



EQUAL PLAY EFFECT

2025

2020

5-YEAR REPORT



A collective global effort to accelerate gender equity
across football for good communities

Imprint

Equal Play Effect 5-Year Report

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Dear friends,

It's my great honor to share with you this 5 year report on the impact of the Equal Play Effect (EPE). What you'll find in these pages is our best attempt to capture a multi-country, multi-pronged journey that spans six continents and has touched hundreds of thousands of lives through the investment and belief of countless people. We are grateful to each and every one of you for your contribution; I hope you see yourself in the impact captured in these pages.

As you read through this report, I encourage you to take in the enormity of this collaboration. The Equal Play Effect is more than a project, more than a program, and more than any one person or organization. I have been in football across almost every level for more than 20 years, and I genuinely believe **it is the world's most substantial ground-up movement to shape a gender equal world through football**. It connects the first-ever league for refugee girls in Kampala, to indigenous girls taking the pitch for the first time in Peru, to women stepping into leading roles in South Africa, to women coaches demanding equal resources in Italy, to collaborative curriculum-building across the Philippines, Nepal, Australia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand. This vision has been amplified by a diverse and committed network, from Colombian national team members uniting with communities in advocacy, to footballers around the world pledging 1% of their salaries, to impact partners like adidas and Right to Dream investing in the movement as whole.

There is nothing else like it.

The Equal Play Effect is what it looks like when we stop waiting for systemic change to happen for us, and instead decide it will come from us. It means taking ownership of our own sphere of influence, however small or large, and choosing to take action. What we learned in this report is that, together, those actions turn a stream into a tidal wave...a movement.

This report takes an academic lens to a human experience. I challenge you to look for what stands true behind all of this: for every individual person or organization that this report counts, including me, their journey didn't just begin five years ago. Our journeys each began in a different moment, a different place, a different football pitch. Understanding this is key to understanding why it is so powerful to see our journeys come together through EPE.

My journey began when I was six; the very first time learned that gender equality was not a given. My family had moved from the United States to Germany, and I was enrolled in 2nd grade at a local public school. I couldn't speak any German, so classes were hard and recess was harder. All of the boys, including my older brother, would play football at recess. I was bullied on the sidelines, teased for being different than everyone else. I would try to run away; I even asked my Mom to remove the hood of my coat so I would be less likely to be caught. I desperately wanted to play with the boys. But there were no girls who played during recess. There were no teams for girls my age.

Through my brother and my Dad's advocacy, I was finally invited to play with the boys. **From that moment on, that play would shape my life, my courage, my friendships, my voice, my career.**

The Equal Play Effect is unlocking a gender equal world at every level, with football as our catalyzing force. In the report you'll find that this approach – the collective unlocking of individual, local acts of changemaking – is working. In aggregate, the Equal Play Effect approach has shifted mindsets, power, leadership, policies, and resource flows, and strengthened connectivity across a network of leaders committed to advancing gender equity through the world's game.

This report is our halftime, and the second half is about to begin.
Don't sit on the sidelines.

Together we can,

Mary Connor
USA Executive Director
Common Goal

A Collective Effort

EPE is a celebration of solidarity over status, of collective action over competition. This report reflects that shared commitment and serves as an open invitation for the community to keep growing.

EPE is driven and powered by a diverse network of individuals, expert partners, community Football for Good organizations, athletes, clubs, brands, development institutions and the media — each contributing in unique ways as door openers, resource providers, curriculum designers, advisors, storytellers, advocates, coaches, teachers, and more.

It is this diversity and its community-driven, bottom-up approach that makes Equal Play Effect truly unique - a model that empowers community-led initiatives while engaging brands, elite athletes, coaches, executives, media professionals, and fans to each play a meaningful role.

Who is part of the EPE Community

A Collective Effort

600+ individuals involved in the development and implementation of EPE globally, including:

- 357 community coaches
- 169 staff members from community organisations
- 100+ team members working regionally and globally, from Common Goal, Women Win, Soccer Without Borders, adidas, 17 Sport, Fundación Selección Colombia, Creating Chances, Moving the Goalposts, Tackle, Kick4Life, Tibu Africa and Reclaim Childhood.

From 101 organisations in 57 countries, including:

- 10 regional and global expert partners
- 91 community organisations
 - 48 in Africa
 - 20 in Latin America
 - 5 in Asia Pacific
 - 3 in the Middle East
 - 15 in Europe

259 Individuals pledging 1% of their salary to support the initiatives featured in this report, including:

- 53 professional players
- 44 Football executives
- 55 coaches
- 18 other individuals from and beyond football
- 89 Club staff

Brands, clubs, public institutions, and other partners

who believe in this movement include adidas, Right to Dream, FC Nordsjælland, GIZ, DAZN, Scotiabank, Bancolombia, World Football Summit, Minute Media, and many others.

chapter

1



THE PITCH WE PLAY ON

Progress on SDG 5* has stalled. Globally, few indicators are on track—

none have been fully achieved, and only two are near their targets. According to UN Women, achieving our ambitious gender equity goals requires close collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs), including grassroots women's groups. These partnerships ensure our efforts reach the most marginalized while leveraging their capacity to advocate for policy reforms, hold decision-makers accountable, and provide essential services.

- UN Women, 2024

*Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5): Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"

What Holds Back our Breakthrough Play

Gender inequity, deeply rooted in historical, social, and institutional factors, manifests uniquely across diverse regions, demographics, and cultures. According to the [UN Women's synthesis of UN Systems Evaluations of SDG5](#), "Harmful social norms are perhaps the greatest impediment to progress across SDG 5 targets."

Ingrained power dynamics and structural inequalities continue to uphold male-dominated structures, severely restricting women's autonomy and impeding their full participation and leadership. This ongoing challenge, perpetuated by both conscious and unconscious biases, demands our shared accountability:



Football for Good is...

Football for Good (F4G) is the intentional use of football to drive positive social and global change, contributing to a world where every young person can play, learn, and thrive. This approach emphasizes inclusion, co-creation, and community leadership, working primarily at the grassroots level to reach communities often left out by traditional football systems.



For Her to Lead Herself:

Girls continue to face entrenched cultural and structural barriers that limit their ability to engage fully in society - and her access to the agency to lead herself.



For Her to Lead Her Peers:

High turnover of girls and women staff [challenges local service providers](#), who often lack the resources, budget processes, and policies to plan and invest long-term development of women stepping into emerging leadership positions.



For Her to Lead Her Organization:

Insufficient budget processes, inconsistent financial commitments, and inadequate policy implementation limit the sustainability of gender-responsive programs.



For A Global Movement:

Safety and security concerns face women advocates, backed up against the broader cultural resistance that continues to challenge women from influencing movement agendas, directions, and growth.

Football for Good organizations in the Common Goal Community are leading the way in challenging these norms. They are taking accountability for how cultural norms and existing leadership structures have been designed through their participation in the Equal Play Effect. By reimagining their own internal structures, they ensure that girls and women are a central and ongoing part of both the solution and the movement for lasting change.

About Equal Play Effect

The Equal Play Effect (EPE), established by Common Goal in partnership with Women Win and Soccer Without Borders, is a scalable, adaptable, and replicable approach to advancing gender equity in and through football. Originally launched as the Global Goal 5 Accelerator in 2020, EPE was developed in direct response to a clear and pressing gap: the imbalance in representation of women and girls at every level of the football ecosystem.

Combining research-backed tools from Women Win, experiential inputs from Soccer Without Borders, and the network of organizations and athletes from Common Goal, EPE represented a bold new approach to tackle the true opponent of gender equity – not the individuals holding the ball or blocking access, but the deeper societal structures, norms, and systems that create barriers at every stage of her journey.

EPE has operated over its first five years as both a capacity-building initiative and a community of practice. As a capacity-builder, EPE offers a shared “Equal Play” framework to guide organizations in embedding gender-inclusive practices across every layer of their work. As a community of practice, EPE connects regional movements around a collective vision for transformation, enabling diverse actors to learn from and support one another while adapting tools and strategies to fit their unique contexts.

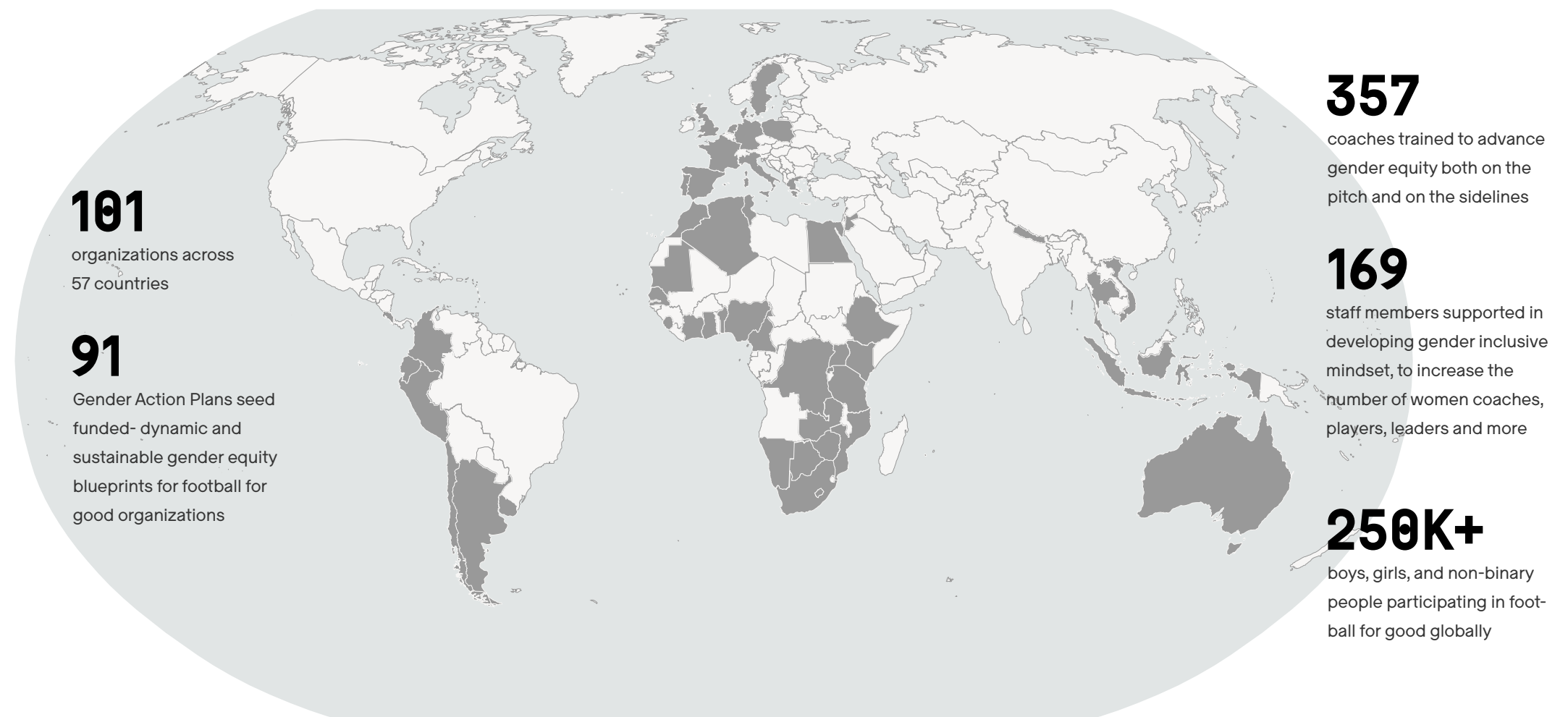


Why We Approach Gender Equity as a Collective

Without sustained collaboration across sectors—education, health, sport, and governance—progress toward gender equity remains fragile. Football, with its global reach and cultural influence, holds a unique power to drive change. At the heart of this effort is the Equal Play Effect.

