

# **AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY SPORT GROUPS BECOMING MORE INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE FOR GIRLS**

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## 2. GLOSSARY

Capacity	The amount a community sport group can deliver with the resources available (e.g. money, materials, staff and other assets).
Effectiveness	The degree to which community sport groups are successful in working towards their mission.
Sustainability	The capability of a community sport group to maintain operations at a steady level over a long time frame.

### 3. INTRODUCTION

Sported is the largest network of Sport for Development<sup>1</sup> organisations in the UK, delivering professional support to over 2,600 sport clubs, youth groups and small charities. Sported supports local leaders of organisations by providing free business, financial and operational support so that their group can become more sustainable, more effective and can thrive.

Sported reports that many community sport groups want to do more to engage underrepresented young people. In response to this need, one of their work streams focuses on the inclusion of women and girls. Since 2016 they have delivered three Women and Girls programmes: *Project 51* (funded by Comic Relief), *Engage Her* (funded by Sport Northern Ireland) and most recently *Girls Unite* (funded by London Marathon Charitable Trust). These programmes, across Scotland, Northern Ireland and England, have the intention of helping groups to become more inclusive and accessible to females.

Underpinning these programmes is an understanding that there is a substantial gender gap in sport and physical activity (65% of men compared to 61% of women are active), equating to a difference of 258,000 people<sup>2</sup>. This imbalance is prevalent from childhood: boys are more likely to be active every day than girls (20% of boys compared to 14% of girls). Evidence suggests the gap widens from ages 9-10 onwards, or around the transition from primary to secondary school<sup>3</sup>.

Sport outside of school is also biased towards boys (23% of boys participate in sport outside of school, whereas only 18% girls do). 24% of girls age 11-16 only participate in sport and physical activity in school<sup>4</sup>. The barriers to participation for females are well known, as well as the benefits of physical activity.

Although Sported's community groups are well placed to address the inequality in participation in sport and physical activity, including gender differences, they lack evidence as to whether being inclusive of society's under-represented groups is helpful in becoming effective and sustainable organisations. To contribute to this evidence base, with a focus on increased inclusion of girls, this report addresses the following question:

***What is the effect of increased inclusion of girls in the activities of community sport groups on their organisational effectiveness, capacity and sustainability?***

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<sup>1</sup> Sported defines Sport for Development (S4D) as the intentional use of sport and physical activity as a tool to bring about positive change in the lives of individuals and communities.

<sup>2</sup> [Active Lives Adult Survey, Sport England \(2017/18\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Children Active Survey, Sport England \(2017/18\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Girls Active Survey, Youth Sport Trust \(2015/16\)](#)

To answer this question, the research aims are to:

1. Understand the motivations for community sport groups increasing girls' engagement in their activities
2. Identify any positive changes that community sport groups have experienced as a result of increasing girls' engagement in their activities
3. Outline any threats to community sport groups as a result of working to be more inclusive and accessible for girls
4. Ascertain any challenges that community sport groups experience in trying to engage more girls in their activities
5. Explore the strategies that community sport groups are implementing to overcome challenges they face in engaging girls
6. Identify external support to help community sport groups to engage more girls.

## 4. KEY FINDINGS

### MOTIVATIONS

Community sport organisations reported that their key motivations to engage more girls included: better connecting with young people, increasing organisational sustainability, better meeting the needs of the community and strengthening partnerships.

### POSITIVE RESULTS AND CHANGES

- **93%** of community sport groups had seen increased engagement of girls in their activities since receiving support through one of Sported's girls' engagement programmes.
- **100%** of community sport groups reported that increased engagement of girls had resulted in a positive impact on organisational effectiveness.
- **100%** of community sport groups reported that increased engagement of girls had resulted in a positive impact on organisational capacity.
- **85%** of community sport groups reported that increased engagement of girls had resulted in a positive impact on organisational sustainability.
- **73%** of community sport groups reported that increased engagement of girls had resulted in more fundraising opportunities.

### THREATS

- **93%** of community sport groups reported that the effectiveness of their organisation was not threatened by being a more inclusive and accessible organisation for girls.
- **86%** of community sport groups reported that the capacity of their organisation was not threatened by being a more inclusive and accessible organisation for girls.
- **71%** of community sport groups reported that the sustainability of their organisation was not threatened by being a more inclusive and accessible organisation for girls.

### CHALLENGES

- **86%** of community sport groups found it challenging to engage girls since receiving support from Sported.

- Community sport organisations reported that the main challenges they experienced in engaging girls included: accessing girls, maintaining the engagement of girls, having sufficient financial resource, having sufficient human resource, recruiting coaches and accessing facilities.

## **STRATEGIES**

- Community sport organisations identified that the main strategies they implemented to engage girls include: bespoke communication strategies for girls, consulting girls and capitalising on partnerships.

## **SUPPORT**

- Community sport leaders identified the support that they would find useful in helping them to engage more girls, including: more partnership work, more training opportunities and help with promotion and visibility of activities.

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

This report presents data collected through a survey and interviews with leaders of community sport and youth groups that have taken part in one of Sported's three women and girls' programmes: Project 51, Engage Her and Girls Unite. The data is accurate as of March 2020. Ethical approval was gained by the University of Hertfordshire ethics committee prior to any data collection.

### ***Survey***

An online survey was distributed to 75 community sport and youth groups. Complete responses were received by 14 groups. As conditional branching was applied to some questions, which creates a custom path through the survey based on a respondent's answer, not all questions were answered by all respondents. Of the groups that responded, nine were sport clubs and five were charities. The age of the organisations ranged from less than five years to more than 20 years. Regions represented were: London (n=4), Northern Ireland (n=4), Scotland (n=2), South West England (n=2), South East England (n=1) and the West Midlands (n=1). Data from the survey is displayed in graphs and charts in this report.

### ***Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews were carried out via an online video calling platform with community sport leaders from 12 community sport and youth groups. Four of these leaders also completed the survey. Nine of the community sport leaders were female and three were male. The leaders represented groups from: London (n=4), Scotland (n=2), Northern Ireland (n=2), West Midlands (n=2) and the South East (n=2). Interviews lasted between 25 and 75 minutes. All interviews were recorded.

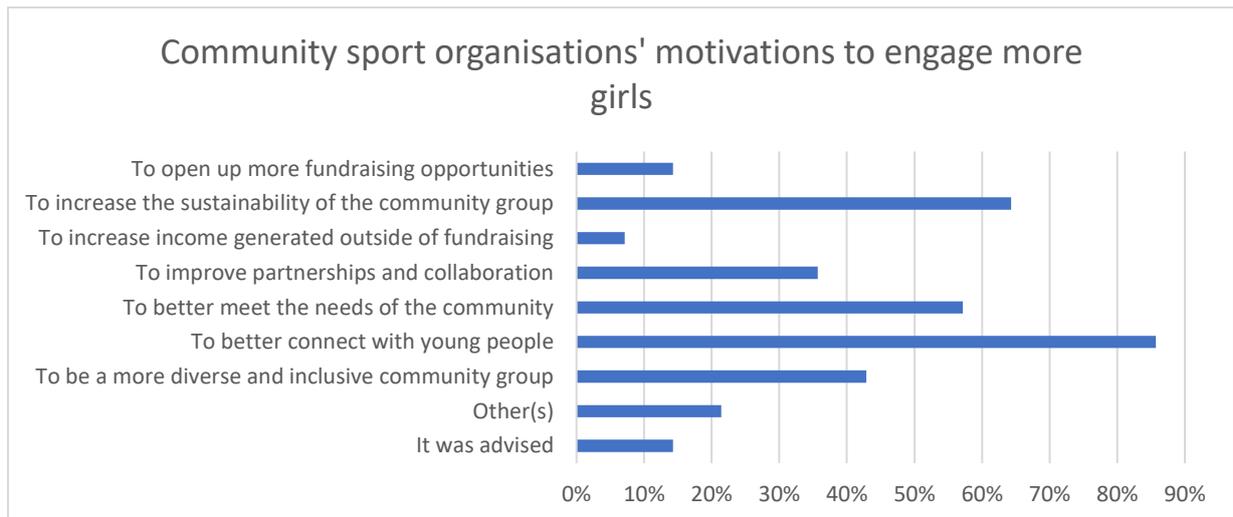
### ***Analysis***

The data was analysed to identify recurrent themes that emerged in response to the research questions.

