



WORKING PAPER

Participation in Active Sports to Develop Peace Building and Resilience in Communities

Based on Round-Table Meeting Recommendations
November 14, 2019

Participation in Active Sports to Develop Peace Building and Resilience in Communities

A working paper

This paper presents suggestions on how participation and endorsement of sport activities can help prevent violent conflict and make its contribution to building peace and harmony in society. It aims to help different sectors of society unite in this endeavor to create various avenues for athleticism and sport, to strengthen a sense of community and prevent violent extremism around us. This working paper for the GNMI research desk was produced on the basis of a round table meeting held by Media Baithak on November 14th, 2019 in Karachi, Pakistan. (The list of panelists is attached herewith)

Introduction

‘Since the beginning of the century, there has been a nine-fold increase in the number of deaths from terrorism, rising from 3,329 in 2000 to 32,685 in 2014. Pakistan endures one of the heaviest tolls in the world with over 21 thousand civilian fatalities between 2003 and 2016 according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal.¹’ For a country investing so heavily against agents of terror, with a struggling economy, and social fabric under threat, one of the first points of neglect is public good. These include parks, hospitals, public libraries, community centers and sports grounds. All are areas that encourage collectivity and communal benefit and they can provide an accurate measure of a community’s social health. A society that encourages the active social and political participation of all its demographics is one that is free from extreme and violent points of views.

It is a misnomer that violent extremism happens through lone actors. Violent extremism needs support to grow and is usually found in entire communities that feel marginalized or vilified. Sports are one such phenomenon of cultural activity that has the power to transcend these social barriers as well as class, race and religion. Sports targeting the youth have the power to deter them away from gang activity and crime by channeling their time and energy into camaraderie and proactivity. Aside from this sports provide opportunities for teamwork and positive avenues

¹ Development Advocate, Pakistan, ‘Preventing Violent Extremism,’ Volume 3, Issue 1, March 2016.
https://www.undp.org/content/dam/pakistan/docs/DevelopmentPolicy/DAP_Volume3-Issue1.pdf

to understand how to deal with the failure and rejection that is just as much a part of sports as winning and celebration can be.

Background

The state has a strong role to play in elevating sports as an integral part of the country's culture. It should ideally ensure safe grounds and spaces that can accommodate participants of all ages, genders, religions, races and social classes. Investing in sporting facilities for the public across the provinces will not only provide a communal gathering space but also a way for political activity and social grievances to be addressed without festering or feeling alienated and pushed towards extreme actions. However civil society organizations too can invest in prioritizing sporting facilities and events across the country to encourage and enable the youth to participate in activities that provide them with the opportunity to be part of a community and also to find the validation they might otherwise not be receiving from their lives outside the sport. 'Sport allows children and young people to lead healthy lives, and it teaches them to take on responsibility, behave fairly and resolve conflict peacefully.'²

One of the most important factors in favor of social stakeholders investing in sport for public good is that it brings a sense of ownership amongst the residents of that community which in turn sustains a level of environmental and social health without extra costs to the city as the citizens will maintain a standard of wellbeing for their surroundings. However this requires an initial investment and involvement by social stakeholders to sustain the public good that they are building and ensure that it is catering to all members of society and not just the ones that already benefit from social inclusion and preference (i.e. for instance men in Pakistan are a lot more entitled to public space than women.)

Sports in Pakistan: An overview

Pakistan is a region of insecurity and many factors that guarantee social stability are under threat, underfunded or underrepresented. The war on terror has taken a toll on the country's economy and has deterred international sports teams from visiting Pakistan for sporting events, which has greatly diminished funding and interest into any sport except cricket. It is no secret that other than cricket our nation has very little invested in sports. Boxing, hockey, football, tennis and squash are mere afterthoughts, and should they garner any attention despite this indifference by the state and civil society, it is only through their own hard earned backing and seeking sponsorships on an individual basis without any or much, support from the state.

To quote from Ahsan Zafeer; 'If the Olympics are a benchmark to gauge the position of a country with respect to sports, then the situation appears to be extremely bleak. With seven representatives from a population of over 198 million – meaning one athlete from every 27 million – Pakistan sent its' smallest-ever Olympics contingent in the 2016 Summer Olympics,

² Promoting reproductive health and education through sport: https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz-s4da-2017-en-factsheet-namibia-web_1.pdf

comprising more officials than athletes. This is the size of the contingent of a country with the seventh largest population in the world... What hurts even more is the fact that none of our seven athletes were even eligible. All players were selected on the wild card basis – usually given to regressive and poor countries that fail to qualify for the Olympics – placing Pakistan in the same category as Afghanistan and Syria. The Pakistani squad did not win a single medal and returned empty-handed for the fifth consecutive time.’³

Aside from this regrettable neglect that athletes have to face in the country, it is economically, socially and culturally detrimental for Pakistan to continue being oblivious to such an integral part of society, but especially one as traumatized as ours. Studies have shown time and again that sports has the quality to heal a community as it brings them together in an arena that is ideally beyond politics, race, religion and gender. The ways in which sport can overcome these divides are a form of therapy⁴ and rehabilitation for a society recovering from events of trauma and uncertainty. According to the UN; to encourage this method further, the General Assembly has just adopted a resolution recognizing the role of sport in sustainable development, promoting its importance and recognizing its impact on the empowerment of people⁵.

