

Opportunities in India For Sport To Contribute To Un's Sustainable Development Goals in India

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Abstract

India, as a member of the United Nations, has over the years shown serious commitment to adopting its policies and goals. As a signatory of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, India has already taken steps to fully adopt best practices and make considerable progress in achieving each of the 17 SDGs. One look at the SDGs clearly reflects there exists an inter-dependence between all the goals. There is thus a need to identify and evaluate those areas which can serve as inter-sectoral platforms. UN has declared Sport as an important enabler of Sustainable Development. The paper focuses on locating Sport and sustainability initiatives within governmental and non-governmental policies in India and identifying the relevant areas which might be impacted and influenced by the power of sport as a medium to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

“You have to decide whether development means affluence or whether development means peace, prosperity and happiness.”- SunderlalBahuguna

Sustainable Development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. There are two main aspects to this – first, the needs of the poor must not be given priority, and the other is that certain limits must be set on the dependence of technology and society on the environment to ensure present and future needs are met.

In the Indian context, concept of sustainability of natural resources while meeting the requirements of a large population can be found in the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted at the United Nations Summit in New York from 25 to 27 September 2015. This is a broad and universal policy agenda, with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Building on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2030 Agenda has been defined with clearer concepts and more specific goals, yet there are clear inter-linkages amongst all the goals. It aims to guide Member States and help transform their approach towards development by ensuring inclusive, people-centered and sustainable development with **no one left behind**(UNGA, 2018)

1.1 Role of Sports in Society and Sustainable Development

The sport system is directly connected with the other sub-systems of health, education and culture.

Education - Owing to its intrinsic nature which constantly demands strict discipline and maintenance of standards and quality, Sport is a major social factor which has been able to resist the invasion of cheap culture and bad habits to a large extent (Nicholson, 2008).

Societal Integration - Sports is often used as a powerful medium of integration by both policy makers and policy influencers. National sports have been used as a platform to integrate diverse communities within a single ideology or to foster a common feeling of belongingness.

Health(Physical, Mental, Maternal, Child)–Physical activity and overall well-being has remained the core domain of sport-related activities. At the same time, the newer associated aspect that has emerged is the positive link between mental health and physical activity. In today's world, there has been a marked shift from communicable diseases to non-communicable diseases, the latter being largely a result of manifestation of stress-related causes. Sport and sport-related activities have been shown to reduce and even treat symptoms of lifestyle- and stress-related diseases.

At-Risk Youth – Isolation of youth from anti-social activities, depression etc.; Excessive energy (mental and physical) is often channelized positively in various sports which brings a sense of normalcy, discipline and self-worth in the youth

Emancipation and Empowerment - Sport has served as a platform to highlight and reform various societal problems such as discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Persons with Disability are yet another target-group.

National/Supra-national Interests – The perfect example being China where after it was isolated and viewed unfavourably after Mao's "closed door" policy, his successors attempted to improve China's world image through its sporting achievements, an approach followed by China till today (Coalter, 2008). Ping Pong diplomacy during the cold war has served as one of the best diplomacy-via-sport examples.

Responsible Citizenry – The strong-willed training of players inculcates values of dedication, perseverance, endurance, independence, responsibility, self-control, etc. Thus, when a sporting culture exists in a any society, it often reflects positively in the citizens having a strong sense of responsibility and membership towards society.

1.2 Sports and Social Policy

"Painful choices have to be made and Sustainable Development must rest on political will."

Sustainable Development is a socio-political practice which requires humane national goals and clear policy priorities.

As seen before, the Sports for Development sector is located within the broader 'global civil society'. In many countries, Sport-based strategies have been used to facilitate different societal advantages such as promoting inter-ethnic or inter-national interactions, as medium of diffusing tensions between communities, crime-reduction by channeling at-risk or borderline youth towards positive outlets, encouraging gender equality, offering dignified employment to unemployed youth and others (Calloway, 2004; Darnell, 2008; SDP IWP, 2008; Willis, 2000).

Relevance of sports in social policy has not been sufficiently addressed but this omission needs to be rectified due to several reasons (Guilianotti, 2010).

The first is the acknowledgement of welfare goals of several sport policies for development sector, a few of which have been mentioned above. Thus societal integration, reduction of conflict, global citizenship, inclusion and sustainability are the core of sport's social sector policies (Calloway, 2004).

The second reason is that governmental organizations contribute to building this sector by using the power of sport to further their agendas at various levels. Some instances are the '1Goal' campaign backed by UK's Department of International Development to promote universal primary education, British Council's sport programs to promote cross-cultural relations through sports, India's Rural Olympics and Himalayan and North-eastern Sport Initiative to promote indigenous sports and preserve culture, football and cricket matches between armed forces and citizens of strife-affected areas to build trust, and many others.

