## Sport and Curriculum Design

## Purpose

Designing a successful, girl-centred sport programme can be complex. While interacting with girls and developing bonds between them, you may have to have a few challenging life skills conversations with them; you may need to carefully consider whether your proposed sport of choice is the right fit; and you may be required to evaluate the risks, benefits and values of combining boys and girls.

## Where areyou?

This section of the International Guidelines will explore how to approach the development of a successful sport programme for girls.

In this section, you will explore the following topics:
01
Using a Life Skills Curriculum
02
Choosing the Right Sport
03 Quality of Sport
04 Benefits of Using Competitions, Tournaments, and Events
05
Mixing Genders

A curriculum, or a set of sessions that guide facilitators and coaches on teaching a certain skill, idea, or lesson, can be indispensable for organisations working with girls, particularly those who want to put girls' rights and life skills at the centre of their sport programmes. A well-designed curriculum can help achieve your sport programme's objectives in a number of ways.

## Support on Sensitive Topics

A curriculum gives your coaches and facilitators flexible and adaptable instructions on how to link games and exercises with life skill lessons, as well as how to lead discussions around sensitive topics such as gender-based violence, sexuality, or reproductive health. This is never an easy task, and having written instructions that guide a coach in asking the right questions and providing factual information is extremely useful.

## Consider

Women Win, with input from programme partners, defines community as all of the stakeholders and community members who influence the lives of the adolescent girls participating in sport programmes. The geographical area that makes up this community differs for every programme; in some cases it may be a village, in some it may be more than one village. This definition not only includes parents, teachers, community leaders, both international and local organisations, peers, and coaches, but also, most importantly, the girls themselves.

Note: This influence or impact may not necessarily be positive.

## Replicable Training Processes

Having a standardised curriculum allows you to expand your programme and train coaches and facilitators quickly since you have a written lesson-by-lesson guide on how to deliver sessions.

## Standardised Programming

By using the same curriculum across multiple programme sites, you can standardise the impact measurement across all participants. Since they are all following similar sessions that are based on a single curriculum, you can use standard surveys and other tools to measure what they have learned, use it to inform your programming approach, and then share this progress with community groups and stakeholders.

## Considerations When Using a Curriculum

The key to successfully using a curriculum is finding the right curriculum for your programme, participants, and community. The following considerations are suggestions to think about when deciding which curriculum to use.

## Evidence-based

When searching for a curriculum for your programme, check to see that it builds on global evidence about what works when addressing topics such as gender identity, gender-based violence, and sexual health, and that the information comes from reputable sources, preferably academic or evidence-based.

## Adaptation

When choosing a curriculum, the best option is to use something that you can easily adapt to your local context, culture, and age of participants. It is also important to let coaches know that even the best curriculum is not meant to be read word-for-word in front of a group of girls, but rather, it is more of a guide that can be and should be adapted to the programme and its context.

## Duration of Engagement

When identifying curricula that fit with your objectives, consider the length of time that your programme will engage each individual girl. The longer that girls are engaged in the sport programme, the more impact a life skills curriculum will have. However, trying to fit too long of a curriculum into too few sessions can result in rushed sessions and limited depth of discussions. Choose what works best for your group and the amount of time they will spend in programming.

## Sensitive Subject Matter

In some cultures and contexts, speaking about sensitive topics such as sexuality, rape, abortion, and reproductive rights can be controversial and put your programme or staff at risk. Ultimately, the goal of using these curricula should be to empower adolescent girls to advocate for and enjoy their rights to dignity, equity, and healthy sexual lives. Progressing towards this goal may mean adapting or emphasising certain sections of the curriculum for political or cultural reasons.

Goal equips girls with the confidence, knowledge and skills they need to be economic leaders in their families and communities. The curriculum is designed for girls aged 12-18 who are living in underserved communities and is typically offered on a weekly basis, over the course of ten months.

Since its launch in 2006, Goal has grown into an internationally-recognised global movement operating in more than 20 countries. Implemented by organisations around the world, the programme teaches girls critical facts about health, communication, rights and managing their personal finances in order to help them transform not just their own lives, but those of their families and friends. ${ }^{1}$


## 02 Choosing the Right Sport

The success and sustainability of your programme will depend, in part, on what sport or physical activity you select. While some programmess offer girls a variety of sports to choose from, there are benefits to focusing your programme on a single sport:

> Often through school or other community initiatives, girls are given basic introductions to many sports but rarely afforded the opportunity to invest their time and energy in strengthening sport-specific skills.


