



**Sports and Society
Accelerator**

Introducing the STEP Framework for Empowering Sports and Physical Activity in India

Report
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Foreword

In the contemporary landscape of India, the need to promote sports and physical activity (SAPA) as a key component of public health has become increasingly important. Sedentary lifestyles and urbanization have contributed to a health crisis, marked by rising rates of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. To address this issue, the STEP framework offers comprehensive, culturally tailored guidelines and design principles for impact-focused organizations to embed within their programs and initiatives to enhance SAPA across the nation.

The STEP framework—comprising Sustainability, Technology, Environment, and Perception—provides a holistic approach to SAPA empowerment. These four pillars are interconnected, creating a dynamic system aimed at promoting sustainable health and socioeconomic improvements. India's unique cultural and social fabric is central to the STEP framework's design. By integrating traditional practices like yoga and regional dance with modern health initiatives, the framework aims to resonate strongly with the populace, ensuring greater acceptance and participation.

The STEP framework serves as a guide, offering a structured pathway to a healthier, more active India. Through collaborative efforts and innovative interventions, it is possible to address the challenges of physical inactivity and build a future where every Indian can lead an active, healthy life. This report outlines the strategic imperatives and actionable insights of the STEP framework, informing policymakers, institutions, and communities towards a more active and healthier society.

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The need for STEP framework

In the face of growing sedentary lifestyles, India stands at a critical juncture to embrace sports and physical activity (SAPA) as a catalyst for enhanced well-being. This framework offers a transformative path towards active living. Four pillars intertwine, encompassing Sustainability (S), Technology (T), Environment (E) and Perception (P), leading us to take our first STEP towards SAPA. Tailored to India's unique cultural and social fabric, the STEP framework empowers organizations, institutions, and policymakers to craft impactful interventions, paving the way to a healthier and fitter India.

In an increasingly urbanized and sedentary world, the importance of SAPA cannot be overstated. Regular SAPA can dramatically reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. It also plays a vital role in preventing neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's disease and extends life expectancy, enhancing the overall sense of community well-being. In addition to improved physical health, SAPA is key to enhancing mental well-being, productivity, and professional and/ or academic performance. Despite a growing body of research on how to design and evaluate SAPA interventions, there are different views and perspectives on which ones are most effective.¹ This is partly because these interventions are often highly dependent on the local context and environment. At the same time, there are common themes, principles,

and best practices that can benefit everyone in the SAPA sector. Recently, global organizations have started specific projects to share these best practices and tailor interventions to local contexts, genuinely boosting SAPA levels and sports participation among people. These projects often aim to address wider socio-economic issues to help create healthier, fitter, more inclusive, and empowered communities.

In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the 'Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030' (GAPPA) to boost global SAPA levels. GAPPA's mission was divided into four strategic objectives and included 20 action plans. While the 20 recommended policy actions in GAPPA are universally applicable, the prioritization, feasibility, and speed of implementation will vary according to context. Four years later, in 2022, the WHO evaluated global progress and issued a report with five key recommendations. Among these, the second recommendation emphasized the importance of integrating SAPA into relevant policies, supported by practical tools and guidelines for effective implementation.² Addressing the issue of SAPA regulation is complex due to its extensive and intricate nature. Nevertheless, GAPPA provides India with a solid foundation and starting point, highlighting key areas for attention.

Similarly, the International Society for Physical Activity and Health has introduced

¹ Laura Gormley, Cameron A. Belton, Peter D. Lunn, Deirdre A. Robertson, *Interventions to increase physical activity: An analysis of candidate behavioural mechanisms*, Preventive Medicine Reports, Volume 28, 2022, 101880, ISSN 2211-3355. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2022.101880>.

² World Health Organization, *Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030: More Active People for a Healthier World* (2018), available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/initiatives/gappa>

eight key investments for SAPA as a global call to action. These investments urge professionals, academics, civil society, and decision-makers to embed SAPA into national and subnational policies. The investments include comprehensive whole-of-school programs to encourage lifelong active habits in children; promoting active transport like walking and cycling; designing urban spaces that facilitate SAPA; integrating SAPA promotion into healthcare settings; utilizing public education and mass media campaigns to raise awareness; ensuring access to sport and recreation for all age groups; creating workplace environments that encourage SAPA; and developing community-wide programs to engage diverse populations in active lifestyles.

Frameworks like the ones noted above are essential for providing a structured and standardized approach to initiatives, ensuring consistency and comparability across different regions. They offer guidance and best practices, helping policymakers and practitioners design effective interventions while remaining adaptable to local contexts. Frameworks include tools for measuring progress, optimizing resource use, and fostering collaboration among various stakeholders. They integrate SAPA into broader policy agendas and empower communities to actively promote SAPA. Ultimately, these frameworks, if well-designed and implemented, have the potential to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of SAPA interventions, leading to healthier, more active communities.



