Through sport, children learn to live and play together and to lead others (UNICEF Rwanda.)

Antoine Deliége's story

Kigali, Rwanda: Every child has the right to play! (Art.31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.) It seems so obvious; yet there are more than seven hundred million children who have never known what play means. That is about a quarter of all the world’s children!

My name is Antoine Deliége and I am an international UN Volunteer from Belgium, working closely with Right To Play International, a non-governmental organization (NGO), to implement an UNICEF-funded project to ensure that many Rwandan children and youth will have the opportunity to play. Through Sport for Development (S4D), we look at children as human beings, not only mouths waiting to be filled or sick bodies to be cured. Food and vaccinations are not the only things Rwandan children are short of; they need just as much as anybody else to bring hopes and dreams into their lives.

When I give a ball to a child, I know I can change that child's life for the better, simply by letting him or her participate in sport and play. Sport for Development (S4D) refers to the use of sport to achieve specific development objectives, like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is a powerful engine to fulfil the rights of children.

Activities that embody the best values of safe and inclusive play and sport
are tools for improving children's lives. They contribute to healthy child development, build self-esteem and life skills, mobilize communities, foster peace and tolerance and teach important life lessons about respect, cooperation, resilience and leadership. Above all, play and sport help all children, including the poorest and most marginalized, to have fun and enjoy their childhood.

Through sport, children learn to live and play together and to lead others. Then, their health gets better and they grow stronger whilst, at the same time, they find respect for themselves and others, too. But, above all, a lust for life enters into their young lives.

For me, to be a volunteer means to spend most of the time out of the office, on the ground, in the midst of the operations and amongst the community. To see the smiles of children gives sense to my work. The impact of sport on children is just magic!

The project seeks out the cooperation of local youth-friendly centres and gets to work training volunteers from the locality in the art of coaching. We then teach these new coaches how to get great games going for boys and girls with only the most simple of available means. Additionally, they are taught how disabled youngsters can join in and gain so much from games and play. Information about healthy feeding is included, as well as attention paid to hygiene, disease such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and the dangers inherent in tobacco and alcohol as well as Sugar Daddies and Sugar Mommies. As this project has clearly shown, children and youth have gained in life-skills, health and happiness.

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Sub-Saharan Africa

- Rwanda • UNICEF • hygiene • play

Sustainable Development Goal: