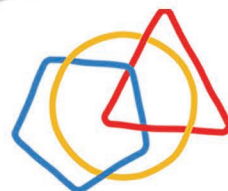
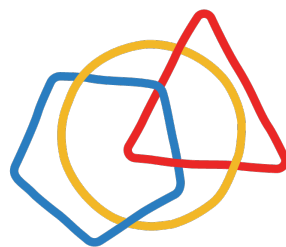


# Growing with the Game

Towards a  
cohesive vision  
for Indian football



**FORCA GOA**  
FOUNDATION



**FORCA GOA**  
FOUNDATION

# Contents

Introduction .....	1
A brief history .....	3
The challenges .....	11
The opportunity .....	17
A way forward .....	23
Our work in Goa .....	27
How you can get involved .....	31

## Introduction:

# The case for grassroots football in India

**A**t the Forca Goa Foundation we define grassroots football as organised football for children under the age of 12, where young players grow up playing the game locally and regularly in a safe and inclusive environment. As a grassroots football organisation we have experienced how playing football benefits individuals and how local football has the power to mobilise communities.

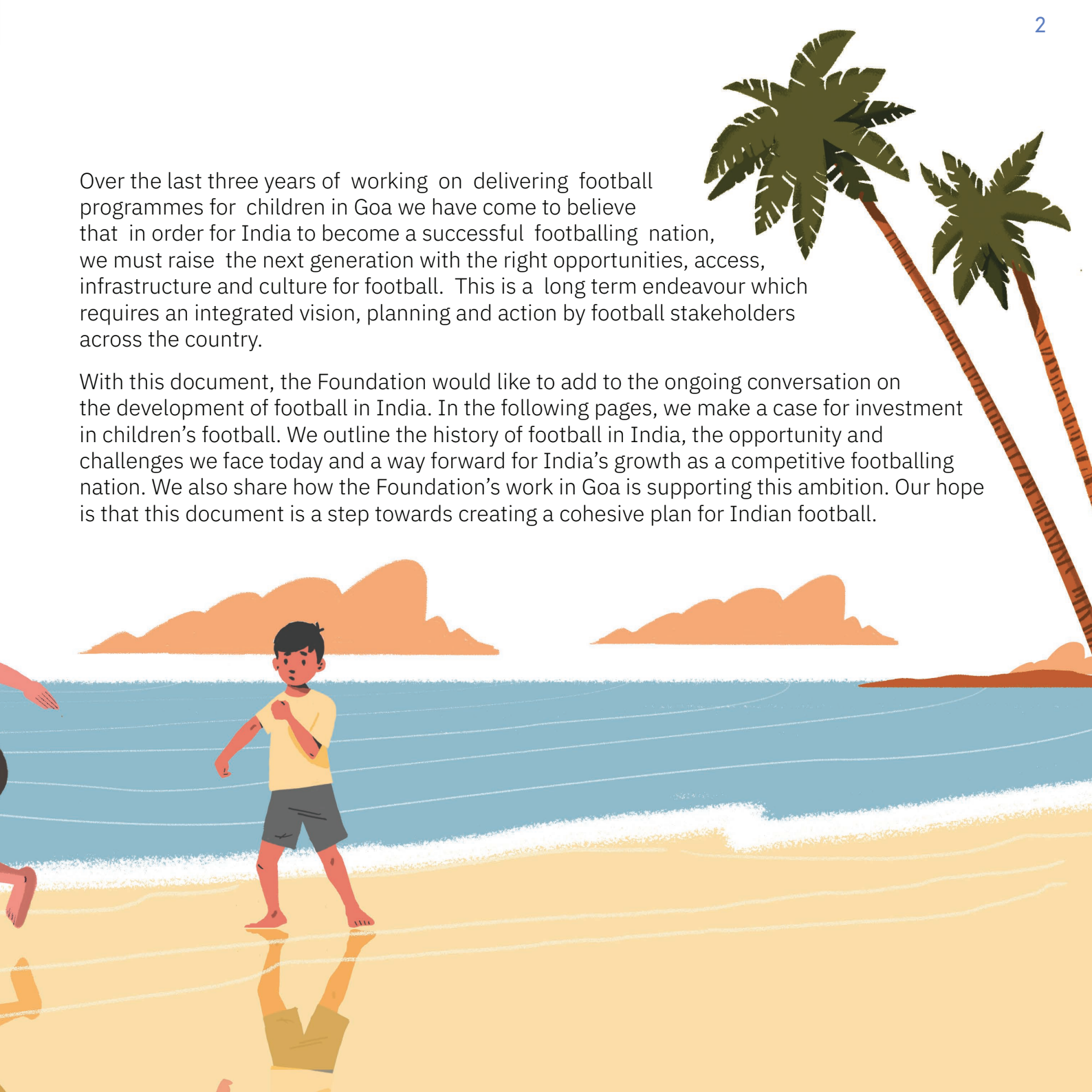
The Forca Goa Foundation is a non-profit organisation with the aim of building a robust football ecosystem for children. Conceived in 2017, the Foundation has its beginnings in FC Goa Club's grassroots football programme - the experience of which shaped our understanding that there is an urgent need to shift focus beyond identifying and training talented players and address larger structural gaps in Indian football.





