

Why look at Self-Concept among Vulnerable Children?

– Reaching one's full potential

The incentive behind working with underprivileged people should be to help making them reach and make use of their full potential. Some argue that all basic needs should be satisfied before looking at self-development issues. Sports neither feed the starving nor cure HIV/AIDS. What organised sports can provide is an environment that fosters development of life skills (SDP IWG, 2007).

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to participate in sports and the right to play.¹ Sport and physical education are fundamental in early stages of child development. Playing and doing sports are decisive to their healthy growth and development physically, mentally and socially. During play, sport and physical education children learn skills that contribute to their holistic development (UN, 2003). According to the Sport for Development & Peace International Working Group (SDPIWG), sport and play can fill out an essential role in the healing and rehabilitation process of children who have been affected by discrimination, marginalization and crisis. It has been argued that children with disabilities also may benefit from playing and doing sports, since



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these activities are likely to combat discrimination, promote physical well-being, and build a sense of security and confidence (SDP IWG, 2007).

The United Nations (UN) argues that the educational impact of sport and physical education includes development of performance and motor skills as well as learning potential (UN, 2003). This reflects the positive relation between participation in sports and psychosocial development, including positive self-concept. Sport and physical education provide a forum

for children to learn how to cope with winning and losing and how to deal with competition and reinforce their social and moral development.

According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), poverty deteriorates a family's or community's capacity to take care of their children. More than half of the developing world's children live without basic services. Over 640 million children live in dwellings with muddy floors, one in six children suffers from severe hunger, and every 7th child has no access to health care. UNICEF estimates, that 300 million children worldwide are victims of abuse, violence, exploitation, and discrimination. These children easily become marginalized, leaving them in a self-perpetuating cycle and decreasing their probability of escaping poverty in the future. Their health and well-being are seriously threatened. Children growing up in poverty live through deprivation of emotional, spiritual and parental resources needed to thrive, develop or simply survive. These children are left unable to experience and enjoy their rights, participate as equal members of society or achieve their full potential (UNICEF, 2005).

WHAT IS SELF-CONCEPT?

Self-concept, also called self-identity, is the sum of one's knowledge and comprehension of self. Psychological, physical, and social attributes are all components of self-concept. The individual's beliefs, habits, attitudes and ideas can influence these components (Møhl & Schack, 2005).

According to Harter, developmental professor emeritus with extensive experience in studies of self-development, self-concept becomes more and more abstract with age. Self-concept shifts from concrete descriptions of behavior in early childhood to character-like psychological con-

structs (e.g. pretty, intelligent, popular) in mid-childhood, and to more intangible constructs during adolescence (Harter 1983, Harter,1985). Increasing differentiation with age is also supported by Marsh, educational psychologist with years of experience in researching the field of self-concept among children (Marsh, 1984). Marsh found that during pre-adolescence self-concept waned dramatically. Self-concept in very young children appears to be unrealistically high. As children age the assessment of their relative weaknesses and strengths become more realistic, and seem to be incorporated into their self-concept.

Theoretical models can be difficult to integrate in practical settings. The following theoretical models by Marsh are no exception. By applying such models the concept of self-concept can easily be simplified and limited to fit models and the broader view of sport and self-concept becomes more vague. However, such models can present valid suggestions leading to valuable reflections.

SELF-CONCEPT IN RELATION TO SPORT

According to Marsh et al., two models offering contrasting interpretations with important theoretical and practical implications have historically been the focus of research within sport and self-concept (Marsh, 2006, Marsh, 2007). The *self-enhancement model* predicts the direction of causal relation moving from self-concept to performance. Support for this model implies putting more effort to improve children's self-concepts rather than focusing only on achievement and performance. The contrasting model is called the *skill development model*. This model predicts the causality direction as moving from performance to self-concept. It justifies that coaches and educators should focus exclusively on ame-

liorating performance and test scores to enhance self-concept (Marsh, 2007).

In contrast to these two models and their mutual relation, Marsh presents the *reciprocal effects model*, REM. This model suggests that performance and self-concept are reciprocally reinforcing and thereby mutually related. Enhanced performance leads to better self-concept, and enhanced self-concept leads to better performance. Instead of focusing solely on one construct, the REM proposes that the most efficient strategy is to enhance both performance and self-concept concurrently. As stressed in the related self-efficacy theory of Bandura, especially famous for his social learning theory, educators and coaches should enhance test score levels and performance as well as improve self-concepts in order to sustain gains in self-concept. If children's beliefs in their capabilities are not fostered while educators enhance the children's performance levels, then performance gains are likely to be short lived (Marsh, 2007).

