

## Activate a Sporty, Playful India

Physical activity and sports is now a key focus area for better health, reduction of non-communicable diseases, gender equality and empowerment, and a source of livelihood. A healthier population can significantly increase productivity. Highlighting the importance of physical activity, and a move towards reducing inactivity, can pave a productive way for our future generations.

Good health and an overall sense of physical fitness are critical to a healthy society, one that optimises natural advantages such as productivity, lower incidence of non-communicable diseases, better soft skills and overall a more empowered and inclusive society. All of this can be attained with a focus on traditional as well as modern interventions.

The benefits of physical activity and sports participation also help attain women-led development, especially empowerment and inclusion, one of G20's focus areas. This on its own sets a viable, sustainable and scalable G20 agenda.

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-30 (GAPPA) sets out four strategic objectives achievable through 20 policy actions that are universally applicable to all countries. It recognises that each country is at a different starting point in their efforts to reduce levels of physical inactivity and sedentary behaviour. These include creating:

- ▶ An active society.
- ▶ Active environments.
- ▶ Conditions to help people of all ages and abilities to engage in regular physical activity.
- ▶ Active systems to achieve excellence in resource mobilisation and implementation of coordinated action.

Physical activity as defined by WHO refers to all movement, and includes walking, cycling, wheeling, sports, active recreation and play. It can be done at any level of skill and for enjoyment. Current global estimates, however, show 1 in 4 adults and 81% of adolescents do not undertake enough physical activity. Furthermore, as countries develop economically, levels of inactivity increases and can be as high as 70%, due to changing transport patterns, increased use of technology for work and recreation, cultural values and increasing sedentary behaviours.

The ensuing levels of physical inactivity, according to WHO, have negative impacts on health systems, the environment, economic development, community well-being and quality of life.

Inactivity reportedly accounts for 1-3% of national healthcare costs —excluding costs associated with mental health and musculoskeletal conditions.

WHO has also indicated that increased levels of physical inactivity have negative impacts on health systems, the environment, economic development, community well-being and quality of life. It is a major contributor to chronic diseases and premature mortality.

WHO has targeted a 15% relative reduction in the global prevalence of physical inactivity in adults and in adolescents by 2030. If India adopts this as a priority, it could seek to exceed this target as a nation.

India also has a significant exercise intervention in the form of yoga. WHO has listed yoga as a means to improve health in its GAPP, and states that ‘regular yoga practice can help people of all ages and incomes achieve adequate physical activity, making it a high-impact, cost effective way to prevent and control non-communicable diseases (NCDs)’. UNICEF has stated that children can ‘practise many yoga poses without any risk and get the same benefits that adults do, like increased flexibility and fitness, mindfulness and relaxation’.

Universal access to participation and universal participation in physical activity for India could be an achievable goal by 2047 with prioritisation. Given India’s demographic dividend, there is no better way of optimising the opportunity than by having a healthy population.

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