



ON

Women, gender equality and sport



Edwina Sandys



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 and the Beijing Platform for Action

Under the critical area of concern on **education**

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.iwgti.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

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, education and health; support women's participation in top-level sport; ensure equality in terms of pay, prize money and bonuses; ensure that women play a greater role in ruling bodies of sports organizations; conduct an in-depth study of national sport policies; ensure collection of gender-specific statistics; and increase media coverage of women in sport.³² The recommen-

Association champion from France, has said that the punches she lands shake the foundations of society.⁴⁰

Empowering women and girls through sport

Sport can be an important tool for social empowerment through the skills and values learned, such as teamwork, negotiation, leadership, communication and respect for others. The social benefits of participation in sport are thought to be especially important for girls, given that many girls, particularly in adolescence, have fewer opportunities than boys for social interaction outside the home and beyond family structures.⁴¹ Women and girls acquire new interpersonal networks, develop a sense of identity and access new opportunities, allowing them to become more engaged in school and community life.⁴² Participation in sport also enables women and girls to enjoy freedom of expression and movement and increase their self-esteem and self-confidence.

It has also been argued that sport and physical education can serve as the

Empowering girls as leaders

A number of initiatives are being implemented to give girls the chance to be leaders, improve their confidence, increase their self-awareness and strengthen their capacities in terms of decision-making, critical thinking and negotiating. A project in Kenya on football and peer-led health education for rural teenage girls uses trained girl referees to officiate at all matches during the organization's annual tournaments. In Zambia, the Go Sisters! project aims to empower girls through sport by training them to become peer leaders, providing them with scholarships, and involving them in all levels of decision-making.

*Source: Sports and Development Projects. Sport and Development official website. Available from www.sportanddev.org/en/projects/index.htm; and International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (2005). *Newsletter*. November. Available from http://www.iapesgw.org/Newsletters/IAPES_W%20Newsletter%20December%202005.doc*

In Saint Lucia, the Healthy Lifestyles Programme exposes girls to sport skills through regional netball tournaments as well as through instruction in healthy lifestyles. Workshops build leadership among girls, with training in goal-setting, teamweta1(g)-6(d71z()12(ts)5()-8(b5()M-6(t)4(h)5(e)5(8 0 0 9.5 67.010(i)1(f)1(h)T)25)-6(L)1(u)112)18(e)3(s)2(t)-27(

were highly responsive to sports-targeted initiatives.⁴⁸ This is an important finding since women now represent half of all people living with HIV, nearly 60 per cent of all infections in Africa and 77 per cent of new HIV infections among young people in Africa.⁴⁹

Ways in which sport can contribute to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS include, for example, sports leagues and matches that provide a forum for public information campaigns on prevention and protection, and a safe and supportive environment among teams

and sport is critical for optimal learning. Research findings indicate that:

- Physical activity has positive effects on the ability to concentrate;
- An increase in physical activity can lead to improvements in problem-solving skills and improved academic results; and
- There is a high correlation between high standardized test scores and high fitness scores.⁵²

Studies in the United States, for example, have also pointed to a positive relationship between girls' participation in sport, positive attitudes towards education and higher academic achievements.⁵³ Gender-sensitive programmes that successfully increase girls' participation in sport therefore have the potential to positively influence girls' academic performance.

Sport as a catalyst for challenging gender stereotypes

The Population Council operates a community-based programme, "Safe Spaces to Learn, Play and Grow", in rural Egypt through NGO and government partners that provide protected spaces, such as schools or youth centres, where girls meet for learning and recreation. The programme aims

letes who speak out on such issues can be particularly effective given their position as role models in the community.