Marsh's model focuses exclusively on the well-being of the individual child. Having a positive self-concept and being skilled are the only targeted areas in REM. This might be of value for children doing individual sports but could lead to an unnecessary competitive atmosphere within a team. A supplemental approach could be to use gained positive self-concept while behaving in a manner that contributes to allowing peers/team mates to experience that same positive outcome.

Although briefly described above, the correlation between self-concept and sport remains vague. Sport will normally be considered as a social environment but some would argue that it cannot be considered in isolation from social settings in general.

The purpose of this article is not to claim that sport is the only way to increase and sustain self-concept in vulnerable children. That being said, organised sports *do* consist of particular valuable elements that many other social settings lack. There are different ways of communicating in sport. Body language plays a big role and the ability to understand the team's agenda is essential. Social settings like scouts and outdoor life activities might create somewhat the same outcome as sport does as regards self-concept but cooperation and dependence on peers are needed for organization in a sport. A distinction should be made between activities in which the body is actively involved and plays an essential role and activities not requiring direct physical exertion.

THE ZAMBIAN RESEARCH. MOTIVATION, METHOD, AND GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING DATA COLLECTION

Since many people remain unconvinced of the impact physical education and sports have on reaching humanitarian and development objectives, the systematic use of sport for development is still in its initial stages.² The underlying motivation for the Zambian research was to provide quantitative and qualitative data on the impact of sports on minds of vulnerable children. The empirical data were collected in Lusaka, Zambia, in Spring, 2008 (Hansen, 2008).

Method triangulation was applied, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data consisted primarily of key informant interviews, observations and field notes, and quantitative data consisted of questionnaires completed by 177 children between 10-16 years of age. The questionnaires were inspired by Marsh's Self Description Questionnaire (SDQ) (Marsh, 1990) and his Physical Self Description

Questionnaire (PSDC) (Marsh, 1994). Recipients answered general informative questions concerning age and gender; with whom they lived; if they attended school and, in the affirmative – how often; exercise habits; why they did (not) do sports; etc. The second part of the questionnaire required respondents to indicate their level of agreement, on a five-point-scale, to 19 statements regarding self-concept and physical self-concept. Four subcultures represent where the children participating in the survey were found: *Sports academies, orphanages, schools, and street*. The quantitative data is divided into *organised* and *not organised sport*. Participating in *organised sport* is defined as showing up at a certain setting at certain times every week, having a coach and being part of a team. *Not organised sport* is defined as physical activity by oneself or with others that does not involve a formal coach and where one does not necessarily show up at a certain place or time (Hansen, 2008).

I was pleasantly surprised at how easily accessible the people were that I needed to interview. Sometimes it seemed that the interviewees wanted to impress the interviewer rather than to focus on the context of the questions raised. Their attempts to make an impact on me could have been due to my academic background, my blue eyes or the hope that I could provide them with money. Thus, to some extent, my findings were affected by my very presence (see also Hansen, 2008).

With respect to the quantitative data collection there were some limitations. Although I made an effort to formulate the questions clearly there is a possibility that the children did not understand them the way they were intended. Many of the children were unable to read and could not fill out the questionnaires without as-

sistance. As different people translated the questionnaires, the children did not all get the exact same translation or interpretation, despite the fact that it was attempted to underscore the same issues for all of the translators. It would have been preferable if all of the children had completed the questionnaires without help. Whether the child knew the person helping him/her or not, this assistance might have resulted in the child not providing a completely honest response in fear of what the helper might think or how he/she would react. In addition, the attention paid by the other children around the respondent may have caused the child to be too afraid or shy to answer honestly. Finally, requesting children to consider and to answer somewhat personal questions holds the risk of putting negative thoughts that were not previously there in their minds. This is an unavoidable obstacle in data collection including questionnaires (Hansen, 2008).