Go to the Quality of Sport section of this guide for more information on why quality of sport is important for developing the leadership of adolescent girls. Turn to the next page to view some considerations to take into account when choosing what sport your programme will focus on.

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## Accessing Resources

Conduct a thorough assessment of the resources you need to begin a sport programme. Resources include space (indoors/outdoors), equipment, girls' practice and game attire (uniforms), transportation to and from playing spaces, and availability of coaches. When choosing your sport, be realistic about what tools you have at your disposal or are able to acquire.


## Case Study: Moving the Goalposts, Kenya

The selection of football as Moving the Goalposts' programmatic sport was related to the popularity of the sport in the country and the existing infrastructure in the community. Football is a popular sport in Kenya and is also a male-dominated sport. Getting girls to learn and play football is a powerful message for the entire community. The existing infrastructure in the community also made it possible to use the fields in schools and local communities and this avoided incurring construction costs.

## Choosing Between an Individual or Team Sport

While both individual and team sports can be empowering tools for girls to exercise their right to play and challenge gender norms, there are different benefits to choosing each type of sport for your programme. Regardless of whether you choose an individual sport, such as running, or a team sport, such as netball, it is ideal to combine the positive aspects of both experiences.


Team sport participation encourages cooperation and communication and gives girls a social context or group in which to place themselves. If you are running a team programme, meet with each participant one-on-one, giving each girl time for individual reflection, and hold eachgirl accountable in front of the team.


- Individual sport participation encourages girls to learn personal responsibility for outcomes, feel unique, and be able to fully control personal progress. When teaching individual sport, create group cohesion through gatherings and collective results so girls feel like they are part of something greater than themselves.


## Identify What Girls Are Interested In

Ask girls what sport they want to play! This is the single most important aspect of which sport to choose and it will make your programme more successful if you choose a sport the girls in your community are excited about. If you choose a sport that girls are not motivated to play, you will face a daily challenge to get them to participate. Share options that are financially and culturally accessible to guide participants, then allow the girls to make the choice.

Case Study: Girl Move, Mozambique

Girl Move has adapted its sports programming depending on the availability of female coaches and interest of girls in specific sports. The programme originally began offering rugby and basketball as two participants in their programme were coaches in these sports. Later they incorporated a martial art, Tang Soo Do, because there was a new participant who practised it and could share their knowledge and skills. In 2020, they chose to incorporate dance because of the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on physical contact. This was a critical adaptation, as the opportunity to dance gave young women new forms of expression in a time of greater vulnerability and social distancing.

## Challenging Stereotypes

Stereotypes around class, gender, and race can exist around many sports. Choosing a sport that challenges a stereotype can be a very positive experience for girls and their community. When girls play a traditionally male-dominated sport, girls and the boys around them experience a transformation in their personal and societal expectations. When community members see girls competing in a sport typically dominated by males, they begin to expand their understanding of girls' capabilities, opening up opportunities for girls to engage in traditional male domains, such as school and work.


However, you must be aware of the potential backlash to choosing a sport that challenges stereotypes. Negative responses could include boys challenging girls outside of the programme and caregivers prohibiting girls from participating. You need to be aware of the impact the challenge could have on the girls' lives, assessing if the sport benefits or harms individuals and the collective group. Once you have identified these factors, assess what is ultimately best for the safety and growth of participants.

Case Study:

## Naz Foundation, India

In India, the Naz Foundation chose netball specifically because it was considered a girls' sport and was not a traditional male sport. Rather than trying to force their way into a traditionally male world like cricket or football, the organisation felt the best option for the girls in their programme would be to focus on a sport that wasn't culturally masculine. Eventually, boys started asking the girls if they could teach them to play netball.