## 6. FINDINGS

### 6.1. MOTIVATIONS TO ENGAGE MORE GIRLS

The following section outlines the various motivations for community sport organisations to engage more girls in their activities (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Community sport organisations' motivations to engage more girls**

#### ***To better connect with young people***

- ***86% of community group leaders said that better connecting with young people was a motivation for their organisation to engage more girls.***

The following themes emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Learning how best to support and engage girls in sport and physical activity to enable tailored marketing, develop a better understanding of the mentality of girls and ensure girls feel safe and comfortable in the sporting environment.

*"As we are very grassroots ... I wanted to have a good understanding of ... personalities of young people and what makes them tick because personally, by experience, I've come up with things that work and things that don't work and I wanted to have something validated."* (Women and girls' fitness and wellbeing organisation, London)

*"I guess it was just to make sure that the practices that we were doing were as best as they possibly could be. So learning more about what we can do to help females become more active."* (Football club, West Midlands)

Transferring learning from girls' programmes to mixed-sex programmes.

*"Any learning we get from Girls Unite we put into our mixed programmes ... it helps us to create quite a positive form of discussion across our formats with young people, and some of our coaches and leaders. ... And it keeps us fresh. ... It's a ripple-effect, it helps me see what's current ... it helps us form ideas for new projects sometimes."* (Multi-sport organisation, London)

### **To increase organisational sustainability**

- **64% of community group leaders stated that they were motivated to engage more girls in order to increase the sustainability of the community group.**

The following theme emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Female participants identified as a gap in organisations' membership bases.

*"I'm well aware of the importance of diversity. Let's face it, the more members we get either male or female, the more secure we are as an organisation."* (Rugby club, Scotland)

*"We saw that actually [Project 51] would be a huge opportunity for us to just really push that out there, get participation up and just open it up to female participants. We saw that that was a gap in our market and we just thought, you know what, let's use this as a kind of launching pad to get more people engaged."* (Urban sport charity, Scotland)

### **To better meet the needs of the community**

- **57% of community sport leaders were motivated to engage more girls to better meet the needs of the community.**

The following theme emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Providing activities for girls is particularly important during a time of austerity when there are few programmes on offer that are designed to engage a diversity of girls in sport and physical activity.

*"I think it's important more than ever for us to be involved in either programmes like this or to offer opportunities like this and to be very vocal about those opportunities because ...it's kind of a responsibility of ours to do it because we just don't see others doing it."* (Multi-sport organisation, London)

Programmes provide a way to address the wider development needs of girls and their communities.

*“We decided to diversify what we offer because of the need of the community. We picked up issues and challenges along the route while delivering those sessions.”*  
(Angling club, South East)

### **To strengthen partnerships**

- *Strengthening partnerships was a motive for 36% of community sport leaders to engage more girls in their activities.*

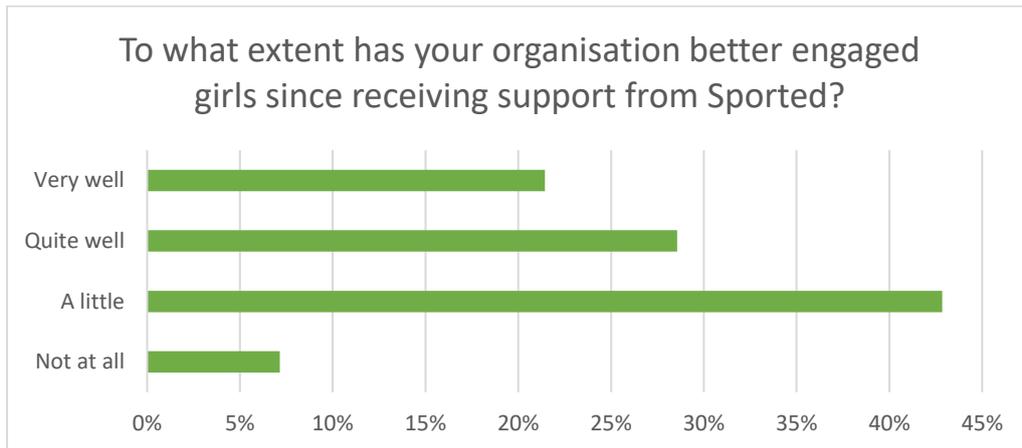
The following theme emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Stronger links with schools as a result of increased girls’ engagement seen as a good opportunity to increase recruitment across the organisation.

*“The other area was that we saw a big opportunity to engage with schools. The engagement officer at the time ... was going into these schools and there was a real appetite for rugby, especially among primary schools.”* (Rugby club, Northern Ireland)

## 6.2. POSITIVE RESULTS AND CHANGES FOR COMMUNITY SPORT GROUPS

93% of community sport organisations had seen better engagement of girls since receiving support through one of Sported’s three women and girls’ programmes (see Figure 2). The one organisation that had not experienced increased engagement reported that this was due to having only attended one Sported meeting so far.

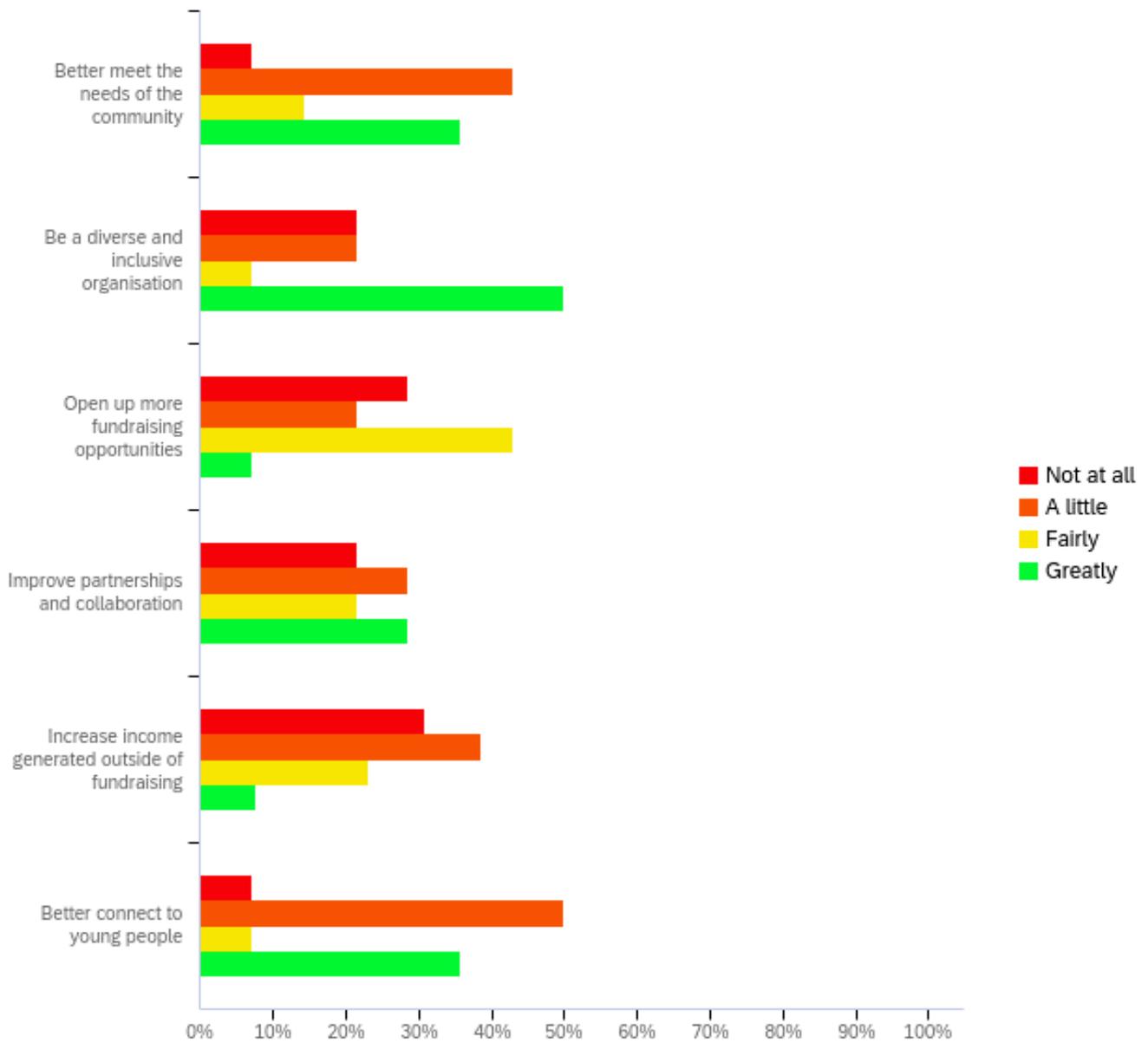


**Figure 2. The extent to which community sport organisations have better engaged girls since receiving support through one of Sported’s women and girls’ programmes**

It was also found that community sport groups experienced a range of positive impacts as a result of engaging more girls in their activities. The extent to which these impacts were positively experienced varied across the community sport groups, however (see Table 1 and Figure 3).

**Table 1. Positive impacts experienced by community sport groups as a result of engaging more girls**

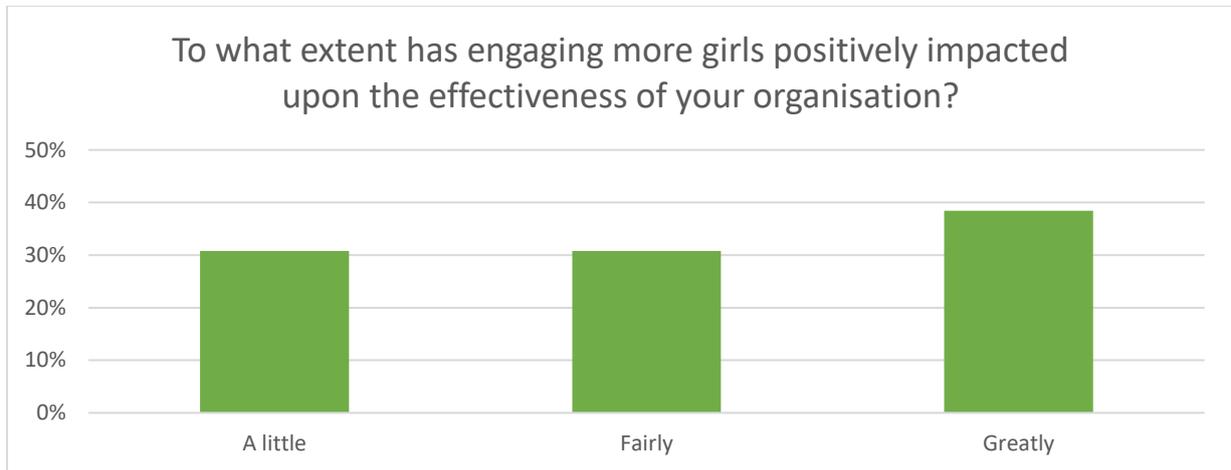
	<b>Better meeting the needs of the community</b>	<b>Being a diverse and inclusive organisation</b>	<b>Opening up more fundraising opportunities</b>	<b>Improving partnerships and collaboration</b>	<b>Better connecting to young people</b>
<b>Greatly</b>	38% (n=5)	54% (n=7)	8% (n=1)	31% (n=4)	38% (n=5)
<b>Fairly</b>	15% (n=2)	8% (n=1)	46% (n=6)	23% (n=3)	1% (n=8)
<b>A little</b>	46% (n=6)	23% (n=3)	23% (n=3)	31% (n=4)	54% (n=7)
<b>Not at all</b>	0%	15% (n=2)	23% (n=3)	15% (n=2)	0%



**Figure 3. The extent to which community sport groups experience positive impacts as a result of engaging more girls**

## Effectiveness of community sport groups

- 100% of community sport leaders reported that increased engagement of girls had resulted in a positive impact on the effectiveness of their organisation (see Figure 4).
- 38% of these leaders reported that effectiveness was greatly impacted by engaging more girls.



**Figure 4.** The extent to which engaging more girls has positively impacted upon the effectiveness of community sport groups

- 100% of community sport leaders reported a positive impact on their organisation's ability to better meet the needs of the community (see Table 1 and Figure 3).
- 77% of leaders reported a positive impact on their organisation's ability to be a diverse and inclusive group (see Table 1 and Figure 3).
- 100% of leaders reported a positive impact on their organisation's ability to better connect to young people (see Table 1 and Figure 3).

The following themes emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Community sport groups experienced increased confidence and knowledge to continue to engage girls as a result of positive experiences through their current girls' activities

*"We're developing more ... engagement and lines of communication which to me is really successful because I've got the confidence now ... whereas before we might have felt like just a little project that was under the shop, whereas now ... I feel much more professional about what I'm talking about."* (Angling club, South East)

Community sport groups experienced improved internal and external organisational image from being a more diverse and inclusive group.

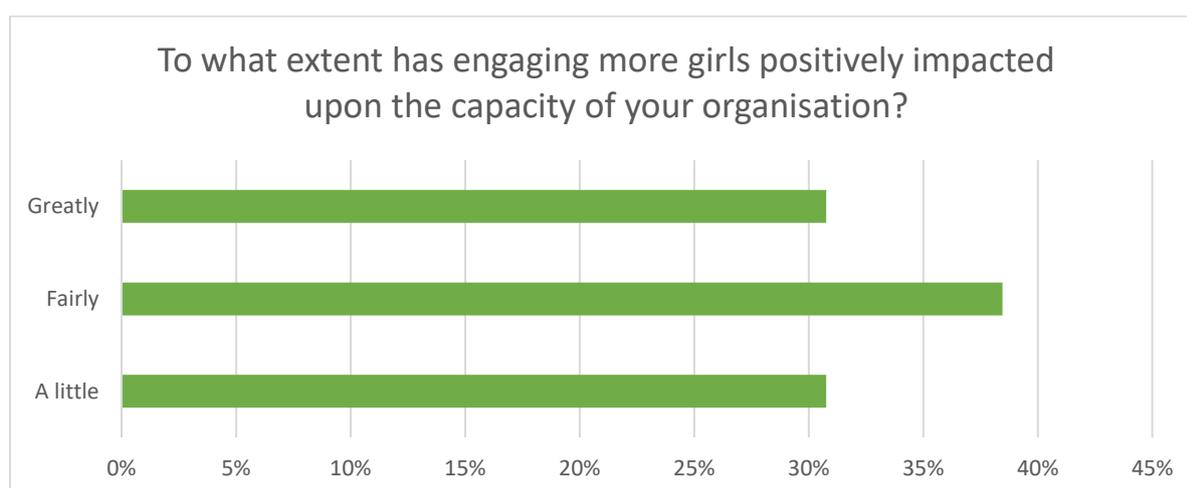
*“We're a bit more known to the local community we work in ... because we've had quite a lot of testimonials and quotes about how we're doing a more joined-up approach.”*  
(Multi-sport organisation, London)

Increased engagement of girls is having a positive impact on the community by supporting the development of the next generation of female adults and leaders.

*“We make up half the population, so it doesn't seem to make sense in not including them. But it's helping our society, our aim is to help all young people no matter who they are or what sort of start they've had in life and it's building our community and the young people who will be the next generation.”* (Youth charity, Scotland)

### Capacity of community sport groups

- 100% of the community sport leaders reported that increased engagement of girls had a positive impact on the capacity of community sport groups (see Figure 5).
- 31% of these organisations reported that the capacity of their organisation was greatly impacted by engaging more girls.



