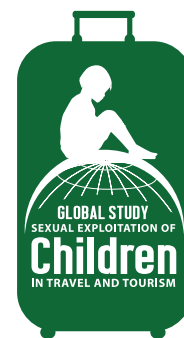


EXPERT PAPER

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: WHAT DO MEGA SPORTING EVENTS HAVE TO DO WITH IT?



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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the Brunel University published a groundbreaking research on sexual exploitation and the FIFA World Cup.¹ The key message conveyed was that although Mega Sporting Events may increase the risk of child sexual exploitation, there is no data to determine whether, how and to what extent these risks translate into harm. Most importantly, the study highlighted that one should not assume that no data means that there is no problem.

With the aim of responding to the lack of evidence and better understand the rights violations against children, the recently published research by the University of Dundee has pointed to sexual exploitation of children as one of the four key violations that happen around Mega Sporting Events – along with police (and army) violence, displacement and child labour.² The interview data showed that poor, marginalised girls aged 9 to 17 as “particularly at risk from sexual exploitation and harassment”. Before the event, child sexual exploitation was observed near prostitution zones next to refurbished stadiums, whereas during the event children were seen within already existing prostitution zones, and there were potential cases suspected in private or VIP areas in stadiums.³

A common trend when analysing existing research is the “invisibility” of child sexual exploitation around Mega Sporting Events. First, it appears child sexual exploitation is hidden behind other social problems, such as diverted services, family stress due to displacement, street clearance and reconstruction of stadiums.⁴ According to the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women, although advocacy interventions focus greatly on child trafficking and sexual exploitation, it appears that campaigns specifically targeting human trafficking may hide a political agenda to de-legalise prostitution.⁵ Second, research has shown that in most cases, girls or boys being sexually exploited are not perceived as victims – in fact, not even as children or adolescents.⁶ A study conducted in several countries has shown that men actually justify their perception of sexual exploitation by saying that although “sex work” of a girl or a

boy (under 18) is morally wrong, it is their own choice to make.⁷ Third, sexual exploitation is invisible because it mostly happens to socially excluded and vulnerable groups, already marginalised by society.⁸ Depending on race, gender, class and nationality involved an interaction can be understood as flirtation or child sexual exploitation. Putting it bluntly, the whiter and more upper class the girl or boy appears, the less likely it will be that people perceive them as sex workers.⁹ In the context of Mega Sporting Events, the “invisibility” of socially excluded groups is further contrasted to the maximum visibility of “profitable” issues, such as the attraction of tourists and investors.¹⁰

In order to prevent, report and respond appropriately to child sexual exploitation during all stages of organising a Mega Sporting Event – from the early planning and bidding stage, the infra-structure development, hosting, implementation, until final reporting – it is key that initiatives take place simultaneously at local and international level involving all stakeholders.¹¹

CHANGING THE GAME OF MEGA SPORTING EVENTS

At the local level, Mega Sporting Events have the potential of providing a platform to strengthen collaboration between various stakeholders aiming to address potential harm and use the momentum for significant and lasting change. For instance, in Brazil, a unique integrated effort between the Brazilian Government, NGO community and UN agencies, the “Convergence Agenda Protect Brazil”, was established with the main goal of addressing the negative impact on children arising from the preparation to the actual implementation of mega events.¹² Key areas could have been improved in order to prevent additional sexual and other exploitation associated with Mega Sporting Events, such as: a longer time frame for greater integration between organisations; better and more reliable data, including statistics on rights violations; and meaningful participation of

children.¹³ Depending on how it evolves, the “Convergence Agenda” might be an important example of how Mega Sporting Events can act as a catalyst for positive change for children.

The actions undertaken at the international level are usually aimed at reinforcing the culture of human rights within leading sports bodies. A recently formed coalition of leading global organisations, the Sport and Rights Alliance (SRA),¹⁴ is currently working to improve human rights, including children’s rights, labour rights, anti-corruption and sustainability in sport, in particular, with regard to Mega Sporting Events such as the Olympic Games and the football World Cup. Apart from representing children’s rights in any action taken as part of the SRA, the Children Win campaign led by Terre des Hommes¹⁵ seeks to strengthen children’s rights¹⁶ within leading sports bodies, so that they enhance positive effects and prevent any direct or indirect negative impact that these events might have on children – before, during and after they take place.