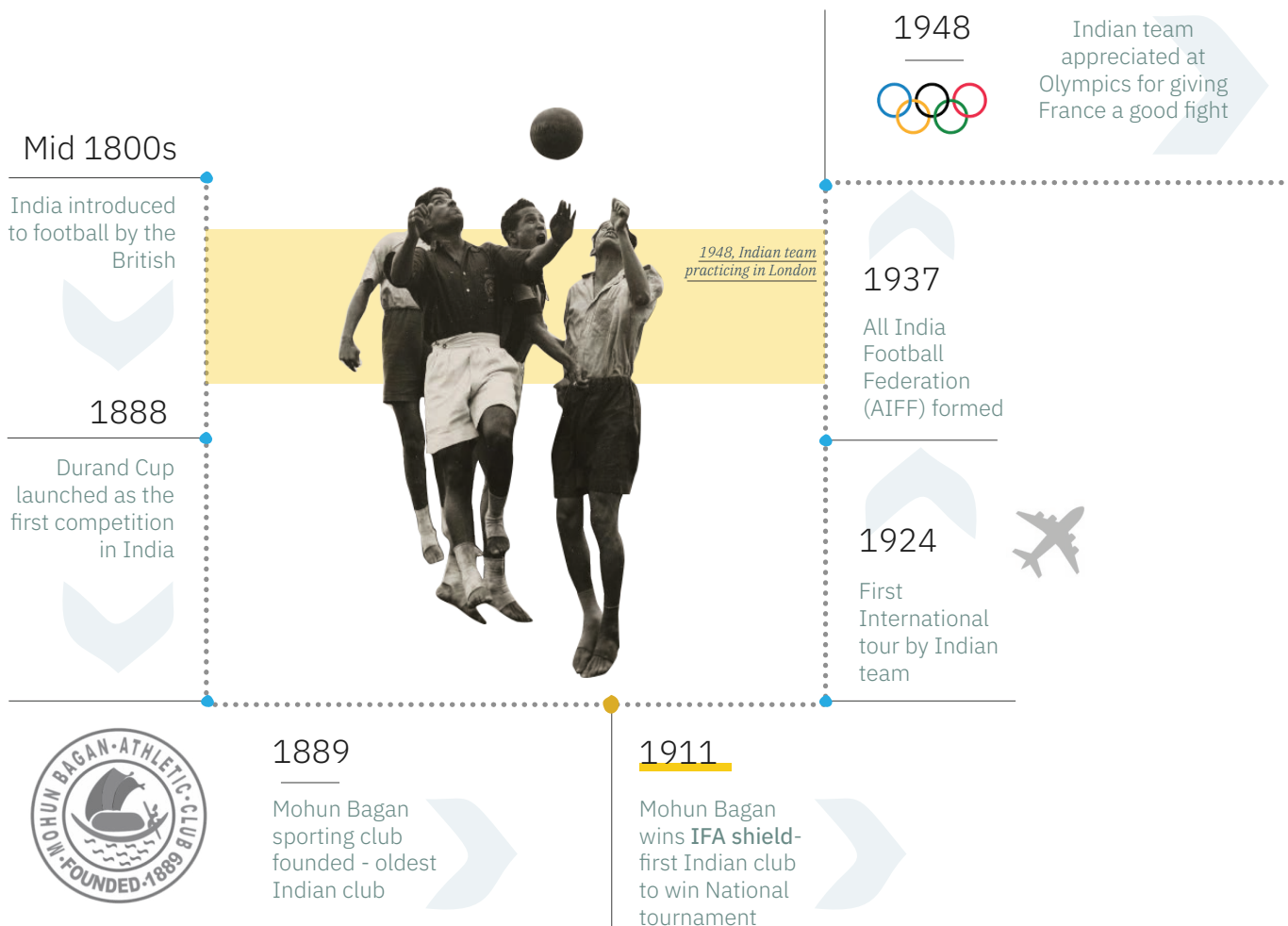
Over the last three years of working on delivering football programmes for children in Goa we have come to believe that in order for India to become a successful footballing nation, we must raise the next generation with the right opportunities, access, infrastructure and culture for football. This is a long term endeavour which requires an integrated vision, planning and action by football stakeholders across the country.

With this document, the Foundation would like to add to the ongoing conversation on the development of football in India. In the following pages, we make a case for investment in children's football. We outline the history of football in India, the opportunity and challenges we face today and a way forward for India's growth as a competitive footballing nation. We also share how the Foundation's work in Goa is supporting this ambition. Our hope is that this document is a step towards creating a cohesive plan for Indian football.



# A brief history of Indian Football

The story of Indian football begins with British soldiers who introduced the game to India in mid 1800s. By the late 1800s, with the launch of the **Durand Cup**, the sport garnered popularity as local clubs cropped up to join India's first football competition



## Golden era

Between 1951 and 1962, we found ourselves in what is largely known as the “golden era” of Indian football. During this time, India had its greatest international successes. The team’s performance was largely attributed to its visionary national coach Syed Abdul Rahim.

1951

Gold at the Asian Games

1956

Finished 4th in Olympics

1962

Gold at the Asian Games

1964

Runners-up at AFC Asian Cup

1966

Eliminated in the first round of Asian Games

1962 Asian Games team:  
Syed Abdul Rahim in the centre



## A downward trend

After 1964, barring a few flickers of good performance by the national team in South Asia and wins by **Mohun Bagan** and **East Bengal** against international clubs in the IFA shield, Indian football sides didn't see much traction for three decades. Although football remained popular in particular regions, India's win at the 1983 Cricket World Cup, effectively made the country a one sport nation.