Addressing Physical Inactivity Through Legal and Policy Interventions

GAPPA recommends that countries assess their current SAPA situation to identify existing areas of progress, policy opportunities, and practice gaps. This recommendation is vital for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where physical inactivity is increasingly recognized as a significant risk factor for NCDs. These countries are slowly beginning to evaluate the necessary infrastructure, strategies, and resources to address physical inactivity effectively.³

Strong leadership and government action are crucial for incorporating and promoting SAPA through national policies and plans. Governments possess the unique authority to legislate and regulate, enabling them to implement comprehensive strategies that can foster a more active population. Effective frameworks must promote and guide discussions among policymakers about where legal intervention could strengthen or support whole-system action for SAPA. Such frameworks should encourage a broad consideration of regulatory approaches, including resource-efficient strategies suitable for constrained environments.⁴

An important first step is legal mapping to understand the current legal landscape affecting SAPA. This involves identifying

existing laws and regulations, whether they are self-regulated, voluntary, or mandatory government rules. Legal mapping helps policymakers spot gaps and opportunities for improving or introducing new laws. For instance, it might show that while a country has policies to promote active transport like cycling and walking, these policies may lack enforcement or proper infrastructure. By understanding these gaps, policymakers can create comprehensive strategies that include not only new policies but also practical plans for implementation and enforcement.

Studies focusing on policy-making for SAPA can help identify factors that influence the successful enactment and implementation of legal interventions, enabling the development of supportive strategies to facilitate the adoption and execution of effective policies. For instance, research may highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement in the policy-making process, ensuring that the voices of communities, health professionals, and other relevant groups are considered.⁵ This research is especially important in LMICs, where local evidence is limited. Strengthening the connection between law and SAPA through research can enhance a framework's value, inform the research agenda, and improve policy and practice. For example, demonstrating the economic benefits of

³ Bellew B, Nau T, Smith B, Klepac P, Pogrmlilovic B, Pedišić Z, Bauman A. Physical activity policy actions – what is the role of governments? Physical activity in low- and middle-income countries. Oxford: Routledge; 2021.

⁴ Nau T, Smith BJ, Bauman A, Bellew B. Legal strategies to improve physical activity in populations. Bull World Health Organ. 2021 Aug 1;99(8):593-602. doi: 10.2471/BLT.20.273987. Epub 2021 May 4. PMID: 34354314; PMCID: PMC8319864.

⁵ Burris S, Wagenaar AC, Swanson J, Ibrahim JK, Wood J, Mello MM. Making the case for laws that improve health: a framework for public health law research. Milbank Q. 2010. June;88(2):169-210. 10.1111/j.1468-0009.2010.00595.x

increased SAPA, such as reduced healthcare costs and improved workforce productivity,

can persuade policymakers to prioritize SAPA initiatives.



The Need for a Systems-Based Approach to Physical Activity in India

The current landscape of SAPA in India indicates concerning trends of sedentary behavior. A 2021 study revealed that 57% of the adult population in India did not meet the World Health Organization's recommended regimen of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week. This, in addition to findings that increasing sedentary lifestyles have led to an estimated number of 101 million Indians affected by diabetes, over 200 million affected by generalized obesity, and about 300 million affected by hypertension.⁶

The journey towards inclusive SAPA participation faces systemic challenges. The unstructured growth of sports has led to unequal access, especially for marginalized groups, low-income families from rural areas, and minority communities. Additionally, the strong focus on elite performance within a resource-limited sports sector is embedded in the educational system and extends to broader sports infrastructure, programs, and governance. This focus often categorizes participants by perceived initial skills and primarily aims for medal-winning goals, limiting long-term access to SAPA opportunities for many.

There is an opportunity to create and enhance policy frameworks to make SAPA-for-all a priority for national and state governments. This national agenda would promote a unified, systems-based approach, encouraging local,

state, and central governments to improve systems for universal SAPA participation. Such an approach would bring together expertise from various sectors—individual, community, societal, and political—to develop a shared understanding of the complexity of physical inactivity. It would map key players and identify intervention points within the system, including people, communities, organizations, resources, environments, infrastructure, and the economy. By integrating these elements, a systems-based approach would have the potential to create a cohesive framework to tackle the multifaceted nature of physical inactivity. Key components of a systems-based approach to SAPA include:

Integration of Multiple Sectors: A systems-based approach involves collaboration across various sectors, including healthcare, education, urban planning, transportation, and sports. Each sector contributes uniquely to creating an environment that supports SAPA. For instance, urban planners can design walkable cities, while the healthcare sector can promote SAPA through regular check-ups and counseling.

Stakeholder Engagement: By bringing together stakeholders locally, nationally, or internationally, a systems-based approach helps identify the root causes of physical inactivity. Stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profits, private companies, and community groups, can see

⁶ Ranjit Mohan Anjana et al., Metabolic Non-Communicable Disease Health Report of India: The ICMR-INDIAB National Cross-Sectional Study (ICMR-INDIAB-17). *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*. 2023. 11(7) 474–489, doi:10.1016/S2213-8587(23)00119-5

their role in both the problem and the solution, fostering a collaborative effort towards increasing SAPA. This method enables wider engagement, allowing stakeholders who previously did not participate in the SAPA agenda to recognize their contributions and potential impact.