**Figure 5. The extent to which engaging more girls has positively impacted upon the capacity of community sport groups**

The following themes emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Increased pool for the next generation of young leaders and coaches.

*“There is more opportunity to identify people, other young leaders who are going maybe to take other roles. ... There is so much to be done to try to have better representation of [minority ethnic] groups in leadership roles. So we are now more into this strategic direction and try to really have those girls believe it's not just for others but they can be a part of it.”* (Women and girls’ fitness and wellbeing organisation, London)

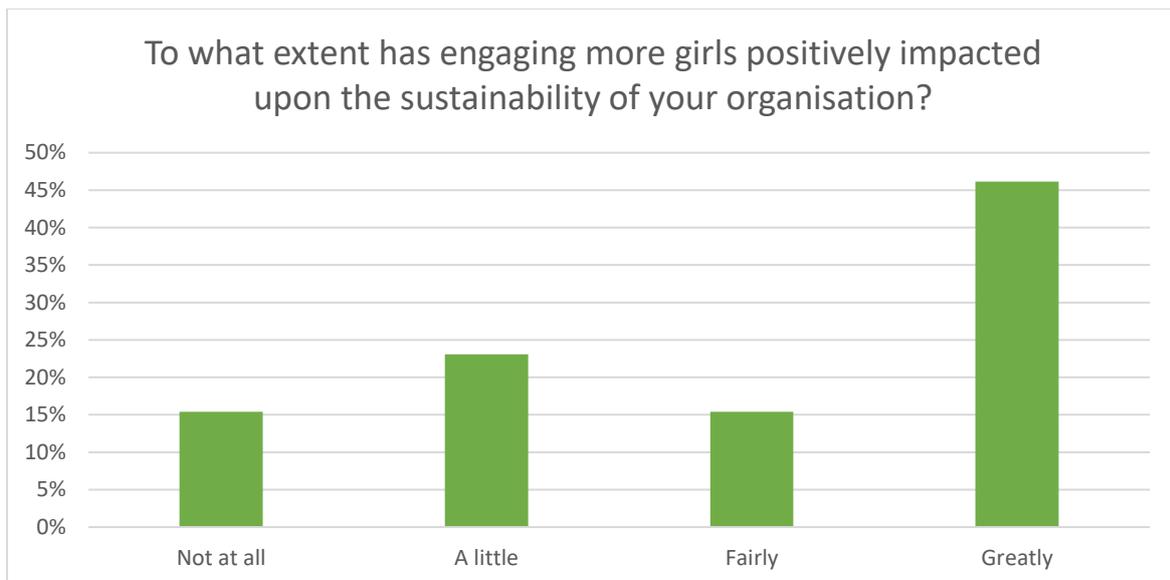
*“These young girls who are skating at the moment, they're future coaches because our coaches will grow on and move on ... so those girls are future skateboarding coaches, they're future BMX coaches, they're future climbing coaches, so I suppose it's that whole cycle of growing our capacity.”* (Urban sport charity, Scotland)

More external volunteers recruited to meet increased demand which reduces pressure on existing paid staff, allowing them to focus on other organisational priorities.

*“We have also had new volunteers come forward to help us with specific things. ... From a fundraising perspective we've got new people now who that is their role in their professional life and they're giving us new ideas and willing to jump on board and be a part of what we're doing.”* (Netball governing body, Northern Ireland)

### **Sustainability of community sport groups**

- **85% of surveyed community sport leaders reported that increased engagement of girls had resulted in a positive impact to the sustainability of their organisation (see Figure 6).**
- **46% of these leaders stated that organisational sustainability was greatly impacted.**
- **Pre-existing self-sustainability was reported as the reason for no improvement in sustainability amongst 15% of organisations.**



**Figure 6. The extent to which engaging more girls has positively impacted upon the sustainability of community sport groups**

The following themes emerged from interviews with community sport leaders and qualitative survey responses:

Increased girls' participation and volunteering positively impacting upon the sustainability of activities.

*"We have increased the number of young people attending our activities, especially sport activities, which makes our activities sustainable. Also, the fact that young girls have been volunteering, this gives us opportunity to sustain our activities."* (Ethnic minority community group, West Midlands)

More female leaders to create a long-term legacy of community sport groups.

*"It will help it to have a long-term legacy if young people take over. It's highly important that we get them to commit and become leaders."* (Women and girls' running club, London)

## **Growth of community sport groups**

- **73% of community sport groups experienced a positive impact on fundraising opportunities, although the majority had seen a little (23%) or fair (46%) improvement (see Table 1 and Figure 3).**
- **85% of organisations reported a positive impact on partnerships and collaboration, with 31% stating this was greatly impacted (see Table 1 and Figure 3).**

The following themes emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Wider visibility and outreach from increased numbers of girls wearing club kit and merchandise and girls spreading the word about activities in person or via social media.

*“I think it's the visibility of the club because we all play in the same strip. So whether you are a six year old girl or a 30 year old man, your shirt design is that same all the way through the club. So from that point of view, when you drive around our area, especially on a Sunday morning, and you see blue, a royal blue jacket or royal blue socks, nine and a half times out of ten they're our players who are walking to matches or walking home from matches. ... And we're noticing it and believe other people have noticed it. And the knock-on effect of that is that sponsors will notice it. If we're raising our profile, by default it will raise their profile won't it.”* (Football club, West Midlands)

*“Young people bring in different ideas and their technology. So certain apps that they use, and they'll use them so they have a wider outreach. ... And who they contact as well, so more access.”* (Women and girls' running club, London)

Increased girls' engagement resulting in a knock-on effect of engagement of friends and family.

*“By people coming into our centre ... it's changed so much the mindset of parents. Because we are community-based they are coming in and using the other things that we offer at the community centre. ... It's helped our employment service because there's more people coming through that way. By getting more girls into sport, so many other things open up for a lot of parents.”* (Community charity, West Midlands)

*“As a result of having an increased female section there has actually been an increase in memberships as well because it's a family sport. ... the fact that we are reaching out to potentially 45 members that we didn't have before 6 years ago. That actually probably in essence is about 100 plus when you include mums, dads, brothers, sisters. It's had a knock-on effect on the whole club.”* (Rugby club, Northern Ireland)

Community sport clubs being viewed more favourably by sponsors and being eligible for certain funding grants due to being able to demonstrate increased diversity and inclusivity.

*“It definitely has given us a new string to our bow in terms of what we can offer and what we can sell to funders, what we can sell to potential sponsors, and sponsorship deals are a key thing for us as well.”* (Netball governing body, Northern Ireland)

*“Sponsors will look more favourably on an organisation that's inclusive, that has boys and girls at mini rugby, that allows pathways for girls to continue in the sport up to under 18 level”* (Rugby club, Scotland)

Increased partnership opportunities, including local clubs and organisations where girls can be signposted for further sporting, developmental and educational opportunities once projects have finished.

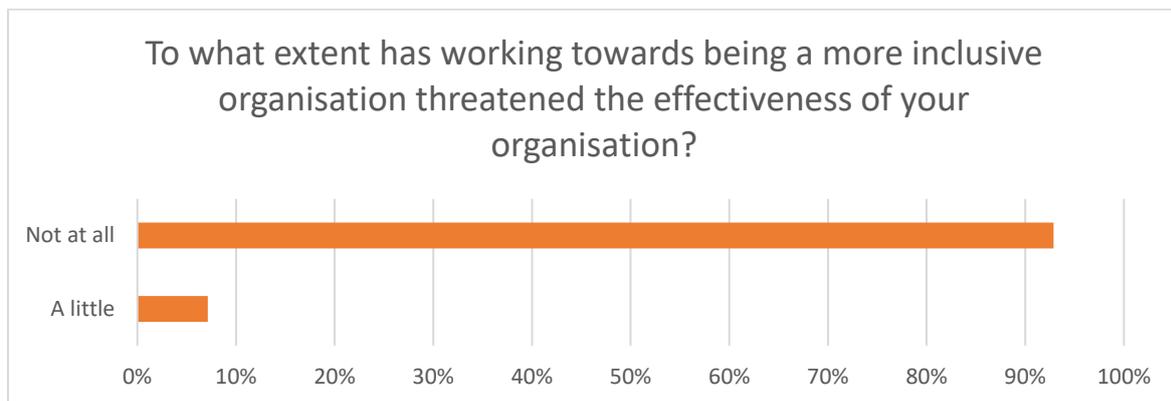
*“Looking at employment routes from our perspective or just getting young people signposted into other localised activity has been a good thing for us. ... With certain programmes ... it's allowed us to feed them into a local football club or a local after school club.”* (Multi-sport organisation, London)

### 6.3. THREATS TO COMMUNITY SPORT GROUPS

Most community sport leaders reported no perceived or actual threat to their organisation from working to increase girls' engagement. This section outlines the few examples of threats reported to organisational effectiveness, capacity and sustainability.

