Impact of COVID-19 on Sport for Development: Challenges & Opportunities

29th May 2020 (Friday)
3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Organised by

Pri International Academy
Pro Sport Development
The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic is having a severe impact around the world, and sports is no exception. Several facets of the sports industry, right from grassroots sports to professional sports, sports coaching and training, sports broadcasting as well as sports events, have taken a major hit due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown in several countries. The biggest casualties include the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games as well as Euro 2020 Football Championship, both postponed till 2021.

Thus, it is no surprise that the sport for development (S4D) sector globally is also being severely disrupted, with the delivery of programmes being halted, funding being in limbo and beneficiaries impacted due to lack of access to programming. However, the S4D sector has also risen to the challenge of providing communities support during the COVID-19 crisis. Many S4D organisations in India have been providing food packets and hygiene kits to several beneficiaries, families and communities with whom they work, others have been finding innovative ways of engaging children and youth who are not able to attend schools or colleges during the lockdown, while some have been ensuring the safety of children and women during the lockdown given the steep rise in incidences of child abuse and domestic violence.

Though it is yet to be ascertained how the world will look in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, it is fair to assume that sport in general and the S4D sector in particular will be severely impacted and go through massive change and restructuring. Moreover, especially in developing economies like India, the sports industry and the S4D sector might be particularly vulnerable and may face an existential crisis, as they might not be seen as important or necessary in the larger scheme of things.

In order to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the S4D sector, and what challenges and opportunities this might present, PRIA International Academy and Pro Sport Development hosted a webinar on 29th May 2020 (Friday) between 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. This webinar aimed at addressing the following key questions:

1. What has been the current impact of the lockdown in India on the S4D sector? What is envisioned to be the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the S4D sector?
2. What role can civil society, social enterprises, donors, philanthropists, and governments play to ensure a stronger S4D sector in a post-COVID-19 world?
3. Does the S4D sector require repositioning of its strategic approach in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic? If so, how?

2. [https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/media/releases/newsid=2641071.html](https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/media/releases/newsid=2641071.html)
PANELISTS

1. Juan Pablo Ramirez Miranda

Juan Pablo is the Head of Social and Human Sciences at the UNESCO New Delhi Cluster Office for Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. He joined UNESCO in 2012 and since then has been posted in Paris, the Ha Noi Office in Viet Nam, and the San Jose Office in Costa Rica. Within UNESCO, he works in the Education sector on education for sustainable development and global citizenship, as well as in the Social and Human Sciences sector. The current focus of his programme in South Asia is youth, sports, gender equality and social inclusion.

2. Lora Prabhu

Lora is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of CEQUIN (Centre for Equity and Inclusion), an organisation that utilizes Football as a tool for the development and equal rights of women and girls. Prior to that, she was associated with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). She was nominated for the International Visitors Leadership Programme on Global Women’s Issues by the U.S. Government’s State Department in 2011. She has co-edited ‘Fear that Stalks: Gender Based Violence in Public Spaces’, published by Zubaan Books 2012. Lora has been a member of the Sexual Harassment Committees in public and private sector firms. She is co-convener of the National Alliance for Women’s Football in India.

3. Dipnarayan Chakraborty

Dipnarayan is the Head of Programme Development at Magic Bus India, an organisation that works with children and young people to take them from childhood to livelihood and out of poverty, using sport as a tool in achieving their mission. Dipnarayan comes with 14 years of experience in the education sector. He holds a Masters Degree in English Literature and Linguistics from the University of Kolkata. He has been in Content Development during the initial years of his career and has worked with organizations like Tata Interactive Systems and LearningMate. Prior to joining Magic Bus, he was Research Head - Instructional Design at Zee Learn.
COMMENTATOR

Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay

Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay is Director at PRIA and Head of PRIA International Academy. He is an internationally acclaimed researcher, trainer and practitioner. Over 25 years, he has led several flagship programme initiatives of PRIA in participatory governance and democracy. His expertise includes Organisation Development, Strategic Planning, and Monitoring & Evaluation.

MODERATOR

Suheil Farrell Tandon

Suheil F. Tandon is a social entrepreneur specializing in the sport and development field, with particular expertise of working with diverse groups of young persons. He has a background in sports management and coaching, with more than 10 years of varied experiences in global locations including the UK, Canada and India. Suheil is the Founder of Pro Sport Development (PSD) and has led the conceptualization and initiation of several sport and development projects on behalf of PSD across India.
196 Registrations

104 Participants

14 Countries
- India
- Mexico
- United States of America
- United Kingdom
- Spain
- Kenya
- Nigeria
- Palestine
- Bangladesh
- Canada
- Malaysia
- Finland
- Sri Lanka
- Belgium

84% Participated in Polls

20 Questions Raised in the Live Q&A
“Girls are not able to access digital platforms for online classes, since the families with one smartphone provide it to the boys for their work. This increases the chances for girls to drop out of school.”