Mapping and Intervention Points: This approach involves mapping key players and identifying intervention points within the system. For example, schools can be pivotal in instilling active habits in children, while workplaces can encourage employee wellness programs. Recognizing these points allows for targeted interventions that can significantly impact overall SAPA levels.

Resource Allocation: A systems-based approach ensures that resources are effectively allocated to areas where they can have the most significant impact. This includes financial resources, human capital, and infrastructural support. For instance, investing in public parks and recreational facilities can provide accessible spaces for SAPA, particularly in urban areas.

Cultural and Social Considerations: Tailoring interventions to the cultural and social context of a region is crucial. Understanding local

customs, beliefs, and social structures can enhance the effectiveness of SAPA initiatives. For example, community-based programs that involve local leaders and influencers can be more successful in encouraging participation.

Recognizing the transformative power of SAPA, various organizations and institutions in India have initiated efforts to promote active lifestyles across diverse communities and settings. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of organizations implementing SAPA interventions in India, including grassroots community-based organizations, international NGOs, public sector entities, and private companies. The need for a systems-based approach to SAPA in India is evident from the diverse and multi-faceted efforts already underway. By integrating expertise across sectors, engaging stakeholders, mapping intervention points, and considering cultural contexts, a systems-based approach can effectively address the complex issue of physical inactivity. As India continues to develop and implement such strategies, the country is well-positioned to foster a healthier, more active population, contributing to broader socio-economic development.

What is The STEP Framework?

The STEP Framework is designed to foster holistic SAPA empowerment in India. It has four interconnected pillars: Sustainability, Technology, Environment, and Perception. This framework addresses various aspects of behaviour change, creating a cycle that empowers individuals and communities to lead active, healthy lives. Each element in STEP

reinforces the others, forming a synergy that encourages active living. The framework provides core design principles and potential actions for organizations, institutions, and policymakers to create effective SAPA interventions tailored to India's unique circumstances and challenges.

Table 1: Value proposition of the STEP Framework

Stakeholder type	Value proposition
Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Public Health: Reduces prevalence of NCDs, lowering healthcare costs. • Economic Benefits: Increases productivity and reduces healthcare expenditures. • Social Cohesion: Strengthens community engagement and social stability. • Policy Innovation: Provides a structured approach for innovative, globally-aligned policies.
Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSR Fulfilment: Meets corporate social responsibility goals by promoting community health. • Employee Productivity: Improves mental and physical health, reducing absenteeism. • Brand Image: Enhances reputation as a socially responsible organization. • Market Opportunities: Opens new markets for SAPA-related products and services.
Academic Institutions/Think Tanks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and Innovation: Facilitates comprehensive research in SAPA and health promotion. • Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Promotes cross-disciplinary projects and initiatives. • Educational Programs: Develops specialized courses, attracting students and funding. • Policy Influence: Provides evidence-based insights to shape public health strategies.
NGOs/Social enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impactful Interventions: Designs effective SAPA and health promotion programs.

Stakeholder type	Value proposition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding and Partnerships: Attracts funding and collaboration opportunities. • Community Empowerment: Empowers communities for sustainable health changes. • Scalable Solutions: Offers a blueprint for expanding successful interventions.

Increased collaboration between educational institutions, sports organizations, health sectors, and community groups is essential to create a supportive ecosystem for SAPA. With the STEP framework, the roles of these stakeholders in such an ecosystem would comprise the following:

- **Do:** Local governments and sports federations actively implementing SAPA initiatives.
- **Fund:** Central and state governments, along with private partners, provide necessary funding for infrastructure, programs, and research.
- **Regulate:** Setting clear regulations and standards to guide SAPA activities, ensuring quality, safety, and equitable access.

The STEP framework's strength lies in its versatility, enabling it to cater to individual needs, institutional and societal requirements, and broader public health initiatives specific to India. It is based on overarching themes, research, and evidence related to SAPA interventions and behavior change. It draws from sources including academic studies, reports from organizations like WHO, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and relevant health and wellness authorities in India. Additionally, the framework takes into account the practical experiences and best practices of organizations and institutions that have successfully implemented SAPA initiatives.

International Frameworks and Pathways: Best Practices from Other Countries

Before examining the STEP framework and its application in India, it is helpful to first look at some approaches from other countries. These international examples provide valuable insights into best practices

that can be adapted and integrated into the Indian context. This section highlights a few notable national frameworks and initiatives that have effectively promoted SAPA and well-being globally.

