://www.aed.org/Youth)

CARE USA

[www.careusa.org](http://www.careusa.org)

Center for the Study of Sport in Society, Northeastern University

[www.sportinsociety.org](http://www.sportinsociety.org)

FHI Youth Net/ Youth Activists Organization (YAO) (Zambia)

[www.fhi.org/en/Youth/YouthNet/Publications/FOCUS/ProjectHighlights/yaozambia.htm](http://www.fhi.org/en/Youth/YouthNet/Publications/FOCUS/ProjectHighlights/yaozambia.htm)

Inter-American Development Bank

[www.iadb.org](http://www.iadb.org)

International Labor Organization

[www.ilo.org/universitas](http://www.ilo.org/universitas)

International Olympic Committee

[www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org)

International Paralympic Committee

[www.paralympic.org](http://www.paralympic.org)

Landmine Survivors Network

<http://www.landminesurvivors.org>

Partners of the Americas

[www.partners.net](http://www.partners.net)

Playing for Peace

[www.playingforpeace.org](http://www.playingforpeace.org)

Right to Play  
[www.righttoplay.com](http://www.righttoplay.com)

Save the Children  
[www.savethechildren.org](http://www.savethechildren.org)

Search for Common Ground  
[www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org)

Special Olympics  
[www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org)

Sport and Development International Platform  
[www.sportanddev.org](http://www.sportanddev.org)

UNAIDS  
[www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

UNESCO  
[www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

UNICEF  
[www.unicef.org/sports](http://www.unicef.org/sports)

United Nations, Sport for Development and Peace (Office of Special Adviser)  
[www.un.org/themes/sport](http://www.un.org/themes/sport)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)  
[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

U.S. Agency for International Development  
[www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)  
<http://exchanges.state.gov/intlathletics/diplomacy.htm>

Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF), Sports for Life  
<http://vvaf.org/programs/sports>



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