- Lora Prabhu, CEQUIN

“There is economic impact, gender impact, health impact and impact on food and nutrition because of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown.”

- Dipnarayan Chakraborty, Magic Bus India

“We are not used to staying indoors for long periods of time. Moreover, the pandemic has affected social inclusion which is a key aspect of Sport for Development (S4D).”

- Juan-Pablo Ramirez Miranda, UNESCO New Delhi
The webinar commenced by addressing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Sport for Development (S4D) sector, especially in India. The panelists discussed the short-term and long-term impact of the pandemic on the S4D sector by identifying the following consequences of the pandemic:

- **Increase in gender gap** - Lora pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the gender gap. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown has inflated the already existing gender gap in terms of mobility and access to public spaces and health resources for women and girls. Gender stereotypes have been exacerbated during this time, and there has been limited access to reproductive health products and services, including the use of sanitary pads or accessing hospitals for deliveries. Moreover, the lockdown has brought to light the gender gap with regards to access to technology. In a time where technology is becoming an increasingly essential commodity, families with only one smart device are giving it to their sons, leaving their daughters behind. This increases the chances of girls dropping out from school. According to Lora, once girls drop out it is very difficult to reach out to them again in order to engage them in programmes.

- **Impact on mental and emotional well-being** - The panelists drew attention towards the mental and emotional impact of the lockdown, especially on young people. Juan-Pablo outlined that the lockdown has meant that all of us have had to stay indoors, which is unusual for most of us. This has affected the mental and emotional well-being of people of all ages. Dipnarayan emphasized that children are stuck indoors and not able to visit their friends and engage in sports as the schools are closed. Similarly, people stuck in different cities far from home are becoming increasingly anxious and isolated. He also highlighted that a disproportionate amount of household chores for women have added to their mental, physical and emotional stress. Lastly, there has been an increase in the instances of anxiety amongst adolescents; they are not only worried about being exposed to the disease, but also about their further education.

- **Shift in funding patterns** - Dipnarayan mentioned that due to the COVID-19 crisis, philanthropists and funders have shifted their focus from investing in S4D to public health and nutrition. Moreover, several companies as part of their CSR are focussing on funding immediate COVID-19 relief work, due to which many funds have gone to the PM Cares Fund. This has affected the funding coming to the S4D sector and sports overall. There is a scarcity of funds to encourage the participation of new entrants in the sector. There is also an increasing pressure to cater to the needs of the children of migrants in the country with limited funds provided to the S4D sector during the pandemic.
ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

The panelists discussed the role that civil society, social enterprises, donors, philanthropists, and governments should play in order to ensure a stronger S4D sector in a post-COVID-19 world. They considered the following roles that can be played by the various actors of development:

- **Use sports as a leverage / tool for change** - Reminding us that sports can foster the holistic development of individuals, Juan Pablo explained that sports can be packaged in a way that brings forth its impact on health and well-being. Governments, civil society organisations, donors, philanthropists, and social enterprises should focus on the health-oriented aspect of sports, especially physical and psychological health to attract socio-economic response to the pandemic. Moreover, Juan Pablo also mentioned that the stakeholders within the S4D sector must emphasize on the positive impact of sports on social inclusion. Sports has the power to bring people of all ages (especially youth) and backgrounds together and can be used as an instrument to bring about real change when it comes to social inclusion and gender equality at the grassroots level.

- **Overcome technological backwardness** - Lora suggested that different stakeholders must come up with solutions to the technological backwardness in remote regions/ grassroots level to engage children and youth in the S4D sector online. She felt that most of the exchange of information or engagement moving forward may be done via digital platforms in the coming months and years. Hence, proper channels and plans need to be devised to encourage participation from remote communities in order for interventions to continue and remain effective.

- **Address the fault lines through Sports** - Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the fault lines in our society have been exposed, including those of socio-economic standing, caste, religion and gender. Lora suggested that sports is an effective medium to address these fault lines as social inclusion is a crucial part of the S4D sector. Dipnarayan further suggested that the civil society organisations in the S4D sector have to balance the need for safety and engagement, while governments should continue investing in programmes and initiatives like Khelo India and Fit India in terms of promotion, support and infrastructure to overcome these differences.
POLL RESULT:
WEBINAR PARTICIPANTS BELONG TO WHICH FIELD OF WORK?