Mega Sporting Events are very complex by “nature”, since it involves a great variety of stakeholders: from the host-awarding process, infrastructure, development of legislation, sponsors’ contracts, technical sport organisations, finances, communications, welfare, public health, environment, security and marketing the legacy. This complexity leads to sometimes competing or overlapping duties, which end up diluting responsibilities between these actors – leaving the local population without a clear responsibility for the impact happening on the ground. That is why it is key that the described local and international levels work hand in hand.

RAISING THE BAR FOR CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

The “Fundamental Principles of Olympism” established in the Olympic Charter guarantees, amongst other values, the respect for “human dignity”, for

“universal fundamental principles” and the “educational value of good example”.¹⁷ Similarly, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) stresses the importance of “humanitarian values” in its Statutes and makes sure to publicise that their duty goes beyond football, stretching ‘to improve the lives of young people and their surrounding communities, to reduce the negative impact of our activities and to make the most we can of the positives.’¹⁸ These powerful statements are very telling when seeking to establish the role of sports bodies in mitigating direct and indirect impact derived from their activities.

Sports organisations too often have declared themselves powerless to act while governments have promised whatever it took to win the bid to host Mega Sporting Events.¹⁹ The momentum has shifted and sport fans, corporate sponsors and the general public are increasingly reminding sports bodies that these are not the principles that they uphold. When countries bid to host Mega Sporting Events, governments pledge not only to build sparkling stadiums but also to uphold these values.

Having faced increase criticism over forced evictions, migrant workers, environmental destruction and LGBT rights’ violations seems to have provided the long awaited impetus needed for sports bodies to reform. With the “Agenda 2020”,²⁰ the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has the unique opportunity to set the example for other international sports organisers to follow. The willingness to lead the introduction of a “new philosophy”, ensuring ‘contract clauses with regard to Fundamental Principle 6 of the Olympic Charter’ and making the host city contract public, represents an important and memorable step by the IOC.²¹ Now the real challenge will be to ensure host states’ compliance with these new criteria.

In order to guarantee coherence and the full implementation of these values, the evaluation of future host candidates should include children’s rights benchmarks, in compliance with international human rights norms and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.²² Bid agreements should involve a **complete and thorough**

assessment of all direct and indirect risks and opportunities to children before, during and after Mega Sporting Events. These standards should not be based on goodwill, but must be non-negotiable and absolutely binding for all stakeholders.

In order to guarantee regular and vigorous investigation, report and remedy violations related to Mega Sporting Events venues in collaboration with the host government, sports bodies should introduce an **independent monitoring board** from the very beginning. Comprising of expert organisations and stakeholders, the board would hold representatives from the local host state that would highlight any contextual variations of the different risks in that specific location and would be mandated specifically on risks related to children’s rights.²³ This may include, for instance, abuse and exploitation, including sexual exploitation linked to large construction sites and child labour concerns. This oversight would also guarantee that there will be no unlawful forced evictions. Moreover, any displacement which paves the way for infrastructure of Mega Sporting Events is done in accordance with international human rights norms and takes into account the right of children to be heard and their best interest accounted for. Further, the independent advisory board will also guarantee that there will be no arbitrary detentions and/or forcible removal of any population groups or individuals deemed undesirable on various grounds by the authorities. The well-being of children is also impacted by the forced removal of their parents or caregivers, street clearance and other rights violations. Increased vulnerability of families, along with other problem situations, increases the risk of child sexual exploitation. Lastly, in the interest of transparency and to better monitor the enforcement of these assessments, the bid agreement and its monitoring should be made public.

As shown, the increased risk of child sexual exploitation due to Mega Sporting Events is only “invisible” at first sight. The premise “you bring the house, and we bring the party” only works if those organising the party fully respect and value the hosts. A global sporting event can only be truly

successful and legitimate if it does not harm the local population – including its children. That is a precondition for sport to serve as a catalyst and effectively show its powerful spirit and “force for good”. It

is time leading sports bodies align their practise to their ideals by putting in place all measures necessary to mitigate any preventable harm to children and support the advancement of their rights.

