

## Synergy of Sports and Leadership: Community Soccer Impact on SDGs Achievement in Leo-Leo Village, Morotai Island

Febriana Pratiwi<sup>1A-E\*</sup>, Gullyt Karlos Papingka<sup>2B-D</sup>, Syahid Nur Yasin<sup>3C</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Pasifik Morotai, Morotai Island, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Pasifik Morotai, Morotai Island, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, STKIP Pasundan, Cimahi, Indonesia

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This research explores the phenomenon of community soccer in Leo-Leo Village, Pulau Rao District, Morotai Island Regency, and its impact on shaping young leaders who contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **Purpose:** The research focuses on two main questions: (1) how community soccer can serve as a means to shape young leaders, and (2) how soccer can be integrated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This research is expected to provide in-depth insights into the experiences of individuals involved in community soccer in Leo-Leo Village, as well as its impact on leadership development and education. **Methods:** Using a phenomenological approach, this study gathers the experiences and perspectives of players, coaches, and community members to understand how participation in community soccer can develop leadership skills and social values relevant to sustainable development goals. **Results:** The results of the study indicate that community soccer serves as an essential platform for youth to learn about cooperation, discipline, and responsibility. Additionally, participation in these activities raises their awareness of social and environmental issues aligned with the SDGs, such as quality education and reducing inequalities. However, there are challenges such as limited facilities and lack of external support that hinder the development of this program. **Conclusion:** These findings are expected to provide insights for stakeholders in creating an environment that supports youth leadership development through community soccer in the context of the SDGs. **Implications and Recommendation:** This research recommends expanding collaboration between the government, non-governmental organizations, and the community to maximize the potential of soccer as a means of forming future leaders.

**Keywords :** community, leadership, SDGs, soccer, sports

### Correspondence:

\*Febriana Pratiwi, Universitas Pasifik Morotai, Jalan A Sudirman, Lemonade, Daruba, Morotai Selatan, 97771 Email: [febrianapратиwi@upi.edu](mailto:febrianapратиwi@upi.edu)

### Article History:

Submitted: February 9, 2025

Revised: February 15, 2025

Accepted: February 19, 2025

Published: February 20, 2025

### Authors' contribution:

- A) Conception and design of the study;
- B) Acquisition of data;
- C) Analysis and interpretation of data;
- D) Manuscript preparation;
- E) Obtaining funding

**Cite this article :** Pratiwi, F., Papingka, G. K., Yasin, S. N. (2025). Synergy of Sports and Leadership: Community Soccer Impact on SDGs Achievement in Leo-Leo Village, Morotai Island. *Indonesian Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 5(1), 81-90. <https://doi.org/10.31949/ijsm.v5i1.13040>

## INTRODUCTION

Soccer is known as one of the most popular sports in the world, uniting millions of people from diverse cultural, economic, and social backgrounds. Its presence is not limited to recreation but also serves as a medium for creating social change and building character, particularly among young people (Tafaqur, 2022). In many communities, including Indonesia, soccer functions as an effective means for talent development, health improvement, and social education. In Pulau Morotai, specifically in Leo-Leo Rao Village, community soccer is not only organized for entertainment but also integrated with a broader social mission, namely educating future leaders.

In an increasingly uncertain global era, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become essential to achieve. Launched by the United Nations (UN), the SDGs consist of 17 goals aimed at creating a better, sustainable, and inclusive world. One of the goals that is highly relevant to youth development is SDG 4, which emphasizes quality and inclusive education (Adesida, 2018). Thus, this research aims to explore how community soccer in Leo-Leo Rao Village contributes to shaping young leaders and supporting the achievement of SDGs, especially in the context of education.

Leo-Leo Village, located in Pulau Rao District, Pulau Morotai Regency, is known for its rich natural potential, including marine resources and cultural diversity. Despite having abundant resources, the village faces several challenges, including the lack of access to internet and mobile phone networks, and intermittent electricity supply provided by PLN every other day. This includes access to quality education, employment opportunities, and leadership development. Many youths in this village have talent in sports, particularly soccer, but still need more guidance and support to develop their potential.

In recent years, the community initiative to establish a local soccer league has been initiated by the Head of Leo-Leo Village to provide opportunities for youths to participate in positive activities. This league not only serves as a place for competition but also as a platform for learning and character development. Through these activities, young people learn about leadership values, cooperation, and discipline, all of which are crucial for achieving sustainable development goals.

Leadership can be defined as the ability to influence and manage others to achieve common goals. In the context of soccer, leadership emerges not only on the field but also in the character development of youth (Whales et al., 2024). Leaders on the field are those who not only possess technical skills but also the ability to motivate and guide other team members. They learn to make important decisions, relevant leadership in the real world.