Role models of women in sport, including star women athletes, such as Nellie Kim (Russian Federation—gymnastics), Mia Hamm (USA—soccer), Takahashi Naoko (Japan—marathon runner), Kirsten Bruhn (Germany—swimmer), Hortencia Maria de Fatima Marcari (Brazil—soccer) and Maria Sharapova (Russian Federation—tennis), also play a central role in challenging stereotypes. Nawal El Moutawakel (Morocco—hurdles) recognizes her position as a role model for women, especially Muslim women, and says that her main function as a member of the International Olympic Committee is “to encourage

Sports legislation for women in Hungary

The “Law of Sports”, enacted by the Hungarian Parliament in December 2000, ensured equal opportunities for men and women and for boys and girls to choose and participate in sport, contribute to the development of leadership in sport and enjoy funding to execute different sport programmes. It also required all sporting organizations, foundations, federations and committees to raise the participation of women to 10 per cent by November 2001, 20 per cent by November 2002, 30 per cent by November 2003 and 35 per cent by November 2004.

Source: International Working Group on Women and Sport (2002). *Women and Sport Progress Report 1998-2002*. Bonn, Germany. Available from http://www.canada2002.org/e/progress/worldwide/chapter3_america.htm

just three sports—tennis, golf and croquet.⁵⁸ By the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, women competed in 26 out of 28 sports and represented 40.7 per cent of the total number of athletes, setting a historical record for women’s participation in the Olympic Games.⁵⁹ Such progress has been spurred on by women athletes, as well as Govern-

and, for example, it was not until 1996 that Spalding Sports introduced the first baseball glove specifically designed for

Ice hockey for women and girls in the Himalayas

A recent film, *Thin Ice*, documents the efforts of women and girls in the Himalayas to play ice hockey. Since ice hockey was traditionally a male sport, women and girls were not encouraged to participate. Women created their own women's ice hockey team which brings together girls from different groups and backgrounds. The women and girls make their own ice courts and skates. They have successfully challenged many stereotypes.

Wimbledon 2005 Prize Money Summary (GB)

	2006	2005	Increase	2004	Increase
Gentlemen's Singles winner	£655,000	£630,000	4%	£602,500	4.6%
Ladies' Singles winner	£625,000	£600,000	4%	£560,500	7.0%
Gentlemen's Doubles winners	£220,690	£218,500	1%	£215,000	1.4%
Ladies' Doubles winners	£205,280	£203,250	1%	£200,000	1.6%
Mixed Doubles winners	£90,000	£90,000	—	£90,000	—

Source: 2007 Wimbledon Prize Money. Wimbledon, The Official Website. Available from http://www.wimbledon.org/en_GB/about/guide/prizemoney.html

Sport and physical education throughout the life cycle

Despite all the evidence on the benefits of an active lifestyle, including physical education and sport, for women and girls, the percentage of women who describe themselves as physically active remains low. As powerful as the rationales and motivation for physical activity may be, the barriers faced by women can be overwhelming. These can include traditional perceptions that sweating and defined musculature are inappropriate for women; the lack of culturally relevant role models; the scarcity of facilities offering women-friendly equipment and programmes; the lack of free time due to work and family responsibilities; worries about safety; and shame and embarrassment about present appearance and capabilities.⁸¹

Promoting participation in sport in Malaysia

The Women's Sports and Fitness Foundation in Malaysia is an NGO established in 1995 to pursue the empowerment of women through sport and physical activities. The Foundation has established, together with the Ministry of Sport, the biannual National Women's Games (2005 and 2007). Participants in the 2nd National Women's Games competed in 12 sports. A total of 5,000 athletes and officials attended. Through the well-managed programme of the Foundation, women of all ages and from all walks of life have the possibility to participate in a wide range of activities, ranging from sport for all activities to high-performance sports. In addition, the Foundation organizes women's coaching training throughout the country, and many women

Maternity rights for Poland's sportswomen

Recognizing that the overwhelming majority of sportswomen abandoned further involvement in sport after giving birth to a child, Poland introduced an anti-discrimination provision in the Qualified Sports Act in 2005. The provision ensures that sportswomen receive a sport stipend in the full amount

also continue to receive more money than women's in scholarships, recruiting, head-coach salaries and operating expenses.⁹³ Although the law states that schools in violation of Title IX will lose their federal funding, this has never happened since the law came into force. Instead, Title IX compliance has been driven by lawsuits and threats of lawsuits.⁹⁴

