

# More than winning

The real value of sport and recreation in Western Australia



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Sport and Recreation**

**Building stronger, healthier, happier and safer communities**

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*While we recognise the contribution sport and recreation makes to the building of national pride, and the value of recreation in community health, we may have overlooked the additional benefits these activities bring to society.*





# Introduction

Sport and recreation is part of the fabric of Australian life. Take a look around our wonderful beaches and waterways, our parks, reserves and sportsgrounds, and it is obvious sport is a passion.

From cycling or walking our high-quality recreational trails, playing kick-to-kick in the schoolyard, to the Test arena of the WACA, sport binds and builds communities, empowers, inspires and motivates individuals, provides work-life balance and helps shape our national character.

While we recognise the contribution sport makes to the building of national pride, and the value of recreation in community health, we may have overlooked the additional benefits these activities bring to society.

Sport plays an important role in society and contributes to our lives in many ways we often don't realise. This document outlines the not-so-obvious benefits that sport and recreation provides.





## The real value of sport and recreation

Sport and recreation helps to build communities through *social inclusion* and a sense of connection. Sport and recreation helps to bind families through shared experiences and shared achievements. Through participation, sport helps address anti-social behaviour and can support education.

Sport contributes to *economic growth* through business investment and employment, and helps sustain the environment through protecting open space and natural areas. It also promotes the use of active modes of transport, such as cycling and walking.

Sport instils a sense of national pride. When Australian competitors triumph on the world stage, the general community, governments and business leaders bask in the reflected glory. We celebrate sporting achievements such as winning the 1983 America's Cup yacht race, Steve Hooker's pole vault gold medal at the Beijing Olympics, the Socceroos' performances in the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Australia's 2007 World Cup-winning one-day cricket team. Such celebrations unite the nation; drawing together people of different race, religion and culture; developing a heightened sense of community and national identity. According to Kelley and Evans (1998) sport has been identified as being the most important element contributing to our feelings about our nation.

Sport is not the cure-all for society's issues, but it can assist significantly in a positive way. This document seeks to raise the level of awareness so that the value of sport and recreation is better recognised, appreciated and understood.



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*Sport and recreation provides the catalyst for community gatherings, from small functions to major events, where people play, talk and share experiences. Importantly, it has a positive effect that reaches many levels of our society. It is an important thread that ties our social fabric.*





## The social value of sport

*"Sport has the power to unite people in a way little else can. Sport can create hope. Breaks down racial barriers ... laughs in the face of discrimination ... speaks to people in a language they can understand."*

- Nelson Mandela

Cultural, artistic, recreational, sporting activities and voluntary work enrich people's lives and improve their connections with the wider community.

International research shows that increasing community participation in organised sport and recreation contributes to what is known as "social capital", which is the "social fabric, or glue" that ties members together in a given locality (Cox, 1995). According to Putnam (2000) sports clubs and community organisations are important conduits for developing such capital and are good barometers of community strength.

Sport and recreation provides the catalyst for community gatherings, from small functions to major events, where people play, talk and share experiences. Importantly, it has a positive effect that reaches many levels of our society. It is an important thread that ties our social fabric.

The beneficial effects on social cohesion, educational outcomes for young people, and the positive impacts on physical and mental wellbeing which flow from participation in organised sport and recreation is particularly important in regional areas, where it has always been one of the main cohesive elements that draw people together. At a time when regional communities are under pressure, the value of sport and recreation becomes even more important.

In most regional and remote communities, it is the local tennis, football or basketball club that provides and sustains community interaction (Kemp, 2006). Atherley (2006) identified other research that recognised the following flow-on effects – social ties, power relations and social capital, social networks, community integration, flow of information and creating a sense of belonging.







## Connecting communities

Sporting and recreational activities and events contribute to the development of stronger social networks and more cohesive communities – for participants, volunteers and supporters. They provide opportunities for social engagement; often creating awareness and acceptance of differences between individuals and communities.

Bringing people together through sport and recreation boosts confidence through times of prosperity. Sport and recreation galvanises communities in times of need. This is especially evident in rural communities, where traditional Saturday sports such as football and netball are the glue that bonds the community; often acting as the main community social event for the week.

