



Policy Analysis Tool for Community Sport and Sport for Development in Response to COVID-19



The Commonwealth

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The Commonwealth

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIS	Australian Institute of Sport
CS	community sport
ILO	International Labour Organization
MINEPS	International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PPE	personal protective equipment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SfD	sport for development
UNDESA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	UN Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization
WHO	World Health Organization

'Health emergencies such as COVID-19 pose a global risk and have shown the critical need for preparedness'

(<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health/>)

Part One



1. Introduction

This policy analysis tool has been prepared in response to the first wave of the COVID-19 global pandemic. It is intended to assist policy planning and implementation under current circumstances. It also provides insights to guide activity during any subsequent waves of COVID-19, future pandemics, and any other widespread states of emergency resulting from natural disasters or other causes that lead to the closure of opportunities to participate in sport and healthy physical activity.

The tool has also been developed to assist Commonwealth countries in achieving their ambition for more widespread, inclusive and safer participation in sport and recreational physical activity in the months and years ahead.

It has been prepared in association with the Commonwealth Discussion Paper on '[The Implications of COVID-19 for Community Sport and Sport for Development](#)' (Donnelly, Darnell and Kidd, 2020).

Research for the Discussion Paper found that:

- Very few countries were prepared for the pandemic, especially in the areas of community sport (CS) and sport for development (SfD).
- The pandemic exposed the underfunding and neglect of physical education and CS, which resulted in the sector being unable to serve as a significant source of resilience for country populations.
- Participation in sport and physical activity fell significantly as a result of the pandemic, with a likely severe impact upon mental health and general well-being. The pandemic also exacerbated the already-lower participation rates for women and girls.
- Many sports organisations, including their athletes, responded by immediately co-operating with closures and other public health measures; volunteering in emergency centres; amplifying preventive health messaging

about hand-washing, physical distancing and the importance of ongoing physical activity; and repurposing of facilities for emergency shelters and food depots.

- Many local governments and sports organisations developed and continue to develop innovative approaches in response to the changed circumstances the virus necessitated. For example, by creating programming that could be delivered online and by traditional media such as radio and loudspeakers; modifying and creating new activities appropriate to restricted environments; closing streets and opening new bike lanes to enable physically distanced walking, running and cycling; and by working with public health experts to develop safe 'return to play' guidelines.
- The preoccupation with high performance sport, at a time of severe financial challenge in the entire sports sector, created additional barriers to what could be accomplished without significant, targeted public reinvestment in community sport and sport for development.

In the Discussion Paper, the following recommendations were made for Commonwealth countries:

1. Immediately begin planning for subsequent waves of COVID-19, future pandemics, and any other widespread states of emergency that lead to the closure of opportunities to participate in sport and healthy physical activity, with strategies for CS and SfD that include consultations for community mobilisations, prevention measures, programme adaptations, 'return to play' guidelines and appropriate training.
2. Immediately strengthen investments in CS and SfD as preventive health measures through well designed strategies and policies, in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A first step would be to implement 'common indicators to measure the contribution of physical education, physical activity and sport to prioritised SDGs and targets', as already agreed to in Action 2 of the Kazan Action Plan. Governments should fund, monitor and evaluate community sport and sport for development as essential components of national population health. (See: [Measuring the contribution of sport to the Sustainable Development Goals](#).)

3. Ensure that the sport sector 'builds back better', by applying a gender equality lens to all ongoing planning and investment.
4. Be directly involved in the activation of pandemic planning for further COVID-19 waves, and for any future pandemics to ensure co-ordination. Ministers should communicate clearly with the sports sector on how it could be engaged beneficially.
5. Take the lead in working with public health authorities and sports bodies in updating, communicating and co-ordinating uniform, safe 'return to play' guidelines.
6. Ensure, as much as possible, that the public space innovations introduced in urban areas during COVID-19 – such as the street closures and additional bike lanes that have enabled safe walking, running and cycling – are made permanent.

COVID-19 has challenged public health providers, governments, citizens, corporations, and the institutions and organisations of civil society in unprecedented ways. The virus continues to spread in many parts of the world, in ways that are incompletely understood, often confounding the public health measures and lockdowns that have been put in place. Every day brings a new report and raises a new question. Until a reliable vaccine is found and effectively distributed, the pandemic will continue to dominate the public agenda in Commonwealth countries.

This policy analysis toolkit reflects these unsettling, uncertain conditions. Part One of the toolkit focuses on the key policy challenges to be addressed and provides evidence-based premises that have guided the thinking. Subsequently, the section outlines the major principles that ought to be involved in the production of a set of policy guidelines for the sector.

Part Two of the toolkit focusses on the major challenges and potential responses under the five headings as follows:

- Preventing the spread;
- Mobilising the sector to support the broader response;
- Return to activity;
- Modifications to programme design and delivery; and
- Building back better.

Under each heading, we discuss the outcomes/objectives desired; provide instructive case studies and external resources through active hyperlinks; outline the actions to be taken; and outline the critical questions that policy-makers should consider. Throughout the discussion, the broader policy context has been kept in mind, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Kazan Action Plan (KAP) and relevant policy directives from Commonwealth Heads of Government and ministers.

Above all, this document focuses on two vital goals: ensuring that community sport and sport for development are conducted in ways that are completely safe and contribute to the overall health and well-being of participants and their communities; and putting in place the planning and consultation that can bring about much more inclusive, democratic and comprehensive opportunities for ongoing and future participation in sport and physical activity.



2. Starting Points

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all areas of society, including sport and physical activity. The need for solidarity and co-operation among member states in response to the pandemic was emphasised by Commonwealth health ministers at the [32nd Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting](#), held in May 2020. A need for shared learning and resources in the sport sector was further emphasised by Commonwealth sport ministers at their virtual [Commonwealth Ministerial Forum on Sport and COVID-19](#) on 23 July 2020. The sport ministers welcomed the 'opportunity to share learning and good practice policies and approaches to sustainably resource sport and enable its contribution to social and economic development, as well as promoting physical activity in the context of COVID-19' (Commonwealth Sport Ministers 2020a, para. 2).

This toolkit begins to address the commitment to share and learn by outlining common principles and approaches that the community sport and sport for development sectors may take in the following areas:

- Containment measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19;
- mobilising community sport and sport for development to respond to the pandemic;
- establishing guidelines for the safe return to activity;
- modifying programming to fit pandemic restrictions; and
- 'building back better'.

These recommendations are a result of an extensive review of COVID-19-relevant literature from Commonwealth websites (e.g. the [Commonwealth Coronavirus Resource Centre](#)), [sportanddev.org](#) and many other sources. Academic contacts and professional colleagues from Australia, Botswana, Jamaica, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, the UK and Zambia were consulted. The authors also drew on inputs from sport ministers at their virtual Forum on Sport and COVID-19.

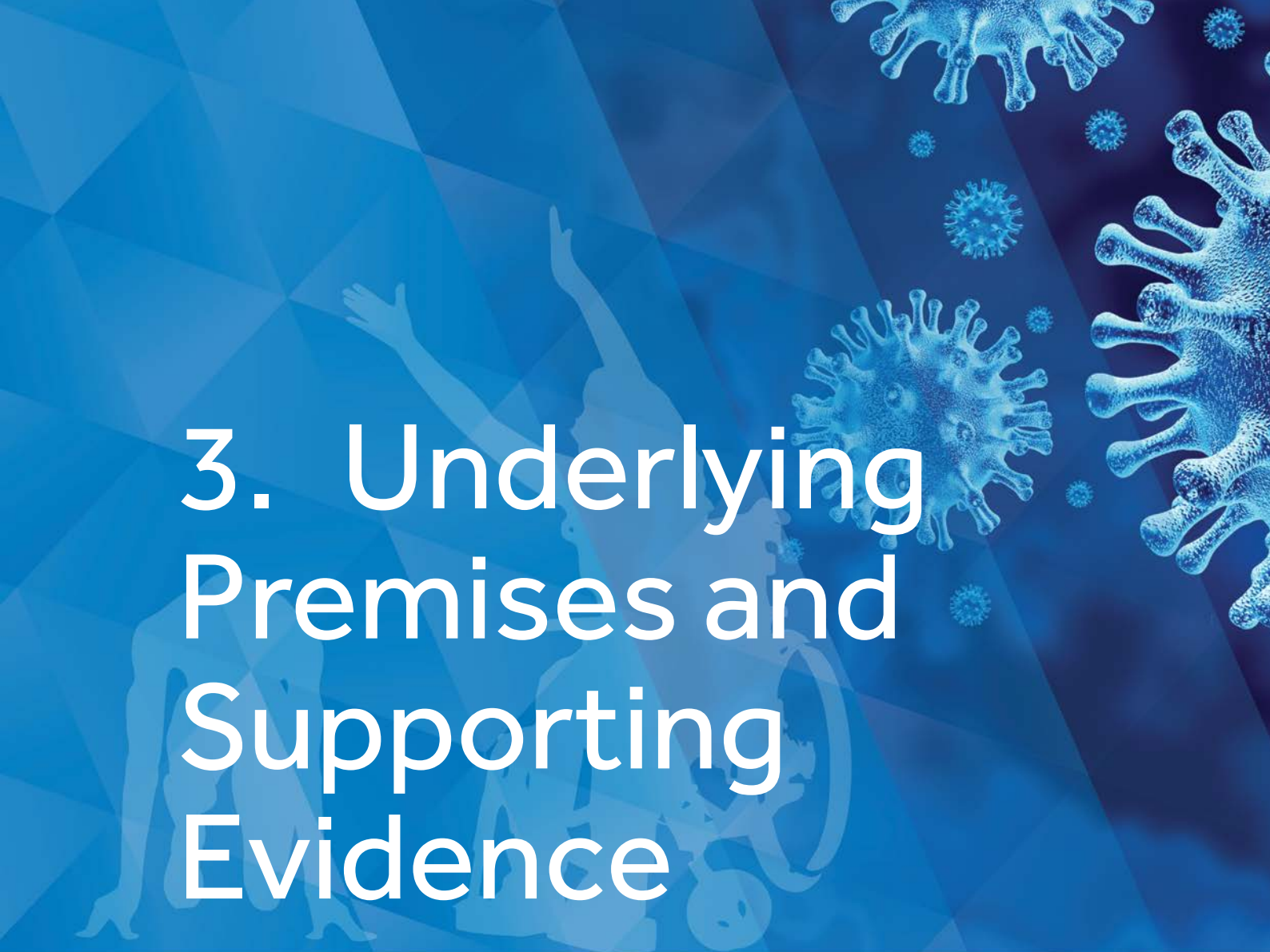
Despite this broad research and review, the evolving characteristics of the pandemic make providing stable and fixed recommendations difficult. As such, a number of characteristics of the pandemic and the unique policy problems it presents have been identified. These are outlined below.

Evolving characteristics of the pandemic include the following:

- COVID-19 is still spreading, and the virus has returned in some places where it was thought to have been eliminated or reduced to manageable levels.
 - Each week, new information is being learned about the virus, its effects, the way it spreads and the most effective prevention measures.
 - A 'one size fits all' approach to providing policy guidelines is impossible. Every different sport, and every different jurisdiction, will have to modify and adapt the policy guidelines to its own circumstances and to the evolution of the virus.
 - Exciting innovations and adaptations in physical activity are being developed in response to the pandemic. Such innovation is to be encouraged, monitored and evaluated.
- This policy toolkit provides an initial attempt to outline some general principles that may be utilised and adapted to these contexts.

Some **key policy challenges** are as follows:

1. How to find the time and resources to carry out the necessary planning for CS and SfD during the current and future waves of COVID-19 and future pandemics. This is largely due to the many competing priorities with respect to responding to the pandemic at various levels.
2. How to encourage and support continued recreational physical activity safely during a pandemic-related 'lockdown', and at each stage of relaxation of the 'lockdown'.
3. How to balance the need for continued economic activity for the sector with continuing and renewed restrictions on group meetings. Further consideration is also needed for balancing renewed and sustainable investment in sport and physical activity as well as the need for investment in restorative social and economic interventions necessitated by the pandemic.
4. How to build back community sport and sport for development in a way that is 'better' than pre-pandemic.



3. Underlying Premises and Supporting Evidence

The two underlying premises for this toolkit are:

1. Community sport and sport for development are indispensable parts of the public/population health system of a community.
2. Poverty and other markers of social inequality such as gender, disability and race/ethnicity, are key social determinants of ill health. Those same markers of social inequality are strongly related to limited participation in sport and recreational physical activity.

As Sandset et al. (2020) point out, 'Doing away with health disparities and social inequality is not just social justice, it is indeed pandemic preparedness at its best' (p. 1967). In line with this link between social inequality and pandemic preparedness, a *social vaccine*, which has previously been proposed for other diseases (e.g., HIV, malaria), is now being advocated for COVID-19 in recognition of the greater impact of the pandemic on more socially vulnerable populations (e.g., Baum and Friel 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the frailty of, and the urgent need to remake, the social contract (*Financial Times* 2020; *The Lancet* 2020). Elderly people in long-term care facilities, low-income individuals, disproportionately women, working in low-paid, essential jobs that expose them to risk, or those unemployed as economies have shut down, have been most likely to suffer and die from COVID-19 (Dennis 2020; Marmot 2020; Toronto Board of Health 2020). Countries with impoverished health systems and weak economies have suffered disproportionately from the virus.

The social inequality exacerbated by the pandemic has drawn increased attention to the medical and social determinants of health. The medical model focuses on the immediate needs of those infected, including the development of a vaccine as the primary solution. The social determinants perspective considers the impact on the entire population, not just those with the disease. In keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the social determinants perspective applies

an equity lens to ensure 'no one is left behind' (United Nations 2015). 'Socio-economic status is the strongest determinant of health. Long-term economic harm may have greater health consequences than COVID-19' (Goel 2020).

