

AATASHALA



UNLOCKING POTENTIAL THROUGH SPORT

10.01.2025

11.01.2025

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INTRODUCTION

Sport and play have emerged as powerful tools globally, unlocking the potential of young individuals. Recognising their transformative power, the United Nations (UN) has been advocating for using sport and play as innovative tools to enable the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), transcending barriers of gender, age, and socio-economic status, while promoting education, equality, and community development.

In a country as culturally, economically, and geographically diverse as India, children and youth play a major role in shaping the future of the country. About 34% of India's Gross National Income (GNI) is contributed by youth aged 15 to 29 years¹. To ensure India's youth continue to productively contribute to the national economy and sustainable growth of the nation, it is essential to ensure they have access to appropriate education, skills, health awareness and other enablers.

¹<https://www.employmentnews.gov.in/newemp/MoreContentNew.aspx?n=Editorial&k=97>

In India, sports and play have a vital role in nation-building and youth engagement. In this regard, numerous government departments and ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private organisations have come to the forefront to implement various initiatives. Working in different contexts across the country, these organisations have been instrumental in enabling young people's capabilities through sport, however, they continue to face multifaceted challenges and hurdles in accessing resources, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring sustainable funding.

Acknowledging the need for a platform to bring together the various organisations working in this space, Rural Development Trust (RDT) - Anantapur Sports Academy (ASA), in collaboration with Generalitat Valenciana, organised the 'Aatashala' workshop and conference, held on the 10th and 11th of January 2025 at Anantapur Sports Village (ASV) in Andhra Pradesh, India.

The term '*Aatashala*' is the combination of two Telugu words, *Aata* (play) and *Shala* (space), which together mean 'space for play.' With a focus on 'Unlocking Potential through Sport and Play,' Aatashala facilitated dialogue on the best practices, successes, and challenges as well as opportunities and solutions within the themes of equitable sports participation, leadership of girls and women in sports, and life skills education through sports.



KEY HIGHLIGHTS



OUTREACH



KEY THEMES



LEARNINGS
FOR FUTURE



TESTIMONIES

OUTREACH

80+

Attendees

23+

Organisations

29

States

05

Workshop
Facilitators

04

Moderators

11

Panellists

04

Speakers

KEY THEMES



GIRLS AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SPORT AND PLAY

- Tailored strategies in sports programmes ensure more female and youth participation in sports.
- Local role models within sports programmes resonate well with the communities and encourage more girls to take up sports and drive change.
- Balancing grassroots sports participation with high performance within sports programmes encourages more girls and youth to get into sports.

LIFE SKILLS AND VALUES EDUCATION THROUGH SPORT AND PLAY

- Sports are identified as a natural medium for teaching essential life skills like teamwork, leadership, decision-making, and resilience.
- An inclusive and community-centric approach in sports programmes ensures equal opportunities for all children to create sustainable change.
- Using stories of young leaders and peer ambassadors inspires communities to sustain engagement.

PARTNERSHIPS TO DRIVE SPORT FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

- An innovative approach and partnership model are required to drive sustainable impact through sports.
- Collaborating with governments and implementing organisations can ensure the sustainability of sports initiatives.
- Strengthened partnerships can ensure better resource allocation and scalability.



LEARNINGS FOR FUTURE

The Aatashala workshop and conference provided an opportunity for individuals and groups across India using sports for social change to connect and learn from each other. The positive response and shared passion for sports and development were evident, with participants travelling to Anantapur from across the country to contribute meaningfully to the discussions.

Aatashala harnessed the power of sport and play to empower girls, youth and communities through a multifaceted approach. It successfully highlighted the importance of tailored strategies, such as promoting female role models as coaches & youth leaders and deepening the community engagement (parents, teachers, youth, community members) in the programmes to encourage more female participation in sports. It also reinforced the role of sport & play in holistic development by integrating life skills training and aligning it with the existing government policies, particularly the National Education Policy (NEP 2020). Contextualising learning through local community engagement makes life skill education more relevant, helping address local challenges and respecting cultural realities.