ORGANISED SPORTS FOR BETTER VALUES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

A good number of Sports Academies start mainly to provide an alternative to drinking, having sex, or doing drugs. Kelly Jones Kaila, founder of Kalim Sports Academy, Kalim, states: “*In the weekends there were no activities in the area. Most adolescents were hanging out in bars, drinking beer, and having sex. I asked them what they dreamed of for their future and they told me they wanted to be like Ronaldiño. So I told them to check out on the internet to see how he’s living. He doesn’t hang out in bars! Sometimes I check the bars and they are no longer there. Now they are always on the pitch!*” (Hansen, 2008, p. 45).

“*Sport keeps the children busy and gets them out of the drinking places. It gives them the opportunity to choose something else. Through sport*

they get better values and goals in life,” says Malanga Jeff Mposhi, founder of Breakthrough Sports Academy, Lusaka (Hansen, 2008, p. 45). According to Clement Chileshe, Executive Director of Sport in Action, SiA, Zambia and African Representative of International Alliance of Youth Sports, a great number of the children are hungry, have no clothes, have lost loved ones, and look after sick relatives. When a child has to face such severe issues every day something happens when he or she gets away and plays. It helps the child to move forward with life.

“Of course we cannot give them their parent back – but before the difficulty and sadness might have been 100%, and as the child develops on the field, it diminishes to 90%, then 80%, as he or she learns that problems are not permanent. For such a child it is about reconstruction of values of life,” says Chileshe, the Executive Director of Sport in Action (Hansen, 2008, p. 46).

Two abbreviations will be used in the following section: *Children doing Organised Sports, COS, and Children Not doing Organised Sports, CNOS.*

COS HAVE MORE POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT THAN DO CNOS

Comparing COS and CNOS for self-concept shows statistically significant differences favouring the COS. Obviously, each statement by itself does not give much information. The following selected results are presented here as they are representative of the entire research findings (Hansen, 2008).

There is a statistically significant difference indicating that more COS than CNOS are confident that they do well in most things they do. Almost 60% of the COS group is confident that most of the time they manage well the things in

which they are involved with. Among the CNOS, only one third felt confident of the same. Especially within the girls of COS and the girls of CNOS there is a gap in the divisions of options which shows that among the COS the answers are divided into almost 50/50. Among CNOS only 3 in 10 always have confidence that they do well.

Another statement used as an indicator of sport as a resource for improving self-concept in vulnerable children is the statement, *“I generally like myself”*. More than 60% of the children are generally satisfied with themselves and less than 30% sometimes like themselves. The difference between COS and CNOS is significant (*p*-value 0,03). This is particularly noticeable among the boys where there is a huge difference in how satisfied they are with themselves. Only a third of the CNOS boys always like themselves whereas 65% of COS boys remain overall satisfied with themselves.

Almost three in four of the COS group are always proud of themselves whereas only half of CNOS group always are. This difference between the two groups is mainly due to the girls. Two thirds of the COS girls remain always proud whereas less than half of CNOS girls answered the same. Only 2% of answers provided by all of children indicated that they were never proud of themselves.

It is easier for COS to believe that others liked them than it is for CNOS. Almost two out of five COS are convinced that others are pleased with them whereas almost three out of four CNOS remain uncertain. The data show interesting results regarding honesty. One third of COS is always honest and the same can be said about one fourth of CNOS. The girls of COS are equally divided between always and sometimes telling the truth. Since only one fourth of the boys of COS always tell the truth and three fourth only can

be trusted sometimes, the boys are less reliable. The data from CNOS are quite different. When introducing gender into the analysis on honesty within the CNOS group a *p*-value of 0,05 indicates that the boys and girls are not equally trustworthy. The boys of CNOS are very similar to girls from COS in that around half of these boys are honest always and half only tell the truth sometimes. The girls of CNOS are otherwise quite different from the girls of COS. Only 15% are always good to be trusted.

During the collection of quantitative data Hansen noticed that generally, the children from sports academies and from the street appeared to be more self-confident than many of the children from the schools and orphanages. The children from the Breakthrough Sports Academy (BSA) and the Bauleni United Sports Academy (BUSAs) smiled, asked questions directly and did not try to hide out of shyness. Many children from the orphanages were quieter. One explanation for this could be that the children from the sports academies had more positive self-confidence than those from the orphanages. Another explanation could be that the children from the sports academies acted with more confidence because they had filled out the questionnaires on the pitch, some wearing their soccer gear, knowing they would be playing a few minutes later. In other words, they were where they really liked to be – in a setting that they had chosen themselves (quantitative data show that most COS were their own primary decision makers for getting involved in sports, whereas CNOS mainly started because a friend or a sibling asked them to). The children from the schools and orphanages might not have acted as confidently because they did not enjoy being there to the same extent as the COS group on the pitch. The street children seemed confi-

dent and this may be linked to their independent lifestyle on the street. All this said, acting confident on the outside might not equal positive self-concept on the inside.

