



# CELEBRATING TITLE IX BEYOND THE U.S.

by Astrid Aafjes and Maria Bobenrieth

## Foreword

*“Sport is very personal for me. As a young immigrant from Chile who did not speak English, my involvement in sports gave me a language that led to my inclusion beyond the playing field. My high school life revolved around teams and as a Title IX beneficiary, I attended college on a partial volleyball scholarship. My experiences as an athlete set the stage for a career built on sports business, expanding into the corporate responsibility realm through my ten years at Nike. Now, as Executive Director of Women Win, my commitment to using sports as a tool to equip adolescent girls throughout the world to exercise their rights is grounded in a personal understanding of a power in us, revealed through the power of sports.*

*As we celebrate the anniversary of Title IX, we at Women Win, would like to explore how we can take the lessons and success of Title IX to accelerate the global movement towards women’s equity. Acknowledging that Title IX has not served all young women in the U.S. equally, and that its enforcement at the high school level has been lacking, we still believe that it is the global best example of how a country can make sports a right for girls and women, giving them access to the benefits of participation. And, to be clear, participation is not enough. Participation is a critical first step and it just gets us to the starting line – our aim at Women Win is to align sports to girls’ and women’s rights, thereby creating a more just and prosperous world. In the article below, we outline a vision for how the spirit and legal structure of Title IX could benefit girls and women far beyond the borders of the United States.”*

*--Maria E. Bobenrieth, Executive Director of Women Win*

International development agencies, funders, governments, universities, and nonprofits are increasingly turning to sports as an innovative and effective way to engage a young woman in achieving her rights. Well-designed sports programs are an effective platform for learning and building skills, increasing knowledge, improving health and fitness, and ultimately yielding positive behaviors and health outcomes.

Title IX, passed 40 years ago this month, has established a most valuable and relevant precedent in the United States on how sports programs are effective in helping a young woman achieve her rights, and how additional resources within the women’s rights and development sectors can be mobilized and targeted to improve outcomes for a woman and her community.

## The Basics

Title IX is a section of the U.S. Education Amendments of 1972 that protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. It is not a sport-specific law, but has had a colossal impact on sport, in particular. Specifically, Title IX reads as follows:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance...

—United States Code Section 20, [1]

## The Impact

Sport has been a right for women in the U.S. since 1972. This transcends the conversation of sports as something that is nice to have, or simply good for women’s health or body fat percentage, but a legally-protected right.

Title IX’s equitable funding mandate for all universities and schools receiving federal funding made

sports programming for girls and women immediately available, and the total number of girls playing high school sports increased from 300,000 in 1970 to over three million today.<sup>1</sup>

Forty years after the passage of the law, and the scores of legal battles that followed, studies are starting to elicit gains made by women who grew up playing sports in the United States. A 2002 study by the mutual fund Oppenheimer found that 50% of women who make \$75,000 and above identify themselves as athletic, and 82% of executive businesswomen played organized sports after elementary school.<sup>2</sup> A 2010 study by Betsey Stevenson, an economist at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, found that sports both increased college attendance and participation in the work force.<sup>3</sup>

## Applying the Rights-Based Approach Globally

When applying sports programming for women in countries where there is a significant gap between a woman’s stated rights and realities, Title IX becomes particularly relevant because it is a rights-based approach. Many programs in emerging economies and “low-income” countries are designed around need. These programs identify a need -- something that is lacking either in the environment or the people -- and then works to fulfill the need. A rights-based approach is just the opposite: it begins with the premise that every person has basic entitlements, and educates and empowers an individual to achieve her rights. The rights-based approach does not require extensive research; rights have become codified by international organizations,<sup>4</sup> and the gap between rights on paper and rights in practice is sufficient evidence for intervention. Rights-based organizations work to both educate individuals about their rights, and then empower each person to achieve their rights.

