



LOCAL ACTION, GLOBAL INSIGHTS: CRICKET, GIRLS, AND CHANGE IN NEPAL

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INTRODUCTION

What Nepal Taught Us About Cricket, Girls, and Change

Around the world, cricket is often described as “more than a game.” But what does that really mean in practice?

In South-Eastern Nepal, a group of adolescent girls helped answer that question.

Over three years, girls known as the Cricket Changemakers worked as players, researchers, leaders and designers to explore a simple but powerful idea: could cricket help transform the social norms that limit girls’ opportunities?

Their answer was yes. This resource shares what we learned.

Why This Matters

In many communities, girls still face barriers to sport: restrictions on movement, expectations to stay at home, lack of confidence, and limited support from families and institutions.

These barriers are not just about cricket, they reflect deeper gender norms that shape education, health, leadership and life chances.

Cricket sits right in the middle of those norms.

- Who gets to play.
- Who gets to lead.
- Who gets to be visible.

Change those patterns – and you begin to change much more than sport.



What We Did

The project in Nepal used a Youth Participatory Action Research approach. Instead of designing programmes for girls, we designed them with girls.

Together we:

- developed play-based ways to gather data
- explored how gender norms affected everyday life
- co-created cricket activities and discussions
- delivered over 1,000 sessions across two districts
- evaluated what changed for girls, boys, families and communities

This was real cricket, in real schools and community clubs, with real communities.

What We Found

When girls played cricket regularly, visibly, and in supportive environments, three things happened:

1. Girls' confidence and decision-making power increased
2. Communities began to rethink what girls could do
3. Young people stepped forward as leaders and changemakers

The biggest lesson was that cricket can either reinforce old norms – or help create new ones. The difference lies in how programmes are designed, who leads them, and what values they promote.

Why does this matter globally?

Nepal's context is unique. But the principles are universal.

Every cricket system – from local clubs to national associations – faces the same questions: How do we create spaces where girls truly belong? How can cricket build leadership, not just skills? How do we move from participation to empowerment?

The experiences from Nepal offer practical, evidence-based answers that can be applied in the UK, across Associate nations, and anywhere cricket is played.

Who This Is For

This guide is for:

- cricket development officers
- coaches and coach educators
- national cricket associations
- community clubs
- NGOs using sport for development
- anyone who believes cricket can help build a fairer world

It translates research into clear lessons, practical tools, and real-world examples you can use in your own context.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR: WOMEN AND GIRLS CRICKET

1. CRICKET IS A SOCIAL SPACE WHERE NORMS ARE SHAPED

The research showed that:

- Who gets to play
- Who is seen playing
- Who is celebrated
- Who is supported

...directly influences how communities think about girls and women more broadly.

When girls played cricket regularly and visibly, communities began to rethink what girls were capable of.

2. VISIBILITY IS A POWERFUL ENGINE OF CHANGE

One of the strongest findings was that: Regular, visible, successful play by girls was a key driver of community-level attitude change. When families, teachers, and boys saw girls:

- training every week
- travelling to matches
- winning tournaments
- being cheered on publicly

...it didn't just change the girls' confidence. It changed how the whole community viewed girls' potential and role in cricket and the wider community.

"Their interest in the community's girls playing is evident when they ask us if we'd won or lost. They have thought that letting our village's girls represent our place would increase our village's pride and respect." - Player, Saptari

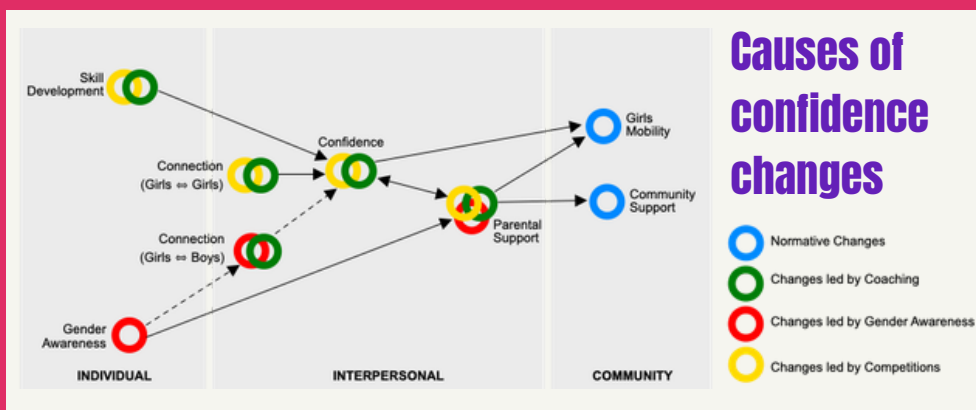
Practical Actions

- Girls matches and training on main grounds, at times when the wider community can see them play
- Mixed-gender festivals where girls are central, not an "add-on"
- Media coverage of local girls cricket
- Visible role models from within communities

A girls programme hidden from view will never transform norms.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR: WOMEN AND GIRLS CRICKET

3. CONFIDENCE IS MULTIDIMENSIONAL



“WE FEEL AFRAID TO
SPEAK BEFORE BUT
NOW I CAN SPEAK
FREQUENTLY”
PLAYER, SAPTARI

The evaluation found that the biggest boosts to girls’ confidence came when programmes combined:

- Practical cricket sessions
- Opportunities to compete
- Spaces to discuss gender issues

Cricket alone was not enough. But cricket + reflection + leadership opportunities created powerful change.

Programmes that integrated:

- Coaching sessions
- Gender discussion workshops
- Girls competitions
- Parent, teacher and boys involvement

Were most likely to improve:

- Girls’ confidence
- Decision-making power
- Sense of belonging
- Freedom to move and participate



Engagement in gender norm discussion workshops was a predictor of increased confidence amongst girls.

