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PLAYING OUR PART

MANAGING SUSTAINABLE PLAYER IMPACT >



ABOUT

Many players want to get directly involved in work that extends beyond the football pitch and generates positive impact on communities worldwide. Nevertheless, the landscape of opportunities and challenges related to working on such initiatives is difficult to navigate for both current and retired players.

This Briefing is designed to summarise key aspects for players, unions, partners, and other stakeholders to consider and provides relevant recommendations related covering:

- **Creating sustainable community impact:** Opportunities – the power of players and football as a social catalyst, and the opportunities this presents for athletes, communities and other partners who want to make an impact in society.
- **Creating sustainable community impact:** Challenges – a summary of the main challenges facing players in this space and how we can look at overcoming these.
- **Players as drivers of social change:** Recommendations for players, Unions, and partners – key recommendations that can set players for success in this context.

This document constitutes, amongst others, an overview of the discussions held during the "Player Our Part Summit," held at FIFPRO House in April 2022, where FIFPRO, Common Goal and the MIP Alumni Association joined forces to create a space for knowledge exchange on sustainable player impact.

FIFPRO PLAYER IQ HUB

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<https://fifpro.org/en/player-iq>

The Player IQ HUB is accessible at the [FIFPRO website](https://fifpro.org/en/player-iq)

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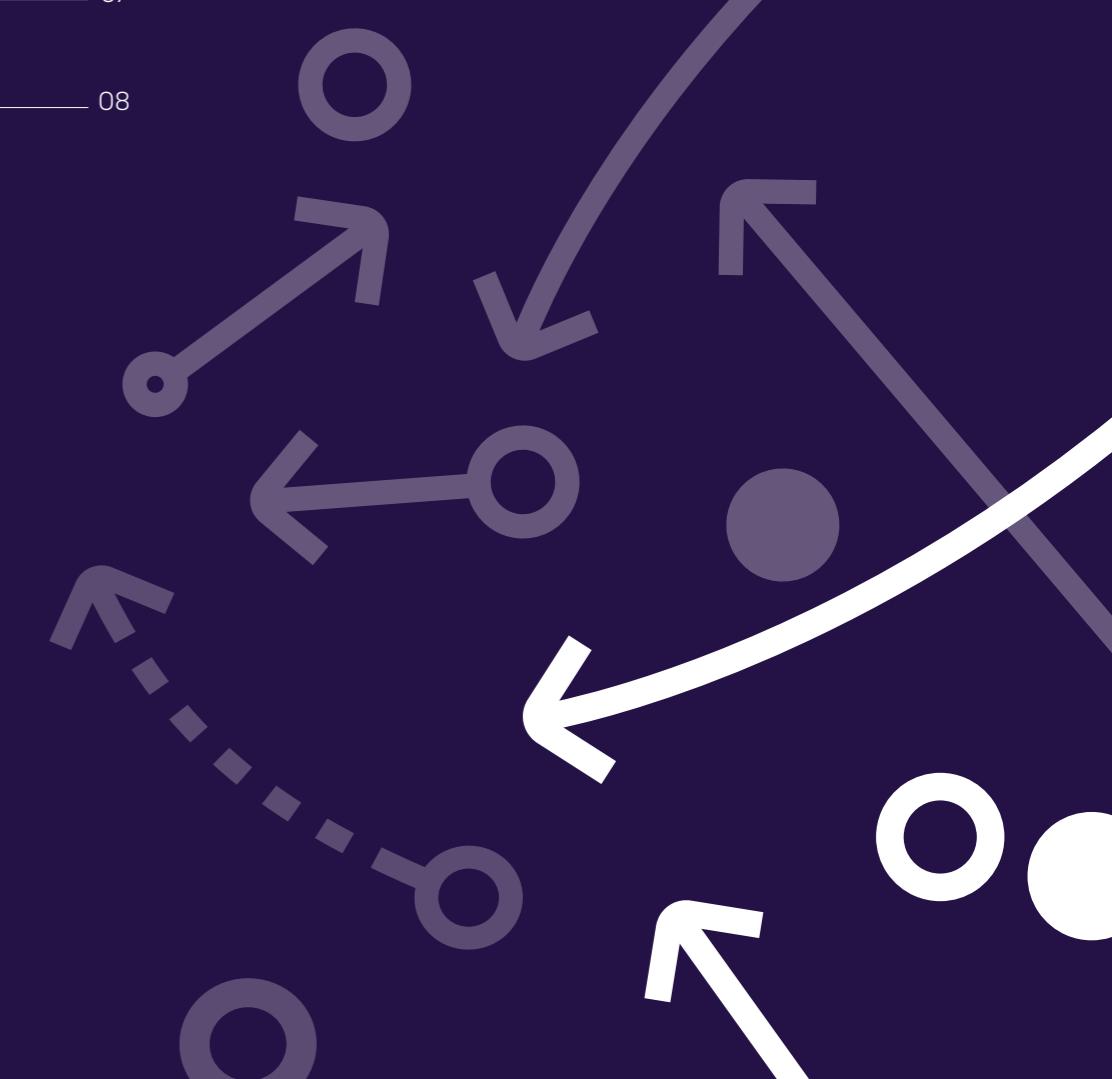
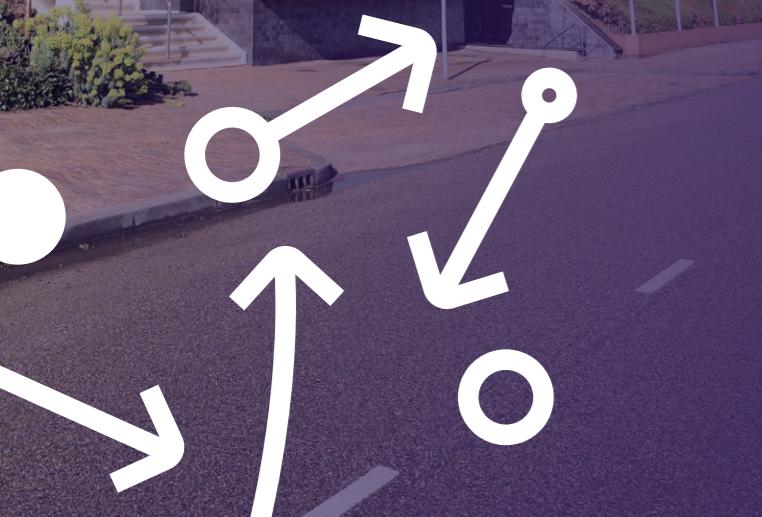
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01 | CREATING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES >

Over the last decade, we have seen the end of social responsibility as a peripheral activity and its rebirth at the heart of most organisations, often required to demonstrate they provide genuine benefit to society. The role of football has also evolved to reflect and respond to these expectations, especially with younger generations.

OPPORTUNITIES

The ability of players to drive positive change lies on authentic, strategic, and effective engagement with stakeholders and society. Below is an overview of the opportunities in this context.

> Choosing how to get involved

The first decision players face is whether to start their own projects or join existing collective initiatives.

- **Individual Player-Driven Initiatives:** Players can tap into their own networks (i.e., collaborators, advisors, sponsors, and other partners) to work on their own projects, foundations, ad-hoc events etc. They can leverage their individual platforms to maximise their reach and help them achieve their goals.
- **Existing Collective Industry Initiatives:** Players can also join existing initiatives that move towards their intended goals. Frameworks, such as Common Goal, provide a way to join a collective motivated by the same desire to create change, while having ability to choose what cause to support. At the same time clubs, leagues and federations provide programmes in which players can integrate easily, overcoming these.
- **Existing Initiatives Outside the Industry:** Players can be approached, or choose to approach, other leading NGO's or purpose-driven organisations to take on ambassadorial (or similar) roles.

> Identifying authentic connections to social causes

As for any individual, players' engagement on social causes shines the most when authentic and in line with their values. Authentic connection to a cause generates more effective engagement; there is scope in helping players understand what causes truly resonate with them to ensure sustained and meaningful work in spaces that matter most to the player.