The UN member states recognize that violent extremism and preventing such does not solely mean acts of terrorism (another term that has been difficult to find consensus on), but also the ideologies that lead to extreme acts of violence, such as violence towards women or children, religious minorities, different ethnicities and the like. They state that ‘most commonly, the term ‘violent extremism’ is used to "refe[r] to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals", which can encompass "terrorism and other forms of politically motivated violence." It is therefore an evolution of this observation to define violent extremism as the belief in any ideology that compels an individual to believe they maintain superiority over another demographic, and that they can use violence or the threat of violence to sustain that dominance over them.

When understanding the role of sports in Pakistan and how it can help prevent violent extremism it is important to do so holistically. Simply constructing sporting grounds and pavilions will not suffice; a social interest has to be created in sports other than cricket that can also provide a source of livelihood and revival of crafts for many. In terms of employment opportunities when it comes to reviving sports in the nation it will be possible to renew industries of crafts that create sports equipment, as well as a margin in society that encourages more people to become sports coaches, trainers, form management agencies, create sponsorships, scholarships, have the media

³ Other than cricket, Pakistan is failing at every sport that it excelled at in the past
<https://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/60214/other-than-cricket-pakistan-is-failing-at-every-sport-that-it-excelled-at-in-the-past/>

⁴ UN recognizes role of sport in achieving sustainable development <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1027531>

⁵Line up to live up; how sports can help prevent violent extremism in youth
<https://www.unodc.org/dohadecaration/en/news/2018/12/line-up-to-live-up-how-sports-can-help-prevent-violent-extremism-in-youth.html>

be involved; the supply and demand chain that will result from the continuous investment and involvement in sports is endless.

One of the most fruitful ways sports will eliminate violent extremism is that it provides the youth with healthy avenues to resolve conflict, as well as opportunities to use physical education as a form of communal therapy. The trauma and aggression that is often leftover from incidents of violent extremism are scars that can further infect society if left untreated in the demographics that are most susceptible to being indoctrinated in extremist or bigoted views.

Changing landscapes

Due to the vacuum left by the state in terms of education and primary needs such as health and employment, sport offers a way to combat extremist views through a sense of community and practices, since familial relations can be built through sports teams and training practices. These facilities, if available, also deliver an alternative to gang activity, drug abuse, turbulent family situations and involvement in crime.

Sports and physical education are of particular benefit to women and demographics of society that are neither socially nor politically empowered. The corporate and government sectors must be galvanized to see sports as having a multitude of offshoots that can not only provide employment opportunities in the community, but also make room for a collective sense of ownership to take place within society. It is this sense of ownership that prevents an individual or group from falling to the frays of society and keeps one in the folds of community.

Pakistan was once a country that had top athletes in a myriad of sports like long distance running, squash, tennis, hockey, snooker, football, kabaddi, badminton and boxing etc. Due to the economic, political and social turmoil the nation has had to face over the past 30 years of violent extremism and acts of terror; spotlight in terms of sports, has only been afforded to cricket. The irony is that all these sports have avid fans who religiously watch these matches; however they do not have the opportunity to support local players in the sport as the state does not prioritize investments in any other sports or interests besides cricket.

Keywords

CVE, PVE, sports, Pakistan, sports for peace, peace building, terror.

Definition of Key Terms

Sports for peace: Using sports as a tool for countering and preventing violent extremism involves the scrutiny and investment required to uplift the role of sports in society as a tool for peace building and healing a traumatized society.

Peace building: A process that aims to understand the root causes of violence or extremism and works to eliminate them from a community.

Preventing violent extremism: This is different from countering violent extremism as this falls under the previous definition of peace building, as the goal of prevention is to recognize the factors that enable violent extremism in society and attempt to reconcile them in a way that proves healing for a society.

Research Questions

The following are some of the questions that were used to structure the round-table meeting:

How can sports be used as a way to empower a disenfranchised community?

Sports are a way to connect with the youth of society. With one of the fastest growing populations in the world, is Pakistan's lack of investment and involvement in sports encouraging fringe elements in society?

Certainly sport is a way to strengthen a community. How can we ensure the active participation in sports, of demographics that otherwise feel alienated in society?

What are some of the feasible ways in which other sports besides cricket can be highlighted on a national level?

Recommendations

Create sports teams of local neighbourhood players that belong to different minority sects and go from neighbourhood to neighbourhood in war torn communities, and conduct small street level matches with their youth. This not only builds camaraderie amongst the initial team but all the teams henceforth have a community of their own and can act as a vanguard against intolerance and violent extremism in their midst in the future.

