

SOUTHEAST ASIA SPORT AND YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION (SYCP) INITIATIVE THEORY OF CHANGE V2.0

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INTRODUCTION

Youth crime, violence, and antisocial behaviour present significant challenges to community safety, public health, and sustainable development. Across Southeast Asia, growing numbers of young people face risks linked to poverty, family instability, limited access to education, trauma, and social inequality. Without positive opportunities and support, these factors can increase vulnerability to crime and violence.

At the same time, international evidence and policy consensus recognise that well-designed sport-based interventions play a powerful role in preventing youth crime, strengthening resilience and building safer communities. ASEAN Member States have recognised sport as a driver of social development, peace, and crime prevention, reflected in Thailand's leadership on integrating sports into youth crime prevention and the ASEAN Work Plan on Sports 2021-2025.

Building on this regional momentum, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Agence Française de Développement (AFD), working through a consortium coordinated by the Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice (AoS), initiated the Southeast Asia Sport and Youth Crime Prevention Initiative. The Initiative uses sport as a catalyst for individual development, community safety, and systems change by:

- Strengthening cross-sector collaboration between governments, sports organisations, civil society, and communities.
- Investing in community-led projects reaching young people in Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam as a pilot for regional scale.
- Building leadership, knowledge exchange, and shared learning across Southeast Asia.
- Developing a shared evidence base to inform policy, practice and investment.

This Theory of Change sets out how the SYCP Initiative delivers impact across two interconnected levels: the programme level (regional and national systems) and the funded local projects they enable and support. It provides a shared framework to guide programme design, strengthen accountability, support investment decisions, and build an evidence-informed pathway toward safer and more resilient communities across Southeast Asia.

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WHAT IS A THEORY OF CHANGE AND WHY IS IT NEEDED?

A Theory of Change is a clear and simple way to explain what a programme aims to achieve and how change is expected to happen. It sets out the logical pathway from resources and activities to outcomes and long-term impact.

Within the SYCP Initiative, the Theory of Change serves as a practical guiding tool for applicants and delivery partners. It supports programme design, funding applications, and the recording of outcomes and impact. It also enables the SYCP Initiative to gather learning and evidence across the region to inform future policy development, partnerships, and investment decisions.

The Theory of Change is designed to:

- **Understand the problem:** Many young people in Southeast Asia face poverty, family instability, school dropout, violence, and social exclusion, which can increase vulnerability to crime and harm.
- **Clarify key assumptions:** Assumptions describe the conditions that must hold true for programmes to succeed and explain how different elements of change connect.
- **Define the solution:** Well-designed sport-based programmes can create safe spaces, build confidence and life-skills, strengthen relationships, and provide positive role models and purpose.
- **Plan the pathway to change:** Effective programmes work with families, schools, community organisations, justice services, and sport bodies to build trust and provide meaningful alternatives for young people.
- **Measure what works:** A shared framework supports partners to track outcomes, improve delivery over time, and share learning to contribute to wider systems change.

This Theory of Change does not describe every detail of every project. Instead, it provides a shared roadmap that partners can use to align efforts, track progress, and contribute to a growing regional evidence base. It is designed to be flexible, allowing adaptation across different countries, sports, and levels of prevention (primary, secondary, and tertiary), while remaining responsive to local needs and contexts.

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WHY SPORT-BASED APPROACHES TO YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION?

Evidence from international organisations, regional and national programmes, and community-led practice shows that well-designed sport-based approaches can play a powerful role in reducing youth crime and violence, supporting positive behaviour change, and building stronger and safer communities.

1. Sport creates safe spaces and new opportunities

Sport offers more than physical activity. It provides safe, supportive, and inclusive environments where young people feel welcome, build trust, and develop positive routines. For many, sport offers a space away from harmful influences and a first step toward a more positive life path.

This is particularly important for young people who have experienced trauma, poverty, exclusion, or violence. Sport-based programmes can reduce key risk factors linked to crime and violence at individual, family, school, and community levels, while strengthening protective factors that support wellbeing and pro-social development.

2. Sport supports behaviour change and positive identity

There is no single cause of youth crime and no single solution. However, evidence shows that sport can help young people to:

- Reflect on their actions
- Build confidence and self-worth
- Develop a positive identity
- Set goals and stay motivated
- Learn respect for rules and the rule of law

Through participation in sport, young people begin to see themselves as team members, leaders, and contributors to their communities. This shift in identity is a critical foundation for long-term change.

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WHY SPORTS-BASED APPROACHES TO YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION?

3. Sport builds individual and social capital

When delivered intentionally, sport-based programmes help young people develop:

- **Individual capital:** confidence, self-control, resilience, motivation, and goal-setting skills
- **Social capital:** supportive relationships, peer networks, mentors, and positive role models

These strengths are reinforced through teamwork, achievement, and connection, helping young people move away from harmful behaviours and toward positive life pathways.

4. Sport is most effective as part of a wider support system

Sport achieves greater impact when linked with education, health, justice, and employment services. Effective programmes are characterised by:

- Trained coaches who understand young people's needs
- Partnerships with schools, community services, and justice systems
- Ongoing support from families and communities

This joined-up approach increases the likelihood of sustained change beyond the sports session itself.

5. Sport can shape better policy and investment

By working together and measuring outcomes consistently, partners across Southeast Asia can demonstrate that sport is a cost-effective and impactful approach to reducing youth crime and violence. A shared evidence base can:

- Inform national, regional, and international policy
- Encourage targeted investment in sport-based prevention
- Strengthen cross-sector partnerships

The SYCP Initiative is designed to build this evidence, showing that sport is not only about participation, but a proven pathway to safer and more resilient communities, and better futures for young people.

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UNDERSTANDING RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

International evidence and global youth crime prevention research shows that young people's involvement in crime is shaped by the balance between **risk factors** and **protective factors** in their lives.

- Risk Factors

Risk factors include experiences such as trauma, family breakdown, school exclusion, substance use, exposure to violence, poverty, and lack of positive role models. When multiple risk factors are present and support is limited, vulnerability to crime and exploitation increases.

+ Protective Factors

Protective factors include safe and supportive environments, trusted adults, positive peer networks, engagement in education, opportunities to develop skills, and a sense of belonging and purpose. These factors help young people build resilience, regulate behaviour, and make positive choices.

Sport-based programmes are particularly well-placed to **reduce risk factors and strengthen protective factors** simultaneously — by providing safe spaces, structured activity, mentoring relationships, and pathways to education, employment, and community participation.

This evidence-based understanding underpins the SYCP Initiative's prevention framework.

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YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION – A THREE-TIERED APPROACH

Building long-term safety and resilience in communities requires more than reacting to crime after it happens. Effective youth crime prevention means raising awareness, supporting young people at risk, and helping those already in conflict with the law to build better futures. Sport can play a role at each of these stages.

The SYCP Initiative uses a **three-tiered prevention** framework, informed by global research and effective practice, to guide how sport-based approaches contribute to youth crime prevention. This framework helps partners design programmes, apply for funding, and record impact.

1. Primary Prevention

Goal: Prevent young people from becoming involved in crime by fostering positive environments and opportunities.

Sport-based approaches support healthy development for young people in communities where crime, violence, or substance misuse are more prevalent. Projects focus on creating safe spaces, promoting inclusion, developing life-skills, and strengthening community connections. These protective factors help prevent violence, school dropout, and risky behaviours before they emerge.

Example activities:

School and community sport programmes
Leadership and life-skills development through sport
After-school sport promoting inclusion
Family and community engagement activities

2. Secondary Intervention

Goal: Support young people facing higher risks to prevent escalation into criminal behaviour.

These programmes target young people who are vulnerable due to factors such as trauma, family breakdown, school exclusion, substance use, or exposure to violence. Sport is combined with mentoring, education, and social or mental health services to build positive behaviours, relationships, and decision-making.

Example activities:

Targeted sport programmes in high-risk communities
Trauma-informed coaching and mentoring
Integrated support linking sport with education and social services

3. Tertiary Intervention

Goal: Support young people already in conflict with the law to rehabilitate and reintegrate into society.

Sport-based approaches contribute to rehabilitation, personal development, and reintegration. They help young people move away from crime and substance misuse and toward education, employment, and community participation.

Example activities:

Sport-based rehabilitation in justice settings
Education and career support after custody
Reintegration pathways through sport, volunteering, or employment

By applying this prevention framework, the SYCP Initiative supports a continuum of sport-based interventions that strengthen protective factors, reduce risks, and promote positive development. This approach enables partners to deliver targeted, evidence-informed programmes that contribute to reduced youth harm, stronger communities, and lasting social change across Southeast Asia.

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FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION: THE SYCP INITIATIVE THEORY OF CHANGE

The SYCP Initiative turns evidence into coordinated action. This Theory of Change shows how regional leadership and local sport-based projects create measurable change for young people, communities, and systems.

The Theory of Change is structured in two connected parts:

- **The programme level (regional and national systems)**, which focuses on coordination, partnership-building, evidence generation, and systems change.
- **The project level (local)**, which focuses on delivering sport-based interventions directly with young people and communities.