The Equal Play Effect is a framework that goes beyond prescribing shared values. It is designed to activate collective power—aligning regional actors around a common goal of challenging patriarchy and building inclusive systems. Rather than focusing only on individual contributions, it emphasizes how change accelerates when leadership is distributed and communities move forward together.

This report explores that collective power in action, spotlighting the power of both the individual systems actors and the broader collective momentum they are building towards advancing gender equity through community-based football organizations worldwide.



chapter

2



THE HALFTIME HUDDLE

“We believe
that all girls are
born leaders

but they don't have many
opportunities to develop those
skills. We can support them to
build their confidence, learn how
to use their voice and speak up
from themselves.”

- Meg, Women Win (Expert
Partner), Global

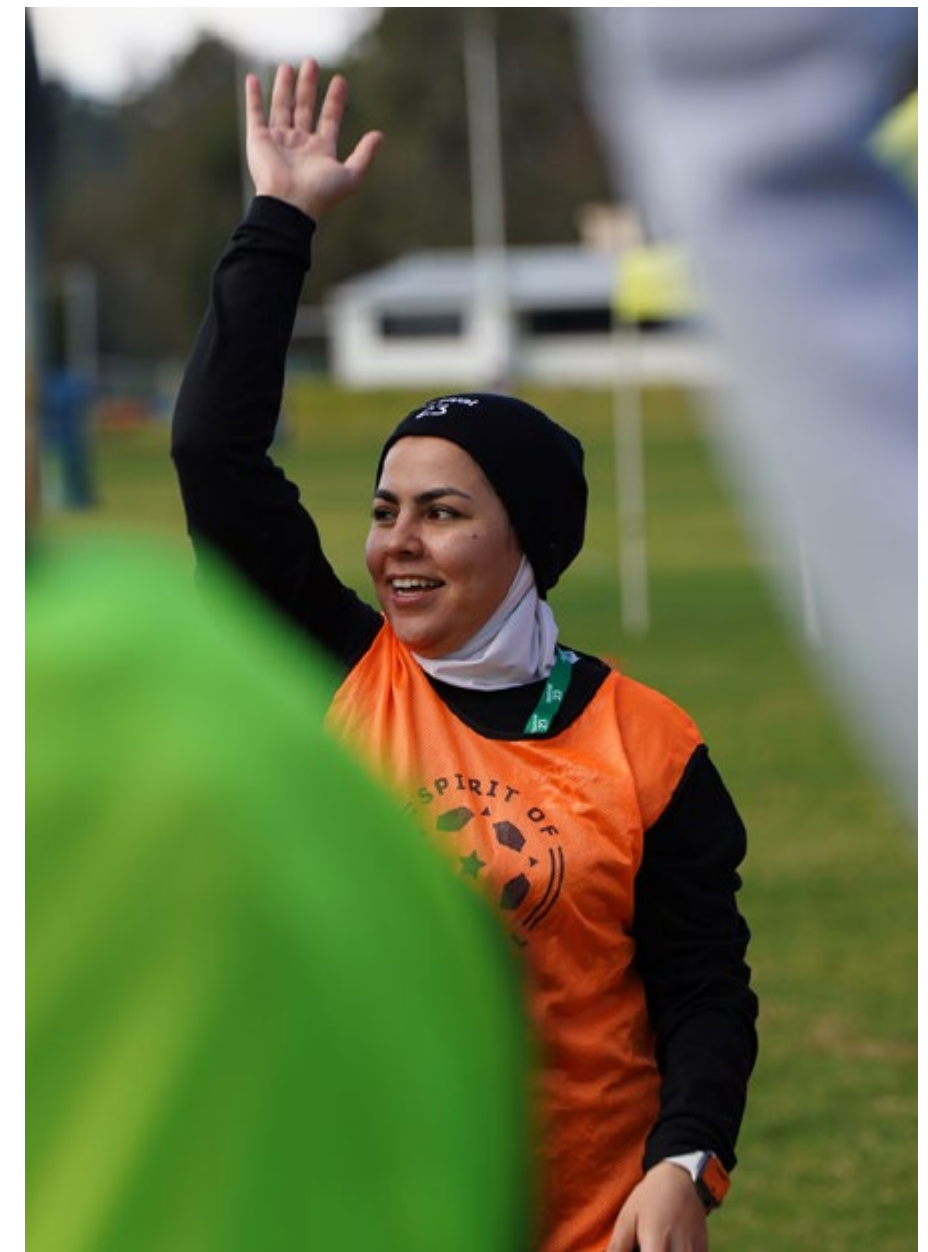
Purpose of the Halftime Huddle

EPE set out with a ten year vision to maximize its contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality by 2030. In the first 5 years of EPE, each regional initiative within EPE was supported by unique funding and resources. This report did not seek to evaluate individual grants or outcomes in isolation. Instead, it looks at the collective impact of the Equal Play Effect network to understand the power within it.

This report is our Halftime Huddle—a moment to reflect on the power of an integrated, global approach and assess how these first five years – our first half – has or has not catalyzed F4G’s contribution to gender equity. We paused at the blow of the first half whistle to dig deeper into two core questions:

1. How does EPE catalyze football’s contribution to gender equity?
2. What systems changes have emerged across regions on the pitch, on the sidelines, in the organizations, and in the communities across Football for Good to advance gender equity?

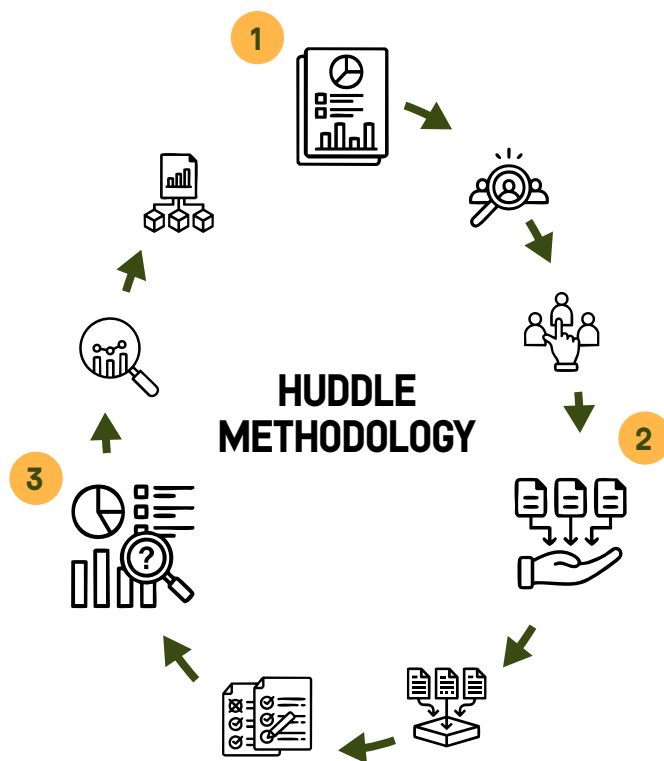
In short, we set out to assess the “Effect” of the Equal Play Effect.





Huddle Methodology

Methodology Overview: Led by Alex Richmond, PhD., this five-year reflective assessment of the Equal Play Effect used a mixed-methods approach, integrating existing monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) data from across regions with qualitative insights gathered through stakeholder focus groups. The assessment was conducted over a three-month period, encompassing three distinct phases of data collection and analysis, with input from 35+ individuals across the Equal Play Effect network and synthesis over 200 pages of stories, curricula, and reports from regional projects (see Appendix 1 for study participants and Appendix 2 for published reports).



Phase 1: Develop Research Approach

In collaboration with Common Goal, this research employed two central theories - **systems and network theories** - to develop the assessment framework to answer our research questions. These lenses helped us understand what elements within the EPE design supported F4G in catalyzing gender equity, what systemic changes occurred within F4G organizations, and what shared outcomes were observed across different regions. Work was done to identify regional leads (approximately 2–5 per region, based on partnership structure, network setup, and engagement capacity) to support the first round of interviews. From there, snowball sampling was used to nominate coaches and staff from EPE implementing partners, ensuring that 5–8 individuals per



region were able to share their insights and perspectives. (see Appendix 3 for the theory of change visualization)

Phase 2: Data Collection

Following this, an aggregation of existing program data and reports was conducted to establish baseline outcomes, while accounting for differences in implementation timelines across regions. This review surfaced knowledge gaps that guided our qualitative research, including focus groups and interviews with regional leads, coaches, and staff to test hypotheses and identify indicators of systemic change.

Phase 3: Analysis

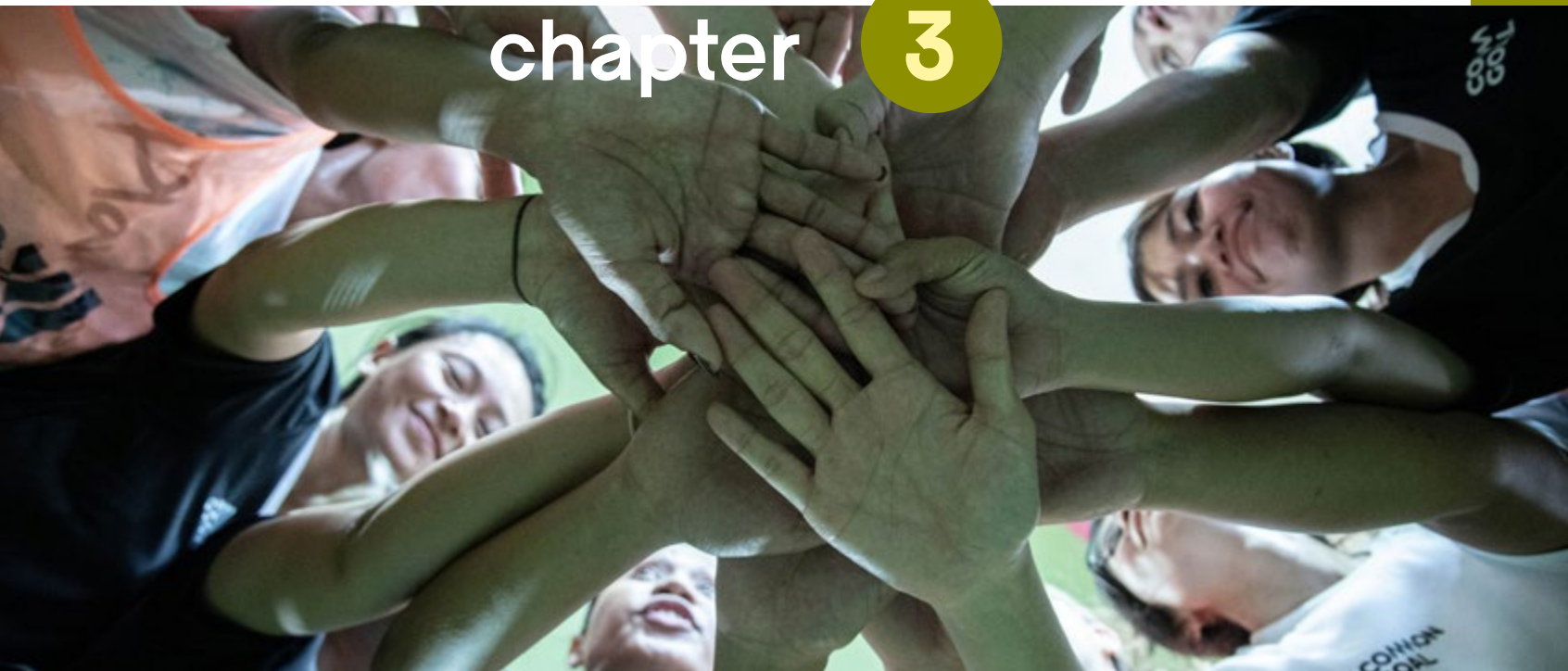
A thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted, surfacing key themes aligned with our assessment framework. These themes reflect how EPE catalyzed core system shifts within F4G organizations and the broader gender equity community. Specifically, changes across roles, relationships, resources, rules, and results were identified—tracing each shift back to elements of EPE design and implementation that directly contributed to these outcomes.

