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Sport for development and peace

Sport: catalyst for a better, stronger recovery for all

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [75/18](#), provides a review of progress towards the implementation of the United Nations Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace over the past two years, drawing on input received from Member States, entities of the United Nations system and other stakeholders. The innovations and adaptations undertaken to deliver sport for development and peace during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic are highlighted, and the potential for sport to play a catalytic role in countries' efforts to build back better is explored. In the context of broader recovery efforts, suggestions are made for ways in which sport can be maximized as a low-cost, high-impact tool to rebuild solidarity within and between countries and to deliver concrete benefits to people in the short term, while generating wider societal-level change, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

* [A/77/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. As the world struggles to recover from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, sport can be a low-cost and effective enabler of sustainable development and peace. Sport in and of itself can help communities to regain lost solidarity, cohesion, health and well-being. Applied with intention, through proven approaches and methodologies, sport can go further, helping countries to recover better, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. The sport for development and peace movement is well placed to help countries to build resilience and address the pandemic-related rise in mental health challenges, social isolation, education deficits, physical inactivity, violence and social unrest. With sufficient investment and targeted approaches, sport can also play a catalytic role in helping countries to address rising rates of poverty and growing inequalities as well as environmental sustainability. Sport is increasingly being applied to enable communities at greatest risk of being left behind to empower themselves, address discrimination, connect people to employment opportunities, develop inclusive labour markets, prevent violence and engage communities in disaster relief and climate action.

3. In 2018, in response to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution [71/160](#), the Secretary-General presented an update to the United Nations Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace (see [A/73/325](#)). The United Nations Action Plan sets out recommendations for improving collaboration relating to international sport policy and practice and outlines a global framework for promoting and mainstreaming sport for development and peace, highlighting two major internationally agreed frameworks: the Kazan Action Plan¹ and the global action plan on physical activity 2018–2030.²

4. In line with the request of the General Assembly in its resolution [75/18](#), the present report provides a targeted review of the contribution of sport to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with particular attention to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The report sets out the innovations and adaptations undertaken to deliver sport for development and peace during the COVID-19 pandemic and outlines the potential for sport to play a catalytic role in countries' efforts to build back better. It contains a thematic analysis of the contributions submitted by Member States, entities of the United Nations system and other stakeholders, and tracks progress in the implementation of the updated United Nations Action Plan from August 2020 to April 2022.³

II. Leveraging sport in the changing and challenging times of the pandemic

5. The past two years have been a challenging time for sport. The cost of sporting events cancelled as a result of the pandemic has been unprecedented. For community-level sport organizations (i.e. grass-roots sport), the cost has sometimes been fatal. As pandemic restrictions continue to ebb and flow, community sport remains short on resources, particularly in countries unable to provide public financing.

¹ Available at <https://en.unesco.org/mineps6/kazan-action-plan>.

² Available at <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272722/9789241514187-eng.pdf>.

³ On 28 January 2022, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs sent a note verbale to all Member States and a memorandum to all entities of the United Nations system requesting input for the present report. A total of 120 contributions were received. See the annex for an account of the contributions.

6. Dwindling resources for grass-roots sport can have compounding social and economic impacts. Community-level sport plays a vital role in fostering social cohesion and maintaining and advancing health, education, empowerment and social inclusion. Grass-roots sport is well placed to help to repair the damage that the pandemic has inflicted on health, well-being and the social fabric. Stepped-up public and private investment and clear public-health guidelines are essential to enable grass-roots sport to recover and meet post-pandemic needs.

7. Pandemic restrictions renewed appreciation for the importance of physical activity and sport, leading to a pent-up demand for sports services. Acute post-pandemic needs have sharpened the intent of stakeholders to harness sport to improve lives. The pandemic has also generated a range of innovations that continue to strengthen the reach, capabilities and resilience of sport organizations.

8. The present section contains highlights of the innovations and adaptations in sport, including physical education and activity, over the past two years of the pandemic, together with reflections on progress to leverage sport for development and peace. Emphasis is given to examples and innovations that can be applied to more fully harness the potential of sport to play a catalytic role in helping countries to recover, better and stronger from the pandemic.

A. Safely harnessing sport and physical activity during the pandemic

9. Many in the sport community were able to shift gears during the pandemic to aid in disaster relief and prevention. For example, sports volunteers were redeployed to support the COVID-19 response, providing masks and sanitizers in Kenya and delivering food parcels to people in the United Republic of Tanzania. Grass-roots sports clubs helped to maintain vital social connections even in the absence of sport. Athlete advocates stepped up to help to save lives and promote continued physical activity. The International Olympic Committee (IOC), as well as the World Health Organization (WHO) and other United Nations entities, joined forces against the pandemic with the help of athletes through the #HEALTHYTogether partnership. The power of athletes' voices was leveraged to encourage vaccination and advocate free and equitable access to vaccines.

10. Virtual spaces as a means of engagement became critical, with many clubs offering online programming. Many clubs provided COVID-19 information along with psychosocial support and information on access to sports. The Association for Social Advancement switched to a virtual platform to apply sport to advance education, gender equality and social inclusion. The Association created virtual empowerment booklets for students and their families, along with a COVID-19 prevention learning platform.