Baum (2000) found sport and recreation makes significant social, economic, cultural and environmental contributions to the life of rural communities.

Dempsey (1999) highlighted the importance of sport in his 17-year study of a Victorian rural community. His study found that sport and sporting clubs enabled all members of a community to be linked by a common bond: their participation in that club.

Similarly, Mahoney (as cited in Townsend, et al., 2002) found in a study of two small Victorian rural communities that at a times of economic hardship, when other institutions and structures were disappearing, physical activity and organised sporting clubs remained, providing a focus within the communities and a sense of community cohesion.

Valuable social networks develop through shared sporting experiences and aspirations.

For many, forming friendships and a sense of belonging are powerful reasons why they become involved and remain active in sport. Access to social support consistently emerges in research as a factor influencing participation in physical activity (Stahl et al., 2001).

A 2002 study in Western Australia showed “more than half of the respondents participate in physical activity with another person, providing further evidence that social support is an important factor in decisions about being physically active” (McCormack, et al., 2003).

Generally, places with high levels of social capital are safer, better governed and more prosperous, compared to those places with low levels of social capital (Putnam, 2000). There are signs that sport can help reduce the crime rate. For example, in the US, cities that adopted midnight basketball leagues experienced sharper decreases in property crime than other cities (Hartmann & Depro, 2006).





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## Social inclusion

Sport and recreation is a key medium for creating new relationships among disparate social groups.

People from culturally and linguistically-diverse backgrounds (CaLD) and Indigenous Australians can be vulnerable to social and structural disconnection. Participation in sport provides increased opportunities for them to connect with the wider community (Savage, et al., 2003).

As a result of a program in the City of Stirling, new bonds have been formed between sports organisations and various immigrant groups, resulting in ethnic youth being exposed to sport and recreational activities they may not otherwise have considered. As one participant commented: “These organisations have recognised that sport programs decrease social isolation for young people and that the city’s project is young-people focused” (Bahn, et al., 2008).

Two young immigrants from Sudan successfully trained to become basketball referees, through a program funded through DSR and run by the Edmund Rice Centre at Mirrabooka. As one of the new referees said:

*“My mum signed me up because I used to sit at home and do other stuff. Now I play all types of sports at the centre instead. The program has helped me to meet others in the community and through the referee training we have also learnt how to treat others fairly.”*

This is where sport and recreation provides some of its greatest value – far from the facilities and television cameras. It’s about including people in a rewarding shared experience and making individuals and our community stronger through the process.







## The benefits of participation

Sport and recreation is an important part of the lives of many Western Australians. According to the ABS, during the 12 months prior to interviews in 2006, 10.5 million Australians, or 65.9 per cent of the population aged 15 and over, participated in physical activities for recreation, exercise or sport. This included just over one million Western Australians.

The State also boasts 121,000 sport and recreation volunteers (DSR, 2004).

In a State with 2.1 million people (ABS, 2008), these are significant figures, particularly when you add a further 173,000 children aged five to 14 who also participate in organised sport (ABS, 2006) and many thousands more attend sporting events. However, the true value extends well beyond the likes of gymnasia, trails and playing fields.

If you consider a typical Western Australian 10-year-old growing up in Perth, there is a two-in-five chance he or she doesn't take part in any sport and recreation at all (Martin, 2006). By age 10, that child may be one of the 37 per cent in their group who does not get 60 minutes of daily physical activity (Department of Education and Training guideline).

"If the child stays at home in front of a games console or computer, the likely outcome is that he or she will be more socially isolated and less motivated. They are more likely to join the growing band of the lifelong overweight, whose expanding waistlines are a precursor to diabetes, heart disease and a costly engagement with the health system" (Martin, 2006).



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## Supporting education

Participation in sport may contribute to academic performance. WA studies have identified strong positive effects of physical activity on cognitive functioning and academic ability (DSR, 2006). Review of the literature relating to the effects of physical activity on cognitive functioning demonstrates that:

- There may be some short-term benefits of physical activity on concentration.
- There is a positive relationship between physical activity and cognitive functioning.
- Acute bouts of physical activity exert short-term benefits on cognitive functioning of youths' ability (DSR, 2006).

Physiological and social development gained through participation in sport impart valuable life skills. These manifest themselves positively in the classroom through enhanced learning capabilities, and lead to better academic performance.