Evaluation Playbook

Systems Theory: Gender equity is a systems issue that requires a reimagining of the roles, relationships, rules, resources, and results of the systems that uphold inequity. We employed this theory to explore the systems shaping key spaces within football for good—on the pitch, on the sidelines, within organizations, and in the community. Using a gendered lens, we examined how power dynamics and structural inequalities were understood, approached, and shifted across these contexts.

Network Theory: Gender equity - as a systems issue - requires a collective approach. This theory explains how relationships and connections between people or organizations enable the spread of ideas and strengthen impact—especially when key attributes like power sharing, trust, accountability, and adaptive learning are present. Using this lens, we positioned the assessment to understand if and how the diffusion of successful approaches and mindsets into adjacent networks and sectors across EPE may amplify the collective impact - and how they did it.

chapter 3



EQUAL PLAY EFFECT: HOW IT WORKS

“Equal Play Effect is about creating a community—a network focused on gender-specific initiatives.

It’s almost like institutionalizing those partnerships, with many organizations working together toward the same goal.”

- Gorka, Common Goal
(Expert Partner), Global

The Equal Play Effect Network

Equal Play Effect is not a collection of isolated efforts by individual organizations. Instead, it is a unified, collective force shaping how football for good acts as a powerful catalyst for gender equity—and a central player in this global movement.

But what unites this collective, and who is part of it? It includes implementing organizations with their staff, coaches and volunteers, a capacity-building framework, a shared systems identity, and the “Effect” — the ongoing shift in game momentum driven by each implementing organization.

One Narrative, different names

The Equal Play Effect is powered by a global network of expert partners, implementing partners, and the collective support of Common Goal, Women Win, and Soccer Without Borders (SWB)—each operating under different names but united by the same framework.

GG5 Accelerator (Africa-2020):

The Pilot Project

EXPERT PARTNER:

- SWB Uganda

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:

- Malaika (DR Congo)
- Sport the Bridge (Ethiopia)
- Moving the Goalposts (MTG) (Kenya)
- TYSA (Kenya)
- VAP (Kenya)
- Future Stars Academy (Tanzania)
- Watoto Wasoka (Uganda)

adidas Breaking Barriers (Europe-2020)

EXPERT PARTNERS:

- Common Goal (Germany)
- Women Win (Netherlands)
- SWB (USA)

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:

- Cross Cultures Project Association (CCPA) (Balkan region)

- GAME (Denmark)
- Kabubu (France)
- Champions ohne Grenzen (Germany)
- Rhein Flanke (Germany)
- Organization Earth (Greece)
- Balon Mundial (Italy)
- YouSport (Italy)
- Johan Cruyff Foundation (Netherlands)
- Trenuj Cycie Dobrym (Poland)
- Associação CAIS (Portugal)
- La Rotllana (Spain)
- En Frisk Generation (Sweden)
- Street League (UK)
- Goals 4 Girls (UK)

SOMOS Equidad (Latin America-2021):

EXPERT PARTNER:

- Fundación Selección Colombia (Colombia)

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:

- Asociacion Civil Andar (Argentina)
- Asociacion Civil Los Pioneros (Peru)
- Club Deportivo Zapatillas Rotas (Chile)
- Gurises Unidos (Uruguay)
- Fudela (Ecuador)
- Fundación Clubes (Chile)
- Fundacion Tiempo de Juego (Colombia)
- Fútbol con Corazón (Colombia)
- Fundacion Falcao (Colombia)
- Fundacion Juventud Lider (Colombia)
- Fundacion Sidoc (Colombia)
- Fundacion Talentos (Colombia)
- Fundacion Deporte en Igualdad (Peru)
- Fútbol Más (Chile & México)
- Fútbol por mi país (Costa Rica)

- Proyecto Cantera Juntos por México
- Más Sueños AC (Mexico)
- Seprojovent (Costa Rica)
- Rescatando Sonrisas (Uruguay)

EPE Asia-Pacific (2023):

EXPERT PARTNER:

- Creating Chances (Australia)

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:

- Inspire Indonesia (Indonesia)
- We United (Nepal)
- Play Onside (Thailand)
- Football for All Vietnam (Vietnam)
- FundLife International (Philippines)

EPE Africa (2023):

EXPERT PARTNERS:

- Tibu Africa (Morocco)
- Tackle (Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal)
- Kick4Life (Lesotho)
- SWB Uganda, (Uganda)
- MTG (Kenya)

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:

- Adaptiv (Algeria)
- SID ONG (Benin)
- South East District Youth
- Empowerment (Botswana)
- Open Field (Cameroon)
- ABISOSA (Cote d'Ivoire)
- Community Support Center (DR Congo)
- Maadi Youth Centre 77 (Egypt)
- Africaid WizzKids United (Kenya)
- YOPP (Ghana)
- Fútbol Más (Kenya)
- MAD Sisters (Kenya)
- MyFugo (Kenya)
- ONG Aiser (Mauritania)
- Association Multiculturelle Pour

- un Avenir Meilleur (Mauritania)
- Club Taliouine pour le football féminin (Morocco)
- Elite Sports Academy (Morocco)
- Association Union Sportive Belvedere (Morocco)
- Grupo Desportivo (Mozambique)
- Physically Active Youth (Namibia)
- FAME Foundation (Morocco)
- YEDI (Nigeria)
- Kids Play International (Morocco)
- Esperance (Rwanda)
- Malika Surf (Morocco)
- Pulse Africa (Senegal)
- SLASA (Sierra Leone)
- Altus Sport (South Africa)
- United through Sport (South Africa)
- Hout Bay United Football Community (South Africa)
- Diski Nine9 (South Africa)
- Karibu Tanzania Organization (Tanzania)
- Peace for Conservation (Tanzania)
- Union sportive d'el Mourouj (Tunisia)
- Le Quai culturel (Tunisia)
- Association CAPSA Sports (Tunisia)
- Community Psychosocial Support Organization (Uganda)
- Raise Chess Academy (Uganda)
- NOWSPAR (Zambia)
- Sports in Action (Zambia)
- Tambai Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe)

EPE Middle East (2023):

EXPERT PARTNER:

- Reclaim Childhood (Jordan)

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:

- GAME (Jordan)
- GAME (Lebanon)
- Palestine Sports 4 Life (Palestine)

Building a Network of Equal Play Effects

91

Coaches Projects to advance gender equity on the pitch and on the sidelines

91

Gender Action Plans established as long-term roadmaps to gender equity in the first half

101

Organizations (91 Implementing partners and 10 expert partners) from 57 Countries

*EPE: Equal Play Effect

Click boxes for more information



The Equal Play Effect Capacity Building Framework

The Equal Play Effect Framework is central to the movement's identity, guiding both its delivery structure and the leadership of its regional partners. This framework outlines a multi-phase plan while also defining how leaders must embody the systems change they seek to create on and off the pitch, ultimately helping girls around the world step into their power.

Equal Play Effect Capacity Building

Equal Play Effect runs two main tracks for Implementing Partners ("implementing organizations"): one for "Coaches" (social workers, volunteers, etc) and one for "Staff", including executives and managers. The initiative unfolds in two phases to first build capacity and then, promote leadership and action by participants of each track – while allowing flexibility for regions to adapt the framework and activities to their specific contexts and participant groups.



How the programme enables football for good organisations to embed gender equity within themselves and their communities





The Equal Play Effect Systems Identity

In order to be effective, EPE not only has to produce systems outcomes that the collective shares, it has to take a systems approach - this is EPE's Systems Identity. The Halftime Huddle highlighted key systems principles within the activation of the EPE methodology across regions:

EPE Models the Change it Aims to See

EPE Regional Leads live the principles of gender equity – power sharing, empathy, distributed leadership – not just teaching them. This includes creating space for others to lead, using tools like challenge “bingo” and Collective Action projects—including adidas Breaking Barriers and Asia-Pacific Collective Clubs—to deepen relationships and encourage shared ownership across the network.

“We intentionally modeled the change we wanted to see—flipping power dynamics and creating a space where vulnerability was not just allowed, but encouraged. By doing so, we reduced the very barriers that often block progress. It wasn’t about telling organizations what to do; it was about showing them what it looks like to lead differently.”

- Mary, Common Goal (Expert Partner), Global

EPE Supports Short and Long-term Wins

Recognizing the complexity and pace of systems change, EPE emphasizes early successes to build momentum, shift mindsets, and foster trust. Tools like the Self-Assessment and Gender Action Plan are framed as adaptable, “living documents” that evolve with organizations, supporting continuous progress and strategic refinement.

“[on the gender action plan] You continue to add an action, and that basically becomes your global strategy for gender equity.”

- Manue, Women Win (Expert Partner), Global



EPE Decenters Western-centric Frameworks

Rather than imposing Western-centric gender frameworks, EPE empowered local leaders to shape the work within their own cultural, social, and political contexts. In regions like the Middle East and Asia Pacific, removing Western gender terminology made the approach more relevant and respectful, strengthening local resonance and impact.

“It wasn’t just about us learning from the West, but about recognizing that we have our own leaders here who are making a difference in our communities.”

- Arpana, We United (Staff), EPE Asia Pacific

EPE Provides Space for Flexibility and Adaptability

Systems change requires ongoing reflection and responsiveness to local realities. In Latin America, coaches emphasized meeting diverse groups—like indigenous communities—“where they are” in their gender equity journeys. This led to adapting resources and methods to fit unique cultural and social contexts, a principle applied across regions to ensure interventions were tailored, not one-size-fits-all.

“They may not really understand equity is or how to apply it, how to live these concepts. Reaching indigenous areas has been a big learning curve, and being able to adapt the methodology to them has been amazing.”