#### **Organisational effectiveness**

- **93% of community sport leaders reported that the effectiveness of their organisation was not threatened at all by working towards being a more inclusive organisation (see Figure 7).**
- **One organisation, which was a charity, reported that they had experienced low-level threat to organisational effectiveness but did not provide any details on the reason for this.**



**Figure 7. The extent to which working towards being a more inclusive organisation has threatened the effectiveness of community sport groups**

The following themes emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Inflexible funding rules for grants related to women and girls' projects potentially threatening long-term organisational performance when measured against the strategy, mission and values of the organisation.

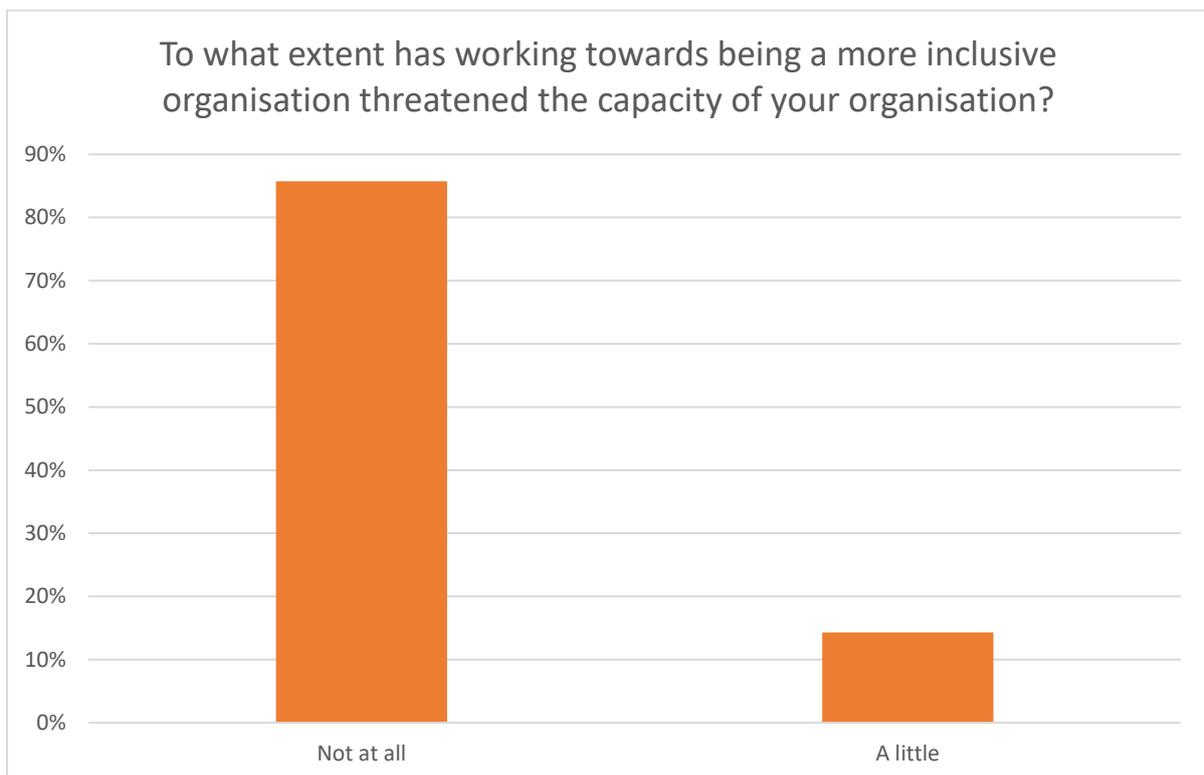
*"Some of the funds won't allow for flexibility. Some of our remits have had to be watered down so much in the past, we've kind of thought is there any point even going down this route because we're not able to work in the way we can. Or we've been offered some girls' initiatives ... [and] it was so restrictive, and we entered the process and had to pull out three quarters of the way in because it was actually damaging what we were trying to do." (Multi-sport organisation, London)*

Focusing too much on engaging girls at the exclusion of other target groups.

*“That's the only thing if it's female-only, it excludes other people that we'd like to get involved but we try and balance everything. ... You can't just have it in complete isolation as well, there is also that transition into a mixed environment.”* (Educational provision, London)

### **Organisational capacity**

- **86% of community sport leaders reported that their organisation's capacity had not been threatened at all by working towards being a more inclusive organisation (see Figure 8).**
- **Leaders from two community sport groups, one charity and one sport club, felt that the capacity of their organisation was a little threatened.**



**Figure 8. The extent to which working towards being a more inclusive organisation has threatened the capacity of community sport groups**

The following theme emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Attempts to engage more girls within a community sport group places strain on facilities and resources.

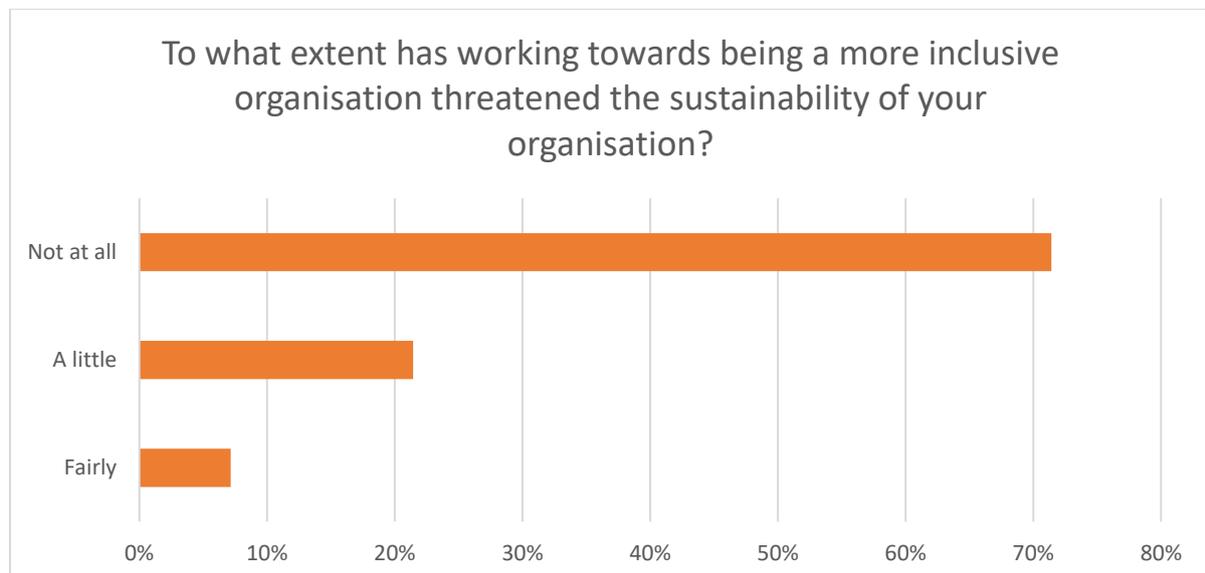
*“The bigger you get, the more wear and tear on the pitches is going to have a knock-on effect. So, from that perspective it could be detrimental if we're not careful.”* (Football club, West Midlands)

*“The resistance is when numbers grow in an organisation, the resources for playing and training facilities don't grow at the same rate ... that footprint stays the same. So, you have turf wars about who gets access to which area of grass and on which night. And that's not always easy to manage.”* (Rugby club, Scotland)

### ***Threat to organisational sustainability***

Organisational sustainability was reported to be the greatest organisational threat as a result of working towards greater inclusivity.

