

AN ANALYSIS OF BOARD SIZE AND COMPOSITION IN NATIONAL SPORTING FEDERATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Sports officials must work with more responsibility to develop sports. Even under the good governance government some Sports Ministry officials don't carry out their duties properly as they are influenced by money and power. It is always sports clubs, institutions and sports personnel who pay the price for all misconducts of officials. To change this trend sports authority must take the necessary steps.”³

Arjuna Ranatunga

Governance is generally defined as the act or process of governing or overseeing the control and direction of a country or an organization.⁴ Sports governance dates back to the Ancient Olympic Games, where the officials devised multiple rules and regulations to keep the games

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³ M. Svoboda, *Arjuna Ranatunga quote*, QUOTEPARK.COM (Jun. 03, 2021), <https://quotepark.com/quotes/1914592-arjuna-ranatunga-sports-officials-must-work-with-more-responsibilit/>.

⁴ *Governance*, MERRIAM WEBSTER DICTIONARY, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/governance> (last visited Feb. 09, 2022).

a peaceful and apolitical event. For instance, the Olympic truce or *Ekecheiria*,⁵ was a practice whereby the city-states participating in the games were mandated to maintain a ceasefire for a fortnight before the games and for the same period after. This has been one of the earliest noted forms of organized sports governance. Many centuries later, and in particular the latter half of the 20th century, saw a more aggressive effort to organize and govern sport with the image of sports taking a more commercial turn. The introduction of leagues, clubs, and increased frequency of matches throughout sports have proved to be an eye opener to major issues – doping, match fixing, underrepresentation, betting, gambling, among others. These have brought considerable shame to the Olympic dream.

South Africa represents a rich landscape full of natural resources, beauty, and cultural diversity. It also represents one of the darkest periods in African history, Apartheid. The governance of South Africa has always been influenced either by the practices followed by their colonizers, mainly the British, or a set of policies which mark stark contrasts to them. The British Crown left indelible marks on several aspects of life for South Africans – including a formal introduction to Cricket, Polo and Tennis. However, these were the elite sports which traditionally were not pursued by the native people. Sports goes back centuries and generations for the continent, with some games representing an ancient version of multiple modern sports today. To begin with, the game of Morabaraba, has been mentioned in the Oxford dictionary to be a precursor to the modern game of chess. This game was historically played on a stone or a rock until one player beats the other and takes away all the pieces on the board. Several centuries ago, this game was played at cattle auctions to ensure objectivity in the process. Lintonga is another game that appears to be an ancestor of Fencing, where the traditional game involved herding boys hitting each other with two types of sticks – for defense and offence. The game continued till one of the two contenders gave up or was seriously injured. Another fascinating game was that of *Dibeke or skununu*, which involved two teams of 6 players each, where one team kicks the ball away and the other make use of their hands to snatch the ball away from their opponents. This would appear to be a mixture of the modern-day sports of Football and Handball, one of which is the world’s most profitable sport.⁶

⁵ David C. Young, *Encyclopaedia*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Olympic-Truce-1688469> (last visited Feb. 09, 2022).

⁶ *Seven Traditional Games*, NEWS24 (Sep. 21, 2014), <https://www.news24.com/news24/Archives/City-Press/Seven-traditional-games-20150429>.

This article began with an introduction to the topic of governance. However, the definition was extremely generic and does lack several nuances of the phenomenon. The understanding of governance practices shifts with socio-political context being unique to each country. A comprehensive understanding of the definition of sports governance, for the South African context could be presented as:

*“Sport governance within the South African environment can be seen as the structure and processes put in place by the government which allow national sport bodies to develop strategic goals and direction, monitor their performances against these goals and ensure that their respective boards act in the best interest of all South Africans”.*⁷

When examined further, the definition seems to lack certain modern aspects of governance, especially in sport, which include gender, occupational diversity, size of executive boards on national sports federations, which are major indicators of the performance of these boards. There are a set of governance principles which have been accepted by researchers all over and include – transparency, accountability, control and democracy.⁸ These are more than mere terms and are significant indicators of the efficacy of a sport federation board. However, there have been minimal to no investigations of them in the South Africa context.

The apartheid era in South Africa ended officially in 1994, which ushered in a new era of democracy and governance for the country. Post the very first democratic elections, governance has been characterized by numerous discriminatory laws and practices. In 1996, the first consolidated attempt at sports governance was introduced when the Ministry for Sports and Recreation released a White Paper on Sports and Recreation.⁹ Thereafter, in 1998, the Sports and Recreation Act was promulgated into law along with the South Africa Sports Commission Act.¹⁰ This established the Sports Commission which has now been replaced by the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC).¹¹ Initially, this was viewed

⁷ PAUL T. JONSON & DAVID THORPE, *ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF SPORT GOVERNANCE* (2019).

