SPORTZ VILLAGE
Foundation

Presents

#SportForChange ROUND TABLE

Truly Grassroots Global

Building a Global Coalition for India's #SportForChange Movement

Powered By

SPORTZ VILLAGE GET KIDS TO PLAY SUMMIT

Global Communications Partner

sportanddev.org
The international platform on sport and development

Knowledge Partner

ISCA
International Sport and Culture Association

Report



Truly Grassroots, Global: Local Strength Meets Global Expertise

Grassroots sport in India has long sat in the background of the country's sporting story - present in every school and community, but rarely part of the national or global conversation that surrounds elite performance. Yet in a country with India's scale of community networks and school systems, there lies a larger opportunity: to treat grassroots participation not as a feeder system for medals, but as a movement capable of shaping global practice in its own right.

This idea took centre stage at the #SportForChange Round Table series, "Truly Grassroots, Global," hosted by Sportz Village Foundation at the Bangalore International Centre. The session brought together Mogens Kirkeby, President of the ISCA (International Sport and Culture Association), with leaders from corporate CSR, grassroots Non-profits and academia, to explore how India's local practice and ISCA's global network could strengthen each other.



Setting the Context: The Opportunity in Front of Us



Fit India Movement data cited during the discussion put the drop-out rate in school-age sport at close to 70-80 percent between the ages of twelve and fifteen - a gap participants agreed captures both the scale of the problem and the scale of the opportunity still ahead. Against that, Sportz Village Foundation's own reach of roughly 1.5 million children in and around schools was cited as proof that solutions at real scale already exist within India.

Participants agreed that the moment is right to treat grassroots participation, and not only elite performance, as central to India's sporting culture - one built on global partnerships, shared measurement, and collective investment from CSR, philanthropy and government alike.

Expanding the Definition of Grassroots Sport



A key thread of the fireside chat centred on vocabulary, and how it shapes who engages. Mogens Kirkeby noted that the word 'sport,' spoken to sectors such as health, education or government, is too easily read as elite competition and medals - closing off conversations before they start. ISCA has learned instead to speak of 'recreational physical activity,' 'grassroots sport' and 'sport for development,' matching its language to whichever sector it is trying to reach.

Participants agreed this reframing runs deeper than semantics: broadening how sport is understood - beyond competition and medals, to participation, wellness and everyday movement - is what allows schools, corporates and governments to support it meaningfully, extending its benefits to every child, irrespective of geography or gender.

Insights and Perspectives from the Round Table

1. The Global Perspective — ISCA



Mogens Kirkeby, President of ISCA, urged the room to see India not merely as a recipient of international best practice but as a potential exporter of it, citing Sportz Village's reach of 6.5 million children as a scale many countries are still working toward. He was candid that grassroots funding can remain a challenge - and mid-term commitments, and that the deepest outcomes - health, education, employability - can take fifteen to thirty years to fully show, even where outputs are visible far sooner. His core message to the room: "if you want grassroots sport to develop, you have to invest in that particular part." He closed by citing MoveForLIFE, a ten-year, cross-organisation project from his own country that outlasted two changes of government, as proof that unusual partnerships and long-time horizons - more than large single grants - are what sustain grassroots impact.

2. Host and Moderator — Sportz Village Foundation

Parminder Gill, Co-Founder and Head of Foundation, Sportz Village, set the frame for the discussion that followed, urging participants to move beyond discussing the problem of inactivity only inside the room, and instead carry it back outward to the corporates, funders and policymakers each of them represents.

3. Corporate CSR Leaders

Representatives from Wipro Foundation, Tata Electronics, Tata Trusts and KPMG shared where their organisations currently stand on sport.

Wipro Foundation has supported grassroots causes for over 25 years, but only began funding a dedicated sports project last year, through a school-transformation program in Bengaluru.

Tata Electronics, a new entrant to CSR, is launching a school-based social-emotional-

learning program built around sport, aimed at building character and "good global citizens" rather than producing athletes.

KPMG's representative argued that the sector's real ceiling on scale is its reluctance to engage government directly, contrasting sport with skilling, where sustained advocacy has already produced a National Skill Mission.

Corporates broadly agreed that sport still competes for CSR budget against sectors with clearer, faster-to-prove outcomes, and that stronger data and documentation would help close that gap.

4. Implementing Agencies and Foundations

Grassroots organisations working directly with children and communities - including Decathlon Foundation, Simply Sport Foundation, a girls'-football-to-coaching program, and a community-led women's sport initiative in Odisha - grounded the discussion in field reality.

A girls' football program shared results from a cohort of 24 alumnae: four went on to become certified coaches with the All India Football Federation, each now positioned to bring further girls into the sport in their own communities.



A community-led initiative in Odisha, built around traditional games, grew organically from one village to twenty-three, with participants describing marked shifts in women's confidence and civic voice.

Several organisations described deliberately staged scaling - one grew from two sites in one city to seventeen sites across eight cities over several years - prioritising program depth over rapid, unproven expansion.

Speakers agreed that the harder challenge is not reach but retention and transition: how long an organisation should stay engaged with a school or community, and what it takes to shift from dependency to local ownership.

5. Academia — Closing the Research Gap

Azim Premji University offered a candid gap analysis: India has deep practitioner expertise in sport for development, spread across many small, regional organisations, but very little of it has been captured in academic curricula or formal research. The university positioned itself as a potential aggregator and convening platform for this knowledge, rather than a generator of new research from scratch, and offered its campus for further collaboration.

Emerging Frameworks and Pathways

A Shared Registry for the Ecosystem

The most concrete proposal of the day was a shared portal or registry, where organisations list their core competencies and the kind of support they can offer or need. Participants agreed this could close the visibility gap several named as the single biggest obstacle to collaboration, while cautioning that such portals are easy to launch and hard to keep current.

Patient Capital versus Funding Cycles

A key opportunity discussed was aligning funding structures with the timelines that real behavioural and community outcomes need. CSR and government funding cycles typically run two to seven years, while the deeper shifts grassroots sport aims for often take six to ten-plus years to fully materialise. Participants pointed to philanthropic capital as a model worth building on - often willing to back early-stage pilots and stay invested through to results - and saw an opening to bring CSR and state funding closer to that model, with reporting frameworks designed around long-term outcomes rather than short-term milestones alone.



Turning Unpublished Data into Shared Evidence

Several participants pointed to years of program data and toolkits sitting unpublished across their organisations. The proposal on the table was a lightweight, shared knowledge function to make existing evidence usable across the ecosystem, paired with monitoring, evaluation and an explicit exit strategy designed into programs from day one, rather than added after a pilot succeeds.

"If we all really can work together to create an open resource where we learn from each other and leverage each other's strengths, we can all reach that goal of one million girls."

Beyond Reach: Building a Culture of Participation



A strong consensus emerged around reframing the purpose of grassroots sport - from counting children reached to keeping them engaged. Mogens' own observation, that India already has a strong movement culture even where a distinct grassroots sport culture is still forming, ran under nearly every contribution that followed. Retention, participants agreed, is the harder and more important measure of success, especially for girls, who continue to drop out earlier and in far greater numbers than boys.

This was the backdrop for the day's central commitment: the Girls in Sport initiative, launched by Sportz Village Foundation in partnership with ISCA, targeting one million girls reached and retained in sport over five years - addressing safety concerns, lack of facilities, mobility and social conditioning concentrated right at the adolescent years when habits and identity are most actively formed.

"There's no reason not to think that girls are just as interested in physical activity and in leading groups as boys. Just give them the chance, give them the opportunity, remove the barriers."

- Mogens Kirkeby

The Road Ahead: Making Sport for All a Reality



The Round Table concluded with a shared commitment to carry these ideas beyond the room, chief among them the newly launched Girls in Sport initiative. Participants agreed that real progress comes from turning conversation into coordinated action - with other successful multi-partner collaborations showing that sectors working together, rather than in parallel, is what drives change at scale.

This will involve:

- Reaching one million girls in sport over five years, through policy engagement, gender-responsive CSR programing, and capacity-building for coaches and the wider school and community ecosystem.
- Building a shared registry or knowledge-sharing function to close the sector's visibility gap and reduce duplicated effort.
- Strengthening the sector's shared evidence base - longitudinal and outcome data - to move sport from a small, boutique CSR line item to a credible funding priority.
- Pursuing direct, organised engagement with government, taking cues from sectors such as skilling that have already secured national-level policy backing.

Closing Note: A Shared Vision for a Global Grassroots Movement



The #SportForChange Round Table's Bengaluru edition marked the opening of a season built on a simple premise: India's grassroots sport ecosystem already has the scale and the practice to shape global thinking, and the work ahead lies as much in making its own parts visible to each other as in reaching more children.

As Sportz Village Foundation and its partners carry the Girls in Sport initiative forward, grassroots sport stands to serve as both a mirror and a mechanism of progress - building healthier, more confident young people, and a more connected, collaborative sporting ecosystem in India and beyond.



> **“True impact emerges when sport strengthens ecosystems, creating lasting capacity, trust and continuity.”**

#SportForChange
ROUND TABLE

SPORTZ VILLAGE
Foundation

Scan Here to Read the Annual Impact Report 2026

sportzvillagefoundation.org
foundation@sportzvillage.com
18008913830