Children engaged in sport and recreation do better academically, are more likely to enjoy school and even complete their homework. There is also a positive link between academic performance and participation in physical activity (Lidner 1999, Dexter 1999, as cited in Atherley, 2006).

Most university-based, internationally-published research finds a positive association between children's level of physical activity or sport and cognitive functioning or academic success. Organised community sport and recreational activities have been indicated as exerting a positive effect on academic success and attitude to school (Harrison, et al., 2003; Lovden et al., n.d.).

Dwyer et al. (2001, as cited in Tredeau and Shephard, 2008) made a cross-sectional survey of 9000 Australian school children between seven and 15, demonstrating a significant association between academic achievement and physical activity – a combination of lunchtime physical activity and structured activity during the preceding week.

Sport and recreation also contributes to lifelong learning. For example volunteers such as sports administrators, coaches and officials, develop new skills through training and professional development courses, adding to each volunteer's body of knowledge.







## Improving our wellbeing

Sport plays a key role in improving the physical and psychological wellbeing of individuals, and therefore our community. Participation in sport can contribute to higher levels of self-esteem, motivation and self-worth. It can contribute to the prevention of obesity, relieve symptoms of arthritis and positively influence the immune system. It helps people improve and maintain cognitive abilities into older age, and may prevent the development of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

“Regular physical activity has been shown to facilitate better stress management, alleviate depression and anxiety, strengthen self-esteem, enhance mood and boost mental alertness. Additionally, it provides social benefits through increased social interaction and integration” (Baumann, 2002).

Sport and physical activity are also important to our health, reflected in the fact that physical inactivity causes 8000 deaths in Australia every year (Bauman, et al, 2002). Participation in physical activity provides clear benefits in the five Australian national health priorities:

- Promoting mental health.
- Cardiovascular disease prevention.
- Diabetes prevention and control.
- Primary prevention of some cancer.
- Injury prevention.









*Sport and recreation can help to divert young people from crime and anti-social behavior. It can also target those young people most at risk of committing crime and help their rehabilitation and development.*





## Preventing at-risk behavior

Community safety issues, such as youth offending and anti-social behavior, can be assisted through sports intervention programs.

By targeting those at risk of offending, participation in sport provides positive alternatives by creating opportunities to learn new skills, develop confidence, enhance self-esteem and, importantly, to reduce boredom and apathy, both of which can be triggers for at-risk behaviours.

Sport and recreation can help to divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. It can also target those young people most at risk of committing crime and help their rehabilitation and development. It can also reduce the fear of crime among residents. Schwaiger (2007) cites an Australian study by Kempe, Grenside & Lopez (2003) who examined the Youth in Sport program operated by the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation and PCYC (police and community youth clubs). The program resulted in a 60 per cent reduction in crime among participants.

Sport and recreation is an ideal medium for social inclusion and support for at-risk members of our society. It provides a level playing field and can therefore help bridge gaps in our society in a positive and constructive manner.

Enhancing social cohesion, improving self-esteem, reducing the incidence of violence, delinquency and suicide, and providing a system of social support are additional benefits of sport that researchers have identified (National Centre for Culture and Recreational Studies, 2001).







## The economic value of sport

*'Sport's economic impact reaches further than most people would expect.'*

The Australian Surf Life Saving Championships attracts more than 200 clubs and 6000 competitors. Perth hosted the week-long championships at Scarborough Beach in 2007 and 2008, and will do so again in 2009. In 2007, the championships injected an estimated \$23 million into the WA economy (Tourism WA, 2008).

Sport is big business in Australia, generating an estimated net income of approximately \$8.8 billion in 2004/05 (ABS, 2005). Australian households spent more than \$6.3 billion on sport and recreation in 2003/04 – up from \$4.7 billion in 1998/99 (ABS, 2008). Retail sales of sports and physical recreation products in WA are about \$409 million. In WA, total income from health and fitness centres and gymnasias alone is approximately \$32.3 million (ABS, 2006). According to the ABS, in 2005, there were just under 5000 people employed fulltime in the WA sport and recreation sector. It is estimated this has grown to more than 6000.

