

Committee/Council: Special Conference on Persons with Disabilities

Issue: Promoting the participation of persons with disabilities in physical activities and sports

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Introduction

Persons with disabilities currently account for 15% of the world's total population: the number is constantly increasing due to modern day phenomena such as an increased life span, improved medicine and population growth. Furthermore, in countries with a life expectancy over 70 years, individuals are almost inevitably bound to live a portion of their lives with some kind of disability. Consequently, it is necessary to improve the general quality of disabled people's lives if national and international development is to be achieved. Revamping the healthcare system, establishing equal rights and opportunities in the work field, as well as ensuring the rehabilitation and reintegration of persons with disabilities into society usually achieve this.

As a result of this realization, regional and international agencies programs have been providing disabled people with the opportunity to partake in sports and other physical activities, because of the benefits that it has on the participants' social life, health and intellectual growth. However, even though such inclusive activities have been increasing in popularity worldwide, they are still not accessible to all disabled people because 80% of the world's disabled population is found in developing countries and many of them do not view such an opportunity for disabled people as a top priority: it may not be as urgent as other problems that the countries are facing or the decision makers may still view disabilities as weaknesses or faults that can be blamed on the disabled individual.

Therefore, promoting the individual, social and economic benefits of the inclusion of persons with disabilities in such physical activities is important, in order to eliminate the negligence that is displayed throughout the world today and to

engage the international community in the fight for disabled people's right to physical and mental development, equal rights and participation in social events.

Definition of Key-Terms

Disability

Disability is a term that covers any physical or mental condition of a person, which prevents them from participating in certain activities or life situations. Therefore the context of this term is also dependent on the relation between a person's characteristics and the archetype that is posed by a community.

Disabled Sports

Disabled sports, also referred to as para-sports or adaptive sports, are the sports that persons with physical or intellectual disabilities participate in.

Social Integration

Social integration is a process that aims to establish peaceful social relations between the members of a society through dialogue and cooperation. Introducing and including persons with disabilities in sports facilitates such purposes since it offers them the chance to communicate and work together with other people.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation for a disabled individual is a process that enables them to improve their physical and intellectual skills. It helps disabled people achieve optimum physical and intellectual levels and provides them with self-determination and independence. Therefore, it is understandable that the cooperation, communication and physical skills that disabled people acquire through their participation in sports are key in rehabilitation process.

Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR)

Community-based rehabilitation is a process focusing on the quality of life, needs, participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in all social activities and services. It is the result of the collaboration between the families and communities of the people with disabilities, themselves and governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Para-athlete

A person is characterized as a para-athlete when they meet the requirements needed to participate in the Paralympic Games.

Background Information

Enabling persons with disabilities to enhance their physical abilities and making sports more inclusive to such persons will not only empower them and improve their mental and physical health, but will also benefit their communities since such an effort will benefit in the battle against discrimination and will be a step closer towards establishing the values first promoted by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Benefits of promoting disabled people's participation in sports

Firstly, taking into account the stereotypes that prevail in many societies around the world, those that prevent disabled people from having access to education, medical care and other social services and opportunities, while also being the cause of further immobility and isolation, using sport as a platform to achieve equality and respect between the members of a community would be very successful due to the absence of linguistic and sociocultural barriers that characterizes this activity. On this basis, sports can divert the attention of people without disabilities from the others' disabilities to their skills and accomplishments athletically. This would especially benefit women with disabilities since they are often forced to suffer from both gender and disability related stereotypes resulting in further restriction and repression. Furthermore, taking into consideration the limited participation of women in such activities and competitions, it is clear that more efficient efforts should be made in order to eradicate gender-based and disability-based discrimination.

Secondly, participation in sports is highly empowering for persons with disabilities by boosting their confidence, improving their social and communicative skills, reducing dependence and allowing them to realize the importance of teamwork, cooperation and their right and capability to act as advocated of change themselves. These acquired skills can also be proven useful for their careers and advocacy work, further enhancing their independence and providing their country

with competent and adequate members of the workforce, thus benefitting it both socially and economically.

Poverty, hunger and low levels of employment can also be battled by reducing stigma associated with disabilities, which often prevent people with disabilities from working, and enhancing the self-confidence of disabled individuals, which can be achieved through the inclusion of persons with disabilities in sports. Furthermore, through such inclusive activities more children are enabled to have access to education, since disability-related stereotypes often do not allow them to go to school.