Through community soccer, youths are taught to cooperate and contribute to the team. This dynamic teaches them how to be good leaders in a broader context, both in the community and in their future careers. The collaborative attitude built on the field positively impacts their interactions off the field, supporting greater engagement in local society and community.

Community soccer also has the potential to help children in terms of education. In this context, soccer is not only seen as a sport but also as a tool for delivering non-formal education. Through these activities, young people can be taught the importance of discipline, commitment, and hard work. Soccer programs integrated with education can serve as a way to introduce important values and create an environment that supports academic achievement (Figgins et al., 2024).

Therefore, soccer can create a bridge between formal and informal education, providing opportunities for young people to expand their knowledge horizons and acquire additional skills needed in the workforce. This is crucial given that many young people in remote villages, particularly in Leo-Leo Village, face limitations in access to quality formal education.

With this background, the research focuses on two main questions: (1) how community soccer can serve as a means to shape young leaders, and (2) how soccer can be integrated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This research is expected to provide in-depth insights into the experiences of individuals involved in community soccer in Leo-Leo Village, as well as its impact on leadership development and education.

## **METHOD**

The methodological framework employed in this research refers to the concept of phenomenology, which emphasizes a deep understanding of individual experiences and the meanings they ascribe within their social and cultural contexts. Through this approach, the research will explore how the youth in the village perceive their participation in soccer and how these experiences shape their views on leadership and their contributions to achieving the SDGs.

### **Participants**

Purposive sampling was chosen as the method for selecting research respondents. The targets include 5 young players actively involved in community soccer, 1 coach and instructor facilitating the soccer program, and 1 organizer supporting and promoting the soccer activities.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through several qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews: semi-structured interviews with participants, coaches, and organizers to explore their personal experiences with community soccer. The questions focused on how they perceive the impact of soccer on leadership skills, leadership opportunities created through soccer, and their views on the relationship between soccer and the achievement of SDGs in the community. Participant observation was also conducted during training sessions and matches to understand interactions, leadership dynamics, and team cooperation directly. This will capture the essence of the community soccer experience.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was performed through three procedures, which include: (1) Transcribing interviews and delving into the data to understand the main points conveyed; (2) Coding, identifying, and labeling key statements and themes that emerge from the data, which include themes such as "leadership development," "team cooperation," "community engagement," and "SDGs awareness."; (3) Theme Development and Validation, extracting core themes that highlight the shared experiences and insights of the respondents and involving the respondents in member checking to ensure that the findings accurately represent their experiences and understandings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Respondents were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and their rights to withdraw at any time, and consent was obtained before data collection. The identities of participants will be protected, and the data will be anonymized to maintain confidentiality. Ensuring that the research is conducted carefully, respecting cultural values and individual perspectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### FINDINGS

This study aims to analyze the impact of community soccer in Leo-Leo Village, Morotai Island, on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It focuses on how soccer can serve as a platform to strengthen leadership among youth. Leo-Leo Village has implemented various community soccer programs that serve as a means to build confidence, cooperation, and a solid social system among village youth.

#### **Community Soccer Activities**

Community soccer in Leo-Leo Village is organized by local institutions in collaboration with the village and non-governmental organizations. Activities include regular training, inter-youth tournaments, and periodic events to raise funds from the community. Participation in these sports not only improves physical fitness but also encourages children and adolescents to engage in positive social dynamics.

#### **Building Leadership**

**Improved Leadership Skills:** Participants reported a significant increase in their leadership abilities. Many players who were appointed as team captains felt more confident in decision-making, both on and off the field. Learning through the experience of leading in match situations helped participants hone their skills, including the ability to motivate the team and handle pressure.

**Enhanced Social Skills:** Community soccer activities improved participants' social skills, such as communication and cooperation. They learned how to work together to achieve common goals within the team. **Conflict Resolution Skills:** Participants also reported improvements in their ability to resolve conflicts constructively, both on and off the field. The study results indicate a positive impact of community soccer on the achievement of SDGs in Leo-Leo Village, particularly in the goals of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

#### **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being**

**Improving Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health:** Participation in community soccer in Leo-Leo Village has helped improve the physical health of participants. Interviews with players showed that their involvement led to increased stamina and overall health. Children involved in the program adopted active lifestyles and became more aware of the importance of maintaining good health. This activity also provided a solution to obesity issues among children. Beyond physical health, soccer had a positive impact on mental and emotional health. Players experienced increased self-confidence and happiness due to interaction with peers and a sense of togetherness. Focus group discussions revealed that many adolescents felt happier and more motivated after engaging in soccer activities.