Additionally, Aatashala underscored the importance of partnerships not just for financial support, but also for facilitating non-financial knowledge sharing that strengthens the impact on the ground and encourages media collaborations to amplify underrepresented grassroots stories and build visibility for inclusive, community-driven sports development.

RDT-ASA, through Aatashala, has taken the first step towards bringing like-minded organisations for shared learning and collective action. By creating more platforms similar to Aatashala, organisations can collaboratively leverage sport as a catalyst for inclusion and community-driven transformations.





TESTIMONIES

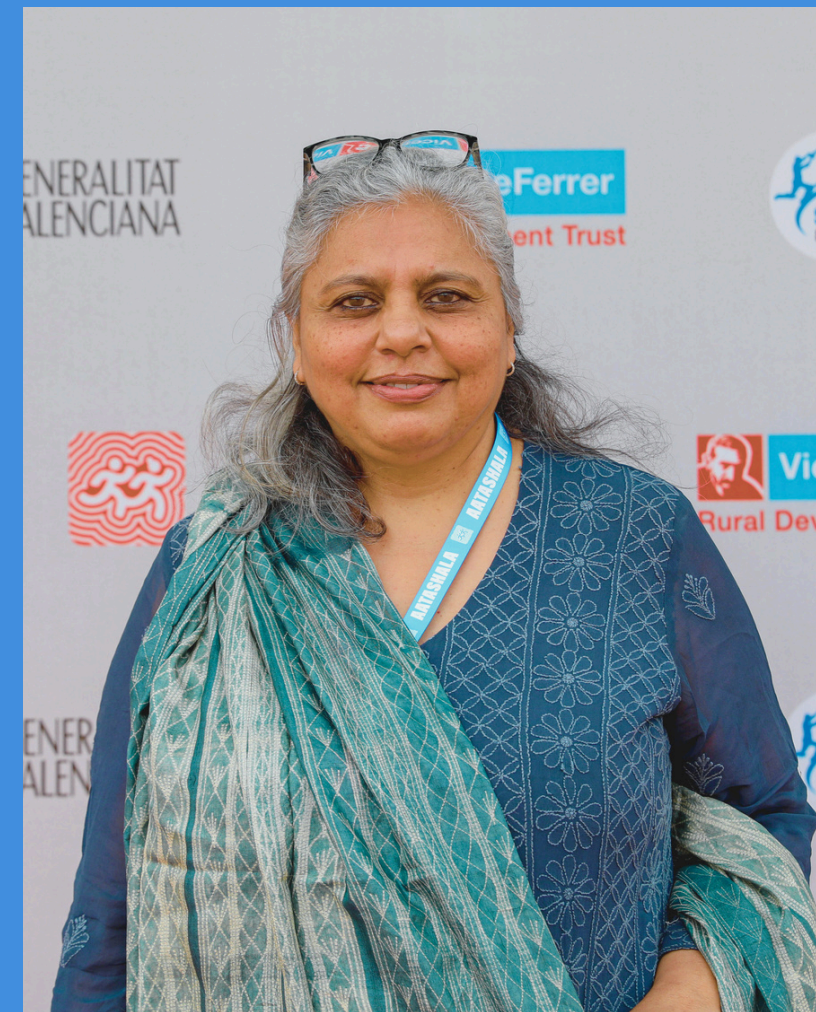
"There is a need to amplify stories about the impact of sports at the grassroots rather than focusing solely on activities or infrastructure."

- Maulshree Kalothia
Piramal Foudation



"For sports in India to thrive, we need a strong and sustainable ecosystem that nurtures both passion and professional opportunities. Establishing a clear pathway from grassroots to elite programmes is essential for long-term growth. Engaging teachers, professionals, and communities, along with the willingness to learn and embrace failure, is what drives true change."

