

## **PROMOTING PEACE THROUGH SPORT**

It takes the continuous effort of peacemakers to devise innovative ways to attain lasting peace in communities and throughout the world. Violence goes to the heart of stability in communities with results which can take many years to bring about healing. When communities are torn about there is usually a gap in trust between citizens that can only be closed by further re-engagement.

Sport is a universally accepted recreational activity or set of activities that keep the mind and body active. While sport has taken a largely commercial position with competitive leagues globally, there is the social aspect of sport that drives development faster than can be imagined.

One way to foster re-engagement with communities devastated by war is to use sport as a meaningful means to rebuild trust. Liberia for instance rallied around its current president and former footballer, George Weah, to rebuild the country which had a long period of violence sparked by its old leadership. This is evidence that the effect of sport on the reconstruction of war-torn nations is one that should not be ignored.

Peacemakers should explore sport as a tool for confidence and trust building before and after crisis in communities. If citizens engage in sustainable sport there is the possibility that violence may not arise because sport becomes a tool for communication. Likewise, sport can also facilitate discussions, friendship and cooperation where war had prevailed in the past. Leaders should not take sport lightly because of its proven effectiveness in promoting peace and understanding.

There is also an opportunity for peacemakers to ensure that the most vulnerable groups – youth and women - are the main drivers of sport initiatives. Sporting activities are to be inclusive to make the impact of healing initiatives in crisis areas possible. Women in particular should be engaged in all forms of sporting activities along with the same measure accorded to their male counterparts.

Peacemakers will soon discover that it is through communicating using the tool of sport that vulnerable groups are able to re-integrate full into society. These views of these groups can be made known when they are involved in peacebuilding through sport. Peace will only become a reality when every stakeholder is given the chance to make an input. There is more to be realised in this peace process that comes with the aid of sport.