

The Value of Sport In A Disaster Setting

There are many examples of sport being used as a healing tool after a disaster, from the implementation of a programme in Iran by the Swiss Academy for Development (SAD), to the community rallying behind spectator sport in North America after 9-11 and Hurricane Katrina. But how does one measure what is a successful programme, and its effects?

The benefits of sport and physical activity go beyond increasing fitness, endurance, and strength. Using group activities properly can allow development in:

- Emotional skills – the ability to cope with emotions such as frustration and aggression;
- Social skills – solidarity, handling conflict, communication; and
- Cognitive skills – discipline, problem solving, strategic thinking.

Because of these benefits, according to Rolf Schwery, co-author of the Moving Forward Toolkit, implementing a sport programme within in a community that has been affected by a disaster can help the population “before they develop a post-traumatic stress disorder”. Therefore, it acts as a preventative tool instead of a reactionary one if implemented immediately after the disaster instead of the late phases of recovery.

Marianne Meier, Research Analyst at SAD, explained that quantifying success accurately in any programme requires active involvement by all partners, and the combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation. Methods include interviews with coaches, parents, and community leaders as well as surveys with participants to measure impact on self-esteem, resiliency, future perspectives, social inclusion, empowerment, and security, among others.

Schwery added, “We have strong evidence that response has to be immediately after the disaster. Firstly, children develop their own coping mechanisms within 2-3 months. Secondly, parents need our support immediately after the first phase. Thirdly, our mentors can support the general recovery work.”

From 1-7 November 2008, the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education will host its 2nd Sport in Post-Disaster Intervention seminar in Rheinsberg, Germany, featuring experts such as Marianne Meier and Rolf Schwery. For more information, and to register, visit www.icsspe.org.

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