Women Win’s rights-based model is built on the premise that adolescent girls are empowered through sports by acquiring new skills and Assets, by Accessing resources, and by developing Agency and leadership. We call it the 3 A’s theory of change. Once empowered, women are able to give back to their communities and play transformative leadership roles in their societies: completing a virtuous circle of empowering others. We have seen substantial traction in three women’s-rights areas, specifically: 1) achieving economic empowerment; 2) addressing gender-based violence; and, 3) accessing sexual and reproductive rights and health. Knowledge and empowerment for young women in these three areas has the greatest impact upon positive outcomes for her, her family and her community.

## Sport for Economic Empowerment

*Women perform 66% of the world’s work, and produce 50% of the food, yet earn only 10% of the income and own 1% of the property. Whether the issue is improving education in the developing world, or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part of the equation.*

*Former U.S. President Bill Clinton (September 2009)*

The economic empowerment of girls’ and women is of the utmost importance to our global development. Higher female earnings and bargaining power translate into greater investment in children’s education, health and nutrition, which leads to economic growth in the long-term. In Africa, total agricultural outputs could increase by up to 20% if women’s access to agricultural inputs was equal to men’s. In India, GDP could rise by 8% if the female/male ratio of workers went up by 10%.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, women in the U.S. have experienced educational, career and economic gains from their sporting experience on account of Title IX. The same effect can be achieved globally.

In many places in the world, a girl is not considered to be a wage-earning part of a family economy. As a result, she, like the generations of females before her, is given responsibility for care-taking, cooking, childbearing, and collecting wood and water. Financially, a girl's value is often perceived as limited to the dowry payment she generates or, in desperate situations, the collateral she can earn to pay back debts. If a girl can demonstrate her capability to generate future income for her family through her participation in a sports program, she becomes an economic agent better placed to have a voice in decisions that affect her life. The financial literacy of girls and women is a starting point.

A poignant example of the economic empowerment of girls through sport is Standard Chartered Bank's [Goal Programme](#), which has reached over 24,000 girls in 15 countries – from India to Zambia. Goal is a weekly program offered over a period of ten months, and includes a mix of life skills education, covering topics such as financial literacy, communication skills, and self-esteem. Each session starts or concludes with a sport activity – which reinforces the lessons and discoveries of the day. Girls that leave the Goal program report improved understanding and agency regarding their rights.

## Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is pervasive and crippling for young women in countries around the world, and adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable. According to the United Nations<sup>6</sup> (U.N.), one in three women is beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime. For a woman to live a life free from violence, she must first be aware that she has this right, she must feel empowered to seek a change, and she must have someone to approach who will help her find a different way. Quality sports programs for women's rights work on each of these levels.

Eighty-nine percent of girls who participated in the Population Council's survey of four Women Win programs reported that they feel safe where they play sports, 83 percent reported that they had made at least five new friends through the programs, and 89 percent reported that they had a female mentor they could confide in.<sup>7</sup> Sports can be the safe space to obtain information and build agency to [address GBV](#).

## Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Every year, close to 14 million adolescent girls give birth.<sup>8</sup> The 2005 Adolescent Fact Sheet from UNFPA states: "Based on data from 56 countries, girls aged 15 to 19 from the poorest groups are three times more likely than their better-off peers to give birth in adolescence, and bear twice as many children."<sup>9</sup> Girls and women have a right to control their own sexuality and reproduction. During adolescence, a girl needs education and support. She needs to build self-esteem and make decisions based on facts, not myths, pressures or social opinion.

Sports can be a powerful tool to help adolescent girls and women build assets, provide access to resources and develop agency and leadership to have a greater degree of control regarding sexuality and reproductive health and rights. Positive, educated female role models, safe spaces to question and learn, and an intentionally-designed SRHR curriculum are key ingredients to the success.