> Empowering players to take charge

Existing systems do not always succeed in empowering players and giving them space to grow as individuals and develop the ways in which they engage on social causes. Players may need an opportunity that goes beyond their media platforms or role as passive ambassadors and will empower them to take charge of the change they want to see.

Players know they have the power to bring people together, activate sponsors and galvanise communities and more of them want to leverage their role to create positive impact on society. However, their potential to move masses does not always translate into equally successful, measurable, and sustainable impact.



> Player development and well-being

Well-run initiatives that empower the player and allow for individual contributions and growth will not only maximise the impact on the causes and targeted communities but will help players in their personal development, well-being, resilience, and career transitions. It provides a purpose driven framework for communities and the player itself.



> Ensuring a strategic approach and appropriate training

To maximise impact, it is important to have a long-term strategic plan in place, ensuring a proactive rather than reactive approach that is sustainable in the long run. This also implies having access to the right advice and guidance from experts in the relevant fields for realistic, efficient, and effective planning.



> Creating synergies

Creating synergies and aligning similar initiatives is a necessary step to accelerate community impact. Players can find guidance and maximise their potential by embedding their efforts into broader independent specialised frameworks such as the United Nations SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Currently, there are no real structures enabling large scale, industry level collaboration. Such collaborations can help people resonate with and understand societal development issues and goals, and be more effective when players are involved to translate these into concrete actions.



> Measuring impact and accountability

Players benefit from the availability and collection of data to track progress, identify trends, and recognise any gaps in their projects and partners. This helps determine impact to benchmark and assess strategy and work. Football and footballers may benefit from a similar body of work to follow a series of social parameters to better sustain and manage their impact in society.

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THE CHALLENGES >



Each footballer will have their own approach, vision, interests, and causes. These will be across vastly diverse cultural and societal contexts, all of which will have their own unique characteristics and set of specific challenges for players.

However, there are challenges that are more general, and pervade much of the work that players will undertake that can limit the success and impact they have. Below is an overview of some of these:

CHALLENGES



> Contextual obstacles to player involvement

Specific challenges arise due to the contextual cultural and societal circumstances and global trends. On the one hand, certain regions may expect players to give back and contribute to their local communities by sharing their earnings - this can be a lot of pressure and hinder authentic engagement. In other regions, there can be social stigma around engaging on certain causes in the first place, and an ingrained idea that football players should only focus on playing the sport. Both circumstances can hinder the players' desire as well as ability to get authentically involved with freedom, agency, and confidence.



> Expectation management

Players have no more and no less responsibility for our society than any other person. It is vital to recognise they can be influential individuals, but this does not make it their responsibility to be the change.

Players are part of the societal system and structures that are still enabling inequity to exist. If the onus and pressure is on them to be and drive the change, we fail to look at the structural issues pertaining to the systems they are part of and the responsibilities of institutions and governments. There is a real threat of associating them with goals and causes which are unattainable without substantial structural shifts.



> Lack of supportive systems and personal involvement

Although the latest generation of players are invested in many social causes, partners tend to fall back to see them as messengers and amplifiers rather than giving them space and possibility to really shape the activities.

Players are often not being supported by the structures around them to know how to manage their involvement. They need support to think critically and independently about their presence and influence; that itself poses a challenge in making social contributions effective.



> Choosing appropriate networks of expertise

Players have a lot of willingness to do good but need adequate networks, tools, and capacity to do so efficiently. In many cases family members get involved first-hand in the work of players' foundations but this can become problematic if the family members or people of trust are not experts or are not trained.

Players should not only pick people they trust but also those who are equipped with the necessary skills to help them in their social efforts.



> Tackling root causes rather than symptoms

Oftentimes support for a social cause is reactive to contextual problems that surge and is not geared to tackling underlying issues or inequities at the root of the problem.

An honest review of the objectives and purposes of a project with experts in the field, paired with the necessary information and data are key for sustainable impact. Hence, education, rather than only reactionary surface-level action, is key to success.



> Standing up to criticism and risk of backlash

No matter the context, criticism and backlash are a risk. Standing up to criticism is critical to success. Having a supportive network, clear and evidence-based data, and a clear understanding of issues at hand and how players can intervene are key aspects to overcome this challenge.