Such actions are behind recent rulings across the United States that require school cheerleading squads to support girls teams on an equal basis with the boys teams. The rulings have, however, received a mixed reaction. Some cheerleaders are not enthusiastic about cheering for the girls teams, often because the need to comply with the ruling has increased their workload and they are no longer sent to away-games. Some members of girls' sport teams have also been unhappy about the ruling, noting that they do not need or want cheerleaders during their games.⁹⁵

*Physical education
in schools*

In terms of participation of disabled women in international competitions, 47 per cent of the nations competing in the 1996 Paralympic Games brought no women athletes, compared to 13 per cent of nations that brought no women athletes to the Olympic Games. In 2004, a record 31 per cent of participants in the Summer Paralympic Games in Athens were women, but this was still below the 40 per cent participation of women in the 2004 Olympic Games.¹⁰⁶

The Women in Sport Committee of the International Paralympic Committee provides advice and consultation on issues of gender equality in Paralympic sport. The role of the Committee is to: advocate for the full inclusion of women and girls at all levels of Paralympic sport; identify barriers that restrict participation; make policy recommendations to address these barri-

Olympic Committee. To give an example of one country, in the Czech Republic: only 8 per cent (33 women) of all members of executive boards in Czech sport federations are women; only 3 women have ever been members of the executive board of the Czech Olympic Committee in its 105-year history; and only 21 per cent of elite athletes are coached by women.¹¹¹

The lessons learned from efforts to increase women's participation in political decision-making show that many of the gains made can be attributed to affirmative action, such as quotas, established in constitutions, by legislation or through temporary special measures. Targets do work, although incentives as well as sanctions for non-compliance are often needed to ensure

ments. Men's leadership on this issue is critical. The Chairperson of the International Olympic Committee's Women and Sport Commission, Anita DeFrantz, has highlighted the need for women and men to work together to achieve the goals set for women's participation in sport leadership.¹¹⁴ Such cooperation can help to achieve the benefits of women's increased participation in decision-making in sport for both women and men, including the diversification of the talent pool among coaches, managers, administrators and other officials.

A number of international and regional meetings and conferences have explored women's participation in sport leadership and decision-making. The International Paralympic Committee regularly addresses this issue in its regional "Women in Sport Leadership Summits", which have been held in the Middle East, Africa and Europe. In October 2005, a conference on "6(TJEzfta)-fr3

Women in coaching

The Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) launched the "We are coaches" campaign in February 2006 to increase the number of women coaching at the community level from 5 per cent to 10 per cent in three years. As part of the initiative, participating women will receive quality coach training in certain sports through the National Coaching Certification Programme. CAC anticipates expansion of the programme to include at least 15 additional sports and many more communities in the second year, and to increase the number of sports and communities again in the third year.

Source:

there is little coverage of women's

The promotion and popularization of women's sport requires an increase in



NGO assisting prostitutes from South-east Asia, reports that the organization and money required to traffic large numbers of women into a country for

icies and procedures; the promotion of women in coaching, management and other leadership positions; and access to open channels of redress.¹⁵³ A system of impunity must not be allowed to perpetuate harassment, exploitation and violence against women and girls in sport.

**Where to now:
conclusions
and
recommendations**

A range of actors are taking actions to address discrimination and inequali-

and the risk of human trafficking to fill that demand.

A number of other critical areas need further attention. Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of initiatives, such as the use of targets and quotas, need to be significantly strengthened. Reliable and comparable data are required, both as an advocacy and awareness-raising tool, and as a means to improve the effectiveness of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of policies and programmes. Improved means of disseminating data and statistics should be sought, including through the media. Initiatives are needed to build a good knowledge base on successful strategies and promising practices for increasing participation of women and girls in sport and promoting sport for gender equality.