- Sport for Development: 34.9%
- Development Sector: 22.1%
- Education: 24.5%
- Sports Industry: 9.3%
- Government: 3.4%
- Other: 3.4%
The three panelists expressed their views on whether the S4D sector requires repositioning of its strategic approach in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following points were the outcomes of the discussion:

- **Re-defining the plan** - Dipnarayan explained that organisations need to come up with a ground-level and detail-specific approach to redefine the purpose of their S4D programmes. Various organisations are using online/digital mediums to communicate effectively with their stakeholders and participants. Similarly, they have created fitness videos and conducted online yoga sessions to engage and communicate with people during the lockdown. It is likely that schools in India will reopen in the month of September. However, games, sports, activities like assemblies or other co-curricular activities involving groups might be put on hold. In this case, S4D organisations will need to devise a plan which involves online and offline mediums of engaging with children in small groups (7-10 students) at the grassroots level. S4D volunteers/programme coordinators can stay in touch with these children by collecting and preparing a database of their contact details.

- **Focus on grassroots** - S4D thrives on a grassroots community-based engagement and therefore, the focus moving forward for the S4D sector should be on engaging with children at the grassroots level and catering to their needs, especially when it comes to providing spaces to play and mobility for girls. Lora pointed out that it is important to realise how sports can help retain girls in school and prevent child marriages, particularly in rural settings. Additionally, it is equally important to provide girls with access to technology in order to reduce dropout rates in schools.

- **Ensuring funding to the S4D sector** - Juan Pablo shed light on sports’ ability to heal in a post-pandemic world. Sports not only helps in relieving physical, emotional, mental and psychological stress, but also promotes social inclusion, fosters leadership and builds communication. Therefore, it is important to promote this aspect of sports and the S4D sector can play a role in attracting funding by aligning sports to the fields of health, well-being and social equality.

- **Advocacy** - Dipnarayan explained that it is necessary to engage with the government and education authorities at the district and panchayat level, in order for them to view the S4D sectors’ potential within the development landscape. The district or panchayat level operations have greater autonomy and would be keen to adopt S4D programmes more readily. Moreover, Juan-Pablo emphasized that sport promotes solidarity, inclusion, discipline, fairness, sense of belonging and sharing, which are all values that have motivated people during the lockdown and should be further taken forward after the lockdown.
POLL RESULT:
WAS THE WEBINAR INFORMATIVE AND HELPFUL FOR THE PARTICIPANTS?

Not At All  |  Extremely
---|---
1  | 6
2  | 5
3  | 2
4  | 7.5
5  | 10
6  | 10

The poll result shows that the vast majority of participants found the webinar informative and helpful, with the highest rating of 10 for "Extremely."
The S4D sector has been an extremely positive and exciting addition to the field of development as well as the sports industry. The S4D sector has been playing a vital role in social, economic and cultural development of countries by working towards enabling various UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Sports has especially been leveraged as a tool to foster the participation of children and youth, especially girls at the grassroots level. However, the pandemic has immensely affected the S4D sector in a number of different ways. Firstly, it has widened an already lopsided gender gap. The lockdown has meant that access to public spaces and mobility has become even more limited for girls. Furthermore, there is also a developing gender gap in access to technology, with many girls not being able to access increasingly vital online resources during this time.

Schools across India have been closed for the past couple of months due to the lockdown. This has affected the participation of children in sports and halted the delivery of S4D programmes. Communication is now primarily done online due to social and physical distancing regulations and this has led to the engagement of several children being limited or cut off as they don’t have access to technology. Moreover, funding has also been rerouted towards immediate relief work, nutrition and public health.

This has created a scarcity of funds and a gaping hole in terms of investment in the S4D sector. Moreover, the idea behind social distancing and the closing of educational institutions, workplaces and public spaces was self-isolation. However, this isolation has caused an increase in mental and emotional unrest across people of all ages, especially youth. Young people are not able to meet one another and engage in social activities, including sports. It is a well-researched fact that sport is a unique tool that can not only help keep a person physically fit, but also aid in their cognitive, emotional and social development and well-being. Thus, it is even more pertinent now that the S4D sector continues to find innovative ways to work with communities during the upcoming period.

Moving forward, the S4D sector needs to emphasize the impact of sports on the developmental process, especially in relation to health and well being and its ability to build resilience among young people. In a time where elite sports have come to a stand still, the pandemic has shown the world the importance of recreational and grassroots levels sports. It is essential for S4D organisations to devise region-specific plans to provide for the needs of participants post the COVID-19 crisis and work with government agencies both at a micro and macro level to overcome the challenges of a lack of public spaces, technology and scarcity of funds.

“If the Sport for Development (S4D) sector is impacted by the pandemic, the development aspect of S4D is automatically affected by the pandemic.”

- Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, PRIA International Academy