

How the Community Cricket Program helped Truptimayee challenge gender stereotypes and build her confidence



Bhubaneswar, Odisha, December 2023

Traditional gender norms often influence the participation of girls and young women in sport and physical activity, [socializing them to believe](#) that they are soft, passive and less capable than men. Further, gender roles prevalent in our society associate certain sports, such as cricket, with masculinity, perpetuating the notion that certain sports are better suited for boys and men. Such gendered association discourages girls from participating in these sports, as they are often expected to participate in activities such as dancing or cheerleading that focus on perceived feminine characteristics like grace and aesthetics.

However, sports such as cricket, not only have the potential to improve young people's physical and socio-emotional wellbeing, but can also address issues of gender-based discrimination and inequality. In keeping with this notion, [Pro Sport Development](#) (PSD) has been implementing the [Community Cricket Program](#) (CCP), which works with young people aged 13 to 16 years from marginalized and underserved communities in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The CCP aims to provide young people of different genders a safe, secure and conducive environment to build their leadership capacities and participate in mixed-gender cricket, which further helps them question and overcome gender-based stereotypes.

Truptimayee Sahoo, a class 9 student of Saraswati Sishu Vidya Mandir school, in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, has been actively participating in the CCP since November 2023. The program has been able to provide her with a first-time experience of cricket and sensitize her on issues of child rights and gender.



Truptimayee Sahoo

Understanding gender-based stereotypes

Truptimayee lives in Patrapada, a slum community in Bhubaneswar. Slum communities in Bhubaneswar are [characterized](#) by the prevalence of gender-based stereotypes and discrimination, with girls often denied and discouraged from pursuing their interests in education or sports. Even if girls are allowed to pursue education, community members believe that their ultimate goal is to get married.

Truptimayee shares how her community believes that girls are inferior and less capable than boys:

“Everybody says that girls and boys are unequal... most people think that girls are not capable of doing anything, only boys can do things. They do not expect girls to excel in anything... my grandmother says you are a girl, you cannot do this, you cannot do that...”

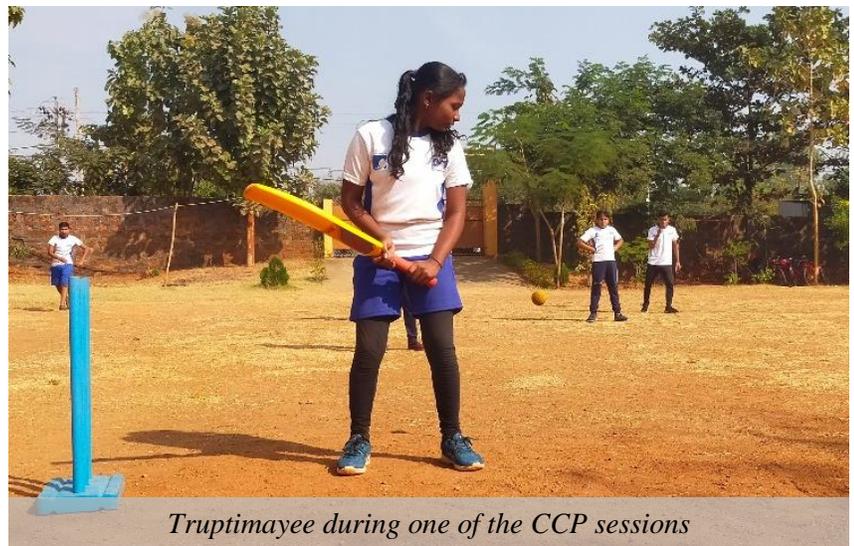
Truptimayee’s teachers are no different as they repeatedly reinforce these gender-based roles and stereotypes. Her teachers often tell young people that the ultimate purpose of girls is to marry, live with their respective husbands and serve their family members, as she shares:

“Our school/tuition teachers never agree that girls and boys are equal. Our tuition teacher tells us - what will we do by studying? Eventually, we have to get married and go to our sasural (spouse’s house).”

These stereotypes have a harmful impact on girls and young women, negatively affecting their self-esteem, academic performances, life choices and wellbeing as well as influencing their participation in schools, workplaces and communities. Therefore, it becomes imperative to address these issues of gender with young people, especially girls, to enable their holistic socio-emotional development.

Confronting gender-based stereotypes through cricket

Cricket was traditionally considered a gentleman’s game, with women historically being reduced to mere spectators of the sport. As the sport has progressed, girls and women have begun to participate in cricket, however, it remains heavily male-dominated as it is still inaccessible to girls and women, especially those from marginalized and underserved communities. This was also a similar story in Truptimayee’s community, where usually only boys were seen playing cricket in the *gullies* (streets) and schools.