Fatuma Abdulkadir Adan integrates lessons about SRHR into the Horn of Africa Development Initiative Girl's club as a way to break the silence on issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM): "It's a silent practice. We use the girls' club as a safe space to talk about FGM. They are able to discuss with me what they go through and talk about the consequences. As of now, we aren't able to prevent it, but they know its effects, know why they feel pain..."

## Funding Drives Equity

One of the most potent outcomes of Title IX was that it simply improved funding for women's sports. As sports is employed with greater fervor in international development, more funds must be targeted toward programs specifically geared toward women. In 2003, only 7.3% of total giving from Foundations in the United States and .04% of total European Commission aid targeted 'women and girls' programs and initiatives. Of the 69 billion USD that was distributed in 2003 in the category of "Official Development Assistance," approximately 2.5 billion, or 3.6 percent, had gender equality as part of the objective.<sup>10</sup>

As funders look to increase their investments in girls and young women, we encourage implementation of another learning from Title IX: funding drives equity. Political structures and international resolutions are not enough. What if funders viewed funding of sports programs as an equity strategy and stipulated equitable access as a requirement for funds? What if funders required communities to allow girls to play as a condition of receiving a grant? How would this stipulation propel a funder's overall goals for a community? We believe that sports programs for women is a strategy that has tremendous impact upon communities, and we encourage funders to see it as such and target and leverage funds to increase overall impact.

Funding is needed at all levels, not the least of which is research. In the field of quality sports programs for girls and women, there is an urgent need for longitudinal studies. The studies cited in this essay are snapshots in time. They provide us with valuable baseline information. We must now turn our attention to tracking changes over time. We know programs work in both engaging and educating young women, but as we expand the model we must ensure quality and effectiveness; to do so we must have longitudinal studies. Moreover, we must measure success by outcomes, not numbers. Our sole interest is in seeing every young woman realize her rights, empowered to make positive contributions in her community and to live free from violence and abuse.

## Conclusion

We imagine a day when sports programs for girls and young women will be viewed as the norm. It will no longer be innovative, or controversial. We imagine a day when, on fields in Dar es Salaam and Mumbai, girls and boys will play in equal numbers. This day will come when we invest strategically in programs that foster a woman's right to economic independence, freedom from violence, and sexual and reproductive health. We know that each girl we work with might return to shepherd the next generation of girls and young women through challenges many of us cannot fathom. We are working with powerful partners across the globe to unleash women's economic and leadership power upon communities. Quality sports programs for women's rights will get us there.

*Thanks to Kate Raphael and Sarah Murray for their contributions to this article.*

*Editor's Note: excerpts of this article are taken from Perspectives - The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs Summer 2012*

## **Endnotes**

- 1 Del Jones, "Many successful women say sports teaches valuable lessons," USA Today, March 26, 2002, <http://www.usatoday.com/money/covers/2002-03-26-women-sports.htm>.
- 2 Danielle Friedman, "Female Jocks Rule the World," The Daily Beast, September 29, 2010, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-09-29/women-and-sports-why-athletic-ladies-excel-in-business/>.
- 3 "Beyond the Classroom: Using Title IX to Measure the Return to High School Sports", Betsey Stevenson, February 2010, the National Bureau of Economic Research, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w15728>.
- 4 For more information on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), please see <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.
- 5 United Kingdom Department for International Development (2010), Agenda 2010 - The turning point on poverty: background paper on gender.
- 6 United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings: Focusing on prevention of and response to sexual violence in emergencies, IASC, Geneva, 2005, p. 3.
- 7 Martha Brady, "A Snapshot of Girls' Perspectives on Sports, Health, and Empowerment: A Descriptive Study of Women Win Program Partners in Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda," Population Council, 2010, iii.
- 8 Adolescents Fact Sheet, UNFPA State of World Population 2005, The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the MDGs website, [http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_adolescents.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_adolescents.htm).
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Cindy Clark, Ellen Sprenger, and Lisa VeneKlasan, "Where is the money for women's rights?" The Association for Women's Rights in Development, February 2006, 11.