11. Confronted by the digital divide, implementing entities were creative, delivering sports and physical activity services through the telephone, television, radio and other mechanisms. Togo created a sports television show, for example, *Gym Impact*, to promote physical activity. Peru employed a "sports truck" to bring sports opportunities to urban populations that might not otherwise have had access, as well as *Virtual Labour Gymnastics*, a weekly video programme aimed at enabling remote workers to maintain their physical and mental health.

12. The pandemic created an urgent need for new methodologies and processes for safe and virtual participation in sports-based programming. The Commonwealth supported partners to modify the ways in which sport was delivered to comply with physical distancing and health guidelines. Loughborough University London developed a methodology for online sport for development and peace programming that drew on digital youth culture. Germany supported partner countries and coaches

to safely restart sports activities. China donated medical masks to sport communities in different countries and to international sports organizations.

13. Through trial and error, organizations developed online sports-based programming that enabled them to tap new and larger audiences and integrate such programming into youth culture. The Jadir Taekwondo Association in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, developed a mix of face-to-face and online activities to help youth from populations at greatest risk of being left behind to cope with the pandemic while learning about the 2030 Agenda. With this hybrid approach, the Association increased its beneficiaries, diversified interactions and continued to provide services safely to youth in areas under threat of armed conflict.

14. The Special Olympics reported benefiting from new digital training solutions developed during the pandemic, noting that it would continue to use them to reach larger audiences. The organization has launched new campaigns to empower children and youth of all abilities and to scale up the training of coaches in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region.

15. The pandemic focused attention and action to harness the potential of using technology in sport to realize health, socioeconomic and peace gains. China has planned a series of international exchanges and projects designed to deepen cooperation in sport science and technologies, with a view to making innovation a driving force for sport for development and peace.

16. Some organizations continued face-to-face sport in open spaces during the pandemic, particularly for young people in vulnerable situations. The National Sports Institute of El Salvador harnessed football to build values and life skills among young people.

B. Integrating sport into sustainable development and pandemic recovery strategies, plans and policies

17. Sport for development and peace can have the most impact when incorporated as an integral part of delivering sustainable development or COVID-19 recovery strategies. By approaching sport and physical activity as tools (or enablers) to help to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, Governments can unleash innovation, facilitate cooperation, attract new partners and pool resources. Governments that integrate sports-based programming into their planning processes are also better able to monitor impacts, understand what works in local settings and draw on evidence to enhance initiatives that improve lives.

18. Noting the impact of the pandemic, Governments reported taking steps to integrate sport into their recovery and sustainable development plans. For example, Mexico integrated sport into its COVID-19 recovery plans (subject to resources), including developing a digital strategy designed to promote the physical activity of as many people as possible, adapted to their interests and needs. The Government expects to reach 700,000 people, helping to combat obesity and sedentary lifestyles.

19. In Morocco, the Ministry of Youth and Sport established partnership agreements with the Department of State, local authorities, private sector entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and sports federations to advance sport for development and peace. The partnership agreements allow for pooled funding, with resources from State and local budgets as well as implementing partners.

20. In Romania, the Ministry of Sports is seeking to apply sport and physical activity as simple, inexpensive and flexible tools for promoting peace and development. It has also recommended the inclusion of sport in its COVID-19

recovery plans, aiming to strengthen connections with and between sports organizations and community-run sports programmes and build cross-ministerial capacity for the implementation and monitoring of sport-related initiatives.

21. Portugal instituted a national “sport for all” programme that supports local clubs to deliver sport in a way that integrates persons with disabilities, promotes social inclusion and gender equality and advances environmental sustainability. In China, planning for the fourteenth Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) for National Economic and Social Development and Vision 2035 includes policies to leverage sport for socioeconomic development.

22. Governments also sought to deliver priorities through sport via centralized hubs. Brazil opened a national secretariat for parasports to ensure access for persons with disabilities. In 2020, Togo created a gender unit in the Ministry of Sports and allocated funds to empower women and girls.

C. Leveraging sporting events to promote peace and sustainable development

23. Global, international, national and community-level sporting events have the power to inspire and unify. Sporting events can be harnessed to change the ways in which people see themselves; they can also build community, shift attitudes and behaviours and raise awareness of social responsibilities.

24. The Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in 2020 and Beijing in 2022, organized with COVID-19 countermeasures in close cooperation with WHO, were the most gender-balanced to date. IOC continued to leverage the Games as a platform for gender equality and the empowerment of women as well as social inclusion, with a record number of openly LGBTIQI+ athletes. The Refugee Olympic Team, competing in the 2020 Olympic Games, called attention to the need to improve the prospects of the more than 80 million forcibly displaced persons around the world.⁴

25. In a drive to lead by example, IOC decided, in March 2020, that the Olympic Games would be climate positive from 2030 onwards. Each Olympic organizing committee will be contractually obliged to hold climate-positive Olympic Games by: (a) minimizing the direct and indirect carbon emissions of the Games; (b) compensating for more than the remaining emissions; and (c) using its influence to implement lasting zero-carbon solutions for the host city and beyond. China reported that efforts to meet sustainability objectives, including low-carbon emissions, for the 2022 Olympic Games in Beijing set a new standard for sustainable venue construction and event organization.

26. In 2020, the National Basketball Association launched the Basketball Africa League with 12 participating African countries. The League uses its platform to promote gender equality among fans and stakeholders, including through broadcast and in-arena messaging to address gender-based violence. On game day, women and girls are invited to play basketball and engage in discussions designed to help them to pursue opportunities in sport and business. The League is also developing opportunities for women across its operations, including by training and recruiting female referees.