Strategies that address the inadequate and often negative portrayal of women's sport in the media are essential. Attention should be paid not only to increasing coverage but also to improving the quality and style of media reporting. Efforts may include reducing the sexualized representation, marketing and promotion of women's sport, and changing the dominant stereotypical gender images to reflect the progress on gender equality in sport.

The establishment of positive role models and development of mentoring systems are important strategies. Positive role models and support are

not only required for girls and young women; there is also a critical need for gender-sensitive male athletes, coaches, journalists and other leaders to provide positive role models and support for boys and young men.

Organizational change is particularly important, including changes to organizational cultures, values, norms, rules and procedures. Practical aspects of organizational change can be critical to ensure women's full involvement, such as establishing appropriate meeting schedules and provision of childcare. Since the representation of women in sporting organizations is currently low, men in leadership positions have a major responsibility for promoting and sustaining the required organizational change.

A range of actors should be involved in and collaborating on promoting increased access, involvement and benefits for women and girls in all areas of sport. These include governments, public authorities, sporting organizations at the local, national and international levels, research and training institutions, women's organizations and networks, and development agencies. Individuals who are involved with promoting, conducting, researching, reporting on and in any way influencing sporting activities—such as coaches, trainers, managers, other officials, journalists and athletes themselves—should also be actively involved. A major challenge—which remains inad-

equately addressed—is identifying means of developing accountability of these key actors.

Men and boys also need to be tar-

Endnotes

tion on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on temporary special measures, para. 38.

²⁷International Olympic Committee (2004). *Olympic Charter*. Lausanne, Switzerland. Available from http://multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/en_report_122.pdf

²⁸International Working Group on Women and Sport (1998). *The Windhoek Call for Action*. Namibia. Available from <http://www.iwg-gti.org/e/windhoek/call.htm>

²⁹International Working Group on Women and Sport (2002b). *The Montreal Communiqué*. Canada. Available from <http://www.canada2002.org/e/communique/index.htm>

³⁰A keynote presentation was made by the Director of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Carolyn Hannan (2006). *Challenging the gender order*. Fourth World Conference on Women and Sport, held in Kumamoto, Japan, from 11-14 May. Available from www.un.org/womenwatch/daw

³¹United Nations Office of Sport for

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⁹²Feminist Majority Foundation (1995). "Empowering Women in Sports". In *Empowering Women Series*, No. 4. United States. Available from <http://www.feminist.org/research/sports/sports2.html>

⁹³Feminist Majority Foundation. Gender Equity in Athletics and Sports. Available from <http://www.feminist.org/sports/titleIXfactsheet.asp>

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Equal cheers for boys and girls draw some boos. In *The New York Times*, 14 January 2007.

⁹⁶Hardman, Kenneth (2004). *An Update on the Status of Physical Education in Schools Worldwide: Technical Report for the World Health Organization*, World Health Organization. Available from <http://www.icsspe.org/por/>

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The study, which addresses violence against women as a form of discrimination and a human rights violation, finds that such violence is severe and pervasive throughout the world, causing untold misery for women, harming families across generations, impoverishing communities and reinforcing other forms of violence throughout societies.

The study acknowledges the work of grass-roots women's organizations and movements around the world in bringing violence against women into the arena of public attention and State accountability. It analyses the causes, forms and consequences of violence against women, reviews available data and outlines States' obligations to address such violence. While the study describes promising practices in the areas of law, service provision for victims and prevention, it also notes remaining challenges in bringing an end to violence against women.

The study puts forward a blueprint for action, by different stakeholders, at local, national and international levels. Such actionio7tio

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**The Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
and its Optional Protocol**

Handbook for Parliamentarians

This *Handbook*, produced by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, offers a comprehensive and educational presentation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol. The *Handbook* presents the background to and content of the Convention and the Optional Protocol and describes the role of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which secures implementation at the national level. It provides examples of good practices and gives an overview of what parliamentarians can do to ensure effective implementation of the Convention and encourage use of the Optional Protocol. It also proposes model instruments and reference materials as aids designed to facilitate the work of legislators.

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