Socioeconomic status is also the strongest determinant of participation in recreational sport and physical activity. As has been well documented, recreational sport and physical activity are important for individual and population health. Government austerity measures in many Commonwealth countries since the 1980s have increasingly removed public sector support for physical education in schools and recreational sport and physical activity in communities. Freely available sport has been replaced by various pay-to-play initiatives from the public and private sectors and non-profit organisations. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including sport for development (SfD) organisations, supported by sponsorships, corporate social responsibility initiatives and charitable donations, have moved in to provide limited recreational sport and physical activity opportunities as alternatives to comprehensive state programmes. These programmes may well benefit those they reach, yet they only cover a fraction of the population and are rarely sustained. Many rely primarily on well-meaning but inexperienced youth volunteers. These circumstances have meant falling rates of participation and much more fragile social systems. In the face of the pandemic, school and community sport have provided much less resilience than they could.

Ideally, future planning for the second wave of COVID-19 or the next pandemic will build on the learnings from the first wave and include strengthened community sport and physical recreation and SfD right now as crucial components of population health and a key part of public health preparedness. There are reams of evidence to show a connection between recreational physical activity and physical and mental health in terms of both protection from illness and the development of resilience, and in terms of rehabilitation from mental or physical illness.

The growth of social inequality since the 1990s has been well documented. Yet the pandemic has thrown this inequality into sharp relief, exposing the damage to the public sector in many countries as a consequence of years of austerity measures. Given the agenda to build sport back better, it is

crucial to pay heed to the inequities exposed by the pandemic.

In just one of many examples of the cost effectiveness of using sport and physical activity as a measure to eradicate the effects of poverty, an extensive four-year study in Canada provided recreation (financial) subsidies and related transportation to children in low-income, sole support families (Browne et al. 2000). The study, in the form of a field experiment, involved 765 households that included 1,300 children and youth. In a comparison of five groups, the study found that 'the *child care / recreation alone* group was associated with the lowest per child annual expenditures for use of health and social services four years after intake (\$908 ± \$2,041), even after including the cost of recreation' (Browne et al. 2000, p. vi).

The report concluded that:

Age appropriate child care and recreation for children on social assistance results in a 10% greater exit of parents from social assistance in one year, maintains the academic, social and physical competence with baseline behaviour disorder at two and four years, and pays for itself within one year because of reduced use of professional and probationary services and after four years, not only continues to pay for itself but results in one-third the annual per child health and social expenditures when compared to children of parents [in the] employment retraining [group]. (p. vii).

Thus, while recreation participation was sustained with cost subsidies and transportation, the children's health status improved.

Research such as the study summarised above, and measurement and evaluation outcomes on a number of effective SfD programmes, suggest that if public funding for community sport and recreation was increased, targeted to populations at risk, and sustained with base funding (rather than short-term and grant-based funding), health benefits such as these would likely be sustained and effectively pay for themselves in reduced costs for other publicly funded services. Similarly, if SfD, school and community sport had adequate, sustained resources, sport organisations could provide much more resilience than they have been able to at this time. CS and SfD programmes could be more effective if participants and staff knew that the activities and programmes in which they were invested would be sustained.

High-performance sport, which is the primary (and almost exclusive) mandate of national sport organisations in many Commonwealth countries, will argue that it contributes to participation by inspiring others to become involved in sport. A number of authors have pointed out that, while inspiration does occur, it quickly leads to disappointment and does not lead to lasting attitude or behaviour change (Bauman et al., 2001; Cleland et al., 2020; Donnelly et al., 2008). First, there is rarely additional capacity in high-performance sport to accommodate new participants. Second, very few sport organisations have an interest in increasing that capacity – their focus is on Commonwealth Games and Olympic medals. Third, inspiration

does nothing to remove the financial and social barriers that kept individuals from participating in the first place.

There may be political or economic reasons for continued investment in professional and high-performance sport. But no one should pretend that these sectors contribute comparable outcomes in terms of sport participation and the population health and equity benefits that community sport and sport for development provide. The research makes that very clear.

One major lesson of the pandemic is that governments need to find new ways to invest in community sport and sport for development as an urgent priority of public health.



4. Principles Underlying the Development of this Tool

Public health enforcement

It is essential that public health recommendations about hygiene, physical distancing, wearing masks, travel and others relevant to community sport and sport for development during a pandemic be followed by all stakeholders and are strictly enforced (Grant 2020).

Example public health recommendations:

- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) COVID-19 Advice for the Public](#)
- [WHO: Mass Gathering Risk Assessment Tool](#)

National guidelines, specific to the local context, can be obtained from the national ministry of health. For example:

- [Ministry of Health and Wellness, Government of Jamaica](#)
- [Ministry of Health, Government of New Zealand](#)

'Nothing about us without us'

All recommendations/policy guidelines for ongoing activity at various stages of the pandemic, and for building back better, should be a matter of consultation between all parties involved.

Some excellent examples of consultation in community sport have been noted from the Commonwealth Coronavirus Response Centre, [Sustainability and Contingency Planning Section](#). Other sources, include:

- [Auckland \(New Zealand\) sport and recreation survey to identify COVID-19 support](#)
- [Guide to digital community engagement during COVID-19 \(GHD\)](#)

Monitoring, evaluation and accountability

National governments should collect and analyse as much demographic, health-related and physical

activity-related data as possible in order to deliver a data-led response to the pandemic and ensure that evidence-informed investments can be made.

It is also important that any interventions are evaluated to ensure that appropriate modifications can be made, to learn from mistakes, and to ensure that best practice is remembered. Such data would also be a valuable tool in advocating for the important contributions that sport has made and is making in combatting the pandemic, maintaining individual and community well-being, and achieving other sustainable development outcomes. This requires data collection and record keeping at every level, including international data sets (such as physical activity data in line with the WHO Global Action Plan on Physical Activity), national statistics and local, community and programmatic data.

While putting monitoring and evaluation in place requires careful work, data from CS and SfD organisations are important to show the value provided by their activities. Such data enable informed decision-making regarding what has been tried, what worked and what modifications were made, especially under the unprecedented, fluid conditions of the pandemic.

Example indicators and further resources for measuring the contribution of sport to sustainable development have been developed under Action 2 of the Kazan Action Plan (International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport [MINEPS] 2017):

- [Measuring the contribution of sport, physical education and physical activity to the Sustainable Development Goals: Toolkit and model indicators](#)
- [Further background on Commonwealth efforts to measure sport's contribution to the SDGs](#)

The results framework for monitoring the contributions of sport to sustainable development outlines various measures of the benefits of sport, along with existing and potential data sources. The framework has been shown to effectively capture data that may guide responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and showcase the positive contributions made by the sector.

Human rights

Policy guidelines/recommendations/actionable items, including those involving the planning and allocation of resources, are to be applied using a

gender lens. They must also take into consideration and ensure the human rights and safeguarding of all participants, including those experiencing poverty, persons with a disability, indigenous peoples and sexual minorities.

Ministers responsible for sport at the 2020 Commonwealth Ministerial Forum on Sport and COVID-19 noted the potential for the pandemic to negatively impact the progress made with regard to 'promoting gender equality, non-discrimination, enhancing accessibility and inclusion, safeguarding athletes and participants and protecting the integrity of sport' (Commonwealth Sport Ministers 2020a, para. 10). The need to further promote and protect all human rights in sport to intensify the fight against racism, discrimination, violence, exploitation, abuse and harassment was also recognised.

[The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGPR), provides valuable guidance on embedding a human rights approach into sport and recreation policy. This guidance underscores the obligations of states and sport organisations, as business enterprises, to protect and promote human rights and provide access to remedy for those whose rights have been affected in or through sport.

Unfortunately, as [the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights recently reported](#), no international sport organisation has an adequate mechanism to protect, promote and provide access to remedy for those whose rights have been affected in or through sports.

Further COVID-19 sport and human rights resources can be found at the Centre for Sport and Human Rights: [COVID-19 Sport and Human Rights Resource Hub](#).

Funding

Fully recognising CS and SfD as a significant aspect of public health, and ensuring widespread and inclusive participation, will require additional funding. Among the social determinants of participation, having low income, being female and having a disability are all key determinants of low levels of participation in sport and recreational physical activity (Donnelly & Harvey, 1996; and numerous subsequent studies).

Funding for sport in most Commonwealth countries has become quite unbalanced. *Sport for the few* – high-performance sport and the highly

competitive development systems that lead to high-performance and professional sport – receives the highest proportion of sport funding from public sources. This is sometimes 90 to 95 per cent of all national government funding for sport (De Bosscher et al., 2008; Green, 2005; Houlihan & Green, 2007; Houlihan & Zheng, 2013). *Sport for all* (including SfD, CS and recreational physical activity) is poorly funded and often contingent on pay-to-play and sponsorship systems (Gardam, et al., 2017; Green, 2006, Gruneau, 2016; Skille, 2011; Svensson, et al., 2018). This lack of public funding accounts, in large part, for the low levels of participation among the populations noted above.

In order to fund increased participation in the interests of population health and equity, it will be important to move toward a more significant, sustained investment in CS and SfD. How can this be done? One approach is to redistribute funds from high-performance and professional sport, which receive the 'lion's share' of public funds for sport in most Commonwealth countries. Another is to tax professional sport to raise revenue for sport for all. While both approaches have been employed with success before, if significant redistribution and/or taxes are involved, they will invariably lead to push-back from the well-organised groups affected. Few governments would be willing to take on such challenges at such an uncertain time. It is much easier to increase funding for underserved groups out of new money than to take it from existing recipients.

We suggest a more cautious approach, freezing (rather than redistributing) the money going to high-performance and professional sport. Meanwhile community sport and sport for development should be placed within the broad envelope of population health, funding them as part of an increased national health budget. As Ronay (2020) notes in a recent issue of *The Guardian*, 'Elite

sport will be fine in the end, but the entire structure needs rethinking and taxpayers' money should go to the grassroots'.

High-performance and professional sport has numerous sources of revenue available: media rights fees, corporate sponsorships, ticket sales, branding and marketing initiatives, financial supplements from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (including the distribution of Olympic Solidarity funding) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and direct support to National Sport Federations from International Sport Federations such as FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association). Significant contributions of taxpayers' money are also paid by governments to support what are, in a number of cases, profitable endeavours.

Similar sources of funding are not available to CS and SfD, and increased support by governments for those sectors represents funding for the common good, in the spirit of *Ubuntu*.¹ If governments freeze current spending on high-performance and professional sport, and commit to prioritising prospective resources for community sport and sport for development as a percentage of national health budgets, gradually, as economies improve, a more appropriate balance of public spending will be established.

At the same time, it will be important to co-ordinate these steps with other measures to address poverty and inequality, including the out-of-pocket costs of participation, childcare, etc., in the calculation of income support and other social supports.

¹ Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu (Southern Africa) word, literally translated as 'I am because we are'. It refers to a philosophy incorporating humanity and mutual dependency, and has been used in SfD research (e.g. Mwaanga & Banda, 2014).

Part Two

Building from these policy challenges and principles, the second part of this toolkit looks at the major challenges and potential responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following chapters are structured to address the challenges unique to the different stages of the pandemic response. These include:

- Preventing the spread;
- Mobilising the sector to support the broader response;
- Return to activity;
- Modifications to programme design and delivery; and
- Building back better

Under each heading, we discuss the outcomes /objectives desired through this activity relevant to that phase of the pandemic response. This is supported by instructive case studies from the first wave of the pandemic along with linked external resources for further detail on specific areas. Under each chapter, the response is broken down into key actions and critical reflection questions that policy-makers should consider.



5. Prevention Measures

Overview

The key learning, and soundest piece of public policy advice, from the pandemic at this stage, is the importance of locking down quickly, and reopening slowly and cautiously. Prevention measures are concerned with planning for the immediate cessation of 'normal' physical activity in order to prevent the spread of a virus, and the implementation, as soon as possible after lockdown, of means to encourage alternative forms of physical activity.

This approach was supported by ministers at the [Commonwealth Ministerial Forum on Sport and COVID-19](#), where it was emphasised that the 'health and safety of participants in sporting activities and the wider community must be prioritised' (Commonwealth Sport Ministers 2020a, para. 4). A number of countries present noted the need for a fast lockdown and for adherence with World Health Organization and other health authority guidelines to support a safe return to play. Ministers concurred that 'future sport policy,

competition delivery and programming would need to integrate enhanced prevention measures, hygiene and physical distancing protocols, various event modifications and contact tracing considerations' (ibid, para 5).

In most cases, CS and SfD have followed the policies and state of emergency guidelines of their jurisdictions. Leagues, gyms, sport facilities, parks and playgrounds all closed down, while all but essential workers were asked/required to stay home. Initially, there was a complete cessation of sport and recreational physical activity. The 'lockdown' meant the immediate disruption of recreation, competition and people's immediate social networks. There was very little immediate response from CS and SfD organisations, and their plans to encourage participation in some form of activity during the lockdown proceeded on an *ad hoc* basis.

In some places, to ensure that physical activity would continue, sport agencies began to issue directions and guidelines. Instructions included

exercising at home and reducing social contact to a bare minimum. The most popular method was a switch to online modes for demonstrating and encouraging various forms of exercise. Eventually, most jurisdictions began to realise that the restrictions on physical activity could also be damaging to health. They began to introduce cautious guidelines allowing for a wider range of physically distanced physical activity to occur outdoors.

While the closure of facilities happened quite quickly following the lockdown, the repurposing of sport facilities, where this occurred, seems to have occurred on an *ad hoc* basis. We have not been able to determine to what extent any repurposing was initiated by relevant authorities or by community sport organisations.

Objectives

Prevention measures are concerned with preventing the spread of the virus through

implementation and management of sector-specific restrictions and responses. The key objectives are as follows:

- Develop and communicate clear sector guidelines and messages
- Ensure clear management structures
- Establish ongoing communication channels
- Provide adequate sector support
- Ensure that population physical activity **and** public health are maintained

A distinction has been made between the required actions in the initial emergency phase, which has typically involved a 'command and control' response, and the need for more inclusive further planning for future phases of the pandemic response and prevention measures during these phases.