- Marilay, FUDELA (Coach), SOMOS Equidad

chapter

4



THE EQUAL PLAY “EFFECT”

“ We need to have more female role models for the girls to see, to inspire them

If we start with this generation, they can shape a new future with greater gender equality.”

- Catherine, Soccer Without Borders (expert partner), East Africa

“Effect” Framework

It’s not just the shared identity or approach that gives this collective its power—it’s the shared outcomes they are collectively working toward that position F4G organizations - and centrally the girls, women, and non-binary individuals within - as central contributors to gender equity through football.

Our Halftime Huddle revealed that participation in the Equal Play Effect drives four dynamic and reinforcing systems outcomes within implementing organizations. These outcomes begin with the individual and expand outward through their surrounding networks—reaching those in close proximity, such as teammates, coaches, and peers, and extending into organizational and community structures. This layered effect reflects the diverse ways individuals are positioned—whether on the pitch, on the sidelines, within their organization, or in the broader community—and how those positions shape their influence.



4 Outcomes Changing the Game for Her Leadership



Shifting Mindsets

EPE network participants experienced a shift from automatic behaviors to intentional, reflective actions around gender equity. This deeper awareness sparks ongoing transformation in how they lead and influence their environments.



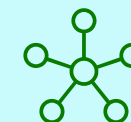
Shifting Leadership & Power Dynamics

EPE network participants experience open leadership pathways in how they showed up in their immediate roles to evolved opportunities in their roles, communities, or in the broader gender equity space.



Shifting Policy & Resource Flows

EPE network participants experienced how embedding equity into structures, practices, and resource flows shifted gender equity from a stated value to an operational norm—woven into how organizations function, allocate funds, and make decisions.



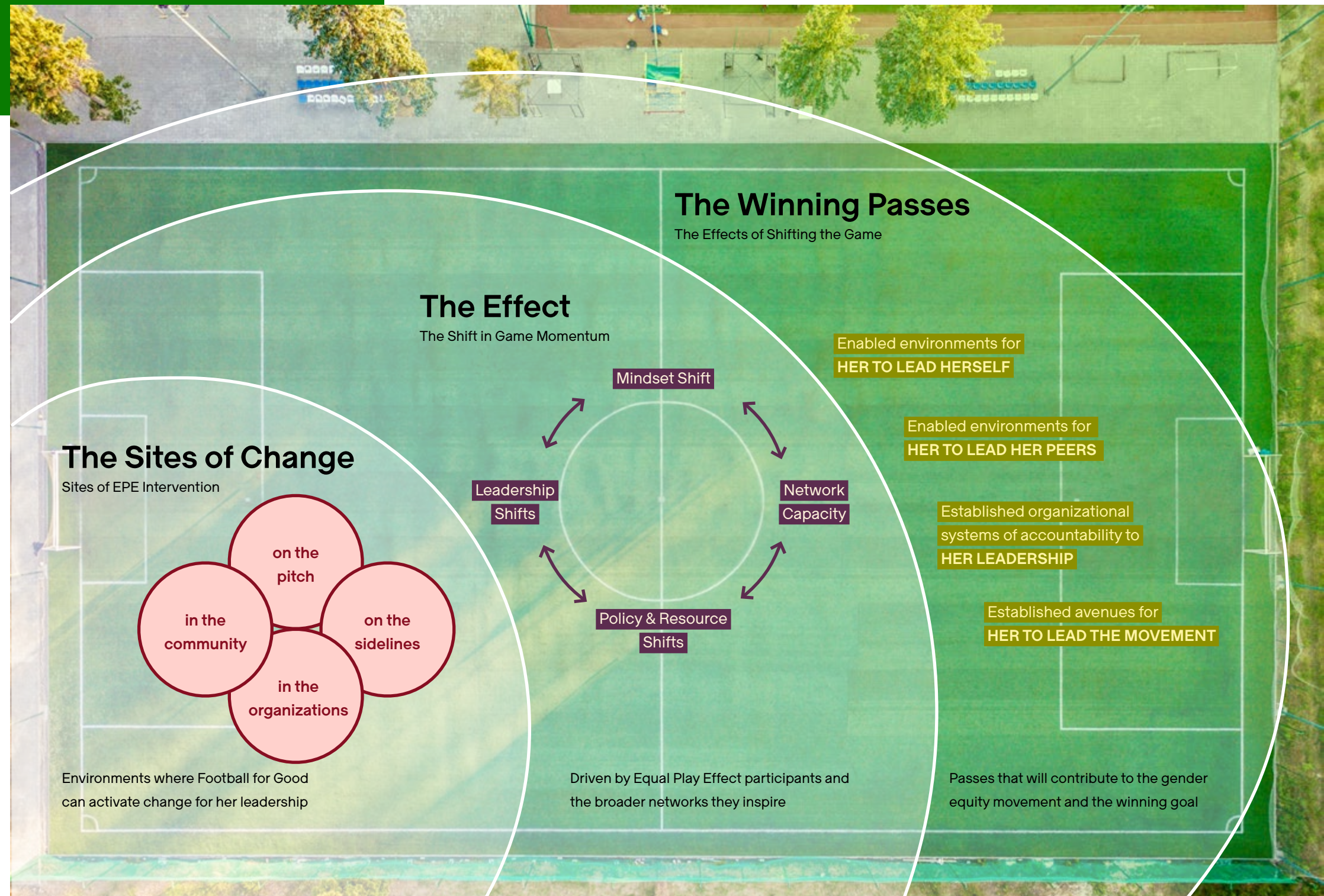
Strengthening Network Capacity

EPE network participants leverage the strength of accountability, visibility, and community for gender equity.

Shifting Game Momentum For Her Leadership

This research demonstrates that the “Effect” is not a single outcome, but a holistic, reinforcing cycle—where each shift builds on others over time. Progress may not appear all at once; instead, it emerges gradually as different elements strengthen and enable one another.

In football terms, the “Effect” is like a shift in game momentum—a series of strategic plays that signal a mindset change, a transformation in leadership behavior, or a reallocation of resources. These are not isolated actions; they are intentional moves that strengthen the organization’s positioning—especially that of the girls, women, and non-binary individuals at its heart—to lead change on and off the field. When these shifts align, organizations are better equipped to unlock dynamic plays for gender equity. All of this adds up to a powerful collective approach toward our common goal.





“I’ve seen, the fight for the women’s game, the fight for women’s equality, the fight for togetherness

— that has created a passion in me to be a part of that. I wanted to be a part of a society that works towards inspiring other people and showing that everything is possible, it’s just about acting on what we say.”

- Jean Sseninde, Common Goal member and former Uganda National Team player



Expanding Opportunities for Her to Lead Herself

Effect #1

Expanding Opportunities for Her to Lead Herself

Every girl has the potential to **LEAD HERSELF** – a power she can claim when systems intentionally create equitable opportunities for her to grow, develop, and thrive alongside her male peers.

The Halftime Huddle surfaced early indicators that the Effect is taking root and repositioning how football can be a powerful catalyst for her leadership and potential when it challenges the structural barriers that have long stood in her way.

98%

of participants believe their organization knows how to increase and maintain the participation of girls and women in football [SOMOS]

73%

of the coaches agreed/strongly agreed that they have seen an increase in girls' attendance in their programs since incorporating gender-inclusive coaching methods [adidas Breaking Barriers Mid-term report]

100%

of coaches increased their knowledge or skill to design and implement programs that tackle harmful gender stereotypes [Middle East]



Football Can Expand Opportunities for Her to Lead

- **Builds confidence, resilience and self-esteem:** Leadership on the pitch fosters personal empowerment that helps to manage challenges.
- **Develops teamwork and communication skills:** Encourages collaboration and social connection.
- **Promotes physical and mental health:** Regular activity improves fitness and emotional well-being.
- **Supports bodily autonomy:** Young people gain confidence and agency in making decisions about their own bodies.
- **Creates safe, inclusive spaces:** Provides belonging and protection from discrimination.
- **Offers positive role models and mentorship:** Exposure to supportive leaders inspires growth.
- **Encourages leadership and decision-making:** Opportunities to take initiative and build agency.

Our Opponent

- **Cultural norms and stereotypes:** Football is seen as a “boys’ sport,” limiting girls’ acceptance and leadership.
- **Lack of role models:** Few female or non-binary leaders to inspire girls.
- **Unsafe or exclusionary environments:** Harassment and unequal access reduce girls’ participation.
- **Social discouragement:** Girls receive less encouragement from parents, peers, and coaches - and the policies surrounding sport.
- **Low self-confidence:** Internalized fears and body image concerns hinder leadership.
- **Logistical barriers:** Limited access to transport, programs, and equipment affects participation.

Shifting Game Momentum for Her to Lead Herself

From cultural norms to logistical barriers for participation to exclusionary practices - EPE network organizations are shifting the game's momentum for her by challenging these barriers.

This includes a mindset shift across the organization to understand the root causes that inhibit girls' participation, and to actively create enabling environments—from access to the pitch, to inclusive experiences on the pitch, to holding the organization accountable through policy changes and the resourcing of gender-responsive programs.



Mindset Shift:

- **Challenge Personal Assumptions** – Coaches developed a deeper understanding of barriers and made more deliberate choices that create space for girls to step up, be seen, and lead—reimagining the pitch as a place where every girl can belong and thrive.
- **Practice Open-Dialogue**– Coaches began to speak openly about barriers like unsafe or exclusionary environments, lack of role models, and social discouragement, making gender equity part of coaching culture.



Decision Making & Leadership:

- **Develop Leadership Strategies** – Coaches began to see their role as more than just teaching sport skills, shifting their leadership style to focus on creating environments where girls felt seen, safe, and supported.
- **Model the Change** – Coaches showed girls that leadership is not about being in charge, but about making space for others to grow. Their presence on the pitch began to shift deeply held cultural norms and offered girls a reflection of what was possible for themselves.



Policy & Resource Shifts:

- **Allocated Resources** – Organizations moved beyond broad commitments to “support girls’ sport” and began establishing clear, actionable measures to tackle exclusionary environments, making participation safer, more consistent, and visibly prioritized.
- **Redesigned Programs** – Organizations began redesigning their programs through a gender-inclusive lens, directly challenging logistical and safety barriers, as well as long-standing cultural norms that limited girls’ roles in sport. Champion Projects centered in decision-making and leadership from the beginning not as an add-on, but as a core design principle.
- **Improved Safeguarding** – New protocols and training equipped coaches with greater confidence to address abuse and discrimination, directly tackling unsafe and exclusionary environments, and creating safer spaces where staff and participants—especially women—felt empowered to raise concerns and speak out against harm.



Network Capacity:

- **Fostered Best Practice Sharing** – Bringing coaches from diverse locations together fostered meaningful collaboration and knowledge sharing, strengthening local identity and creating lasting bonds. This connection was especially important in isolated areas, where it supports growth and contribution.

Global Goal 5 Accelerator: From knowledge to action - a three year journey of strengthening environments for her to lead herself

The Global Goal 5 Accelerator was launched in East Africa in 2020 with nine organizations, each developing a Gender Action Plan (GAP) to guide gender-transformative practices within their teams and communities.

These GAPs, shaped by 18 components and over 60 self-assessment targets, served as roadmaps for change across multiple areas. While each organization took a different approach, one shared focus was on resourcing gender-inclusive programming.