⁸ Council of Europe - Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS), *A review of good governance principles and indicators in sport*, STRASBOURG: INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR SPORT STUDIES (Sept. 2016), <https://www.icsspe.org/system/files/EPAS%20-%20Review%20of%20Good%20Governance%20principles%20and%20indicators%20in%20sport.pdf>

⁹ Ministry of Sport and Recreation, Government of South Africa, *White Paper on Sport and Recreation* (Jun. 2011), https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/white-paper-sport-and-recreation-june-201110.pdf.

¹⁰ *South Africa Sports Commission Act*. [No. 109 of 1998] [Status: Repealed]

¹¹ Petri Prinsloo, *South Africa*, in *SPORT GOVERNANCE INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES* (Ian O’ Boyle and Trish Bradbury eds., 1 ed. 2015).

as largely successful due to the ground-breaking nature of the report. However, until 2003, the inefficiency of the report came to light and the report was subsequently updated, to incorporate the several changes in the sports governance developments in South Africa. The current system of governance in sport now involves a central body in the form of the Department of Sport and Recreation. In 2011, another effort was made by the government, through the newly created wing to redefine sports governance in the country by introducing certain goals, collectively known as the Road Map to Optimal Performance and Functional Excellence.¹² The White paper as well as the Road Map now constitute the wider National Sports and Recreation Development Plan (NSRP) which represents a major implementation plan for policy framework in the country.¹³ The Department of Sports and Recreation was merged into the Department of Sports, Art, and Culture (DSAC) in June 2019.¹⁴ In 2021, one aspect of governance remains unchanged in South Africa – the power for change and its implementation lies with local sports bodies,¹⁵ which have been at the center of the criticism received by the governance structure in the country. A particular area of research, which forms the center of our paper is to understand board structures and the subsequent effect that the improper functioning of a board has on the governance of sports in any country. There are several concerns regarding the structure and composition of sport boards, which, in the South African context, are headlined by the issue of a lack of appropriate demographic profile on board major sports federations in the country.¹⁶

Through this paper we shall be presenting a thorough examination of the Board structures and compositions of national sports federations in South Africa. Along with this, the paper will examine the factors of gender and occupational diversity, as well as the size of boards to understand the governance trends and practices in the country. Lastly, we aim to provide recommendations to improve governance practices in South Africa in the modern context.

¹² *Id* at 92.

¹³ National Sport and Recreation Plan.

¹⁴ Department of Sports, Art and Culture South Africa, *South Africa Sports and Culture Yearbook 2020-21*, GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS, <https://www.gcis.gov.za/south-africa-yearbook-202021> (last visited Feb. 09, 2022).

¹⁵ *Id*.

¹⁶ *Id*.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Board composition data was collected for 93 sports federations in South Africa which equated to 498 directors. A positivist descriptive research approach was adopted for this study. The data was gathered from various online sources. The name of the board members, gender and occupational background was collated in an Excel spreadsheet. The data was taken from the official websites of the sports federations and the occupational background from LinkedIn profiles and other similar websites. Occupational background was a difficult category to collect data on because of the lack of social media or professional LinkedIn profiles for many board members. Some of the websites had profiles for the board members written which was of convenience but many of them only had the names and phone numbers. To tackle this problem, we used Google as a search engine to determine the background of the members. Many of the searches led us to old sporting records which matched the particular sports federation we were investigating, leading us to conclude that the board member had a background in sports. Using this method, we were able to confirm the occupational background of 195 directors (39.1%) of the total sample. The approach followed in the paper by McLeod and colleagues was replicated.¹⁷ While the statistical analysis provides useful insights into the governance structures of South African NSFs, the authors acknowledge that the percentages with respect to occupational background on boards may have a margin of error due to the challenges with the data collection process. Despite this limitation, this study provides readers with a general overview of the trends in sport governance in South Africa.

¹⁷ Joshua McLeod, Shaun Star & David Shilbury, *Board composition in national sport federations: a cross-country comparative analysis of diversity and board size*, MANAGING SPORT AND LEISURE (2021). DOI: 10.1080/23750472.2021.1970614

3. BOARD COMPOSITION

3.1. OCCUPATIONAL DIVERSITY:

The data suggests that a large number of board members of South Africa NSFs belong to the category of Business Operations and Administration. They make up 31.79% of the entire board population in this context. One of the main reasons for this could be that each separate federation is treated and run like a separate business where the board members are constantly trying to be innovative and find new ways for the athletes, the sport, and the federation itself to grow, expand, conduct tournaments and for its athletes to represent the country in international competitions. It could also be because of the occurrence of globalization and could also imply that the reasoning behind this was to contribute better towards funding.

