

Playing for Peace: The Use of Soccer As A Gender Empowerment Tool in a Post-Conflict Society  
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Section I

The goal of this project was to empower girls and young women through soccer to overcome the effects of conflict and gender inequality. The use of soccer was meant to help stimulate gender equalization as well as increase community and institutional support for girls' participation in sports and education. The funding for this project came solely from the Davis Project for Peace grant; however, there were community donations of sports equipment that were taken with me to Ghana.

I worked with Right To Play, a well-established international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Tamale, Northern Ghana. Right To Play and I selected two teams in two districts (Savelugu Municipal and Tolon district) in the surrounding area of Tamale. The first step of the project was to visit with three communities to meet with girls and other stakeholder groups to get a deeper understanding of socio-cultural beliefs that prevent females from participating in sporting activities, such as soccer.

After the initial research put into place with the teams and community members, Right to Play and I set out to accomplish four main goals: (1) Sensitization, (2) capacity building, (3) provision of sports equipment for the girls' teams, and (4) an income generation activity that is sustainable and will continue on once the project comes to an end. Girls between the ages of 12-17 years were the key beneficiaries of this intervention. In all, about 200 girls have benefitted from this project as direct recipients, and about 1500 parents, teachers and other stakeholders are currently benefitting indirectly. The project activities included:

- Meeting with and coaching the girl soccer players, hosting a girls' sports coaching and sensitization clinic with 17 sports coaches in attendance.
- Setting up and working with the teams and the communities to begin a sustainable farming project (soy beans) for each team to continue to use as seed money for their team and themselves.
- Providing sports gear for each team to use, inclusive of five soccer balls, a set of cones, training pennies (bibs), a set of 16 jerseys with socks and shorts, a set of 11 soccer cleats (boots), 11 pairs of shin guards, and 25 sports bras to each team.
- A final game was held where the two girls' teams played against one another in a big tournament event, with over 1,000 people from both communities in attendance. Prior to the game there were various speakers from each community, including the chiefs from each district, most of the parents of each girl playing, and local government leaders.
- Separate from my work with Right to Play, I worked with some employees from Right To Dream, a program located in Accra, to organize a spur-of-the-moment girls' soccer tournament in the urban setting of Accra. At this tournament there were six girls' teams in attendance and prizes were handed out to each team at the end of the tournament.

Of course I faced difficulties with this project, especially in dealing with the very conservative Muslim communities in Northern Ghana, but overall the project was successful on a level that I never would have dreamed possible in such a short period of time. Not only was Right to Play a key component in my work and has offered for me to come back and continue my project, they have also

continued it in my absence and I am receiving monthly updates from Right To Play about how the crops for each team are growing, what they are doing with them, and how their soccer skills are advancing.

## Section II

Peace, in my own terms, is defined as the ability of two parties to interact and solve problems in a manner that does not tolerate violence and in a space where compromises can be agreed on. One major humanitarian issue facing our world is gender inequality and gender violence. My project works for sustainable peace on two levels: First, by providing the training gear, the soccer skills, and my knowledge on the sport, these girls' teams are now able to continue to use soccer as an outlet for themselves and to push themselves to do better in school to continue to be able to play. Also, by sensitizing these communities on the benefits of girls in sports, gender equality in these very conservative areas of the country has started to increase, especially in the aspect of rights for young girls. Second, by having a sustainability project for each team, i.e. the crops, they will be able to sell them and use that money as "seed money" to again purchase supplies to grow more crops, but also to buy themselves school supplies, sanitary products, and sports supplies – all things that they previously could not afford.

As someone who plans on trying to do humanitarian work as a career, I was inspired and excited by what was accomplished due to the grant money I was provided. It wasn't always easy dealing with the cultural barriers and many of the challenges I faced as a woman in this very conservative community, but overall I loved every minute of it. The willingness and kindness of the people of Ghana to learn and grow despite the struggles they face has humbled me and given me a drive to go out and continue to help promote peace.

There are days when I wonder if anything is going to make a difference in this crazy world we are living in. However, after hearing the stories of hope from the people I worked with this summer and seeing the changes that occurred right before my eyes, I've realized that there are still ways of creating peace among people; and that is what drives me to want to do more.

- Sarah Nieburg