27. Sporting events can be leveraged to generate employment and economic development in communities at greatest risk of being left behind. As hosts of the

⁴ As at the end of 2021, 89.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. See <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

Winter Olympics and Paralympics in 2022, China targeted poorer areas for infrastructure and service development, helping to transform the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region into a sport and tourist destination. In its 2021 inaugural season, the Basketball Africa League employed over 100 local vendors, entrepreneurs and freelancers in Rwanda.

D. Delivering technical assistance on sport for sustainable development and peace

28. Bilateral development agencies, international NGOs, the United Nations and other development, peace and technical assistance organizations have increasingly incorporated sport as a tool to advance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The solidarity, examples, lessons, tools and partnerships built through such efforts can be applied to leverage sport for a better, stronger recovery. The present section provides highlights based on contributions to the report.

29. Since 2014, the German Agency for International Cooperation has worked with partners to include sport for development methodologies in policies and national curricula, strengthen capacities and promote education and employability through sport. From 2020 to 2022, Germany implemented projects in 22 partner countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Senegal, where sport for development is being integrated into the curricula of technical and vocational schools.

30. France integrated sport and development into its roadmap for the 2030 Agenda, and created an inclusive sports policy arm in its development cooperation framework. In 2021, France, together with the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the German Agency for International Cooperation launched a sport for mental health and social cohesion initiative to tackle the negative impacts of the pandemic in Africa, Latin America and the western Balkans.

31. Italy has also integrated sport into its international development cooperation. With the Italian Footballers Association, Italy is engaging young people in sport for social inclusion and peace in Jordan and Uganda. Progetto Filippide of Italy leverages sport to advance social inclusion and empower persons with disabilities. In Central American and Caribbean countries, for example, Italy is working with Governments, civil society and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to maximize the positive impact of sport for youth with autism spectrum disorders.

32. Team Up, the Australian Government's flagship sport for development programme across the Asia-Pacific region, addresses the "play gap" by supporting women and girls and persons with disabilities to benefit from participation in safe, inclusive and accessible sports programmes. Working with local organizations, the programme engages youth and adults in festivals, tournaments, competitions and sport for development events.

33. As of 2021, the Sports for Tomorrow consortium of Japan reported activities reaching over 13 million people in 204 countries. The consortium, implemented through public and private entities, facilitates multicultural exchange through sport, harnesses sport for change and expands anti-doping activities. Its initiatives have helped to engage women and girls in sports, enabled sports development in poor countries, addressed social problems through sport and helped to foster mutual understanding across cultures.

34. The Qatar Fund for Development and Qatar Charity plan to enable community-led sports-based programmes that advance the integration of displaced persons, facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities, promote social cohesion in post-conflict settings and prevent violent extremism.

35. One Win Leads to Another, a joint programme of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), IOC and Women Win, together with Empodera, helped community organizations in Argentina and Brazil to build safe spaces to engage girls and young women through sports and strengthen their capacities to influence the decisions that have an impact on them. During the pandemic, the safe spaces helped to address increases in gender-based violence, while offering opportunities to disclose situations of violence experienced or witnessed at home. The Olympic Refugee Foundation and its partners were able to continue to support around 60,000 young people affected by displacement in six countries and develop two new programmes in 2022.

E. Strengthening the global framework on sport for sustainable development and peace

36. As diverse actors seek to leverage sport to advance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is vital that their work be guided by a common vision and framework. The present section features initiatives designed to strengthen the shared vision and global framework on sport for sustainable development and peace, aligned with the United Nations Action Plan, the Kazan Action Plan and the global action plan on physical activity.

37. Stakeholders recognize the important role that the United Nations plays in maximizing the contribution of sport as an enabler of development and peace. Contributors to the present report noted the need for stronger collaboration between United Nations entities to ensure that the Organization worked cohesively to support the priorities of Member States.

38. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which holds the substantive portfolio on sport for development and peace, plays a key role in advancing coordination and collaboration between United Nations entities, Member States and other stakeholders. The Department holds regular meetings of the Inter-Agency Group on Sport for Development and Peace and supports the intergovernmental mechanisms on sports-related discussions.

39. In 2021, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched Fit for Life, a programme aimed at enabling countries to translate and implement the Kazan Action Plan at the national level. Taking into consideration the impacts of the pandemic, Fit for Life encourages smart investments in sport to tackle rising rates of physical inactivity, mental health issues and social inequalities. At the national and local levels, Fit for Life supports ministries of sport, education, health and youth to develop implementation strategies that increase impact and revise national curricula frameworks to mainstream sport values in education, build soft skills and embed high-quality physical education. At the international level, Fit for Life activities are focused on harmonizing and systematizing intervention and impact measurement methodologies, building cross-country knowledge and national capacities and rolling out evidence-based advocacy to reframe sport as a critical investment for sustainable human and social development.

40. The Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport, which includes Member States, experts from United Nations entities, the sport movement, academia, regional intergovernmental organizations and development banks, promotes the role and value of sport and its relevance for public policy. In 2020, in response to the pandemic, the Committee agreed to establish two working groups, focused on: (a) updating the Kazan Action Plan to facilitate implementation at the national level; and (b) strengthening the evidence base for increased investments in sport and physical education.

