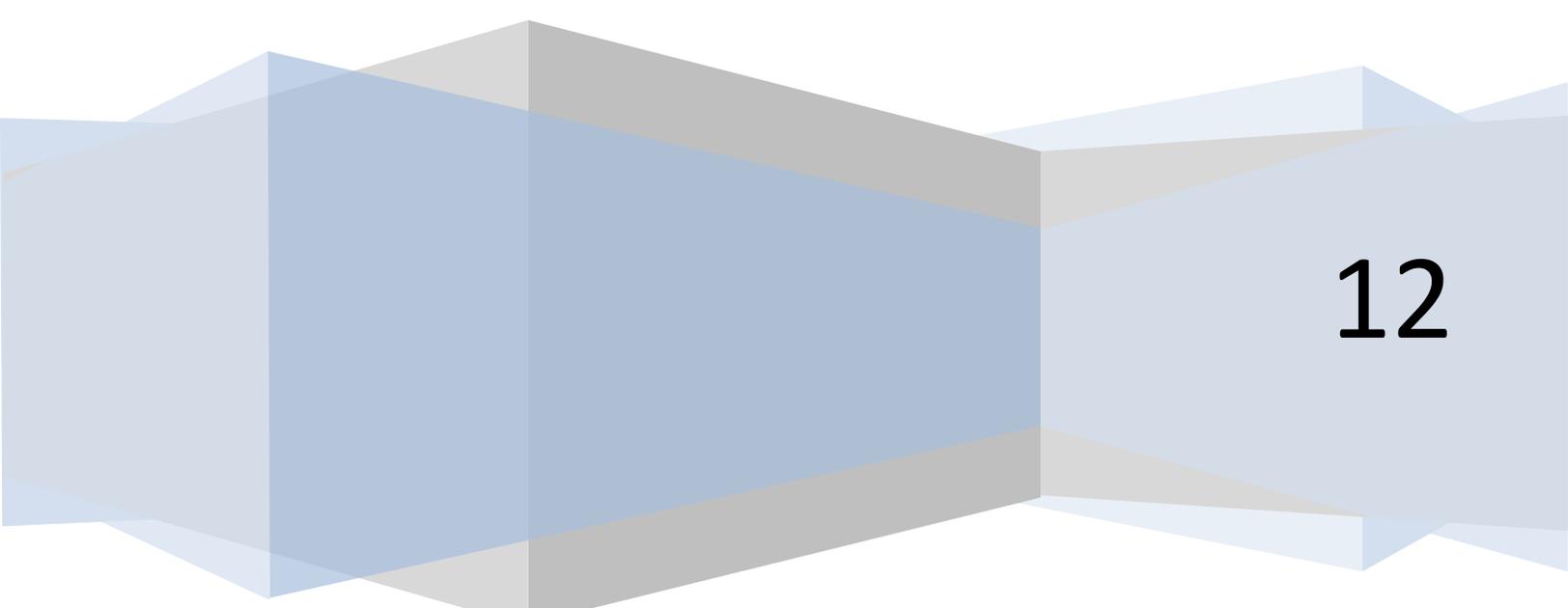


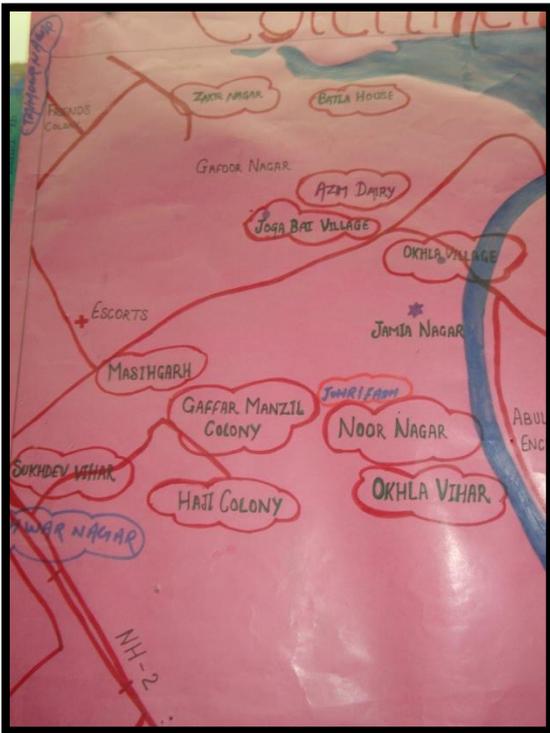
Center for Equity and Inclusion (CEQUIN)

# External Evaluation of CEQUIN's 'Women in Sports' Program

Conducted by: Grace Ogilby



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The map which hangs in CEQUIN's Gender Resource Center displaying the areas in which CEQUIN football players live.

