



# PLAYING THE GAME

There's a breathless hush in the close tonight –  
Ten to make and the match to win –  
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,  
An hour to play and the last man in.  
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,  
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,  
But his captain's hand on his shoulder smote –  
'Play up! Play up! and play the game!'

*Vital Lampada, Henry Newbolt (1862–1938)*

SPORT IS A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE THAT CAN BRING PEOPLE  
TOGETHER, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR ORIGIN, BACKGROUND,  
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR ECONOMIC STATUS.

Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General

LEFT: Papua New Guinea. Clash of the  
Titans – Australia versus Papua New  
Guinea. Photo: Action Photographics  
TOP: Pakistan. Sunday afternoon cricket.  
Photo: Dermot Tatlow/Panos Pictures

## PACIFIC STEPS

Non-communicable diseases – heart disease, diabetes and cancer – are rapidly increasing in many Pacific island nations.

While associated with ‘preventable’ lifestyle choices, such as smoking, inactivity and diets high in fat, until now there has been no reliable data on risk factors and prevention strategies.

With support from AusAID, the World Health Organization trialled STEPS – an information collection plan. By analysing data gathered through regular surveys, trends of key risk factors are emerging. Such is the success of the initiative, STEPS is spreading not only around the Pacific but also to the Philippines, Mongolia, Malaysia and Vietnam.



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[1] Running hard. Tonga–Samoa Inclusive Games in Nuku’alofa, Tonga. Photo: NSIC Collection/ASC  
[2] Maldives, shortly after the wave. Not even the Indian Ocean tsunami could stop the world game. Photo: Will Salter  
[3] Solomon Islands. The Hurricanes in training. Team members are deaf. Photo: Lorrie Graham  
[4] Solomon Islands. Anyone for tennis? Improving skills, health and wellbeing

under the Pacific Junior Sport Program. Photo: Lorrie Graham  
[5] Solomon Islands. Girls just want to have fun – the playful aspect of sport, part of the Solomon Islands Pacific Sports Carnival. Photo: *Solomon Star* newspaper  
[6] Sione Manu competes at the Tonga–Samoa Inclusive Games in Nuku’alofa, Tonga. Photo: NSIC Collection/ASC



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SPORT CAN HELP OVERCOME IGNORANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AND SOW THE SEEDS OF INTEGRATION AND EQUALITY.

Adolf Ogi, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace

## MULTIPLE SPORTS FACTORS

### Sport – it's entertaining, healthy and everyone can play

The appeal of sport is beginning to gather pace. 'So many development objectives can be realised through sport,' says Mark Peters, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Sports Commission. 'Its value is sometimes underestimated but as anyone knows who's ever been to a rugby game in Samoa or Fiji – there's very little that mobilises Pacific island communities quite like sport.'

There's something about the sports factor. Research carried out by the Australian Sports Commission shows it transcends all social, political and ethnic barriers. Its appeal crosses educational levels, religious preferences and all language groups.

Its easy ability to bring people together makes sport a powerful communication tool – a fact not overlooked by AusAID.

Increasingly, the aid program is using sport to reach people – to tell them about important development issues such as HIV/AIDS awareness, drug and alcohol education, and non-communicable disease prevention.

Then there are the health benefits for those who play sport. The World Health Organization estimates physical inactivity causes 1.9 million deaths globally including:

- » about 22 per cent of ischaemic heart disease
- » 10 to 16 per cent of cases each of breast cancer, colon and rectal cancers and diabetes mellitus

'Western lifestyle' diseases – such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes are on the rise in developing countries, even among young people. The increase in fatty diets and a decrease in exercise are the main causes. The World Health Organization

estimates 'less than one-third of young people in countries around the world are sufficiently active to benefit their present and future health and wellbeing.'

### FINDING WAYS TO INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS THE MOST COST EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE WAY TO TACKLE HEALTH PROBLEMS.

Regular physical activity is important for building and maintaining healthy bones, muscles and joints. Acquiring better fitness levels also help control feelings of anxiety and depression. According to the World Health Organization, there are further bonuses in properly guided physical activity. It encourages other healthy behaviours, such as avoiding tobacco, alcohol and drug use.

It also helps to filter violent and aggressive behaviours by allowing participants to 'let off steam'.

Health advantages may be overwhelming but so too are the social ones. UNICEF has identified studies showing involvement in sport or other physical activities allow young people to build self-confidence and feel a sense of achievement. Belonging to a social group or 'team' also encourages greater social interaction and integration. In societies, such as Papua New Guinea, comprising hundreds of different tribal and language groups, sport is a uniting force. It promotes social cohesion and 'nation building'.

For the aid program the case for more sporting opportunities is clear – taking in the multiple factors of social, physical, mental and political gains.

# SPORTS PROGRAMS

The Australian Government is at the international forefront of 'sport for community development'. It funds programs in southern Africa, the Caribbean but mostly in the Pacific, reflecting the national interest.

