

## **ASSESSING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN SPORTS SECTOR**

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### **—Abstract—**

Sport has generally been a male-dominated domain which appears to discriminate against women by preventing their advancement to high-level positions in sports organisations. The article conceptually utilises the Gender and Development approach as a theoretical framework. The rationale behind this approach is that in a patriarchal society, there are stereotyped mentality, social practices, and cultural traditions confining women to household tasks only; role-conflict between men and women; and gender challenges in terms of work-family-balanced tasks that restrict women from advancing their careers outside their delegated and expected home-based tasks. This approach therefore aims to empower, incorporate, integrate, and mainstream gender in the sport sector. The article contextually utilises a comprehensive literature survey, document analysis, and a desktop review of the Department of Sport and Recreation South Africa to identify gender gaps. Through document analysis, the gender gaps will be discussed in the South African sports sector at strategic and policy levels that suppress women from holding decision-making and strategic positions. Authors believe that women alone are not responsible for the lack of gender-based representation in sports management. Male counterparts hold equal responsibility to encourage, promote,

and support women in leadership positions in the sports sector. Nonetheless, the examination of the reports and statistics of SRSA supports the stereotypical mind-set of people, and gender-disaggregated norms exist on professional levels, hampering women from progressing to leadership positions in the sports sector. The article recommends policy imperatives for mainstreaming gender in the sports sector.

**Key Words:** Gender, gender equality, sports management, Women in Development, Department of Sports and Recreation South Africa

**JEL Classification: Z19**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aspects of gender mainstreaming and equality have raised several issues regarding the inclusion of gender in sport, challenging traditional gender norms and values. Although the involvement of females in sport are imbalanced compared to the participation of males, the majority of the researchers agree that female participation in sports have a large impact on gender equality in certain contexts (Sportanddev.org, 2018). In addition to this transformed mind-set, sport is considered as “a social and cultural process in which social constructions of masculinity and femininity play a key role” (Klinhomdee, Phar-amnart, Tupan, Singhapan & Sermsakul, 2015:1). Furthermore, Klinhomdee *et al.* (2015:1) emphasises that although “sport is traditionally associated with masculinity, which is considered inappropriate for women to engage in sports ... yet, it is evident that there is no one masculinity or femininity, and sport could provide a space where masculinity and femininity are re-negotiated rather than re-affirmed in their dominant acceptance”. This article explores gender equality in the South African sports sector at strategic and policy levels, and exploring the gender gaps that suppress women from holding decision-making and strategic positions.

The study is qualitative. It “is a well-accepted fact that qualitative researchers have their own ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological assumptions” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994 in Auriacombe & Schurink, 2012: 152). It is emphasised by Mouton (2001 in Auriacombe & Schurink, 2012: 152) that “the questions social scientists pose have different answers depending on their ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology and teleology...and there is no

bias-free point of view in any approach to research.” The article utilised a qualitative research approach, which allowed the authors to develop a more accurate understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Torrance, 2012:3). It utilised the exploratory design, which seeks to identify problems (Singh & Naidoo, 2017:1416). The approach considered to complete the study was phenomenological, and according to Singh and Naidoo (2017:1416), it has roots in epistemology. The literature on gender equality, sports management, and the official documents of the Department of Sport and Recreation South Africa (SRSA) were reviewed. Authors however believe by quoting Zongozzi (2015: 12) that “ a good literature review is not only limited to covering relevant literature, but must also have the following attributes: provide awareness of what is going on in the field; outline a theoretical base for the proposed study; show the significance of the study; and offers new ideas”. The review therefore aimed to identify existing challenges related to gender inequality in the sport sector and find solutions for improvement.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

*Gender* is described as the learned behaviour and socially constructed roles that are related to the biological characteristics of both men and women (Inglehart & Norris, 2003:8). It can be construed, according to Vyas-Doorgapersad (2017a), that as a primary observation, the concept of gender is linked to the physiognomy separating male and female, and is physically constructed. However, gender cannot simply be categorised according to sexes; a far broader understanding is required in terms of different physiological, emotional, and psychological behaviour, attitudes, abilities, tasks, and responsibilities that are associated with masculine and feminine selves. On the other hand, according to Walby (2014:2), *gender mainstreaming* is an innovative system of gendered policy and political practices and also a new gendered strategy for the development of theory. It involves the improvement of the effectiveness of principle policies, through making the gendered nature of assumption, process and outcomes visible. Gender-mainstreaming further involves the re-branding, re-structuring and re-inventing of the important aspects of feminism in the modern era. “Gender mainstreaming should be considered as an essential strategy to achieve gender equality and not only as a goal (Woelfle, 2014:8). *Gender equality* therefore demands that women

and men are provided with equal opportunities for participation and representation in the public sector.