Table 2: Notable practices and framework

Country and Initiative	Framework Overview	Key Components and Best Practices
Canada: ParticipACTION	A national non-profit established in 1971, dedicated to promoting everyday SAPA among Canadians through programs, campaigns, and partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Report Card: Publishes yearly SAPA report card for children and youth, offering data and recommendations. • Community Programs: Runs programs in schools, workplaces, and communities to encourage SAPA. • Public Campaigns: Uses mass media to raise awareness and provide practical tips for getting active. • Collaborations: Partners with government, non-profits, and private sector to promote SAPA nationwide.
Australia: The Australian Physical Literacy Framework (APLF)	Sport Australia developed the Australian Physical Literacy Framework to promote physical, psychological, cognitive, and social skills essential for lifelong SAPA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic Approach: Integrates physical, psychological, cognitive, and social dimensions. • Educational Integration: Provides resources and guidelines for teachers to promote physical literacy in schools. • Community Engagement: Collaborates with community organizations to support SAPA.

Country and Initiative	Framework Overview	Key Components and Best Practices
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and Evaluation: Includes ongoing research to assess and improve initiatives.
<p>Scotland: Public Health Scotland's new framework to increase SAPA</p>	<p>The framework provides a pragmatic, system-based approach to boost SAPA levels across Scotland. It aims to help achieve the Scottish Government's goal of a 15% reduction in physical inactivity by 2030, aligning with the GAPP objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System-Based Actions: Implemented across schools, healthcare, transport, urban planning, sport, communities, and workplaces. • Strategic Collaboration: Encourages cross-sectoral efforts over isolated, short-term interventions. • Evidence-Based Guide: Provides practical guidance for practitioners and policymakers. • Health Benefits: Highlights physical and mental health advantages of activities like walking, wheeling, and swimming. • Positive Outcomes: Targets broad improvements in public health and disease prevention.
<p>Singapore: National Steps Challenge</p>	<p>The National Steps Challenge by Singapore's Health Promotion Board encourages walking and daily SAPA using technology and incentives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearable Technology: Fitness trackers monitor daily steps. • Gamification: Rewards and leaderboards motivate participants. • Incentives: Rewards for reaching milestones encourage activity. • Public Engagement: Events, social media, and community partnerships promote participation.

Understanding the STEP Framework: Strategies for Enhancing SAPA in India

Pillar 1 - Sustainability

The sustainability pillar represents the first element of the framework, emphasizing the development of actionable, easy-to-implement, scalable interventions that can withstand the test of time and align seamlessly in India. By prioritizing evidence-based strategies and reproducible approaches, this pillar ensures that SAPA initiatives can be seamlessly integrated into various settings and demographics. Sustainability, as a core component, enables organizations, institutions, and community leaders to craft interventions that adapt to changing needs, continually nurturing a culture of active living in India.

Entities seeking to offer sustainable SAPA interventions could focus on the following:

Culturally Adapted SAPA Guidelines:

Understanding the significance of cultural diversity in India, this aspect emphasizes the development of evidence-based SAPA guidelines that resonate with various age groups, abilities, and cultural practices prevalent across the country. Integrating traditional forms of exercise like yoga, martial arts, and regional dance forms with modern health and hygiene recommendations is one of the ways by which citizens can embrace SAPA as part of their daily routines. For instance,

Japan promotes "Rajio Taiso," a radio broadcasted calisthenics program rooted in traditional exercise practices, widely accepted and practiced across age groups.⁷ Similarly, Finland promotes traditional outdoor activities, like Nordic walking, into public health guidelines, encouraging all age groups to stay active year-round.⁸

Home-Based Exercise Programs:

Acknowledging the importance of accessibility and convenience, this aspect focuses on designing simple yet effective SAPA routines that can be performed in the comfort of one's home with minimal equipment. Home-based exercise programs must be tailored to suit varying fitness levels and cater to different age groups, ensuring inclusivity and broad participation. By breaking down barriers to SAPA, these programs can empower individuals to engage in regular exercise irrespective of where they are and contribute to improved overall health and well-being. In the UK, the "NHS Couch to 5K" program encourages beginners to start running, gradually increasing their stamina. This free, app-based program has helped many people start exercising at home.⁹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries like China¹⁰, Germany¹¹ and Australia launched various online exercise programs catering to different

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200609-the-life-long-exercise-that-keeps-japan-moving>

⁸ <https://finland.fi/life-society/finland-the-frontrunner-in-sports-and-fitness/>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/sport/68836703>

¹⁰ Liang Z, Deng C, Li D, Lo WLA, Yu Q, Chen Z. The effects of the home-based exercise during COVID-19 school closure on the physical fitness of preschool children in China. *Front Pediatr*. 2022 Aug 30;10:932734. doi: 10.3389/fped.2022.932734. PMID: 36110116; PMCID: PMC9469900.

¹¹ <https://efsupit.ro/images/stories/iunie2021/Art%20209.pdf>

fitness levels and age groups, ensuring continuity of SAPA while staying at home.

