

Sport Based Approaches to Address Gender Based Violence in India

A Learning Brief



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Background

Oxfam India has developed a strategy to address Gender Based Violence (GBV) through Sport Based Approaches (SBAs), in order to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. GBV is both an impediment to achieving gender equality and is the product of gender inequalities rooted in patriarchal norms, values and practices. A reduction in GBV through SBAs would thus contribute to improving gender equality, which has been explored as part of this strategy.

Oxfam India has worked with various local organisations in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand to use sports as a part of their overall strategies to address gender injustice and inequality in their local contexts. It realised that a systematic documentation and analysis of these, along with other initiatives across the country, will help fine-tune its strategy.

This Learning Brief utilises information collected from the sport-based interventions that Oxfam India has supported in the two states, a series of interviews and an online consultation with Oxfam India partners and other organisations in India which use SBA to tackle GBV as well as an extensive literature review to understand the current strategies, processes, outcomes and lessons in terms of what works and does not work.

Gender Based Violence: Causes and Implications

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a widespread form of human rights violation that is prevalent in all societies. Neither is this a new issue, nor is it restricted to any single class, community, society or country. GBV is defined as a set of harmful acts that is directed at an individual or a set of individuals on the sole basis of their gender. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a part of GBV and it occurs because of the dominant power differential between men and women in society.¹ The consequences of VAWG are pervasive as it disproportionately affects the social, psychological, economic and political realms of women and girls. Examples of this type of violence include domestic violence, sex selection, sexual harassment, sexual violence, rape, human trafficking, stalking, and honour-killing.

The scale of VAWG in India has been multiplying with a rapid increase in rape cases, domestic violence and emotional violence. India has been ranked 95th out of 129 countries on the SDG Global Gender Index released in 2019, which is suggestive of the downgraded status of gender equality in India.²

“Girls have no freedom. They are not supposed to talk or laugh loudly. They are not supposed to run around or jump. There are so many restrictions. Girls are not supposed to look at someone and answer. They are expected to not talk back when spoken to, but instead look down and do as told.”

- Sister Sudha Varghese, Founder of Nari Gunjan in Bihar

The prevalence of rigid societal structures in India is responsible for the perpetration of GBV against women and girls, as they have historically placed them at a lower pedestal in society. The patriarchal

¹ See UNFPA, *What is Gender-Based Violence?*, 2016

<https://www.friendsofunfpa.org/what-is-gender-based-violence-gbv/>

² See Oxfam India, *Towards Violence Free Lives for Women*, February 2021.

<https://d1ns4ht6ytuzzo.cloudfront.net/oxfamdata/oxfamdatapublic/2021-02/Gender%20Budget%20and%20Financing%20for%20VAW%20-9.pdf?ZoJ4ukZCF1zMZrqtWwt2M7yagQyKAerv>

setup has prescribed rigid codes of conduct, which act as discriminatory behavioural norms wherein men are prioritised over women. The norms exist in the form of stereotypes, traditions, rituals and customs that designate a subjugated position to women. Flouting these norms results in violence and exclusion for both women and men. However, women are at a higher risk to bear the brunt. These norms manifest at the level of family, community, institutions and government, perpetuated by men, especially from upper caste and upper class, and those sections of society who possess the power to dominate over others. This unequal power dynamic is internalised by individuals through religion, family, institutions, popular culture and state policies.

“In order to end gender-based discrimination, the societal changes need to be systemic and this requires change in culture. Patriarchy is the host and social norms are born from it.”

- Pankaj Anand, Director, Programme and Advocacy, Oxfam India

Sport Based Approaches to Fight GBV: Lessons from CSO Interventions

Sport Based Approaches (SBAs) can be defined as the intentional use of sport, play and physical activity to attain specific developmental objectives. SBA as a tool for development has the power to bring together people from diverse backgrounds by breaking gender, social and ethnic barriers, thus encouraging equality and inclusion.³ Its ability to strengthen social cohesion can be leveraged to increase awareness on issues related to education, health, environment, equality and peace.