Action list

Initial emergency response	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish a working relationship with public health agencies in order to retrieve up-to-date information on the spread of infection, along with revised advice and guidance that could impact sport and physical activity participation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish sport sector-specific guidelines and requirements at the current stage of the pandemic, based on national or jurisdictional public health guidance. Ensure that all aspects are covered, including guidance for high-performance or professional sport, community sport, recreation, and facility use.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate restrictions as soon as possible to sport stakeholders, using existing networks and public and private channels of communication.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure enforcement of restrictions in a timely manner, including, when required, cessation of activity, closure of facilities, etc.
Further planning for subsequent phases	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish timeframes and regular communications with sector stakeholders in order to receive and provide regular updates.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish a two-way communication system for feedback and consultation to develop long-term response plans and sector-support initiatives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan for other stages of the pandemic, at different levels of restriction that will permit safe physical activity. Revise the restrictions and frameworks in line with government advice and changes in regulations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify sources of data and gaps in data. Develop tools to gather data relating to participant well-being in general, and physical activity levels in particular.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop resources and tools to encourage a range of activities to promote the maintenance of physical activity during lockdown situations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conduct a facilities audit and identify the use of facilities to support various responses to the pandemic.

Detailed actions

i. **Establish working relationships with public health agencies to retrieve up-to-date information on the spread of infection, and revised advice and guidance.**

A working relationship between CS, SfD and public health agencies is critical to ensure the sector response is based on the most up-to-date and relevant information. This should be a core focus and function for ministries responsible for sport, and for arm's length bodies acting as a conduit between government agencies and the sport sector.

Establishing this working relationship should include identifying key contact points for regular communication, as well as for establishing the most effective means of communication and the best sources of information on government procedures, policies and health guidance.

ii. **Establish sport sector-specific guidelines and requirements at the current stage of the pandemic, based on public health guidance. Ensure that all aspects are covered, including guidance for high-performance or professional sport, community sport, recreation, and facility use.**

Sector-specific interpretations of health guidelines have been an effective means of communication and enforcement. This includes providing specific and clear instruction to those in the sport and recreation sector about what is appropriate and possible during the current stage of the pandemic. These guidelines should be released in a timely manner and focus in the first instance on the most time-critical aspects of the prevention measures.

Some simple principles to guide the development and execution of a sport-sector crisis communications strategy include empathising with stakeholders, focusing on action, keeping communications simple and concise and utilising the best, targeted communications channels (Johnston, 2020).

It is important that communications and activity guidelines are compatible with public health and government messaging, and that health officials work with senior officials in ministries responsible for sport on the development and review of the guidelines for the sport sector.

It is also important that these guidelines encompass all aspects of the sport sector, including community sport and recreation and high-performance or professional sport, and that they cover all requirements or implications of restrictions. These may include:

- Curfews and lockdown protocols
- Social distancing measures
- Personal hygiene requirements
- Training facility and infrastructure implications
- Training requirements in isolation or in groups
- Travel restrictions for training or play
- Pre- and post-match protocols
- Testing and tracing

Examples of the different sector-specific guidelines can be found through the Commonwealth Coronavirus Response Centre, under [Policies and Guidelines](#). Some specific examples include:

- [Australia's Community Sport Infection Control Guidelines for Community Sport](#) (30 May 2020)
- [Canada Sport Institute Advisory on COVID-19](#)
- [Sport Singapore Advisory on Sport and COVID-19](#)
- [London Sport COVID-19 Guidance](#) (London Sport, 2020)

iii. **Communicate and enforce sport and activity restrictions as soon as possible with sport stakeholders. This can be through existing networks and public and private channels of communication in all locations where there is the potential to spread the virus.**

One strength of the sport and physical activity sector is the diverse communication networks that exist and enable information to flow to communities quickly when activated properly. Ensuring that sport restrictions are communicated to the necessary stakeholders requires activating channels, such as:

- Federated sport structures from national sport federations down

- Central government communication channels
- Provincial and local government channels
- Sport ministry web page and networks
- Public media – news, print and social media channels

It is important that this initial communication is distributed in a timely way to provide immediate guidance and support to stakeholders. Subsequent communication should be co-ordinated as part of a broader communication plan, which includes regular updates, clarity about immediate and future requirements, and permits two-way communication and sector engagement (as detailed in Action IV, below).

Examples of the use different communication channels:

- [Rwanda Ministry of Sport Notice for COVID-19 & News Hub](#)
- Papua New Guinea Sport Foundation Facebook updates

iv. Establish a two-way communication system for feedback and consultation in the development of long-term response plans and sector responses.

Consultation is a core principle at all subsequent stages of the pandemic response. Ensuring the opportunity for stakeholders to provide input and feedback into the prevention measures is essential to ensure plans are representative and supported by a consensus of views. It also permits plans and processes to be tailored to the needs of those most affected and for key questions to be responded to.

Social distancing measures, as well as geographic distance, are a hurdle to consultation. However, there are examples of some formats for consultation using digital technology that have been effective in those contexts. For example, Active Auckland, the regional sport body for the Auckland region in New Zealand, utilised [a web platform](#) to provide free advice and resources to sport stakeholders, host regular updates and webinars, and create forums and workshops for discussion, feedback and questioning. Further,

Figure 1. Papua New Guinea Sport Foundation Facebook update on COVID-19 control measures



a sport and recreation survey was conducted to identify the type of COVID-19 support required for the sector.

v. Plan for other stages of the pandemic, at different levels of restriction that will permit safe physical activity. Revise these restrictions and frameworks in line with government advice and changes in regulations.

National sport agencies across the Commonwealth, including Australia, Kenya, England, South Africa, New Zealand and Singapore, all drafted timely messages about continuation of activity while remaining physically distanced. For example, Sport Singapore informed citizens when they were allowed to walk, run or cycle, alone or with members of their own household.

National sport agencies also drafted and distributed useful guidelines such as Sport Australia's Toolkit to help guide the return of community sport, and COVID-19 infection control guidelines for community sport. (See also: [A toolkit to help Ottawa sport organizations return to play safely and responsibly.](#))

Examples:

- [Australian Institute of Sport Framework for Rebooting Sport in a COVID-19 Environment](#)
- [Sport New Zealand Alert Level Information](#)
- [Ministry of Sports, Culture and Heritage, Kenya-Guidelines for Resumption of Sporting Activities During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

- [Ministry of Sports, Arts and Culture, South Africa-Measures to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19](#)

vi. Identify sources of data and gaps in data. Develop tools to gather data relating to participant well-being in general, and physical activity levels in particular.

Physical activity has well-established links to individual health and well-being. For this reason, measuring population activity levels is an important determinant of variables related to SDG 3.4: *By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.* As much as possible, consistent measures and tools to gather data should be implemented in response to COVID-19.

Monitoring activity levels is increasingly important, to assess the impact of physical distancing measures and to gather data about how physical activity contributes to the reduction of non-communicable diseases (NCDs; in line with SDG 3.4.1). Indeed, there seems to be an important inter-relationship here, since NCDs were highlighted as a key risk factor for COVID-19 – making these chronic health conditions a more acute threat.

Table 1 outlines some diverse data sources providing examples of how data associated with the sport and SDG indicators may be used to guide the COVID-19 response. These include Australian survey data marking declines in activity levels, with 44 per cent of Australians reporting less physical activity participation since their lockdown began.

Table 1. Examples of how data associated with the sport and SDG indicators may be used to guide the COVID-19 response

Sport & SDG indicator	SDG	Data relevant to COVID-19 response	Examples
1.a. % of the population sufficiently physically active	3.4	% of the population sufficiently physically active during physical distancing measures	Fitbit decrease in global step counts Australia PA Survey Data
1.e. % of population who participate once a week in sport, fitness and active recreation	3.4	Type of activity and exercise habits during physical distancing measures	UK 25% of people engaged in home workouts UK 59% using activity time to go for a walk 58% of low-active people in Brussels exercising more during lockdown.

These data also show the value of disaggregated data, with declines most marked for 30 to 39-year-olds (see also Moore et al. 2020).

A number of academic studies are ongoing looking at the impacts of lockdowns on physical activity. Current results are mixed, with different outcomes for different activity groups. A study of physical activity levels during the lockdown in Brussels, Belgium, suggested increases in physical activity among low-active people, with 58 per cent reporting exercising more; however, these impacts were far less for those who previously exercised once or more a week before COVID-19 (Constandt et al. 2020).

As noted, a number of countries have recognised that the restrictions on physical activity could also be damaging to health. As a result, they began to introduce cautious guidelines permitting physically distanced physical activity. In some places, to ensure that physical activity would continue, local governments and sport agencies began to issue directions and guidelines. Instructions included exercising at home and reducing physical contact to a minimum. The most popular method was online platforms/channels demonstrating and encouraging various forms of exercise.

vii. Develop resources and tools to encourage a range of activities to maintain physical activity during lockdown situations.

Plan, using best practice from the current phase of the pandemic, alternative, safely distanced forms of physical activity. Then determine the best way to communicate these activities, along with public health messaging about hygiene and physical distancing, to as many citizens as possible, especially those in vulnerable communities.

Produce or retrieve materials for a range of activities that are adaptable to local circumstances (e.g., full lockdown; physically distanced outdoor activity). Activities that are fun and varied, and that are adaptable to local contexts and to specific populations (e.g., older citizens, children, people with a disability), are likely to have the most uptake.

Plan with media production agencies, to develop media-based communications about activity, including modelling and/or instructing various forms of activity, which are ready to distribute immediately after a state of emergency is called. These productions should be based on lessons learned and best practice from the current pandemic. Alternative means should be developed

to disseminate appropriate materials to those without media access, and those with a sensory disability. The Commonwealth Secretariat is establishing a resource of best practice for these items ([Commonwealth Moves](#)).

In line with the previous action, it is important to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions in terms of their ability to influence levels of participation in activities (e.g., social media, online tracking, surveys, head counts and so on), and plan for adjustments or alternatives for the less successful (in terms of participation) forms of activity.

viii. Conduct a facilities audit to identify use of facilities in supporting pandemic response.

During the initial stages of the pandemic hospital admissions escalated with health care systems across the globe being overwhelmed by hospitalisations due to COVID-19. In a number of contexts this led to a focus on finding additional sites ready to handle patient overflow (JLL – Jones Lang LaSalle, 2020).

Due to the closure of many sport facilities during the pandemic, a number of examples have emerged of the repurposing of these facilities to support the broader response. This is a significant contribution the sector can make, and one that can be facilitated through the development of processes to assist on a needs basis. To that end, a general facilities audit can help in terms of understanding which facilities could be repurposed for emergency use (as clinics, laboratories, hospitals, for emergency shelters, equipment/supplies storage, rest stations and temporary housing for emergency workers, and so on), and as part of sustainable disaster relief and sector contingency planning beyond COVID-19.

This can be done through a formal facilities audit focusing on the major providers in all forms of sport, including the professional, corporate and Olympic sectors, or by creating a mechanism for these stakeholders to offer up facilities to support the pandemic response.

Examples:

- The Marion Jones Sports Complex in Belize was used as a food pantry site distributing flour, sugar and water to community members in need. For more information, see: [Repurposing sport for community in Belize](#) (Lee, Jacobs & Cattouse, 2020)

- In Toronto, Canada, Maple Leaf Sport and Entertainment (the company that owns most of the major professional sport teams in the city) used some of its facilities as shelters and depots for food distribution. For more information, see: [Scotiabank Arena turns into giant kitchen as MLSE looks to make 10,000 meals daily](#) (Davidson, 2020)
- Similar use was made of the Bell Centre (an ice hockey arena) in Montréal, Canada. For more information, see: [Bell Centre kitchens cooking up food for charity amid coronavirus pandemic](#) (Olivier, 2020).
- In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the city's sports facilities and Olympic Park were repurposed to provide hospital facilities. For more information, see: [Brazilian soccer stadium that hosted 2014 World Cup final and 2016 Olympic ceremonies is transformed into COVID-19 hospital](#)

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- Have government officials and sport facilities managers and owners been consulted with regard to repurposing facilities?
- Have the results of these consultations been considered against the possibility of second and third waves of COVID-19, and future pandemics or other states of emergency?

Recommendation 3: Adapt activity programming to online use, compile results and make them widely available in the Commonwealth. These should include adaptations made to online sources for those with little/no internet access, such as through the distribution of .pdf material, and the use of widely available television channels and/or radio stations to provide information on continuing activity at home, or in safe ways (physically distanced) outdoors.

Critical reflection questions

Recommendation 1: Involve both sport and recreation organisations and relevant local and national government agencies in confirming/ revising plans to communicate and implement the rapid cessation of 'normal' activity, in the event of a renewed state of emergency where it is unsafe to continue with such activity.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- Have you included all relevant parties, including health officials and sport stakeholders in planning?
- Have you pre-tested the plans?
- Do plans cover all aspects of sport, including community sport, recreation and sport for development, as well as high-performance and professional sport?

Recommendation 2: Involve both local and national governments and the owners/ managers of sport facilities in negotiations about how to repurpose facilities for specific uses in anticipation of a second or third wave of COVID-19 or future pandemics.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- Have activity programmes been adapted to, and for, online use?
- Have other examples of such adaptations been considered?
- Have the results of these adaptations been compiled and shared across other Commonwealth contexts?
- Have issues of internet access been considered in order to create the greatest access and availability possible?
- What range of online (and alternative) programming is available to, and adapted for, various populations (e.g., according to age, disability and so on)?



6. Mobilising the Sector to Support the Broader Response

This section outlines documented activities that the community sport and sport for development sectors have undertaken to support the primary response. This includes supporting official community health messaging, redeploying community sport organisations and volunteers to assist with community service, and utilising the social networks of sport clubs as channels to maintain community cohesion. Key actions are explored to ensure the community sport and sport for development sector is mobilised in a manner that best supports the broader government response and community health outcomes. These actions are also vital in ensuring the sustainability of the response and building a strong platform for sector recovery.

Overview

The community sport and sport for development sectors have proved to be valuable allies in the response to COVID-19. This is both in terms of supporting government actions to prevent the spread of the virus, and through providing essential services and support to communities throughout the pandemic.