Image source: Naz Foundation, India


The pilot programme of Pass it Back started by offering several sports, but only one of them attracted girls and women: rugby. The lack of knowledge about rugby in Laos, combined with a strong focus on female leadership from the start, brought new opportunities for the programme's growth. Being a new sport strongly promoted by female trainers and coaches for female players, rugby began to be


## Can Your Sport Programme Also Teach Self-defence and Build Physical Strength in Girls?


#### Abstract

Strength differences between men and women put girls at risk for being physically abused, beaten, sexually assaulted, or raped. Although most sports build muscle, sports that build speed, confidence and strength can be effective tools for the empowerment of women. Programme leaders of organisations that teach girls boxing and martial arts, such as karate and weightlifting, attest to the benefits of teaching girls about personal strength and self-defence. They note that if a girl has experienced abuse or bodily trauma, self-defence training can be a powerful way to regain control over her body.




Image source: UNICEF

## 03 quality of Sport

There are multiple ways that organisations can design sport programmes for girls, each with different outcomes or experiences for participants. Some organisations choose to offer unstructured or non-competitive programmes to girls in the community, whereas others choose to formalise their sport programmes and offer girls an opportunity to gain skills and play in a competitive environment. Both types of programmes have benefits, and it is up to organisations to understand the needs of the girls in their community as well as the resources available to them. Some organisations choose to include both types of approaches in their programme design, offering all participants a non-competitive environment that introduces them to sport as well as a competitive environment that allows those girls who are interested the opportunity to excel.

## Consider

Sport is inherently a competitive space, but ethically and in practice, programmes that serve girls most effectively are those that emphasise wellness over winning. Girls can benefit greatly from learning how to compete, how to win, and how to lose with grace. However, if your programme's aim is to help strengthen girls off the field, growth and development of the girl must always be considered to be more important than winning or losing.

## Unstructured or Non-Competitive Programme

## Characteristics

- Sports "buffet" with lots of choices for girls to try different sports and activities.
- Flexible scheduling, irregular or infrequent training.
- Events-based activities, such as sport days or celebrations.
- Play-based programme with low-level instruction of games.
- Unsupervised or led by untrained coaches/teachers without deep sports knowledge.


## Benefits

- Familiarises girls with physical activity and play.
- Non-threatening environment to try new things.
- Generates interest in a lot of sports and activities.
- Few resources needed (equipment, coaches, fields).
- Low/no pushback from parents or community - does not challenge gender stereotypes



## Formalised Sport Programme

## Characteristics

- Single sport focus in single site or programme.
- Consistent and frequent sport training over a longer period of time.
- Structured teams that participate in leagues, tournaments, and other sports events.
- Skill-based development emphasised and competition encouraged.
- Practices planned and delivered by trained, qualified coaches.


## Benefits

- Progressive skill development and mastery build girls' confidence.
- Enhanced pride and commitment of being part of a formal sport programme or team.
- Structured environment and sustained skill development optimal for teaching the transferable life skills including discipline, teamwork, learning from mistakes, time management, goal setting, stress management. See more life skills that can be addressed through sport in Adolescent Girls Life Skills.
- Extensive opportunities for leadership practice that give different girls a chance to shine.
- Can create pathways to sport employment, such as professional contracts, coaching, refereeing.


## Tips: Formalising a Sport Programme

Formalising your sport programme can provide a host of additional benefits that a noncompetitive or unstructured programme can't. If you would like to formalise your sport programme, here are some tips to consider:


Choose a single sport in a single site or programme (see Choosing the Right Sport for more tips).


Design your programme with a sport specialist.


Create training pathways for girls with interest/talent in sport (coaching, refereeing) and provide regular opportunities for development.

Support girls' opportunities for sport employment outside of the programme.

Build a gender-friendly sport culture at all levels of your organisation.


Hire qualified, trained coaches.

Provide coaches with national/international certification opportunities.

Encourage coaches/trainers to challenge girls and celebrate accomplishments.

Invite elite/successful female athletes and coaches to visit as guests to encourage girls to invest more time and energy into sport.

Consider proper nutrition options for girls at practices and games.


Invest in equipment, facilities, and clothing to lower barriers to access for girls in your programme.

Partner with existing sport structures: federations, physical education colleges, other sport for development NGOs.