1984

India won its first of seven SAFF Championships

Qualified for the AFC Asian Cup

1987

**I-LEAGUE**

1993

1996

Introduction of I-League (known as the National Football League at the time)

1997

1999

◆ SAFF Championship trophies

1970s

Indian Women's National Team formed



*Indian Women's National Team, 1978*

1980

Indian Women's team won silver in AFC Women's Asian Cup

1998

Women's team participated in Asian Games for the first time but suffered its biggest defeat against China (0-16)

## The new millenium

2000s brought new life to football in India. In 2002, the men's team won its first tournament outside of South Asia since the 1960s. In 2007, on his visit to India a former FIFA president referred to India as a “**sleeping giant of football.**”

2002

India U-23  
Won LG Cup in  
Vietnam

2003

Won Silver in  
Afro-Asian Games

2007

Won Nehru Cup for  
the first time under  
Bob Houghton

2008

Won AFC Challenge  
Cup thus qualifying  
for AFC Asian Cup

2009

Won Nehru Cup

*Indian National Team,  
AFC Asian Cup qualification, 2007*



2009

Women's team  
delisted from  
FIFA due to  
inactivity



2011

Participated in the AFC Asian Cup after 27 years

2012

Qualified for the AFC Challenge Cup

2013

Indian Super League formed

2014

AFC President Recognition for Grassroots Football

2016

Named 'AFC Developing Member Association of the Year'

## A clear imbalance

Women's football didn't take off in India at the national level until the 1970s. The Indian women's team was a front-runner in Asia when they started. As with the men's team the women's game lost steam in the 1980s. At an institutional level little attention has been paid to women's football which reached an all time low in 2009 when the women's team was delisted by FIFA. In 2010, the SAFF Women's Championship was launched and the Indian women's team has won every one of these tournaments. As India stages the next U17 Women's World Cup there is a spotlight on the development of women's football.



2016

Indian Women's League is born  
Won Women's SAFF Championship

2010

Women's SAFF championship is born & victorious in the same year

2013

Best FIFA ranking till date - 49





*Indian National Team celebrating their win against Thailand*

2017

Hosted U-17 World Cup with live audiences greater than cricket World Cup

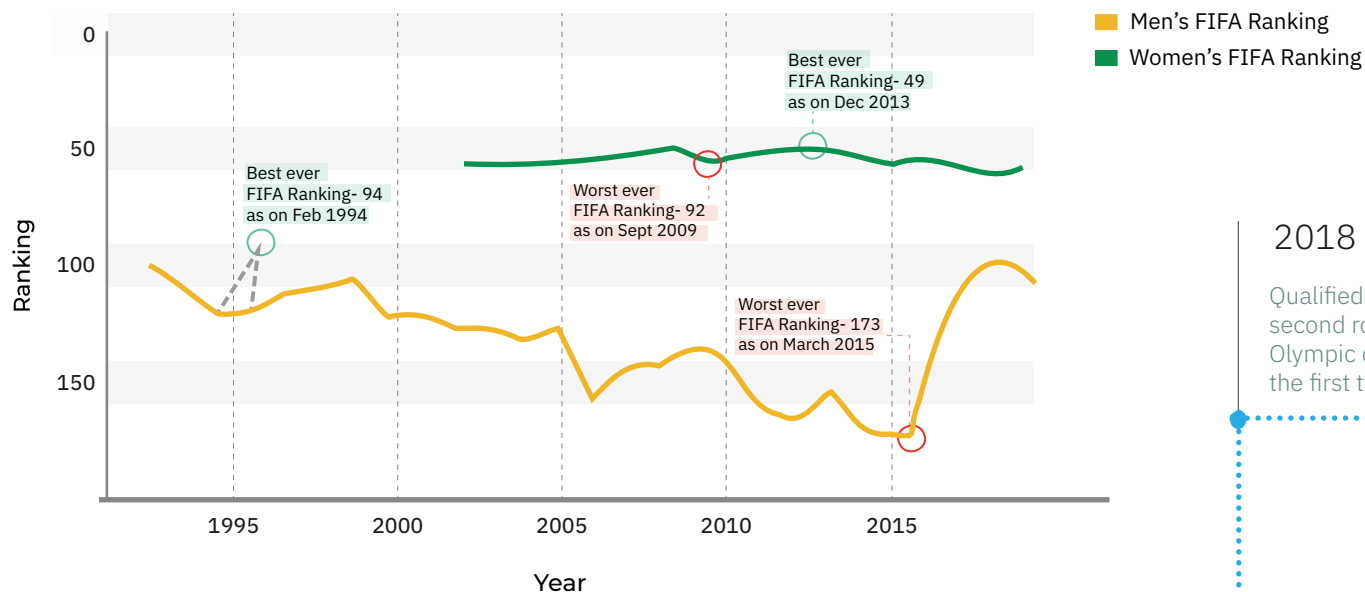
Broke into the top 100 FIFA Rankings for first time in 21 years

2018

Milestone win against Thailand in AFC Asian Cup (qualified for the cup for the first time since 1984)

Lost to Maldives in SAFF Championship final

## Men's & Women's FIFA Rankings over the years



2018

Qualified for the second round Olympic qualifiers for the first time

2019

Made it into the  
2nd round of  
Olympic qualifiers



2020

FC Goa creates history by  
becoming the first Indian  
club to qualify for the  
AFC Champions League