- Hakimuddin Habibulla
Olympian swimmer



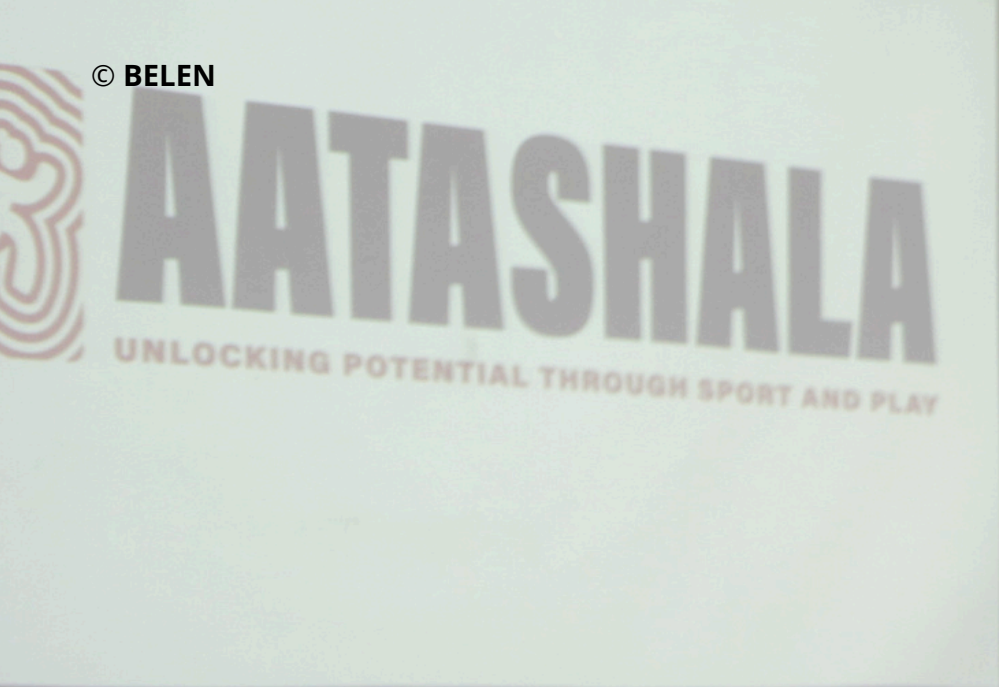
"Organisations need to evaluate whether they should individually tackle every aspect of sports for development (S4D) or focus on partnerships for greater impact. Joint advocacy efforts can enhance access, understanding, media coverage, and funding opportunities."

- Suheil F. Tandon
Pro Sport Development



"Sports must be accessible to all. It is an exciting medium that captures the interest of children naturally, making it a powerful tool for fostering awareness about topics as well as building life skills. By linking sports to education and life skills, we can turn policies into action. Stakeholders need to be educated about the importance of integrating sports into everyday learning."

- Priya Gopalen
Great Goals Trust



METHODOLOGY



WORKSHOP



10-January-2025



Anantapur Sports Village

03

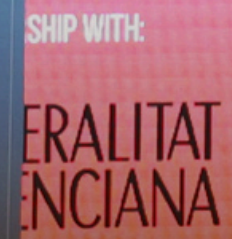
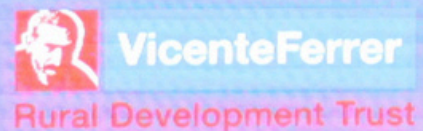
Sessions

35

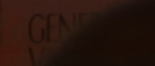
Participants



ORGANISED BY:



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



CONFERENCE



11-January-2025



Anantapur Sports Village

01

Fireside Chat

03

Speakers

03

Panel discussions

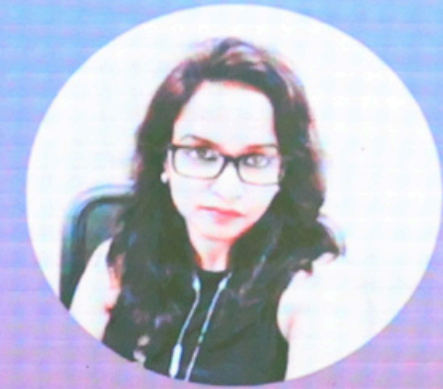
80

Attendees

Creating and enabling ecosystem to empower girls and women through sport



SNEHAL PRADHAN
MANAGER OF WOMEN'S CRICKET, ICC MODERATOR



MEENAKSHI ROY
HEAD OF OPERATIONS NAANDI FOUNDATION, PANELLIST



ABHIJEET BARSE
CEO, SLUM SOCCER PANELLIST



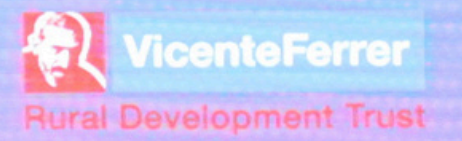
ANJALI DEVI
FOOTBALL COACH, ANANTAPUR SPORTS ACADEMY PANELLIST