Community Exercise Classes and Local Instructors: Affordable fitness programs and exercises can be offered in a variety of public settings including gated communities, public parks, retirement homes, offices, etc. Such community exercise classes can be thoughtfully curated to incorporate traditional dance forms, local games etc., making them both appealing and enjoyable. These classes also foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie, encouraging sustained participation in SAPA. For example, the Community Better Challenge is an annual event aimed at getting communities across Canada active. It encourages local communities to host free exercise classes and activities, such as yoga, dance, and sports, often led by local instructors.¹² "This Girl Can" is a campaign by Sport England that offers community exercise classes tailored to women, aiming to break down barriers to participation in SAPA, and classes are offered in local gyms and community centers, led by local female instructors.¹³

Workplace Wellness Challenges and Incentives: This aspect encourages the organization of regular SAPA challenges and provides relevant incentives to motivate employees during work hours. Leveraging the power of team-based activities and localized incentives, these workplace wellness programs nurture a supportive environment for SAPA. These challenges can not only improve employees' health but also boost productivity and job satisfaction. Mitsubishi Corporation in Japan has implemented a "Walking Campaign" to encourage employees to be more active.¹⁴ The

company provides incentives such as wellness points, which can be exchanged for various rewards, to those who achieve their step goals.

By implementing the components within this pillar, organizations, institutions, and community leaders can shape interventions that align with the Indian context while fostering a sense of ownership and enthusiasm for SAPA.

Pillar 2 - Technology

At the heart of the framework lies the technology pillar, symbolized by the letter 'T.' This pillar leverages the power of digital leaderboards and interactive tools to provide real-time feedback on performance, creating a sense of camaraderie and motivation among individuals engaging in SAPA. By tapping into the innate human desire for connection and competition, technology can foster a communal spirit, fueling intrinsic motivation and enhancing the sense of accountability. The insights generated through technology also feed into other pillars, informing the design and optimization of interventions for greater effectiveness.

Digital technology has witnessed widespread adoption presenting an immense opportunity to harness its potential for promoting SAPA. This pillar introduces an approach to enhance engagement and accountability through digital technology in the Indian context. By leveraging mobile applications, social media challenges, and localized corporate wellness platforms, individuals can receive real-time feedback on their SAPA levels, fostering a sense of community and healthy competition. Gamification of SAPA routines digitally with

¹² <https://www.participaction.com/programs/community-challenge/>

¹³ <https://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk/campaign-hub/resources/insight#>:

¹⁴ https://www.mcgc.com/english/group/health-productivity-management/pdf/well-being_report2023.pdf

the integration of specific ingredients can make SAPA more engaging and motivating for individuals. Digital leaderboards can help motivate desired behaviours by allowing individuals to directly compare their own performance with others.¹⁵ Of course, while developing such digital leaderboards, developers need to find ways to motivate every user and not just the top performers. Fitness applications installed on smartphones can take advantage of gamification design to achieve better health outcomes. Such digital interventions offer a wider and more individualised scope than face-to-face interventions, with potentially lower long-term costs.¹⁶

Some interventions that can be considered while developing or leveraging technology for SAPA are:

Mobile Applications for Health and Wellness: Developing user-friendly apps that cater to Indian users' preferences and cultural preferences to track individual SAPA levels, set goals, and compete with friends or colleagues. Mobile applications should consider incorporating regional languages to enhance accessibility and user engagement. For example, Keep is China's leading fitness app that offers personalized workout plans, diet recommendations, and progress tracking. The app brings personalized workout plans, workout classes, exercise products, and other social fitness features to a growing cohort of young, health-conscious urbanites.¹⁷

Social Media Challenges and Community Engagement: Organizing virtual challenges

and creating online communities to foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie around SAPA. Social media platforms offer opportunities to connect individuals and communities with a shared interest in SAPA and encourage mutual support. The global social network Strava is a good example of a platform that hosts various challenges, such as monthly mileage goals, virtual races, and community events. Users can join challenges, track their progress, and share achievements with the Strava community. The platform also integrates with other fitness apps and devices for comprehensive tracking.¹⁸

Corporate Wellness Platforms: Implementing digital leaderboards and wellness challenges in workplaces to gamify SAPA participation and reward active employees. Corporate wellness programs in India can leverage gamification strategies and localized incentives to motivate employees to participate actively in workplace challenges. Platforms like Virgin Pulse offer personalized health plans, fitness challenges, and a social component for employees.¹⁹ Stepathlon is another corporate wellness program from India that gamifies SAPA through a global corporate challenge.

