

# The State of Play in India Initiative



**Discussion brief**

February 2023



**Sports and Society  
Accelerator**

Building India's Sports Stack

**Dalberg**

41% of Indian adults don't get adequate physical activity today

# A fully active India by 2047 will see

MACRO-ECONOMIC BENEFITS

UPTO **\$50 BILLION PER ANNUM**

HEALTH BENEFITS

UPTO **\$17 BILLION PER ANNUM**

through reduced expenditure on non-communicable diseases



PRODUCTIVITY BENEFITS  
UPTO **\$28 BILLION PER ANNUM**

through reduced absenteeism and presenteeism costs

Others: • SOCIAL COHESION • COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT • LIFE SKILLS

While these estimates are for adults, physical activity has numerous advantages across the entire population.

To make India universally active we have to:



INCREASE AWARENESS



CHANGE MINDSETS



INCREASE ACCESS TO INFRA AND FACILITIES



GENERATE LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES



INCREASE FUNDING



TRACK OUTCOMES BEYOND PERFORMANCE



\*Estimates are based on past studies by WHO, The Lancet, RAND Europe, and PJM Economics UK

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## Physical Activity for all: The \$50 Billion per year opportunity

**Increasing physical activity (PA) and sport participation are widely recognised as key social impact interventions.** Through recent research, a greater understanding of the wide-ranging benefits of PA and sport has emerged across jurisdictions and demographics. In fact, a growing literature has shown that participation in sport and PA can have personal health benefits beyond the physical and can significantly improve mental and social health. Regular PA has been shown to reduce the risk of several non-communicable diseases including coronary heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers, obesity, to delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease and dementia, to increase lifespan, enhance a sense of wellbeing and community, and increase productivity.

**The potential socio-economic gains from increased PA are significant.** The positive impact of increased PA in the population is particularly important for health systems. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) cause 71 percent of worldwide deaths each year – including more than 15 million premature deaths for those aged 30 to 69 years – and are projected to result in an estimated \$47 trillion loss to the global economy between 2010–2030. The gains of consistent PA have been shown to be available to all age groups, genders and socio-economic classes, and its cumulative economic impact is globally estimated at \$1.2-1.7 trillion between 2020-2030.

**Global institutions have launched specific initiatives aimed at enhancing PA levels of populations.** In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched a new Global Action Plan on PA (GAPPA) 2018-2030. The plan outlines four policy actions areas and twenty specific policy recommendations for its member states and international partners to increase PA worldwide. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted a revised International Charter of Physical Education, PA and Sport in 2015, which introduces universal principles such as gender equality, non-discrimination and social inclusion in and through sport.

**Several governments have followed suit.** Countries like the UK, Australia, UK and Canada are increasingly prioritising population-scale PA in sport and health policy. While the PA-focused model still maintains a focus on participation rates in grassroots sports and recreation, its key performance indicators are based on general levels of adequate PA across the population. For example, in the **UK**, the government has increased funding of physical activity programmes for women and girls, the elderly, disabled, and people from lower socio-economic groups. It has also increased grassroots investment in non-Olympic sports to promote participation. Sport England has been set up as a public body tasked with growing the number of people playing and active, and to sustain participation levels. **Australia** has developed a physical literacy framework that is aimed at building the skills, mindsets, and behaviours that are needed to lead an active life. The framework is accompanied by a tool that provides knowledge on the benefits of physical activity, how those benefits can be achieved, and how progress can be measured. **Canada's** Sport For Life framework aims to build quality sport and physical literacy in Canada by addressing overall sport and physical activity from policy to program delivery. In general, developed countries have taken a broader view of sport policy, which represents a shift from funding 'sports for sport's sake' to enveloping investments in increasing PA and using sport as an instrument and an approach for achieving social and economic goals.