## Case Study:

 ChildFund Rugby and Laos Rugby Federation - Pass It BackPass It Back is a sport for development programme that offers an integrated rugby and life skills curriculum for boys and girls in rural and urban communities in Laos. Their focus on technical rugby skills creates employment and leadership opportunities for participants and alumni. In the Pass It Back programme, participants who go through the curriculum often go onto: be trained as Pass It Back Coaches or LRF staff, start their own clubs or hold club board or leadership positions, be trained as World Rugby qualified Coaches, match officials or medical personnel, or play for the Laos National Team in international competitions.

This broad range of personal and professional development pathways entices young people to continue their involvement and supports them to practise the leadership competencies developed during the Pass It Back curriculum.

## 0 . Benefits of Using Competitions, Tournaments, and Events

While much of the technical and life skill building happens in regular training sessions, it can be empowering for girls to test those skills at competitions, tournaments, and events. These competitions can also be excellent opportunities to motivate girls' growth, generate a sense of pride in their team identity, and build enthusiasm around your sports programme. Participants and community members will get the chance to see other girls compete, reinforcing the image of girls as athletes and competitors.

You may choose to organise competitions within your sports programmes (between teams from your programme), or include other local girls' teams as well. They may be held at the community, regional, or even national level, giving opportunities for girls to meet other athletes from different teams and communities.

If done in public, competitions and events allow girls to showcase their skills in front of community members, which can have impacts on both the individual and the community. It is one thing for a girl to practise shooting baskets on her own, but quite another for her family or neighbours to come and watch her score baskets, play defence, celebrate with her team, and share her growth with an audience. Public acknowledgement and celebration of development can accelerate progress inside and outside of the sporting arena.

Community engagement through competitions and tournaments can also encourage the shift of perceptions about girls' participation in sport, as well as facilitate conversation among community members about the value of sport in girls' lives. Gender stereotypes are automatically challenged when community members witness girls participating in activities that are assumed to be reserved for boys.

For more information on using events and other activities to engage the community, go to the Community Engagement section of this guide.

For assessing if your organisation's events are safe for and inclusive for adolescent girls, complete the Safety and Gender Inclusion self-assessments.

Image source: OWLA Program, Empodera, Brazil

(0) Mixing Genders

By necessity or by choice, there are times when boys and girls are integrated into a sport programme. Common scenarios from our partners include organisations that share resources (such as play space, sport equipment, or coaches), or when a programme originally designed for boys decides to add a component for girls. This section will explore the benefits and risks of the combination of boys and girls in sport programmes and provide recommendations on how to effectively integrate these groups.

It is important to be intentional when mixing genders and recognise that simply adding girls into an existing boys' programme without considering their unique needs could be harmful for the girls as well as the boys. Research shows that when girls' and boys' bodies change during adolescence, the playing field becomes unequal in many sports. In life skills sessions, girls and boys should have their own spaces to discuss sensitive issues if they come up or are part of the curriculum.

You should carefully consider before mixing genders, making sure that the girls and their needs aren't marginalised in the process.

## Understanding Gender Roles



The term 'gender' refers to the set of social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, and the socially constructed norms and ideologies which determine the behaviour and actions of men and women.

When considering mixing boys and girls in a sport programme, it is critical to first recognise the power dynamics and imbalances that exist between genders in most societies. Gender relations involve a system of power relationships between women and men in the context of socio-cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity and economic relations. In many societies, the system of gender relations gives power and privilege to men and discriminates against women.

A child's sex usually determines his or her gender role, expectations, tasks and responsibilities, and personal belief in his or her potential. Characteristics of gender roles vary greatly across cultures, as does the distribution of resources, decision making power, and economic privilege between men and women. However, across cultures, girls are often given fewer opportunities, less access to public spaces, and less power than male peers.

To effectively integrate girls and boys in programmes, you need to have a complete understanding of the social distribution of power and social expectations of both genders for the culture in which you are working.

## Recommendations

Recommendations and experiences for mixing boys and girls in a sport programme are often defined by conditions and intentions. How you should handle introducing boys to an existing girls' programme is different than how you would handle adding girls to an existing boys' space, although many of the same principles of equity, respect and communication remain the same.

The following information is most relevant for:

- Those who have been operating a sport programme for boys and want to add, improve or expand a component for girls.
- Those who have been operating a sport programme for girls and choose to integrate boys, either on account of limited resources or to help promote growth for all children.
- Newly established programmes designed with the intention of mixing boys and girls.