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ABOUT TERRE DES HOMMES

The Terre des Hommes International Federation is a network of ten national organisations working for the rights of children and to promote equitable development without racial, religious, political, cultural or gender-based discrimination.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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- ¹ Brunel University London. *Child Sexual Exploitation and the FIFA World Cup: A review of risks and protective interventions*. (2013).
- ² University of Dundee. *Let's Win This Game Together: Documenting violations of children's rights around the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil*. (2015), p. 5 and 48.
- ³ Idem, p. 34.
- ⁴ As raised by a representative of the National Articulation of the Centre for the Defense of the Rights of Children (ANCD): 'in the area of construction of stadiums there was the issue of sexual exploitation of children, we have reports in São Paulo, in Fortaleza, Recife, I mean, have begun to organise certain exploitation networks around the stadiums for the male contingent of the works allocated there' (University of Dundee. *Let's Win This Game Together: Documenting violations of children's rights around the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil*. (2015), p. 33.).
- ⁵ For more information on this topic, see: Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW). *What is the cost of a rumour? A guide to sorting out the myths and the facts about sporting events and trafficking*. (2011).
- ⁶ A report by Childhood Brasil showed that 'although 85% of respondents say they have seen children or adolescents involved with the sex trade near construction areas, in the eyes of the majority of this population of men workers, there is no sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. They are not seen as victims even as children or adolescents' (Childhood Brazil. *The sexuality of the Civil Construction Worker – Sex Trade and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents*. (2009)).
- ⁷ The study was conducted in Brazil, Chile, Croatia, India, Mexico, Rwanda and South Africa. International Center for Research on Women and Promundo. *Evolving Men - Initial Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)*. (2011), p. 53-54.
- ⁸ De Paula and Bartelt (2014) discuss how the increase in violations is felt in particular for the poorest and underprivileged sectors in terms of social policies (Heinrich Böll Brazil Institute. De Paula and Bartelt. *Cup for whom and for what? A look at the legacy of the world in Brazil, South Africa and Germany* (2014)).
- ⁹ Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. *Observatório da Prostituição*. (2014), p. 38.
- ¹⁰ University of Dundee. *Let's Win This Game Together: Documenting violations of children's rights around the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil*. (2015), p. 10.
- ¹¹ As stated in para. 24 of the UNGA Progress report of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee on the study on the possibilities of using sport and the Olympic ideal to promote human rights (A/HRC/27/58, 24 August 2014): 'Major Sporting events can be used as a catalyst to implement child protective strategies and to strengthen cooperation amongst various stakeholders to mitigate potential harm'.
- ¹² Agenda de Convergência Proteja Brasil. Accessed on 5 May 2015 from: <http://www.childhood.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/agenda-convergencia.pdf>
- ¹³ University of Dundee. *Let's Win This Game Together: Documenting violations of children's rights around the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil*. (2015), p. 6.
- ¹⁴ The Sport and Rights Alliance is composed of the following organisations: Amnesty International, FIFPro – World Players' Union, Football Supporters Europe, Human Rights Watch, International Trade Union Confederation, Supporters Direct Europe, Terre des Hommes and Transparency International Germany.
- ¹⁵ For more information on Children Win campaign: <http://www.childrenwin.org/>
- ¹⁶ A "child": means every human being below the age of eighteen years, as established by Article 1, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Accessed on 5 May 2015 from: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.
- ¹⁷ International Olympic Committee. Olympic Charter (in force as from 8 December 2014), p. 11 to 12. Accessed on 5 May 2015 from: http://www.olympic.org/Documents/olympic_charter_en.pdf
- ¹⁸ FIFA. *What we stand for*. Accessed on 3 May 2015 from: <http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/explore-fifa.html>.
- ¹⁹ For more information on this topic, see also: Minky Worden. *Raising the Bar: Mega-Sporting Events and Human Rights* (2015), p. 42. In: Human Rights Watch. World Report 2015 (events of 2014).
- ²⁰ International Olympic Committee. Olympic Agenda 2020. Accessed on 5 May 2015 from: http://www.olympic.org/documents/olympic_agenda_2020/olympic_agenda_2020-20-20_recommendations-eng.pdf.
- ²¹ International Olympic Committee. Olympic Agenda 2020, Recommendation 1. Accessed on 5 May 2015 from: http://www.olympic.org/documents/olympic_agenda_2020/olympic_agenda_2020-20-20_recommendations-eng.pdf.
- ²² UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Accessed on 5 May 2015 from: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.
- ²³ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child notes in its preamble that 'the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care'.

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