Over four years, this intentional commitment led to the collective reach of more than 4,000 girls and non-binary participants across East Africa — demonstrating the power of a focused GAP component to scale impact.

88%

of participating organizations added new curriculum to train coaches in gender inclusive mind-set and practice

88%

of organizations increased the number of female coaches engaged

4K+

girls reached through leagues, tournaments, and camps

From Individual Growth to Regional Scaling

Equal Play Effect “individual” investment of 26 individuals

In 2020, Common Goal, Soccer Without Borders, and Women Win launched the Global Goal 5 Accelerator, delivering a collective 948 hours of training to coaches and staff across nine organizations. In its first year, the Accelerator created learning opportunities for leaders and coaches to explore gender equity and identify indicators of progress—laying the foundation for their participation in a gender equity self-assessment and the development of Gender Action Plans.

Seed Funding GAPs & Champions Projects to build leadership pathways & shift resources

By 2021, after a year of learning and support through Gender Action Plans and Champions projects, organizations began to take visible steps toward gender inclusion. This included increasing the visibility of girls on the pitch, dedicating financial resources to gender-inclusive programming, and boosting the participation of girls and female coaches.

Sustaining and Rippling Increased Participation across East Africa

To date in 2025, in East Africa alone, one of the clearest signs of progress and scale has been the creation of dedicated spaces for girls to play. Starting in Uganda, five Girls’ Leagues have been launched and sustained - beyond individual programmatic investment - reflecting a sustained commitment to inclusive programming. Building on this momentum, girls were also intentionally included in two of the region’s largest youth football tournaments: the Chipkizi Cup in Tanzania, hosted by Future Stars Academy, and Uganda’s Kampala Slums Derby and Watoto Wasoka Holiday Camp.

These initiatives demonstrate how GAPs can move from internal planning tools to community-wide impact. As a direct result of these commitments, the reach of girls’ programming has expanded significantly, providing thousands of girls with opportunities not only to participate, but to lead, compete, and grow through sport.

“I told them about it, and we started discussing it—reflecting on our experiences since we started, giving examples of when it happened, and thinking about how we could apply this learning moving forward [for girls participating].”

– Zain, GAME (Coach), EPE Middle East

“The safeguarding protocol is now well known across the league, along with the sanctions we implement when needed. It’s published for everyone to see and understand why actions are taken. In this way, we’re able to create a much safer league.”

– Debora, Asociación Civil Andar (Coach), SOMOS Equidad

“Making sure organizations ask themselves what barriers girls face to participate has led to creative solutions. For example, in Costa Rica, they found girls weren’t coming because the roads to the fields were unsafe. So, the coach created a route and started picking them up. First one girl, then three, then ten, then twenty—all coming together. Now parents feel their daughters are safe, so they allow them to go.”

– Juliana, Fundación Selección Colombia (Expert Partner), SOMOS Equidad

“I’m not just running the league for players, I’m creating space for coaches to grow too. I can help girls not only learn on the field, but see themselves as leaders themselves.”

– Ketrin, Inspire Indonesia (Coach), EPE Asia Pacific

“It’s not just about running a girls’ program—it’s about asking what kind of change you’re creating. Are you shifting something within the organization?”

– Martin, Tambai Zimbabwe (Staff), EPE Africa

“It’s about recognizing how this field connects with the challenges facing communities. By opening doors through sport, we can start to address the root causes of the violence we see and amplify girls’ voices, helping to build their strength and presence.”

– Marilay, FUDELA (Coach), SOMOS Equidad

“Being a leader challenges you to be creative in every way—how you plan, how you deliver, and how you connect with different people. Everyone comes with their own emotions and experiences, so as a leader, you have to constantly evolve to meet them where they are.”

– Bertha, National Organisation for Women in Sports, Physical Activity and Recreation (Coach), EPE Africa

“All the coaches involved in EPE came from different locations, but when we came together to plan the project, the collaboration was incredible. I didn’t expect the outcome to be so positive. We felt truly inspired by one another and built a strong bond that has lasted long after the EPE project ended.”

– Pratigya, We United (Coach), EPE Asia Pacific



**“We joined forces
for gender equality.
We created a
project together.”**

Football-loving women who
understood the power of being
able to do many things thanks
to football.”

- Natalia Gaitán, Common Goal
member and former Colombia
National Team player



**Creating Enabling Environments
for Her to Lead Her Peers**

Effect #2

Creating Enabling Environments for Her to Lead Her Peers

Every girl has the potential to **LEAD HER PEERS**—a power she claims when given environments to test her influence, share power, and embrace her identity as a leader.

Analysis of EPE's first half shows that network organizations are helping position football for good as an environment where girls can step up and lead their peers. This support comes from every level—from the pitch to the organization—working together to challenge the opponent.

67%

participants believe there is an active strategy to strengthen the leadership of women coaches and support their transition into staff roles [SOMOS]

100%

of staff members feel that the Equal Play Effect project has provided them with new ideas on how to promote leadership pathways for girls, women and non-binary people [APAC]

73%

of Champions across cohorts feel more recognized as a role model in their communities; [adidas Breaking Barriers]



Football Can Support Her to Lead Her Peers

- Creates structured environments for leadership: Coaching, refereeing, or captaining offers real responsibility and pressure—giving girls a chance to lead with authority and accountability.
- Makes leadership visible, repetitive, and normalized: Leading warmups, drills, or making calls on the sidelines allows girls to show up as leaders over and over again—shifting how they and others see their role.
- Fosters trust and belonging through shared goals: The team context creates natural peer relationships, making it easier for girls to influence and support one another as leaders.
- Rewrites who has knowledge and authority in sport: When girls are the ones teaching or making calls, they challenge norms about who holds expertise—redefining who is seen as a leader in the football space.

Our Opponent

- Gatekeeping by traditional leadership models: Leadership roles like coach, referee, or captain are often reserved for men, sidelining girls from visible decision-making opportunities
- Unequal access to leadership training: Boys are often prioritized for coaching clinics, referee certifications, or tactical learning, leaving girls without the skills or confidence to lead.
- Stereotypes about authority: Girls are seen as supporters or followers, not as those with the knowledge or authority to lead others, especially their male peers.
- Resistance from peers and adults: Girls who lead are often met with skepticism, undermined by adults or dismissed by boys, making it harder to assert leadership in peer groups.
- Lack of visible peer-led examples: Without seeing other girls lead from the sidelines, girls are less likely to imagine themselves in those roles—or be accepted by others when they try.
- Invisibility in decision-making spaces: Girls' voices are rarely centered in how programs are designed or evaluated, reinforcing the idea that leadership is something done to them, not by them.

Shifting Game Momentum for Her to Lead Her Peers

From designing programs with clear pathways that create real opportunities for decision-making, collaboration, and positive impact to developing systems that sustain these pathways, Equal Play Effect shifts the game momentum for football for good to challenge these barriers.



Mindset Shift:

- **Challenged What They Believe Makes a Powerful Leader** – Equal Play Effect helped challenge traditional assumptions about who is seen as a credible leader on the sidelines, confronting and overcoming internalized doubt and external judgment.
- **Strengthened Accountability to Peers** – EPE participants embrace their role as leaders who challenge barriers, creating visible examples that inspire other girls and young people to envision themselves as leaders and claim their space on and off the pitch.



Leadership & Power Dynamics:

- **Strengthened Pathways to Leadership** – Equal Play Effect created new opportunities for girls and women to step into leadership roles—not only on the sidelines as coaches, but as equals within their organizations. Participants described how they began working more closely with administrators, gaining confidence, trust, and responsibility.



Policy & Resource:

- **Focus on Leadership Development** – Dedicated mentorship and the intentional sharing of skills and knowledge proved transformative in challenging leadership stereotypes. By carving out space to support peers' growth, coaches empowered girls—especially those historically marginalized—to step confidently into leadership roles on the sidelines. This investment sparked ripple effects within organizations, demonstrating that leadership development is not only about individual talent but about creating a culture where emerging leaders are equipped, believed in, and supported to lead.
- **Strengthened Resources for Female Staff** – Gender-balanced boards and youth advisory groups focused on women's empowerment created a measurable rise in female coaches and staff. By intentionally resourcing gender equity by ensuring dedication to female coaches and mentors organizations also challenged the high-turnover present in the F4G landscape - particularly for girls programs.



Network Capacity:

- **Provided Collaborative Ideation:** For EPE participants, learning extends beyond gaining initial knowledge through regional webinars. It involves applying and accelerating that knowledge together with peers in the EPE network—especially at the regional level—as they face new challenges and opportunities to put the theories and practices into action.

Stories of Change

Asia Pacific Coach Toolkit: From Asia to the Globe - Transferring the Knowledge of the Coaching Collective for Gender Equity

Equal Play Effect Asia Pacific implemented the Collective Clubs, a collaborative experience where coaches and staff learn and co-create together on topics relevant to their Gender Action Plans and Champions Projects. Each club is guided by a theme most applicable to its region.

Through the Coaches Collective Club, participants co-designed a global coaching resource drawing on their knowledge of key games, implementation strategies, and coaching tactics used to get more girls on the pitch and create environments where they can lead themselves.

Since 2024, this resource has been translated into five languages and shared globally. For example, in Creating Chances, the Asia Pacific Equal Play Effect Equity Hub Lead strengthened local coaching leadership by sharing the toolkit with 80 coaches in Australia. This resource equips coaches with new techniques to build more inclusive environments.

“The development of the coach toolkit was massive for us—a huge achievement. Too often, resources are just guidelines or bullet points on what to do and what not to do. We wanted to give the community something they truly needed. The more games people have, the more exciting and engaging things become—and these games were designed by women themselves.”

– Assmaah, Creating Chances (Expert Partner),
EPE Asia Pacific

From Learning
Locally to Scaling
Resources
Worldwide

Learning and Capacity Building

In Year 1 of the Equal Play Effect, Champions took part in intensive capacity-building and learning initiatives on key gender-inclusive topics—ranging from coaching lenses and safeguarding in sport to increasing girls' participation, game design, and more. This collective learning strengthened their leadership skills and sharpened their ability to take action, equipping them to design impactful gender-inclusive projects ready for launch in Year 2.

Through the program's design, coaches continued to step up into leadership positions during each training, leading icebreakers, games, and more - growing in the leadership they continue to apply to the pitch.

Individual Action

In Year 2 of their EPE journey, 69 coaches including 45 young female coaches strengthened their knowledge, skills, confidence, and practical tools—culminating in the launch of five gender equity “Champion Projects.” These initiatives demonstrated how their individual expertise could spark reimagined programming that tackles the root causes keeping women's leadership from developing on the sidelines. They addressed barriers such as access to training and leadership development, organizational investment in women's growth, and persistent stereotypes about who belongs in the game.

As a result, the APAC region saw increased access to referee training programs, dedicated girls' leagues, new coaching pathways, and expanded training for both coaches and volunteers.

Movement Building through Asia Pacific

Their journey went beyond personal growth. They channeled their individual skills and insights into the Asia Pacific Coach Toolkit in 2024 - a tool designed to extend well beyond the barriers of the Equal Play Effect. With this resource, this coach collective provided a vital resource for women, girls, and non-binary who aspire to step into coaching or to transform their existing programs to be truly gender inclusive. In doing so, they addressed a critical root cause of women's underrepresentation in leadership—the lack of confidence in delivery and self-expertise—by making knowledge and tools accessible to all women in an open, supportive way.