**The Sports and Society Accelerator and Dalberg Advisors are collaborating on the State of Play initiative – a first-of-its-kind research and impact evaluation of the PA and sport sector in India. The initiative aims to highlight the key aspects of being a physically active nation and to create**

a measurable data-led framework on India's opportunity and vision for PA and sport. This discussion brief is the inaugural output of an ongoing research study.

Under the State of Play initiative, we will also seek to conduct India's first study to quantify the comprehensive economic benefits of universal PA. To give us an early sense of what the size of the prize could be, we developed high-level estimates based on extrapolations from global evidence.<sup>1</sup> **Our top-down extrapolation suggests that the elimination of adult inactivity by 2047 could increase India's GDP by up to \$50 billion annually, which is roughly the size of Chhattisgarh's annual GDP.** This means that every percentage point reduction in adult inactivity in India could unlock about \$1-1.25 billion in annual GDP (in 2047).<sup>2</sup> This number represents the sum of all potential benefits of universal adult PA to the economy – including improved health and well-being, productivity, cognitive development, life skills, livelihoods, and social cohesion.

**Of this, about \$17 billion annually could come from improved health and about \$28 billion annually from increased workforce productivity.**<sup>3,4</sup> We focused on health and productivity because these outcomes are most directly and tangibly linked to increases in PA and to be aligned with global quantitative research and scientific studies on the topic. The *health impact* will be driven mostly by reduced expenditure on NCDs like cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases, diabetes, anxiety, depression, hypertension, and dementia. These diseases currently contribute about 66% to India's annual mortality burden and is expected to exponentially increase. The *impact on productivity* will largely be driven by reduced absenteeism and presenteeism,<sup>5</sup> among India's workforce in high-growth sectors like IT, retail, textiles, etc.

Our estimates of the benefits are conservative as they are based on global averages, whereas in India the potential to increase awareness and unlock access to PA is higher as PA has historically not been an area of focus. Thus, this is a significant opportunity to create a first of its kind baseline with granular data on the impact of PA in India.

## The Opportunity

Traditionally, India's emergence as a 'top sporting nation' has been a key pillar of the overall vision of India at 100 in 2047. Sport policy at national and state levels has tended to prioritise excellence in national and international competitions. As a result, the success of both elite and grassroots sports initiatives has been generally measured as results and medals. The Target Olympic Podium Scheme and Khelo India have received much focus, and in many ways,

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<sup>1</sup> **Extrapolations:** We calculate the impact of universal PA on India's overall GDP (top-down) and on health and productivity savings (bottom-up). This is based on a limited set of credible global data points and research initiatives. We rely on relevant and pioneering studies by WHO, ICMR, and RAND.

<sup>2</sup> **Top down estimate:** Our estimate is founded on global research which has shown that a 1-percentage point reduction in the inactive adult population will increase global GDP by 0.0054% to 0.0079% annually. This estimate assumes India's current share of inactive adults to be 41%, which is based on a WHO-ICMR study, the first nationwide survey on physical activity levels involving both the urban and rural areas in different states.

<sup>3</sup> **Health benefit estimate:** We build from global evidence that a 1-percentage point reduction in the inactive adult population globally can reduce NCDs by 0.29%. This average is applied to the Indian context (GDP in 2047, a 41-percentage point reduction in adult PA, and our annual expenditure on NCDs) to arrive at total health savings (in 2047).

<sup>4</sup> **Productivity benefit estimate:** Emerging evidence from the UK shows that 1 day of work absence per year could be prevented for every inactive adult who becomes physically active. We apply this, as above, to the Indian context (factoring in population growth, workforce participation rates, wage rates, current inactivity levels, etc.), to arrive at the total cost savings due to increased productivity.

<sup>5</sup> **Absenteeism:** The days of absence that an employee takes due to physical or mental health issues; **Presenteeism:** Attending work but operating at reduced efficiency due to physical or mental health concerns.

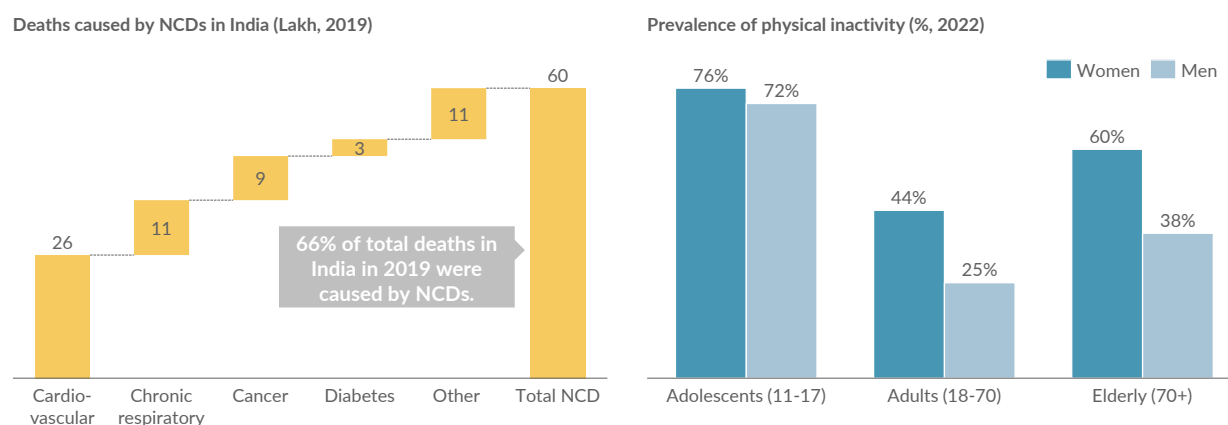
deservedly so. India has emerged as an elite sports contender across several disciplines, and the pipeline of international talent and potential champions is sure to be sustainable and on an upward trajectory. **What is equally important now is to use the benefit of PA and sport as effective health, education, and economic tools that have further downstream benefits to both youth and adults in equal measure including life skills.**

**The international and domestic experiences offer benchmarks and best practices to learn from and enhance and accelerate our own PA movement.** In India currently there is a nascent but growing recognition and prioritization of the importance of PA and Sports for Development (S4D) in sport and health policy, although its manifestation and implementation is still at an early stage. There will need to be a systematic focus on and a macro-level switch to the holistic benefit of PA and sport as compared to how it is today. While the intent is clearly there, decision-makers and key opinion leaders require the support of a participatory framework where civil society actors, private sector participants, and the population at-large assist in helping identify, create, and implement effective and flexible PA models customized to the Indian ecosystem. This is where the true opportunity and synergy lies.

**India is uniquely positioned globally to lead a PA agenda.** As a country that is looking forward to several decades of demographic dividends, with growing recognition and focus on health, fitness, and physical activity, and currently holding the G20 Presidency, India has the singular opportunity to be the lighthouse nation in making universal participation in PA a reality. The opportunity is to prioritize and lead a movement that considers traditional forms of exercise such as yoga and sports like *kabaddi* and *kho-kho*. This could increasingly target improving health and productivity parameters through inclusive and equitable population-scale interventions. It would further help India set the tone for a global undertaking that optimizes the unequivocal positivity of PA.

**The significant health and productivity benefits from increased PA provide tangible returns on governmental initiatives and investments.** The recent report on the levels of physical inactivity in India (as reported by the World Health Organization in 2022) shows inactivity levels of over 70% for adolescents, coupled with a 66% mortality rate due to non-communicable diseases across the population.

Figure 1: India's NCD mortality and PA profile<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> "India's Physical Activity Profile," WHO (2022) [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/country-profiles/physical-activity/physical-activity-ind-2022-country-profile.pdf?sfvrsn=4208cb78\\_5&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/country-profiles/physical-activity/physical-activity-ind-2022-country-profile.pdf?sfvrsn=4208cb78_5&download=true)

The importance of an integrated and holistic sport and health policy agenda has already been recognised in a few states with governments like Haryana and Odisha adopting an approach of sport for social good, that is based on inclusion, access, and participation alongside sporting success. In addition to increasing the medal tally for the country, the Haryana government's focus has also been on physical training education and increasing school children's participation in sports, improving women's participation in sports, infrastructure development, and developing incentive structures for youth that tie participation and excellence in sports with employment in the government sector. The Odisha government is focusing on youth participation and invests in grass root initiatives to create active environments to make villages physically active through PPP models.<sup>3</sup> Adopting a PA agenda at national scale will encourage governments at all levels – local, state and central – to further systems to achieve universal participation in adequate PA.