## Consider Timing and Frequency

Consider integrating slowly, inviting the new group to attend sessions occasionally at first and then with more regularity when both groups are comfortable with the presence of the other. Girls must feel comfortable in their teams, playing their sport, and communicating with one another and coaches before introducing boys into the programme. Similarly, if you are adding girls to a programme that was formerly only for boys, it is important to talk to boys about why girls are being added. If integrated too early or hastily, girls or boys can feel threatened and intimidated, thereby stunting opportunities for growth.

## Consider the Age of the Groups you Intend to Integrate in your Programme

In various countries around the world, children's sport is often mixed-gender, with girls and boys playing alongside each other on the same teams. However, as girls and boys hit adolescence, their bodies change in different ways, making it difficult for them to play together. This transition to adolescence is a scary, confusing and emotional time for both boys and girls. Research shows that when girls turn 14, they drop out of sport at two times the rate of boys, ${ }^{3}$ particularly when the teams are mixed-gender. Although mixed-gender teams may be great ideas for girls and boys at a young age, as they both enter their teens, it is important for an organisation to recognise girls may need their own space and/or their own teams so as not to stop playing completely.


## Position Girls in Leadership Roles

It is important to demonstrate that girls are capable of being strong leaders, and to ensure they have opportunities to gain this experience, particularly in the presence of boys who may try to assume leadership positions in the programme. According to Women Win programme partners, it is not uncommon for girls to be shy and reluctant to be vocal or volunteer in front of boys due to social or cultural norms. Position girls in places of power whenever possible by giving them the opportunity to be team captains, teach skills to younger boys and lead discussions.

## Case Study: Boxgirls

At Boxgirls, in Nairobi, Kenya, boys are invited to train with the girls from time to time, in part due to limited gym space. Coaches will have a more experienced female boxer instruct a less experienced, younger male boxer. This encourages the boy's respect for the girl's mental and physical skill, while building the girl's confidence in herself and her abilities.

At Sadili Oval, in Nairobi, Kenya, young tennis players train to be the best they can be. Girls and boys alike come every day to improve skills, get stronger and become well-rounded athletes. Director Dr. Liz Odera, a former professional tennis player, believes that girl-boy integration is the ideal set up for a sport programme, primarily because this is how we all live in society. Once a girl has established a feeling of comfor and confidence at Sadili Oval, she is encouraged to play matches against athletes of similar skill level, boys or girls.


## Case Study: Naz Foundation

In the Naz Foundation's Goal Programme in India, female Goal Champions lead select life skills sessions as well as teaching netball skills to boys who would hand around during the girls' practices. Coaches realised that the boys wanted to know how to play netball because it was something new to them, netball being traditionally a girls' game. One coach used girls in her programmes who were leaders to teach those boys how to play netball and lead them through selected life skills sessions as well.

## Maintain a Safe Space

A primary focus of every sport programme for girls should be maintaining a safe space. This means that all children must feel emotionally and physically safe and comfortable at all times. In some communities, this might mean allowing girls to wear long pants while playing in the presence of boys if wearing shorts around boys is socially prohibited. You should monitor this carefully and proactively address any indications that girls are uncomfortable or becoming hesitant or reserved. It might also be necessary to create a participants' code of conduct, which ensures both boys and girls understand the need for respect. For more information, see the Safe Spaces section.


## Facilitate Sensitive

 Discussions SeparatelyWhile there are some discussion topics for which it can be beneficial and important to share with mixed-gender groups (such as health, gender roles, communication, leadership, and economic empowerment), there are others (such as sexuality, abuse, and menstruation) which are more sensitive and should be carefully facilitated. The type of subjects that are "sensitive" depends on culture, context, and level of trust between boys and girls.

These important conversations might not be happening in school or at home, and both girls and boys can benefit from factual education and a safe space to explore sensitive issues. You should consider the environments in which to have sensitive discussions, and that single-sex environments may lead to more productive discussions, where girls can feel free to talk openly, ask questions and insert personal experiences into conversations. The presence of members of the opposite sex can inhibit this freedom and even make girls more shy about opening up, for fear of being judged.