The boards have a significant representation of athletes or people related to the field like coaches (40.51%). This suggests that South Africa does put in some effort in selecting whom to place on the boards of NSFs. Selecting active athletes, retired athletes, or retired coaches to be part of boards provides the boards with an important perspective. This could be considered as a positive aspect for the sports industry of South Africa because they could empathize with the current players and it allows them to think from the point of view of an athlete and make decisions accordingly that would provide some benefit for overall athlete morale. It also shows that by having retired athletes or current athletes on the board that the selection and quality of athletes for tournaments or meets increases.

The number of politicians (0.51%) on board are very few compared to other countries internationally. Having politicians, bureaucrats and people working in public administration can have pros and cons. There is a possibility of speeding up formal processes while they may be on the board, but there is often a view that such individuals join boards for self-interested purposes.

The boards have low numbers of engineers (2.56%) and medical professionals (1.54%) which may indicate that the sports federations of South Africa give more importance to having people who know the sport such as athletes and others who can help with the governance and business administration by virtue of their professional background. Interestingly, there are numerous academicians (6.15%) on the boards of the federations.

There is a slightly higher number of board members with a marketing (5.13%) and accounting (5.13%) background which could be an indication of wanting to both the financial compliance and profiling and outreach within their sport because participation in sport. This could also be because the federations engage in organizing tournaments, events, games meet, inter-region sports meets and so on for the athletes and these are marketed in order to raise funds and increase publicity and reach for the athletes and the federation itself. Despite positive signs in several sports, there is still scope for the South African sports sector to improve and scale its approach towards commercialization. Therefore, having a high number of business professionals and marketers is a positive indication of the professionalization of national sport federations.¹⁸ This process could also require some lawyers on the board which has already been fulfilled (currently 4.1% of board members are lawyers).

South African sports federations had no journalists on the boards, in contrast to other countries such as the UK and Australia which had numerous journalists on NSF boards.¹⁹ This might have been detrimental to some of the sports federations in South Africa as the amount of reach and publicity and awareness for those sports or athletes would have reduced significantly.

There is a minor representation of the South African Military personnel (1.03%) on NSF boards. Having a higher representation could bring discipline and order which comes with the military, and higher levels of Military representation is evident in other countries, especially in South Asia. In the last five years, the potential has been noticed and can be seen by the launch of Basketball African League.²⁰ This has been an acknowledgement for Africa's sports market and talent.

¹⁸ BBC, *The benefits of commercialisation in sport - Commercialisation in sport*, BITESIZE, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zp2jxsg/revision/1> (last visited Feb. 09, 2022); MSG, *How Sports Became Big Business and Its Implications for All Stakeholders*, <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/how-sports-became-big-business.htm> (last visited Feb. 09, 2022).

¹⁹ McLeod, *supra* note 17.

²⁰ Refiloe Seiboko, *NBA and Fiba launch Basketball Africa League*, MAIL & GUARDIAN (May 12, 2021), <https://mg.co.za/sport/2021-05-12-nba-and-fiba-launch-basketball-africa-league/>

3.2. GENDER DIVERSITY

South Africa, like most of post-colonial counterparts has been considered a patriarchal society.²¹ Gender inequality, thereby, is an age-old phenomenon and is seen across sport. The country sees an imbalance in the participation of women not only in sporting events, but also on the executive boards of national sports federations. To understand this further, we undertook a thorough analysis of the board composition of various sports Federations in South Africa just as was done for the earlier section on occupational diversity. From the data collected, it was clearly visible that the various positions in sports federations in South Africa were dominated by men. The ratio of female to male board members was 30.91% to 69.09%.

After review of data of the South African NSF's we saw that the male board-members outnumbered the female board-members. The percentage of Male members was 69.09 % and females was 30.91%. From an overall perspective the number of females in the boards of NSFs in South Africa is reasonably low. There are cases where some sporting federations have a healthy participation of women on the boards but there are also cases where there are almost no females on the boards.

One of the possible reasons for this could be that since there are a multitude of sports played in South Africa, some sports have adequate female participation where in some instances the female teams have more success than their male counterparts. Hence, in order to cater to the needs of the female athletes there is some female representation on the boards. Another interesting point which we could gather was about female participation on boards. There was the higher number of women as a part of national sports federations in South Africa compared to other countries.