The lack of preparedness for the pandemic, in societies at large as well as in the CS and SfD sectors, made mobilising those sectors to support the primary response to COVID-19 quite difficult. Mobilising the community sport sector was not a high priority for many public health agencies, and any support that occurred seemed to be initiated by the CS sector itself. Such support is admirable, since the CS sector has been burdened with its attempts to ensure the safety and income-continuity of employees, closing facilities, and communicating with its diverse stakeholders. There have been many heroic stories of CS and SfD providing emergency support, including initiatives to provide those in need with access to shelter, food and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Successful interventions that have been delivered by CS and SfD actors to support official and community health messaging across the Commonwealth have featured the provision of clear, timely and accessible public health advice. They have also involved the activation of existing communication channels and partnership networks, between government and CS and SfD, to reach communities.

This section deals with key actions and recommendations to ensure that the community sport sector is mobilised in a way that best benefits government responses to the pandemic, and community health and well-being outcomes, while at the same time maintaining the viability of the CS and SfD sectors.

Objectives

The key objectives are as follows:

- Recognise the valuable contributions made by the CS and SfD sectors
- Activate community networks to support the COVID-19 response and to support and protect communities
- Support official community health messaging through the CS and SfD sectors and networks
- Redeploy organisations and volunteers

Detailed actions

i. Engage community sport organisations in the promotion of health messaging and pandemic prevention measures.

In line with the communications developed under the **preventing the spread** section above, Community Sport and Sport for Development organisations have proven to be valuable allies in conveying relevant public health messaging and other pandemic prevention measures. Critically, they have proven to be effective at reaching vulnerable groups and those who are harder to reach through traditional channels.

Key to delivery of this action is having existing, and up-to-date, databases and communication channels with various stakeholders, and ensuring they are empowered to deliver effective messaging in line with national objectives and global best practice.

Example:

Right to Play (2020), which has programmes in seven Commonwealth countries, has been using its programmes to teach and encourage handwashing, social distancing and other hygiene practices to keep children safe, on the basis of experience gained during the Ebola epidemic in 2014. In Burundi, where schools stayed open, Right to Play distributed soap and buckets to encourage frequent handwashing. It has also been working to keep children learning where schools have been closed, with appeals to parents and elders to arrange some sort of formal learning situation, especially for children and young women. In Tanzania, these appeals are made through a public address system mounted on the back of a truck. Right to Play also provides remote instruction in life skills and educational games, through radio (Tanzania) and online. Part of this involves reaching out to teachers in disadvantaged communities to help them deliver better on what they do. Finally, Right to Play's efforts have been directed toward keeping children mentally strong. It is drawing on its experience in conflict zones to interact with children, parents and teachers to 'deliver health and psychosocial support activities', through modifications to its 'PLAY' programme, so that children can organise games themselves.

Action list

<input type="checkbox"/>	Engage community sport organisations in the promotion of health messaging and pandemic prevention measures.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborate with community sport organisations and engage them in dialogue to promote positive community outcomes – including asking for their input into community requirements.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that legal structures and government frameworks support community sport and SfD organisations to deliver pandemic support – including recognition of the volunteer labour force and informal work arrangements.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Include community sport resources in pandemic response plans and explore further opportunities for engagement and mobilisation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Record and ensure recognition of the role of community sport organisations in the pandemic response – including through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data.

ii. Collaborate with community sport organisations, engage them in dialogue to promote positive community outcomes and ask for their input into community requirements.

Along with supporting health messaging, community sport and sport for development organisations are valuable partners for government and other bodies to reach specific communities and receive specific feedback and perspectives from target groups.

For example, StreetGames' (2020) report, *The Experience of the Coronavirus Lockdown in Low-Income Areas of England and Wales*, provides numerous examples of an SfD organisation utilising its social networks to extend its mandate during the pandemic in order to reach out to families and older people, in addition to youth.

Key to activating these partnerships is having strong existing relationships, collaborative structures and institutional arrangements that enable co-operation toward shared goals.

Example:

The Safer Communities Programme (SCP, affiliated with Fight for Peace) in Kingston, Jamaica, 'is also supporting state responses, and, in partnership with the National Parenting Support Commission, UNICEF and a private sector foundation, has set up a coronavirus helpline for parents'. This is a unique situation of collaboration between the SfD sector and other partners to support government initiatives, facilitated through effective existing communication lines and ways of working (Fight for Peace 2020).

iii. Ensure that legal structures and government frameworks support community sport and SfD organisations to deliver pandemic support, including recognising the volunteer labour force and informal work arrangements.

Sport is effective in generating employment because it is community-based and depends on human interaction. As such, investing in sport can be an effective response to reduce unemployment during a recession (Kokolakakis et al., 2020).

However, many of those working in the sport sector are informal employees (that is, neither taxed nor monitored by government). This presents a significant risk to those in the CS and SfD sectors and those being supported by these sectors through the pandemic.

Research commissioned by the Commonwealth on the [potential economic impacts of COVID-19 on the sport sector](#) shows the expected sport sector recession to be several times worse than the average sector of an economy, with predicted sector contractions of up to 42 per cent (Kokolakakis et al., 2020).

Commonwealth sport ministers recognised the significant economic downturn caused by the pandemic at the recent Ministerial Forum on Sport and COVID-19, with many countries responding with support packages to support the sport sector.

According to the World Bank, informal employment in developing countries can be as high as 60 per cent of total employment, with many women and men in the informal economy reliant on income earned each day to feed themselves and their families. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is predicting an expansion in the informal economy due to financial crises and closure of small and medium-sized organisations in the wake of COVID-19 (ILO 2020). While there has been significant financial support and the introduction of income relief schemes in response to COVID-19, those in the informal economy generally do not qualify.

It is important that governments and policy-makers responsible for sport consider these informal employees and their access to support in order to: i) ensure they are able to continue to provide the vital community support they have been delivering through the pandemic; and ii) protect the workforce and ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector.

Example:

A number of governments have released relief funds to support affected industries, businesses and communities. For example, the [South Africa COVID-relief fund](#) provides relief for athletes, their coaches, and technical support staff responsible for athletes who were confirmed to participate in events that have been cancelled (with proof of the cancellation and up-to-date taxes). The fund caters for athletes identified on the Operation Excellence Programme as 'National Athletes'.

By 17 April 2020, 300 applications had been received from sport federations, while 6,000 applications were received from the broader arts and culture sector. This programme is similar to many others across the Commonwealth in that

it focuses on high-performance and professional athletes and does not provide support for community sport and SfD organisations and personnel. This may account for the very low number of sport applicants. This example provides additional support for the earlier contention about the imbalance in government support between high-performance sport and CS and SfD.

It is essential that CS and SfD groups are also supported. Key steps include:

1. Conducting rapid assessments of the effects of COVID-19 on these sectors
2. Providing income and food support for individuals to compensate for loss of, or reduction in, economic activity
3. Mobilising effective resources, defining eligibility criteria and setting benefit levels
4. Reaching out to individuals or connecting through sport networks to provide support (digital technologies may assist in harnessing and reaching out to those affected)
5. Working with CS and SfD organisations to understand needs and provide support

This response is in line with guidance produced by the International Labour Organization (ILO) [brief on COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy: Immediate responses and policy challenges](#).

Along with the immediate responses, consideration should also be given to the long-term sustainability for this section of the sport labour force, along with recognition of this important aspect of the sport economy. This includes registration of CS and SfD organisations, recognition of volunteer workers, and ensuring that legal structures and government frameworks are in place to support these workers during the pandemic and beyond.

iv. Include community sport resources in pandemic response plans, and explore further opportunities for engagement and mobilisation.

Many individuals, organisations and governments have redeployed community sport organisations and staff to assist with community service. This has included the redeployment of government employees (municipal, regional and national) from sport and recreation work to pandemic-related work; using sport networks to deliver food,

PPE or other essential items; and repurposing sport facilities to support communities and the pandemic response.

Adopting a 'whole of government' and 'whole of society' approach to COVID-19, and mobilising all effective resources, including those of the CS and SfD sectors, requires a policy framework for sector engagement. This would allow the sector to:

- Quickly understand what is going on in the country with respect to COVID-19, and what the immediate needs are nationally and in the communities
- Select a fit-for-purpose strategy to engage with the sport sector
- Identify necessary resources and engage with partners
- Involve the whole sector and engage across government, the private sector and the not-for-profit sector

Key steps to enable the co-operative activity and mobilisation of the sector include:

- Ensuring the provision of clear, timely advice and the promotion of trusted channels for mass communication
- Involvement of the sector in planning and strategies to work together now and in the future
- Strong existing communication channels and partnerships between government and CS and SfD
- Established ways of working and/or plans to respond to pandemics or natural disasters
- An understanding of the potential resources available (facilities, staff, expertise, networks), and that may be mobilised.

Examples:

- At a municipal government level, non-essential city staff, including staff from the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Department in Toronto, were given the choice of redeployment or unpaid leave. Many chose redeployment and worked in areas such as long-term care or senior citizens' homes (Rider 2020). For more information, see: [Non-essential city staff given choice of redeployment or unpaid leave](#).

- In Belize, staff from the Ministry of Youth, Education and Sports, together with sport co-ordinators from the Belize National Sport Council, organised and ran the food pantry mentioned in the previous section (Lee et al. 2020). For more information, see: [Repurposing sport for community in Belize](#)
- In India, the Oscar Foundation (2020) distributed essential supplies to families in late March, and Fight for Peace (2020) has been running food programmes for children and families. For more information, see: [OSCAR Foundation distributes essential supplies to families affected by COVID-19 lockdown](#)
- Fight for Peace have rolled out remote support programmes for the young people they work with as well as carrying out one-to-one mentoring check-ins by telephone. For more information see: [Safeguarding and sustainability: Our response to COVID 19](#)

v. Record and ensure recognition of the role of community sport organisations in the pandemic response, including through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data on the impact of these interventions.

As noted, community sport and sport for development organisations are supporting official and community health messaging and pandemic response outcomes across the Commonwealth. Recognition of these benefits is essential to ensure they are resourced effectively and can be relied on as part of a co-ordinated cross-sector response in the future.

These data will be valuable to use as a future advocacy tool for the contributions community sport and SfD programmes make in relation to national development outcomes. The [Sport and SDG Indicators Toolkit](#) provides specific advice on the measurement of programmatic outcomes in a consistent manner, including providing a common language for explaining the depth and type of impact of these interventions in line with the SDGs (see Table 2).

Table 2. Indicators for community-level change – Sport and SDG Category 1 Indicators

Community-level change	
24	Reach of impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. # people reached by a programme, activity or event
25	Depth of impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Connect: # people who report the programme has contributed to a preliminary change ii. Improve: # people who report the programme has contributed to improvement in their lives/community iii. Transform: # people who report the programme has contributed to an enduring change in circumstances, or for whom a significant change can be observed
26	Type of impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Awareness/knowledge: # people reporting improved awareness, knowledge or understanding as a result of the programme ii. Self-efficacy: # people reporting the programme has contributed to improved self-efficacy as a result of the programme iii. Attitudes/behaviours: # people reporting the programme has contributed to changed attitudes or behaviours iv. Skills/effectiveness: # people demonstrating improved non-sport skills, competencies and personal effectiveness v. Well-being: # people reporting improved subjective well-being vi. Quality of life: # people or communities reporting the programme has contributed to improved quality of life

Table 3. Sport and SDG indicators with data relevant to the COVID-19 recovery

Sport & SDG Indicators	SDG	Data relevant to COVID-19 response
% of population who volunteer in sport	8.3, 8.6.1	Volunteer mobilisation in the face of the pandemic and impacts on the volunteer workforce
% of workforce within the sport, fitness and active recreation sector	8.5	Employment impacts of the pandemic on the sport, fitness and active recreation sector
# of national sport bodies using sport to communicate health messaging	3.1–3.5	Number of sport bodies communicating public health messaging and/or physical activity messaging to their communities and the reach of the communication
A recent (previous two years) national community-wide public education campaign for sport, fitness or active recreation has been implemented to support participation behaviour change	3.4.1	The number of impressions/views of community-wide campaign to promote physical activity in lockdown
The extent to which a national knowledge exchange and learning forums exist to share insights on SDP	17.14.1	The extent to which knowledge exchange platforms are activated in relation to the pandemic response
# of formally registered NGOs providing services related to sport, physical education and physical activity (including SDP actors)	17.17.1	Impacts of the pandemic on the number of formally registered NGOs providing services related to sport, physical education and physical activity

As well as providing a methodology for measuring programmatic impact, the Sport and SDG Indicators include a number of indicators with linked data sources. These may be relevant in the co-ordination of any CS and SfD involvement in the face of the pandemic.

Critical reflection questions

Recommendation 1: *Ensure clear, accessible and timely public health messaging.*

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How has clear, accessible and timely public health messaging around COVID-19 been developed? Has it been disseminated to ensure that CS members have the information they need to make healthy and safe decisions that affect their members and communities?

- How have current public health messages been relayed to the leaders of CS organisations who are in a position to act on them, and have they been provided in a clear and timely manner?
- What method or avenue is in place for public health messages to be relayed from CS organisations to their members? These include: listservs, social media, etc.
- What plan is being implemented for regular updating of communications, given the changing and shifting nature of the COVID-19 public health messages?
- How have the leaders been consulted on the content and avenues of such communication and how have communications been revised accordingly?

Recommendation 2: *Support CS and SfD organisations to build safe and supportive community networks.*

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How are CS and SfD organisations being actively encouraged and supported by policy-makers to prioritise safe and supportive community networks?
- How have areas of potential community isolation or conflict been discussed and identified, such that CS and SfD organisations might target them?
- How have online communication networks been extended to, and maintained with, community members to ensure networks continue?

Recommendation 3: Recognise the valuable role and platform of sport organisations in the community and ensure they are recognised in response planning, resourcing and long-term sustainability planning.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How has the value, role and platform of sport organisations in the community been acknowledged publicly? Possible outlets include: government messaging, community outreach, listservs, social media, etc.
- How have community sport organisations and stakeholders been recognised, included, and consulted in response planning, resourcing and long-term sustainability planning?
- How has community sport and the sport for development sector workforce been acknowledged and supported through financial

support schemes? Has the informal sport workforce been supported through financial support schemes?