There are various developmental approaches of feminist ideologies, such as Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD), and Women and Development (WAD). The WID approach, according to *Mainstreaming Gender Dimensions into Water Resources Development and Management in the Mediterranean Region* (GEWAMED, 2018:1), calls for greater attention to WID policy and practice, and emphasises the need to integrate them into the development process. The WID perspective evolved in the early 1970s is marked as an important corrective, which highlights the fact that women need to be integrated into development processes as active agents to ensure that efficient and effective development is to be achieved. The WID is associated with the “modernization paradigm” that dominates “mainstream thinking” (Rathgeber, 1989:4). This paved the way towards the WAD school of thought, which considered women as part of the developmental process. This realisation demanded scholars to debate on issues surrounding women’s exploitation, unequal rights, and suppression. Therefore, demanding implementation of developmental approaches to correct the situation. The GAD approach incorporates both men and women, stating that women are equally responsible to support families at social and economic levels.

The GAD approach “shifts the focus from women to gender and identifies the unequal power relations between women and men. Second, it re-examines all social, political and economic structures and development policies from the perspective of gender differentials. And lastly, it recognizes that achieving gender equality demands ‘transformative change’ in gender relations from household to global level” (Yassen, 2014: 2). The GAD approach, according to the National Gender Policy Framework (RSA: the Office on the Status of Women, Undated in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017b: 106) focuses on ‘strategic needs,’ the goal of which is gender equality”, hence it is considered as the theoretical framework to empower, incorporate, integrate, and mainstream gender in the sport sector. This empowerment, according to Lee (2001) cited in Surujlal and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2015:82), may increase the personal, interpersonal, and political power of oppressed populations which in this study was women, for individual and collective transformation.

### 3. GENDER IN SPORT

Gender equality in sports has always been a controversial topic. Even the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, said in 1896: “No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks” (Pavlovich, 2017:1). Female participation is lacking in management, governance, and leadership positions in the sports sector, due to the fact that the field of sports is considered “masculine” in approach and holds male-driven norms. In addition, the sports organisations have established “masculinity” as the primary principle in sport and has categorised the male activity as privileged and as suitable qualities which are required in sport. Furthermore, within the sports organisation, gender inequality has become an institutionalised practice (Senne, 2016:3).

In order to mainstream gender in sports, the first World Conference on Women and Sport was held in Brighton, United Kingdom, in May 1994. The conference paved the way towards establishing the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG). The aim of the establishment of the IWG was to increase the involvement of women in sport at all levels, including leadership. Thereafter various conferences were organised, which resulted in the adoption of the 1994 Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport which is now known as the Brighton Plus Helsinki Declaration on Women and Sport (Kotschwar & Moran, 2015). The reality is that within the sports organisations, hegemonic masculinity is regarded as an operating principle that limits the access of leadership positions of women in sport. The results of a study regarding the influence of hegemonic masculinity on the advancement rate of women and women in senior leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics within a developed country identified that the male populations continuously control the athletic director position and have the largest rates for organisational success, where women had less than 15% of the athletic director position (Senne, 2016:4). This situation may be dire in underdeveloped countries where patriarchal dominance can suppress women to be part of a male-dominated sports sector. It can therefore be considered that gender inequalities still exist in the sports sector where women are restricted from achieving strategic and decision-making responsibilities. According to Pfister and Hartman-Tews (2003) cited in Pfister (2004:22) the reason behind this segregation, both vertically and horizontally, is that the sports institutions and associations management and decisions are dominated by men. Pfister (2004:22) adds that

gender hierarchies within the sport associations mirror gender relations in different societies and show how power, status, and prestige are unevenly distributed between men and women.