Engaging Athletes and Sportspersons: Collaborating with renowned athletes, sportspersons and influencers to promote SAPA through social media and digital platforms. For example, the Nike Training Club app features workouts led by top professional

¹⁵ Bunchball. 2010. "Gamification 101: An Introduction to the Use of Game Dynamics to Influence Behavior," <http://www.bunchball.com/sites/default/files/downloads/gamification101.pdf>

¹⁶ Mazéas A, Chalabaev A, Blond M, et al, *Digital intervention promoting physical activity among obese people (DIPPAO) randomised controlled trial: study protocol*. BMJ Open 2022;12:e058015. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2021-058015

¹⁷ <https://thechinaproject.com/2023/08/11/keep-fitness-app-bet-big-during-the-pandemic-will-it-pay-off/>

¹⁸ <https://press.strava.com/articles/strava-releases-year-in-sport-trend-report>

¹⁹ <https://www.virginpulse.com/solutions/employee-experience/>

athletes and trainers, such as Serena Williams.²⁰

Pillar 3 – Environment

In his book "Atomic Habits," James Clear explains that while motivation is important, the environment has a more significant impact on shaping human behavior over time. He emphasizes that designing an environment conducive to good habits can lead to better outcomes, as environmental factors often have a more profound and lasting effect on behavior than sheer willpower or talent alone.²¹

The third pillar - Environment describes the importance of creating accessible environments that inspire and facilitate SAPA. It involves advocating for infrastructure development, promoting active commuting options, and fostering a culture of wellness within workplaces, schools, and communities.

As supportive settings seamlessly integrate SAPA into daily routines, the environment pillar acts as a powerful motivator, encouraging individuals to embrace active lifestyles as an integral part of their lives. For example, promoting walking and cycling as viable transport options can significantly increase SAPA levels in urban Indian populations.

Creating a conducive environment for access to SAPA also requires interventions that build, strengthen, and maintain social networks. This change can be achieved either by creating new social networks or working within pre-existing networks in a social setting outside

the family, such as the workplace.²² Research has highlighted the need to integrate SAPA opportunities within the fabric of communities and cities. Community-based interventions have an important role in promoting SAPA behaviour among people.²³

Some of the key mechanisms for creating a supporting environment for access and motivation are:

Urban Planning for Active Communities: Collaborating with policymakers and urban planners to design cities and communities that prioritize and facilitate SAPA, such as safe walking and cycling paths, parks, and recreational facilities. Urban planning must focus on creating pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods, providing dedicated cycling lanes, and developing green spaces that serve as recreational areas for SAPA.

In India, the National Urban Transport Policy, 2014 highlights the importance of walking and cycling. Many cities in Europe are well known for enabling active transportation. Copenhagen and Amsterdam are renowned for their extensive bicycle infrastructure, including dedicated bike lanes, bike-friendly traffic signals, and bike parking facilities.²⁴

In Colombia, the Ciclovía program is a community-based program in which streets are temporarily closed to motorized vehicles to allow exclusive access for pedestrians, cyclists, skaters, and others for active

²⁰ <https://www.self.com/story/i-did-serena-williams-15-minute-arms-and-back-workout-and-i-felt-almost-as-badass-as-her>

²¹ <https://jamesclear.com/power-of-environment>

²² Worksite Physical Activity, Physical Activity, CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/worksite-pa/index.htm>

²³ Kahn EB, Ramsey LT, Brownson RC, Heath GW, Howze EH, Powell KE, Stone EJ, Rajab MW, Corso P. *The effectiveness of interventions to increase physical activity. A systematic review.* Am J Prev Med. 2002 May;22(4 Suppl):73-107. doi: 10.1016/s0749-3797(02)00434-8. PMID: 11985936.

²⁴ <https://urbancyclinginstitute.org/the-popularity-of-bicycle-tourism-in-copenhagen/>

recreation.²⁵

Group-based interventions: Group or community-focused SAPA interventions are more effective than individually-targeted ones, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged communities.²⁶ We have seen examples of national mass-participation events on SAPA in India like FIT India's Freedom Run, Walkathon, Cyclothon, etc. Parkrun is another example of a free, accessible community event where one can walk, jog, run, volunteer or spectate.²⁷

Community-Based SAPA Spaces: Establishing community exercise parks, playgrounds, and outdoor gyms that cater to people of all ages and abilities. Community spaces can serve as centres for SAPA and social interaction, contributing to a sense of belonging and community well-being. An example of such spaces is Open Streets events during which, cars are restricted from driving on certain streets so that people may walk, run, bike, skate, dance and play for a few hours each week, most commonly on Sundays. Common in Latin America, these events give communities a safe and affordable environment in which to come together for exercise and play.²⁸

Active School and Workplace Initiatives: Integrating SAPA breaks in schools, incorporating SAPA in corporate wellness programs, and promoting an active work

culture. In schools and workplaces, incorporating SAPA into daily routines can positively impact both academic performance and workplace productivity. SAPA programmes at workplaces have the potential to increase employees' productivity, reduce absenteeism, and increase morale. There are several active school and workplace initiatives across the world which are in place and exemplify how such programs can be designed and implemented. Finnish Schools on the Move aims to establish a physically active culture in Finnish comprehensive schools. In 2012, the Danish government emphasized that 45 minutes of exercise and PA must be part of the integrated school day at all year levels. The Government of Queensland launched an Active Workplaces Guide outlining why 10,000 steps daily are key for good health.²⁹

Institutional design: At schools, universities or workplaces, individuals can be encouraged to carry out SAPA on-site by building safe walking trails or paths, installing showers for joggers and exercisers, and installing gyms with aerobic and weight training equipment (with instructions on proper equipment use).³⁰ At the University of East London, The Active Trails and Active Journey Programs offer a range of free activities designed to enhance mind, body, and spirit, including mindful movement, fitness classes, and well-being walks.