- How have community sport and SfD volunteers been consulted, encouraged and supported to assist with community service and maintain current community connections?

Recommendation 4: Consider and rethink the role of SfD organisations in terms of their co-ordination, regulation and funding.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How have the roles of SfD organisations been considered in terms of their co-ordination, regulation and funding capacities?
- How have the roles of SfD organisations been considered in terms of the important social services they provide to community members?
- What new sources of funding have been directed towards SfD to facilitate their delivery of social services to community members?
- How have relevant case studies or best practice from CS and SfD been shared with other organisations?
- How have other experiences in dealing with previous pandemics (e.g., Ebola in 2014) or other states of emergency been utilised or drawn upon to support CS or SfD organisations?



7. Return to Activity

Return to activity or return to play concerns efforts to restart sport and physical activity during lockdown and following the easing of restrictions and reduced threat from COVID-19. This section outlines guidelines, criteria to ensure a safe and well managed return to community sport, in a way that also welcomes new participants and maximises the scaled benefit from participation in sport and physical activity.

Overview

At the community sport level, the emphasis on return to play has been driven on the one hand, by the desire, on the part of public health agencies, parents and many participants, to return to play only when safe to do so; and on the other hand, by the politically popular wish to restart the economy in general, including the community sport economy (clubs, gyms, dojos, golf courses and so on), and the population health imperative of increasing participation.

There is some tension between these two. People are anxious to return to work and recreation, and governments recognise that permitting a return to activity is not only popular, but necessary for an increase in health-enhancing participation. At the same time, public health and medical officials have warned against 'jumping the gun'. As a consequence of uncertainty associated with the pandemic, a widespread desire to restart the economy, and an increasing number of infections, some countries and regions which had begun to restart their economies and return to activity were obliged to step back (e.g., at the time of writing, parts of Australia, the UK and the USA; and Israel, Spain and Mexico), even in some cases to return to lockdown.

In most cases, government return to activity guidelines have been a part of a more general phased reopening of the economy, based on criteria derived from the rate of spread of COVID-19. Specific guidelines are often produced by municipalities, local boards of health and also sport organisations.

Ministers supported the phased return to play during the 2020 Commonwealth Ministerial Forum on Sport and COVID-19, where ministers commended the efforts and leadership of Commonwealth countries who had developed protocols and risk mitigation strategies to support a safe return to sport and physical activity. It was noted that any return would 'require formulation and communication of methodical, well-planned, and evidence-based approaches to restart sport, in adherence with the guidance of the World Health Organization (WHO) and regional national and local public health authorities' (2020, para. 4).

Objectives

The key objectives are as follows:

- Return to activity and encourage new activity, to begin as soon as is safely possible after restrictions are imposed
- Develop phased activity guidelines (including indoor activities) to support safe physical activity at all levels/stages of restriction (based on public health advisory)
- Outline clearly and communicate how to participate in safe outdoor physical activity when possible
- Develop a phased plan for full return to physical activity, detailing opportunities for sport and physical activity at all levels of lockdown (based on public health advisory)
- Broadly communicate the need for increased physical activity as a population health strategy

- Clearly lay out and communicate these phased plans for broad public understanding and compliance

Detailed actions

i. **Develop staged guidelines for reduced restrictions on the sport and recreation sector/return to play, under the guidance of a medical officer of health and/or public health experts.**

Return to activity guidelines have been developed by national sport agencies, by specific sport governing bodies, by local and regional governments, and by public health agencies. Examples for one jurisdiction, Ontario, Canada, include: Government of Ontario Stages 1, 2 and 3 (2020a, 2020b, 2020c), in which return to activity guidelines are part of a larger framework for reopening the economy (at the time of writing, Stage 3 was just beginning to come into effect in many parts of the province; Stage 3 still precludes, for example, 'prolonged or deliberate contact while playing sports'); local municipality boards of health guidelines, which are continually being updated (e.g., Ottawa Public Health, 2 July 2020); and sport-specific guidelines such as Athletics Canada's (2020) *Back on Track*.

Return to activity guidelines have usually been developed under the guidance of medical officers of health and public health experts. It is important that these strategies and guidelines factor in the risk of a return to sport, and that they outline mitigation strategies.

Action list

<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop staged guidelines for reduced restrictions on the sport and recreation sector, under the guidance of a medical officer of health and/or public health experts.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish criteria for phased reopening, such as a specified number of days without an increase in cases (flattening the curve) or an ongoing reduction in the number of cases.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage safe forms of physical activity first, such as exercise at home, active transport (such as walking or cycling) or outdoor activity with social distancing.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide clear advice on the use of parks and public spaces, and take measures to ensure these spaces are safe for use.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage the development of phased individual sport return to play guidelines and support this development.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop protocols for the phased reopening of indoor facilities in a safe manner.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop a communication strategy to encourage safe physical activity as a population health strategy.

Some key elements for these plans have emerged. These include:

- Requirements for providing a safe environment for sport and recreation
- Social distancing measures and limitations on crowds
- Enforcement of social distancing measures
- Cleaning protocols
- Measures for staff safety
- Athlete education arrangements
- Governance and accountability arrangements for sport bodies and organisations, such as appointing a COVID-19 safety co-ordinator
- Requirements for a limited reopening where shared space is reduced
- Preparations for a rapid response in the face of another wave or outbreak of the disease
- Sustaining these practices to ensure the health of all participants and others present

Examples:

A wide range of return to activity guidelines may be found on the Commonwealth Innovation website, [Sport and the coronavirus](#). Specific examples include the following:

- [Sport Authority India, Standard Operating Procedure \(SOP\) for Sports Activities](#)
- [Exercise New Zealand, considerations for reopening exercise facilities](#)
- [Canadian Sport Institute Return to Sport](#)
- [Australian Institute of Sport, Return to Sport Toolkit](#)

These guidelines are also developed by specific activity sectors in some countries. For example, in Canada:

- Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE) provides return to school guidelines for physical education
- Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) provides [materials for children's physical activity at home](#)

Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) provides a series of [return to activity videos from Canadian sport organisations](#)

A number of countries have also developed separate guidelines for the return to high-performance sport training, based on considerations specific to their high-performance sport system.

The phased approach to return to sport based on reductions in risk factors is recommended, as it allows for changing levels of activity in line with changing levels of health risk. The resumption of community sport and recreation activity should take into account the different risk factors of different sports and encourage activities of the lowest risk first. Risk factors that have been identified (at the time of writing) include the size of the group participating, whether the sport involves contact or not, and whether the sport takes place indoors or outdoors.

Example:

An example of this is the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) [Framework for the reboot of sport in a COVID-19 environment](#). The AIS team, led by Chief Medical Officer, Dr David Hughes, developed the framework in collaboration with sport chief medical officers (CMOs) around Australia and in consultation with the federal government's CMOs. The framework underpins the principles, and has been adopted by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and national cabinet as the guide to reintroduce sport and recreation in Australia following the COVID-19 pandemic.

ii. Establish criteria for phased reopening, such as a specified number of days without an increase in cases (flattening the curve) or an ongoing reduction in the number of cases.

These criteria should be established by health officials and incorporated in plans and strategies relevant to the sport sector. The idea for establishing these criteria is to ensure clear and effective communication and that the approach is consistent with international and national health guidelines. The criteria to be considered in this process include:

- A consistent 2–4 week decrease in the number of new daily COVID-19 cases
- A decrease in the number of cases that cannot be traced to a source
- A decrease in the number of new cases in hospitals

- Sufficient acute and critical care capacity, including access to ventilators, to respond effectively to potential surges
- Ongoing availability of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Approximately 90 per cent of new COVID-19 contacts being reached by public health officials within one day, with guidance and direction to contain community spread
- Ongoing testing of suspected COVID-19 cases, especially among vulnerable populations, to detect new outbreaks quickly
- A shift to new ways of testing and contact tracing to promote widespread tracking of cases

Examples:

- [WHO Recommendations for Mass Gatherings](#)
- [WHO Considerations for Sport Federations](#)
- [Ontario \(2020\) Framework for Reopening Our Province](#)
- [AIS Return to Sport Toolkit](#)

iii. Encourage safe forms of physical activity first, such as exercise at home, active transport or outdoor activity with social distancing.

Initially, during the height of the pandemic, most activities took place in people's residences. These included exercises, online leadership of activities such as yoga and dance, SfD-led activities online, and the use of social media platforms such as TikTok and Facebook.

For example, StreetGames (2020) describes, 'Using TikTok to share funny ways of staying active at home; e.g., using a frying pan to practice tennis serves #SERVES (London Sports Trust)'.

Resumption of other forms of sport and recreation activity should be prioritised based on the risk of infection, taking into account local epidemiology, risk mitigation strategies, public health capabilities, and the type of sport or recreation activity. As noted previously, risk factors that have been identified include the size of the group participating (a number of nations are limiting the size of groups gathering at various phases of return to activity); whether the sport is a contact or non-contact sport; and if the activity takes place indoors or outdoors.

For countries and regions where there was a hard lockdown, the early stages of return to activity have encouraged physical activity such as solitary or physically distanced walking, running and cycling. The measures to reopen parks, and new infrastructure such as street closures and new bicycle paths, seem, at least anecdotally, to encourage new forms of physical activity among some people. Research from Sport New Zealand supports this, with almost 40 per cent of people starting or restarting sport activities during lockdown and increases seen in participation in walking, cycling and running/jogging reported in April 2020, when compared with previous years (Sport NZ 2020).

iv. Provide clear advice on the use of parks and public spaces, and take measures to ensure these spaces are safe for use.

Guidance can be developed to support the use of local infrastructure for physical activity during, and after the pandemic. The US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention for example, has provided specific advice for [visiting Parks and Recreation facilities](#) in a safe manner.

Similarly Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) provides a series of [documents, videos and webinars on outdoor activity in parks and other outdoor locations](#); see also Parks Canada for [information on national parks safe access](#).

v. Encourage the development of phased individual sport return to play guidelines and support this development.

Return to activity guidelines have been developed by international and national sport bodies that tailor advice on safe conduct specific to individual sport practices. These are valuable resources, providing context-specific guidelines relevant to particular sporting contexts and accounting for, for example, the different risk factors between contact and non-contact sports and indoor or outdoor activity. Such guidelines should, therefore, be encouraged as part of a co-ordinated sector-wide approach. This was the case in the [AIS Framework for the reboot of sport](#), which allows high-performance athletes to continue their training provided their sport organisation and facility operators have an up-to-date risk management plan in place.

Ministries responsible for sport can support sport stakeholders in developing return to play guidelines through the development of effective tools and

templates, or by signposting to international examples or frameworks established by sport federations. A number of examples can be found under 'International sport organisation policies, guidelines and advice on the [Commonwealth sport and coronavirus response page](#).

These should be promoted by CS and SfD organisations, using social and traditional media as much as possible, and especially through existing membership and communication networks. This can be facilitated through international federations' sport structures and networks.

For example, the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) has developed a [Return to Sport Toolkit](#), which includes a suite of resources and checklists to help sporting organisations prepare to recommence training, competitions and programmes in a safe, responsible and low-risk manner. This toolkit is intended for national sport organisations, state sport organisations, and community sport or participating programmes.

The toolkit outlines four elements for a safe return to sport:

1. Plan: Implementing plans, processes and systems to meet government and health requirements, and provide safe sport environments
2. Prepare: Ensuring safe facility and participant practices, like hygiene practices, attendance registers at training and limiting shared equipment, as much as possible
3. Respond: Being prepared for management of a COVID-19 outbreak, noting that things can change quickly in your local area
4. Recover: Consideration of protocols to optimise good public and participant health into the future

A [detailed checklist](#) has been developed to support the safe return to sport for large and medium sport organisations, and a [simplified checklist](#) for small sport organisations. These cover the following areas:

- Organisational structures and processes
- Required approvals
- Return to training
- Facilities
- Hygiene

- Management of illness
- Employees and volunteers

Other examples include, international sport body advice:

- [FIBA Guidelines for Return to Basketball](#)
- [PGA Health and Safety Protocol](#)
- [FIFA COVID-19 resource centre](#)
- [World Rugby Return to Play Guidelines](#)

And national sport examples:

- [Australian National Principles for return to sport and recreation](#)
- [AIS Return to Sport Toolkit](#)
- [Community Rugby Return to Play guidelines](#)
- [Athletics Canada Return to Play guidelines](#)

vi. Develop protocols for phased reopening indoor facilities in a safe manner.

In a number of contexts, strict limits were placed on access to sporting facilities. Reopening facilities is a critical element for restarting many sports. As facilities reopen, it is important that government guidelines are available to ensure they open in a safe manner.

Such guidelines should be produced in collaboration with public health officials. In many cases, they are consistent with work-place guidelines. As with all guidelines, it is likely that these will need to evolve, based on the developments of the pandemic and enhanced knowledge of the risk factors for COVID-19. At the time of writing, it seems that indoor spaces with poor ventilation pose a greater risk for infection than other settings.

Guidance includes steps taken to: manage contact; manage capacity and avoid crowds; ensure safe and distanced entry and exit; employ effective hygiene and cleaning; enable the provision of food and drink at the premises; provide effective guidance to workers, customers and others on site; and support efforts that will enable contact tracing.

The UK government recommends that a specific risk assessment is conducted by each facility and activity to identify the number of customers/ participants/spectators that may reasonably follow social distancing protocols on the premises, and the steps that can be taken to enhance safety at the facility.

Specific guidance on the reopening of indoor sport and leisure facilities, including gyms, has been issued by the following:

- [UK Government Guidance for Providers of grassroots sport and gym/leisure facilities](#)
- [Exercise New Zealand](#)

vii. Develop a communication strategy to encourage increased physical activity as a population health strategy.

Public authorities face a delicate balancing act: when to close down and discourage sport and physical activity in the interests of public safety; when to modify sport in limited environments; and when to reopen and encourage sport in the interests of population health. Yet it is important to emphasise that it will not be sufficient to return to the pre-COVID-19 status quo; that if only those who previously participated 'return to play', then the majority of the population will not have the health and resilience benefits of sport and physical activity. 'Return to play' needs to encompass 'played for the very first time'.