Every dollar invested by the State Government in the Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund generates \$2.36 in direct economic activity and \$6.51 in total economic activity. On the basis of the current annual commitment of \$10.5 million, this equates annually to more than \$24.7 million in direct and \$68.3 million in total economic activity.

The State benefits economically by hosting major events. Examples include the "Bledisloe Cup rugby test, world cup for cricket, soccer, rugby union, and regional sporting events (e.g. Asia Cup football), Commonwealth Games" (DSR, 2007). The Brisbane City Council reports that the economic value of one Bledisloe Cup match is \$16.5 million.



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*Major sporting events and competitions also generate employment, infrastructure investment and attract thousands of visitors to Western Australia every year.*





## Events and tourism

In an increasingly competitive market, where sport and particularly sporting events are seen as an ideal medium to increase product/service awareness, sport sponsorship was estimated to be worth in excess of \$1 billion in Australia in 2004 (Lee, 2004) up from \$282 million in 1996/97 (Sport and Recreation Ministers' Council, 1997, p. 4).

More than 700,000 Western Australians attended sports events in 2005 (ABS). Major sporting events and competitions also generate employment, infrastructure investment and attract thousands of visitors to Western Australia every year.

As a result of hosting the cricket Test between Australia and England in Perth from 2006, more than 4400 interstate and overseas visitors came to WA, spending \$12.5 million.

Other events that attracted large numbers of spectators and participants include the Johnnie Walker Golf Classic (1202 visitors spending \$8.75 million) and the Red Bull Air Race (8739 visitors/ \$12.9 million).

Western Australia will host six major University Games events from 2009 to 2016, generating an estimated \$17 million in visitor expenditure (Tourism WA, 2008).

Perth hosted five matches in the 2003 Rugby World Cup, including the blockbuster match between England and South Africa, generating \$41.8 million for the State economy (Tourism Western Australia, 2008).

Sporting events can also stimulate the economy in regional areas. The Ironman Western Australia, held in Busselton, three hours south of Perth, is dubbed as the fastest course in the Ironman series. The event is a qualifier for the World Ironman in Kona, Hawaii. A total of 1197 overseas and 1045 interstate visitors to this event spent \$6 million in 2007 (Tourism WA, 2008).

## Employment

Sport and recreation is a large employer. From turf managers, sports administrators, trainers, coaches, officials and athletes, to educators and event managers, to tourism and retail, sport and recreation cuts across many sectors representing a broad and diverse industry.

Sport and recreation's contribution to Australia's gross domestic product is approximately two per cent, which is larger than the motor vehicle industry (Australian Sports Commission, 1999).

In the 2006 Census, nationally 75,155 persons were employed in sport and physical recreation occupations, an increase of 21.6 per cent compared to the 2001 Census. In WA there were 7446 people employed in sport and recreation.

The department's research in 2004 showed Western Australian households spent more than \$409 million on selected sports and physical recreation products, including sport and recreation vehicles, products, fees and services (\$4.1 billion nationally). This represents 1.6 per cent of the total expenditure by Australian households.







## Increasing productivity

Research suggests a direct correlation between the health of an individual and their level of productivity. Healthy, fit employees are more likely to be productive, with increased output due to attitude and motivation changes from positive leisure experiences improving their quality of life (Australian Government, 2004). They are subsequently better equipped to deal with the physical demands of their job and to cope with stress and mental pressure.

*“Healthy people enjoy greater freedom and opportunities to maximise their wellbeing and to participate in society. Healthy Australians are more able to participate in work, sport and family activities. During our working life, good health is an important factor in labour force participation and productivity.”*— Treasury Report (2004).

Sound mental health also affects levels of productivity. Participation in sport can deliver positive mental health benefits, such as improved self-esteem and self-worth through achievement and social interaction.

“Productivity can also be measured in absenteeism. Corporate fitness programs have resulted in absenteeism being reduced between 23 per cent and 50 per cent” (Sport England 1999).

There are many simple ways employers can improve wellbeing, with employees and the organisation reaping the benefits. The WA Healthy Business Association (2008) recognises this. It has been shown that participation in workplace physical activity programs can:

- Improve mental concentration, stamina, reaction time and memory.
- Increase alertness.
- Develop a better rapport between workers.
- Increase work enjoyment.
- Increase job satisfaction.
- Improve performance.