41. In 2020, the Sport for Development Coalition of development banks was launched at the Finance in Common Summit, held in Paris from 9 to 12 November, with the aim of scaling up investment in sport for development. Through two working groups, one of which is chaired by UNESCO, the Coalition is: (a) elaborating a pipeline of sustainable sport infrastructure and development projects; (b) setting standards for sport-related data; (c) raising the awareness of financial institutions of sport as a funding opportunity for social and development outcomes; and (d) enabling Governments with innovative financial instruments that lower their risk and stimulate cross-sectoral funding.

42. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is working with IOC to increase the number of Olympic bids that embed international labour standards, including by strengthening the capacity of Olympic organizing committees. ILO is also building a global network on sports skills to raise awareness of employability skills that can be learned in and through sports and to guide stakeholders in the development of implementable skills frameworks.

43. WHO provided invaluable guidance for sporting organizations throughout the pandemic. The organization also supported a case study on the impact of COVID-19 on grass-roots sport, highlighting the importance of grass-roots sports organizations as the bedrock of affordable access to sport. In 2021, WHO held a series of webinars to assess the impact of COVID-19 on sport and physical activity.

44. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continues to strengthen national capacities to integrate sport in crime prevention frameworks. From 2020 to 2022, its global Youth Crime Prevention through Sport initiative undertook events engaging over 9,000 State and non-State actors, including 6,500 coaches, youth leaders and other practitioners on the use of sport for youth crime prevention. UNODC also launched the Line Up Live Up sports-based skills curriculum in 14 countries, which has helped over 35,000 young people to strengthen their resilience to violence and crime. UNODC also produced a range of tools, including to help to leverage sport to address violent extremism.

45. Since 2018, the UNODC Programme on Safeguarding Sport from Corruption and Crime has organized or contributed to more than 130 activities, engaging 8,000 representatives from criminal justice authorities and sports organizations. In 2021, UNODC launched the *Global Report on Corruption in Sport*, along with a series of technical guides and publications.

46. In 2021, the United Nations Children's Fund issued a guiding framework and toolkit for sport for development programming targeting children and youth entitled "Playing the Game". It is also engaging in targeted research aimed at pinpointing the mechanisms by which sport and physical activity improve the mental health of refugee children.

47. In 2021, the Government of Switzerland, in partnership with UNESCO, established the Global Observatory for Women, Sport, Physical Education and Physical Activity to serve as a central source of knowledge, networking and advocacy for gender inclusivity and equality in and through sport, physical education and physical activity.

48. In 2020, the Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events and Promotion of Sport and its Values to Prevent Violent Extremism was launched to: (a) build the capacity of countries to prevent, protect, mitigate, investigate and recover from terrorist attacks in the context of major sporting events; and (b) identify, support and enable good practice policies and programmes that apply sport and its values to prevent violent extremism and radicalization.

49. In 2021, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations joined the Sport for One Humanity initiative, established by Turkish Airlines, which is focused on expanding the use of sport to advance diversity and social inclusion and foster mutual understanding between communities and cultures. The Alliance aims to strengthen the capacities of grass-roots organizations and identify the ways in which sport can be leveraged more effectively to build bridges between people and communities.

50. In 2022, the online platform sportanddev.org launched a global campaign aimed at reshaping sport to better serve all people and to demonstrate the potential of sport and physical activity as global actors seek new solutions for pandemic recovery. The platform provides resources and online courses on linking sport to COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

III. Going forward: how sport can be a catalyst to build back better

51. The pandemic has not only confirmed but also aggravated existing inequalities. Poorer countries are contending with a deeper, longer-lasting pandemic crisis, as debt burdens prevent Governments from investing in recovery. The pandemic is set to increase the number of extremely poor people by up to 224 million. More than three quarters of these “new poor” are in middle-income countries. This could lead not only to a lost decade for development, but also to a lost generation of poorly educated, unemployed and disaffected young people.⁵

52. Poorer households face greater losses in education and livelihoods and experience a disproportionate impact from over-burdened health systems and mental health challenges. Women, minorities, older persons, the informally employed and other populations at greatest risk of being left behind have been hit particularly hard. As countries struggle to recover from the pandemic, growing numbers of increasingly destructive climate disasters and a rising tide of conflict and violence are leaving already vulnerable populations even further behind.

53. The Secretary-General has called for a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change and the many other global challenges. The 2030 Agenda serves as a guide to a better, stronger recovery.

54. In the context of broader Sustainable Development Goal achievement, as well as recovery efforts, sport can play a catalytic role in rebuilding solidarity within and between countries, delivering benefits to people in the short term, while sparking wider societal-level change. The present section draws on evidence, lessons learned and practice to consider how sport can be maximized as a low-cost, high-impact tool to help countries to build back better. Below are five areas in which sport can play a catalytic role:

- (a) Advancing social inclusion, empowerment and anti-discrimination;
- (b) Overcoming poverty and addressing inequalities;
- (c) Improving mental and physical health;
- (d) Generating climate action;

⁵ See the remarks of the Secretary-General at the High-level Meeting on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond, held virtually on 28 May 2020, at www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2021-09-28/remarks-high-level-meeting-financing-for-development-the-era-of-covid-19-and-beyond.

(e) Facilitating peacebuilding, disaster recovery and crime and violence prevention.

55. Before consideration of the five areas, two enabling factors are highlighted as essential to maximizing sport as a vehicle for catalytic change.