- ***21% (2 sport clubs and 1 charity) of community sport leaders stated that organisational sustainability was a little threatened (see Figure 9).***
- ***7% (1 charity) of leaders felt that organisational sustainability was fairly threatened.***



**Figure 9. The extent to which working towards being a more inclusive organisation has threatened the sustainability of community sport groups**

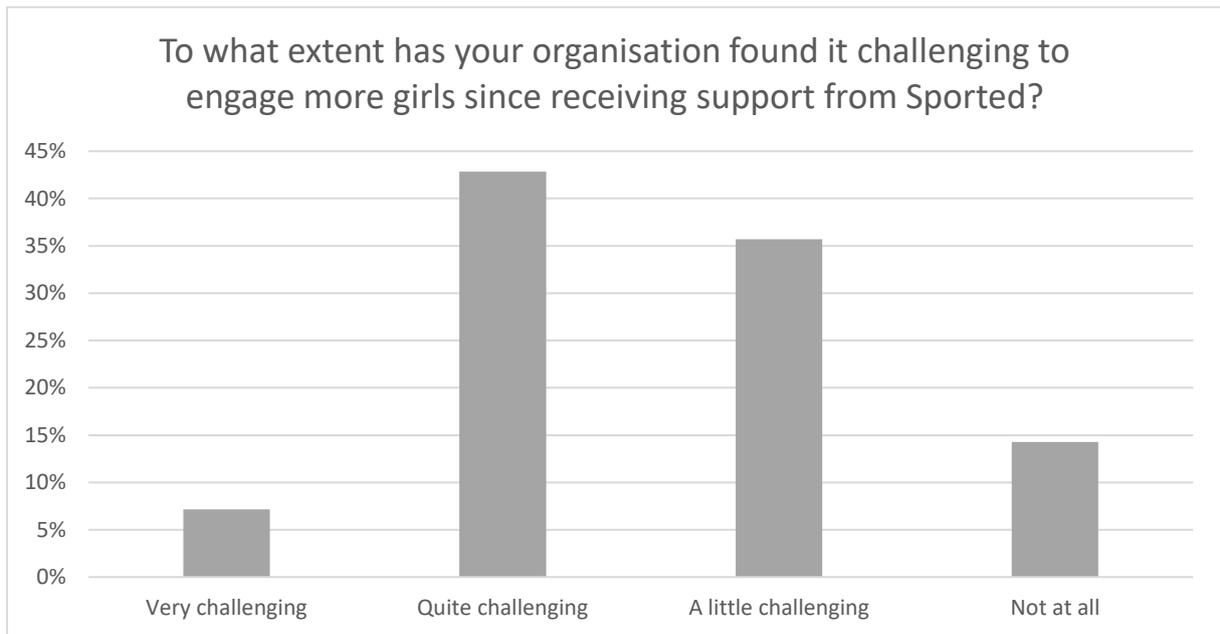
The following theme emerged from interviews with community sport leaders:

Community sport organisations growing at an unsustainable rate.

*“I think the problem that you get is that if you go too big too quickly you run the risk of not being very sustainable at all. Our big gamble right now is taking on a lease on a private property to be able to grow. We’ve got to make that sustainable.”* (Football club, West Midlands)

## 6.4. CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY SPORT GROUPS

- 86% of community sport groups experience challenges in increasing their engagement of girls to some extent (see Figure 10).
- The extent to which organisations face challenges varies across groups, with some (7%) finding it very challenging and others (14%) not finding it challenging at all.
- Most sport leaders reported their organisations finding it a little (36%) or quite (43%) challenging to increase girls' engagement.

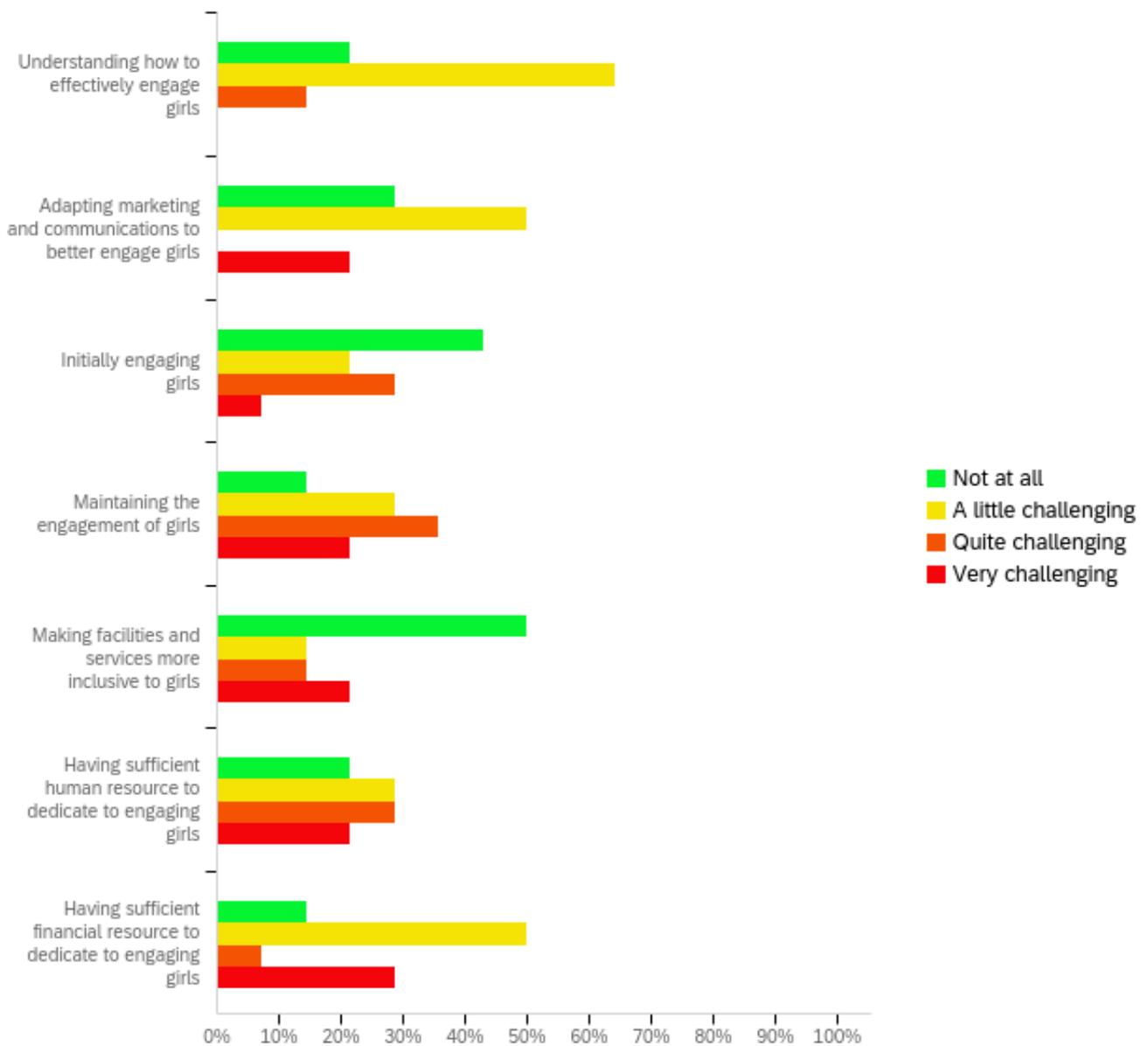


**Figure 10. The extent to which community sport groups find it challenging to engage more girls since receiving support from Sported**

Table 2 and Figure 11 summarise challenges in engaging more girls and the related responses of community sport leaders.