To achieve universal participation in PA, India will have to overcome unique challenges related to awareness, availability, access, affordability, attitudes, motivation, incentives, among others. These will need to be addressed through policy, programmes, and projects that build capacity, systems and enabling environments. Underlying and fundamental to all this is the need to develop a data-backed understanding of the *State of Play in India* and to build monitoring, evaluation and reporting tools and frameworks that will help us keep track of progress.

With the enablers in place, India could be in the unique and enviable position of being the first country in the world to have universal participation in physical activity by 2047, with every child playing, and every adult active.

**Universalisation of PA, sport and play is a goal we can all get behind. The State of Play initiative will not only set the parameters for how this can be achieved but will also provide the analytical framework that allows each of us, our society and our government to understand the gains from being a healthy, fit, and participative.**

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<sup>3</sup> [How Odisha turned into a sporting capital of India | Bhubaneswar News - Times of India \(indiatimes.com\)](#); [Know how Odisha came to be known as the Sports Capital of India? \(bighit.fans\)](#); [This is how Odisha came to be known as sports capital of India - OrissaPOST](#)

## Objectives: The State of Play initiative

The main objectives of the SSA-Dalberg State of Play initiative are to:

- provide a nuanced data-led view of PA in India across age groups, and the economic and social benefits that can be unlocked by increasing physical activity;
- build awareness of and encourage PA as a priority national-level agenda item, in which sports is not only an outcome, but also a critical enabler of broader population-scale outcomes, using traditional methods such as yoga, and modern interventions through the education and awareness channels;
- identify gaps and challenges that must be addressed to unlock gains and benefits and borrow relevant and adoptable lessons from local and global best practice on how to address them;
- lay out a clear set of actionable policy and implementation recommendations and roadmap for key sector stakeholders, including government actors, educational institutes, health and wellness service providers, corporations, grass root organizations, and individuals;
- provide stakeholders a baseline to help measure the success of potential future investments.

We believe that this approach will need synchronized interventions including more access to infrastructure, incentives for participation, community-based approaches, combined with mindset changes across home and workplace. All of these will contribute towards increasing activity rates in the population. The initiative will appeal to several critical stakeholders in the sports and PA ecosystem in India, as is reflected in the table below.

*Table 1: Value proposition of the State of Play for key audience members*

Stakeholder type	Value proposition
<b>Governments</b>	The government can use the initiative's output as a benchmark – of scale of opportunity and potential returns on social investments – as they think of key reforms for India at 100, of which achieving universal participation in adequate physical activity must be one. This can help the government mainstream PA as a developmental goal and to allocate resources and attention to solutions.
<b>Private Sector</b>	The global market size for PA is expected to surpass \$1 trillion in 2023. In India, it is a sunrise sector and expected to grow much faster than the global annual average of 10%. This study will allow private companies a better understanding of potential growth areas and market segments. Companies will be able to offer targeted interventions to segments of interest. Companies outside the industry too will benefit from gains in productivity. Investments into this study will offer a clear link between social contributions and economic benefits.
<b>Academic Institutions/Think Tanks</b>	The social impact of PA is well established, yet currently there is a lack of data relevant to India. This initiative will allow for common, broad-based understanding that can become a starting point for