The United Nations (UN) attributes enormous significance to sport in the field of development and has been advocating its use as a tool in development, cooperation and humanitarian aid efforts since the early 2000's. The UN 2030 sustainability agenda recognises and highlights the role played by sport in promoting development initiatives. The UN has recognised SBAs as enablers of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including good health and well-being (SDG 3), inclusive and equitable quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

It is important to note, however, that sport in itself is part of a society that creates certain gendered norms and structures that exclude women and girls and perpetuate violence against them. Hence, these gendered norms and misogynistic culture that discriminate against women and girls and perpetuate VAWG are prevalent within sport and its current structures, right from the grassroots to the elite levels. But, well designed, effectively delivered and appropriately evaluated SBAs utilise sport in a manner that acknowledge and tackle these inherent deficiencies and biases within sport, in order to achieve specific objectives. This intentionality behind SBAs provides benefits that go beyond traditional sport, including opportunities for individuals to tackle restrictive challenges, change mindsets and build their social skills, along with enhancing future socio-economic prospects.

Sport has been widely utilised as a tool to promote gender equality as intentionally designed SBAs have effectively challenged and changed attitudes, fostered inclusion and questioned rigid social norms and structures. This is evident from the experiences of multiple Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in India that have used SBAs to deal with GBV by enabling

³ See GIZ, *Achieving more together with Sport for Development*, 2019.
<https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/42673.html>

women and girls to reclaim public spaces and reverse the traditional gender-roles through various sport based activities.

The use of SBAs is an effective method of challenging gender subordination as they lead to the **improvement in the confidence levels and agency of women and girls, which can further enable them to resist and question GBV**. Sport not only gives girls and women a platform to participate, but that too in an unconventional field wherein they are able to **challenge the misogynistic system that otherwise lays out a certain behaviour for them**. SBAs also help create body autonomy – a sense of control over one’s body. They are a powerful medium through which **body consent, body positivity, sexuality, personality enhancement in terms of confidence, power and a sense of self can be developed**.

Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA), a feminist, rights-based organisation noted a similar pattern in the results of their sport-based intervention in Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.⁴ The programme helped adolescent girls **gain negotiating power to confront their families** as well as **react strongly to the derogatory comments** directed towards them. Through the incorporation of football, the intervention was successful in opening up a space to discuss GBV with these adolescent girls.

“Football transformed the girls’ mindsets and personalities, along with tackling societal norms in the communities. Girls in the programme began to be sensitive towards the oppressive caste systems, fighting early marriages, voicing their concerns louder and asserting their rights. My own family’s mindset towards my ambitions changed due to my participation in sport.”

- Sapna Gurjar, Member of Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti’s football programme in rural Rajasthan

SBAs are also able to tackle the economic impact of GBV, wherein women and girls have unequal access to economic resources within households and communities, which stunts their development. Through the strengthening of soft skills and leadership capabilities, SBAs provide **women and girls with socio-economic opportunities that can help them flourish**. Centre for Social Research (CSR), an organisation that works on gender issues, led a sports-based approach in Haryana and Punjab which enabled women to participate in sport, eventually linking them to **better livelihood opportunities** including working as sport coaches, police officers, bureaucrats and professional sportswomen.⁵

Moreover, the strengthening of soft skills and leadership capabilities through sport can also foster the **political empowerment and participation in local governance of women**. Lok Swar, a CSO in Jharkhand, observed an increase in political representation of women in the local governance institutions as a result of their participation in their sports-based programme.⁶

One of the intentions for local organisations utilising SBAs is to make girls and women visible in the public space. This helps break the stereotypes that girls cannot be seen in public, and provides girls and women access to their right of utilising public spaces for social interactions. Parcham Collective, an NGO that uses sport for gender equality in Muslim ghettos in Mumbra, Maharashtra mentioned that

⁴ Interview with Smruti Behera, CREA, 2021.

⁵ Interview with Manasi Mishra, CSR, 2021.