» The Australia–South Pacific Sports Program, funded by AusAID and managed by the Australian Sports Commission, operates in 14 Pacific island nations and has been in existence since 1994.

It addresses sport and physical activity at all levels. The Pacific Junior Sport Program improves health and wellbeing of children aged six to 12 by making sport fun and increasing opportunities to play.

» The Pacific Sport Ability Program is a games-based, inclusive sports program for teachers, sport development officers, coaches and community group representatives. Its purpose is to improve sporting opportunities for people with disabilities. Paralympic sports of boccia, seated volleyball and goalball are part of the program.

Currently operating in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji, the program is making an appreciable difference. One of the main benefits is everyone is learning more about disability. 'We know that if children with a disability participate in sport they become more active in their everyday life. Other people see them playing sport and understand that they are capable of doing many things,'

says Nina Davis, President of the Solomon Islands Paralympic Committee.

- » Through the Australia–South Pacific Sports Program, the Australian Government is welcoming Pacific athletes to train at the world-class Australian Institute of Sport.
- » Since 1994, the Australian Sports Commission has offered over 450 scholarships to elite and potentially elite athletes, coaches and sports science practitioners. Many of these athletes have gone on to record significant achievements at World Championships and Olympic, Commonwealth and South Pacific Games.
- » The long-term benefits of Australia's sport development programs in the Pacific are underpinned by the Oceania Sport Education Program. AusAID has committed \$615,000 to developing a world-first regional approach to sport education. It will provide sport administration and coaching courses via flexible and distance learning throughout the Pacific.

The Australian Government is contributing to the development of communities through sport in over 30 countries worldwide (southern Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific). Such activities ensure Australia's respected international sporting reputation extends beyond the performance of its elite athletes.

For more information about sports programs in developing countries run by the Australian Sports Commission and funded by AusAID see [www.ausport.gov.au/international](http://www.ausport.gov.au/international)





ABOVE: Australia's Anthony Tupou breaks through defence in the independence celebration match in Port Moresby. Photo: Rocky Roe

LEFT: Rugby league heroes from Papua New Guinea and Australia talking frankly about HIV/AIDS with students. Their main message – 'Play safe, stay safe.' Photo: Rocky Roe

ABOVE RIGHT: Mal Meninga, considered a superstar by locals, is led through the crowd. Photo: Action Photographics



## TACKLING HIV

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA:** Australian rugby league aims to help bring down HIV infection rates.

Such is the passion for rugby league in Papua New Guinea, all those who play – especially at an elite level – are revered. In a country where rugby league is the national sport, visiting Australian players are feted as heroes.

In the daunting battle against the spread of HIV/AIDS, rugby league players are lending their considerable weight to the cause. Drawing on their 'star status' they're talking openly about a disease not many people are comfortable mentioning.

In between rugby matches they're visiting schools and community groups to help raise awareness. And because of the high regard in which they're held, their words resonate. Audiences listen.

Coached by league legends Mal Meninga and Brad Fittler

– 'super heroes' say the locals – the Australian team played in Port Moresby to a capacity crowd roaring its appreciation at every tackle and try. After the match, held as part of recent independence celebrations, Captain Luke Ricketson summed up the feelings of the Australians. Referring to the spirit and goodwill of the game, and the enthusiasm of the supporters, he said it was 'a moment he'd never forget'.

While touring Papua New Guinea, there were plenty of moments the team would never forget. School and community groups packed halls and ovals to listen to their heroes talk about 'staying healthy'. That 'includes protecting yourself against HIV/AIDS,' Brad Fittler told students at Gerehu High School.

Papua New Guinea has the highest reported rate of HIV/AIDS in the Pacific. An AusAID-commissioned report concludes, if not checked, the HIV epidemic will lead to major economic and

AUSTRALIAN RUGBY LEAGUE PLAYERS ARE DEMONSTRATING THE POWER OF SPORT IN COMMUNICATING IMPORTANT LIFE MESSAGES.

social declines. Heterosexual transmission is the most common means of infection. More than twice as many women aged 15–24 have HIV as young men, whereas males have higher infection levels in older age groups.

Infection rates will start to fall only when community attitudes to sex change. It's here in changing attitudes that Australian rugby league players are fulfilling a crucial need. Their high standing in the community permits them to challenge customs and social values, particularly those that subjugate women. In short, as role models and ambassadors for sport, they're able to influence changes in behaviour.

'There can be no rugby league players in the future if this terrible disease isn't stopped now,' says Mal Meninga. 'Australia and Papua New Guinea must work hard to beat it together. One of the ways we can help is by reaching people through rugby league.'

The centrepiece of Australia's response to HIV/AIDS in Papua New Guinea is a five-year, \$60 million National HIV/AIDS support project which works with Papua New Guinea's National Aids Council. Its activities include education programs, counselling, community care and clinical services. For more information <[www.ausaid.gov.au/country/png/hiv aids.cfm](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/country/png/hiv aids.cfm)>