**Table 2. Challenges experienced by community sport groups working to increase girls' engagement**

	<b>Initially engaging girls</b>	<b>Maintaining the engagement of girls</b>	<b>Understanding how to effectively engage girls</b>	<b>Adapting marketing and communications</b>	<b>Making facilities and services more inclusive</b>	<b>Having sufficient human resource</b>	<b>Having sufficient financial resource</b>
<b>Very challenging</b>	0%	21% (n=3)	0%	21% (n=3)	21% (n=3)	21% (n=3)	29% (n=4)
<b>Quite challenging</b>	14% (n=2)	36% (n=5)	14% (n=2)	0%	14% (n=2)	29% (n=4)	7% (n=1)
<b>A little challenging</b>	64% (n=9)	29% (n=4)	64% (n=9)	50% (n=7)	14% (n=2)	29% (n=4)	50% (n=7)
<b>Not at all challenging</b>	21% (n=3)	14% (n=2)	21% (n=3)	29% (n=4)	50% (n=7)	21% (n=3)	14% (n=2)



**Figure 11. The extent to which community sport groups experience challenges in working to increase girls' engagement.**

The below sections present statistics and themes that emerged from the survey and interviews with community sport leaders related to challenges outlined in Table 2 and Figure 11.

### **Initially engaging girls**

- *79% of community sport groups experience challenges in initially engaging girls to some extent (see Table 3 and Figure 11).*

Challenges creating links with schools because of a lack of dedicated community officer and/or schools failing to respond to correspondence.

*“I think the engagement plan is struggling, not because we are not open and ready to accept, encourage, motivate others, it's because some of the links we had with the schools are no longer as strong as they were”. (Rugby club, Scotland)*

### **Maintaining the engagement of girls**

- *86% of community sport groups experience challenges in maintaining the engagement of girls to some extent (see Table 3 and Figure 11).*

Challenges maintaining the engagement of girls between the ages of 16-18 because of their difficulty to commit during exam times and their transitioning from school to work or further study.

*“The challenges of that is keeping the girls on the programme for a long time. ... They're not stagnant because one minute they're here then they've gone to university or doing A Levels.” (Women and girls' running club, London)*

### **Having sufficient human resource**

- *79% of community sport groups experience challenges in having sufficient human resource to engage more girls to some extent (see Table 3 and Figure 11).*

Recruiting qualified coaches with the experience and knowledge to effectively coach girls.

*“What I've observed is that ... you'll get some male coaches in who really, really don't know how to coach girls because it is different. Having coached boys at the same age as girls that's very, very different, the way that you can speak to them, the tone that you can speak to them in. ... And I think it's the qualified coaches and the people coming forward with the commitment to do it is the other big big issue.” (Football club, West Midlands)*

### Recruiting female coaches.

*"I think a challenge moving forwards is getting younger female coaches in. We have a few men who coach the sessions ... which is great, but the challenge is to get more female coaches into rugby especially. I think you need a balance of both."* (Rugby club, Northern Ireland)

## **Making facilities and services more inclusive**

- *50% of community sport groups experience challenges in making facilities and services more inclusive to some extent (see Table 3 and Figure 11).*

### Accessing facilities to host new girls' activities.

*"I think that's a huge struggle that we've had in terms of access to facilities. Netball in Northern Ireland is predominantly played inside ... so we need access to sports halls and a lot of sports halls aren't the right size to play football matches or you can't get into the sports halls because there's 5-a-side football in it. ... Our clubs can't grow unless they can get time in the facilities."* (Netball governing body, Northern Ireland)

*"Just to have a good venue is a bit challenging in the area where we are in terms of prices, in terms of having a good, accessible place that is fit for all and available, even for people with disabilities."* (Women and girls' fitness and wellbeing organisation, London)

## **Other: Competing sports, activities and clubs**

### Competing sports, activities and clubs resulting in a smaller pool of girls to recruit from.

*"And with other sports out there, there's a big challenge to be competitive against other sports. In our part of the world GAA is the most prominent sport."* (Rugby club, Northern Ireland)

*"The FA were quite guilty at throwing an awful lot of money at girls' football in the beginning ... so you had teams springing up that weren't there before. ... If we'd had less funding, I think a couple of clubs that I've seen have gone down the route of girls' football wouldn't have bothered in the first place, they only went there for the money."* (Football club, West Midlands)

*"Every sport is trying to get every girl."* (Netball governing body, Northern Ireland)

## 6.5. STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY COMMUNITY SPORT GROUPS

Community sport leaders discussed various strategies that their organisations have put in place to overcome challenges they face in increasing girls' engagement: consulting girls, bespoke communication for girls and capitalising on partnerships. This section will present themes that emerged from interviews with community sport leaders relating to these three strategies.

### **Consulting girls**

Consulting girls to gain feedback on the types of activities they want to participate in, their needs and any barriers that they face in engaging in sport and physical activity.

*"We originally started out with a consultation task with girls. ... We got some feedback from them in relation to what activities they felt they wanted and how we could contact them about the things we were providing and the things that they felt stopped them from engaging in the things we did."* (Youth charity, Scotland)

*"We've just made sure that we do regular girls' nights to check in with our girls, check that they're happy, check that everything's okay, that they're safe, comfortable, that we're doing everything that we can to make sure that they have access."* (Urban sport charity, Scotland)

Involving girls in the planning process for activities.

*"I think from our perspective it's a case of doing a bit of research before we commit to anything. ... For us it's less about the resources and more about how we plan. ... We try and involve them in the planning process which helps us with funding as well."* (Multi-sport organisation, London)

## **Bespoke communication strategies for girls**

Social media offers a free platform to promote and provide information and updates on girls' programmes, make female role models more visible and share key messages.

*"You have to get the right posts on the right platforms. ... What we've found mainly is Facebook is really good for parent engagement, we use Instagram for the teenagers or the younger, sort of 12 to 20s probably ... and we use Twitter for adults mainly."*  
(Football club, West Midlands)

*"I think it's word of mouth and knowing this service is going on. ... that's why social media will be so helpful because then we will be able not to lose sight of whoever has a life change and we can at least keep them posted ... or if we have, for example, a YouTube channel with advice or tips or something that we've been asked, [we] will at least be able to keep in touch."* (Women and girls' fitness and wellbeing organisation, London)

## **Partnerships**

### Partnerships with local schools.

*"For us, sustainability-wise, it's huge that we stay relevant ... and then from a participation side of things that we get our model right in terms of transitioning from schools to clubs."* (Netball governing body, Northern Ireland)

### Partnerships with local councils.

*"We've got a very good relationship with our active schools department from the City Council. So they obviously work in schools, so having that good relationship with them helps us signpost and they support us in doing that to help spread the word on what's being offered after school and where it is."* (Youth charity, Scotland)

*"Being in the Council, we're very much connected with ... young people leaving care. ... It's having support from them to bring young people. ... There's also social care, so the social care service in the Council. ... Being in the Council there are the networks, there's the young offending team as well. It's reaching out to those networks."* (Educational provision, London)

## Partnerships with local leisure centres

*“In my area those leisure centres are run by Everyone Active, so it's part-run by the Council and part-run privately with memberships. But they have a duty because of the Council putting money in, they have to reach out to the community. So recently I've been ... going to the network to influence to make sure that places are more available in terms of cheaper rates for organisations.” (Women and girls' fitness and wellbeing organisation, London)*

## 6.6. EXTERNAL SUPPORT TO HELP COMMUNITY SPORT GROUPS

Community sport leaders discussed various methods of external support that they would find useful in helping them to engage more girls within their organisations' activities: partnerships, training and support with adapting marketing and communications. This section presents themes that emerged from interviews with community sport leaders relating to these three areas of support.

### **Partnerships**

Whilst partnerships were identified as a strategy already in place by some community sport leaders, others expressed their need for more support in this area:

Partnerships with local authorities, councils and community groups to improve links and increase awareness of girls' activities across a diversity of girls.