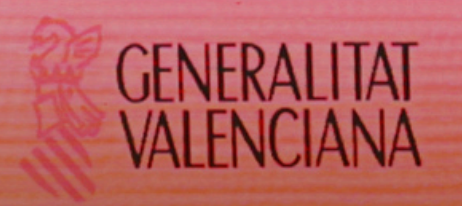
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ORGANISED BY:



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



KEY SESSIONS



WELCOME & CONTEXT SETTING

Speaker:

Sai Krishna Pulluru
(Anantapur Sports Academy).

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ICEBREAKER

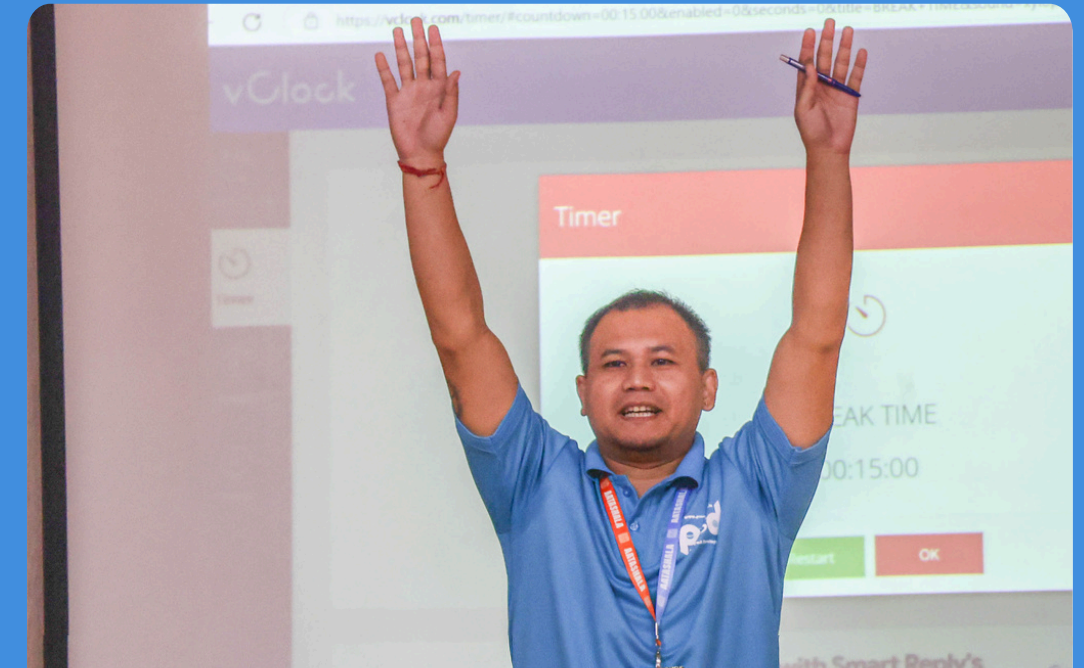
Facilitator:

Anshul Sanghi
(Piramal Foundation).

-Group Activities & Games.

© BELEN

WORKSHOP



LIFE SKILLS AND VALUES EDUCATION THROUGH SPORTS

Facilitators:

Suheil F. Tandon & Akash Thapa
(Pro Sport Development).

-Group Discussions & Polling
Activities.

© RIYA



EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS

Facilitator:

Aditi Mutatkar

(Simply Sport Foundation).

-Aditi's Personal Journey & Group Discussions.