The culture of sports has to be rejuvenated and brought to its former glory where once physical education was as important as academic education. 30 to 40 years ago the state and private sector offered sponsorships and scholarships and tournaments that provided opportunity to the people who were otherwise financially unable to participate in higher education or even opportunities for employment.

Social media and technology has managed to alienate and marginalize the community to a very large degree and has created increased discrimination and bigoted attitudes amongst the youth. Therefore it is harder for sports to stay a priority since it is a team activity and social media discourages collectivity and breeds individualism. In light of this, parents have to play a role to curb the fixation with social media and technology and instead encourage physical education in their children.

The crux of reviving any sector of society is to reward it in a way that increases its value in society. Pakistan Sports Board and its tangential departments are not afforded the budget to meet the meager salaries of the people running it, let alone provide for the equipment, supplements and dietary care that are involved in creating a star athlete. The War on Terror has brutalized the nation's priorities to such an extent that ironically, the budget has failed to fund the factors that actually prevent and counter violent extremism, such as sports.

Pakistani community has a tendency to view sports as a waste of time or a sign of corruption in their children. The tunnel vision when it comes to academia forces the parents and children to neglect other aspects of human development such as the arts, as well as physical and psychological education. The uncertainty in tenuous communities also prevents mothers from letting their children out to play in the streets and sporting grounds out of fear in case of acts of violence or crime that increased in the recent past.

Local associations must be given priority instead of only funding and giving prominence to associations at a national level. Since it is the local associations that are usually responsible for head hunting and training the athletes that then play at the national level. Therefore the local associations must be strengthened monetarily and in social capital so that they can better scout and train more individuals in the future.

Due to economic uncertainty and the fear of not being employable, parents and schools are more likely to focus an inordinate amount on academic performances instead of creating an environment that encourages the holistic wellbeing of their pupils. Since most schools collect a sports fee from their students, there must be a regulatory body that holds the schools accountable for how they spend this capital. Trained and informed coaches must be made available for boys and girls to not only provide them with positive role models but also real life examples of individuals excelling in physical education.

Women especially are not seen in the media or school environments as succeeding in their fields and this causes demoralization in girls and young women and it is noticed that as they grow older, more and more of them drop out of their chosen sports due to societal pressure and familial discouragement. Avenues must be created for women and other targeted minorities to safely take part in sports and physical education to create a positive cycle of involving more women and targeted minorities from pursuing sports.

The culture of nepotism is rampant in the country and corrupts every active industry and the same is seen in the sporting arena where many of our athletes are not fit to qualify for international tournaments. It was urged by the panelists to focus on merit based selections so as to give players from all walks of life a chance at playing professionally.

The private sector in the country must be held accountable for their Corporate Sector Responsibility (CSR) revenue and they should be mobilized to use their CSR funds to sponsor local athletes and tournaments so as to build interest in sports besides cricket and give communities the opportunity to come together on the basis of sports. This will not only decrease intolerance in society but also provide opportunities of employment to those who are passionate about sports.

The more the government invests in sports, the more foreign players are likely to participate in and the more the state is liable to invest in the safety of those playing. Another benefit of having foreigners involved in local sporting events is the increased exposure our communities will have to different ethnicities, religions and races as they visit Pakistan for sporting events. This will increase tolerance in our people as well as dispel otherwise negative views about Pakistan that foreigners may have. This latter factor will play a great role in reducing the racism and discrimination Pakistani's face abroad, on account of being Pakistani and will further decrease the alienation and marginalization felt by different demographics locally and abroad.

SR	Name of Guest	Organization / Area of Profession
01	Naseem Rajput	Sports Anchor
02	Faisal Iqbal	Former Test Cricketer
03	Afzaal Farooqi	Sports Analyst Samma TV
04	Hamza Haider	Founder and Admin GG Riders
05	Mohammad Asim Abbasi	Video Analyst Pakistan Hockey Team Pro League
06	Syed Naveed	Sports Activist
07	Uzair Qadri	Fitness Trainer/ Youth Activist
08	Iraj Khalid	Coach Zamzama United Football Club
09	Sadiq Suleman	Table Tennis Player
10	Jaffer Hussain	Sports Journalist Geo News
11	Ashar Zaidi	Sports Journalist
12	Obaid Awan	Sports Journalist Abbtakk TV
13	Qudsia Kanwal Raja	Founder and CEO Sports Awareness Program
14	Hira Manan	Volleyball Player

About the Working Paper:

This working paper is based on 10 days of desk-based research and policy recommendation proposed in aforementioned round-table. It was prepared for the GNMI ©. The views and recommendations expressed in this working paper are those of the speakers and experts of the round-table, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GNMI, its partner agencies or the federal or provincial governments of Pakistan. The GNMI Research desk provides rapid syntheses of key discussion and of expert recommendations in response to specific topic of discussion on governance, social development, humanitarian and conflict issues. Its concise working papers draw on a selection of the best recent literature available and on input from national experts. Each GNMI Research desk working paper is peer-reviewed by a member of the GNMI team.

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