2019

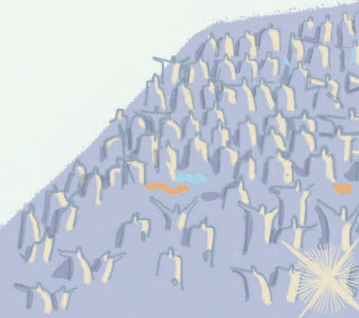
India chosen  
to host U-17  
Women's  
World Cup

Won Women's SAFF  
Championship



2020

Baladevi signs for  
Rangers FC being the  
first Indian woman to  
join the club



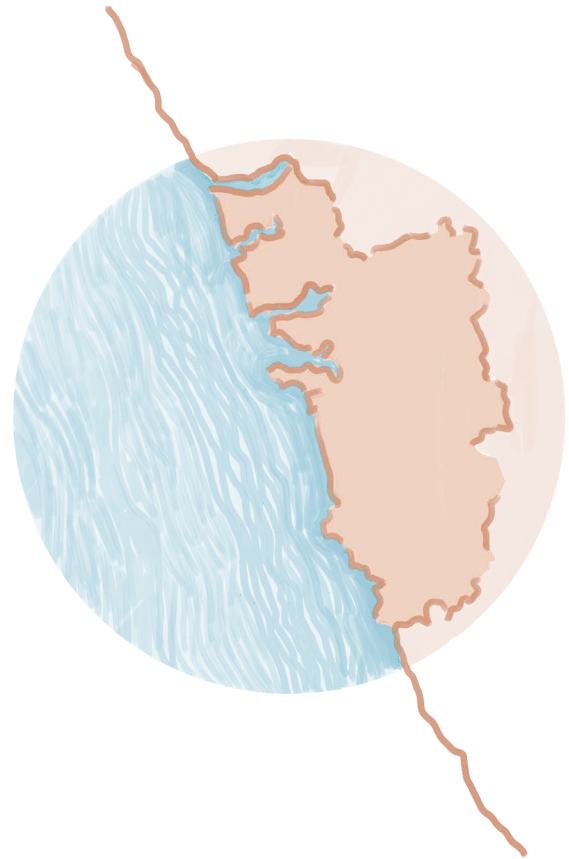
## Becoming a footballing nation

The last decade has put India back on the map. There is an increase in interest among fans alongside investment from Indian corporate houses and international clubs. The success of the U17 Men's World Cup helped India win the bid for the 2021 U17 Women's World Cup. The 1.3 million strong attendance at the U17 Men's World Cup was a key milestone for football in India. The fan engagement is a clear challenge to the notion that we are destined to be a one sport nation.



The challenges with Indian Football:

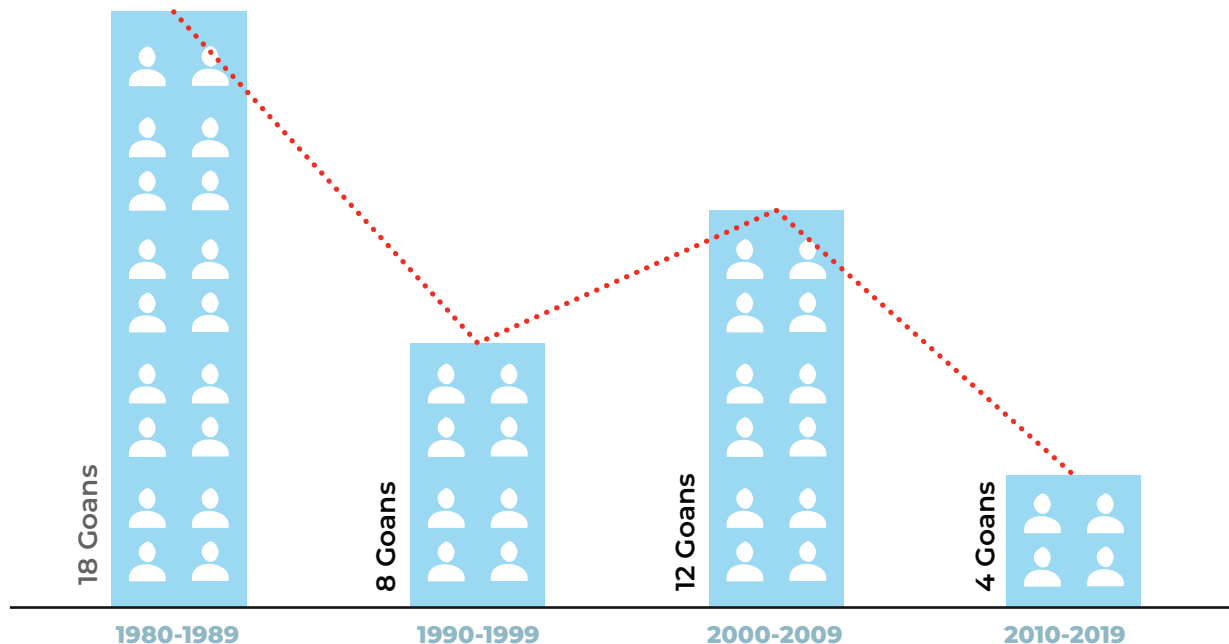
# Three perspectives from Goa



Goa was introduced to football by an English priest and spread through the church community in the late 1800s. Later, supported by the Portuguese rulers, the game has become an integral part of the Goan identity.