“Before, it was even worse for me. But now, we talk every day—we’re following up on everything together. I’m not just someone who comes in to coach; I’m part of the team.”

– Zain, GAME (Coach), EPE Middle East

“People would say, ‘she can’t do this. She can’t run. How will she work with our children?’ It wasn’t just the community. But over time, I’ve built self-confidence and self-awareness. I’ve learned that it doesn’t matter how I look—the real result is what I give back. If I can help the kids around me build their own confidence, that’s what makes me a leader.”

– Bertha, National Organisation for Women in Sports, Physical Activity and Recreation (Coach), EPE Africa

“The greatest part of being with EPE was realizing that I can do it on my own if needed. I have the resources. I have a network. I can reach out to coaches from other organizations, to facilitators. Knowing that gives me confidence moving forward.”

– Ketrin, Inspire Indonesia (Coach), EPE Asia Pacific

“At the staff level, especially in the West Africa region, we can be proud of how much our representation has improved compared to where we started. This progress continues beyond current funding, as we aim to retain these staff members when securing new projects—supporting their ongoing involvement and growth in gender equity roles.”

– Samantha, Tackle Africa (Expert Partner), EPE Africa

“We didn’t have that many females in higher positions and it was always something that we wanted to change anyway. And I think Equal Play Effect made that happen a lot quicker than it would’ve happened”

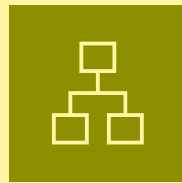
– Dorcas, Moving the Goalposts (Staff), EPE Africar

“People feel very connected to each other, which in itself I think elevates their visibility, as well as their work and presence within their organizations and communities. There’s also a lot of cross-pollination, inspiration, and a strong sense of community among them.”

– Catherine, Women Win (Expert Partner), Global

“I had the time to mentor her and give her the tools to become a sports tutor. Now she’s coaching four- and five-year-olds—the first disabled woman in our youth academy to do this. She’s a coach at heart; I just helped her believe she could do it.”

– Debora, Asociación Civil Andar (Coach), SOMOS Equidad



“That’s why the women I met along the way have been so important to my life.

My teammates are the ones who helped show me what’s possible.”

- Jéssica Silva, Common Goal member and Portugal National Team player



Establishing Systems of Accountability to Her Leadership in Organizations

Effect #3

Establishing Systems of Accountability to Her Leadership in Organizations

Every girl has the potential to **LEAD HER ORGANIZATION**—an opportunity she steps into when leadership isn't treated as a one-off placement of power, but as an ongoing relationship between her and the systems around her.

Findings from the Halftime Huddle show how F4G organizations across the EPE network are beginning to build these systems of accountability, creating more systems - roles, resources, rules, and more - and where the organization is responsible for sustaining that leadership.

81%

of respondents perceived that their organizations have either made significant or tremendous progress towards gender equity in their leadership [EPE Africa]

100%

of the organizations who completed two years of the program reported that they agreed/ strongly agree that they (staff of organization) know-how to develop a gender strategy for their organization [adidas Breaking Barriers - from mid-term report].

98%

of participants believe frequently to always use gender equity tools and practices in your daily work within the organization. [SOMOS]



Football Can Create Systems of Accountability to Her Leadership

- **Legitimizing girls' leadership:** Girls in leadership challenge gender norms and gain authority, increasing acceptance of female leaders
- **Providing leadership pathways:** Clear advancement routes help girls envision and pursue sustained leadership roles
- **Challenging structural bias:** Embedding gender equity in policies disrupts male-dominated cultures and normalizes girls' leadership
- **Sustaining leadership:** Ongoing training and development improve retention and build resilient female leadership pipelines

Our Opponent

- **Male-dominated cultures:** Persistent patriarchal norms marginalize female leaders and limit their authority
- **Weak gender equity policies:** Lack of formal policies and enforcement makes leadership equity dependent on individuals, not system
- **Tokenism:** Girls often hold symbolic leadership roles without real power or resources
- **Unequal resource distribution:** Funding and training disparities restrict growth and sustained influence
- **Limited mentorship and networks:** Scarcity of mentoring hampers leadership development and resilience
- **Invisible power dynamics:** Implicit biases and resistance maintain barriers to leadership and accountability

Shifting Game Momentum towards Her Accountability

It's not just about stepping into leadership—it's about creating organizational accountability systems that define and support what that leadership means in practice.

Equal Play Effect shifts the game momentum to embed intentional systems—like inclusive planning processes, shared leadership roles, and feedback mechanisms—that elevate girls' voices and ensure gender equity is integrated into how organizations operate, not just what they say.



Mindset Shift:

- **Built a Shared Understanding of Gender Equity** – Coaches and staff were empowered to move beyond personal growth and actively share their knowledge across their organizations. By fostering a common language, these individuals continue to help their peers recognize and address gender-based barriers systematically.



Leadership & Decision Making:

- **Accessed Investment in Their Growth:** Coaches and staff strengthened their self-recognition and confidence, deepening their understanding of their own value and broadening their leadership capacity. This growth enabled them to sustain their commitment to their work while also helping to counter the common challenge of limited mentorship opportunities and scarce professional networks available to them.



Policy & Resource:

- **Aligned Funding with Gender Equity Goals:** Implementing partners began accessing new funding opportunities and regional partnerships, driven in part by increased confidence in their gender equity policies and the knowledge they applied to further integrate gender equity into their organizational identity.
- **Moved from Standalone Policies to Organization-Wide Gender Integration:** Implementing partners used policy to drive self-reflection, redesign internal structures, and embed equity into core operations rather than serving as add-ons or one-offs. This led to gender equity working groups, shifts in board recruitment, coaching resource allocation, and community engagement.



Network Capacity:

- **Strengthened Access to External Partners and Advisors:** Coaches and staff benefited from access to critical expertise—from corporate mentors to regional sports leaders and gender equity specialists. This access, facilitated through the EPE network, recognized that connecting individuals and organizations beyond what any single organization can provide creates far greater opportunities.

Stories of Change

Balon Mundial: From Personal Development to Institutional Responsibility for Girls' Participation

From organizational policy change to emerging regional practice

Equal Play Effect “individual” investment

In 2020, Balon Mundial joined the first cohort of adidas Breaking Barriers to initiate transformative change across two key tracks: staff and “Champions” (coaches). 10+ participants engaged in a learning journey focused on gender transformation and inclusivity. This early phase was centered on building awareness, encouraging critical self-reflection, and sparking curiosity around new ways of thinking about gender in sport.

Seed Funding GAP and Champions Project

By 2023, Balon Mundial shifted from awareness to action. Through capacity-building, inclusive hiring, and internal systems change, the organization began embedding gender inclusion into practice and policy — with individuals now driving change across the following outcome areas:

Sustaining and Rippling through Proximal Partners and the EPE Network

By 2024, Balon Mundial solidified its shift from action to influence — scaling its gender-inclusive approach across teams, programs, leadership, and networks. The organization not only deepened its internal commitments but also became a model for others, demonstrating how sustained investment in gender equity - and the accountability behind these investments - can reshape sport systems from within.

In 2020, Balon Mundial—a football for good organization in Italy—joined adidas Breaking Barriers and embarked on their journey to institutionalize gender equity, shifting it from a ‘nice-to-have’ to a core organizational mindset.

Their journey began with a self-assessment, followed by developing the early stages of a gender action plan. This plan soon evolved into a comprehensive roadmap for embedding gender equity into the very DNA of the organization. By fully embracing this roadmap, Balon Mundial has become a beacon for others, demonstrating how gender equity can move beyond being an add-on to become a central pillar of operations across an entire organization.

7

Champions Stepped into New Leadership - Champions stepped into key leadership roles across the organization's gender equity work.

1

Gender Policy Offer Hired - Hiring guaranteed oversight of integration of inclusive practices.

20+

Organizations Reached - Balon Mundial's Gender Action Plan became a shared learning tool across the sector

“Having access to an external advisor provides valuable insights and the wisdom needed to understand which steps to take and what measures to apply before, during, and after program implementation to effectively address challenges”

– Carolina, FUDELA (Staff), SOMOS Equidad

“Now everything includes gender. Instead of just fundraising for a one-off gender project, they’ve created a gender strategy and policy, and are applying a gender lens across all levels of their work. One way they’re sustaining it is by making gender part of every new employee’s onboarding”

– Manue, Women Win (Expert Partner), Global

“Being part of EPE has positioned us as an engaged and proactive player in the region, helping to create space for collaboration and increasing opportunities for both partnerships and funding.”

– Kimberly, FundLife (Staff), EPE Asia Pacific

“I was actually planning to leave the organization, but Equal Play Effect played a big role in why I stayed. It gave me the confidence I needed—not just in building systems and documentation, but in understanding the human side and the sports for development approach. Being equipped with that knowledge made all the difference.”

– Josefina, Physically Active Youth Namibia (Staff), EPE Africa

“I realized how important it is to address these topics both with participants and within our staff. So, we began creating trainings and workshops focused on gender equity. Another area we are improving is providing more training for our entire team—administration, communications, and facilitators—to deepen their understanding of gender equity.”

– Carolina, FUDELA (Staff), SOMOS Equidad

“I think the model contributes to a lot of these organizations, especially the male led ones. Before EPE, lack of resources was a barrier to do gender equality work - and sometimes used as an excuse to not do it or to delay doing it. Through EPE and the Gender Action Plans, we can shift it to looking at other less, resource-dependent approaches to continually chipping away at creating gender equitable spaces”

– Steve, Soccer Without Borders (Expert Partner), EPE Africa



“Stay true to your values and find allies who will accompany you along the way.

Everything is easier when we work as a team.”

- Isabella Echeverri, Common Goal US Board member and former Colombia National Team player



Creating Avenues for her to Lead Her Community and this Movement

Effect #4

Creating Avenues for her to Lead Her Community and this Movement

Every girl has the potential to **LEAD HER COMMUNITY**—an opportunity she embraces when leadership is understood as a dynamic and collective process that cultivates shared purpose, nurtures relationships, and mobilizes collective action.

Findings from the Halftime Huddle show early signs that women and girls are stepping up to lead their communities. The impact goes beyond organizational systems shifting; new roles, relationships, and resources are emerging outside their organizations - from the diversity of communities connected to the F4G community - to support their growing influence.

100+ Professional athletes and coaches pledging 1% to Equal Play Effect, including Isabella Echeverri, Jessica Silva, Melissa Ortiz, Eniola Aluko, Christiane Endler and many others.

\$8 million in financial investment distributed between 2020 - 2024

20+ global brands, institutions, clubs and other partners supporting EPE including adidas, Right to Dream, FC Nordsjaelland, GIZ, Scotiabank and many others.