### **Acknowledgements:**

This evaluation would not have been possible without the generous help and support of many members of the CEQUIN staff. Many thanks to Lora Prabhu and Sara Pilot for permitting the author to access both the CEQUIN staff and the football girls themselves. Thank you also to Zulfia at the Gender Resource Center for setting up meetings with the girls, and particular thanks to Rizwan who agreed to translate in interviews. Finally, thanks go to the girls themselves for answering the interviewer's questions candidly and with good humor.

## **Background on CEQUIN's Women in Sports Program:**

In 2010 against the backdrop of the Commonwealth Games CEQUIN organized and facilitated a high profile Sub Committee on Women and Sports. The 27 member Committee met on May 11<sup>th</sup> of 2010 at the Commonwealth Games Office in New Delhi to deliberate issues pertaining to women and sports in India such as:

- How to increase women's participation in sports
- How to enhance women's access to sports facilities
- How to use sports as a vehicle to promote women's leadership and decision making skills
- How to use women and sports to combat gender inequality

The Committee discussed the barriers to women's participation in sports in India, including stereotypes of women's physical ability and the generally low value placed on women's involvement in sports. Several members of the Committee conversed about the potential for sports to promote both improved nutrition and a violence- free lifestyle. Indu Puri, Arjuna Awardee for Table Tennis spoke about the link between sports and empowerment through increased levels of self confidence and autonomy.

The Committee agreed on several short term and long term goals. Short term goals related primarily to the Commonwealth Games whereas long term goals targeted stronger national sports curricula, wider and more prominent advocacy campaigns to combat stereotypes, and policy changes to increase infrastructure and the availability of sports facilities for women and girls.

In 2011 CEQUIN decided to test out some of the long term goals of the Committee and run a pilot program out of Jamia Millia Islamia University for young women living in and around the area of Jamia Nagar, the site of CEQUIN's Gender Resource Center. Community Mobilizers spread information about the new pilot program throughout the various neighborhoods around Jamia Nagar and 100 girls signed up for the program. Many of the girls were the daughters, nieces and cousins of members of CEQUIN's Self Help Groups, microfinance loan groups comprised entirely of women.

Most of the girls, though not all, knew at least one other girl enrolled in the program when they began to play. All the girls were issued a maroon uniform with CEQUIN's logo (see right) that consisted of long trousers and a shirt made of polyester.



The girls were anywhere between 12 and 18 years old. Jamia Millia University kindly allowed them to practice on University fields for one hour 2-3 times a week. The large group was split into several teams that scrimmaged against one another. Much time was spent on fitness and

getting the girls into shape as none of them had ever engaged in competitive sports before. In addition to the head female coach, there were several male assistant instructors. The girls learned the basics of football: how to run, kick, pass, dribble, and keep goal. Their female coach and several male instructors taught the girls team work and the rules and regulations of football.

## **Evaluation Methodology:**

Of the 100 girls who originally signed up for CEQUIN's program approximately 65 completed the program. Of these 65 players, 8 girls were interviewed. Interviews were conducted in CEQUIN's Gender Resource Center in the Jogabai Extension of Jamia Nagar over the course of 3 afternoons after the girls had finished school for the day. Rizwan Ahmed Khan, Project Coordinator of the Gender Resource Center, translated the interviewer's questions from English into Hindi and the player's responses from Hindi into English. These responses were recorded and later transcribed.

Each girl was asked the same 34 questions from a questionnaire developed by the interviewer. On occasion a girl would be asked fewer questions if the questions became redundant. For example, since many girls on the team were related and some of the girls interviewed lived in the same household, questions about their family income and the level of education achieved by their parents were unnecessary to ask twice.