A broad population health strategy would encourage all citizens to engage in safe, appropriate sport and physical activity. Public agencies should plan for and undertake outreach to increase participation, while community sport and sport for development organisations should be encouraged to contribute to these efforts.

These ideas are expanded under section 9, 'building back better'.

Critical reflection questions

Recommendation 1: Provide clear public health guidelines, including explicit stages or alert levels.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How have clear public health guidelines been collected and provided?

Recommendation 2: Create sport sector frameworks and guidelines for different levels of activity, based on public health advice and working with public health officials.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- Have sport sector frameworks and guidelines been created?
- For which sports have specific frameworks and guidelines been created?
- How have these guidelines been developed in consultation with public health authorities?
- How do the guidelines take into account different levels of activity and different populations?

Recommendation 3: Prepare future planning advice that includes the provision of guidelines for safe physical activity, even during lockdown and during stages of high restriction.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How have plans for future waves of COVID-19 been prepared and communicated?

Recommendation 4: Provide reasonable means to monitor and enforce the guidelines at each stage.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How have the means for monitoring and enforcing guidelines been developed and communicated?
- How have CS and SfD organisations been consulted on the above steps and recruited to contribute to their communication and enforcement?
- What information has been developed and communicated on the social importance of compliance with public health guidelines?



8. Modifications to Programme Design and Delivery

Return to activity guidelines for sport amid the COVID-19 pandemic have generally included a staged return, with gradually decreasing modifications toward the goal of 'normal' activity. This section discusses some of the modifications required in relation to programme design and delivery towards the goal of eventually returning to activity. This includes key considerations for enhanced remote delivery (including online, radio and television).

Overview

The most significant modification has been the shift to online formats for instruction, coaching, exercise leadership and so on. (It is important to note the associated limitations of such shifts, which are contingent on internet availability and reliability.)

A second key modification has been the adaptation of activities to honour physical distancing guidelines

(established at 2 metres [m] in many places). This is leading to changes in the way that sports are played. It also has the potential for the emergence of new forms of games, sports, dances and exercise systems that respect distancing guidelines.

There are two key considerations for supporting and implementing the above modifications:

- *Available internet access and equipment to establish access:* Without such access, it is not possible to make the shift from face-to-face to online programming.
- *Potential participants' familiarity with internet access and use:* If potential participants (e.g., young children or those with no computer availability at home or in school, older people, persons with a disability) are unwilling or unable to learn, then it is necessary to find alternatives or 'work-arounds'. (See those described below, under consideration by Active Mauritius, as particularly good examples).

Objectives

The key objectives are as follows:

- Maintain community sport and sport for development operations during physical distancing and other pandemic restrictions
- Maintain and promote physical activity levels and the other benefits that derive from sport-based programming during the pandemic
- Encourage innovative delivery methodologies to maximise the benefit the sport sector can provide
- Encourage appropriate and safe modifications to sport and physical activity programmes, and maintain a record of those modifications and of innovations developed by participants themselves, for future reference

Detailed actions

i. Identify target populations and ensure that any sport programme modifications are made with their needs and contextual factors in mind, including access to and familiarity with technology.

The comfort and ease with which online and modified programmes can be accessed differs by region, and may vary by class, gender, ability and age, among other factors. Such challenges are exacerbated by the unequal availability of high-speed internet and smart phones, from country to country and region to region across the Commonwealth. Even when a signal is available,

conditions may make its use difficult; for example, when several people in a spatially cramped household all rely on a single computer or smart phone, they may not be able to engage in activity programmes. As the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2020) has noted, access to high-speed internet is marked by inequality. Despite widespread advocacy of the internet as a democratising and equalising force, lack of access may further reproduce social inequalities. As such, it is also important to consider other modifications and modes of delivery during lockdown conditions.

Example:

Pro Sport Development (personal communication, 21 June 2020) in Odisha, India, noted the scarcity of smart phones and broadband internet as a major obstacle in modifying and adapting its community sport initiative to online delivery. However, in partnership with the Martha Farrell Foundation, Pro Sport Development has produced *Kadam Badhaate Chalo* (KBC), an initiative to spread awareness about sexual violence against women and girls. Its [online programming](#) has been able to reach children across India, involving them in building campaigns through Zoom. This exercise offers insights into what might be possible if internet access was more equitably distributed.

ii. Consider the local context, cultural factors and trends when planning modifications to programmes, such as the rise of digital innovation and use of mobile technology in low- and middle-income countries.

Action list

<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify target populations and ensure that any sport programme modifications are made with their needs and contextual factors in mind, including access to and familiarity with technology and, where feasible, with full consultation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider the local context, cultural factors and trends to support modification to delivery, such as the rise of digital innovation and use of mobile technology in low- and middle-income countries.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Explore low-cost production channels and use of existing infrastructure, such as international, national, regional and local sport networks and platforms online, on TV and on radio.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create a conducive environment to support delivery and innovation in order to maintain community engagement.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhance risk assessment protocols and modifications to maintain physical distancing during activity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintain a record of modifications and adaptations made to sport and physical activity, both by CS and SfD organisers and by participants themselves, for future reference.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Support CS and SfD organisations to provide a safe environment adapted to online and other modalities and accounting for new risks.

Adaptations and modifications should be made, keeping particular local cultures, contexts and structures in mind. This requires an understanding of target populations, their knowledge, skills and preferences for consumption of physical activity, as well as utilisation and familiarity with innovative communication channels. Supporting modifications with effective data and insights is a valuable contribution that ministries responsible for sport can make, particularly when integrating these modifications into the national/sectoral response to COVID-19.

Collaboration with national statistics offices, and other bodies familiar with official statistics, may assist in providing insights in this regard. Alternative approaches to collect this information include targeted surveys or focus group discussions to gain better insight into sample populations.

Examples:

In Namibia, for example, a mix of existing data and adaptations to the national census, along with mobile survey technology, is being utilised to understand the sport and physical activity trends and behaviours of the country's population. In Australia, the sport market research firm, Gemba, conducted a [survey of Australian's physical activity behaviour and preferences](#) during lockdown; this revealed different perceptions of new forms of physical activity during lockdown, and various opinions around using the internet to stay fit (see Figure 2).

As Figure 2 shows, Australian women in the sample are more likely than men to 'love new and innovative ways people can stay fit during the lockdown' (more than 40 per cent of respondents), suggesting that this may be an effective channel for engaging women.

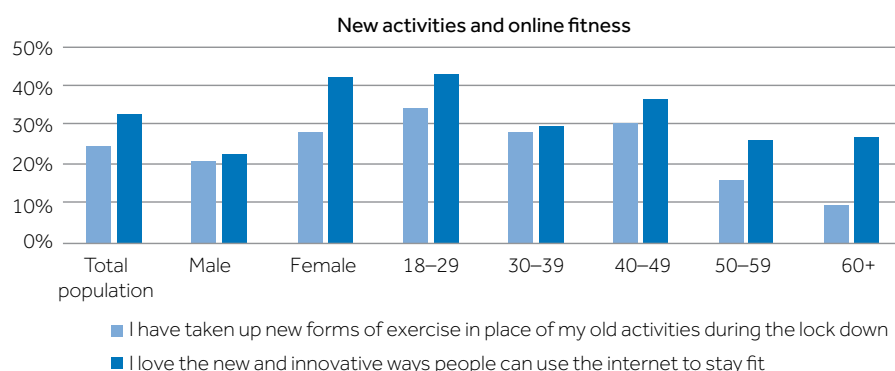
It is important to use these insights to guide initiatives intended to support physical activity for a specific population. Such insights can also guide modifications to programmes and modes of delivery, which may include online platforms as well as publicly available mass communication channels such as TV and radio. This was the case with a fitness programme for older people in Mauritius, as outlined in the example below.

Example:

The [Active Mauritius 'Elderly Fitness' programme](#) was created to raise awareness of the benefits of physical activity among older populations, and was specifically designed for seniors. While broadband access is quite good, many of the participants were not familiar with communications technologies. As Dr Baptiste (personal communication, 17 June 2020) noted, 'for that issue we are still thinking how but we might ask the care person of the elder to help, or we have asked the IT guys to make it as elder friendly as possible'.

Further modifications are being introduced, including the introduction of 'downloadable infographics of all the exercises' to take advantage of the fact that 'all the elders have a quite recent mobile phone nowadays' [and] 'they can download the infographic and use it'. If access is still a problem, the plan is to work with the different senior citizen councils to provide the downloads and print the infographics. Finally, Active Mauritius has a one-hour time slot, daily, on the local television sports channel (YS-tv). It is 'planning to have video sessions, live or recorded, delivered through this channel and have the elders tune in at the appropriate time'.

Figure 2. New activities and online fitness (Gemba 2020)



iii. Explore low-cost production channels and use of existing online infrastructure, such as international, national, regional and local sport networks and platforms.

When and wherever low-cost online infrastructure is already in place, it may be adapted to support modifying the delivery of sport programmes. A key strength of the sport sector includes existing networks and champion teams or individual athletes with a large following of fans. This, in combination with the ever-expanding use of mobile networks and social media platforms in professional and high-performance sport, can enable wide-spread engagement and awareness at a low cost.

Examples:

The All India Football Federation launched the #FitWithIndianFootball campaign (PTI 2020) in April 2020, in an attempt to inspire and promote fitness among fans when the entire country was locked down as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Over the course of the month, the campaign garnered 1.56 million impressions across social media platforms and saw wide participation, both male and female, from across all age groups in India. The campaign featured well-known names from Indian football, past and present, demonstrating and explaining exercises that could be executed safely at home with a football and, in the process, encouraging fans to do the same to stay fit and healthy. For further information, see: [All India Football Federation campaign](#).

The Indian Sport Minister, Kiren Rijju, has launched a campaign to encourage citizens to run on the spot in their own homes or outside on their own as a way to strengthen their health. For further information, see: [Hindu Times Article on Fit India Freedom Run](#)

Other examples of where the sport sector has mobilised its networks to support the COVID-19 response are available through the Commonwealth Coronavirus Response Centre: [Helping the Community through Sport](#).

iv. Create a conducive environment to support delivery and innovation in order to maintain community engagement.

Prioritising community engagement is also important, given that many CS and Sfd organisations are significant anchors for

participants and community members. Approaches to modifying sport should be conducted with the goal of maintaining community engagement as much as possible.

Example:

For example, Toronto Women's Run, a two decades' old organisation devoted to encouraging women to run and support each other, has substituted virtual races for its annual calendar, and [initiated a new event, '416', to reach out to women who have not already participated](#). '416' (the main Toronto area code) challenges participants to walk or run a total of 416 kilometres over the next year. Toronto Women's Run links participants to other women as a way of maintaining and strengthening community.

v. Enhance risk assessment protocols and modifications to maintain physical distancing during activity.

New and enhanced risk assessment protocols will likely be needed to ensure that physical distancing is maintained during physical activity. In some cases, this might require the modification of activities themselves. The shift to physical distancing is leading to changes in the way sports are played, and has the potential to enable the emergence of new forms of games, sports, dances and exercise systems that respect distancing guidelines.

Example:

See, for example, [physically distanced futsal](#). Extensive observations in Toronto city parks, since they reopened, has seen the emergence of such innovative forms of activity, ranging from dancing to slacklining, and many activities not seen before. There are also examples of Sfd organisations developing new games and drills that maintain physical distancing. For example, Coaches Across Continents' (CAC) series of soccer-based game drills also provides information about staying free from COVID-19.

Risk assessment protocols are context-specific and should be guided by up-to-date public health guidance and national regulations or restrictions. Examples of risk considerations during COVID-19 include: the current state of the pandemic and infection rates; and mitigating sport- or facility-specific risks by ensuring procedures such as cleaning protocols and social distancing measures. These are covered in more detail under

the Section 7 'Return to activity' guidelines above. The [Australian Institute of Sport Return to Sport Toolkit](#) provides a number of useful resources and tools to support this risk assessment process.

Further information can be found on Commonwealth Moves: [Commonwealth Guidance on health, risk assessment and safeguarding considerations](#).

vi. Maintain a record of modifications and adaptations developed by sport and physical activity organisations, and by participants, for future reference.

SfD organisations might use the context of COVID-19 to develop new games and drills that maintain physical distancing. These can then be used in future programming.

Example:

Coaches Across Continents has introduced a series of soccer-based game drills that also provide information about staying free from COVID-19. Also, Right to Play (RtP) has been striving to keep children mentally strong during the COVID-19 pandemic by 'drawing upon their (RtP) experience in conflict zones to interact with children, parents and teachers to "deliver health and psychosocial support activities", through modifications to their "PLAY" programme so that children can organise games themselves' (Right to Play 2020).

Information is also available at the [Commonwealth Moves web portal](#). The portal provides ideas to support countries in creating and modifying policies and modes of delivery in sport and physical activity programmes, so that they comply with guidance on social distancing, hygiene and safety protocols. Collaborating organisations include:

- Sport for Life, Canada: [Staying Physically Active Through the Life Cycle](#)
- Active Mauritius: [Elderly Fitness](#)
- Coaches Across Continents: [Mental Health Through Sport and Physical Activity](#)
- Pro Sport Development and Martha Farrell Foundation, India: [Gender Equality through Sport](#)
- Dynamic Development Solutions, South Africa and Namibia: [Life Skills Through Sport and Physical Activity](#)

vii. Support CS and SfD organisations to provide a safe environment adapted to online and other modalities and accounting for new risks.

The move to online programming by many CS and SfD organisations presents a new set of risks unique to the online environment. It is important that these are taken into account and that governments are able to support and enable the sector to provide these modifications safely.

In many instances, this will require the development of specific online safeguarding tools and resources that are tailored to the specific risks and challenges of the online environment. These include:

- Online sexual abuse
- Cyberbullying
- Risk-taking online behaviour
- Potentially harmful content
- Privacy risks

A number of examples of how CS and SfD organisations have adapted their programmes and safeguarding strategies to the COVID-19/online environment are available on [Commonwealth Moves: Implications of COVID-19 for Community Sport and Physical Activity](#).