Today, football is the official state sport of Goa. Most Goans have grown up playing and watching the sport. Many inherently recognise the value it brings to their lives - be it through family members who play professionally, through attending local and league football matches on a regular basis or by experiencing how the sport benefits them and their communities directly.

The state has 190 clubs registered with the Goa Football Association and is a hotbed of footballing talent in the country. Goan representation in the national team however saw a major decline in the last decade.



While this trend is likely to be the result of myriad socio-political and economic reasons, for a generation of young players, the problem quite simply was the **lack of opportunities to play and compete.**

Take the case of Josline D'Souza, who started playing with the boys in her class as a young child in the early 2000s. Josline and her friends didn't have a football so they would kick soft toys around. When she was a little older, Sanjay sir, her PE teacher put together a girl's football team. She played for the school for a couple of years and at age 11 got selected for the Under13 state team. By 2008, she had joined the Indian national camp, with the first ever national team at the U13 level.

Josline had the likes of Maymol Rocky to look up to. Rocky, now the head coach of the national women's team, coached Josline's Goan team to victory in the national school games in 2010. One of the most hardworking goalkeepers in India, Josline had a budding career in football. Until competitive opportunities in women's football at the state level dried up. Josline and her cohort of players just didn't have leagues and tournaments to participate in, a sad situation that thwarted their development.

While there is no denying that women's football lags behind men's in terms of investment and interest, Josline's story points to how structural breakdowns fail players across the board.

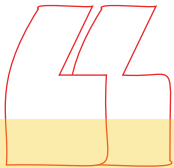
**Josline  
D'Souza**





## Derrick Perreira

Derrick Perriera grew up playing football in local clubs in the 1970s at a time where Goa was leading the charge in football. He was part of the national team that qualified for the AFC Asian Cup in 1984. His training, he says, really only began at the age of 17 when he started playing for Salgaocar SC in 1980. And it wasn't until he saw the change in his performance against Czechoslovakia after a month-long camp with the national team in Kolkata that he started to understand the value of a routine, the importance of rest and recovery. He only began to get a sense of what an ideal environment for a footballer would look like once he was playing for the national team.



*We used to sleep after training, have lunch, rest and then go for the evening training sessions and then freshen up and eat again and then sleep. Only Sundays were given off. We played Czechoslovakia after one month of this routine. Despite all the rasagullas we ate, I didn't feel a thing after that match ended. I could have played for another 120 minutes. From then on, I started following this routine and played until I was 38.*



Both Josline's and Derrick's experiences point to a system that is reactive rather than forward looking. Although such short sightedness is often the result of a lack of resources, this approach is far from sustainable. Without a long term vision and planning the limited available resources cannot be directed towards important ends and the consequences, as in Josline's case, for the footballers and the football ecosystem are dire.

The Foundation spoke with Marcus Mergulhao, journalist and passionate observer of Indian football, who looks at the narrative of Indian football a little differently from the history laid out previously. Believing the 1950s and 60s to be the golden era of Indian football implies that we can revive the glory days without acknowledging the fact that the football landscape has changed drastically.

He says that while India has continued with our old ways, other countries were professionalising and fundamentally changing the way they played football. The level of professionalism and structure among countries vested in football competition is fundamentally different today and India has some catching up to do.

Marcus points out, for example, in India, minor but important considerations around practice timings are not made. Many football clubs, Marcus says, continue to conduct training sessions in the morning, an age old practice from a time when players would have to go attend to their day jobs after the sessions. This trend continues today despite the fact that matches are held in the evening and footballers play professionally on a full-time basis.

Another huge gap is our approach to coaching. Marcus points out that “coaching is seen as a backup career option - you become a coach if you don’t make it as a player or after retirement. We don’t develop coaching as a profession.” Coaching is a serious skill and it's impossible to develop a sport without good coaches. While India has the necessary licensing structures, career progressions for coaches are not defined.



**Marcus  
Mergulhao**

What we need, he says, is involvement from stakeholders at every level - from government bodies to parents. Sports tend to be pitted against academic work and not seen as an important part of a child's education. Support for sports from parents and academic institutions is uncommon and the tremendous benefits of playing team sports aren't widely known or understood. In his day, he was lucky to be allowed to skip preliminary exams to play for the state volleyball team - this is highly unusual in India.

Josline like Marcus was one of the few who had support from her school and her proud parents. It was a lack of opportunity that failed her as a player. Luckily, she has persisted with football and is a grassroots coach and a state referee. Derrick too has stayed with the game. After his retirement as a player he has become one of most respected coaches in the country and an active campaigner for the development of grassroots football.

These perspectives point to the current need of the hour in Indian football. The grassroots football ecosystem requires a revamp through local strategies to address the following gaps:

Football competition across age groups for children and young people

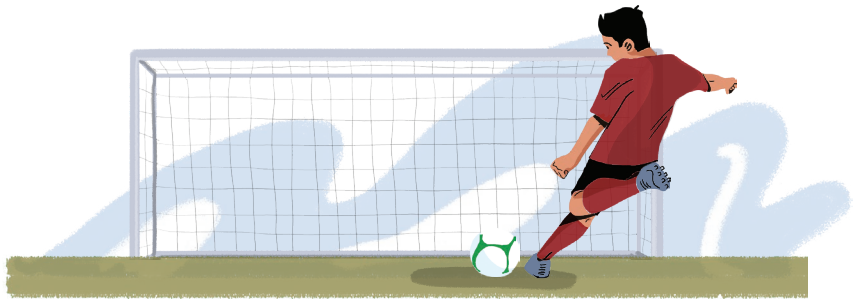
Development and recognition of football coaching as a career option

Support for sports from parents and academic institutions

Access to quality infrastructure for grassroots football

Building inclusivity in the game with a focus on women's football

# The Opportunity



In the run up to the 2018 FIFA World Cup, The Economist built a statistical model around the factors that were linked to success at the tournament. To put it simply, researchers at the publication identified what makes a country good at football. They took the results of all international games since 1990 and correlated a team's performance with the wealth of a nation (GDP per capita) and popularity of the game in the country.