⁶ Interview with Shalini Samvedna, Lok Swar, 2021.

though boys initially created hurdles by pushing the girls back, girls slowly started asserting themselves and claiming community spaces to play football.⁷

The most essential element of preventing GBV is to break down the patriarchal system and the discriminatory norms. SBAs can achieve this by **changing the behaviour and attitudes of key stakeholders**, including adolescents and youth, parents and families, CSOs, government institutions as well as local governance institutions. These are all relevant stakeholders who need to be engaged with in order to increase awareness on GBV and sport can be a creative tool to get them together.

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) implemented a sport-based intervention in Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Maharashtra where they observed that **mothers became more supportive of their daughters pursuing sports and fathers became partners in the process, thus changing the discourse within families.**⁸ This was possible as the sport-based programmes had integrated sensitisation drives with boys, families of the female participants as well as local institutions, including training on masculinity with both girls and boys. Similarly, Anantapur Sports Academy, a project based out of Andhra Pradesh, observed an increase in the levels of acceptance of girls' participation in sport among parents and teachers, which is a transition from the initial scepticism expressed by them.⁹ The change in the families' perception is reflective of how women are no longer considered weak or burdensome, which provides the right kind of support system to deal with GBV.

Reclaiming Public Spaces

In November 2019, Lok Swar organised a game for a group of mothers who started their own football team at a local ground in Jharkhand. The women had prepared the ground prior to their match by levelling the field and building wooden goalposts. However, on match day they discovered that some individuals in the community who were against the idea of women playing football had destroyed the field by scattering pieces of broken glass, digging up the ground and breaking the goalposts that the women had made.

What followed was perhaps more inspirational than if the game had gone ahead under normal circumstances. In a very short time, the women along with Lok Swar volunteers and a few young men from nearby villages organised equipment and started filling the pits and levelling the ground again. Some women also arranged for new wooden poles and within hours had the pitch ready for use again. According to Lok Swar's account of the incident, *"The planned session of matches got delayed but we got an opportunity to witness a better event than the match where we saw first-hand most of the skills we were trying to generate over the past three years such as confidence, leadership and collective effort"*.

Stakeholder Landscape

At the centre of the stakeholder landscape part of the strategy in utilising SBAs to tackle GBV are adolescents and youth, particularly girls and young women, who are the primary stakeholders. Adolescent girls and young women are not only those most impacted by VAWG but also often face

⁷ Multi-stakeholder Consultation, Sabah Khan, Parcham, 2021.

⁸ Interview with Ravi Verma, ICRW, 2021.

⁹ Interview with Sai Krishna Pulluru, ASA, 2021.

lack of opportunities to participate in sport-based programming. However, given the right opportunities, they show a strong inclination and interest in participating in SBAs. In order for SBAs to be effective, well-designed strategies will provide adolescent girls and young women, along with boys and young men, the right platform, support and avenues to be able to access sport part of a programme specifically designed to address GBV.

Figure 1 illustrates the key stakeholders who are likely to influence SBAs addressing GBV and whose involvement is critical for the empowerment of primary stakeholders – adolescent girls and young women.