WHAT IS THE VALUE IN DOING SPORTS?

The COS group sees more different values from the CNOS group about participating in sports. That sports make the children feel good is the most popular answer for both COS and CNOS also when allowed for gender. Three fourths of all of the children mentioned that sports made them feel good as either the only thing or one of the things they liked most about doing sports. The second most popular thing about sport within the COS group were *feeling fit* (60%) compared to 1/3 of CNOS – which makes the difference statistically significant and one of the greatest disparities between the two groups. For both girls and boys of COS, three out of five felt fit doing sports but for CNOS almost twice as many boys (50%) as girls (26%) felt fit. Safety is another issue that dissociate COS and CNOS to a great extent. About two in five of COS related *feeling safe* with doing sports whereas the number for CNOS is only one in five. This difference is predominant with the girls in particular, in that almost 1/3 of the COS girls felt safe but only ten percent of the CNOS girls did. On average, half of all of the children felt fit when doing sport and one third felt safe. With respect to *worrying*, there is no notable distinction between COS and CNOS or between genders. About a fourth of all the children worry less while doing sport. More than twice as many boys (one in three) than girls (15%) in the COS group appreciated adult attention. Receiving attention in general was valued by about one in five girls doing organised sports compared to only one in ten of girls not doing organised sports. Al-

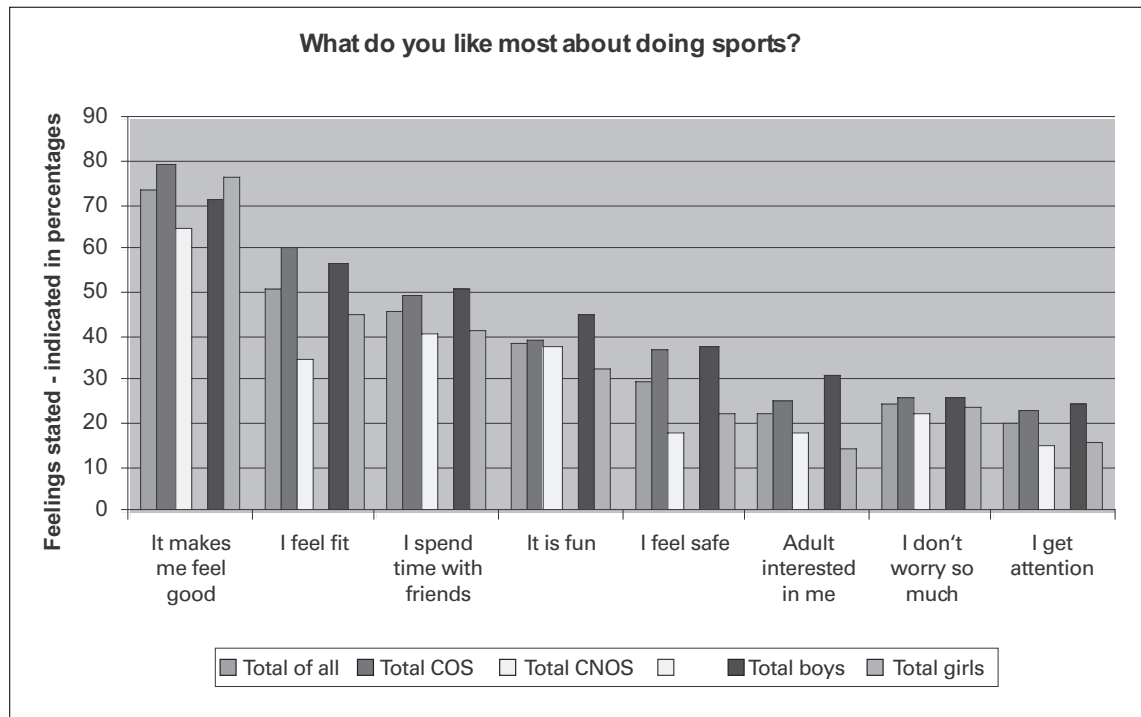


Table 1. The table shows the percentage of the total number of children stating their feelings. Results are expressed comparatively between COS and CNOS as well as between genders. Respondents could check more than one answer. The total number of marks by all children was 532, with the girls marking 242 (45,5%) and the boys 290 (54,5%). Total of all n=177. Total COS n=107. Total CNOS n=70. Total boys n=84. Total girls n=89.