²⁵ Torres A, Sarmiento OL, Stauber C, Zarama R. The Ciclovía and Cicloruta programs: promising interventions to promote physical activity and social capital in Bogotá, Colombia. *Am J Public Health*. 2013 Feb;103(2):e23-30. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2012.301142. Epub 2012 Dec 13. PMID: 23237179; PMCID: PMC3558786.

²⁶ Claire L. Cleland, Mark A. Tully, Frank Kee, Margaret E. Cupples, *The effectiveness of physical activity interventions in socio-economically disadvantaged communities: A systematic review*, Preventive Medicine, Volume 54, Issue 6, 2012, Pages 371-380, ISSN 0091-7435, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2012.04.004>.

²⁷ <https://www.coachweb.com/running/7917/what-is-parkrun-and-why-does-everyone-love-it#:~:text=Why%20is%20parkrun%20so%20great,not%20about%20competing%20with%20others>.

²⁸ <https://publichealth.wustl.edu/open-streets-rwjf-project/>.

²⁹ <https://sports-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Issue-brief-3-Active-Workplaces.pdf>

³⁰ Division of Population Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/health-strategies/physical-activity/interventions/environmental-support.html>

Pillar 4 – Perception

This pillar of the framework focuses on transforming the perception towards SAPA demonstrating that SAPA is much more than just good physical health. It emphasizes the significance of raising awareness about SAPA and its multifaceted benefits in the Indian context. Increasing awareness can inform citizens about the benefits of SAPA, explain methods for overcoming barriers and negative attitudes about SAPA, and increase participation in community-based activities.

Through targeted public health campaigns, educational workshops, and engagement with health professionals, this pillar seeks to empower individuals with knowledge about the positive impact of SAPA on mental health, productivity, performance, and leadership skills. This pillar acknowledges that, alongside changes to the physical environment and policy around SAPA, we must also target social and individual factors such as social norms, perceptions and attitudes.

While educating citizens, SAPA-focused initiatives must encourage the target audience to consider the type of information in the message, of which there are three potential types: (1) what to do, (2) why to do it, and (3) how to do it. ‘What to do’ information includes information on the amount, intensity and type of SAPA being promoted. ‘Why to do it’ information includes information on the benefits or consequences of being active (or sedentary). ‘How to do it’ information encompasses practical or supportive information that may provide instructions or guidance on how, when, and where to be active.³¹

The following are some examples of initiatives which can help increase awareness surrounding SAPA:

Public Health Campaigns: Implementing multimedia campaigns that resonate with Indian cultural norms and values to educate the public about the importance of SAPA for mental health, productivity, performance, and leadership. Public health campaigns should consider incorporating traditional activities like yoga, dance, and traditional games as part of the promotion of SAPA. In the last few years, International Yoga Day has been widely promoted which seeks to spread awareness about the benefits of yoga and meditation worldwide. Launched by Sport Australia, “Find Your 30” is another effective campaign which encourages Australians to find 30 minutes for SAPA every day.

Integrating SAPA in School Curriculum: Health education and SAPA classes at the school level can lead to a positive change in students in terms of prioritizing SAPA and taking care of their diet and physical and mental health. In India, there are many laws and guidelines which highlight the provision of quality physical education in schools and this is enshrined in the National Curriculum Framework 2023 as well as The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. The erstwhile Let's Move! initiative in the USA aimed to combat childhood obesity by promoting SAPA and healthy eating. It included the integration of physical education into school curricula, providing resources and support to schools to enhance physical activity programs.³² In China, basic elements of the school curriculum include fundamental motor

³¹ Williamson, C., Baker, G., Tomasone, J.R. et al. *The Physical Activity Messaging Framework (PAMF) and Checklist (PAMC): International consensus statement and user guide*. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 18, 164 (2021).