A. Enabling sport for the Sustainable Development Goals

1. Increasing policy coherence, partnerships and financing

56. The sport for development and peace movement has led to an ever-expanding number of initiatives, approaches and actors. The evidence suggests that the results are helping to improve lives and the prospects of communities. Given the community-level nature of most sport for development and peace initiatives, however, Sustainable Development Goal impacts and lessons learned are often not aggregated or applied to improve programming or scale up what works. Evaluations have sometimes found the contributions of sport to the Goals to be piecemeal, rather than the result of strategic and sustained investment.

57. It is important that actors at all levels distinguish between sport versus sport for development and peace. While investment in sport can produce such benefits as health, gender equity and economic development, the greatest benefits are derived from approaches that intentionally use sport to target sustainable development outcomes. To maximize sport as a catalytic tool for recovery, stepped-up leadership and coordination are needed to provide strategic direction, build partnerships and integrate sport into plans and policies. Two areas of intervention are needed.⁶

(a) Establishing enabling institutions

58. Some Governments have established a dedicated sport-for-development unit or committee to deliver priorities across disparate actors, ministries and sectors. Such units facilitate collaboration among Governments and implementing partners (grass-roots, non-governmental and private sector entities) to monitor and scale up Sustainable Development Goal impact. Portugal, for example, benefits from a coordination office that links ministries and implementing entities to advance the values of sport across sectors and levels of society.

59. Local authorities designated to work with community-level partners serve a vital intermediary role. Community-based monitoring can ensure the ongoing engagement of local authorities in the delivery of sport for development and peace.

60. National and international actors should work in concert with Governments to increasingly strengthen the capacity of grass-roots entities to design, implement, monitor and evaluate sport for development and peace initiatives. The United Nations should use its convening power to increase the visibility, partnership opportunities and capabilities of community-level implementing entities. Online or in-person mechanisms can be used to enable the sharing of lessons learned and tested tools and methodologies.

(b) Financing sport for policy coherence and grass-roots impact

61. It is difficult to ensure the sustainability of sports-based programmes where there is a lack of basic sport infrastructure, as in many least developed countries.

⁶ Based on the stakeholder consultations undertaken for the present report and a survey of existing practices.

62. Work under way by the Coalition for Sustainable Development through Sport offers the potential to boost the quantity and sources of financing available to poor countries to develop their sport sectors. Coordinated financing pipelines for sport for development and peace made available through development banks can improve policy coherence by advancing shared approaches and methodologies.

63. The private sector can and should increasingly help to deliver sport for development and peace. Many banks and businesses remain unaware that investment in sports can be directed to the Sustainable Development Goals. Such umbrella organizations as the Generation Equality Forum offer important opportunities to engage the private sector. At the project level, the inclusion of private sector partners as early as the design phase can enhance sustainability and scale.

64. The paradox of sport is that those with access to the largest pool of players (grass-roots sport) have the fewest resources. Community-level actors implementing sport for development and peace are often dependent on public and corporate funding. Many lack the personnel to monitor and scale up good practices and meet donor requirements. Going forward, it is important that:

(a) Financers of sport for development and peace allow for flexibility in implementation and adjust their expectations on timing and reporting to reflect local realities and constraints, particularly considering the ongoing pandemic;

(b) Public and private investment in the sport sector prioritize what is known as “the bottom of the sports pyramid”, i.e. community and grass-roots entities;

(c) International and national actors ensure that community voices, including those of youth, are heard and reflected in design, planning and implementation.

2. Growing evidence of the impact of sport on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

65. At the global level, sport is recognized as an enabler of sustainable development, but its contribution to the achievement of specific Sustainable Development Goals has not yet been systematically recorded. Improved impact measurement can go a long way towards winning new partners, increasing investment, multiplying impact and generating policy coherence.

66. Governments have recognized the need for common indicators, benchmarks and assessment tools. Joined-up efforts, led by UNESCO and the Commonwealth, are under way to develop pragmatic methods to capture the contribution of sports-based interventions to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Such efforts are aimed at strengthening the scale of sports-related data available to policymakers, refining indicator protocols and ensuring appropriate disaggregation, while improving the relevance of sports-related data to monitor specific Goals.⁷

67. Going forward, monitoring and evaluation should be integrated into sport and sport for development and peace programming. The Sustainable Development Goals provide a reference to guide evaluation. To generate a culture of learning, stakeholders should report both positive and negative outcomes. The sector would also benefit from an increase in the number of independent and participatory evaluations based on clearly defined theoretical frameworks.

⁷ For an account of ongoing work to measure the impacts of sport for development and peace, see <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-work/measuring-contribution-sport-sustainable-development-goals>.

B. Sport as a catalyst to build back better

1. Sport as a catalyst for social inclusion, empowerment and anti-discrimination

68. Sport is increasingly being leveraged as a tool to empower women and girls, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees, minorities and other populations at greatest risk of being left behind. Sports-based programmes can be catalytic when they are shaped to improve people's opportunities, confidence and sense of belonging in the short run, while laying the groundwork to change mindsets and build inclusive societies.