#### **SDG 4: Quality Education**

**Raising Awareness of the Importance of Education:** The research shows that community soccer programs increase participants' awareness of the importance of education. Children involved in sports activities were more motivated to succeed in school, as they sought support from parents and coaches for their continued studies. Many participants expressed a desire to pursue further education after seeing examples of successful leaders in the world of sports. The study results indicate a positive synergy between education and sports. Students who are active in sports tend to have better discipline in their studies. Reports from teachers showed that



children involved in the soccer program demonstrated improved school attendance. They learned about the importance of preparation and hard work through competitive experiences.

### **SDG 5: Gender Equality**

**Empowering Women:** Community soccer programs in Leo-Leo also had a significant impact on empowering women. The involvement of women in soccer teams created opportunities for them to showcase their skills and promote gender balance in social activities. Discussions revealed positive changes in the community's perception of women's roles. Participants involved in sports began to recognize the importance of active female participation in various fields, including within families and the community. This led to increased support from men for gender equality.

## **DISCUSSION**

Community soccer organized in Leo-Leo Village demonstrates that sports can serve as a platform to create inclusive and productive social spaces. Community soccer not only facilitates physical activity but also acts as a tool to foster community solidarity (Hugaerts et al., 2021). Community soccer can explore other strategies to strengthen community engagement, such as adding sports-based education programs or inter-regional competitions. Participation in community soccer helps individuals develop leadership skills, such as decision-making, conflict resolution, and communication (Mccarroll & Mccarroll, 2024). The experience of leading on the field can translate into community leadership. Emphasizing the importance of mentoring by coaches to players serves as a cornerstone for developing the leadership of the players.

Community soccer programs have a positive impact on physical and emotional health, helping to combat obesity, improve fitness, and strengthen social bonds. Participation in these programs can serve as a model to promote healthy lifestyles in other villages (Lundvall & Fröberg, 2023). Community soccer programs in Leo-Leo Village raise awareness of the importance of education. Children involved in sports show better discipline, motivation, and school attendance. Sports can be a motivational tool to address dropout issues (Hambali et al., 2022). Players also consider the importance of involving teachers and coaches in developing integrated education and sports plans.

Community soccer functions not only as a sport but also as a learning platform. Bandura (1977) in his social learning theory states that individuals learn through observation and interaction with others. In the context of community soccer, youths learn about cooperation, discipline, and responsibility. This process helps them to form character and social skills that are highly needed in their personal and professional lives (Gündoğan, 2024).

This theoretical study shows that community soccer has tremendous potential to play a role in shaping young leaders and supporting the achievement of the SDGs in Leo-Leo Village. Based on relevant theories, it can be understood how the interaction in the context of sports can contribute to social learning, leadership development, and positive social change.

The involvement of women in community soccer programs in Leo-Leo Village shows the potential of sports in empowering women and changing societal views on gender equality (Bertho et al., 2024). It is important to create a supportive environment for women, such as gender-friendly facilities, female coaches, and campaigns to change social norms that limit women's roles in sports (Mikkonen, 2023). This research highlights the success of community soccer programs, but there are challenges to be addressed to expand its impact, such as limited resources, infrastructure, and women's participation. Innovative funding strategies, such as crowdfunding or sponsorship, and the importance of building local capacity for independent management are considered. The findings of this research confirm that sports like community soccer can be a strategic tool to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The concept of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) is becoming increasingly popular as an approach to using sports to achieve sustainable development goals (Charway et al., 2023). The United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) indicates that sports can promote health, education, and social justice (Beutler, 2008). In the context of Leo-Leo Village, community soccer can be used to engage youth in efforts to achieve SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) in an interactive and engaging manner.

As an effort to expand the impact of these community soccer activities, regular forums have been established involving local institutions, village governments, and non-governmental organizations to share ideas, plan programs, and evaluate activities. These forums determine the responsibilities of each party, leading to better-organized activities. Integration of the program with local policies in Leo-Leo Village is currently being proposed to include community soccer in the village development plan, thus securing funding from the village budget. Additionally, the Leo-Leo village government helps provide adequate infrastructure to support the activities.

Although community soccer in Leo-Leo Village does not yet have a specific program name like other community sports programs, such as the Liga Desa Nusantara Program in Indonesia or the Kampung Bola program in Yogyakarta (Pollock, 2021), Leo-Leo Village can learn from these programs, especially in terms of management strategies, fundraising, and social impact development. Partnerships or experience exchanges with similar programs can be conducted to enhance the capacity of community soccer programs (Lindsey & Chapman, 2017; Okayasu et al., 2016).