The questionnaire was divided into 7 parts: Basic Information, Background Questions, The Process of Playing, Perception of Self, Standing in Community, Lessons Learned and Follow up in the Present. The questions utilized various indicators common used to measure women's and girl's empowerment, defined generally as *the ability to make decisions and exercise control over one's life and environment* in accordance with standard United Nations Research Institute for Social Development definitions.<sup>1</sup> The indicators of decision making ability include: mobility, autonomy, status in family and community, and self confidence. The questionnaire contained a mix of open and close ended questions in an effort to elicit the most accurate and introspective answers possible from the players. Open ended questions were especially important in this questionnaire due to a lack of a baseline survey against which the researcher might have been able to use. The following section is divided into four subsections corresponding with each of the abovementioned indicators.

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<sup>1</sup> See Kabeer, Naila. "The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment." UNRISD Discussion Paper No 108, August 1999. Accessed October 8 2012 at: [http://www.unrisd.org/UNRISD/website/document.nsf/d2a23ad2d50cb2a280256eb300385855/31eef181bec398a380256b67005b720a/\\$FILE/dp108.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/UNRISD/website/document.nsf/d2a23ad2d50cb2a280256eb300385855/31eef181bec398a380256b67005b720a/$FILE/dp108.pdf)

## **Findings:**

The following section is divided into four parts, each of which discusses a different empowerment indicator. These indicators are: 1) mobility 2) autonomy 3) status in family and community 4) self confidence.

### **1. Mobility**

Mobility plays an important role in women's empowerment and decision making ability. Simply put, in order to complete an action- working outside the home, attending school or university, practicing football- a woman must usually move somewhere to effectively complete the action. Her ability to move of her own volition and her confidence and comfort levels with her movement are important indicators of her ability to make decisions and control her own life and thus a measurement of her empowerment.

A common theme emerged among the players interviewed. The actual freedom of movement for these girls did not seem to change very much between their pre- and post-football lives. Some of them can move around by themselves, but most of them must be accompanied by another sibling or parent (often but not by necessity a man). This has remained constant regardless of whether or not they were playing football. However, 5 out of 8 girls interviewed said that they now feel more comfortable moving around their communities than they did before they started playing football. Several girls said that they no longer felt the need for their brother's accompaniment. Two girls said "I feel that I can go anywhere." *While football does not appear to have impacted their physical ability to move, football has greatly increased the girls' confidence and comfort levels moving around Delhi.*

### **2. Autonomy**

Autonomy can be a slippery term to pin down when discussed in conjunction with women's empowerment. For the purpose of this evaluation autonomy refers to self determination, perhaps more easily conceptualized as self governance.

Many of the young women in the CEQUIN program have already displayed a large amount of autonomy by signing up for CEQUIN's football program in the first place. All of them had the support of at least their mother but some of them hid the fact that they were playing football from their fathers, or their fathers remained indifferent to their participation in the program. (Other girls had supportive fathers who encouraged them to



play). Additionally the decision to keep playing on the team and not to drop out also demonstrates autonomy on the part of these girls as 3 out of 10 of the original girls did not continue with the program. So the question becomes: did the process of playing and continuing to play football increase the players levels of self determination?

Every girl interviewed described the process of learning how to exercise and getting in shape. With the exception of one very peppy girl they all said it was a difficult and painful process but hugely rewarding because they felt more energized, healthier and happier. Many of them said that they were lazy before they started to play football, but that football taught them how to work hard and focus not only with their bodies but also with their minds. Most of them said that hard work and discipline were among the most important lessons that they learned which have translated to their lives in school and at home. In other words, the *girls described how football has improved their physical and mental wellbeing. This wellbeing springs from their respective decisions to continue playing football, exercising a kind of self governance and self determination over both their bodies and their minds. Based on their descriptions, this self determination, this autonomy, is beginning to spill over into other parts of their lives like their studies.*

### 3. Status in Family and Community

The process of empowerment does not exist in a vacuum nor is it an individual process. Measuring the changing reactions of both a girl's family and her community to her decision to play football is important because the opinions of the people close to her affect how a girl perceives herself and her abilities.

As mentioned above, all the girls interviewed had mothers who supported their decision to play football. However, the degree of support that they received from their fathers and other siblings varied from girl to girl and ranged from extremely supportive to not supportive at all. Women in the girls' families were not universally supportive of the girls; several girls mentioned grandmothers and sisters who said that they should not play football because they are girls.

Players described their respective community's reactions as mixed. Some neighbors and friends were very supportive while others were very critical. Those who were critical told girls that they should go to school and come home and study- not play football. Many girls said that other members of their communities felt jealous of the girls' opportunity to play football.



