

The Olympic Values through Sports Program

Technical Report No. 5

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I OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

GENERAL OBJECTIVES: 1) To research and evaluate the effect of *Olympic Values through Sports Program (OVTSP)* on youth who will be participating in this program in 12 municipalities of El Salvador; 2) To determine the program's contribution in preventing their involvement in gangs.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: a) To identify the main problems concerning juvenile delinquency in the communities where the OVTSP will be conducted; b) To determine whether OVTSP is effective in preventing youth from joining gangs; and c) To determine if children and young people's lack of involvement in sports influences communities with higher violence rates.

II DATA COLLECTION SUMMARY

The table below summarizes the population sample size and indicated the names of the 12 municipalities that participated in the program. Data collection activities were completed in January 2016.

	%	TOTAL POPULATION	MUNICIPALITY	BASELINE SURVEYS MONITORS	BASELINE SURVEYS POPULATION	FOLLOW UP SURVEYS POPULATION
ZONE 1	32	241403	SOYAPANGO	25	23	100
	4	29458	NEJAPA	12	100	20
	7	52643	QUEZALTEPEQUE	17	24	30
	5	41260	PANCHIMALCO	5	19	20
	7	52359	ACAJUTLA	13	50	30
	7	52404	SAN VICENTE	15	50	30
ZONE 2	7	50315	COJUTEPEQUE	15	22	30
	8	61510	ILOBASCO	10	50	30
	3	23893	TECOLUCA	6	18	30
ZONE 3	10	73064	USULUTAN	13	19	30
	7	52484	CONCHAGUA	12	50	30
	4	34045	LA UNION	21	20	30
TOTAL PROPOSED		764838		137	705	90
ADVANCE				119 (86%)	125 (18%)	13 (14%)

III RESULTS

Below are results obtained through this study, as per the three main specific program objectives:

Specific Objective No. 1: Identify the main types of conflict affecting youth in target communities participating in the Olympic Values through Sports Program.

The program was conducted in 12 municipalities located in the Eastern, Central and Western areas of the country (see summary table). All of these municipalities are in the “Partnership for Growth” and in the “Crime and Violence Prevention” project supported by the United States Government and the Government of El Salvador. These municipalities have the highest violence and highest risk indicators in the country.

Risk factors prohibited us from conducting surveys regarding crime and violence, so data was obtained from local organizations. We determined that the main obstacles preventing youth from participating in sports were: 1) Security issues (86%), 2) Economic reasons (10%), and Lack of infrastructure (4%). These percentages indicate that gang violence is still the main obstacle preventing the development of sports activities that benefit youth within the municipalities studied.

Nevertheless, many different local actors and youth in these communities participated actively in the development of the “Sports Monitors” program and many of these youngsters and their families also participated in many of the different sporting activities in the project.

It is important to mention that lack of sports facilities was a mayor issue. Out of the 12 participating municipalities, less than 50% of them have proper spaces to practice sports and in the other 50%, most of them only have soccer fields.

Another important statistic is that out of the total number of participants, 73% were men and 27% were women. In addition, the majority of the population interested in participating in sports events were young people; 92% of them were from 15-20 years old. The rest were over 21 years of age.

Specific Objective No. 2: Determine if the Olympic Values through Sports Program Influenced the Decision of Youth to Stay Out of Gang Activities.

This objective was explored through survey questions and focus group interviews. 99% answered that sports generated positive attitudes in young people across the country and in their communities.