Football Can Build a Collective Identity

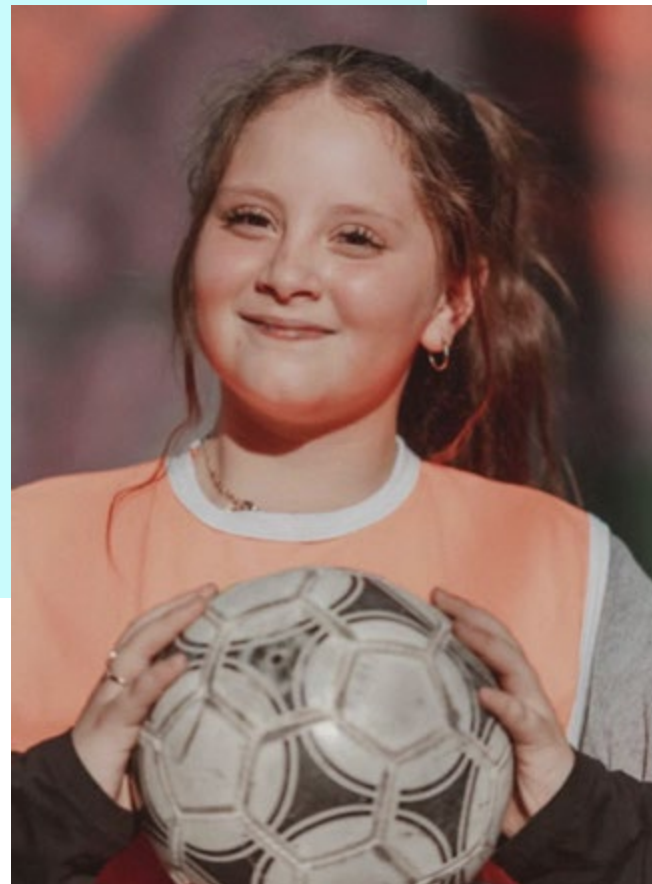
- **Leveraging Networks and Mentorship for Sustained Leadership:** Access to mentorship, peer networks, and leadership development within F4G organizations is a critical factor that sustains women's leadership and builds capacity for movement leadership.
- **Collective Identity:** Women leaders in F4G organizations develop a shared identity not only as sports leaders but as social change agents, helping to build broader gender equity movements inside and outside their organizations.
- **Team Connection:** Football fosters deeper connections across players, aligning them towards a shared goal.

Our Opponent

- **Cultural Resistance to Change:** Efforts to shift gender norms through leadership roles often encounter backlash from communities invested in maintaining status quo power relations
- **Emotional labor and Burnout Without Support:** Leading social movements, particularly in marginalized communities, often demands high emotional labor—navigating trauma, community conflicts, and systemic obstacles—without adequate psychological or institutional support, leading to burnout.
- **Internalized Barriers:** internalized stereotypes can undermine women leaders' confidence and perceived legitimacy, leading to self-doubt and hesitation to claim authority or mobilize others effectively.

Shifting Game Momentum for Her to Lead the Movement

Equal Play Effect shifts the game momentum to a women-led movement at every level. From shifting parents' perceptions of inclusion to creating and leading new, dynamic networks. As leaders of all genders adopt a gender-transformative mindset, they inspire others to follow.



Mindset Shift:

- **Increased diffusion of mindset:** Coaches and staff diffused the Equal Play Effect “mindset” beyond their immediate influence on the pitch, on the sidelines or in their organization, but to their community. This was driven by a deeper recognition that achieving gender equity requires more than training a select few leaders; it involves engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders—coaches, parents, volunteers, teachers, associations, and community partners.



Leadership & Power Dynamics:

- **Encouraged Credibility in their Advocacy:** Coaches and staff increased their courage to raise awareness and speak out on gender issues – strengthening external credibility in their voice and contribution to the gender equity movement. This was driven by a growing confidence that grounded their approach to gender equity, not just in their personal values, but in fact helping them align with a global vision and strengthen their voice.
- **Legitimized Their Leadership Across Community Groups:** Coaches and their work began changing perceptions about gender roles at home and in society. These individuals observed how mothers—often the primary support system for young athletes - saw in their children’s experience a model for their own empowerment.
- **Recognized Her Role in Leading Partnerships:** Participants recognized a growing external perception of themselves as respected experts when collaborating with larger institutions - traditionally dominated by established power holders. This recognition allowed them to step up not only as implementers but also as contributors, sharing ideas on how partnerships could achieve greater impact.



Policy & Resource Allocation:

- **Strengthened Internal Support for as Gender Equity Leaders:** Staff experienced greater validation and credibility in their work as they advanced gender equity within their organizations. This reinforced their growing professional identity and aligned with their increasing confidence and self-belief.



Network Capacity:

- **Cultivated International Collaboration:** Participants overcame the isolation and loneliness often associated with being change leaders. In-person convenings played a key role, fostering connections and relationships that encouraged reflection and reinforced their growth. Being part of a network of like-minded leaders allowed them to see how others in different contexts step into their power, which in turn motivated them to drive meaningful change.

Stories of Change

SOMOS Equidad: Showcasing the Power of Women to Lead their Communities

Launched in 2021, SOMOS Equidad has built a collective of 32 staff and 349 coaches across eight countries in Latin America. Guided by regional leaders and inspired by the visibility of female role models in the region—including Colombian footballers—members of the collective are showcasing the change they are driving together.

Through this network, they have gained access to resources, co-developed toolkits for change, shared learnings, and integrated the Equal Play Effect methodology into their organizations. Growing together as a collective, they continue to advance gender equity across the region.

“I find those stories truly inspiring, and I believe it is essential—almost mandatory—to continue sharing them, giving visibility and recognition to all these women, the organizations supporting them, and the work they have accomplished.”

– Ana, Fundación Selección Colombia (Expert Partner), SOMOS Equidadr

From Individual Visibility to a Regional Movement

Build the Collective

Launched in 2021, SOMOS Equidad has built a collective of 32 staff and 349 coaches across eight countries in Latin America. Guided by regional leaders and inspired by the visibility of female role models in the region—including Colombian footballers—members of the collective are showcasing the change they are driving together.

Through this network, they have gained access to resources, co-developed toolkits for change, shared learnings, and integrated the Equal Play Effect methodology into their organizations.

Showcase the Stories

To challenge the root causes of invisibility and marginalization, SOMOS Equidad launched their first showcase, *En la Cancha: Mil Mujeres, Mil Historias*, at Parque Bicentenario in Bogotá, Colombia, in 2023.

Featuring the stories of 15 women from across Latin America, the exhibition highlights the role of women in football and their efforts to advance equity in the sport, giving visibility to voices that are often overlooked.

Leaders across the network were invited to shape the narrative, contributing to the photography and storytelling while amplifying the exhibition through their own organizations. For example, FUDELA in Ecuador leveraged its radio station to continue promoting the SOMOS network, ensuring the stories of women and girls in football reach wider audiences and activate change across the region.

Advance the Visibility Internationally

SOMOS Equidad continues to bring their showcase beyond borders and into more diverse spaces, driven by the recognition that football is more than just the game, tournaments, or convenings, it is the voices that shape the sport at every level.

In 2023, the initiative engaged over 100 young female leaders and industry professionals at Festival '23 during the FIFA Women's World Cup in Sydney, Australia, celebrating the achievements of women in Latin American football and inspiring young leaders worldwide to see themselves reflected in these role models.

In 2025, the exhibition was presented at the World Football Summit in Monterrey, transforming the event into a platform for visibility, recognition, and cultural change.

“ Seeing what folks from around the world have accomplished, regardless of background or resources, has made me see that myself and my organization can accomplish more”

– Festival ‘23 Delegate

“ Knowing they can have a safe space where they belong is powerful. Through the approach of inclusion and equality on the pitch, many mothers are realizing, often for the first time, that they too deserve inclusion and can be empowered.”

– Marilay, FUDELA (Coach), SOMOS Equidad

“ I became vice president of the Women’s Sport Africa network—which I don’t think I would’ve achieved without being part of Equal Play Effect.”

– Samantha, Tackle Africa (Expert Partner), EPE Africa

“ I see myself as a reference point, something I never thought was possible when I first started. It’s been a long and challenging journey, but one that I’ve come to truly enjoy. This project has transformed me in so many ways, and I know that even if I step away from Football Mas and move on to something new, I’ll continue working toward the same mission. This is my passion.”

– Katherine, Futbol Mas (Staff), SOMOS Equidad

“ We’re now expanding the Equal Play Effect model beyond our organization to national federations—football, netball, basketball, and more. Six have already expressed interest in partnering. That’s the kind of ripple effect EPE has had on Zimbabwe and sport across the country.”

– Martin, Tambai Zimbabwe (Staff), EPE Africa

“ What makes this program and methodology truly unique is how it has evolved. By applying a gender lens and a gender-transformative approach, it recognizes that if we want to address the main goal—getting more girls on the pitch—we have to understand and engage with the entire ecosystem surrounding those girls.”

– Sol, (Expert Partner), Global

chapter

5



CONCLUSION

“ We’ve been implementing gender equity from the beginning, but these spaces give us new insights

and the wisdom to know what path to take in program implementation.”

- Ana, Fundación Selección Colombia (Expert Partner), SOMOS Equidad

Recommendations

The Equal Play Effect is more than the sum of its parts. It demonstrates how one win leads to many influencing people and systems beyond just the original investment. The 35+ EPE leaders interviewed from the first half—including regional coordinators, champions, and staff—strongly believe in the growth potential of this investment, from tailored regional leadership and capacity building to sustained implementation beyond initial participation.

Equal Play Effect can continue to support leaders in creating environments that increase the visibility of women and girls, grow their participation both on and off the football pitch, and challenge existing narratives and barriers.

In this Halftime Huddle, we asked participants to share ideas for the second half. Together, three recommendations emerged, aligned with a systems strategy to scale wide and deep:



Advance the Culture:

Build on the momentum of current leaders' journeys, supporting them to adapt to evolving challenges, and continuously providing tools and support to drive ongoing impact.

Tactic 1: Strengthen next-generation leadership by investing in training and support to position them as equity hub leaders.

Tactic 2: Elevate visibility by prioritizing local leaders for speaking roles and opportunities.

Tactic 3: Conduct ongoing impact assessments to track the sustainability of gender action plans and leadership development.

Tactic 4: Resource leaders with tailored support at each stage of their journey to navigate complex change and fully realize their potential in implementing Gender Action Plans.

Grow the Team:

Expand the network for new organizations, partners, and communities to join the movement. Continue to strengthen collaboration across regions by sharing proven strategies, tools, and practices for a consistent understanding and application of gender equity.

Tactic 1: Increase access to more football-for-good players by identifying those ready to take the journey.

Tactic 2: Include implementation partners as active members of the ecosystem.

Tactic 3: Convene cross-regional connections and thematic learning groups.

Tactic 4: Highlight intersectional leadership and demonstrate how gender equity is foundational to other equity engagement strategies.

Rewrite the Rules:

Position the Equal Play Effect as a driver of structural shifts by embracing systems measurements and relationship-based approaches.

Tactic 1: Strengthen and expand partnerships to connect with stakeholders who can support and amplify systemic change efforts.

Tactic 2: Shift focus from measuring program outputs to capturing the systems change driving this work.

APPENDIX

Contributors

These insights and recommendations were informed by the stories of change across the five regions where the Equal Play Effect (EPE) network has taken root: Southeast Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America, and North America.