In most of the South African NSFs the total number of female board members did not exceed four. However, there were certain sports federations where the number of female board members were as high as 6 and 7. The data show that the South African Netball Federation had 7 female members on the board which was the highest number. The entire board comprised of female members ranging all the way from president to director. The South African Ring Ball Federation had 7 female secretaries as members of the board. In contrast, federations like the

²¹ D. Coetzee, *South African Education and the Ideology of Patriarchy*, 21 SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION 300 (2001).

South African Powerlifting Federation and the South African Squash Federation have only 1 and 2 female board members respectively.

The deeply patriarchal South African society represents certain unique challenges to women, which could be corrected with more participation and representation on boards. The problem begins from ground level treatment of female participation in sport. A serious lack of physical education, training facilities, lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, healthcare facilities, poverty, violence, are some of the few factors that keep young girls from participating in sporting activities. The patriarchal ideology and institutionalization have now trickled down into a newer age medium, namely – the media. Young girls and budding athletes are often discouraged by either the lack of coverage of the achievements of female athletes or by the over sexualization of female athletes on the basis of their gender. The works of several researchers seek to understand the effect of media and the lack of regulation, and thereby governance in the area of gender diversity in sport. Media has a significant influence on girls' and young women's participation and socialisation into sport.²² It is, therefore, crucial “that we observe and challenge those media representations that perpetuate the notion that only white, young, physically attractive, non-disabled women can, and do engage in sport”.²³

4. CONCLUSION

The power to drive change within the South African sports governance context lies with the Department of Sports, Art and Culture (DSAC) and the local authorities,²⁴ as these organizations formulate the policy framework in tandem, and thereby, shape the governance structure and policies. Policy implementation and smooth execution depends on the National Sport Federations²⁵ which have been the center of our enquiry through this paper. Inequality

²² Joshua A. Senne, *Examination of Gender Equity and Female Participation in Sport*, 24 THE SPORT JOURNAL (2016); Federica Affolter, *The Effects of Sport Media on Children's Sports Participation: the Influence of Gender, and Social Background*, (2017), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319059058> (last visited Feb. 07 2022).

²³ Nereshnee Govender, *The influence of print media in portraying women in sport: A case study of The Independent on Saturday* (Mar. 2010), <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.962.1652&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

²⁴ Johnson, *supra* note 7.

²⁵ Prinsloo, *supra* note 11.

in sport has been a common theme throughout the studies presented and has also been a recurring theme in the history of South Africa. Some of the malpractices in sports governance in the South African context have been summarized as:

*“Unfair discrimination (race & ethnicity), unequal distribution of resources, and unequal access to opportunities in sport, as a legacy of apartheid, and the lack of integrity and ethics knowledge amongst sport leaders are significant threats to sports governance. The inequality in sport is associated with historically institutionalized exclusionary practices that targeted particular segments of the population, particularly the black Africans, resulting in discrepancies in resource distribution and discrimination in all levels of sport across South Africa.”*²⁶

The discrepancies in occupational background and gender diversity hints at an incongruity with the previously mentioned good governance principles in sport²⁷, namely, transparency, accountability, control, and democracy. When researching to create a database for the federations and their board structures, there was a lack of information provided by these governing bodies. This missing information was mostly from the perspective of getting a clearer picture about the occupational backgrounds, governance compositions and governing statutes of each national federation. A lack of information can be easily construed as a lack of transparency, as more information could even reveal serious biases in terms of the occupational background of board members, their involvement with governance of any sort, and especially, their history with sport. Secondly, even after the size of boards are relatively lesser than most countries, the diversity within the board is of great importance, which is lost in the South African context. Male-dominated federation board structures most likely reinforce the patriarchal ideologies of the societal context in South Africa. As established in earlier sections, not only is female participation less on-board positions, but there are also minimal to no measures being taken to bridge the gap. Sport governance must be used consciously as an instrument to promote gender equality, and prevent harassment and abuse in sport, along with support to developing women’s skills in management and leadership.²⁸ The data presented does not necessary symbolize a bleak picture for sports governance in South Africa but shows a void

²⁶ University Sport South Africa, *University Sport South Africa : Transformation Policy* USSA (Apr. 2019), <http://www.ussa.org.za/doc/USSA%20Transformation%20Policy%20%20-%20Rev003.pdf>

²⁷ *Id* at 6.

²⁸ International Olympic Committee, *Women in Sport Commission*, IOC, (2018), <https://olympics.com/ioc/women-in-sport-commission> (last visited Feb. 09, 2022).

in terms of policymaking and implementation as the root cause of the lack of maintaining good governance standards. Periodic changes in governance policies, along with strict implementation of these can potentially prove to be the cure for South Africa's governance context.

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