Example:

Pro Sport Development and the Martha Farrell Foundation have developed Sport Against Gender Inequality: [Safeguarding and COVID-19 guidelines](#). This includes specific guidelines on cyberbullying and online harassment, identifying online risks to children and best practice to ensure online safeguarding.

Additional resources:

- [Commonwealth Guidance on health, risk assessment and safeguarding considerations](#)
- UNICEF has developed advice for [keeping children safe online during COVID-19](#), which can be adapted to the CS and SfD environment

Critical reflection questions

Recommendation 1: *Identify target populations and ensure that any modifications are made with their needs and contextual factors in mind, including access to and familiarity with technology.*

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How have particular groups, populations or communities been identified, and their needs assessed, prior to modifications being implemented?
- Have particular groups, populations or communities been consulted, where possible and/or appropriate?
- How has remote access, including the internet, TV and radio, been assessed and considered in the planning and implementation of modifications to sport and SfD programmes?

Recommendation 2: Take the local context, cultural factors and trends into consideration to support modification to delivery, such as the rise of digital innovation and use of mobile technology

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- What features of the local context or culture might be utilised in planning and implementing modifications to sport and SfD programmes?
- What features of the local context or culture might present complications or barriers to the planning and implementing of modifications to sport and SfD programmes?

Recommendation 3: Explore low-cost production channels and use of existing online infrastructure, such as international, national, regional and local sport networks and platforms.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- What digital and internet technology is already in place that might be utilised in the planning and implementing of modifications to sport and SfD programmes?
- In particular, what part of this type of infrastructure is already dedicated to sport, and therefore might be particularly amenable to support the planning and implementing of modifications to sport and SfD programmes?

Recommendation 4: Ensure that modifications take into account and address the current circumstances and needs in relation to the pandemic and improved hygiene measures.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- What are the current circumstances and needs in relation to the pandemic and improved hygiene measures?
- What modifications to sport and SfD now being discussed or implemented are likely to improve hygiene, and therefore support reducing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Recommendation 5: Enhance risk assessment protocols and modifications to enhance physical distancing during activity.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How have the current risk assessment protocols and modifications, intended to enhance physical distancing during activity, been carried out; do they draw on current public health policies and messages?
- How do the modifications to sport and SfD that are being discussed align with the protocols on physical distancing?
- How have these protocols been incorporated into the proposed modifications to sport and SfD?

Recommendation 6: Pursue effective impact measurement and a results-based approach to the delivery of modifications.

Questions to ask/steps to take:

- How has a plan been developed to measure the delivery and impact of modifications to sport and SfD?
- What plan or timeline is in place for reviewing, and where appropriate revising, the modifications to sport and SfD based on the results of this measurement?



9. Building Back Better

This section outlines key considerations for the community sport and sport for development sectors in building back following the restrictions associated with COVID. This includes consideration of potential reforms for community sport and sport for development to enhance equality, inclusion and access to sport while responding to social transformations including digitalisation, urbanisation and environmental sustainability.

Overview

The restrictions associated with COVID-19 have given many people in sport, and in society in general, time to reflect. In particular, there is widespread hope that, during rebuilding from the pandemic, that we will be able to build back better. As Das and Gaiind (2020) argue: 'To emerge stronger from this crisis, it is necessary to acknowledge and address the inherent inequalities in sports that discriminate on the basis of body, gender, sexuality, age, ability,

caste, race, tribe, location, class and religion'. This is a damning critique of the current sport systems in many countries, where they are widely seen as inequitable and exclusive, while unsafe and harmful to many participants.

The call is timely during a pandemic, because greater participation in CS and recreational physical activity is strongly related to individual and public health. The overarching theme for rebuilding sport concerns how to make it more accessible to more people – to overcome barriers to participation with a more equitable and inclusive sport system.

The call is not only supported by Commonwealth sport ministers, but a coalition of United Nations agencies, including the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN Women, the World Health Organization, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ILO, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the UN Children's

Fund (UNICEF), and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children.

Sustaining the *status quo* and returning to 'normal' is not an option. If sport and recreational physical activity are to become part of a more widespread and comprehensive system of public health, let alone provide sport for all as a basic human right as promised in the [International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport](#) [Article 1: The practice of physical education, physical activity and sport is a fundamental right for all], and many other human rights commitments, it is necessary to build back better.

Objectives

The key objectives are as follows:

- A significant, measurable contribution of sport to sustainable development (Kazan Action Plan, Action 2) and the realisation of human rights
- Widespread recognition of the important social benefits and public health contributions of CS and SfD and statutory incentives for setting up CS and SfD organisations
- Ring-fenced budget and resources prioritised for CS and SfD through targeted policies and by building greater resilience into the sport/physical activity system
- Measurable increases in participation, especially among low-income people, women and girls, people with a disability, older people and other populations traditionally under-represented in participation in sports and recreational physical activity
- Include CS and SfD organisations as key stakeholders in the decision-making process for public health policies
- Achieve potential solutions or considerations for policy-makers to support these outcomes in a sustainable manner
- Develop effective mechanisms to ensure participants' human rights, including the right to protection against sexual violence and other forms of maltreatment, and to provide access to remedy for those whose rights have been affected in or through sport

Action list

<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearly articulate the desired vision for the sport sector that you would like to build toward.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify the key roles and responsibilities for CS and SfD organisations towards achieving their vision, and ensure effective communication channels are in place.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Commit to overcoming the inadequacies of current sport systems by incorporating plans to build back better into all policy actions taken during the pandemic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	In order to sustain and build the resilience of the population in anticipation of subsequent waves of COVID-19 and future pandemics, start to increase the resources available to CS and SfD and allocate resources toward innovative approaches to delivery.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor, evaluate and learn from the most successful aspects of online programming, urban design, and other innovations relating to sport and physical activity emerging from the pandemic, and use these to implement plans to build back better.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop a plan for gender equality and ensure that the plan is embedded into all rebuilding plans, in coherence with existing policies and procedures and in partnership with key sectors and stakeholders.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop effective mechanisms to ensure participants' human rights, including the right to protection against sexual violence and other forms of maltreatment, and to provide access to remedy for those whose rights have been affected in or through sport.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhance national, regional and international partnerships and knowledge sharing through the sport sector.

Detailed actions

i. Articulate the desired vision for the sport sector and identify key areas for development.

COVID-19 has laid bare challenges which hampered the sector's response to the pandemic. These included issues relating to investment, the sport business model and inconsistencies in policy development. The pandemic has, however, presented an opportunity for the sector to address these areas for development through a co-ordinated and planned response to build back better.

This requires looking beyond the immediate pandemic response and emergency support, to develop a long-term vision for the sector. A road-map should be made toward achieving that vision, one which is supported by and integrated into the emergency support packages. Development of such a vision should be a collaborative and inclusive process, reflecting the needs and aspirations of all actors in the system and the local context. It should, however, be based on making sport, physical activity and physical education more inclusive, with collaborative opportunities that break down the barriers associated with poverty and social inequality, are developed with a gender lens, and ensure the human rights and safeguarding of all participants.

The Kazan Action Plan, from the Sixth International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VI), recognised that 'the 2030 Agenda [for SDGs] forms the overarching policy consensus on development priorities, goals and targets that guide international and national policy design, implementation and monitoring.' The MINEPS Sport Policy Follow-up Framework, developed by UNESCO, intends to facilitate international and multistakeholder policy convergence, ease international co-operation, and foster the capacity-building efforts of governmental authorities and sport organisations. Moreover, it was designed to identify gaps with respect to previously agreed principles, commitments and recommendations, to promote tools and good practice.

Main Policy Area I of the MINEPS Sport Policy Follow-up Framework focuses on 'Developing a comprehensive vision of inclusive access for all to sport, physical education and physical activity'. It outlines the following specific priority areas:

- I.1 Align with Sustainable Development Priorities
- I.2 Establish multistakeholder partnerships

- I.3 Foster quality physical education and active schools
- I.4 Promote research-based evidence and strengthen higher education
- I.5 Enforce gender equality/empower girls and women
- I.6 Foster the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes
- I.7 Foster empowerment and inclusive participation

Development of a coherent vision for the sector and driving policy coherence is an important enabler for the contribution of sport to sustainable development. This should be done in recognition of the local context and national sport-related policy objectives, and based on analysis of local development needs, the contributions sport can make, and existing capacities and constraints across the sector. As noted, the current pandemic has made evident a number of these capacities and constraints.

Underpinning such a vision for the sector is the requirement to:

- Prioritise and set national sport-related policy objectives
- Co-ordinate with existing sport-related policy priorities
- Ensure good governance and the integrity of the sport system
- Effective monitoring and evaluation with respect to sport policies

Resources for developing a vision for the sport sector:

- [Strengthening Sport-Related Policy Coherence](#)
- [Enhancing the Contribution of Sport to the Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- [MINEPS VI – Kazan Action Plan](#)
- [The Discussion Paper on the Implications of COVID-19 for Community Sport and Sport for Development \(2020\)](#), which identified a number of common issues

ii. Identify key roles and responsibilities for CS and SfD organisations in achieving the vision, and ensure effective communication channels are in place.

Community sport and SfD will play a critical role in delivering on the vision for the sector, and

maximising the contributions the sector makes to sustainable development. It is therefore essential that CS and SfD are engaged in the development of the vision and are committed to support its implementation at the local or national levels.

In line with previous recommendations for the COVID-19 response, this requires:

- Recognition of the role and contributions of the sector
- Establishment of two-way communication channels with the CS and SfD sectors
- Ensuring that legal structures and government frameworks support community sport and SfD organisations, and recognise their volunteer labour force and informal work arrangements

iii. Commit to overcoming the inadequacies of current sport systems by incorporating plans to build back better into all policy actions taken during the pandemic.

There is widespread support for the intent to build a more equitable and accessible system of sport and physical activity. Individuals who have had the least opportunity to participate in sport and recreational physical activity during the pandemic are also (using data from many countries) among the demographic groups much more likely to contract COVID-19 and to die from the infection. These include the elderly, racial minorities, people with the diseases of poverty, and front-line, low-paid service workers in various sectors (Mallapaty 2020).

Successful actions have been taken by some governments, communities and sport organisations to assure more equitable and accessible opportunities to participate in sport and recreational physical activity during the pandemic. These need to be sustained and expanded after the pandemic.

Example:

For example, in the case of urban design, the Canadian Urban Institute released a report on the first 100 days of responses to COVID-19 in Canada (CUI 2020). In terms of 'building back better', municipalities closed traffic lanes to reserve them for pedestrians and cyclists, and opened up roads and parks for walking, cycling and street games. This is one of the emerging success stories. As the report notes:

Cities across Canada have started to implement strategies to open more space for residents to move without compromising safety. Streetscapes are being repurposed for pedestrian and cycling use. CUI's CityWatchCanada.ca recorded that at least 11 municipalities have already put this idea into action, with more cities likely to follow. Montréal alone has provided 112 km of new walking and biking paths for their residents to move around the city (p. 22).

To the extent that urban redesign results from the pandemic, especially infrastructure that facilitates active transportation, physical recreation and informal sports, it will be one of the clearest examples of 'building back better'. See also: Barrington-Leigh (2020); and Maydianne Andrade's [Quiet Streets](#) podcast.

iv. In order to sustain and build the resilience of the population in anticipation of subsequent waves of COVID-19 and future pandemics, start to increase the resources available to CS and SfD and allocate resources toward innovative approaches to participation.

As is the case in non-pandemic times, much of the government emergency funding directed toward sport in Commonwealth countries is targeted to sustain high-performance sport, and the athletes, staff, facilities and organisations involved in high-performance sport. These emergency support packages do not address the need to make post-COVID sport safer, nor more accessible and equitable. However, there are a few exceptions. New Zealand has made emergency funding available to high-performance sport, but the government has also designated 104 million New Zealand dollars (NZ\$) to help the sport sector to rebuild in the medium term, including making changes to operating models, and NZ\$78 million to find innovative ways to deliver active recreation and sport (Wade, 2020). From the philanthropic sector, the Laureus Foundation (2020) launched the Sport for Good Response Fund to mitigate the retrenchment of funding for SfD programmes.

Research outlined previously in this policy analysis toolkit suggests that funding directed toward the CS and SfD sectors is enormously cost-effective – even to the extent of paying for itself in terms of reduced social and health support costs. To enable Commonwealth governments to develop more resilient populations in the face of future waves of

COVID-19 and other pandemics, increased support to CS and SfD is a key element in the process of building back better.

v. Monitor, evaluate and learn from the most successful aspects of online programming, urban design, and other innovations relating to sport and physical activity emerging from the pandemic, and use these to implement plans to build back better.

The importance of monitoring and evaluation to guide the response to the pandemic has been a common theme throughout this toolkit. It is also an essential element to ensure that the sport and physical activity sector can build back better and maximise its contribution to the SDGs. Indeed, the need for effective data and evidence to inform policy-making is almost universally recognised across Agenda 2030.

It is crucial to begin to collect comprehensive, national data on sport and physical activity participation, especially data differentiated by demographic characteristics such as social class, race, ethnicity, gender, age and disability. This is aligned with Action 2 of the Kazan Action Plan (MINEPS 2017), which focuses on developing 'common' indicators to measure the contribution of physical education, physical activity and sport to prioritised SDGs and targets. The development of the measurement framework and model indicators has been led and co-ordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat (2019), with the support of a global steering group comprising UNESCO, UNDESA, leading member countries and sector experts. A number of member countries and organisations are currently utilising this framework, with greater global adoption anticipated. Disaggregated data are essential to explore the nuances of class, race and gender inequality, as it relates to sport and physical activity participation. For example, it is important to ask whether the design of new city infrastructure for cycling and walking has served the entire population, including at-risk groups, or only communities with an active middle-class cycling, anti-car lobby.

In addition to physical activity-related innovations in urban design, reports indicate successful innovations in online programming and in the creation of new physical cultural forms that respect physical distancing. Online delivery of CS and SfD programming, which has been the major modification to respond to the pandemic, represents a potential opportunity for positive

future changes. However, it may be some time before we have full information about its effectiveness.