Truptimayee during one of the CCP sessions

The CCP aims to challenge these orthodox ideas by creating a level playing field for young people of different genders to participate in cricket. Truptimayee shared how earlier cricket was exclusively played by boys in her community. However, following her participation in the CCP, Truptimayee now strongly believes that even girls can play cricket.

Moreover, her involvement in the CCP made her question and reflect on gender-based stereotypes, which hold back women's representation and participation in public spaces and institutions. Further, she believes that girls are capable of achieving whatever boys can, be it cricket or anything else:

“People question girls when girls go outside during the night, but no one questions boys... whatever boys can do, even girls can do. Be it cricket or anything [else].”

Building confidence and self-esteem

Another reason Truptimayee has been able to strongly vocalize her views on gender equality is the improvement in her confidence and communication skills, which she believes is a result of her participation in the CCP.

Earlier, Truptimayee would be scared to communicate with others, especially if she met them for the first time. Furthermore, she would get intimidated by a group of people and would refrain from speaking in front of them. This hesitation negatively hampered her self-confidence.

After attending the CCP sessions, she feels she has become more comfortable in her interactions with others and can now very easily befriend people, which has in turn boosted her confidence levels:

“I learned to speak confidently... and to communicate with others... Earlier, I used to be really sad, and did not used to talk a lot to others. I also learned to make new friends, and give respect to other people's views and opinions.”

Additionally, Truptimayee was one of the eight young people, who was selected from the CCP to represent Team PSD - India Crocodile at the [Street Child Cricket World Cup](#) (SCCWC) 2023. The SCCWC was an initiative organized by [Street Child United](#) (SCU) to bring together young people from marginalized and underserved communities around the world, so that they could advocate for their rights and drive change. Truptimayee describes her experience below:

“I really liked the SCCWC cricket tournament. There were so many people from different countries. We made friends with children from Delhi and Mumbai. I had never attended anything like a Congress, a meeting with so many people, ever before. I met and talked with people from so many different countries”



Truptimayee (third from right) at the SCCWC 2023

The SCCWC served as a great exposure and learning experience for Truptimayee as she got the opportunity to interact with young people from different parts of the world, listening to their stories and learning about the challenges they face as young people within their contexts.

Truptimayee's positive progress with respect to her self-esteem and confidence has also been observed by PSD's community sports coordinator, Pragatee Sethy, who shares:

“Truptimayee always looks to support and encourage her team... she has developed immense confidence. I have seen lots of positive improvements in her.”

Advocating for an equitable society

Through her participation in the CCP, Truptimayee has realized that girls and boys are equal, irrespective of what her family members and teachers, say. She firmly believes that girls are just as competent as boys, and can reach great heights when provided with sufficient support from their family members.

Truptimayee wants to utilize her learnings from the program and advocate for equal rights and treatment of everyone, especially for girls and young women. She strongly believes that gender-based stereotypes negatively affect her and other girls on a daily basis, and hence, wants to champion the cause of gender equality within her community. She states:

“I just want to say that girls and boys are equal. If we [girls] get support from our parents, community and society, then even we can do everything. I want to tell this to everyone in our community, at our homes and our schools.”

In order to create a more equitable society, it is important for young people, including girls and boys, to become gender-sensitive as they learn to interact with the world around them in those formative years. Truptimayee believes that it is imperative to teach concepts of gender justice to young people as they are future citizens, policymakers, leaders and decision-makers. She aims to educate and sensitize her peers on issues of gender through informal conversations and dialogues with them to further foster sensitivity and inclusivity among them:

“I will explain this [gender equality and child rights] to children my age. They will understand. They are going to grow up and become adults, and become parents.”

Truptimayee’s story brings forth the challenges and struggles faced by young girls, as they are conditioned to learn and perform certain socially accepted behaviors. Hence, it is imperative that young people are provided with learning opportunities and experiences to develop their life skills and leadership abilities as well as increase their awareness on gender-based issues. Such opportunities not only empower young people like Truptimayee into leaders, but also help them identify, resist and tackle gender-based stereotypes and discrimination within their communities.

The [Community Cricket Program](#) (CCP) is a structured, mixed-gendered intervention led by [Pro Sport Development](#) (PSD) that works with young people between the ages of 13 to 16 years from marginalized slum communities across Bhubaneswar. The CCP leverages the power of cricket to improve young people’s health and wellbeing, equipping them with crucial soft skills and sporting values, as well as increasing their awareness on issues of gender and child rights.