Across both levels, the model shows:

- The **conditions that enable success** (Enablers)
- The **resources provided** (Inputs)
- The **work carried out** (Activities)
- The **services and products delivered** (Outputs)
- The **changes achieved over time** (Outcomes)
- The **external conditions required** (Assumptions)

Together, these elements describe a clear pathway from investment to impact.

The SYCP Initiative operates as a learning system. Evidence and experience generated through funded local projects inform regional and national policy development, programme refinement, and investment decisions. In turn, regional and national leadership provides frameworks, resources, and coordination that strengthen local delivery. This two-way feedback loop supports continuous improvement, shared learning across partners, and sustainable systems change.

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OUR SHARED PURPOSE AND GLOBAL ALIGNMENT

Our mission: Build safer and more resilient communities across Southeast Asia through sport

Our shared vision: A better world through sport

Global alignment: The SYCP Initiative contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Goals:



Together, we are building a coordinated regional movement that transforms sport into a catalyst for systems change, and better futures for young people.

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Enablers

Enablers describe the conditions that must be in place for inputs and activities to lead to meaningful change. They explain how partners work together and create the environment needed for success.

Enablers are defined at two levels:

- **Programme enablers**, which support coordination, shared direction, and systems change.
- **Project enablers**, which support effective delivery and learning on the ground.

The key enablers are outlined below.

PROGRAMME LEVEL (REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SYSTEMS)

A shared vision, delivery framework, and commitment unite a broad range of collaborators at every level to use sport as a tool for youth crime prevention. Together, this creates an ecosystem where collective action and shared investment build safer and more resilient communities across Southeast Asia.

PROJECT LEVEL (LOCAL)

Grantees bring relevant experience and are supported to align with the programme delivery framework

Coaches and staff have relevant skills and engage in further training to strengthen youth crime prevention practice

Communities and local stakeholders are involved in project design and delivery

Simple monitoring and learning systems capture data and improve practice

Grantees connect through the SYCP Community of Practice to share learning and strengthen delivery

Grantees engage with partners beyond sport to support cross-sector collaboration and systems change

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Inputs

Inputs are the resources and support that make the programme and projects possible. They provide the foundation for the activities shown in the boxes below.

Inputs are provided at two levels:

- **Programme inputs** support coordination, leadership, funding, capacity building resources, and technical expertise so the initiative can function and grow.
- **Project inputs** provide funded partners with the resources, guidance, and tools needed to deliver effective sport-based programmes on the ground.

PROGRAMME LEVEL (REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SYSTEMS)

- Funding for programme coordination, capacity building and project delivery
- Governance and leadership structures at international, regional and national levels
- Co-ordination, technical and advisory expertise through the Consortium
- Fundraising and partner engagement to support sustainability and growth

PROJECT LEVEL (LOCAL)

- Grant funding through a grant agreement
- Participation in the SYCP Community of Practice
- Due diligence, safeguarding, and risk management support
- Technical guidance, support, and delivery frameworks
- Monitoring and reporting tools

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Activities and Outputs

Activities describe what the programme and funded projects do with the inputs. Outputs are the visible results of these activities. Together, they show how resources are turned into real-world action, as illustrated in the boxes below. Activities and outputs are defined at two levels:

- **Programme activities** focus on coordination, capacity-building, partnership development, evidence generation, and system strengthening.
- **Project activities** focus on delivering sport-based programmes directly with young people, families, and communities.

Together, regional and local activities connect leadership and support with delivery and impact on the ground.

PROGRAMME LEVEL (REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SYSTEMS)

Activities – <i>What the programme does</i>	Outputs – <i>What the programme delivers</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and apply shared evidence and delivery frameworks • Bring partners together across sectors and countries • Provide grants and technical support to network and delivery organisations • Design and deliver training programmes, peer learning and Communities of Practice • Share learning, research and effective practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active national and regional networks • New and strengthened cross-sector partnerships • Funded projects engaging young people at-risk • Trained leaders and strengthened organisations • Shared tools, frameworks, and learning products • A growing regional body of evidence

PROJECT LEVEL (LOCAL)

Activities - <i>What funded projects do</i>	Outputs - <i>What funded projects deliver</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver sport-based activities for young people in accordance with the delivery framework (see page 7) • Provide mentoring and positive role models • Create safe and inclusive spaces • Engage families and local partners • Track progress and improve delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular sport sessions delivered for young people • Mentoring and support relationships established • Safe and inclusive community spaces provided for participation • Education, training and personal development sessions delivered • Families, teachers, and coaches engaged in activities • Case studies and impact reports published

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Outcomes

Outcomes describe the changes that happen as a result of the activities and outputs. They show how progress unfolds over time — from early improvements, to deeper changes in practice and systems, to long-term impact. Outcomes are defined at two levels:

- **Programme outcomes**, which focus on strengthening coordination, partnerships, evidence, and policy alignment so that sport-based youth crime prevention becomes embedded across systems.
- **Project outcomes**, which focus on changes for **individual young people, communities, and local systems**.