The girls interviewed kept playing football regardless of the disapproval of their communities, and those that had trouble with family or community members all said that the objections of their communities changed when the CEQUIN program was featured in the newspaper and the girls became celebrities in their communities. Furthermore *the girls said that their status in their families and communities increased when they received medals for playing with the CEQUIN team and when they became good enough players to start winning their matches.* Every girl interviewed who mentioned trouble with her family or community said that the criticism of her decision to play ended or was greatly diminished after she received her medal and was featured in the newspaper. Now, these girls say, their families and communities are supportive of them and proud of their accomplishments, urging them to continue playing (and winning). Below are stories from the girls about how they have challenged and changed their communities' perceptions of women in sports:



**Namratha, 18, Okhla Village:**

I went to the Doctor because I injured my ankle playing football. The Doctor asked me “how did you get this injury?” I said, “playing football.” The Doctor looked very surprised and said “How? Girls don’t play football.” I said “Yes they do- you should come and watch the CEQUIN team play.”

**Mala, 16, Okhla Railway Station:**

One day after I had just joined the team, a boy in my community with a football came up to me and teased me, saying “how can you play football? You’re a girl. You can’t even kick this ball!” I looked at him, went over to the ball and kicked it- hard. He was very surprised!



**Kurson, 13, Haji Colony:**

One of my father’s friends objected strongly when I started playing football, saying that I was a girl and should only study and stay at home. However, my father was very proud of me and supported me. He showed his friend when I won my medal and my picture was in the newspaper. Now his friend is proud of me too!

#### 4. Self Confidence

Self confidence plays a large role in decision making ability and therefore in empowerment. One of the most striking similarities among the young women in the football program was the change that all of them acknowledged in their levels of self confidence. Every girl interviewed said that she had gained self confidence as a result of the CEQUIN football program. Many of them discussed their shyness before the program and constantly feeling unable to express themselves. *“Now I’m not afraid to talk to boys. I feel that I can go anywhere and do anything” 15-year-old Zuliha said, sentiments echoed by many of the girls. “Now,” Zuliha said, “I feel that I am equal to boys.”* Girls explained that their clarity of thought and their confidence in their thinking had improved. For example, 16-year-old Jhoti said that in retrospect she could not think properly before she joined the team, but that now she can think in a focused and effective manner.

Several girls mentioned their surprise at their ability to play football well. Before joining the team they did not think that they were physically capable of playing team sports. Other girls were afraid on the first day of practice that they would hurt themselves. One girl recalled how she was afraid to kick the football at first because she was worried that she would break all the bones in her foot and leg. The same girl proudly recounted her goal during the season’s exhibition game in front of VIP guests.

The players have gained self confidence not only in an individual capacity but also in a team capacity. When asked what were the most important lessons she had learned from playing football 18-year-old Namratha explained “Team work is the most important thing because you can do things together that you can never do alone.” Girls mentioned the importance of the new friends that they have made through the team and the sense of team unity and singleness of purpose.



## **Conclusion:**

CEQUIN's Women in Sports program has made an impact on several important parts of the lives of the young women who participate in the program. The impact can be summarized as:

- Increased confidence in mobility, especially solo travel
- Increased control over individual girls' physical and mental health
- Increased status for girls in their respective family and community
- Increased self confidence

All of these factors are indicators of movement towards empowerment for these young women. When asked "What are your goals for your future?" all of them said that they wished to continue playing football, and many of them said that they want to play for the Indian National Team.

It must be noted that there are several shortcomings of this study. The girls interviewed are the ones who chose to continue with the program not the ones who chose to stop. In other words, only the success stories were interviewed. In the future it would be beneficial to interview the girls who chose not to continue playing in order to understand why they chose not to continue. Why did 35% of the girls who signed up for the program stop playing? This evaluation has not been able to answer this very important question.

Finally, the girls themselves recommended several improvements for the program. Many of them are frustrated that they do not have a constant schedule but have to play on alternate days at inconsistent times. They would like to have a steady practice schedule and to have more practices than they are currently able to have.

### **About the Author:**

Grace Ogilby is an American who received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Carleton College of Northfield Minnesota in 2012. Her research at CEQUIN was made possible through her Fellowship with the Watson Foundation of New York. She spent 2 months in Delhi between August and October of 2012 working with CEQUIN. You can contact her at [grace.ogilby@gmail.com](mailto:grace.ogilby@gmail.com).