most half of all of the children enjoy being with their friends while doing sports and *having fun* was an objective for almost two out of five of all the children (Hansen, 2008).

The following facts probably make a great impact on the outcome mentioned below and should be taken into account in future research. COS spent a lot more time doing sports than CNOS. Another characteristic of COS is that half of them live with both parents. Only very few of the CNOS live with both or one parent.

Furthermore, the study shows that COS are more likely to attend school than CNOS. Maybe the higher level of positive self-concept among COS stems from growing up in a well-structured and loving home. Expanding their knowledge through education might also have increased the self-concept of COS.

The above-mentioned factors naturally play an important role in the overall perspective, but at the same time they highly strengthen the indication that girls benefit more than boys from

doing organised sports, also when allowed for time spent doing sports, living with parents and school attendance!

CHILDREN'S CONDITIONS

A description of children's conditions includes several sad statistics. An estimated 158 million children aged 5-14, i.e. 1 in every 6 is involved in *child labour*. This equals 2/3 of children in Sub-Saharan Africa. Overwhelmingly, the girls are burdened with household chores. Of the children born in 2006, an estimated 51 million do not have their *birth registered*. In Africa, 2/3 of all children under the age of 5 are not registered. Due to *armed conflicts*, an estimated 5,8 million children under 18 live as refugees. Other estimated 8,8 million children are internally displaced (UNICEF, 2005). And these statistics are just a fraction of reality.

The Zambian study represents children like these; children who have been deprived of several of their rights. According to UNICEF, it is a fact that children in poverty are deprived of several resources (UNICEF, 2005). The right to play and do sports might be associated with living conditions. Results from my study show that more COS than CNOS live with at least one of their parents. This shows a tendency that if a child is already suffering from living without his/her parent(s), there is a chance that he/she will not participate in organised sports and subsequently, perhaps be deprived of the right to play and to do sport.

Organised sports provide a context with great opportunities for recognition, relationships, and bonding. Smith, specialised on sport and exercise psychology among youth, states that research shows relationship to peers as an essential part of children's sports experience. Social acceptance and affiliation are other significant

components. As children grow older they rely more on feedback and information from their peers regarding physical competence. That makes sports key for child development (Smith, 2003). Similarly, almost half of the children in the Zambian research indicate that being with their friends is something they value greatly in doing sports. Developmental psychology claims that feedback from others regarding accomplishments has a great impact on how children view themselves and it is crucial for the development of the child to receive positive feedback. Hansen, Larson & Dworkin argue, in their study in developmental experiences across different types of organised activities that although organised sports offer an area for positive social interaction, negative experiences can also occur (Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003). Peer interactions were mentioned as triggers for these issues. Half of the COS group in the research value spending time with their friends while doing sport which may be associated with positive and negative experiences with peers (Hansen, 2008).

Adolescence is the period known for discovering moral purpose as well as formation of social and personal identity.³ As mentioned in their study of relationship between athletic participation and leadership ability, Dobosz & Beaty point out that adolescents doing sports possess greater leadership skills than those who do not. The researchers do not mention whether that is true for youth doing organised sport only or if it is also valid for those not participating in organized sports (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999). For children living in poverty and facing daily deprivation of several of their rights, it must not be very motivational to search out opportunities to develop life skills, and even less so leadership skills. In developing countries where education often is



Girls' team from Bauleni United Sports Academy in Lusaka, Zambia (Photo: Tanja Marie Hansen).

insufficient it is possibly more important to be part of a context in which leadership skills can be fostered and developed.⁴