PRACTICAL WAYS OF WORKING COLLABORATIVELY

Facilitators:

Suheil F. Tandon

(Pro Sport Development) &

Sai Krishna Pulluru

(Anantapur Sports Academy).

-Group Discussion & Polling Activities.



CLOSING REMARKS & WAY FORWARD

Speaker:

Vamsi Krishna Gyalam

(Anantapur Sports Academy).

CONFERENCE



WELCOME & CONTEXT SETTING

Speaker:

Moncho Ferrer
(Rural Development Trust).

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Speaker:

Hakimuddin Habibulla
(Winning Matters Consulting & Olympic Swimmer).

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CREATING AN ENABLING ECOSYSTEM TO EMPOWER GIRLS AND WOMEN THROUGH SPORT

Moderator:

Snehal Pradhan (International Cricket Council & Former Indian Women's Cricket Player).

Panellists:

Meenakshi Roy (Naandi Foundation),
Anjali Devi (Anantapur Sports Academy),
Abhijeet Barse (Slum Soccer).

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SPORTS FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

Presenters:

Hakimuddin Habibulla

(Winning Matters Consulting & Olympic Swimmer),

Visha Ferrer

(Rural Development Trust),

Anjali Devi &

Sai Krishna Pulluru

(Anantapur Sports Academy).

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FIRESIDE CHAT

Moderator:

Sai Krishna Pulluru

(Anantapur Sports Academy).

Panellists:

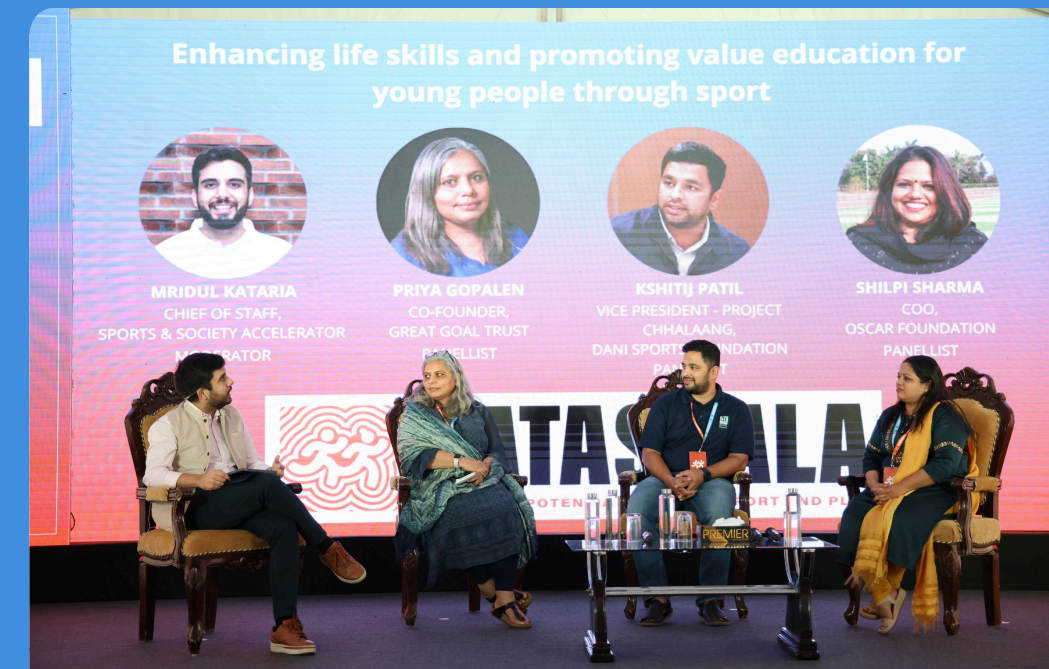
Nagpuri Ramesh

(Pullela Gopichand Foundation) &

Deepthi Jeevanji

(Indian Paralympic, World Para Medal Winner, & Arjuna Awardee).

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ENHANCING LIFE SKILLS & PROMOTING VALUES EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH SPORT

Moderator:

Mridul Kataria (Sports and Society Accelerator).

Panellists:

Priya Gopalen (Great Goals Trust),

Kshitij Patil (Dani Sports Foundation) &

Shilpi Sharma (OSCAR Foundation).