Outcomes are grouped into three stages:

- **Short-term outcomes** – what improves first
- **Medium-term outcomes** – changes in behaviours, practices, and systems
- **Long-term outcomes** – sustained impact and lasting change

Together, these outcomes show how regional leadership and support combine with local delivery to create safer and more resilient communities across Southeast Asia.

The boxes on the next page illustrate this pathway.

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PROGRAMME LEVEL (REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SYSTEMS)

Short-term change - <i>What improves first</i>	Medium-term change - <i>What changes in systems</i>	Long-term change - <i>The impact we aim for</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations strengthen skills and systems A shared understanding of sport-based youth crime prevention develops Better data and evidence inform decisions The programme gains visibility and interest from new partners and potential investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies align policies and programmes around shared approaches to sport-based youth crime prevention Shared standards and safeguarding practices are adopted across partners Effective approaches are scaled and replicated in new settings Investment in sport-based prevention increases New partners and institutions formally join and support the programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport-based youth crime prevention becomes an embedded and trusted part of national and regional systems, contributing to safer and more resilient communities across Southeast Asia

PROJECT LEVEL (LOCAL)

Short-term change - <i>What improves first</i>	Medium-term change - <i>What changes in systems</i>	Long-term change - <i>The impact we aim for</i>
<p>Individual outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people feel safe and welcomed in sport-based activities Increased attendance and sustained participation Improved wellbeing, confidence, motivation, and pro-social relationships <p>Community outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger trust between projects, families, schools, and community partners Increased community engagement in youth-focused activities Safe spaces become active and regularly used by young people <p>Systems outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local organisations adopt shared delivery and safeguarding standards Improved use of data and learning to adapt project delivery Stronger collaboration between sport, education, justice, and community partners 	<p>Individual outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people develop stronger life-skills, resilience, and self-control Reduced risk behaviours and increased positive choices Improved engagement in education, training, or employment pathways Stronger trust in adults and institutions <p>Community outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and communities are more confident supporting young people Reduced tensions between young people and community members Community organisations work together more effectively Local spaces are recognised as safe and positive environments <p>Systems outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local partners coordinate services and referrals around young people's needs Sport-based prevention is embedded in youth, education, and safety strategies Data and evidence are used to inform local decision-making and investment Cross-sector partnerships are sustained beyond individual projects 	<p>Individual outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people are less likely to engage in crime or harmful behaviours Young people sustain positive life pathways in education, training, or employment Young people develop lasting resilience, agency, and positive identity <p>Community outcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities experience reduced youth-related harm and improved safety Families feel confident supporting young people Positive youth-friendly spaces remain active and valued <p>Systems outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport-based youth crime prevention is embedded in local policy and service provision Cross-sector partnerships continue to coordinate support for young people Local investment in sport-based prevention is sustained beyond project funding

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Assumptions

Assumptions describe the external conditions that must be in place for the Theory of Change to work as intended. They highlight risks and dependencies that sit outside the direct control of the programme and funded projects. Identifying these assumptions helps partners understand what needs to hold true for activities and investments to lead to the expected outcomes.

Assumptions are defined at two levels:

- **Programme assumptions**, which relate to political, institutional, and partnership conditions needed for coordination and systems change.
- **Project assumptions**, which relate to participation, community support, and delivery conditions needed for effective implementation on the ground.

The key assumptions are outlined in the boxes below.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS					
PROGRAMME LEVEL (REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SYSTEMS)					
Governments and public institutions remain engaged and supportive of the programme	Stakeholders are willing to work across sectors and collaborate in new ways	National partners continue to participate in and strengthen National Networks	Partners are willing to share learning, data, and evidence to improve practice	The wider political, social, and economic environment remains stable enough to deliver the programme	The Consortium remains trusted, well-resourced, and able to lead coordination and shared learning
PROJECT LEVEL (LOCAL)					
Young people consistently choose to participate in sport-based projects	Safe, inclusive, and accessible spaces are available to deliver sport and activities in communities	Families, schools, and local communities actively support and engage with the projects	Sufficient funding and resources remain available to maintain project activities over time	Project activities are designed in ways that appeal to young people and fit local cultures and sensitivities	

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