

# Changing Gears

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

## Study Guide

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# Purpose of the Toolkit

The following guide is designed to accompany the screening of the 22-minute documentary film, titled *Changing Gears*, and to support and prompt discussions around it.

*Changing Gears* provides a global approach to understanding the role of a bicycle in community building, global development and mobility justice. This documentary traces the diverse journeys of three community organizations operating in Canada, Nicaragua, and Uganda as they work to use bicycles for more just, equitable, and sustainable futures.

The contents and key messages of this documentary provide implications for sport policy, programs, and practices, as it serves as a learning resource for policymakers and program developers when working with marginalized populations.

As you navigate this guide, you will find a brief synopsis of the film, along with a discussion of key themes and keywords. We also outline recommendations based on the film's learnings that can be integrated into sport programming design and practices.

The documentary and trailer are available in English and can be found on this [website](#).

## Intended Audience and Educational Setting

This toolkit is designed for all students engaged in different educational environments, including high school and higher education like college and university.



# Synopsis

This documentary is informed by a broader project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) titled ‘Wheels of Change? Exploring ‘Bicycles for Development’ for Women and Girls in the (Post-)Pandemic Contexts of Canada, Uganda and Nicaragua.’ The ‘Wheels of Change’ study builds on the activities, findings and community partnerships developed during the research team’s recently-completed five-year study (2017-2021) on ‘bicycles for development’ (BFD) - the use of bicycles to achieve community-level, national and global development objectives in Canada, Uganda, Nicaragua, South Africa, and India.

This project is led by Dr. Lyndsay Hayhurst (York University), Dr. Brian Wilson (UBC), Dr. Francine Darroch (Carleton University), Dr. Cathy van Ingen (Brock University), Dr. Brad Millington (Brock University), and Dr. Mitchell McSweeney (Western University).

The bicycle’s capacity to address pressing social issues (e.g., gender inequality, access to education) and to facilitate social change has inspired both interest and optimism, especially amid COVID-19.

For example, in May 2020, the United Nations formed a task force to assess how to “make post-COVID-19 mobility more environmentally sound, healthy and sustainable” with an eye to “bicycles as drivers of post-COVID-19 ‘green recovery’” (UN, 2020). Additionally, there are a number of non-governmental organizations around the world that utilize bicycles to address social issues, including for instance, reducing gender-based violence; promoting social entrepreneurship for women and girls in bicycle-related work; and considering the roles of women and girls in achieving the aforementioned ‘green recovery’ in a (post-)COVID context. But, what is the role of the bicycle in community building, global development and mobility justice efforts?

*Changing Gears* takes a global approach to begin answering these questions as they relate to mobility, gender justice, and sustainable futures.

## Before Watching

Before watching the documentary, it is essential to foreground and clarify key terminology and themes to better understand how these concepts can be applied in practice.





# Terminology

Term	Definition
<b>Mobility Justice</b>	Mobility justice can be defined as a framework or research methodology that examines how power, inequities and access operate within social institutions and spaces (Sheller, 2018). Mobility justice does not focus solely on movement but also on how discourses of power are embedded throughout mobility infrastructures (Sheller, 2018).
<b>UN Sustainable Development Goals</b>	The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), developed in 2015, include 17 global objectives and pathways to tackle violent conflict, inequalities, climate change and environmental degradation (UN, 2026).
<b>Sport for Development (SFD)</b>	Sport for Development (SFD) is “the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialization of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution” (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011, p. 311).
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	HIV, or human immunodeficiency virus, attacks and impairs the immune system (UNAIDS, 2026). AIDS, or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, is an advanced stage of HIV marked by symptoms and infections from immune deficiency (UNAIDS, 2026).
<b>Sustainable Development</b>	Sustainable development is a form of development that meets the needs of current generations without impacting and/or compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and support their own communities (IISD, 2026).
<b>COVID-19</b>	COVID-19 (coronavirus disease) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This disease led to a pandemic, exacerbating inequalities and impacting communities across the globe (WHO, 2026).

## Term

## Definition

**Environmental Sustainability**

Mitigating global warming, sustaining resources and protecting ecosystems (Hanson, 2010).

**The “Bike”**

In development contexts, the “bike” (bicycle) is conceptualized as a tool to address pressing social issues (e.g., gender inequality, access to education) and to facilitate social change (Bicycles for Development, 2026).





# Thematic Focus Areas

In this section, we identify key themes presented in the documentary and provide further details for each.

## **Sport and Bicycles for Gender and Development**

One of the central themes of the documentary is the relationship between sport, gender and development. This involves using sport, leisure, and physical activity (including bicycling) to support development goals, policies, and practices to achieve gender equality (Saavedra, 2009).