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GALVANISING PARTNERSHIPS TO DRIVE SPORT FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

Moderator:

Vijay Krishnamurthy (Sports Researcher & Co-Author of 'Get Kids to Play').

Panellists:

Rahul Kargal (The Bridge),
Maulshree Kalothia (Piramal Foundation),
Darshan N. K. (Simply Sport Foundation).

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REFLECTIONS FROM THE WORKSHOP

Presenters:

Nida Ansari (CEQUIN) &
Nathaniel Da Costa (Forca Goa Foundation).

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CLOSING REMARKS & WAY FORWARD

Speaker:

Sai Krishna Pulluru
(Anantapur Sports Academy).

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Hakimuddin Habibulla, Olympian swimmer & Director of Winning Matters Consulting, delivered the keynote address, setting the tone for the conference and the foundation for the discussions ahead.

- The untapped potential in Indian sports is immense and needs to be created in ecosystems that nurture it.
- Engaging teachers, professionals, and communities, along with the willingness to learn and embrace failure, drives true change.
- Emphasising grassroots initiatives and the role of individuals as catalysts for transformation enables the path forward, where partnerships, learning, and community-driven efforts converge to shape India's sporting future.

GIRLS AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SPORT AND PLAY

Aatashala created an engaging platform for personal narratives, practical insights, and shared strategies under the topic of girls' and youth empowerment through sport and play. It successfully highlighted diverse approaches to empowering girls through sports, underscoring the importance of grassroots engagement, parental involvement, and creating role models.

- Tailored training and strategies addressing the unique physiological needs of female athletes for holistic well-being.
- Recruitment and training programmes focusing on female coaches and community leaders to encourage more female participation in sports.
- Education of coaches to ensure safe environments for girls' participation in sports; inclusion of first-aid kits, menstrual pads and hygiene products for girls in sports.
- Age and gender-specific training and sports science support ensure inclusivity through structured development pathways.
- Importance of organisational policies like prevention of sexual harassment and safeguarding, including staff training, clear internal and external communication and provision of trauma support systems.
- Success stories and role models from within the community inspire and sustain the engagement of girls in sports.
- Engagement communities before starting programmes by leveraging support systems like female teachers and local role models.
- Building trust with parents and celebrating small wins to encourage sustained participation of girls in sports.
- Grassroots engagement and providing tangible resources like sports gear, equipment and uniforms are crucial to encourage the participation of girls.





LIFE SKILLS AND VALUES EDUCATION THROUGH SPORT AND PLAY

Aatashala explored how sport and play equip children and youth with essential life skills in different contexts across India. Sports were identified as a natural medium for teaching essential life skills like teamwork, leadership, decision-making, and resilience. The discussions successfully highlighted the importance of integrating sports into education to create leaders of tomorrow.

- Focusing on holistic development by integrating life skills training into sports programmes ensures that young people are empowered not just as players but also as individuals.
- Contextualising learning by engaging local communities and stakeholders fosters a supportive environment where young people develop essential life skills such as resilience, leadership, and teamwork, making it more relevant to local challenges and cultural realities.
- Developing scalable frameworks by standardising methods to strengthen life skills and values education. A structured approach helps measure progress in key areas while addressing the specific needs of young people, ensuring they grow both in sports and in life, fostering personal development and community engagement.
- Sports are an exciting medium that captures the interest of children and youth, making it a powerful tool for fostering awareness about topics like environmental awareness, gender equality, life skills, values education and more.
- Leadership training and expanding leadership programmes are important to equip young people with essential life skills beyond sports.

PARTNERSHIPS TO DRIVE SPORT FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

Aatashala highlighted the need for strengthening partnerships through sustainable collaborations with governments, NGOs, and corporates to ensure better resource allocation and scalability of programmes.