They found that the economy and the popularity of the game accounted for 40% of the variance in international performance of national teams. This means that there were several small and/or developing countries that did well in football. **Uruguay was among the biggest overachievers along with several other countries from South America, West Africa and the Balkans.** When the researchers looked into what these countries were doing they found that there were four actions that football entities could emulate to increase their chances of doing well at the World Cup:

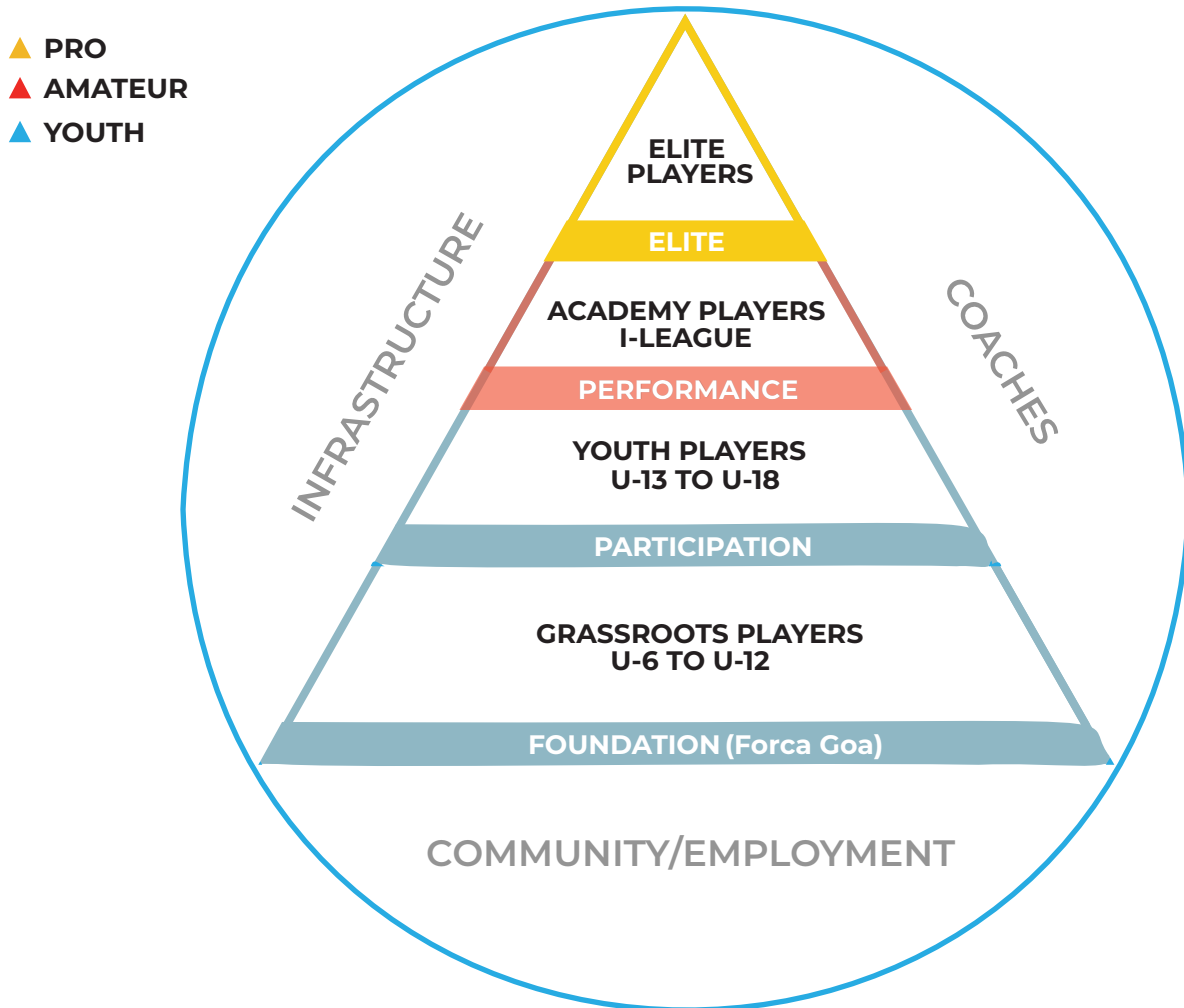
First, **encourage children to develop creatively.**

Second, **stop talented teenagers from falling through the cracks.**

Third, **make the most of football's vast global network.**

And fourth, **prepare properly for the tournament itself.**

In India, there has been a consistently growing exchange between Indian and foreign football organisations. International clubs are increasingly investing in football clubs in the country, organisations are sharing knowledge and working on skill development, and Indian players are beginning to play for international clubs.