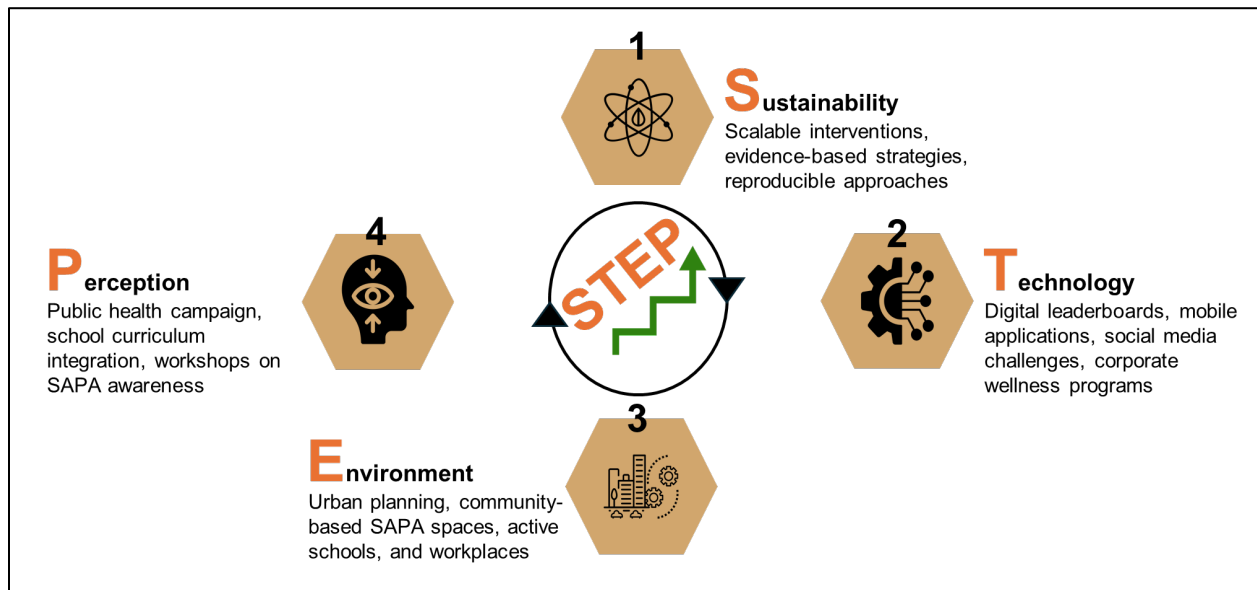
³² <https://letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/>

skills, athletics, games, gymnastics, martial arts, and other traditional sports.

Workshops on SAPA: Engaging with local communities and using vernacular languages in workshops can effectively convey the importance of SAPA and break down language barriers. For instance, Change4Life is a public

health programme in England which is the country's first national social marketing campaign to tackle the causes of obesity.³³ In the USA, the Minnesota Department of Health has started Walkable Community workshops which bring together community members and local leaders to create strategies for improving walkability in their areas.³⁴

Figure 1: Key features of the STEP framework



The STEP Framework operates as a dynamic, circular mechanism, with each pillar reinforcing the others. At its core, sustainability (Pillar 1) focuses on creating scalable, evidence-based interventions tailored to the Indian context. This foundation ensures lasting impact by allowing interventions to adapt and evolve. Next, the technology pillar (Pillar 2) leverages digital tools like mobile apps and social media challenges to enhance engagement and accountability. Real-time feedback fosters community and competition, while technology

insights optimize sustainable interventions. The environment pillar (Pillar 3) then creates supportive settings with safe walking and cycling paths, parks, and recreational facilities. Community exercise classes and workplace wellness initiatives integrate SAPA into daily routines, fostering a culture of wellness. Finally, the perception pillar (Pillar 4) raises awareness of SAPA's benefits through public health campaigns, education, and workshops. Increased knowledge encourages individuals to seek active living environments, reinforcing the other pillars. Technology, through digital

³³ <https://www.thensmc.com/resources/showcase/change4life>

³⁴ <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/physicalactivity/walkablemn.html>

leaderboards and virtual challenges, further enhances SAPA's communal perception, boosting motivation and participation.

This iterative cycle ensures the STEP Framework remains responsive to changing needs, promoting a culture of active living deeply ingrained in Indian society. By integrating sustainability, technology,

environment, and perception, the framework empowers individuals and communities to embrace SAPA, leading to improved health, well-being, and quality of life. The collaborative efforts of policymakers, organizations, institutions, and community leaders make the STEP Framework a powerful tool for a healthier, more vibrant future in India.

Conclusion: Paving the Way for a Healthier India

The STEP framework addresses the many aspects of behavioral change, considering the cultural, social, and environmental factors that influence attitudes and behaviors toward SAPA. It is designed to be adaptable and scalable, allowing organizations to tailor interventions to the specific needs and challenges of different communities, institutions, and demographics within India. From crowded cities to rural areas, the framework recognizes the varying social dynamics that influence SAPA participation. SAPA decision-makers can use the STEP framework to design and optimize interventions that fit India's unique cultural context while accommodating different social dynamics and infrastructural constraints.

The framework's iterative nature, guided by continuous evaluation and feedback, ensures it stays responsive to new research and evolving societal needs. Through the interplay of its pillars, the STEP framework creates a cohesive approach that adapts to the changing needs and aspirations of individuals and communities.

By promoting a culture of active living, the framework aims to improve physical health, mental well-being, productivity, performance, and leadership capabilities, contributing to a thriving society. With this framework, stakeholders in the India SAPA and broader impact ecosystem can embark on a transformative journey, empowering individuals and communities to embrace SAPA for better health and quality of life. Whether piloting new interventions, optimizing existing programs, or launching public health campaigns, the STEP framework can, we hope, serve as a blueprint to guide Indians to an active and healthy future.



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