## 椟 Be Mindful About Mixed-Gender Physical Activity

Depending on the age of participants, there can be significant differences in boys' and girls' physical strength and aggression, particularly during and after puberty. Having girls and boys play against each other can actually reinforce gender power dynamics and disempower girls. In programmes where girls are being integrated into existing boys' teams, you need to carefully consider if girls are physically and emotionally safe competing against boys, or if they need their own groups.

When considering integration, there is no hard rule for when it is or is not appropriate for girls and boys to compete alongside and against one another. What matters is that you and your coaches pay close attention to the physical safety of girls and ensure that girls are not playing with greater reservation when competing with boys. It can be helpful to ask girls if they want to play with and against boys; coaches should honour their decision.

## Consider

Partners have shared with us that unsuccessful integration of boys and girls in a sport programme can lead to a reinforcement of unequal power dynamics and girls' feelings of sporting inadequacy. For example, if a coach rewards boys for passing to girls during a football game, he unintentionally reinforces the notion that girls are inferior to boys and would not receive passes unless others are forced to pass them the ball.

## Conduct Follow-up Discussions

Give girls the opportunity to debrief about their interactions with boys, both on the field and in programme discussions. Ask them how they felt, what was different, and what they thought about sharing their space with boys. Reflection will give coaches important information about what to do differently and give girls the opportunity to express themselves and experience a level of control over their programme.

It is also important to conduct follow-up talks with boys. This enables coaches to gain an understanding of the ways in which boys learn from the process and help answer their questions, address their concerns and guide their experiences. Give feedback to both boys and girls on their different perceptions of the experience. This helps them understand each other better. Both coaches and participants need to understand gender dynamics. A successfully integrated program can be a positive breakthrough moment for boys with regards to the physical abilities of the girls, as well as a self-realisation of strength and ability for girls.

## The Potential Value of Integration

Mixed-gender sport participation can have a positive impact on girls' development, and should be considered when designing sports programmes for girls. While there are likely other benefits, the following is a list of reported positive outcomes when partners organisations mixed boys and girls in sport sessions and life skills discussions.

## - Empowering Girls in the Presence of Boys

Although they may be shy at first when participating or speaking up in front of boys, girls find increased confidence in themselves when they are able to demonstrate their skills and strength in front of male peers.

## - Changing the Perspective Girls and Boys have of Each Other

Communities and individuals are at risk when girls and boys are not educated about life skills and gender dynamics. For example, if children do not understand how and why to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, they are more likely to spread infection. If a boy sees girls being treated poorly, and no one speaks up against it, he will do the same. However, if girls and boys are encouraged to treat each other with respect and question societal gender norms, it can spur peer-led empowerment and the challenging of unequal and destructive power dynamics.

## - Facilitating Positive Cross-Gender Communication

Social cues teach boys and girls over time how they should communicate with one another. When a boy hears their father say disparaging things to their mother, they learn something about what is an acceptable way to talk to women. Conversely, if they are taught to be respectful, honest and open with women, their communication and treatment of girls outside of that environment is likely to improve. Sport programmes can give girls and boys the tools to talk about sensitive issues, handle conflict respectfully, and use appropriate language in a protected and equitable environment. This can have wide-reaching, positive ramifications outside of the playing field.

## Diffusing Potential Gender-based Challenges

When boys see girls participating in sport, receiving uniforms, instruction, and attention, they are likely to become curious. If they are not included, boys can become jealous and challenge girls physically and emotionally when girls leave training. In this way, sport programmes can actually escalate instances of gender-based violence and abuse. If boys are invited occasionally to see what is happening in the sport programme sessions and educated about why girls are playing sport, they may become allies with the programme and be less likely to make jealousy-inspired challenges. In fact, inviting a boys' team to come and support girls at a game or event can be a powerful statement and affirm a girl's participation in the programme.

## Case Study: MIFUMI

Programme partner MIFUMI (Uganda), uses karate and taekwondo to educate girls about domestic violence and empower them physically and emotionally against it. When the programme began, project coordinators reported that boys were physically attacking girls on their way home from training. They were uneducated in martial arts and wanted to show the girls that they, too, could fight. Programme coordinators made the decision to include boys occasionally to educate them about the non-violent principles of martial arts to help keep girls safe.


[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ https://www.sc.com/en/sustainability/investing-in-communities/goal/