Sport, gender and development interventions have emerged over the last twenty-five years as part of sport for development and peace, an international movement that positions sport (including physical activity, recreation and leisure) as a pertinent tool to address a number of international development objectives, particularly those related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Hayhurst et al., 2021; Wilson, 2012). Despite the widespread presence of BFD initiatives across the globe, there is little unified understanding of how bicycles, in particular, contribute to development, how BFD programs are implemented, and how they are experienced by women and girls.

## **Sport and Bicycles for Gender-Based Violence Prevention**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as violence directed at individuals based on their gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender (WAGE, 2022). Promoting gender equality and women's rights through bike-for-development (BFD) initiatives is increasingly important, especially considering the rise of a 'syndemic', the intersection of COVID-19 with racism and GBV. This pandemic of GBV disproportionately affects racialized women and girls (Khanlou et al., 2020). Several BFD programs now use bicycles to support the health, well-being, and safety of women and girls. Hayhurst et al. (2025) reported that BFD curricula focused on GBV prevention, particularly in Nicaragua, Uganda, and Canada, are especially effective for women and girls of colour. However, little is known about how more equitable participation in such programs might impact outcomes. Past research on physical activity for marginalized women and girls, those facing increased inequity, disruption, barriers, and trauma, indicates that trauma- and violence-informed approaches enhance program success (Darroch et al., 2024).

### ***Deep Dive!***

In Nicaragua, women frequently face violence and harassment, with over a third experiencing this gendered violence in their lives, especially during times of economic and social instability like the COVID-19 pandemic (Madera, 2023; Neumann, 2023). As shown in the film, young women in rural communities often travel in groups, fostering a sense of community and collective safety that can help reduce gender-based violence and harassment. This provides physical safety when riding with friends and a mental sense of security, making community areas feel less risky and lowering stress. However, this underscores the harsh reality that while bicycles offer some relief from negative experiences, systemic inequalities remain unaddressed.

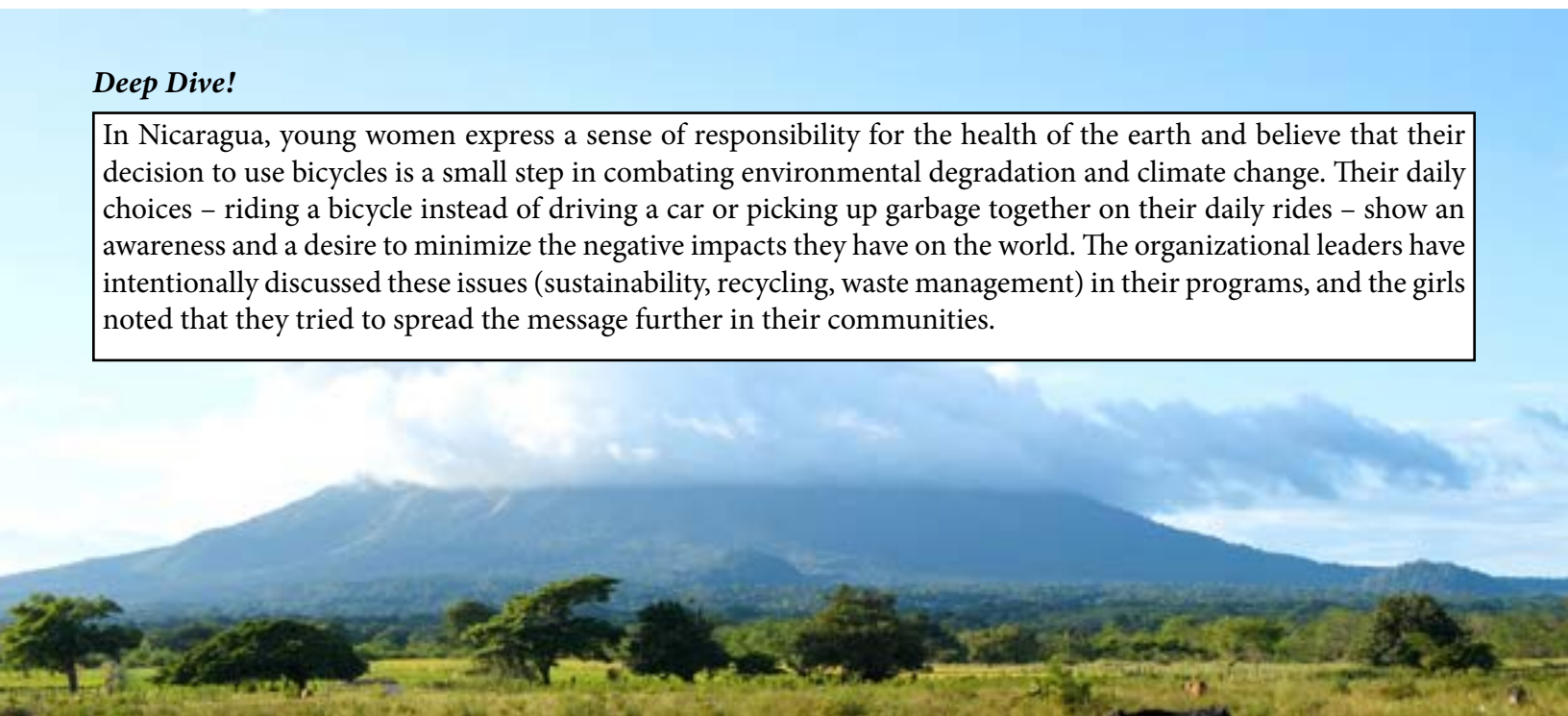
### **Bicycles, Mobility, Gender and Environmental Sustainability**