In the South African context, the reasons behind the lack of female representation in sports governance could be that there is a lack of female role models within the decision making positions of the sport sectors, due to the reason that women does not have the self-confidence to deal with top level sport management issues. Therefore, the management styles of women executives in the South African sports sector resulted in the lack of competency top management skills, which can also be a contributory factor behind the cause of gender inequality in the sport governance (Goslin, 2006:5). In South Africa, culture, traditions, and tribal heritage are considered as obligatory norms to follow. Therefore, the majority of the women who aim for leadership positions in the sports sector are caught between the African and western values juxtaposition (Goslin, 2006:5), and hence cannot take appropriate decisions regarding their career in sports management and governance.

#### **4. THE CASE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SPORT AND RECREATION SOUTH AFRICA**

SRSA is the national government department responsible for sport in South Africa. Aligned with its vision of creating an active and winning sporting nation, its primary aims are to provide opportunities for all South Africans to participate in sport, manage the regulatory framework thereof, and provide funding for different sports codes (SRSA, 2015:1). The following section aims to discuss and explore the gender gaps and status of women in SRSA at strategic and policy levels.

##### **4.1 Strategic level**

The strategic level is guided by the political and bureaucratic offices responsible for policy formulation regarding sport in South Africa. This level is dominated by men holding decision-making powers. The authors compiled statistics of male and female personnel holding strategic portfolios in SRSA that offer a clear scenario, exploring that men are holding more decision-making authority, responsibilities, and accountability than women (refer to Tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1: Gender representation in SRSA: Ministry level**

| <b>Designation</b>                       | <b>Male</b>    | <b>Female</b>    |
|--|----------------|------------------|
| Minister                                 |                | 1 Female         |
| Deputy Minister of Sports and Recreation | 1 Male         |                  |
| Accounting Officer                       | 1 Male         |                  |
| Chief Operations Officer (COO)           |                | 1 Female         |
| Chief Financial Officer (CFO)            | 1 Male         |                  |
| Director: Strategic Support              | 1 Male         |                  |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>4 Males</b> | <b>2 Females</b> |

Source: compiled from SRSA (n.d.a)

SRSA is headed by the Minister (a female); the Deputy Minister of Sport and Recreation (a male), Director General (a male), and Chief Operations Officer (a female). Table 1 explores the fact that at political and strategic levels, the portfolios are held by a majority of men (four men).

**Table 2: Gender representation in SRSA: Directorate level**

| <b>Designation</b>   | <b>Male</b>  | <b>Female</b>   |
|--|--|---|
| Director General   | 1 Male   |   |
| Office of the COO  |  | 1 Female  |
| Ministerial Staff  | 3 Males (Parliamentary Liaison Officer, Media Liaison Officer, and Protocol Officer) | 3 Females (Special Adviser, Private Secretary, and Appointment Secretary) |
| Chief Directorate: Active Nation (Directorate: School Sport) | 2 Males (Director, and Deputy Director: Competitive Programmes [School Sport])       | 1 Female (Personal Assistant)   |

| <b>Designation</b>  | <b>Male</b>   | <b>Female</b>  |
|---|---|--|
| Chief Directorate: Active Nation (Directorate: Community Sports and Recreation)                                     | 1 Male (Senior Sport & Recreation Coordinator: Club Development)  | 5 Females (Director: Community Sport, Deputy Director: Community Sport and Recreation, Senior Sport & Recreation Coordinator: Community Sport, Senior Sport & Recreation Coordinator: Special Projects, and Secretary) |
| Deputy Minister's Staff   | 1 Male (Head of Deputy Minister's Office)   | 1 Female (Administration Secretary)  |
| Chief Directorate: Sports Support Service (Directorate: Sports Support Services)                                    |   | 2 Females (Deputy Director: Education and Training, and Manager: Conditional Grants)   |
| Chief Directorate: Sports Support Service (Directorate: International Liaison)                                      | 2 Males (Director: International Liaison, and Deputy Director: International Relations)                                   | 2 Females (Deputy Director: Major Event Support, and Secretary)  |
| Chief Directorate: Sports Support Service (Directorate: Infrastructure Support, Management & Delivery [Facilities]) |   | 2 Females (Director: Infrastructure Support, Management and Delivery [Facilities], and Secretary)  |
| Chief Directorate: Sports Support Service (Directorate: Science Support Services)                                   | 2 Males (Director: Scientific Support, and Assistant Director)  | 1 Female (Secretary)   |
| Chief Directorate: Corporate Services (Directorate: Human Resources [HR])   | 3 Males (Director: HR, Deputy Director: Organisational Performance, and Deputy Director: Special Programmes Practitioner) | 2 Females (Deputy Director: HR Administration, and Manager: HR Administration)   |
| Chief Directorate: Corporate Services (Directorate: Labour Relations)   | 1 Male (Manager: Labour Relations)  |  |