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RECOMMENDATIONS >

There has been a large shift in football and players have increased opportunities to focus on their values and social presence rather than just on their performance on the pitch. Footballers recognise they can impact their local and global communities, and many want to act on their ability to be drivers of social change. This puts emphasis on the importance of empowering and supporting them in this context.

Whether a player wants to go it alone, join a collective, or engage with partners, effective and meaningful player impact requires skills and leadership that go beyond the football pitch.

This section includes some key recommendations aimed at helping set players for success.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PLAYERS

> Define your vision and contribution

This is the cause you are fighting for. Make sure it matters to you and you own it. This means commitment to the cause and what you are doing. Do not lose sight of the big picture through micro-managing – all activity you do should be a means to achieving your goal. This requires sensible roadmaps, strategic planning, and clear understanding of your objective and challenges.

> Track your progress

It is important to track progress every step of the way and to understand where improvement is needed. Successes must also be celebrated to understand what you have achieved – no matter how small it feels. Hold your partners accountable to the same standards.

> Surround yourself with the right people

Do not be afraid to ask for support in all your work. You will never accomplish your goals on your own. Sharing of knowledge is critical for growth. That means cooperating with people better than you, who inspire you to do more and guide you, and who are not afraid to challenge or criticise constructively. These people will make a difference in the success of your cause on a day-to-day basis.

> Focus on what you can influence

The reality is that national and global change takes time. Do not hold yourself accountable to performance on this level. But there are things you can control and can change around you to be successful in pursuing your goal. That includes the people you work with, the communities you work with or come from, the goals you are striving towards, the values that guide your thinking and the projects you support.

Before seeking change on a societal scale, ensure you are satisfied with factors such as this, and are making a difference in your everyday work. Small steps working towards a bigger goal.



> Embrace your role with long-term vision and dedication

Long-lasting change relies on drive and determination. This is not simply a give-back mechanism following a successful career in the game. It needs to be engrained in all you do, and into football.

> Embrace criticism and seek support

Engender and embrace constructive discussions. You do not have to agree with what you are told, but also embrace criticism of your position and ideas. This exercise is about being authentic and building character and resilience – this will help your cause.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIONS, PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

> Help players identify the causes that resonate with them

Invest on authentic engagement to avoid replicating the commodification of players. Helping players identify and start engaging on causes they care about ensures a meaningful connection that helps sustain support in the long-run, maximising impact, and purpose.

> Support players' personal development

Educate players about the role they can play in society and how this does not only benefit others but also their personal development as a human and citizen. Work to empower them to be agents of change that extends beyond the playing field and support them along the way with education opportunities and tools.

Entities working with players must encourage engagement and discussions to identify an authentic and individual form of engagement, understanding the players and their commitment.

> Provide resources and access to expertise

Player Unions, the United Nations and other partners can serve as knowledge hubs for players to tap into resources that support their endeavours, ensuring they are protected and given the necessary tools to engage with confidence. Work to provide resources that include educational opportunities but also specialised insights on specific issues, access to expertise and strategic roadmaps.

> Integrate players more holistically into their projects

Football is falling short if the story ends with individual-centred philanthropy. There is an opportunity for football to consider setting up frameworks such as the United Nations SDGs to give players the opportunity to rally behind a cause with the appropriate expertise and adequate roadmaps.

There needs to be more options available to players that allow them to unite and align their collective strength on a global scale. To an extent, this can be done by clubs, progressive football agents, Common Goal, and the United Nations SDGs movement but there needs to be more clear options available.



> Seek alignment with existing global frameworks

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> Support strategic planning

Help the players think strategically and determine with them the right messaging and vehicle (to articulate their position clearly, underlining their values and motivations, expressing their passion, and not being seen as out of touch), the right partnerships (to give a cause more clarity, influence, and credibility) and the use of the media (media training to understand opportunities and risks).



> Consider a policy-driven approach

Empowering players to take charge requires ensuring they are supported in the process. Consider policies and contractual possibilities in this context. A social impact-driven policy approach is beneficial in embedding social responsibility into football and players' contracts through collective agreements with.