The Zambian study shows that COS have better physical self-concept than CNOS. Interestingly, there is a significant difference in physical self-concept among the girls whereas it is similar within the boys (Hansen, 2008). The girls, however, are at significantly greater risk of being victims of injustice than boys. They have fewer opportunities to interact socially outside of the home compared to boys. They also have reduced probability of attending school, and street girls must protect themselves from the bad guys by hiding their gender (UNICEF, 2005). They tie up their breasts, wear loose clothes and

cut their hair to look like the boys (Innocent, referred to in Hansen, 2008). According to Bandura, it is essential for children to develop their physical and social skills in order to comprehend and manage the challenges they face on a daily basis (Bandura, 1986). Combining this theory with the outcome of the research of Hansen and the conditions of vulnerable girls in general, it would make sense to suggest that sports provide better physical self-concept for vulnerable girls that can help them to overcome their daily burdens. Richman & Shaffer found partially similar results in their US based research. In their study on assessing the association between sport and self-esteem among adolescents, Richman & Shaffer found that girls doing sport had greater

levels of physical competence, self-worth, and body image (Richman & Shaffer, 2000).

As mentioned above, sport does not affect both genders the same way nor to the same extent. However, organised sports hold the ability to deal with gender sensitive issues.

IS SPORT MORE VALUED BY GIRLS THAN BY BOYS?

Traditionally, sport is a male domain and girls' participation in sport is a challenge for stereotyped girls destroying entrenched negative attitudes. Girls have fewer opportunities for social interaction beyond family network than boys. The values and skills children learn through sport are therefore important for girls in particular.⁵ Marsh found that boys have higher physical appearance self-concepts than girls. This is compatible with the findings in Hansen's study as long as only gender is taken into consideration (Marsh, 1989). However, Marsh's theory does not consider the fact that organised sports could be related to the outcome of gender differences regarding physical appearance self-concepts.

The results of the Zambian study regarding physical appearance show that the majority of all children greatly care about their looks. Actually, more than 3 out of 4 of both sexes of COS and boys from the CNOS group care about their appearance consistently. Less than half of the CNOS girls are that aware of their looks. In other words, regardless of organised sport, boys care more about their physical appearance than girls, however, the same number of boys and girls are equally satisfied with the way their bodies look. According to this study, fewer girls from COS than CNOS indicated that they wish to look different always, but simultaneously, two in five girls from CNOS never wish for a different appearance. Among the COS girls, only

one in five answered similarly. According to Smith's theory presented earlier, relationship with peers is an important influence on the outcome of a child's experience of doing sport (Smith, 2003). It could be that peer interaction is important for physical self-concept as well and that it is part of the reason why girls of COS think more about their looks than do the girls of CNOS (Hansen, 2008).

From the experience of the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) in Kenya, Willis suggests that sports programmes are most pervasive when introduced during adolescence given that the time of transition from childhood to adulthood is normally the period when boys become more mobile, more autonomous, and have greater opportunities and privileges than do girls (CABOS, 2006). Brady & Banu-Khan mention in their article about the acknowledged female football programme at MYSA, that the children are very much aware of gendered norms (Brady & Banu-Khan, 2002). The boys have increased access to equipment and facilities, to playing times and to the coaches than do the girls. Findings from both MYSA and *Ishraq* (a similar project in Egypt), indicate that sports for girls play an important role in improving self-esteem, self-empowerment, and personal freedom and provide safe social spaces for them in low- and middle income countries (LMICs) (Brady, 2005, Brady & Banu-Khan, 2002).

As mentioned above, the availability of coaches for girls and boys may differ. The coach plays an essential role in how well a sports academy is run (Hansen, 2008).

COACHES AS ROLE MODELS

The role of the coach is an important factor in children's learning of behavior and moral values (Ewing et al., 2002). Malanga Jeff Mposhi from

Breakthrough Sports Academy, BSA, Lusaka, agrees when he talks about the children looking up to their coach and striving for a behaviour pursuant to that of their coach. “*The children want to be like the coach – as in do good, behave, etc. The coach infects a player, and that player infects another player, a family member or a neighbour, etc.*”, says Mposhi (Hansen, 2008, p. 45). Interestingly, the Zambian study shows that a third of the boys of COS indicated that attention shown to them by an adult was a value in doing sports whereas only 15% of the girls of COS appreciated that attention. According to Brady & Banu-Khan, the boys at MYSA, Nairobi, have better access to coaches, facilities, equipment and playing times (Brady & Banu-Khan, 2002). Reasons underlying this outcome in Hansen’s research could be that the girls simply do not receive as much attention or favourable treatment as do the boys. Another reason could be that the boys and girls in some ways are competing for the same attention from the coach. As referred to by Hansen, Kaluba Kangwa from BUSA indicated that not every coach is suited for coaching girls. This could reflect the disparity between the boys’ and girls’ access and relationship to the coach (Hansen, 2008).