69. Women's and girls' participation in sport, for example, can boost confidence and self-esteem while challenging gender stereotypes and influencing the behaviour of men and boys. There is evidence that years of advocacy and the example of women athletes are paying off. As indicated by an interviewee in a Commonwealth Game Associations' account of the impacts of sport for development and peace, "gender equality has not been too good ... because we have very few women involved in sports but ... there is now a sustainable effort to get more women into sport".⁸

70. With intentional approaches, sport can expedite changes in mindset. To tackle gender-based violence in Indonesia, for example, close to 20,000 teenage boys made the "Pledge2Respect" after completing a programme that combines football and a curriculum about positive masculinity. After the programme, women and girls reported a change in the behaviour of boys that made them feel safer and more respected.

71. Urece Sports and Culture for the Blind in Brazil uses sport as a fun way to break down barriers between young people with and without disabilities and enables those with disabilities to share their stories with peers in socially vulnerable communities.

72. One underutilized application of sport is facilitating the social inclusion of refugees and migrants. Sanctuary Runners, for example, uses sport as a bridge between refugees and local communities in Ireland. Refugees and community members run together wearing the same blue tops under the banner of solidarity, friendship and respect. The organization encourages people who may have had negative views on immigration to join and multiplies its impact by attracting positive coverage in local media markets.

73. Lessons learned include:⁹

(a) Increasing the visibility in professional and grass-roots sports of athletes from populations at greatest risk of being left behind is a powerful way to amplify impact. Members of the media and implementing organizations should seek to boost the coverage of women and girls, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants, minorities, indigenous peoples and other populations at greatest risk of being left behind. Where formal media coverage is not an option, sports events can be disseminated through social media;

(b) Inclusive design principles should be applied to all sports-based programming, as well as sport and recreation infrastructure. Enabling people of all ages, genders, ethnicities and abilities to play together starting at a young age can instil mutual appreciation and lay the groundwork for social inclusion;

(c) Women and members of populations at greatest risk of being left behind should be trained and recruited for leadership in professional and grass-roots sports.

⁸ See <https://jsfd.org/2021/08/23/the-contribution-of-sport-to-the-sustainable-development-goals-insights-from-commonwealth-games-associations/>.

⁹ Drawn from contributors to the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on the Role of Sport in Addressing Inequalities in Times of Crisis and Recovery.

Role models can expedite the inclusion in sport of populations at greatest risk of being left behind, while advancing broader social inclusion objectives. The Team Up programme in Australia, for example, employs women and girls, persons with disabilities and individuals identifying as LGBTQI+, including Pacific gender identities;

(d) It is critical to change the dynamic that leaves sport for women and girls with little or no financing, equipment, media coverage or access to infrastructure. Sport for development programming can help by encouraging and enabling the families of girls, youth with disabilities and other populations at greatest risk of being left behind to advocate their children's ability to participate in sport.

2. Sport as a catalyst for overcoming poverty and addressing inequalities

74. Sport can make a powerful contribution to local, national and global efforts to address inequalities, generate employment and overcome poverty. Sports-based interventions have proved effective at making school more attractive to children and young people, promoting the value of education and contributing to educational outcomes. The pandemic has increased the importance of such interventions, particularly in the developing world. According to UNESCO, the pandemic disrupted education on an unprecedented scale, affecting 1.6 billion learners and leaving 11 million girls at risk of dropping out.¹⁰ Children in developing countries, who have been hit hardest by the losses, are most at risk of not returning to school. Given the role of education in enabling upward mobility, the unequal impact of the pandemic on education levels threatens to have a dire impact on poverty and inequality for years to come.

75. The pandemic has also pushed 205 million additional people into unemployment, raising levels of poverty and leaving vulnerable and poor countries, people and communities ever farther behind.¹¹ Sports-based programmes can help to develop the entrepreneurial and soft skills of young people and vulnerable individuals and enable them to gain and retain suitable employment. Sport for Kenyan Youth Employment, with partner Barclays Bank, for example, leveraged football to help young people to secure jobs in the construction sector. Through lessons that integrated football, young athletes received work readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy training, along with practical, market-relevant training and certification.

76. The potential of the sports industry to generate employment and contribute to economic growth is underrated,¹² considering that the global sport sector has an estimated value of \$700 billion to \$800 billion and employs many millions worldwide.¹³ The industry can contribute strongly to economic growth and employment, particularly in the developing world.

77. Sports-based approaches to regional development can generate a virtuous cycle by building networks of local entrepreneurs and small businesses, while increasing an area's attractiveness to tourism. The sports sector and ancillary businesses generate jobs in administration, coaching, food vending, hotels, cleaning, transportation, security, accounting, journalism and retail, among other sectors.

78. Sport has the most potential to contribute to economic development and employment in Africa, where commercialization and grass-roots sport remain limited.

¹⁰ See <https://en.unesco.org/themes/sport-and-anti-doping/fitforlife>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Emmanuel Acquah-Sam, "Exploring the link between sports development and economic growth", Business and Financial Times, 22 March 2021. Available at <https://thebftonline.com/2021/03/22/exploring-the-link-between-sports-development-and-economic-growth>.

¹³ See <https://sport4sd.com/goal-8-decent-work-and-economic-growth>.

Youth account for about 60 per cent of Africa's unemployed population. A growing sport industry could provide productive employment opportunities for young people across the continent, helping to catalyse stronger and more inclusive and sustainable economic growth.¹⁴

79. Governments need to take the lead in developing and promoting sport at the grass-roots level as well as generating enabling legal and regulatory frameworks and implementing their enforcement. Concerted effort is also needed to address the lack of financing for sport infrastructure and strengthen local capacities to build the sport sector.