22%

HIGHER CONFIDENCE SCORE

amongst girls who took part in discussion about gender norms, stereotypes and discrimination.

Download an English language version of the play-based gender norm curriculum.

Remember! This curriculum was built for Nepal - your context may have slightly different norms and stereotypes to overcome.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR: WOMEN AND GIRLS CRICKET

4. QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE MATTERS MORE THAN QUANTITY

A crucial finding: *Simply delivering “more sessions” did not guarantee positive change.*

What mattered was:

- how safe girls felt
- how inclusive coaches were
- whether activities were genuinely empowering
- whether girls had a voice

A small number of high-quality, girl-centred experiences produced more impact than many poorly designed ones.

Implications

For cricket organisations this means:

- Investing in coach education around gender and inclusion
- Focusing on safe, welcoming environments
- Listening to girls about what they need
- Prioritising relational coaching

5. BOYS ARE PART OF THE STORY TOO

Interestingly, the research found that:

- Some boys initially showed reduced self-confidence when exposed to discussions about restrictive gender norms
- This was interpreted as part of a process of critical reflection on masculinity
- Over time, boys’ attitudes shifted toward greater support for girls’ participation

“There is discrimination between boys and girls in our community but while we are in coaching there is no discrimination – we are playing combined.”

Player - Saptari

Takeaway: Women and girls cricket programmes should also engage boys and men as allies – not treat them as bystanders.

Implications

To build your own curriculum to engage both boys and girls:

- Workshops should be designed based on experiences of girls and boys in your context.
- The best way to understand these experiences is to use games with girls and boys to help them identify the challenges and raise their awareness of their role in shaping them.
- Adults should not assume they are experts in adolescent experience.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR: YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN CRICKET

A central feature of the project was that adolescent girls were not just participants. They were researchers, designers, facilitators, evaluators and leaders. This has major implications for how cricket organisations think about “youth voice”.

1. YOUNG PEOPLE CAN DO FAR MORE THAN WE USUALLY ALLOW

The Cricket Changemakers:

- helped design surveys
- ran workshops
- analysed findings
- created intervention materials
- led community events

Given genuine responsibility, they became agents of change – not just beneficiaries.

Implications

Move beyond “junior leadership awards” and token youth committees. Instead:

- involve young people in real decision-making
- co-design programmes with them
- let them help evaluate and adapt activities

2. YOUTH LEADERSHIP IS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



The research showed that when girls became leaders:

- their confidence increased
- their social networks expanded
- they were taken more seriously by adults
- they influenced other girls to join cricket

Youth leadership wasn't just a programme output. It was a mechanism for gender norm change and increasing girls' participation in cricket.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR: YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN CRICKET

3. PLAY-BASED APPROACHES UNLOCK YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Traditional surveys and meetings often do not connect with young people.

The project developed play-based research methods that made it possible for adolescents to:

- express opinions safely
- participate actively
- lead discussions
- gather data themselves



[Download an English language guide to using games to explore issues](#)

Implications

Use the language of sport and play – not boardrooms – to engage young people.

Examples:

- game-based feedback tools
- on-pitch consultations
- peer-led workshops
- creative, physical activities for learning



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR: YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN CRICKET

4. ADULT ROLES MUST SHIFT FROM DIRECTORS TO FACILITATORS

A big learning from the project: Adults working in cricket often need to move from: “We design, you attend” to “We support, you lead”.

This requires:

- patience
- humility
- new coaching and facilitation skills
- willingness to share power



5. SUSTAINABLE CHANGE REQUIRES SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Youth leadership flourished when:

- schools supported activities
- local cricket associations created spaces for girls to shape programmes
- communities recognised young people’s contributions



Implications

For cricket governance, youth leadership and input can and should to be built into:

- national strategies
- coach education
- club structures
- competition formats
- decision-making processes



ACTION CHECKLIST

If you work in cricket development, here are concrete steps based on the research. This research shows that cricket can be:

a place where gender norms are **reinforced**
or
a place where gender norms are **transformed**

The difference lies in how programmes are designed and who gets to lead them.

1 For Women & Girls Cricket

- Put girls' matches in visible, valued spaces
- Train coaches in gender-transformative approaches
- Combine cricket with reflection and life-skills discussions
- Celebrate girls publicly as athletes and leaders
- Engage families, teachers, male peers and communities, not just players

2 For Youth Leadership

- Create genuine youth advisory groups with real power
- Involve young people in programme design
- Use play-based methods for feedback and learning
- Train adults to be facilitators, not controllers
- Recognise youth leaders formally within cricket structures

Sara conducted the research in this briefing for her PhD in Global Health, and has worked in cricket development in the UK and internationally for over 20 years. She is passionate about building the capacity of others to grow women and girls cricket, empower young people, and deliver positive change through cricket.

If you have questions or would like to discuss the activities and materials used as part of the project in Nepal, and how these can be adapted for use in different contexts, get in touch with Dr Sara Begg at sara@cricketwithoutboundaries.com.

The PhD dissertation describing the project methodology and outcomes in detail can be accessed here:

Research outputs and other materials and handbooks from the project can be found on the Cricket Changemakers website: cricketchangemakers.com

Order a copy of "Ishq and the Cricket Changemakers" - a storybook version of the impact of the project suitable for readers aged 8-13. £2.50 from each copy is reinvested back into girls cricket in Nepal via Cricket Without Boundaries.

Contact sara@cricketwithoutboundaries.com about large orders for schools, clubs and community programmes at a lower cost.



[amazon.co.uk/gp/
product/
B0GLYFD22M](https://amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B0GLYFD22M)



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