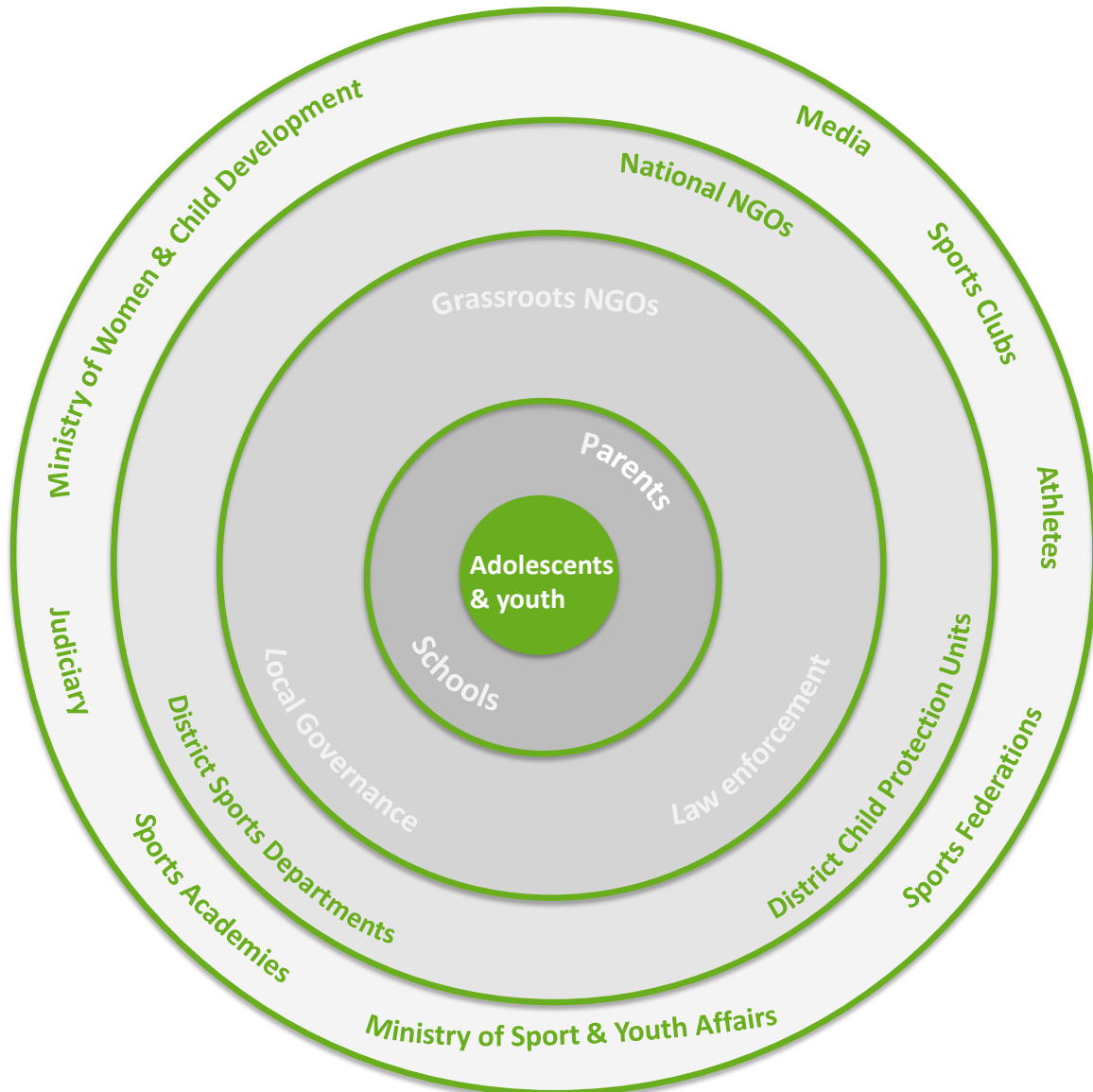


Figure 1: The key stakeholders of the strategy

Objectives and Strategic Outcomes for A Future Scaled Up Programme

The **Overall Objective** of the strategy is to “contribute towards the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment by addressing violence against ‘girls and women’ through sport based approaches”. The primary target group of the programme are adolescent girls (12-16 years) and young

women (17-21 years). GBV is both an impediment to achieving gender equality and is the product of gender inequalities rooted in patriarchal norms, values and practices. A reduction in GBV through a SBAs would contribute to improving gender equality in the programme areas and beyond.

The strategy will realise two **Specific Objectives** based on a **theory of change** that sustainable improvement in achieving gender equality would require simultaneous interventions to support and unleash opportunities for adolescent girls and young women for exercising their free choices on one hand, and sensitising adolescent boys and young men along with other institutions that are locked in patriarchal norms and practices for changing their attitude and behaviour, on the other hand.

The **first Specific Objective** is to “*empower girls and women, through increased participation in sport based activities, to have greater control over decisions that affect their life- and work-choices*”.

The **second Specific Objective** is to “*sensitise community actors and stakeholder institutions to support participation of girls and women in sport based programmes and take positive actions to address GBV*”.