The third reason pertains to the contribution of sports towards building ideological forces which impact policy agenda. Many non-governmental and community-based organizations which run Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities become channels of public intervention in shaping policies (Clark et al., 2007; Taylor-Gooby, 2008). Popular examples are Nike's Clean Clothes Campaign, Barclays' Spaces for Sports program, Coca Cola India's initiative of promoting active healthy living through cricket, Essar Group's initiative to engage rural youth in a productive manner, JSW's aim of providing equal opportunity for People with Disability through Sport, Oil India Limited's initiative of promoting rural sport in rural Assam, Rio Tinto's initiative in the Keonjhar district of Odisha, Standard Chartered Bank's GOAL initiative developed in association with International Federation of Netball Associations and Naz Foundation India Trust that uses life skills, education and sport to empower adolescent girls, Sesa Goa Limited's initiative to enhance and contribute to the sport's development in Goa, through the Sesa Football Academy (SFA), TATA Steel

Limited's initiative of holistic development of the community through sport, Thriveni Earth Movers Pvt. Limited's initiative in Transformed the Lives of Odisha 's Rural Youth and Vedanta's efforts through sport to enhance the spirit of fraternity and strengthening solidarity amongst the rural and tribal youth groups (Holden, 2006).

The fourth reason is locating social policy in the intersection of sport, leisure and 'global civil society', where contribution of recreation and leisure to human wellbeing has been vastly overlooked even in the past (Rowantree and Lavers, 1951; Dean, 2006). This oversight is glaring in view of the widespread emphasis on role of sport and recreation policy to tackle mental illness, child obesity, non-communicable lifestyle diseases and the like.

(Giulianotti, 2011)The four policy domains, along with the institution-type, are:

- The Public Sector – national-level and transnational agencies and organisations, sport federations, associated with *strategic developmentalists* social policies;
- The Private Sector - corporate institutions, associated with *neo-liberal* social policies, notably CSR;
- The Third Sector - mainstream NGOs and community-based organisations, channeling *developmental interventionist* social policies;
- New Social Movements, associated with social policies centred on *social justice*.

There is therefore, a need to expand the social policy research terrain into the sport for development sector. This will provide cohesion and long-term strategy in formulating policies for a sustainable society, not only of a prescriptive nature rather one that will eventually have a long-lasting impact and ensure that sustainability becomes an internalized manner of living (Chandhoke, 2005)

1.3 UN Vision for using Sport to achieve SDGs

As per the UNEP, the current world population is the most literate in history, but is ironically depicting irresponsible behaviour towards their natural environment. 'Sustainable' education is the binding factor between the SDGs, especially in the context of the rapid urbanisation of the world.

Sport has an clear link with some of the SDGs, such as "Good Health" (SDG 3), "Quality Education" (SDG 4), "Gender Equality" (SDG 5), "Reduced Inequalities" (SDG 10), "Sustainable Cities and Communities" (SDG 11) and "Responsible Consumption" (SDG 12), but it can easily be used as a medium to contribute to all SDGs.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) which led the movement for Sports for achieving the MDGs has initiated the IOC Sustainability Strategy under which 11 SDGs have been identified as pertinent to the Olympic Movement. Sport for Sustainable Development programmes integrate sport with other non-sport components to enhance their effectiveness across local, regional, national and transnational sustainability initiatives so that they are mutually reinforcing. These programs do not only impact the target groups but also empower the participants at every step in the delivery chain of sustainable activities and pursuing sustainability through collaboration, partnerships and coordinated action (Levinsen, 2004).

DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE BENEFITS ACHIEVABLE THROUGH SPORT

Promoting health and preventing disease • Prevents and manages chronic disease • Prevents and manages infectious disease • Enhances mental health • Reduces direct and indirect health care costs Enhancing the inclusion and well-being of person with disabilities • Reduces stigma • Enhances socialization • Enables independence and participation • Contributes to empowerment • Fosters greater inclusion Enhancing social inclusion, preventing conflict, and building peace • Promotes social inclusion • Provides respite in periods of conflict • Builds trust and establishes bridges between groups in conflict • Builds peace in a post-conflict situation • Promotes a culture of peace	Strengthening child & youth development and education • Enhances physical health and development • Fosters psychosocial health and development • Builds life skills and positive values • Helps children and youth recover from trauma • Strengthens education Promoting gender equity and empowering girls & women • Enhances girls' and women's health and well-being • Fosters self esteem and empowerment • Facilitates social inclusion and integration • Challenges gender norms • Provides opportunities for leadership and achievement
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The IOC Sustainable Strategy leads with the Olympic Agenda 2020 with sustainability at its core. It has further identified five focus areas mainly infrastructure, sourcing & resource management, mobility, workforce and climate which have a clear link with 11 of the 17 SDGs. Pragmatically, IOC has also acknowledged that the limited availability of human and financial resources are the main challenges which have to be overcome to ensure the success of Olympic Agenda 2020.