The documentary also connects and highlights the potential of bicycles to achieve environmental sustainability. In 2005, the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace highlighted sport, including bicycling, as a promising avenue for promoting environmental sustainability (UN, 2025). Sport serves as both a practice and a platform for raising awareness of environmental issues and modelling eco-friendly event and activity management (Wilson & Millington, 2020). However, contrasting studies have also pointed out the destructive impacts of certain sporting practices on the environment (e.g., Stoddart, 2011). Despite these concerns, thousands of NGOs and initiatives worldwide have emerged, based on the idea that sport, recreation, and leisure are positive tools for combating environmental degradation and its effects (Giuliannotti et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, current scholarship largely overlooks the gendered aspects of environmental problems and the role of mobility-centric bicycle programs. Scholars of mobility have noted a lack of research exploring the relationships among gender, mobility, and environmental sustainability (Hanson, 2010). Providing women and girls with mobility opportunities allows access to public spaces and jobs, while bicycles can reduce their risk of harassment and violence encountered on foot. Additionally, girls can learn about environmental sustainability through recycling and waste disposal practices that benefit their communities. These connections are significant because evidence shows that when women and girls have mobility opportunities, particularly for accessing public spaces and employment, they can challenge existing gender power dynamics, identities, ideologies, and practices (Hanson, 2010). Conversely, immobility caused by pollution, natural disasters, unsafe conditions, or pandemics can further marginalize women and girls (Hayhurst et al., 2025).

### ***Deep Dive!***

In Nicaragua, young women express a sense of responsibility for the health of the earth and believe that their decision to use bicycles is a small step in combating environmental degradation and climate change. Their daily choices – riding a bicycle instead of driving a car or picking up garbage together on their daily rides – show an awareness and a desire to minimize the negative impacts they have on the world. The organizational leaders have intentionally discussed these issues (sustainability, recycling, waste management) in their programs, and the girls noted that they tried to spread the message further in their communities.



## Mobility and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic posed numerous challenges worldwide. While it led to many tragedies and losses, it also offered opportunities (e.g., relationship-building).

The UN emphasized the importance of lessening the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, highlighting that “there are opportunities for radical, positive action to redress long-standing inequalities in multiple areas of women’s lives, and build a more just and resilient world” (UN Women, 2020). Most research on cycling focuses on the global North and discusses urban transportation (Pucher et al., 2011) and cycling’s health benefits (Mayers & Glover, 2019). Despite progress in the emerging ‘bicycle justice’ movement, which addresses racial, gender, and class disparities in cycling (Golub et al., 2016; Steinmann et al., 2022), we still lack understanding of how these inequalities intersect with COVID-19 and its effects on access to bicycles for racialized women and girls during (post) pandemic life.

### *Deep Dive!*

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a wide variety of challenges globally, including economic strains and health-related problems. In the film, the organizational leaders from both the Ugandan and Nicaraguan organizations explain how the cost of living, namely, the cost of transportation, and the fear of contracting the virus while using it, made bicycles a critical mobility resource in these communities that were experiencing extreme economic challenges.

### Learning for Students

While watching the documentary, use the space below to note down your ideas or key takeaways. Feel free to also write any questions you may have

# Discussion Questions: Partner Up!

After watching the documentary do your best to answer the following questions with a partner.

## **Sport and Bicycles for Gender and Development**

- In what ways can the bicycle contribute to gender equality and the expansion of women and girls in sport? Consider the stories shared in the documentary.

## **Sport and Bicycles for Gender-based Violence Prevention**

- How can bicycle for development (BFD) organizations integrate trauma-informed and violence-informed approaches into their programs to better support marginalized women and girls?
- In what ways did the COVID-19 pandemic intensify domestic and gender-based violence against women and girls?
- How do power imbalances impact the everyday experiences of different communities, and what role might mobility play in reinforcing or challenging these dynamics?

## **Bicycles, Mobility, Gender and Environmental Sustainability**

- How can bicycles alleviate burdens and stressors that contribute to environmental (in)sustainability?
- How can NGOs in both the Global North and Global South collaborate to promote environmental sustainability across borders? What challenges might arise?
- Who determines who benefits from, and who is excluded from transportation systems?
- How have marginalized communities resisted transportation injustices, and what barriers might they face in making their voices heard?



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