80. Lessons learned include:

(a) Programming should be informed by local labour markets and skills frameworks to connect populations at greatest risk of being left behind to employment opportunities and skills through sport;

(b) Sport should be maximized as a tool to reach those at risk of dropping out of school, including to increase the appeal of educational and vocational opportunities and foster the building of soft skills;

(c) Skills relevant to the labour market should be integrated into sports-based programming and training for coaches and physical education teachers. Sports educators should be empowered and encouraged to advise participants on life choices and support their efforts to pursue education and employment opportunities;

(d) Investment in professional and grass-roots sport should be targeted at generating a virtuous cycle of increasing tourism, businesses, jobs and opportunities in vulnerable localities and poor communities.

3. Sport as a catalyst for mental and physical health and well-being

81. Sport and physical activity are vital post-pandemic tools to improve health outcomes, enable active ageing and address the global mental health crisis. Sport and physical activity can have immediate impacts on well-being, while serving as a catalyst to lower the cost of health care and reap the benefits of a more productive, active population. Regular physical activity can result in a 30 per cent reduction in obesity as well as depression and other mental health conditions.¹⁵ Sport and physical education are springboards for health improvement, with the potential of adding \$12 trillion in economic benefits to the global gross domestic product by 2040.¹⁶

82. The pandemic has led to a renewed urgency to address the dangers of physical inactivity. Emerging data indicate a decline of 41 per cent in physical activity since the beginning of the pandemic. This decline is even more alarming considering that 80 per cent of young people and one in four adults did not meet WHO recommendations for physical activity before the pandemic.¹⁷

83. Lockdowns, combined with a lack of physical activity, contributed to spikes in anxiety and depression, with a 200 per cent increase in mental health conditions reported among youth. The resumption of quality physical education is vital for recovery.¹⁸ Physical education that gives children a positive association with sport at an early age can lead to lifelong habits and improve the health of generations.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Nick Peirce and others, Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine UK joint position statement with the Sports and Exercise Psychiatry Special Interest Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, "The role of physical activity and sport in mental health" (May 2018; reviewed May 2021).

¹⁶ McKinsey Global Institute, "Prioritizing health: a prescription for prosperity" (July 2020).

¹⁷ See www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity.

¹⁸ See <https://en.unesco.org/themes/sport-and-anti-doping/fitforlife>.

Recognizing this, Monaco has invested in physical education for all, from the age of 5 years onwards, with such activities as rowing and ice skating that teach young people to integrate physical activity into their daily lives.

84. Sports-based programming can also be tailored to address mental health challenges and build coping skills. The Futbol Mas Foundation, for example, operates programmes for young people using football as a learning scenario and analogy for life.

85. Tailored physical activity can have particularly positive health and psychosocial impacts on older persons. Germany, for example, is designing a programme with local sports clubs to engage people with dementia. Brazil has an initiative to shape exercise opportunities for those aged 60 years and older.

86. WHO estimates that up to 5 million deaths per year could be averted if the global population were more active. Yet many live in areas with little or no access to spaces in which they can safely walk, run, cycle or engage in other physical activities.¹⁹ COVID-19 recovery presents an opportunity to rebuild stronger physical education and activity systems that reach underserved populations. WHO has identified three strategic drivers:²⁰

(a) Sustained communication campaigns that promote physical activity, using a wide range of media, with messages and images tailored to diverse communities;

(b) Environments that provide safe, affordable access to facilities and spaces that enable people to be more active;

(c) Programmes and services that offer affordable, rewarding and enjoyable opportunities to participate in physical activity across the life course, aligned to different abilities and preferences.

4. Sport as a catalyst for climate action

87. No sector can build back better without addressing the climate crisis. With little time left to prevent or limit catastrophic climate change, there is an urgent need to move from words to actions. Sport can play a key role by using its universal platform to raise awareness, influence behaviour and generate action to combat climate change. Given its visibility, the sports industry can play a catalytic role by example, lowering its own carbon footprint and proactively adopting sustainability standards.

88. Sport's broad social platform makes it a strategic tool to influence attitudes and behaviours. Athletes, leagues and teams are increasingly raising awareness about climate change and encouraging fans to reduce their footprints and become climate advocates. To tap this potential, the United Nations planned to launch, in July 2022, the "Football for the Goals" campaign, designed to encourage the football community to recognize its responsibility to help to create a sustainable future. In the lead-up to and at the FIFA Football World Cup in Doha, to be held from 21 November to 18 December 2022, the initiative will invite football leagues, players, the media, fans and other stakeholders to become agents of change by adopting sustainable practices and acting as champions of climate action, equity and human rights to advance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

89. More than 280 leading sports organizations have signed on to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Sports for Climate Action initiative,²¹ which supports and guides sports actors to achieve global climate goals. In November

¹⁹ WHO, "Fair Play: building a strong physical activity system for more active people" (WHO/HEP/HPR/RUN/2021.1 (October 2021)).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ For the list of participants, see <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/sectoral-engagement/sports-for-climate-action/participants-in-the-sports-for-climate-action-framework#eq-1>.

2021, signatories committed to ambitious new targets to cut their greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 and achieve net-zero by 2040.

