

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**EMPOWERING  
GIRLS AND  
YOUNG  
WOMEN  
THROUGH  
SPORT FOR  
DEVELOPMENT**

Research into the Significance of Female Coaches and Female Leadership in Sport for Development confirms that this is an important part of getting girls and young women actively engaged. Together with community outreach strategies, gender sensitive and adapted program models, and having strategies in place to increase girl's and young women's participation, female coaches and female leadership are a critical component for girl's and young women's empowerment through Sport for Development.

The empowerment of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) through sport has increasingly become a top priority for Sport for Development (SfD) organizations and funders. Yet, it is not always clear how organizations can improve in this area and what strategies prove most effective. This research explores promising practices through six case studies with organizations from different corners of the world. The aim was to understand how female coaches and female leadership impact the participation and empowerment of girls. These organizations are: Moving the Goalposts in Kilifi, Kenya, Dancing Grounds and Elevate in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, Slum Soccer in Nagpur, India, Boxgirls in Nairobi, Kenya, and Active Communities Network in Belfast, Northern Ireland.



### What lessons can we learn from Active Communities Network, Belfast, Northern Ireland?

- Community outreach to talk to girls about what kind of sports or what kind of activities they want allows you to build a program with higher girl participation.
- Girls often feel uncomfortable playing certain sports that are associated with being masculine, thus, ACN offers diverse sport activities that are requested by girls in the community.
- Financially supporting young women to become certified coaches helps to boost female participation in community sport.
- Female coaches help encourage girls to join the program and become coaches themselves, creating a positive cycle.
- Engaging professional female athletes as Ambassadors to the program inspires girls.



The objective of this research is to share insights (best practices) and strategies with other organizations that may struggle to engage and support girls in sport. Laureus Sport for Good Foundation identified the need for this research after commissioning a gender review of its grant portfolio in 2016. The review found that very few organizations in the Laureus grantee network, reported on gender-related outcomes. Additionally, there was limited information on how organizations create opportunities for girls in sport, achieve an equitable gender balance within their organization, and develop pathways for female leadership.

This report expounds on key findings and recommendations for organizations prioritizing the empowerment of girls and young women, including: creating opportunities for girls to become leaders, enabling mentorship between girls and women, and employing female leadership and role models in different ways.

## ? What lessons can we learn from Elevate in New Orleans, LA, USA?

- Preparing kids with the necessary basketball and academic skills to win a college scholarship will give them an opportunity for a better future.
- Sustained and intense support allows male coaches to better understand and support girls over time.
- Female coaches who have played college basketball are important role models for girls to imagine themselves playing college basketball.
- Intense and sustained interaction with participants allows coaches to create connecting points that create strong relationships across gender, race, or background.

## FEMALE LEADERSHIPS AND COACHES HELP GIRLS SEE BIGGER FUTURES

Each of the six organizations studied expressed the importance of female leadership and coaches to getting girls to participate in their program. They also felt that visible female leadership enabled girls to see bigger futures that go beyond the gender barriers they encounter in their communities and daily lives. Each organization addresses the needs of girls in their communities and supports them to overcome the barriers to participation and enjoyment of sport in different ways. For example, Slum Soccer partners with local schools to engage girls in football because it brings a sense of safety and legitimacy in the eyes of parents who may otherwise be reluctant to send their girls to play football.

All of these organizations seek to increase girls' participation because they realize that in order for girls to become leaders, empower themselves and take on pathways to build better futures, they first need to be able to engage with the sport program.



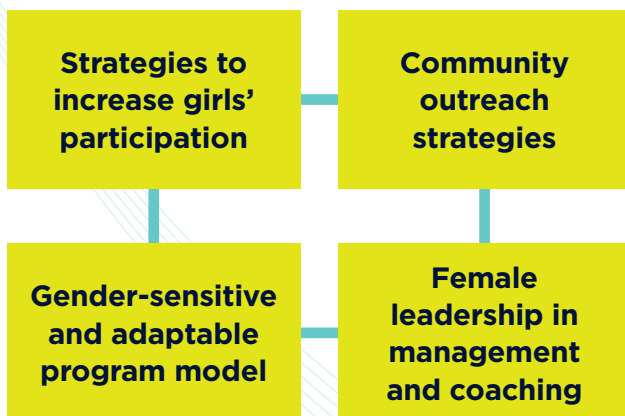
### What lessons can we learn from Moving The Goalposts in Kilifi, Kenya?