Regular physical activity has the potential to reduce worker absenteeism by an average of 1.5 days per worker every year. This equates to the net equivalent of \$84.8 million for each additional 10 per cent of the working population that takes up physical activity (Australian Sports Commission, 1997). A study in The Netherlands found obese employees were absent 14 days a year more than normal-weight employees (Jans, et al., 2007).





*"Productivity can also be measured in absenteeism. Corporate fitness programs have resulted in absenteeism being reduced between 23 per cent and 50 per cent" (Sport England 1999).*



*Increased participation in sport and recreation provides substantial returns to the public and private sectors through improved health. Even moderate regular exercise is a positive measure that significantly reduces health costs.*





## Reduced health costs

It is recognised that sport and recreation activities produce a healthier population, which in turn places less stress on the health care system.

If the typical Western Australian 10-year-old remains an active participant in physical activity, overseas studies suggest that his or her Body Mass Index – the ratio of weight to height – is more likely to remain in the healthy range. They won't get fat (Martin, 2006).

Increased participation in sport and recreation provides substantial returns to the public and private sectors through improved health. Even moderate regular exercise is a positive measure that significantly reduces health costs.

Increased weight and related rates of obesity result in increased health costs. Research done by Econtech, commissioned by Medibank Private (2007), stated: "If more Australians were physically active for just 30 minutes a day the Australian healthcare system could save \$1.5 billion a year. According to Access Economics (2006) the total economic cost of obesity in Australia in 2005 was \$21 billion, with the cost to the Western Australian economy \$2.1 billion. Nationally, this is expected to increase to \$34.6 billion in 2008.

Armstrong et al (2000) cites a lack of physical activity as second only to tobacco as the leading contributor to the overall burden of disease among Australians, contributing to around 13,000 deaths per annum. This corresponds to 36 deaths per day or 1.5 deaths per hour. Similarly, Bull et al (1999) cites lack of physical activity is also a major cause leading to an epidemic of overweight and obesity, with more than half of Australians now considered overweight or obese.

Social participation and social support has been shown to increase participation in physical activity (McNeill, 2006; Kahn, et al., 2002) and engagement in physical activity is strongly associated with sound mental health (Baum, et al., 2000; Savage et al., 2003; McAuley et al., 2005).

People who participate in sports and recreational activity enjoy better mental health, are more alert, and more resilient against the stresses of modern living. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) noted that "participation in recreational groups and socially-supported physical activity reduces stress, anxiety and depression and the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease."

Lautenslager (2008), conducting research for the WA Centre for Health and Ageing, found just 20 minutes of moderate exercise a day can protect the brain from memory loss and potentially delay dementia.

If an additional 40 per cent of the Australian population engaged in regular, moderate and effective exercise, an estimated net benefit of \$6.5 million per day would result from reduced costs associated with heart disease, back pain, absenteeism and low workplace productivity.

"In a country where health costs are expected to rise from 3.8 per cent of gross domestic product this year to more than five per cent within two decades, we must ensure a healthier, more active Australia" (Brandis, 2007).



## Urban and regional regeneration

Investment in sports facilities can bolster a community's perception of their local area, restoring pride in their region and improving future social and economic possibilities.

Cities use major sporting events to redefine their image, promote urban development and fund economic growth and regeneration.

The infrastructure legacy of Sydney hosting the 2000 Olympic Games has resulted in regenerating an urban wasteland in a low socio-economic area into a dedicated sports and recreation precinct at Sydney Olympic Park. The park is now used by more than seven million visitors a year; tourists, school children, sports participants at elite and grassroots levels, businesses, volunteers and spectators.

Where new facilities are established or redeveloped – often as a consequence of much hard work in fundraising and lobbying – the heightened sense of community achievement can be as valuable as the facility itself.

Increasingly land developers are recognising the social and environmental value of the provision of diverse recreational infrastructure in areas of new housing development. There is a strong trend towards the provision of quality walking and cycling trails, playgrounds and open green areas for active sport – all enhanced by landscaping and other environmental improvements.