Because so many scheduled competitions and races have been cancelled, another form of innovation online has been virtual competitions, races and challenges. These include commercially driven competitions such as [Zwift races](#) in cycling – global online bike races utilising a bike trainer – and [Everesting](#) – online riding challenge featuring hill repeats anywhere in the world to reach 8,848m of climbing (the equivalent of Mt Everest). Virtual running races are being widely held, and track and field competitions involving athletes in different locations competing against each other. It is likely that we have only seen the start of an era of cultural production in this area, and it would be presumptuous to try to determine what the future may hold for virtual and distanced events. It is important to remember that such events may only be accessible to those with equipment and good broadband access. Any efforts to make such events open to 'all' would be a major step in building back better.

New research in several countries is beginning to show a move away from traditional organised sports, and toward more informal sports and activities for both children and adults. It will be important to monitor if sports that were formerly associated with youth from low-income families – street (or beach) football and hockey, playground basketball, pick-up cricket or baseball in public parks – become more widely played. The costs of organised sports, together with the lack of fun associated with 'win-at-all-costs' attitudes, are increasingly making them less attractive to young people. Other recreational sports previously more associated with middle class youth, such as Ultimate Frisbee, could be added to the informal sports repertoire, and could introduce some more gender inclusivity to informal sports.

In order not to lose this wave of physical cultural production in the area of sport and recreational physical activity, it is important to maintain a record – especially for those activities that are democratising in the sense that there are few, or no, barriers to participation.

Resources to support effective monitoring and evaluation:

- [Measuring the Contribution of sport, physical education and physical activity to the Sustainable Development Goals Toolkit and Model Indicators](#)

- [Commonwealth efforts to measure sport's contribution to the SDGs](#)
- [Sportanddev.org: Measuring the Contribution of Sport to the sustainable development goals](#)

vi. Ensure that an ambitious plan for gender equality is embedded into all rebuilding plans.

As countless studies have shown, girls and women are significantly under-represented as both participants and in leadership positions in sport and recreation in Commonwealth countries. They also generally receive significantly fewer resources and qualitatively poorer opportunities. The pandemic has only exacerbated those historic inequalities, at the cost of women and girls' health and well-being and the productivity of their societies. It is essential that 'building back better' includes an ambitious plan to tackle and reduce gender inequality in sports. There must be a gender lens to every plan to resume and rebuild.

Examples:

Canadian Women and Sport have designed [a toolkit for sport organisations to bring a gender equity lens to their COVID-19 responses](#). This includes resources for understanding the issues and capitalising on the opportunity to rethink gender equality in sport, as well as providing [a framework for gender equality](#) in decision-making, and free webinars on how to keep girls engaged even while programming is postponed.

The International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with a '[Call to Action](#)' encouraging the nearly 600 signatories to the [Brighton plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration on Women & Sport](#) to lead the world by example as they recover and rebuild. The IWG global executive identified five potential areas of concern for women and girls due to COVID-19: well-being, safety, resourcing, leadership and the sector's structure.

Similarly, YWCA Canada, a leading voice for women, girls, two-spirit and gender diverse people in Canada, have produced a [statement titled 'An extraordinary time requires extraordinary solidarity'](#). This is an important statement calling on members of the G7 to use the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic to enhance their commitment to gender equity. The statement includes,

for example: Item 3: '...governments should ensure that gender equality is front and centre of their education response. School closures will exacerbate existing gender inequalities, particularly for the poorest girls. Governments must keep all girls engaged in learning, factor in gender considerations when planning for school resumption and make good on aid commitments'.

vii. Develop effective mechanisms to ensure participants' human rights, including the right to protection against sexual violence and other forms of maltreatment, and to provide access to remedy for those whose rights have been violated in or through sport.

Sport has long promoted an inclusive, humanitarian approach and proclaimed policies that promise human rights to all participants. As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2020) recently reported, no sport body has an effective mechanism to actually protect those rights, let alone provide a remedy for those whose rights have been violated through sport. It is only nation states that currently have the power and responsibility to intervene to protect participants' human rights.

COVID-19 has exacerbated racism, hate speech and scapegoating, with certain groups being wrongly perceived as more likely to spread COVID-19. Moreover, gender-based violence in sport has increased under the conditions of confinement.

Commonwealth ministers responsible for sport recognised the 'pandemic's negative impact on progress made with regard to promoting gender equality, non-discrimination, enhancing accessibility and inclusion, safeguarding athletes and participants and protecting the integrity of sport' at the [Commonwealth Ministerial Forum on Sport and COVID-19](#) (2020a, para. 10). Ministers also went on to condemn all forms of 'racism and discrimination and highlighted the importance of joined up action by governments, sport organisations and civil society, in and through sport, to confront this systemic and structural issue' (2020, para. 12).

To this end, progress made on the [Commonwealth Consensus Statement on Promoting Human Rights in and through Sport](#) (Commonwealth Sport Ministers 2020b) was supported, along with commitments to strengthen language that

condemns racism and discrimination. Building on this statement will take a multipronged, collective strategy to effectively address these challenges.

viii. Enhance national, regional and international partnerships and knowledge sharing through the sport sector.

At the 2020 Sport Ministers Forum on Sport and COVID-19, ministers welcomed the opportunity to 'share learnings and good practice on policies and approaches to sustainably resource sport and enable its contribution to social and economic development, as well as promoting physical activity and well-being in the context of COVID-19, and acknowledged the value that the diversity of Member Countries planning together provided' ([Forum Statement 2020, para. 3](#)).

This is further emphasised in the Kazan Action Plan, through the recognition of ministers 'that international cooperation is critical to ensuring that inequalities between different countries' sport policy deployment capabilities be reduced' (MINEPS 2017).

This policy analysis tool is based on this notion of sharing good practice and key learnings in the face of this unprecedented and uncertain global situation. While respecting the unique national and local contexts and the need for context-specific responses, sharing best practice tools and resources from other countries allows these tools to be adapted and localised. Ministers resolved to continue to share good practice and key learnings through the Commonwealth Coronavirus Response Centre during the 2020 Sport Ministers Forum on Sport and COVID-19.

Co-operation outside of the sport sector is also vital, as Commonwealth member states respond to the pandemic. It requires an integrated, multisector approach reflecting that the pandemic is affecting all sectors. Establishing collaborative partnerships with health and social policy agencies and across all levels of government is vital, with particular emphasis placed on the up-to-date guidance from ministries and authorities responsible for health (e.g., the [WHO guidance on COVID-19](#)).

Finally, it is important to recognise the opportunity to collaborate with the academic sector. In addition to carrying out research, universities provide an ideal forum for academic discussions and community engagement on important topics such as the effects of the pandemic on sport and

recreational physical activity. We remind ourselves, and urge our colleagues at universities across the Commonwealth, to consider organising forums like the session on Sport after COVID-19 at the Department of Sport, University of the West Indies (University of the West Indies Mona Media, 2020).

Critical reflection questions

Recommendation 1: Establish a collective vision for the future of the sport sector to guide 'building back better' and identify key areas for development.

Questions to ask/steps to take

- How have CS and SfD stakeholders been engaged in development of the vision for the sector, and how has a sense of collective ownership been established?
- To what extent has the pandemic response been able to look toward the future of the sector and take steps to support the long-term sustainability and capability of the sector?
- How have innovative approaches and new ways of working been encouraged?

Recommendation 2: Commit to overcoming the inadequacies of current sport systems by incorporating plans to build back better into all policy actions taken during the pandemic.

Questions to ask/steps to take

- How have previous research, and reports about the inadequacies of current systems, been addressed in plans for building back better?
- How have representatives of under-represented groups and the public providers of CS and SfD been consulted in the development of plans for the resumption and renewal of sport?

Recommendation 3. Maintain a record of the most successful aspects of online programming, urban design, and other innovations relating to sport and physical activity emerging from the pandemic. Use these in the implementation of plans to build back better.

Questions to ask/steps to take

- To what extent has there been a comprehensive, community-based analysis of the responses to the pandemic, involving those who took part, those who could not or did not, and the various providers, to assess the recent innovations?

Recommendation 4: Increase the resources available to CS and SfD.

Questions to ask/steps to take

- How have the social, economic and health cost benefits of new investment in CS and SfD as a public health measure been analysed?
- Have disproportionate funding levels between elite and community sport been revisited and reconsidered in the design and implementation of the return to sport?

- To what extent has emergency funding support been allocated to future innovations and the development of the sector?

Recommendation 5: Embed a plan for gender equality in all rebuilding plans.

Questions to ask/steps to take

- How have equity and inclusion issues been considered in the design and implementation of the return to sport?
- How has an explicit gender equality lens been incorporated?
- How have women participants and sport leaders been consulted?



10. Conclusion

COVID-19 has challenged public health providers, governments, citizens, corporations, and the institutions and organisations of civil society in unprecedented ways.

In the majority of countries, governments as well as sporting bodies could have been better prepared. After recent experiences with HIV/AIDS, SARS, H1N1 and Ebola, infectious disease specialists urged comprehensive pandemic planning, but implementation of key measures was limited. A more comprehensive strategy for population health, including inclusive, democratically planned, comprehensive opportunities for sport and physical activity, could have ensured better health and resilience within societies, supported by stronger networks of community support.

It is incredibly complicated to predict and prepare for large-scale unforeseen challenges such as a pandemic. This is true across various facets of societies across the Commonwealth – including healthcare systems, governments, economies, school and childcare institutions, and sports and

physical activity – as well as a variety of other stakeholders ranging from the sub-national to the global level. That being said, the pandemic has exposed not only the degree of unpreparedness across most systems, but also the gross inequalities of contemporary societies and the resultant social tensions and costs. Alongside heroic medical and public health interventions, record levels of emergency government income support, and the emergence of innovative approaches to recreation, we have also seen a new period of social questioning, introspection and, in many cases, new grounds for protest.

The virus continues to spread in many parts of the world with an unpredictability that continues to confound the public health experts, and decision makers who are struggling to strike an appropriate balance between preventive measures including large-scale lockdowns, and economic stability. Since the onset of the pandemic, every passing day has seemingly resulted in a new inquest at all levels across all systems. Until reliable vaccines

are effectively distributed, the pandemic will continue to dominate the public agenda across Commonwealth countries.

Commonwealth ministers responsible for sport have called for greater collaboration and shared learning in dealing with the initial pandemic response, along with the longer term impacts emerging from restrictions instituted as preventive measures. In particular, ministers have called for collective action to focus on strategies and approaches to sustainably resource sport and ensure its contribution to sustainable development is maximised, while supporting the overall recovery of Commonwealth countries in the wake of COVID-19 (Commonwealth Sport Ministers, 2020a). This toolkit goes some way towards sharing successful practices from across the Commonwealth to ensure all countries have access to quality global tools and information that can then be adapted and applied in a manner specific to their context.

The recommendations above focus on different phases of the pandemic response and include actions aimed at containing the spread of the virus; mobilising community sport and sport for development to support the response; guiding the return to activity; modified programme design and delivery; and, building back better from the pandemic and associated restrictions.

Despite the broad research and review that has informed this toolkit, the evolving characteristics of the pandemic make providing stable and fixed recommendations difficult. This is where establishing strong national and international communications will be essential for the continued sharing of key learnings and approaches.

Above all, this document focuses on two vital goals: ensuring that community sport and sport for development programmes are conducted in ways that are completely safe and contribute to the overall health and well-being of participants and their communities; and putting in place the mechanisms for required planning and consultation

that can bring about much more inclusive, democratic and comprehensive opportunities for ongoing and future participation in sport and physical activity.

Core to the response is the recognition of community sport and sport for development as significant aspects of public health, and acknowledgement that poverty and other markers of social inequality such as gender, disability and race/ethnicity, are key social determinants of ill health. Those same markers of social inequality are strongly related to limited participation in sport and recreational physical activity.

Ideally, future planning for the any subsequent waves of COVID-19, future pandemics, and any other widespread states of that lead to the closure of opportunities to participate in sport and healthy physical activity will build on the learnings from the first wave. This should include strengthened community sport and SfD right now as crucial components of population health and a key part of public health preparedness. Part of this will be addressing inequalities highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic and ensuring the sector can build back better in a manner that ensures no one is left behind.

Historians now liken COVID-19 to the influenza epidemic that followed World War 1, the cholera attacks of the early modern period and the Black Death that brought the Middle Ages to a close. They point out that pandemics can lead to social collapse or 'shake up the way people think' to stimulate progressive change. Gianna Pomata, Professor Emerita in the History of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University, has pointed out that 'the Black Death really marks the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of something else'. That something else was the Renaissance (quoted in Wright 20 July 2020, p. 18).

We would like to see the COVID-19 pandemic mark a Renaissance in broadly based participation in sport and physical activity.



Glossary

Better: More activity and more inclusive activity opportunities, especially collaborative opportunities that break down the barriers associated with social inequality, are developed with a gender lens, and ensure the human rights and safeguarding of all participants.

Community sport: A broad definition includes all manner of individual and group (team, club, informal group) participation in traditional sports and recreational physical activities within a community. This also includes dance of all kinds (including dancing alone in front of a screen) and exercise systems (ranging from tai chi to Zumba, which can be practised alone or in socially distanced groups).

Sport for development: '...the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialisation of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and intercultural exchange and conflict resolution' (Lyras and Welty Peachey 2011, p. 311).

Health: '...a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (WHO, 1948).

Public/population health: The health of the population as a whole. The Public Health Agency of Canada says 'its activities focus on preventing disease and injuries, promoting good physical and mental health, and providing information to support informed decision making' (see: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html>).

Safeguarding: The US Center for Safe Sport describes safe sport as 'safeguard[ing] athletes from bullying, harassment, hazing, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and sexual misconduct'. (Kerr et al. 2020, p 3).

Human rights: 'Human rights are moral principles and norms of social behaviour that are now widely considered to be the *natural* entitlement of all humans' (Donnelly 2019, p. 142). Hunt (2007) argues that the success of human rights lies in the fact that it is no longer possible to pretend that some humans are less human than others.



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