

Health must be the priority

In developing countries, sport is a necessary component of an overall aid programme, says the Australian development worker William Glenwright

By William Glenwright

Of all the functions of sport and physical education in developing nations, that of the promotion and maintenance of health must be the priority. The improvement of the health of a nation is the most significant contribution that sport can make. More importantly however, is that sport and physical education is perhaps the most economical health strategy that a nation can undertake.

The World Health Organisation has identified the following facts:

- Regular Physical Activity (PA) reduces the risk of dying from Heart Disease (1/3 of global deaths);
- Physical Activity reduces the risk of developing heart disease, type II diabetes (90% of world diabetes cases), colon cancer. Evidence suggests also that Physical Activity may probably provide protection against breast cancer;
- Physical Activity helps control weight and prevent /reduce hypertension (affecting 20% of the adult world population). Physical Activity helps to reduce osteoporosis;
- Physical Activity reduces stress, anxiety and feelings of depression;
- Physical Activity enhances functional capacity and independent living in older persons;
- Physical Activity and 'Sport for All' promote social interaction and contributes to social integration.

Such statistics are of particular relevance to the nations of the Pacific Islands and East Timor. Nauru, located in the northern Pacific Ocean and one of the world's smallest nations has one of the world's highest per-capita rates of diabetes.

In 1998 East Timor had a life expectancy of just 55 years. Sport and Physical education programs therefore have a

crucial role to play in the health of a nation's citizens.

Furthermore, it has been argued that a high health standard translates into higher domestic productivity and greater national prosperity and as such, the long-term health effects of sports and physical activity have other far-reaching benefits towards the development of a nation other than the immediate health benefits.

Sport and a nation's economy

Studies undertaken at the international level indicate that every \$1million spent on sport and physical activity, generates a saving of \$3.2million in national medical costs [...]

Sport and physical activity will always be debatable components of a nation's federal budget. A government's commitment to sport will often be weighted against other government objectives such as health and education.

Particularly in developing nations, the economic pressures faced by federal go-

vernments increases the dependence of these nations on international aid programs.

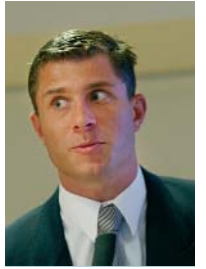
Sport and physical activity programs should not replace existing aid infrastructure.

However, sport and physical education is being more widely recognised as legitimate tool for social development and a necessary component of an overall aid program aimed at alleviating poverty and developing nationhood.

The success of sports development programs is reliant on a government's recognition of the role of sport and physical education – and a commitment in terms of policy to that effect.

The most successful sport development programs will be those that are delivered in states with sound sport and physical education policies.

William Glenwright is a development co-ordinator for the Australian Sports Commission and has done field work in East Timor. See his whole contribution at www.play-the-game.org



Sport and physical education is a very economic health strategy, William Glenwright told

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