When participants were asked if sports and their practice contribute to a peaceful environment inside their communities, 100% of the respondents said yes. Regarding their communities being involved in sports and consequently learning values through them,

100% of the respondents also agreed. Regarding the question that if sports contribute in diminishing violence within the community 100% agreed with this statement and the reasons they agreed were the following:

- It keeps us from conducting missteps
- It keeps us away from crime and violence
- It keeps our minds focused
- It has helped family members
- Many stray away from gangs due to sports
- It keeps us entertained and safe
- It keeps us safe
- It keeps us away from violence
- It keeps youth's minds busy
- It keeps teenagers involved in sports and away from gangs
- It's entertaining in a healthy way
- It keeps us away from gangs
- We share with others in a good way
- Keeps youth away from crime
- We coexist with others in a good way
- It keeps us away from bad situations and it is entertaining in a healthy way
- Helps youth keep their minds busy

The most common answers to more direct questions on the reasons why youth believed that sports have a positive influence were:

- Because sports involve teamwork
- Because sports strengthen relationships between the youth in the community
- Because young people entertain themselves through sports
- Because youth can use sports as a distraction while developing athletic skills
- There is support and companionship in sports
- Distraction is important for youth
- Because youth get to socialize with adults
- Because youth use their time doing something positive

Also, during focus group interviews, there was evidence that the project had an impact in developing youth leaders and that many were motivated to try new sports and to involve themselves in positive activities. Sports reduces idleness and some youth that once were spending time on the streets doing nothing productive are now motivated to engage in sports activities and other productive activities.

Training represented an invaluable resource to widen the potential and improve capabilities of working with children and youth at risk of joining gangs, giving them effective tools to be able to conduct sports programs efficiently. In this project, we provided training to volunteer community leaders in different sports and in prevention of violence through sports. Below are some examples of these innovative programs:

Check Mate to Violence with Chess – This was a strategic plan developed by community leaders with the purpose of exploiting all of the virtues of the game and promote important

values while helping eliminate violent behaviors. This game helped promote peace and have a non-violent mentality. It worked well in the communities that were trying to solve internal conflicts as a non-violent mediation activity. Chess has been shown to have a positive impact on the mind. The program also promoted inclusion by using a “sports for all” mentality that avoids discrimination due to age, gender, or any disability one may have.

“One More Table Tennis Player, One Less Gang Member” – Table tennis provides lessons in respect, leadership and cooperation while promoting equality and the accomplishment of goals. The Salvadorian Federation of Table Tennis is incorporating the power and potential of the sport, with its recreational ability in a working platform all over the country within a program they call “Building a Nittaku Dream in El Salvador”. They are developing alliances with many different areas in the country and in the society, such as municipal governments, bringing the sport to everyone (kids, youth, adults, disabled people) with a very strong educational platform with the intent of preventing them from joining gangs.

Handball – Different activities were planned in the municipalities to introduce handball, including sports events, teamwork dynamics and leadership activities. This sport promoted solidarity, honesty, fairness, respect and friendship.

Community Sports Leaders in Cycling – These leaders completed a training program on procedures to promote cycling by creating cycling schools and clubs in every municipality that COES and USAID have worked. Kids and youth will be educated on the values learned through this sport. Many of them already owned bicycles. With support from the municipalities, local police department and schools, “Nocturnal Cycling Events” have taken place, giving families an opportunity to enjoy a family event in a safe environment.

Community Sports leaders in Volleyball – These trained youngsters are already coordinating different volleyball events in their communities, promoting inclusion of children, teenagers and adults. They have become change agents that serve as positive role models. Through the creation of spaces for practicing the sport, they help increase community participation at different events.

Swimming – Swimming was not a very popular sport in the target communities. However, this program helped people in these communities to develop discipline while trying to improve their timing and learning about different swimming styles. It has been satisfying for the trainer, coach or teacher to see how motivated kids, teenagers and adults are about this sport. Also, it has been proven that some of the benefits of swimming include relaxation and stress reduction. It is a sport that demands concentration. Five of the target municipalities have had a swimming pool opening event, benefitting about 200 swimmers plus their families.