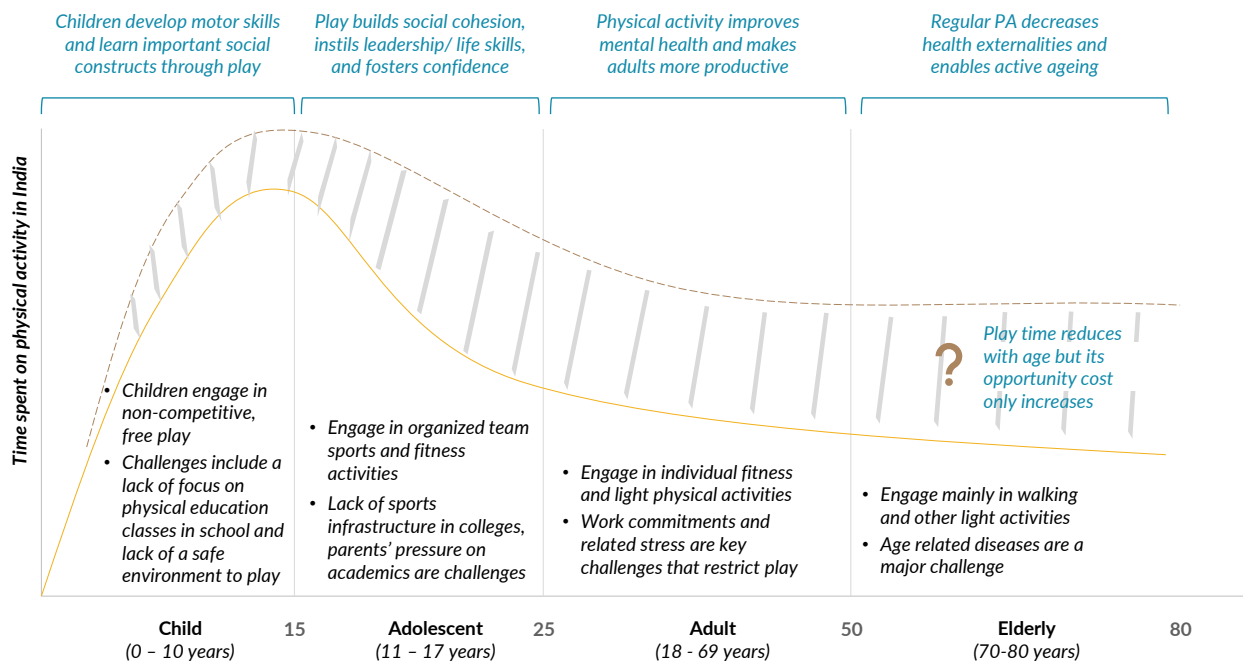
<b>Stakeholder type</b>	<b>Value proposition</b>
	more research, understanding, and debate in the academic and practitioner communities.
<b>NGOs/Social enterprises</b>	A data-led approach with definitional clarity and monitoring and evaluation metrics can make it easier to access funding for organizations working on solutions and using sports for human development.

## The next phase for the State of Play

The State of Play initiative will, over a series of releases, add to the existing foundation of benchmarking and sector learning for India in six meaningful ways:

- (1) **Add nuance to the definition and understanding of 'adequate' PA in the Indian and developing country context.** The current standard of PA of 150 minutes per week for adults may not capture Indian context where a significant portion of the population is engaged in physically demanding work (e.g., agriculture, construction, etc.) and non-elective PA which may not always be healthy. The State of Play will seek to build from existing literature and seek expert inputs from global and local experts to develop more clarity to distinguish between work and recreation and elective and non-elective physical activity, so as to more correctly reflect demographics and positive impact.
- (2) **Develop a holistic and comprehensive framework linking sports and PA to socio-economic benefits.** The State of Play initiative and the research outputs emanating from it will provide a holistic framework that captures lifelong benefits, drivers, challenges, etc. across different age segments. This will serve as a baseline understanding for initiatives and programmes to address barriers and gaps and find solutions across the board.