**As for preparation, there tends to be a limelight on the national team's training and performance in international tournaments. The first and second actions described by The Economist's researchers i.e. our grassroots and youth system need more attention.**

Iceland - a country with a population of 3,35,000, stunned everyone by their performance at the 2018 World Cup. A neat two page document by Iceland's Football Association, titled, "*Why has Icelandic football been so successful recently*" outlines the reasons for their rise as investment in coaching and infrastructure. Iceland has built 154 indoor football pitches, and trained over 900 professional coaches, to produce a 'golden generation' of players.

**India's population is 4,000 times that of Iceland but as per the number listed in the All India Football Federation registry, India has 363 B-licensed coaches - a little over half of Iceland's 669 coaches (as of 2018).** In Goa, our grassroots coaches tell us that until recently opportunities to coach professionally at the grassroots level were extremely limited. Coaches were often paid hourly wages for their time and there was little by way of coach development and professional accountability.

**Uruguay, a small developing country, has had a nationalised baby league system for ages 4 to 13 since the 1960s** - they make sure their young children play a lot of football giving them plenty of opportunities to work on their technical skills. .

While there are hundreds of local clubs in India, children don't usually get to play games regularly - competitions tend to be limited to knock-out tournaments which

But some may believe comparing India with smaller countries like Iceland or Uruguay would be unfair. So let's look at China, the country we are often compared to in terms of population and development.

**In 2015, Chinese Football released a 50 point reform plan wherein 50,000 schools are to have a strong emphasis on soccer by 2025, a leap from 5,000 in 2015.** By then, the plan states 50 million Chinese, including 30 million students, will regularly play soccer.

It does look like China is on course - as of last year, it named over 27,000 primary and middle schools across the country as specialist football schools to spearhead youth football development. Moverover, the authorities are creating resources for teaching football and developed a syllabus for football courses in primary, middle and high schools. Football teaching videos have been made and will be offered to schools across the country.

For 50 million Chinese to play football the reform plan includes a growth in the number of football fields across China to over 70,000 by the end of 2020, from under 11,000 in 2015.

**New Zealand**  
FIFA Rank - 122



**India**  
FIFA Rank - 108



**China** FIFA Rank - 76





In India, we need not mandate specialist football schools but we do need to develop our football infrastructure. Even though Goa has over 200 football pitches spread across its small area, access and quality tend to pose major hurdles for those running football programmes. According to a study conducted by the Foundation almost half of the fields have sections that are unsafe to play on. The fields that are suitable, in our experience, are either prohibitively expensive or layers of red tape and bureaucracy make them near impossible to access for tournaments and coaching programmes.

India was referred to as the ‘sleeping giant of football’ in 2007. Since then there have been some efforts to rouse the giant and its latent talent. Most of the focus has been at the top of the football pyramid. With well-regarded platforms like the I-league and the Indian Super League and an increase in resources and know-how from successful international clubs, India is making strides as a footballing nation. Anticipation around the country’s performance at the international stage is increasing and the time is ripe for the football fraternity to invest in a long term strategy for the game.

# A way forward for grassroots football in India



**W**hen every child and young person who wants to play can play, learn and grow with the game, we will build a shared culture around football. This is a culture that values play, fitness, team work, confidence, self expression and a sense of belonging. We believe that unless we are able to build this culture, any strides we make in football will only be temporary advances. An investment in grassroots football is a long term investment in the game and the only way to ensure sustained growth towards a thriving, competitive footballing nation.

The need of the hour is a nation-wide grassroots movement with every stakeholder engaging with one or more of the following five key areas:

### **Providing regular gametime**

In order to inculcate a culture of football children need to play more. The AIFF suggests children should play 40-50 games a year in a safe environment while managing their social and academic life to experience a true football season. Baby leagues, as we have seen in the case of Uruguay, are one of the most effective ways of inculcating this practice. Consistent gameplay in the form of leagues ensures development of a wide range of skills from match play and team work to learning how to manage the highs and lows of competition in a healthy way.

## Grassroots coach development:

Coaches are the lifeline of a sport with the job of helping athletes play at their full potential. A grassroots coach is an educator and a role model who is tasked with instilling basic technical skills and values of fair play while having fun. Besides being good teachers they also have to be good organisers and adept communicators.


There is a need in Indian football to recognise the importance of coaches with these skills and encourage grassroots coaching by recruiting and training the right people. Currently, AIFF's E license and Premier Skills community coaching training programmes focus on grassroots development and PE teachers and aspiring coaches should be supported in skill development through these trainings.

## Scouting and focused training:

While the focus of the grassroots football system is to encourage young players to play the game in a safe and inclusive environment, it is important to identify and nurture talent. The natural progression to investment in good coaching and leagues is expansion in scouting and training efforts. As a result, children who show promise will be able to move up the football pyramid with access to academies and focussed training.

## Football infrastructure development:

While there is a need for investment from the state and from businesses to build more football infrastructure, expense and bureaucratic delays often get in the way of organising training and leagues for children on existing fields. A comprehensive policy that enables maintenance and easier access to existing infrastructure will go a long way in supporting the grassroots system.





Schools, community organisations, resident associations can also effectively work with grassroots programmes so that existing spaces are well utilised.

### **Encouraging inclusivity and community engagement:**

Playing football has a wide range of benefits and organisations across the globe have embraced football as a mechanism for working with children and young people on a wide range of issues. A truly inclusive and sustained culture of football will only be built if those who do not typically have access to football training can learn. This can be done by offering coaching to organisations or communities who don't have access or by developing coaching skills within these spaces or by simply offering access to football infrastructure.