*"I think there needs to be partnerships with the local Council in particular ... using rugby to deliver wider messages to young people, so working with different branches of Council."* (Rugby club, Northern Ireland)

*"I think if other organisations around the area could support, like by referring people my way, that would be a big help. ... Organisations that look after families."* (Community charity, West Midlands)

Partnerships with national governing bodies that are not agenda- or data-driven.

*"You have to have the support of your national governing body when it comes to rugby delivery, there has to be an element of partnership, but no it's driven by the club development officer and club volunteers."* (Rugby club, Northern Ireland)

*"Certainly, regional NGB support would be massively helpful. I found it's bitty at best when I reached out or it's very agenda driven. ... It's been very much a case of we'll speak to you when we've got a window open to talk about this because they essentially have a project. But sometimes what we've said is we don't want a project, we just want to pick up the phone and build a relationship with somebody who can just guide us, come down every so often and even critique us and say look, this idea is great, and to not have an agenda on it, to not want data from us."* (Multi-sport organisation, London)

Partnerships with the commercial sector to offer commercial or value-in-kind support.

*“And then the businesses and organisations like visits to BT Sport which are completely amazing ... and almost once in a lifetime experiences and can really have a big impact on how a young person wants to develop and focus their skills.”* (Education provision, London)

*“Further support could be collaboration with the ... commercial sector, maybe some sports outlet if they could give us discounted trainers because some of these young people come from marginalised backgrounds or they maybe can't buy trainers for running. And you do need specific trainers if you're going to do those long-distance races. So a commercial partnership would be good.”* (Women and girls' running club, London)

Partnerships with local and professional sport clubs.

*“The support has to come from kindred clubs who, people have to wake up to the fact that they can no longer remain an exclusive environment for males, it's as simple as that.”* (Rugby club, Scotland)

*“All the professional clubs around The Midlands have got female sections now, maybe they should be offering something out. Even, come and watch our coaches working with female footballers or that kind of thing. These development centres. Coaches learn off of the coaches anyway.”* (Football club, West Midlands)

## **Training**

Intergenerational training so that young people and adults train together and learn to work inclusively.

*“There could be more intergenerational workshops so that young people aren't always separated from the adult world and work inclusively.”* (Women and girls' running club, London)

More online digital training to benefit volunteers who have difficulties travelling to training sessions or have domestic responsibilities that make it difficult to attend in-person training.

*“I know that Sported did lots of online digital training and that was so useful because sometimes there are meetings that are very difficult to ... go, especially if you have other external things to take care of. ... So definitely more training online would be perfect.”* (Women and girls' fitness and wellbeing organisation, London)

Tailored training to be more attractive to young people rather than feeling like a formal, educational setting.

*"I found some of the courses or seminars or webinars, ... they're not that attractive to young people. A lot of the young people I speak to say that they feel they're too formal and they feel like they're back at college."* (Multi-sport organisation, London)

## **Marketing and communications**

Support to raise awareness of community sport groups and their activities through various methods and across diverse audiences.

*"Sometimes you need someone to just bang your drum for you."* (Netball governing body, Northern Ireland)

*"It'd be nice just to have a shout out somewhere ... and get maybe into some of this local advertising. But some of it is time and I need someone to help me to actually put that together because ... my background is in education it's not in media. ... And where to go to reach the best audiences"* (Angling club, South East)

*"I think it's promotion, I think promotion would be really good. And being able to promote it really well online and more professional videos and things like that."* (Community charity, West Midlands)

## 7. SUMMARY

Community sport organisations have a range of motivations for increasing the engagement of girls within their activities. This includes motivations relating to the needs of communities, understanding young people, partnership work, organisational sustainability and financial gain.

There is a clear case for increased girls' engagement across community sport groups. The majority of community sport leaders reported a wide range of positive impacts as a result of increased girls' engagement in relation to organisational effectiveness, capacity, growth and sustainability.

Despite overall positivity relating to the impacts of increased girls' engagement within community sport groups, a small number of leaders did perceive or had experienced low-level threat to their organisation's effectiveness, capacity and sustainability. Furthermore, most community sport leaders reported that their organisation experienced challenges in engaging girls. This means that there is still work to be done to ensure that community sport groups experience the benefits of increasing girls' engagement.

To overcome some of the challenges they face, community sport leaders reported a range of strategies being implemented by their organisations. These include bespoke communication strategies to attract girls to participate in activities, consulting girls to ensure understanding of their desires and needs, and capitalising on partnerships.

Although community sport organisations are taking initiatives to implement their own strategies to overcome the challenges they face, leaders spoke of a range of support methods that they felt could help them to attain and retain girls' engagement within their organisations. This included further support through partnerships and training, and support with promotion and visibility of their organisations and their activities.

Several different sources were identified as having the potential to provide support to overcome the challenges that community sport groups face in increasing their girls' engagement. This includes schools, local councils and authorities, national governing bodies, local and professional sport clubs, training providers and local media. This demonstrates that, moving forward, a collective effort across a range of stakeholders is required to enable community sport organisations to continue to engage more girls and experience the positive impacts that result.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section outlines recommendations relating to priority areas for community sport groups and Sported. These priority areas have developed from lessons learnt and examples of good practice identified through this research

### 8.1. COMMUNITY SPORT GROUPS

#### 1. CONSULTATION

- Where possible, community sport groups should consult girls before, during and after the establishment of new activities to gain feedback on the types of activities girls want, their needs and any barriers they face in participating in sport and physical activity.
- Consultations can be delivered via a combination of formal research methods such as surveys and interviews, and informal conversational methods such as hosting girls' nights and informal discussions before, during or after sessions.

#### 2. SUSTAINABLE AND STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

- It is important that community sport groups take precaution to ensure that planned organisational growth in relation to increased girls' engagement is sustainable in relation to availability of facilities, coaches, human resource and financial resource.
- Before applying for funding grants, community sport groups should ensure funding requirements align with their organisational strategy, mission and values to avoid restrictive funding requirements threatening the achievement of long-term organisational aims and objectives.
- Developing young leader programmes can help the sustainable growth of community sport groups by creating a knock-on effect of increased volunteer and coach bases from increased girls' participation.

#### 3. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- Developing bespoke communication strategies for girls' activities can help to market and promote them more effectively.
- Consultation with girls and their parents can help to identify the best media platforms for different age groups/target markets.
- Media platforms can also be used to disseminate key information to ensure girls are informed and help to remove barriers of insecurity and lacking self-esteem and confidence going into new programmes. Such information could include what girls can expect from the session and what they need to bring to sessions.

## **4. PARTNERSHIPS**

- Partnerships with local clubs, organisations and institutions can help community sport groups to create sporting, educational and employment pathways for girls once projects or programmes have finished.
- Forming partnerships with local schools and councils can open up further opportunities for a diversity of girls to access activities.
- Exploring partnerships with local commercial organisations can open up the potential for support for girls' programmes in the forms of commercial support (e.g. sponsorship) and value-in-kind support (e.g. free trips and visits, kit donation or discounts and waived event entry fees).

## **8.2. SPOR TED**

To explore the potential to provide support and or/training across the following topics:

### **1. FUNDING APPLICATIONS**

- Help community sport groups to identify the right funding opportunities for them in relation to their strategy, mission and values.

### **2. ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

- Help community sport groups to develop sustainable plans for increased girls' engagement and ensure they do not grow too quickly.

### **3. PARTNERSHIPS**

- Help community sport groups to strengthen links with local schools, clubs, councils, national governing bodies and leisure centres.

### **4. TRAINING**

- Explore options of intergenerational training to increase opportunities for adults and young people to learn together and from each other.
- Look at further options for online training on topics such as leadership, governance, funding applications, marketing, GDPR, administration, IT and first aid refreshers.
- Explore options for making training more appealing to young people by hosting training in less formal or educational settings.

### **5. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS**

- Support community sport groups to raise awareness of their activities through various methods and across diverse audiences.

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The logo for SPORTED features a stylized blue checkmark above the word "SPORTED" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The "ED" is slightly smaller than "SPORT".

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