

Sports and Physical Activity as a Powerful Driver for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established by the United Nations in 2015 with the aim of eradicating poverty and ensuring quality education, better health, gender equality, environmental protection, as well as peace and prosperity by 2030. Sports and physical activities are not limited to mere recreation or competition; they are also vital tools for social, economic, and environmental development. Sports promote discipline, leadership, cooperation, equality, health, and social inclusion. This research paper analyzes the role of sports and physical activities in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development Goals, sports, physical activities, health, education, gender equality, social development.*

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals are not merely for governments or the United Nations; rather, they represent the shared future of all humanity. Sustainable development (SDGs) entails meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the requirements of future generations. Rapid human development and industrialization have caused immense damage to the environment. To address challenges such as climate change and resource scarcity, the United Nations established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on September 25, 2015, with the consensus of its 193 member nations.

These 17 goals are deeply interconnected and are briefly outlined below:

- 1. No Poverty:** To completely eradicate poverty from every part of the world.
- 2. Zero Hunger:** To end hunger, achieve food security, and improve nutrition.
- 3. Good Health and Well-being:** To promote healthy lives and well-being for people of all ages.
- 4. Quality Education:** To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education.
- 5. Gender Equality:** To empower women and girls.
- 6. Clean Water and Sanitation:** Ensuring the availability of water and sanitation for all.
- 7. Affordable and Clean Energy:** Ensuring access to modern energy for all.
- 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Promoting sustainable economic growth and productive employment.
- 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure:** Building resilient infrastructure and sustainable industrialization.
- 10. Reduced Inequalities:** Reducing inequality within and among countries.
- 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities:** Creating safe and sustainable human settlements.
- 12. Responsible Consumption and Production:** Ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources.
- 13. Climate Action:** Taking steps to combat climate change and its impacts.
- 14. Life Below Water:** Conservation of oceans and marine resources.
- 15. Life on Land:** Conservation of forests, and protection against land degradation and biodiversity loss.

16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Ensuring access to justice for all and building peaceful societies.

17. Partnerships for the Goals: Strengthening global cooperation to achieve these goals.

Status of Sustainable Development Goals in India:

NITI Aayog is the nodal agency for monitoring and localizing these goals in India. The Commission evaluates the progress of states at both national and sub-national levels through the "**SDGs India Index and Dashboard.**" India currently ranks 94th out of 167 countries in the United Nations development report. Since 2015, the country has improved its ranking by 18 places, yet the pace of progress remains slow regarding the timely achievement of all 17 goals set for 2030.

The Role of Sports and various activities in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in India:

Sports are an integral part of human life. Regular participation in sports and physical activities plays a vital role in keeping the body healthy, the mind cheerful, and the personality balanced and refined. Through sports, individuals develop qualities such as discipline, self-confidence, patience, leadership skills, time management, and team spirit. When these qualities are cultivated in individuals, they prove instrumental in realizing the vision of a strong and robust society. The importance of sports and physical activities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations can be highlighted through the following points:

1-Good Health and Well-being (SDG-3):-

Healthy citizens are the most valuable asset of any society or nation. Achieving any goal or objective becomes difficult without good health among citizens or individuals. Regular exercise and participation in sports play a crucial role in mitigating issues such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and mental stress. Sports act as a motivating force in boosting immunity and fostering a healthy lifestyle.

2. Quality Education (SDG-4):-

Education forms the foundation of a person's life. It equips individuals with knowledge, good values, and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Sports foster the development of discipline, self-confidence, concentration, leadership qualities, and a spirit of cooperation. Physical education and sports play a vital role in the holistic development of an individual.

3. Gender Equality (SDG-5):

In simple terms, gender equality means that no individual should be discriminated against based on their gender. Gender equality fosters a sense of justice, equity, and development within society. Sports provide girls and women with equal opportunities to participate in competitions. Participation in sports boosts women's self-confidence and helps reduce gender discrimination in society. The achievements of female athletes send a positive message to society.