While these five key areas provide the blueprint for grassroots football, the way forward will be defined by how different organisations, institutions and regions devise strategies for their own contexts. These areas of development will require specific strategies keeping in mind not only the specific challenges but also the opportunities that are unique to different cultures and regions in India.



## Our work in Goa



**FORCA GOA**  
FOUNDATION

Over the last three years, our work at the Forca Goa Foundation has deepened our understanding of gaps in grassroots football in Goa and we have built a comprehensive programme to address them. For example we found that the state does not have many competitions and tournaments for girls under the age of 12, so we have created a special age category for girls in our children's league.

As an organisation we recognize our place in the larger social and environmental ecosystem and the role sport can play in addressing some of the challenges human society is facing. The Foundation is committed to three of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the UN General Assembly for 'peace and prosperity for people and the planet'. Through our work we actively promote SDG 3 - good health and well-being, SDG 5 - gender equality, and SDG 12 - responsible consumption.

We work with several experts and partners who help make these issues an integral part of our programme delivery and have received recognition from international organisations such as Fairtrade and the Global Goals World Cup for our efforts. Moreover, we are lucky to have guidance from FC Goa's technical team in designing and assessing our football programmes. The Foundation has 5 core initiatives which we are starting to extend beyond Goa through partnerships with sports organisations around the country.

## Little Gaurs League

To address the need for regular organised gameplay for children in Goa, the Foundation runs the Little Gaurs League which is the largest football 'baby league' in Goa. The league saw participation from over a 100 teams in the 2019-20 season with over 950 players across three regional zones in the state.

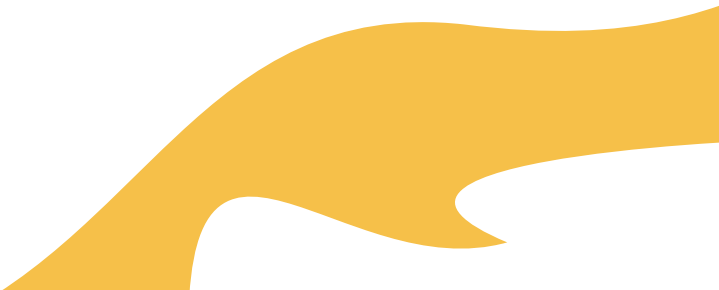
The event is a mixed gender competition for Under 6, Under 8 and Under 10 age categories. We also conduct a girls only competition in the Under 12 age category. While there are tournaments and leagues for boys in this age bracket, there aren't many opportunities for girls.

## Grassroots coaching and leadership programme

Based on our learnings and technical expertise of ISL club FC Goa, we are offering a practical Grassroots Leadership training program in Goa. This training will enable individuals to conduct grassroots football initiatives in their own communities. The training will be open to individuals from football clubs and organisations around the country.

## Centres of Excellence

Like academies of top clubs across the world, the Foundation along with FC Goa has developed its own Centres of Excellence where we train the talent scouted through the Little Gaurs League and other tournaments in Goa. Currently, we run centres in two regions in Goa in the U6, U8, U10 and U12 age categories.



## Focused Community Initiatives

In 2019-20, we piloted a targeted approach and built partnerships in 4 communities which could benefit from, but do not have access to football training. These communities range from working with special needs organisations to village panchayats. The interventions entail football skills training, life-skills workshops focussed on nutrition, mental health and gender and pop-up football festivals that include children and adults.

## Field of Dreams

A mapping exercise of football fields in Goa gave birth to the concept of 'Fields of Dreams' - an initiative where the Foundation aims to transform Goa one ground at a time. The objective of this initiative is to improve the level of football infrastructure by creating quality fields for communities using environmentally sustainable practises.



# How you can get involved



**W**e at Forca Goa Foundation seek proactiveness, collaboration and investment from those who wish to grow the beautiful game in India. We are looking to corporate bodies to recognise the power of sport and invest in its development, to state institutions to support stakeholders working on grassroots football, to football organisations to share learnings and collaborate, to passionate individuals to become coaches and league operators, and to parents to encourage their children to play.

Some of the ways you can get involved:



**Sponsor a regional baby league or one league team to compete in the Little Gaurs League.**



**Apply to the grassroots coaching and leadership programme to learn how to build and run a grassroots football initiative with your community or organisation.**



**Provide funds for essentials such as medical staff, nutrition, maintenance for football fields for grassroots initiatives.**



**Sponsor a focussed community intervention for a group of children who could benefit from football training.**



**Join a community coaching training with the Foundation and learn the basics of how to organise fun football training with children of all levels.**



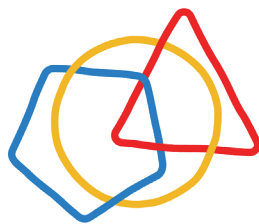
**Help organisations and schools working on grassroots football to gain access to fields and football infrastructure.**

To learn more please get in touch with the Foundation team -

Nathaniel | [nathaniel.dcosta@forcagoa.org](mailto:nathaniel.dcosta@forcagoa.org)

Ishita | [ishita@forcagoa.org](mailto:ishita@forcagoa.org)

Khushal | [khushal@forcagoa.org](mailto:khushal@forcagoa.org)



**FORCA GOA**  
FOUNDATION

---

[forcagoa.org](http://forcagoa.org)

---

Follow us to stay in touch!

[f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [in](#) / ForcaGoaFoundation



FORCA

GOA

FOUNDATION