| <b>Designation</b>  | <b>Male</b>   | <b>Female</b>  |
|---|---|--|
| Chief Directorate:<br>Corporate Services<br>(Directorate: Legal<br>Services)                                  | 3 Males (Director: Legal<br>Services, Senior Legal<br>Services Advisor:<br>Legislation and Contracts,<br>and Advocate)                                    |  |
| Chief Directorate:<br>Corporate Services<br>(Directorate: Information<br>Technology [IT])                     | 4 Males (Director: IT,<br>Information: Security<br>Manager, Deputy Director:<br>Business Intelligence, and<br>Deputy Director: Service<br>Supply Manager) | 1 Female (Secretary)   |
| Chief Directorate:<br>Corporate Services<br>(Directorate: SRSA<br>Facilities & Security<br>Management)        | 1 Male (Deputy Director:<br>Logistics)  |  |
| Chief Directorate:<br>Strategic and Executive<br>Support (Directorate:<br>Strategic and Executive<br>Support) | 2 Males (Director: Strategic<br>& Executive Support, and<br>Director: Research &<br>Evaluation)   | 3 Females (Personal Assistant:<br>Strategic and Executive Support,<br>Admin. Assistant to the Director:<br>Strategic & Executive Support,<br>and Deputy Director: Strategic<br>Management) |
| Chief Directorate: Office<br>of the CFO   | 1 Male (CFO)  | 1 Female (Secretary to the CFO)  |
| Chief Directorate: Office<br>of the CFO (Directorate:<br>Supply Chain<br>Management)                          | 1 Male (Director)   | 2 Females (Manager:<br>Acquisitions, and Manager:<br>Supply Chain Administrator)   |
| Chief Directorate: Office<br>of the CFO (Directorate:<br>Finance)   | 2 Males (CFO, and Deputy<br>Director: Bookkeeping<br>Services)  | 2 Females (Director: Finance, and<br>Secretary)  |
| Chief Directorate<br>Marketing and<br>Communication (Chief<br>Director)                                       | 1 Male (Chief Director:<br>Marketing and<br>Communication)  |  |
| Chief Directorate<br>Marketing and<br>Communication<br>(Directorate Marketing)                                |   | 4 Females (Director and Deputy<br>Director: Marketing, Information<br>Officer, and Secretary)  |

| <b>Designation</b> | <b>Male</b>     | <b>Female</b>     |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>31 Males</b> | <b>33 Females</b> |

Source: compiled from SRSA (n.d.b)

Table 2 illustrates that even though there are more women at the directorate level than men (33 women over 31 men), the strategic portfolios are mostly held by men (four men over two women). Women mostly hold the positions of secretary, personal assistant, and administrative assistant. There are no men in secretarial positions, and all the managers are men. The rest are responsible for strategic and decision-making tasks. This is in contrast to the message delivered by the previous Minister of Sports and Recreation, Rev. Makhenkesi Stofile, who delivered his speech during Women's Month in South Africa (SRSA, 2010:1), asking delegates at the 2010 SASReCon sport science conference held in Durban to "use sport science to help address gender imbalances" in sport. This scenario resonates with gender inequalities in sports management, holistically, whereby the "male-dominated leadership has created a gender-segmented work structure that places the majority of female employees in low-paying jobs with minimum advancement potential" (Fink & Pastore, 1999, cited in Moore, Parkhouse & Konrad, 2010:1).