4. Reduction of Inequalities (SDG-10):

Sports provide equal opportunities to all individuals, transcending the inequalities prevalent in society—such as those based on caste, religion, language, economic status, and regional discrimination. Competitions organized for differently-abled athletes serve as an excellent example of social inclusion.

5. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG-16):

The presence of peace, justice, and strong institutions is an essential prerequisite for the sustainable development of any society or nation. Sports provide a robust foundation for mutual cooperation, tolerance, and a spirit of brotherhood. National and international competitions act as a bridge in fostering friendship and peace among different countries.

6. Development of Sustainable Cities and Community Participation (SDG-11):

Through sports, people from diverse castes, religions, and regions learn to work together as a team. This strengthens unity, social harmony, and a sense of community. Developing sports grounds, parks, open gyms, cycling tracks, and exercise areas in cities further enhances community participation.

7. Poverty Alleviation and Employment (SDG-1 and SDG-8):

Sports provide various employment opportunities that contribute to poverty alleviation. They create numerous job prospects in fields such as coaching, fitness training, sports journalism, physiotherapy, sports management, sports equipment manufacturing, and sports tourism.

8. Achieving Goals through Partnerships (SDG-17):

Various types of sports events play a significant role for both government and private entities. Through sports, the government promotes health, national unity, tourism, and the country's international profile. Meanwhile, private organizations engage in the sponsorship of sports events, which boost their business and enhances their brand recognition. Additionally, sports events generate employment opportunities and strengthen the local economy.

Sports and Sustainable Development in India:

The Government of India is continuously working towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through various schemes and programs, viewing sports and physical activities not merely as a medium for competition but as effective tools for health, education, gender equality, social inclusion, and sustainable development. For instance—

1. Khelo India Programme
2. Fit India Movement
3. Yoga and Fitness Campaign
4. National Sports Policy

The objective of these initiatives is to engage the Indian public in sports and physical activities inspire them to adopt a healthy lifestyle, and ensure excellence in sports at the international level. Expanding sports facilities at the school level and in higher education institutions is a significant step towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Challenges:

Although the importance of sports is steadily increasing, there are certain key challenges in fully achieving the objectives:

1. Lack of sports facilities in rural areas.
2. Shortage of trained coaches and modern equipment.
3. Limited opportunities for women and differently-abled athletes.
4. Lack of awareness regarding sports.

5. Lack of financial resources.
6. Insufficient importance given to sports education in many institutions.

Suggestions:

1. Quality sports facilities should be made available in every school.
2. Daily physical activities should be made mandatory for children.
3. Sports grounds and training centres should be developed in rural areas.
4. Special encouragement should be provided to female athletes and athletes with disabilities.
5. Awareness campaigns regarding sports and health should be conducted regularly.
6. Sports activities should be linked with environmental conservation campaigns.
7. The number of sports coaches and physical education teachers should be increased.

Conclusion

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is not merely a matter of economic growth; it is a comprehensive effort to build a healthy, educated, equitable, inclusive, and peaceful society. Sports and physical activity serve as a powerful medium that connects all these areas.

Sport promotes health and well-being under SDG-3; strengthens education and life skills under SDG-4; contributes to the empowerment of women and girls through SDG-5; fosters employment and economic activities through SDG-8; helps reduce social inequalities through SDG-10; contributes to building active and healthy communities for SDG-11; and can strengthen peace, tolerance, and social harmony under SDG-16.

According to the WHO, engaging in any amount of physical activity is better than remaining inactive and regular activity offers significant benefits for health and well-being. Therefore, sports should not be viewed as an activity reserved solely for talented athletes but should instead become an accessible part of everyone's lifestyle.

Ultimately, it can be said that sport is a medium that begins on the playing field and extends to a sustainable society. If sport is systematically integrated with education, health, social policy, urban planning, and youth development, it can make a significant contribution towards achieving the SDGs by 2030.

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