The Specific Objectives will be realised through four **Strategic Outcomes**:

Outcome 1: *Leadership and social skills are developed among girls and women using SBAs, along with developing an understanding of the concepts of gender and VAWG.*

The ability of adolescent girls and young women to exercise gender aware leadership through improved skills on communication, organising, assertiveness and mitigating local conflicts, along with building an understanding on the root causes of gender and VAWG, would be key to enhancing their self-confidence and ability to participate in decision making. The strategy will utilise SBAs to enhance these practical skills and build knowledge.

Outcome 2: *Sensitised boys and men advocate for greater participation of girls and women in sport based activities and proactively address all forms of GBV at home and in public places.*

Garnering support from adolescent boys and young men is critical in facilitating the intended gender transformation in the community. The strategy will create learning opportunities for boys and men to participate in SBAs along with educational activities for facilitating their attitude and behaviour towards girls and women, including understanding and interrogating the concepts of masculinity and patriarchy. In addition to organising separate and specific interventions with the boys and men, a number of activities will also be organised to facilitate joint activity planning and organising by the girls, boys, women and men. This interface and interactions will contribute to better appreciation of existing gender based inequalities and their implications.

Outcome 3: *Equal access to sport facilities (playgrounds, coaches, equipment, infrastructure and kits) are ensured for girls, boys, women and men in the community.*

The differential access to sport facilities and opportunities among girls and boys is a significant barrier to participation of girls and women in sports. The intervention in partnership with local stakeholders will help reduce these differences and inequalities. It will either utilise existing facilities or refurbish local spaces for developing sport amenities with equal access to girls and boys.

Outcome 4: *Sensitised stakeholder institutions (educational, sport, local governance and law enforcement) proactively promote sport-based activities as a means to prevent all forms of GBV.*

Sustainable impact at a systemic and institutional level will only be possible with the engagement, sensitisation and support of local and community-based institutions. Stakeholder institutions such as educational institutions, sports clubs, sport regulatory bodies, local governance institutions, police, judiciary and administration at the local and state level have a critical role in addressing gender inequalities and different forms of GBV. These institutions need to be enabled through greater sensitisation and must be held accountable for their roles and responsibilities. SBAs will be an excellent means to engage and sensitise these stakeholder institutions to provide support for greater participation of girls and women in sport and other public programmes.

Table 1: A short guide to choosing an appropriate sport for women and girls as part of SBAs

Factors to Assess Appropriate Sport for Women and Girls	Examples of Popular Sport	Examples of Organisations utilising the Sport
Team sports	Football, Netball, Kho-Kho, Cricket, Volleyball	Football and life skills programme by Oscar Foundation in Mumbai
Individual sports	Tennis, Table Tennis, Badminton, Chess, Wrestling, Gymnastics, Track and Field	Gymnastics programme by Centre for Social Research in Haryana
Outdoor sports (those that can be played in public spaces)	Football, Netball, Kho-Kho, Cricket, Volleyball	Young People's Initiative (Netball-based programme) by Naz Foundation across India
Ability to engage large number of individuals	Football, Netball, Kho-Kho, Cricket	Kho-Kho programme by Nari Gunjan in Bihar
Ability to enhance teamwork, cooperation and communication between individuals	Most team sports	Multi-activity programme by Martha Farrell Foundation across India
Sports that are considered masculine (or those that are usually played by boys and men)	Football, Cricket, Wrestling	Football programme by Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti in Ajmer
Sporting culture in local context	Football in Jharkhand Wrestling in Haryana Kho-Kho in most rural areas	Football programme by ASHA in Jharkhand
Sport requiring low-cost equipment	Kho-Kho, Football, Netball, Chess, Track and Field	Nanhi Kali programme (based on track and field) by Naandi Foundation across India
Sport that is easier/ safer to deliver in COVID-19 context	Most individual and non-contact sports such as Tennis, Table Tennis, Track and Field	Nadal Education and Tennis School by Anantapur Sports Academy (in collaboration with Rafa Nadal Foundation) in Andhra Pradesh

Note: Organisations utilising SBAs with girls and young women choose one or multiple sports based on the factors described in the table above. In most cases, multiple factors determine the choice of the sports.