The right of people with disabilities to participate in sports

Through many occasions, events and conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the establishment of the MDGs, it has been repeatedly stated and proven that all human beings are equal and thus ought to be provided with the same choices and opportunities for a peaceful and fulfilling life with the possibility for personal development and social inclusion. This also applies to persons with disabilities when it comes to their participation in sports games, events and other such activities. Sports are a useful means for social integration, rehabilitation and indispensable when seeking to improve cooperation and communication skills, hence, when such an opportunity for knowledge and improvement is withheld from a part of the population it is necessary to work to reestablish such activities.

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that providing people who live with disabilities with such opportunities for social integration and inclusion, chances for personal growth are not optional but rather play an indispensable role in social and economic growth, while it is also an action that respects disabled people's right to inclusion in sports activities.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

International Paralympic Committee (IPC)

The International Paralympic Committee is the body governing the Paralympic Movement. With a vision of enabling para-athletes to perfect their abilities and allow them to motivate and inspire people internationally, its

responsibilities include organizing the Paralympic Games for summer and winter, along with world championships and other similar events, while also acting as the International Federation for several sports.

International Wheelchair & Amputee Sports Federation (IWAS)

The International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation founded the Paralympic Movement and Games. It was a founding member of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). It collaborates with about 70 national organizations aiming to provide sport related opportunities to physically disabled persons. According to the official IWAS website, throughout its existence its vision has been to "Inspire Worldwide Achievements in Sport" (<http://www.iwasf.com/iwasf/index.cfm/about-iwas/>).

International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA)

The International Blind Sports Federation is a non-profit organization responsible for a variety of sports suitable for visually impaired athletes. It was founded in the UNESCO Headquarters, France by representatives of 30 countries. It aims to use sports as an effective means for social integration of persons with visual impairments.

International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability (INAS) - for para-athletes with an intellectual disability

INAS acts as a charity organization and the International Federation (IOSD). It manages sports for athletes with intellectual disabilities, representing them as a member of the International Paralympic Committee. It has more than 70 member-nations and over 120,000 athletes.

Its vision and actions focus on the belief that an intellectual disability shouldn't prevent the individual from excelling in sports. Furthermore, it believes that intellectually disabled athletes around the world should have the opportunity to



Figure 1.1: Athletes with intellectual disabilities

participate in competitions and events. Its aim is to assist aspiring athletes fight for equality, active participation in social matters and sports excellence.

Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association (CPISRA)

CPISRA is an international organization that aims to make sports more accessible to persons suffering from cerebral palsy by ensuring that the proper resources they need to partake in competitions are available. Moreover, it cooperates with its national members so as to promote the value of the participation of such people in sports and contributes to the organization of more Games. Its values focus on being inclusive, respectful to their athletes' needs and wishes and valuing cooperation and partnership between the members, the organization, the athletes and other bodies involved, aspiring for constant improvement and quality in its work, harnessing an open mind and always striving for continuous innovative ideas and action.

The United States of America

The US is very active concerning the support and contribution to sport for persons with disabilities. With over 21% of American citizens living with disabilities, the U.S. Paralympics benefits such citizens by providing a chance for excellence in the Games, supporting a network of Paralympic Sport Clubs with which the U.S. Paralympics cooperates with amongst other agencies and sponsors in order to provide disabled sports opportunities in schools, competitions, etc., as well as helping aspiring athletes connect with organizations that can provide them with support and resources needed to achieve their goals. Furthermore, organizations such as Gateway to Gold organize national efforts to discover talented persons with disabilities, introduce them to Paralympic Sports and lead them towards taking part in the U.S. Paralympics.

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was created in order to monitor the proper implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the member-states. It consists of 18 members and all countries that have ratified the Convention are expected to report to the Committee on their progress.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1924	The International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (CISS) founds the Deaflympics games, which are international games for athletes that suffer from hearing impairment that are held every four years.
29 July 1948	Dr. Ludwig Guttman organizes for the first time the Stoke Mandeville Games, in which several servicemen and women that had been injured and in wheelchairs took part in an archery competition.
1952	In 1952, the International Stoke Mandeville Games are founded.
1960	The first Paralympic Games are held in Rome, Italy where a total of 400 athletes participated.
20 July 1968	The first International Special Olympics Games at Soldier Field in Illinois, USA, mark the official beginning of the international Special Olympics movement, even though the concept has existed since Eunice Kennedy Shriver held a day camp for intellectually disabled persons at her house in 1962.
1976	The first winter Paralympic games take place in Örnsköldsvik, Sweden.
1978	The Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association (CPISRA) is founded.
April 1981	The International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) is founded at the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris, France.