Specific Objective No. 3: Determine if the lack of involvement of children and teenagers in sporting events may result in violence

Through surveys and focus groups we were able to gather comments and thoughts from community members regarding sports involvement and reduction of violence. Below are some comments:

- Representatives of the municipalities mentioned that with sports they can develop sports projects with a focus on crime prevention, having recreational spaces and driving teenagers and children to learn values through sports.
- Community leaders mentioned that sports can surely prevent people from wasting time on the streets, especially children and teenagers, and that sports can also promote important values and help with community development.
- Teenagers stated that when they get involved in a specific sport, they can coexist with others, become disciplined, have more tolerance, and improve their mental health.
- In general, in 100% of surveys, participants mentioned that they believed sports contribute to reduce violence in their communities.
- Project participants indicated that sports not only reduce violence in their communities but also contributes to improve familial relationships.

IV LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the lessons learned through this program include the following:

- a) Olympic sports were unknown in the target communities. This program helped introduce several sports to those municipalities.
- b) Municipal government officials are more likely to find approaches attractive if they are low cost. Many agreed to continue coordinating youth tournaments and conduct sports programs aimed at reducing violence because they will not be costly events.
- c) Less than 50% of the participating communities had adequate facilities or spaces to practice sports. It is imperative to obtain resources to build sports infrastructure to help promote new Olympic sports such as volleyball, basketball, athletics and handball. Children and teenagers commented that they would be interested in developing and learning sports like Taekwondo, swimming and chess.
- d) Municipal governments and community members reaffirmed that sports can be a good alternative to prevent crime and violence.
- e) The practice of values through sports was an important teaching concept introduced by this program. Sports contribute to family union and community sharing.
- f) Violence prevention and monitoring programs need to be strengthened in all communities. 86% of surveyed participants defined insecurity and gang violence as the main obstacle to the development of sports in their communities.
- g) Although 73% of participants were men, there was significant female participation (33%) in the component of sports monitors. Sports present a good approach to promote gender inclusion and reduce inequality.
- h) There is a large youth population in these communities that is interested in participation in sports programs. Most of them are from 15 to 20 years of age. More

sports programs need to be conducted with support from local and foreign organizations.

- i) Even though 99% of participants agreed that sports generate a positive attitude in children and youth, it is important to build capacity and education of sports monitors and trainers.
- j) The participatory approach presented through this Olympic Values Through Sports Program has been of great value to the communities and municipal governments.

V CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

- a) Sports can be an important tool in crime prevention. Long-term programs are needed in order to have a significant effect in reducing violence and crime.
- b) The practice of sports generates a change in attitude, however, it has to be accompanied by teaching values and counseling to promote real change.
- c) The sports infrastructure is very deficient in target communities and there are no adequate spaces to host large sports events.
- d) The gender barriers still remain in sporting events.
- e) Low cost Olympic sports, like chess, handball and volleyball have great potential to develop Olympic athletes in these communities.
- f) Working articulately, in conjunction with municipal governments, communities and sports committees generate a warranty of sustainability in crime prevention activities.
- g) Crime and other security-related risks in these communities made it hard for researchers to work in these communities and for people to attend sports events, although they had a lot of enthusiasm for participating.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) There should be more work done to motivate the participation of women in these events in the future.
- b) A letter of compromise should be signed after these programs between the local governmental authorities, the community leaders and the Olympic Committee to guarantee sustainability of these programs.
- c) It is of great importance to promote Olympic sports in these communities because they are highly attractive to children, youth and their families.
- d) Sports infrastructure construction programs would be a good investment in these communities.
- e) The approach “Values and Sports” can be highly effective in achieving positive change in these communities, but complementary programs for sports monitors and trainers need to be part of the formula.

- f) Due to the high level of violence in the country, it is highly recommended to enlist the help of local governments and community leaders and to obtain security information prior to working in these gang-afflicted areas.

Through this study we feel certain that sports play an important role in the community in helping prevent youth violence and crime, and helping with youth development. In both groups studied, youth would like to increase their knowledge regarding other Olympic sports. This poses a potential of introducing other Olympic sports and programs.

According to the results of this program we can assert two important conclusions: on one hand the population expressed with certainty that the practice of different sports keeps young people away from violence because they are occupied with physical activities; secondly, the obstacles that young people face to develop sports are violence and insecurity followed by lack of available spaces or adequate sports infrastructure.