Learning Framework

Key Learning Questions

An innovative strategy would require a robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) mechanism to harvest learning, which could help in showcasing and scaling up the impact. Deriving from the articulated theory of change, the two main **learning questions**, which could be traced are:

1. What advantage do the SBAs have over other approaches to address the entrenched gender inequalities in families, communities and institutions?
2. Which set of interventions and processes produce better impact in reducing GBV?

Key Processes for Learning

1. **Organisation and leadership building for the girls and women:** The methods and tools applied to build, nurture and strengthen organisational capability of girls and women in the form of local sports clubs is critical to the success of the strategy.
2. **Developing and nurturing sport based skills for the girls and women:** The processes and interventions employed to provide access to and nurture the ability of girls and women in sports is the core strategy which needs to be continuously monitored.
3. **Interface and joint activities by girls, boys, women and men:** An effective strategy would be to engage girls, boys, women and men to jointly plan, execute, and monitor sport based as well as other community based actions that lead to addressing GBV at home and in public.
4. **Interface and joint activities by the community actors and key stakeholders:** The support from parents, community opinion leaders, frontline government workers, educational institutions, law enforcement institutions and other development agencies would be critical to mobilise local resources, infrastructure and opportunities.

Challenges, Lessons Learned and Way Forward

While COVID-19 has put a hold on several sport-based programmes across India in the past year, as the country navigates its way through the pandemic, many of these interventions are looking to get back on track in the near future. There is an interest and desire to continue SBAs with girls and women in order to reduce GBV, as change has been witnessed on the ground. However, one of the questions that remains is how organisations can take this approach from merely utilising sports activities in a limited capacity to integrating a well thought-out and designed strategy utilising SBAs to tackle GBV, which is both effective and sustainable.

Training and sensitisation of facilitators, coaches and trainers enables them to utilise sport for inclusion and to challenge gendered and patriarchal norms within sport structures. This was commonly observed by multiple organisations as a vital factor for the effective translation of the programme's design into practice at the ground level. Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF), an organisation which works extensively on reducing GBV and sexual harassment, uses sport to tackle gender injustice in collaboration with Pro

Sport Development (PSD), a sport for development organisation. Their experience suggests that trainers need to be sensitised on issues of gender, including understanding patriarchy and masculinity, to ensure that the SBAs are gender-sensitive in their implementation.¹⁰ Another lesson learnt by several organisations was the dearth of women and girls as sports coaches, which needs to be addressed as this causes many participants to drop-out of sport-based interventions.

An emerging concern for CSOs utilising SBAs is taking COVID-19 into consideration, as the pandemic has immensely restricted the implementation of sports activities. Organisations feel that it is difficult for programmes to be shifted to an online platform as the digital access among the participants of the interventions is extremely limited. CREA pointed out how their programme participants could not be reached during the health emergency, as they did not have access to mobile phones.¹¹

Many organisations feel that institutionalisation of SBAs through engagement with local authorities, sport regulatory bodies, educational institutions and local governance institutions is necessary to enhance their impact. Adolescent girls part of a football programme in rural Rajasthan led by Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti (MJAS), a grassroots organisation working on social justice and empowerment of women, were able to raise their voice within and beyond their communities, and speak to various local sports associations and government bodies to demand for their rights.¹²

A related challenge is the lack of linkages of SBAs to mainstream sports structures, along with poor accessibility to public/ quasi-public sport structures in remote areas, which makes it difficult for girls and young women to enter mainstream sport in order to pursue a career in the industry. Nari Gunjan, a grassroots organisation in Bihar utilising SBAs, acknowledges sport as a unique and powerful tool to empower girls. However, they highlighted the severe lack of opportunities for the girls they work with to pursue sport at higher levels in Bihar, and weak linkages in helping girls gain employment and access higher education through sports, including government sports quota schemes.¹³