It is generally acknowledged that properties near health, fitness and leisure facilities usually sell for more than those farther away from these facilities. Such developments also have the potential to deliver wider benefits, such as improved environmental amenity and sustainability, a sense of connectedness through enhanced civic pride, and a more physically-active community.

## The environmental value of sport

Sport and recreation is faced with a lack of public space. As a result, the need to retain and secure public open space is becoming more important.

The State's parks, beaches, reserves, sporting ovals and walking trails are key assets that rely on successful planning and management to minimise the negative impact of human activity on the environment.

Sustainable sport and recreation management makes a valuable contribution to protecting our delicate environment and reducing our impact. Through the provision of parks, open spaces and protected natural environments, sport contributes to the environmental health of the community.







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*Trails provide economic benefits through trail construction and user spending. These benefits are often enjoyed by regional areas.*





## Sustainable open spaces

The shape of Western Australia's urban living spaces is changing. The quarter-acre housing block is being subdivided to promote urban infill, and backyards are shrinking – even disappearing.

Developing specific areas for physical activity can contribute to improved streetscapes, open spaces and preserving natural landscapes (Driscoll and Wood, 1999). Parks and trails can be designed to protect the natural environment by providing users with low-impact routes through delicate landscapes and ecosystems such as riverbanks and sand dunes.

The *Recreational Trails Strategy for WA* sets out a plan for the development and maintenance of environmentally-sustainable recreational trails. The almost 700 formally-recognised trails, and an unknown number of informal tracks, provide an opportunity for the community to experience recreational, health and wellbeing, environmental, economic and/or cultural enrichment through interaction with the environment, in metropolitan and regional areas, and for a variety of users.

Trails such as these are linked to nature corridors such as beaches, forests and national parks, which are also a playground for physical activity.

Trails provide economic benefits through trail construction and user spending. These benefits are often enjoyed by regional areas.

- The construction of trails provided an investment of \$9 million into the community between 1988 and 2007.
- Individual users on major trails spend an average of \$72 (one day) to \$737 (four days).
- Total revenue generated by the Bibbulmun Track (an example of a major WA trail) exceeds \$21 million a year.







## Minimising the ecological footprint.

Sport has close ties with conservation, particularly through the outdoor recreation and ecotourism industries. These industries serve the dual purpose of introducing people to the natural environment and encouraging physical activity in such pursuits as horse riding, cycling, scuba diving, snorkeling, canoeing, kayaking and bushwalking. Aware of how such businesses affect the natural environment, operators make a conscious effort to preserve and protect the outdoors as much as possible.

The operating principle of “take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints” is a testament to the sector’s commitment to environmental sustainability.

## Reduced pollution

Increased use of active green transport options such as cycling and walking can significantly contribute to a reduction in air and noise pollution.

According the Australian Bureau of Statistics, participation in walking and cycling among Australians aged 15 years and over has significantly increased since 1999. Walking has increased from a participation rate of 18.8 per cent to 25 per cent, while cycling has increased from 4.9 per cent to six per cent (ABS, 1999, 2001, 2005).

Physically-active communities put less strain on the environment by reducing dependence on vehicle use. Environmental issues are being increasingly recognised world wide in major initiatives to create communities that support walking, cycling and mixed modes of transport (Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2000).



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*Sport does matter – to all of us. It is a big business cutting across many sectors and is a medium that can play a key role in developing and sustaining the communities in which we live.*





## Conclusion

Society is ultimately poorer without sport and recreational activities, yet their true value is perhaps not fully recognised, appreciated or understood.

Picture a society without sport and recreation. How strong would our sense of community be? What would our health be like? What would our environment look like? What would we do for enjoyment, to challenge ourselves, to excel, to achieve? How would it affect industry, employment – and life in general?

Sport and recreation does matter – to all of us. It is a big business cutting across many sectors and is a medium that can play a key role in developing and sustaining the communities in which we live.

Sport and recreation is more than winning and can offer many direct and indirect benefits. Through quality delivery and a partnership approach, there is significant scope for sport to be further integrated throughout our society.

*“Sport is not a luxury in society. On the contrary, sport is an important investment in the present and the future.”*

Walter Fust, Director General, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2005).





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*“Sport and  
recreation is not a  
luxury in society.  
On the contrary,  
sport is an important  
investment in the  
present and the  
future.”*





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