Our deepest thanks go to the 35+ Lead Organizations and all EPE participants across the coaching and staff tracks who generously shared their halftime reflections and insights. Your contributions have shaped this report and the continued evolution of a more gender-equitable football ecosystem.

Europe

The adidas Breaking Barriers network participants: Gorka Planchuelo-Monnier, Mitsy Barriga Ramos, Sol Fauquier (Common Goal, Global); Kat Sipes (Soccer Without Borders, Global); Catherine Shulter, Emmanuelle Schach, Nicole Matuska (Women Win, Global).

Latin America

The SOMOS Equidad network participants: Ana Arizabaleta (SOMOS Equidad, Colombia); Juliana Gomez (SOMOS Equidad, Colombia); Debora Jorquera (Granja Andar, Chile); Eugenia Núñez (Seprojovent, Costa Rica); Carolina Recalde (FUDELA, Ecuador); Marilay Marquez (FUDELA, Ecuador); Katherine Carrasco (Futbol Mas, Chile)

Middle East

The Middle East network participants: Anna Barrett (Reclaim Childhood, Global); Rima Yacoub (Reclaim Childhood, Jordan); Afraa Qahtan (Reclaim Childhood, Jordan); Lynn Hajj (GAME, Lebanon); Mohammad Al Omari (GAME, Jordan); Rahaf Odeh (Palestine Sports for Life, Palestine); Zain Ismael (GAME, Jordan)

Africa

The Africa regional network: Steven Davis (Soccer Without Borders, Uganda); Laura Lebens (Common Goal, Global); Samantha Royle (Tackle Africa, Senegal); Dorcas Amakobe (Moving the Goalpost, Kenya); Fahaby Kitimbo (Soccer Without Borders, Uganda); Josefina Endjala (Physically Active Youth, Namibia); Martin Dururu (Tambai Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe); Bertha Bessy (National Organisation for Women in Sports, Physical Activity and Recreation, Zambia)

Asia Pacific

The APAC network participants: Assmaah Halal (Creating Chances, Australia); Eve Wilcox (Creating Chances, Australia); Mia Weinland (Women Win, Global); Catherine Schulter (Women Win, Global); Kimberly Lopez (FundLife, Philippines); Arpana Pradhan (We United, Nepal); Sicilia Setiawan (Inspire Indonesia, Indonesia); Ketrin Marpaung (Inspire Indonesia, Indonesia); Rojie Mae Valiente (FundLife, Philippines); Pratigya Joshi (We United, Nepal); Mashal Hussain (Women, Win Global)

adidas Breaking Barriers Project Europe

Halftime Statistics:

43

Staff Participants

102

Coach Participants

87,619

young girls, boys, and
non-binary indirectly
impacted



About Equal Play Effect Europe

Between 2020 and 2025, adidas Breaking Barriers—a European consortium led by Common Goal, Women Win and Soccer Without Borders, —onboarded 15 organizations across four cohorts. Its multi-cohort model fostered peer learning and piloted strategies like adidas mentorship, the “Changemaker Challenge” (a 1-year project led by 2–3 Implementing Partners), and Collective Club virtual sessions on shared GAP priorities. Movement-building tools included an open-access learning academy and three research papers advancing evidence on gender inclusivity in the ecosystem.

adidas Breaking Barriers Resources:

- The Breaking Barriers Academy: breakingbarriersacademy.com
- Breaking Barriers Research: [BEYOND REPRESENTATION: Exploring comprehensive gender-inclusive approaches to elevate women in professional sports](#)
- Breaking Barriers Research: [EMPOWERING HER GAME: Exploring the Importance of Gender-Informed Coaching](#)
- Breaking Barriers Research: [MORE OBSTACLES THAN ACHIEVEMENTS: An exploration of the key hurdles to girls' participation in sport in Europe and opportunities that remain](#)

SOMOS Equidad Latin America

Halftime Statistics:

32

Staff Participants

349

Coach Participants

40K+

young girls, boys, and
non-binary indirectly
impacted



About Equal Play Effect Latin America

Between 2021 and 2024, Somos Equidad launched two cohorts across eight countries, quickly emerging as a dynamic regional hub. Colombian futbolistas and local funders played a key role in securing foundational support and modeling strong leadership. To build identity and visibility, the network co-created a “Collective Identity Visuals” t-shirt and piloted a photo exhibition - *En la Cancha: Mil Mujeres, Mil Historias* - highlighting female leaders advancing gender equity. These launched in Colombia, Argentina, Mexico, and at Festival ‘23 in Australia—demonstrating how EPE can evolve into a broader movement for growth, resources, and impact in Latin American football.

SOMOS Equidad Resources:

- [SOMOS Equidad Website: www.somosequidad.com](http://www.somosequidad.com)
- [SOMOS Equidad 2021 - 2025 Impact Report](#)
- [En la Cancha: Mil Mujeres, Mil Historias Photo Exhibition](#)

Equal Play Effect Asia Pacific

Halftime Statistics:

23

Staff Participants

69

Coach Participants

38,198

young girls, boys, and
non-binary indirectly
impacted



About Equal Play Effect Asia-Pacific

Launched in 2023, the Asia Pacific region led one cohort using a locally adapted Equal Play Effect methodology, shaped by cultural and gender norms. Guided by Women Win and Creating Chances, coaches and staff co-designed region-specific programs through a design-thinking approach. A regional convening in Jakarta sparked power-sharing and collaboration, resulting in peer exchange tools like the Menstruation Toolkit and a Coach Toolkit—translated into five languages and adopted across multiple organizations. These open-source resources now anchor ongoing gender equity efforts across the region.

EPE Asia-Pacific Resources:

- [Equal Play Effect - Asia Pacific Website](#)
- [Football for Gender Equity Coach Toolkit](#)
- [Equal Play Effect - Asia Pacific Menstrual Care Club](#)

Equal Play Effect Africa

Halftime Statistics:

65
Staff Participants

57
Coach Participants

86,342
young girls, boys, and
non-binary indirectly
impacted



About Equal Play Effect Africa

Since 2020, Equal Play Effect has grown from the Global Goal 5 Accelerator pilot into a coordinated Africa-wide network, officially launched in 2023 and led by Tackle Africa, Soccer Without Borders Uganda, Kick4Life, Moving the Goalposts, and TIBU Africa. One cohort ran across four sub-regions with staff and coach tracks to ensure local relevance. Organizations applied core gender equity tools, fostering collective learning and adaptation. An expert Advisory Board was formed to guide strategy and connect the network to sector leaders. This multi-layered model enabled localized learning, language adaptation, and collaboration—positioning Africa as a leading voice in gender equity in sport for development.

EPE Africa Resources:

- [Equal Play Effect - Africa Website](#)
- [Global Goal 5 Accelerator Impact Report \(2020 - 2021\)](#)
- [Equal Play Effect - Africa: 2023 - 2025 Stories of Impact](#)

Equal Play Effect Middle East

Halftime Statistics:

6
Staff Participants

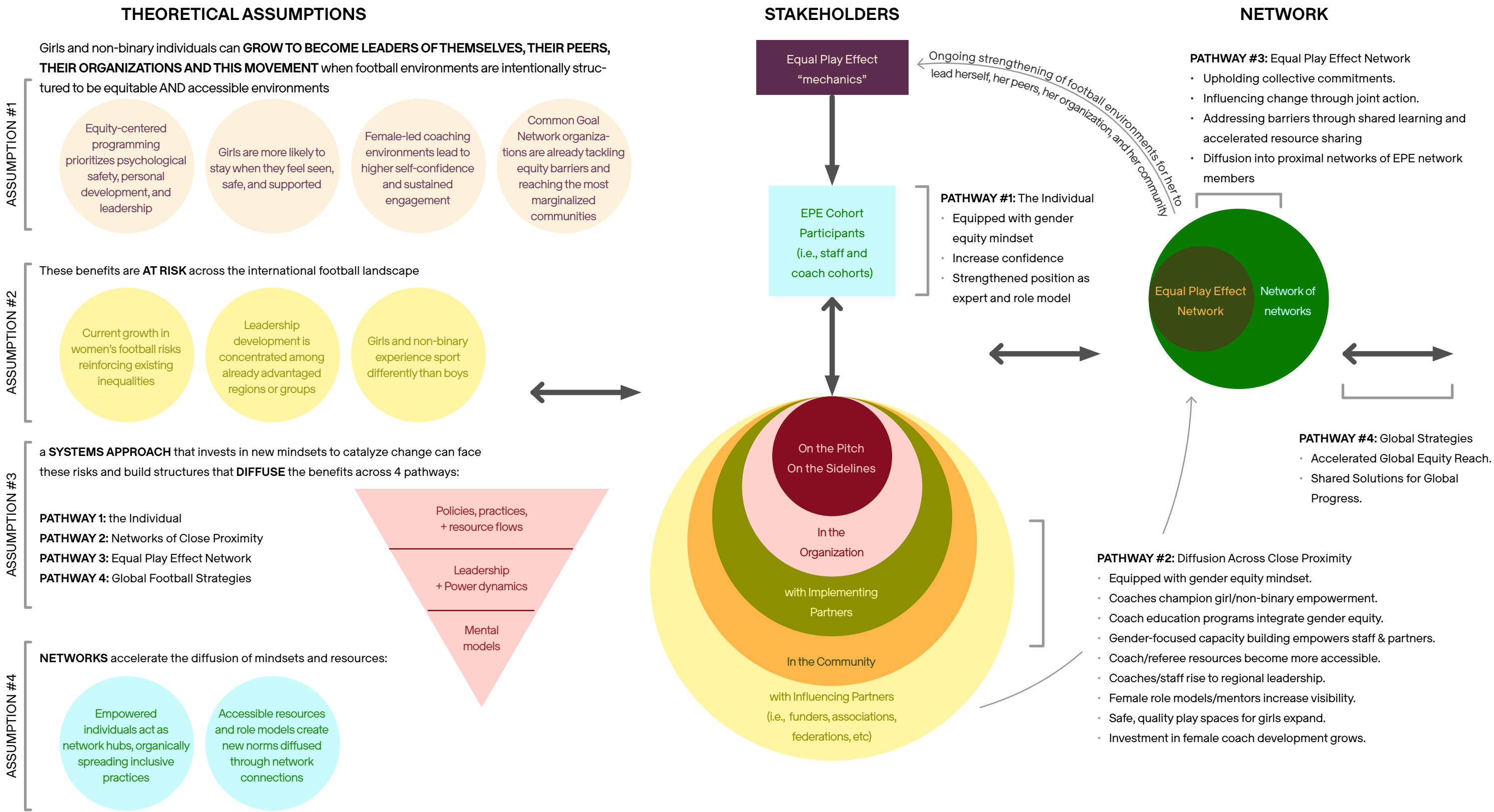
6
Coach Participants

757
young people indirectly
impacted



About Equal Play Effect Middle East

Launched in 2023 during a period of regional conflict, the Middle East initiated its Equal Play Effect pilot with Equity Hub Lead organization, Reclaim Childhood, successfully launching its first cohort with six coaches and staff in each track across two organizations. The program adapted to the complex context by delivering tailored, trauma-informed coaching and gender-inclusive leadership training, ensuring the methodologies were relevant and sensitive to the unique challenges faced in the region.



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