

Randolph-Macon College
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Playing for Peace: The Use of Soccer As A Gender Empowerment Tool in a Post-Conflict
Society
June 3rd, 2014 – July 22nd, 2014
Ghana

Background

As a student at Randolph-Macon College, my experience working in the field of Peace Studies comes from a semester spent abroad Spring 2013 with School for International Training (SIT) in Uganda with the Post-Conflict Transformation Program. I am also an International Studies major with a Sociology and Political Science double minor.

Between 1990 and 2002, the northern region of Ghana went through cycles of conflict and violence between the ethnic groups over land and power disputes. Due to the conflict and unrest, the northern region has fallen behind in socio-economic development in comparison with the rest of the country. Ghana is in a relatively stable and peaceful state, but, like many post-conflict societies, the people are still dealing with the mental, physical, and emotional trauma brought on by this violence, as well as the economic loss that has come with the fighting.

There are many different tools used to help those affected by the atrocities of civil wars, one of which involves the use of soccer (football) to help with reconciliation and to promote peace. One specific justification in using soccer as this kind of tool, is to help create an improvement of social cohesion, as sports teach teamwork and respect for others and shared property, as well as being used as a community builder to break down social, ethnic, and religious barriers.¹

In conflict, research shows women and children tend to be the most affected by violence, which translates to harming families, reinforces inequality and continues to impoverish communities.² What this proposal hopes to do is provide soccer specifically for women and girls in the community, in order to be used as a tool for reconciliation and support to help women gain self-esteem and empowerment, social support, and leadership opportunities. Research on sport and gender proves that sports can benefit women and girls by (1) enhancing health and wellbeing, (2) fostering self-esteem and empowerment, (3) facilitating social inclusion and integration, (4) challenging gender norms and (5) providing opportunities for leadership and achievement.³ When there is gender equality, the likelihood of abuse lowers, and the possibility of women to become politically, economically and socially active in their family and community becomes available.

Mission

Over the course of 7 weeks in Summer 2014, I will travel to Ghana to work with Right to Play (www.righttoplay.org), an organization that works at an international level to provide sports opportunities to children and young adults affected by conflict. Through this partnership, as well as a partnership with my own collegiate soccer team, Randolph-Macon Women's Soccer, I would conduct work with Right to Play in order to build a women's soccer program, for those between the ages of 12-23. These teams will practice at least once a week and potentially have bi-weekly meetings about gender empowerment. Those who do participate in the sports program will also gain the benefits of gaining self-

sustainability through future construction of at least one poultry house, where participants will be able to care for the animals and sell the poultry products in order to gain money to pay for sports gear and/or send themselves to school.

This project would provide a future impact on the community by having an established women's soccer program that helps with gender equality, as well as continuing to provide money for the women involved through the poultry house.

Project Timeline

Part I: Randolph Macon College, Ashland, VA.

Spring 2014:

I will host a special soccer clinic through Randolph-Macon Women's Soccer Team during the Spring 2014. This clinic would be open to children in the community to spend the day learning from the soccer team and about my future trip to Ghana. The cost of the clinic would be donations of old and new soccer gear that I would then be able to take with me on my trip. The clinic will help to raise awareness of the use of soccer as a peace promoter and a gender equalizer.

Part II: Accra and Tamale, Ghana. Summer 2014

June 4st-6nd: Travel and arrival to Accra, Ghana

Week 1:

- Begin working with Right to Play in their Accra office and devise a plan on moving up to work in Tamale, the Northern region

Week 2:

- Conduct interviews with women there on how they would respond and feel about a women's soccer program
- Assess supplies and grounds for poultry building project
- Ongoing arrangements being made with Right to Play on coaching and practices for women's soccer organization

Week 3-5:

- Set up and organization of soccer practices and teams based on level of playing ability
- Begin the construction of the poultry house
- Start advertisement of the women's soccer tournament, hosted in either Accra or Tamale areas (where Right to Play specifically works)

Week 6-7:

- Host the women's soccer tournament
- Make final preparations for exiting the country and working with Right to Play to finalize plans of the women's soccer program

Contacts

Right to Play: Ghana

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Randolph Macon College Women's Soccer

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