Towards SDG 4 of Gender Equality, World Taekwondo took a strategic decision ensuring equal number of male and female referees for all its events. The immediate challenge was that of shortage of qualified female referees which was overcome by organizing educational programs for referees on a large scale. This also contributes to SDG 8 of Decent Work and Economic Growth.

World Sailing also addressed the obvious issue of sustainability of environment by conducting a survey amongst its members and players as the sport depends upon provision of water-bodies, thus aligning itself to SDG 13 of Climate Action and others for environment. World Sailing's Agenda 2030 launched in November 2017 also addresses topics such as end-of-life of boats, and it aims to actively engage the industry for production of minimum wastage equipment.

FIFA endorses the UN's guiding principles on business and human rights for the construction work for organizing World Cups. An analysis has been undertaken to identify the gaps in both in which it came to light that human rights standards differ in their hosting countries. Thus, the contracts and administrative work has now undergone a significant change and by enforcing UN guiding principles, FIFA indirectly pushes the level of the standards for human rights of the local industry to conform with those of UN. FIFA has also signed a pledge with the UNFCCC (Climate Neutral Now campaign) which pragmatically measures, reduces and off-sets the environmental footprint of FIFA football events and aims for carbon-neutral FIFA events by 2050 (Iemanique, 2017).

1.4 Instances of Sport promoting Development in India

India has a unique demographic, large in number yet having little homogeneity, be it in the case of ethnicities, religions, cultures or even age-groups. There has always been a need to ensure availability of ample opportunities for integration and development of to maintain the delicate social fabric of Indian society. Subsequently, there has always been a need to find common ground and this need has

been fulfilled by Sport to a certain extent. Thus, sport has already proved itself a binding factor of the Indian population even though it has been restricted to a handful of sports, mainly Cricket and Hockey. The 'Indianness' of the teams compulsorily had to be reflected in its compilation, usually players from marginalized communities found their way into the national teams. This served the dual purposes of the team reflecting the true Indian diversity and also offering a chance to the minority or marginalized communities to gain a national platform.

Apart from its unifying function, Sport has another social relevance of serving as a tool of gender empowerment. Case studies of Haryana rural belt showed a dismal sex-ratio and extreme forms of patriarchy in the early 21st century but a decade later the promotion of sport at the most fundamental levels contributed to the emancipation and empowerment of women in one of the worst-hit areas of the nation as they went on to win medals at the highest of sporting platforms.

The same inspired many more similar occurrences in Assam-Jharkhand belt where tribal youth engaged and excelled in different sporting activities and went on to represent their country at the Olympic Games, the most prominent being the case of gymnast Hima Das. Another contributing factor has been the development of sports infrastructure and its accessibility to the local youth. This infrastructure is usually developed when international events such as Games and World Cups and Championships are held in our country.

This further leads to production of sports-related infrastructure which is an entire industry in itself, thus contributing to economic development and employment. Also the requirement of trainers, coaches, technical officials, etc. is consequent to sports development which ensures decent work, imparting of skills to youth.

The potential of sport to generate awareness on social issues has already been discussed in detail and the impact of these campaigns on both society and social policy has proven to be positive.

Methodology

The present paper is a desk-based evaluative analysis conducted after an extensive review of literature was done to collect information and get a fair understanding previously conducted research on similar issues, and analyzed in order to understand the different aspects of the research area and its preclusion. Interviews of key informants and oral narratives of sportspersons, officials and experts were analysed. Qualitative content analysis of government and inter-government documents was conducted.

Conclusion

Sport has often been described as "a continuous social experiment as it performs multiple functions – developmental, educational, communicative and patriotic, thus integrating and coordinating individuals, groups and even nations" (UK-E, 2016). Sport is one common binding factor for humanity. It has a number of advantages that makes it an essential component for the achievement of any universal goal, more so for the Sustainable Development Goals

Taking into consideration its past contribution and its potential to develop society, the Sport for Development sector has received far less attention from social policy researchers and analysts than it should have, and this stands true especially more so in India. Considering that India is entering the phase where its much touted Demographic Dividend is expected to push it towards becoming a world leader, not much has been done at the ground level at the policy end. Although many policies have been formulated (Mission Skill India) and many more are in the pipeline, yet there is an evident gap in research for the contribution of Sport and the utilization of sporting platforms in a much more coherent manner.

In the view of all these advantages existing in a single sector, it would be highly unfortunate if the 'Sport and development' movement, more specifically the Sport as an enabler of Sustainability, is not utilized in the Indian context. Thus there is a need for research in the sport-social policy and the sport-SDG domains centering around:

- Evaluating the extent of adoption of UN initiatives in India for promotion of Sport in achieving Sustainable Development Goals
- Streamlining public policies to optimally harness Sport for SDG achievement in India – Evaluation and Feedback

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