Leadership skills acquired through sports, such as community soccer in Leo-Leo Village, have broad applications in various contexts. In education, decision-making skills trained through the role of a team captain can help students prioritize academic tasks and strategize study plans (Hugaerts et al., 2021). The experience of teamwork in sports encourages collaboration in group projects or extracurricular activities at school (Holopainen et al., 2023). Soccer team leaders who are accustomed to motivating team members can become role models in the school environment, motivating their peers to achieve common goals (Gosai et al., 2023).

In the workplace, the experience of resolving conflicts on the field helps individuals manage interpersonal conflicts in the workplace constructively (Jianhui & Rashid, 2020). Sports team leadership skills are directly relevant to managerial or leadership roles in companies. Through the experience of facing pressure during matches, individuals are better prepared to handle deadlines or stressful work situations (Larneby et al., 2024).

In village leadership, sports leaders who are used to listening to various opinions and uniting the team can apply these skills in facilitating discussions and decisions in the village. The ability to build team cohesion can be applied to mobilize the village community to achieve common goals, such as village development planning. Former leaders in sports can become role models for village youth, motivating them to actively engage in social and development activities (Adesida, 2018).

Youth leadership development is often influenced by various leadership theories. Transformational Leadership, as described by Bass (1985), emphasizes the importance of leaders who inspire and motivate followers to achieve common goals. In the context of community soccer, youths involved in these activities can learn to become transformational leaders by motivating their peers and building a better community through inclusive and value-based leadership (Holopainen et al., 2023).

The various impacts of community soccer programs in Leo-Leo Village can be integrated with health promotion activities. Discussions on the importance of mental health, given that soccer has proven to enhance emotional health (Lynch, 2016), and providing basic training on stress and pressure management can be included. The social change theory, primarily developed by Marx and Engels, explains that societies can change through conflict and collaboration.

Community soccer can serve as a mediator in social change, providing youths with a space to explore their roles in the community and contribute to positive change (Graf & Fleischhacker, 2023). Through participation in soccer, youths learn to tackle social challenges such as stunting and early marriage, as well as advocate for policies that support health and education.

The synergy between sports and education can be optimally utilized through a well-approached method that enhances discipline, as soccer activities train players in time management between training and school (Hugaerts et al., 2021). A structured schedule can help students adapt to good time management (Strittmatter et al., 2024). Soccer teaches values such as hard work, responsibility, and teamwork that can be applied in the school environment (Charway et al., 2023). Participation in sports improves physical health, which in turn helps enhance students' concentration and learning performance at school (Annesi et al., 2023). Physical activity also helps reduce stress and anxiety, thus creating a better learning environment (Lundvall & Fröberg, 2023). With the active role of coaches in character education, community soccer programs can become platforms that not only improve sports skills but also shape the personalities of outstanding students (Meir, 2024). Community-based development is an approach that emphasizes community involvement in the planning and implementation of programs. Community Development Theory underscores the importance of community participation not only in the execution but also in decision-making. In the context of soccer, communities involved in soccer programs can feel ownership of the initiative, enhancing participation and support from community members (Glibo & Koenigstorfer, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

Community soccer in Leo-Leo Village, Morotai Island, serves as an effective tool in building youth leadership and supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Community soccer as a means of leadership formation sees youths active in community soccer experience enhanced leadership skills, including decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution. Contributions to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) show that participation in community soccer improves the physical health and fitness of players. Youths engaged in this sport become more aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles, such as regular exercise. Soccer also aids in mental and emotional health aspects, boosting confidence, happiness, and reducing social stress. Additionally, the development of SDG 4 (Quality Education) sees community soccer helping to motivate children to attend school and excel academically. With regards to SDG 5 (Gender Equality), this program begins to create space for female participation in community soccer. Awareness of the importance of gender equality increases as more women participate in sports activities. However, female involvement still faces challenges such as social stigma and lack of gender-friendly facilities. While this research has revealed the positive impact of community soccer on leadership and SDG achievements, several aspects need further exploration in future research.

Further studies can employ a longitudinal approach to understand the long-term impacts of involvement in community soccer on youth careers and leadership. Long-term studies will provide a comprehensive picture of how experiences in community soccer shape the future of participants in education, employment, or social leadership. In-depth studies are needed to understand the barriers faced by women participating in community soccer and effective strategies to increase their participation. Research can also explore how sports can become a tool for women's empowerment in societies with strong patriarchal norms. Studies on the relationship between community soccer and youth mental health can also be an interesting topic, considering the importance of sports in reducing stress and enhancing psychological well-being. Comparative research between community soccer in Leo-Leo Village and similar programs

in other regions can help identify the best strategies for managing and developing these programs. Further research can examine the most effective funding models to support the sustainability of community soccer, including the role of sponsorship, village funds, and private contributions.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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