- Plan activities with the needs and lives of girls in mind. Ask questions such as: where is the pitch? Is it safe? What are the girls' schedules, and can they attend planned activities?
- Open participation to all girls, even those with no experience with sport.
- Public visibility of girls coaching or leading activities helps change community mindsets about gender roles.
- Internal leadership pathways and training for girls is essential to developing leaders.
- Female coaches who are of similar age to their players can be less intimidating and easier for girls to build a connection.



## INTERLINKING ELEMENTS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESS

The empowerment and development of girls and young women is intrinsically linked to female leadership in coaching and is further reliant upon an organization's management of strategies to increase participation, community outreach, and gender-sensitive and adaptable program models. These four interlinking pillars to success were found across all six organizations, although each organization employed different strategies to achieve these aims.



The four pillars support and reinforce one another; if an organization has strong female management or coaching staff, then girls' participation is more likely to rise, and the program model is more likely to be gender-sensitive from design. Similarly, girls and young women will face a more difficult environment in which to challenge gender stereotypes and barriers that have kept them out of sport in the first place if the program does not address the community attitudes that keep girls out of sport or adapt their program to meet girls' needs.

As the case studies indicate, organizations must take an approach that is both self-reflective and intentional in its design to achieve gender equality and empower girls and women in sport. The four pillars presented above are a good blueprint for organizations to reference when building a program for girls. Female coaches and female leadership are vital to the approach and must be accompanied by engaging communities and families of girls, as well as ensuring that girls have access and pathways to participate in sport.



### ? What lessons can we learn from Slum Soccer in Nagpur, India?

- Creating a girls-only program (or activities) is essential to engaging girls.
- Creating pathways for girls to become leaders within the organization can contribute to more girls' participation.
- Working with community-trusted institutions, like schools, helps overcome parents' doubts and barriers to allowing girls to participate in programs.
- Regular communication with parents by coaches helps maintain girls' participation.
- If you cannot find female coaches in the community, build pathways for girls and young women within the organization to become coaches.

## ASK THE GIRLS

In order to increase young women and girls' participation and empowerment through sport, the research supports the following recommendations for organizations:



**Ask the girls in your program why they think other girls do not join, be open to amending your program based on their responses**

**Reflect on how many female coaches you have in your program and create opportunities for more**

**Identify female leadership and encourage and support it at every level of the organization**

At Laureus Sport for Good Foundation we believe that Sport for Development is an essential tool that can help empower young women and girls living across varied social contexts. It is our hope that this research will support more Sport for Development organizations in their engagement of young women and girls and that this engagement will contribute to our mission of ending violence, discrimination and disadvantage around the world. We invite you to read the full report here: [https://www.laureus.com/sites/default/files/sfg\\_report.pdf](https://www.laureus.com/sites/default/files/sfg_report.pdf)



### What lessons can we learn from Dancing Grounds in New Orleans, LA, USA?

- Providing gender training for staff increases awareness about inequalities and potential barriers for girls.
- Hiring female teachers and staff members who are also professional dancers provides girls with important role models.
- It is easier for teachers to achieve safe spaces for self-expression for adolescent girls in girl-only classes.
- Making classes accessible in the neighborhood where young people live helps facilitate inclusive participation.
- Dance itself, as a sport activity, challenges the heteronormative masculinity that dominates more traditional sports like football.



## What lessons can we learn from Boxgirls in Nairobi, Kenya?

- A flexible program model that can be amended to fit the needs of local girls leads to better supporting girls in the community.
- Leadership pathways that provide young women with income, albeit small, help keep them involved in the program so that they do not have to find work elsewhere.
- Showing the positive outcomes of girls' boxing breaks gender stereotypes in the community.
- Professional female boxers are important role models for girls, especially coaches they know who are also professional boxers.
- Female leadership of staff creates a supportive environment for younger female coaches and staff members.



### Alison Carney:

An independent consultant, advocate and researcher in Sport for Development and social change since 2002. Expertise in the gender analysis of sport and development programs, gender inclusive programming, impact evaluation and M&E. Significant experience in developing and implementing M&E systems and tools with projects that use sport for youth empowerment, leadership and education. Experience also includes: curriculum and project development, training of sport coaches, digital storytelling and grant-writing. Emphasis on participatory methods for more sustainable implementation of projects that work with sport for social change.

Researcher and blog writer on topics related to gender, sexuality, inclusion and sport. Has published research in the International Review for the Sociology of Sport and has contributed to the Institute of Development Studies' Toolkit on Sexuality and Social Justice.

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