90. Signatories, including FIFA, Athletics Kenya, BBC Sport and the Premier League, have committed to concrete actions to implement the 2030 targets. Many have started mapping their greenhouse gas emissions and are proactively driving climate awareness and action. Their leadership and the incorporation of sustainability standards in the sports industry, more broadly, can have a ripple effect, contributing to the adoption of sustainable production and consumption standards in other sectors.

91. To achieve such catalytic impact, efforts under way must be strengthened and scaled up, including through the following actions:²²

(a) Governments should set policy frameworks and incentives for sport to become sustainable;

(b) Sports organizations should make their climate targets and actions public, with such highly visible actions to reduce emissions as using solely renewable energy and building carbon-free sport venues. Climate action messaging can also be broadcast by stadiums and athletes through social media;

(c) Sports organizations should encourage climate responsibility across the supply chain, including in transport, merchandising and ticketing;

(d) Governments should monitor and report robust data, including the broader spectrum of emissions relating to sporting events.

5. Sport as a catalyst for disaster recovery, peacebuilding and the prevention of crime and violence

92. Sport is an effective tool for building shared identities, preventing conflict, crime and violence and providing psychosocial support to people recovering from conflict and disasters. Applied with intention, sport can have a catalytic impact, helping to ease the tensions and violence aggravated during the pandemic, while laying the groundwork for more peaceful, resilient and cohesive societies.

93. The response of the sports community to the pandemic, highlighted in section II, demonstrates that sport can be an invaluable vehicle for crisis management and disaster prevention and recovery. Sport can be harnessed to motivate community participation, mobilize volunteers and provide an ongoing channel for social connection and psychosocial support.

94. Sports programmes are being shaped in increasingly sophisticated ways to address trauma, improve well-being and strengthen the resilience of persons displaced by violence, conflict or disasters. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for example, has reported an overwhelming response by national sports federations to work with the Office to support Ukrainian refugees. In Bangladesh, Terre des hommes and the Olympic Refugee Foundation are drawing on sport to strengthen the resilience of people displaced by climate disasters.

95. Many countries and organizations have realized that sport can be shaped to foster more peaceful and cohesive communities as well as to help to lay the groundwork for peace in conflict-affected regions. Costa Rica opened a series of civic centres to engage at-risk youth and children in activities, including sport, that facilitate the prevention of violence, promote social inclusion and strengthen citizen coexistence capabilities. The Government of Israel has integrated sport into its efforts to foster peace, leveraging sport to facilitate relationships between Jewish and Arab

²² United Nations, “Addressing climate change through sport”, Future of the World Policy Brief No. 128 (New York, 2022).

Israelis. In the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Peace and Sport organization trained local teachers to apply peace and sport methodology and opened community training centres that provide weekly sporting and peacebuilding activities to 700 young people.

96. Sport can also be an effective tool to help to reintegrate people who have served time in prison. Vision Changers Kenya, for example, encourages juvenile offenders to see themselves in a new and more positive light through sport and technology. Sport is also leveraged to encourage collaboration with communities and educate the public on the need to reintegrate children in conflict with the law.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

97. **To advance the work on sport for development and peace and maximize the contribution of sport to the COVID-19 recovery and beyond, the General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations:**

(a) **Note the potential of sport to deliver short-term benefits, while helping to catalyse transformational change in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, including to address the climate crisis;**

(b) **Urge Governments to strengthen action to shape policies and programmes that realize that potential by integrating sport and high-quality physical education and activity into the COVID-19 recovery and beyond, as well as into sustainable development plans;**

(c) **Encourage the United Nations system to support Member States to undertake such efforts;**

(d) **Adopt measures to strengthen national and local government collaboration with grass-roots entities implementing sport for development and peace, including to build enabling partnerships, strengthen local capacities to monitor impacts and scale up what works in a sustainable manner;**

(e) **Strengthen the provision of capacity development, technical cooperation and financial assistance to enable policies and approaches that maximize the contributions of sport for development and peace, including at the grass-roots level, in relation to overcoming poverty, promoting social inclusion and reducing inequalities;**

(f) **Encourage the United Nations and relevant stakeholders to take concerted steps to more fully leverage sport to address the devastating impacts of the pandemic on education and employment rates in the developing world;**

(g) **Take steps to strengthen United Nations system-wide coherence and increase collaboration among system entities, within their mandates, to advance sport as an enabler of development and peace;**

(h) **Acknowledge the work of the Inter-Agency Group on Sport for Development and Peace and encourage United Nations entities to work collaboratively through the Inter-Agency Group to strengthen coherence and efficiency, including by means of collaborative initiatives and shared tools;**

(i) **Strengthen the capacity of the Secretariat to enable a “one United Nations” approach.**

Annex

Contributions to the report

Member States

1. Australia
2. China
3. El Salvador
4. Germany
5. Guatemala
6. Hungary
7. Italy
8. Japan
9. Lithuania
10. Mexico
11. Monaco
12. Morocco
13. Peru
14. Romania
15. Togo
16. Turkey

United Nations contributors

1. International Labour Organization
2. Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events, and Promotion of Sport and its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism
3. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
4. United Nations Children's Fund
5. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
6. World Health Organization
7. United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

Public and private contributors

Total of 81, including universities, community groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations and sports leagues

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on the Role of Sport in Addressing Inequalities in Times of Crisis and Recovery

Held on 12 April 2022 to inform the present report. There were 125 participants, including experts and practitioners, from 24 countries.