- Developing a shared directory or consortium of organisations working in this space to align pathways and objectives.
- Creating spaces for regular dialogue and engagement of different types of organisations working in this space.
- Enhancing collaboration between implementing organisations and government decision-makers.
- Leveraging partnerships by collaborating with schools, NGOs, corporate sponsors and the media enhances the reach and impact of sports initiatives.
- Strengthening the existing collaborative relationships rather than seeking separate channels of funding for projects fosters deeper trust and long-term collaboration towards sustainable goals.
- Platforms like Aatashala organised across the country will enhance the potential for effective collaboration.
- Amplifying grassroots stories, especially from underrepresented sports, to bridge the visibility gap and ensure that innovative interventions and emerging talents are recognised through collaborative partnerships with the media.
- Promoting non-financial collaboration among organisational stakeholders to share expertise and promote learning.





FIRESIDE CHAT

The Fireside Chat with Deepthi Jeevanji, Paralympic Medalist at Paris 2024, and Nagpuri Ramesh, Senior Athletics Coach - Pullela Gopichand Foundation, highlighted various challenges and key approaches that help to unlock the potential of children and young people in sports. The personal narratives of Deepthi Jeevanji and Nagpuri Ramesh added depth to the discussions, inspiring the audience and underscoring the importance of recognising grassroots talent to identify and nurture promising athletes.

Their stories highlighted the transformative power of sport and the need for continued efforts to support and elevate athletes from underrepresented communities. Furthermore, the discussions highlighted the need for structured pathways for athlete development, with a focus on their financial stability and emotional well-being. Additionally, the discussions emphasised the importance of partnerships between organisations, government bodies, and corporate sponsors to achieve shared goals.

NETWORKING

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"A wonderful set of panellists and speakers from the sport and development sector came together to share their insights. We need more platforms like Aatashala to enable open and meaningful conversations."

- Vijay Krishnamurthy
Sports Researcher & Author

"Platforms like Aatashala are vital for strengthening and advancing the sports ecosystem in India."

- Snehal Pradhan
International Cricket Council



"The experience was truly enriching, reconnecting with so many familiar faces in the sector, and I also had the pleasure of meeting new, inspiring individuals who are equally passionate about creating change through sports."

- Abhijeet Barse
Slum Soccer



"It's truly amazing! The interactive sessions have been excellent, and the practical life stories shared have been incredibly inspiring."

- Vijaya Bhaskar
Anantapur Sports Academy



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



We extend our gratitude to the Generalitat Valenciana for their unwavering support and commitment as the cornerstone of this conference. Their partnership provided the foundation for fostering meaningful dialogue and innovation throughout the event.

We also recognise the invaluable contributions of our moderators, panellists, and speakers, who enriched discussions with their expertise and insights. This milestone would not have been possible without the dedication of the participating organisations, educators, and practitioners for sharing groundbreaking ideas.

Thanks to the RDT-ASA team, whose tireless efforts behind the scenes ensured seamless execution of the 'Aatashala' workshop and conference. From planning to the conclusion of the event, their enthusiasm and hard work at every stage are appreciated.

TOKEN OF GRATITUDE



SUHEIL F. TANDON

Founder & Director, Pro Sport Development

For his invaluable advisory support and guidance in conceptualising the Aatashala Workshop & Conference.



ADITI MUTATKAR

*Programme Head - Athlete & Women Initiative,
Simply Sport Foundation*

For her expertise in facilitating and delivering impactful sessions on 'girls participation in sports' during the workshop, contributing significantly to its success.

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS



Brahmaputra Volleyball League



Centre for Equity and Inclusion



Dani Sports Foundation



Enabling Leadership



Forca Goa Foundation



Great Goals Trust



Karuna Football Foundation



Life Sports Academy



Maitrayana



Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti



Naandi Foundation



OSCAR Foundation



Piramal Foundation



Pro Sport Development



Simply Sport Foundation



Slum Soccer



Sports and Society Accelerator



The Bridge



The Right Pitch



The Yacht Club of Hyderabad



Winning Matters PVT Ltd



Youth Football Club Rurka Kalan



Y-Ultimate



Anantapur Sports Academy (Host)

ORGANISED BY



Vicente Ferrer

Rural Development Trust



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



**GENERALITAT
VALENCIANA**



AATASHALA

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL THROUGH SPORT

10.01.2025

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