Figure 2: Example of potential PA framework (preliminary)



- (3) **Complete the most detailed mapping yet of access to opportunities and participation in PA in India.** Based on large-sample data collection, including insights on key segments (e.g., Adolescent/ Adult) and sub-segments (e.g., women, rural, etc.). As described previously, this is fundamental to future work in this space. This baseline will not only feed into our own models and estimation of the potential benefits of increased physical activity, but also hopefully prove to be rich fodder for future research as well as solutioning.
- (4) **Undertake a first-of-its-kind estimation of the comprehensive economic benefits of increased physical activity in India.** In line with existing literature will focus on health and

productivity as the key drivers of economic value. Surveys will collect detailed large-sample data on health behaviors and outcomes, link between health and absenteeism and presentism in priority/ relevant sectors, etc. to develop most robust estimates available today. When the economic benefits can be estimated, this can help with driving public investments into programmes and initiatives.

- (5) **Deep dive into behavioural and mindset challenges and barriers:** While there is not much data on this currently it is conceptually one of the most critical to address. Changing attitudes (particularly those of parents, educators and employers) today will set India to be active for generations. The State of Play will combine parental surveys with targeted FGDs to understand both how parents, educators and employers prioritize sports/ PA for their children and what are the underlying drivers of their choices. Taking parents, educators and employers along will be key to unlocking greater activity in India for future generations.
- (6) **Issue a clear call to action and roadmap to the sector, with clear roles and responsibilities for its main stakeholders.** The roadmap will aim to set common strategic goals and priorities for the Indian PA ecosystem and highlight tactical steps and milestones to achieve them. This will be a first step to universal PA becoming a recognized national mission.

**There is no better time than now to have a systematic and holistic focus on ensuring that PA and sports become an integral part of Indian society. With an eye on optimizing health, economic growth, productivity, livelihoods and life skills, and capitalizing on the favorable demographic dividend, prioritizing PA and sport is a clear policy and research imperative. Using the existing comparative advantages and building upon several of the foundational initiatives that exist in India, the State of Play initiative is poised to help create the sustainable 'active for life' ecosystem, targeting universal participation in India by 2047.**

## About



### Sports and Society Accelerator

Building India's Sports Stack

The Sports and Society Accelerator is an independent not-for-profit organisation (Section 8) focused on building the Indian sports ecosystem. Its goal as an ecosystem builder is to achieve social outcomes at population scale, using the universality of the sports experience, with an eventual target of universal participation in physical activity for India by 2047.

Established as a policy-to-action initiative, the Accelerator has a dual-engine approach. It uses independent research and policy interventions to drive institutional and systemic reform, and programmes and projects to enhance inclusion, empowerment and equality using sport. The Accelerator works with government, civil society, and social enterprises.

The Accelerator's theory of change is that 'sports for all' can be achieved when solutions are in the hands of participants. Its Sports Stack approach advocates a whole-of-system and open-source model to achieve universal access to sporting opportunities and universal physical literacy, working with government and civil society.

The Accelerator's board of advisors includes noted sports journalist Sharda Ugra, CEO of Pratham Rukmini Banerji, and veteran sports administrator Joy Bhattacharjya.

<https://www.sports-society.org/>

## Dalberg

Dalberg is a leading social impact advisory group that brings together - strategy consulting, design thinking, big data analytics, and research to address complex social and environmental challenges. We work collaboratively with communities, institutions, governments, and corporations to develop solutions that create impact on a large scale. We have rich experience in conducting landscape assessments and policy-focused research in India.

Recently, Dalberg hosted the State of Aadhaar Initiative (2019/2020), in which we distilled insights from two national household surveys, capturing experiences and perspectives of over 167,000 residents. Together these surveys represent the largest primary dataset on the use of Aadhaar and, more broadly, digital ID anywhere in the world.

We also conducted a landscape assessment to understand the State of Digital Connectivity across five regions in India from an infrastructure, device, and consumer readiness perspective. We used a mixed-methods approach including macro data analysis, human-centered design research, expert interviews, and workshops to identify industry trends, consumer archetypes, and opportunity areas for an end-use case of digital financial services.

<https://dalberg.com/>