22 September 1989	In Dusseldorf, Germany, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is founded.
25 July – August 4 2002	In the Commonwealth Games at Manchester in 2002, several Para-Sports are included for the first time in an inclusive program.

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

Resolution on “Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace”, 31 October 2014, (A/RES/69/6)

This resolution aimed to acknowledge the importance of sport-related activities in promoting development and peace and making such activities accessible to all members of society.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 13 December 2006 (A/RES/61/106)

In the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities Article 30 stresses the importance of enabling people with disabilities to participate in the cultural life of their community, have access to recreation activities, leisure and sports. The convention has been signed by 159 member-states and ratified by 157.

Panel Discussion on Sports for Inclusive Development: Sports, Disability and Development

In 27 June 2011 a panel discussion was held at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York. The main point of the discussion was the use of sports as a means to empower people with disabilities and the communities in which they live.

Declaration of Human Rights

One of the most important documents for the establishment of equal rights for all, the Universal Declaration of Human rights was created by representatives coming from different regions and cultures around the world and in 1948 was characterized in the General Assembly resolution 217 A as a set of achievements

applying to countries universally. For the first time, fundamental human rights are defined and protected.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The need to make sport programs and games accessible to people with disabilities has led to the creation of movements with this purpose, formed as early as the 19th century. However, disabled sports started gaining popularity after the Second World War due to the high numbers of injured servicemen and civilians.

While organizations were being formed with a goal of assisting persons with certain or all types of disabilities and creating national and international games, the UN aided the efforts of such organizations by creating committees, such as the committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, conventions and resolutions. Moreover, the Millennium Development Goals have also been an attempt at achieving greater development in all aspects of social life by the year 2015.

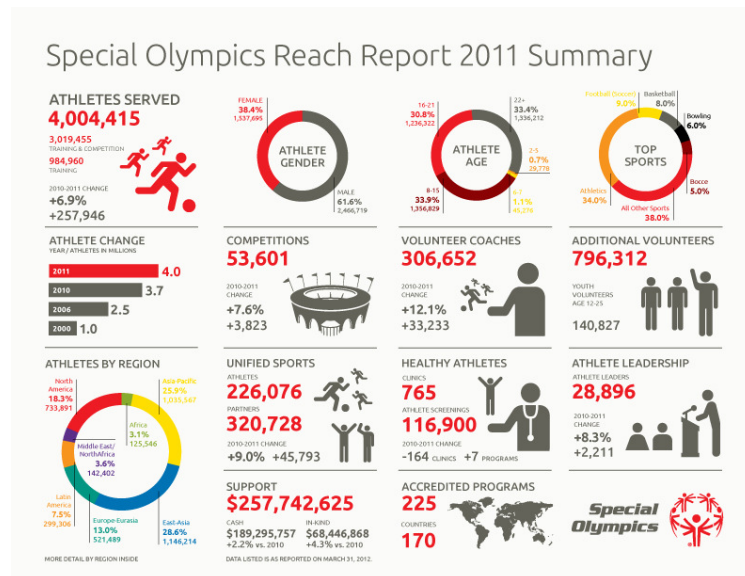


Figure 2.1: Special Olympics Reach Report 2011

While the Paralympic movement led to the establishment of the Paralympic Games after the International Stoke Mandeville Games, the concept of the Special Olympics organization and the Special Olympics World Games originated from a day camp held at the home of Eunice Kennedy Shriver that was meant for people with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, Deaflympics, the second oldest multiple sports games in the world, was designed for people with hearing impairments and as such the activities in the Deaflympics do not rely on the sounds that are usually used in sports such as whistling, bullhorns, or the directions of a referee.

Furthermore, the National Paralympic Committees that many countries have are responsible for the participation of each country in the Paralympic games, thus assisting Paralympic athletes on a national level. Numerous organizations representing disabled people in sports are also rely on raising public awareness in order to be able to cooperate with informed and knowledgeable communities when

it comes to the rights of para-athletes. While all these attempts have been a major contribution to the establishment of sports events and activities for disabled persons their right for such kinds of inclusive and educational activities continues to be neglected or even denied by many countries and cultures around the world.

Possible Solutions

The successful integration of persons with disabilities in a community's sports culture also depends on the degree in which the members of the community are informed about the rights and needs of this part of the population: battling social issues demands cooperation and effort between all members that affect it and consequently ignorance poses great obstacles in the way of accomplishing such efforts. Therefore, since persons with disabilities often don't have access to sport activities that can offer them the chance to excel, develop and learn, it is important to ensure that the public is properly informed and aware s that organizations responsible for such matters can rely on the general public as well as the leaders of each country to assist them in their purpose.

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