The coaches teach the children life skills and provide attention, guidance, and support. According to Chileshe, the Executive Director of Sport in Action, some coaches are the only ones caring for the children. That is especially true for the children living on the street and deprived of close relationships with adults. Being a coach comes with substantial responsibilities. His/her attitude, behaviour and moral conduct spread to the children like ripples in the water (Hansen, 2008).

Some coaches take great responsibility for the

upbringing of the children they train; even outside of the field. They follow the children’s progress in school. They speak with the teacher about how the child is behaving and about the child’s grades. After practice the coach talks to the children about a variety of issues. If a child does not attend class, the coach finds out why and encourages the child to return to school. At BSA, the coaches feel great responsibility for the children’s school attendance and completion of their education: “*They [the children] have to realise that they have to do something themselves... But if a child fails an exam, we [the coaches] can do better*” (Mposhi, referred to in Hansen, 2008, p. 46).

Pursuant to Hansen, Kalim, BSA, BUSA and SiA look at the individual child to assess the impact of their work. Generally, they experience brighter faces, more laughs, and better attitudes. A child’s friends notice that the child no longer fights when upset; the parents notice that the child shows more respect and generally behaves better; and the teacher notices that the child is more active in class. At BSA they also have children who initially are very quiet but who later on become more talkative, allowing them to recognize their potential (Chileshe and Mposhi, referred to in Hansen, 2008).

According to Kangwa, a child’s parents play an important role in the sports involvement of the child. SiA, for example, usually works with a child’s family, however, not all parents are thrilled that their child has found another place they would prefer to be: “*Some parents are a challenge so the kids play secretly*” (Chileshe, referred to in Hansen, T. M., 2008, p. 48). The coaches at BSA visit the parents regularly to compare how the child is doing on the pitch and at home. The child might be respectful to the coach but be-

have badly with the mother, and the coaches need to know about that in order to help rectify the situation. BUSA has a so-called *Parent's Forum* to encourage parents to become more involved with their child's sports interest. Every month the coaches receive thank you letters from parents who are grateful for the change they see in their children (Hansen, 2008).

It can be argued that there are positive and negative aspects linked to the extent of involvement of the coaches, as described above. For those children who do not have other role models this option may provide an ideal solution. However, if parents are not good role models for their child, the coach as a role model may cause conflict, especially if the parents become envious of the coach's relationship with their child. On the other hand, there is also the possibility that parents are inspired by the coach's actions and strive to change their behaviour for the better. Every child needs (a) good role model(s) – whether he or she finds that in a parent, in a coach, or preferably in both. A way for the coach to cooperate with the parents is to involve them in sporting events. By involving the local people from the community, and especially the parents, sport programmes can contribute to empowering the community. It is strongly recommended that sports programmes be integrated with pre-existing structures in the community (UN, 2003).

Another issue worth mentioning is sexual abuse of children. Wherever adults have access to children there is a risk of sexual abuse. There is reason to believe that vulnerable children are even more likely to be victims of sexual abuse as they may long for affection due to lack of attention from an adult. In addition, it is possible that children are unaware of their right to say no. It also takes a certain degree of self-concept to be able to stand up for one's rights.⁶

COMMUNITIES EMPOWERED BY SPORTS

Sport programmes can create safe environments and promote reliable relationships between the children, and between the children and the adults. Through sports activities children of all ages are provided with opportunities to express themselves, to contribute their opinions, ideas and voices, and to become agents of change. Hence, sports programmes help build communities and support a more peaceful and just society.⁷

Sport and physical education among children build healthy activity habits encouraging life-long involvement in sport and consequently, potentially contribute to improving public health.⁸ Sport and play can promote feelings of belonging and friendship. These activities teach respect, discipline, and teamwork. Sport and play even promote coping skills necessary to ensure that children develop into strong individuals. According to UNICEF, youth involved in sports become prepared to face future challenges and to become leaders within their communities. Usually, this is done in close working relationship with sports academies (UNICEF, 2005).