The involvement of girls and boys in the design of the methodology for SBAs is another crucial lesson. Organisations learnt that the perspectives of youth in designing programmes is critical to making planning and execution more effective. This was mentioned as a successful strategy by Oscar Foundation, an organisation that uses football to develop life skills and improve educational attainment of adolescents from underprivileged communities in India. As part of their interventions, Oscar Foundation setup youth advisories, which enabled the participating young people and other stakeholders from the community to provide feedback and suggestions with regards to the design of programmes, including what worked and what needed change.¹⁴

A key challenge in ensuring that a well-developed strategy that utilises SBAs to reduce GBV gets translated into effective and sustainable programmes on-ground is the availability of funding along with the willingness of donors to support such novel strategies. Several organisations have lamented the scarcity of funds for SBAs enabling a range of development outcomes, especially long-term and multi-year funding. An associated challenge is the lack of funds for sufficient sport equipment and infrastructure as well as additional nutritional needs of participants, during and beyond project cycles.

¹⁰ Interview with Nandita Bhatt, MFF, 2021.

¹¹ Interview with Smruti Behera, CREA, 2021.

¹² Interview with Indira Pancholi, MJAS, 2021.

¹³ Interview with Sudha Varghese, Nari Gunjan, 2021.

¹⁴ Interview with Simran, Oscar Foundation, 2021.

On the flipside, monitoring and evaluation of programmes utilising SBAs to generate evidence remains a big challenge, which impedes the ability of organisations to raise sustainable funding and scale-up programming. In this regard, greater exchanges of strategies, ideas and experiences between organisations using SBAs to address GBVs would contribute to greater collective learning. Documenting programmes as well as monitoring and evaluating the processes and results is important not only for learning and improving programming, but also for mobilising resources to support such SBAs.

SBAs in different contexts across India have tackled patriarchal setups and led to improved outcomes in gender equality and women's empowerment. However, as the use of SBAs are a relatively new method to reduce the cause and incidence of GBV, it is important to continuously evaluate the ongoing strategies and results to ensure it remains an effective strategy.

Oxfam India hopes that its strategic planning exercise to develop an innovative strategy to challenge gender norms and reduce GBV through SBAs will provide local partners with a sustainable model that will only further the effectiveness and potential impact of the existing work that has proven to be so fruitful.

The proposed strategy and this learning brief have been prepared by Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and Pro Sport Development (PSD) on behalf of Oxfam India



Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) is a global centre for participatory research and training, which looks to build the capacities of citizens, communities and institutions, to enable vibrant and gender-equal societies.



Pro Sport Development (PSD) is an award winning social enterprise that utilises sport as a tool for the holistic development of children and youth, especially those from marginalised and underprivileged communities.

Annexure

List of individuals/organisations Interviewed/Consulted

Sl. No.	Name of Organisation	Individuals Interviewed/ Consulted
1.	Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti	Indira Pancholi, Padma Joshi and Sapna Gurjar
2.	Anantapur Sports Academy	Sai Krishna Pulluru
3.	Association for Social and Human Awareness	Ajay Kumar Jaiswal
4.	CREA	Smruti Behera
5.	The International Center for Research on Women	Ravi Verma, Nalini Khurana and Sapna Kedia
6.	Gaurav Gramin Mahila Vikas Manch	Pratima Kumari
7.	Naandi Foundation	Rohini Mukherjee and Lisa Murawsky
8.	Martha Farrell Foundation	Nandita Bhatt
9.	Oscar Foundation	Simran K, Poonam Gautam and Netra
10.	Centre for Social Research	Manasi Mishra
11.	Lok Swar	Shalini Samvedhna
12.	Nari Gunjan	Sudha Varghese
13.	Participatory Research in Asia	Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay and Niharika Kaul
14.	Pro Sport Development	Suheil F. Tandon, Kabeer Arjun and Isha Saxena
15.	Manav Vikas Sansthan	Sunil Mandal
16.	Oxfam India	Amita Pitre, Anushree Jairath, Pankaj Anand, Rukmini Panda, Mona Mehta, Sushmita Goswami, Priyanka Mukherjee and Chandan
17.	Parcham	Sabah Khan
18.	Chotanagpur Sanskritik Sangh	Sachi Kumari