

## **GIRLS EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SPORT: EXPERIENCES FROM THE EDUSPORT GO SISTERS! PROGRAM IN ZAMBIA**

**Annie Namukanga**, Edusport Foundation, Zimbabwe

### **Context**

Many observers agree that even among other marginalized groups, girls and women are the most affected by AIDS, poor health, poverty and other social problems in Zambia and other third world countries. As the situation stands, living conditions for girls and women continue to deteriorate, making girls and women even more disempowered, alienated and marginalized. Participation in Sports can benefit girls in terms of improved health and empowerment. Sports can also be a powerful for addressing problems that effect girls in the Zambian society.

The EduSport Foundation has been active in community sports programming in Lusaka, since 1999. In November 2001 they launched the Go Sisters program to help address the many problems facing girls in Zambia. The programme aims at empowering girls with the knowledge and skills to prepare them to pursue equality, and to improve the outlook for their future. It also encourages them to stay in school.

### **Edusport and Go sisters!**

In 2002 following preliminary findings of an in-depth study on the empowerment experiences of girls who participate in football and Education through sport (EduSport) activities, "Go Sisters!" was started as a priority program of the EduSport Foundation. The presentation will focus on the how the program is being implemented and the lessons learnt so far. The target group of the Go Sisters! programme are socio-economically underprivileged girls between the ages of 5 to 25 years. The main aims of this programme are two fold: first, to increase girls' participation (also the quality of participation) in sport, P.E and other forms of physical recreation; and second, to use sport as a tool to empower girls with skills and resources important in real life situations. Peer leadership, were girls are trained to lead their peers, is the primary methodology for delivering the Go Sisters! programme.

The cornerstone of the Edusport philosophy is that education is the essential tool needed by youth if they are to affect change in the future. Edusport sources sponsorship for all peer leaders involved in their programs, to pay for their school fees, uniforms and books, as long as they continue to volunteer. This program extends from elementary up to university education. As little as \$100 USD/year will keep an Edusport peer leader in school and allow them to build skills in facilitation, peer education and HIV/AIDS information dissemination through sport.

The Go Sisters programme has seen unparalleled success in Lusaka with wide support from the National Sports Council of Zambia, Ministry of Youth Sport and Child Development, UNICEF and the first lady herself, Maureen Mwanawasa. Since its inception, Go Sisters has trained over 150 female youth leaders and coaches in the Lusaka area. Each of these leaders in turn has reached hundreds of girls in their school and community. What led this program to be so successful and stay grounded in reaching young Zambian girls is that the Go Sister's coordinator is a Zambian role model. Annie Namukanga has played on the Zambian Women's National Football team, was one of the members of the first Zambian youth teams to the Norway Cup and successfully completed a year long sport as a development tool volunteer placement in Namibia with SCORE.<sup>1</sup>

The Go Sisters programme works in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the District Sports Advisory, and local schools. Edusport takes a multi-faceted approach to address the holistic needs of youth and particularly girls at risk. Edusport combines a school-based component with a community outreach mandate to develop a strong youth leadership development focus.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sport Coaches Outreach – South African NGO that provides volunteer opportunities in development through sport in Africa

Go Sisters works to assist girls to develop the tools to stay in school. EduSport realises that not all the factors rest with the young girl herself, as cultural factors, parent beliefs and the reality of living a subsistent existence all contribute to the ever increasing drop out rate throughout Zambia. With 700 youth in school in Chirundu, Southern Province, 3000 are out of school. This provides an opportunity to train those young women in school, help keep them in school and empower them to run projects for those with no access to education. By offering insight into what is possible if they act as role models, the out of school youth will be able to access the fee payment scheme of the Edusport Foundation.

Go Sisters aims to do 3 things:

1. Engage girls who are in school and provide them with skills to keep them in school, and tools to improve their lives.
2. Encourage young girls who are not in school to participate in Go Sisters programming.
3. Illustrate the powerful connection between schools, girl's empowerment and positive community driven change.

Several lessons, which can contribute towards the development best practice models in girls and sports participation, have been learnt from the implementation of this program. Some these lessons are that:

- Sport can be a power tool for addressing wide range social problems affecting girls.
- Sports can help girls develop a sense of belonging and important social network and support.
- Participation in sports boosts self-confidence, self-image and self esteem for underprivileged girls.
- Sport is good arena for leadership development for girls.
- To empower girls we must enlighten boys and sports activities can be used to help boys learn to respect girls as complete human being with full human rights.
- Girls sport challenges society to see the female gender in a different light

*“Empowerment means a chance to go back to school and have a sense of real hope for the future because in my community people respect real things.” (Go Sisters participant, Lusaka, age 14)*

Contact: [edusportfoundation@hotmail.com](mailto:edusportfoundation@hotmail.com); [edusport@zamtel.zm](mailto:edusport@zamtel.zm)