Coalter's review essay holds significant evidence regarding the role of sports in facilitating and building communities and promoting social inclusion and active citizenship. He concludes that sport has the deepest impact at community level when it is supports already existing community-based sporting infrastructure and when local labour and resources are utilized (Coalter, 2005). With great knowledge in development of citizenship through sport, Eley & Kirk state that such sports programmes lead to increased measures of community orientation, leadership, and altruism (Eley & Kirk, 2002).

Mposhi mentions how none of the sports academies are only restricted to the field and are

only focusing on the children in front of them. They all, to a greater or lesser extent, involve the community where they are located. At BSA, the children pick up trash and clean the community to pay for their school fees. Kangwa states that at BUSA, the children are provided with information about environmental issues such as air pollution and hygiene. By living out what they learn, they become role models for their families and neighbours. As a concrete example of how the community is socialising through sport, Chileshe mentions that volunteers are needed during tournaments and a good number of people from the community show up to participate and assist at events (Hansen, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Under the right circumstances, sport can contribute to develop many factors. In both high-in-

come and low- and moderate-income countries, especially girls participating in sports gain self-esteem and self-empowerment. Sports offer opportunities for social acceptance, affiliation, and leadership development and the coach's role is essential to a positive outcome for the child. Studies have documented that sports can lead to improved school performance and to building communities by involving the local people.

Empirical findings show a tendency in Children doing Organised Sports (COS) to feel better about themselves in a variety of aspects when compared to Children Not doing Organised Sports (CNOS). COS are more likely to attend school and develop life skills while playing and having fun, and they usually have an adult caring for them – also outside of the pitch. Although there are significant differences be-



Soccer can be played everywhere - Casual soccer in a poor community in Lusaka (Photo: Tanja Marie Hansen).

tween COS and CNOS, a lot of these results are due to the girls. In several areas, the gap between the girls from the two groups is significant whereas the two groups of boys are very similar. Awareness of and confidence in physical appearance is much greater for children participating in organised sports than for children not involved in organised sports, and again the girls representing the greatest difference.

There are different conditions that may have played an essential role in the outcome of the Zambian research. Nevertheless, the gender issues in that research strongly indicate that girls benefit more from participating in organised sports than do boys, also with the conditions mentioned above taken into account.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

Looking at who or what made the children interested in doing sports in the first place shows some interesting findings. More COS than CNOS indicate that it was their own interest and decision to become involved with sports. The majority of CNOS became interested in doing sports at the influence of a friend or a sibling. This could be an indication that it takes more positive self-concept to become involved in organised sports – and that the higher self-concept among COS already existed beforehand. The Zambian study does not include data from children before they started to participate in organised sports and a follow-up later on which would reveal whether self-concept of the individual child had developed.

Future research should be longitudinal to see how much the state of mind at the moment (while answering the questions) impacts the outcome – compared to the state of mind in general.

Since children in rural areas are at twice the risk of being deprived goods and services and

even three times as likely of being enrolled in school compared to children in urban areas, according to UNICEF, it would be interesting to include self-concept of children living in rural areas.⁹

Most sports academies focus on football. Maybe more girls would participate if there were more female oriented sports to choose from. Perhaps the relationship between sports and self-concept depends on how the child relates to the type of sport he or she is participating in. If so, self-concept and physical self-concept might be different for girls if they were doing organised dance instead of organised football...

The sports academies in the Zambian research are founded not too many years ago. Hence, their sustainability or the consequences of their closing are still unknown. How can a sports academy assure its sustainability? Which precautions should be made in order to not leave the children and involved communities behind? These are other areas that need further discussion.

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NOTES

1. Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1999, Article 31: "The right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child".
2. See http://www.sportanddev.org/learnmore/history_of_sport_and_development/index.cfm
3. See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Developmental_psychology
4. See www.unicef.org
5. http://www.sportanddev.org/learnmore/history_of_sport_and_development/index.cfm
6. See www.unicef.org
7. Ibid.
8. http://www.sportanddev.org/learnmore/sport_education_and_child_youth_development2/healthy_development_of_children_and_young_people_through_sport/index.cfm
9. See http://www.unicef.org/childsurvival/files/poverty_fact_sheet_final.pdf