#### **4.2 Policy level**

At global level, South Africa was one of the first countries to adopt the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport to increase women's participation in sport. Thereafter the country also implemented a few initiatives to advance female involvement in the sports sector. These initiatives include the National Strategy for Women and Sport that focuses on the grassroots level and proposes advanced female participation in sport (The Conversation Africa, 2018). There is also a National Charter for Women and Sports South Africa (WASSA). The charter calls on the decision makers (government, non-governmental organisations, all sport organisations, and individuals) to commit to equality and set up policies, structures, and mechanisms to achieve the aim to develop a sport culture that values and allows women involvement in all the aspects of sports and recreation (WASSA, 2011, in Singh & Naidoo, 2017:1411).

However, there is still a long walk for women to be recognised in the sports sector and hold management positions to prove their capabilities. In addition, there is a

lack of gender-disaggregated data exploring the number of women participating in sport-related activities. Despite the statistics submitted by the sport bodies, the department of Sports has not set out a plan on how to ensure gender equality in the sports sector (Adom – Aboagye, 2017:1).

It should be noted that SRSA's *Annual Performance Plan 2018/19* states six strategic goals. Only in "Strategic Goal 2 (Sport and recreation sector adequately transformed)" are the youth, women, and people with disabilities prioritised (SRSA, 2018:20), with no detailed explanation in this regard.

The reasons for gender discrimination, inequalities, and lack of female representation in decision-making and strategic levels of the sports sector are two-fold. At personal/societal level, sport is considered as "a social construction. The cultural ideology influences the significance of the society and paradigms features of sport. Ideologies are defined as "ways in which people give meaning to gender equality and the position of women in sport" (Goslin & Kluka, 2014:97).

Regarding the leadership role in South Africa, according to Goslin and Kluka (2014:97), when approached through the lens of social constructivism, as well as cultural ideology, the influence of the patriarchal cultural system becomes evident and cultural beliefs that define gender positions in sport are accepted as normal practice. In the patriarchal system, traditional beliefs, cultural expectations, and attitudes regarding the position of women in society dominate and model social human interaction.

At professional level, in South Africa, despite the interventions of the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service (1997) which focused on recruitment as the main instrument to achieve offered opportunities and equity for all races particularly women, challenges still exist (Singh & Naidoo, 2017:1420), in the sport sector.

This situation confirms that the gender equality in the sports sector, especially at strategic and managerial level, is still a goal to achieve and gender mainstreaming gaps are visible in policies at all levels: nationally, regionally, and globally. This situation can be substantiated by the statement issued by the United Nations (2007:5), that even though policy and normative frameworks are in place, the implementation of these frameworks are constrained by gender related discrimination at all the levels and areas of sports and physical education.

## 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature review, the study identifies challenges restricting women from seeking career advancement in the sports sector. In order to improve the gender gaps in sports management, the study offers the following policy suggestions: gender quotas must be determined, and more women must be appointed to the boards of various sports associations. This is significant to advance gender diversity in sports management and governance due to the reason that without leadership that involves diversity, there cannot be a policy that includes diversity and support (Santiago Times, 2018). However, this aspect of gender quotas is not widely researched, hence more qualitative and quantitative research is required to establish the appropriate gender quota in sports management in a country-specific context.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) offers leadership development, advocacy, and awareness campaigns regarding more women in leadership roles within the administration. The aspect of gender equality is reaffirmed in the Olympic Agenda 2020 under Recommendation 11 (IOC, 2018:4). The implementation of this agenda ought to be annually monitored by SRSA at country level. The IOC has also strategised sports governance and leadership, suggesting action plans to manage the development of a unique senior executive-level roundtable which involves top female sports leaders around the globe. Furthermore, also introduce a co-mentoring programme for women that involves partnering potential governance candidates with senior-level board members. This initiative should include mentoring, networking and training related to succession planning (IOC, 2018:22). The timeframe to achieve these objectives is June 2019.

SRSA needs to adopt these strategies and implement them strategically to achieve the goals of advancing female leadership with adequate capacity-building interventions. In addition, SRSA needs to learn from best practices regarding “electoral processes with a view to developing strategies for gender-balanced representation in their governance bodies” (IOC, 2018:23) and incorporating gender diversity in sports management and governance. It will assist SRSA in identifying and addressing gender-based segregation and “marginalisation by women and men sharing responsibility for the implementation and sustainability of gender equality ... and ensuring women have roles of influence and decision-

making responsibilities in the organisation's administration and governance' (IOC, 2018:24).

SRSA needs to ensure reporting on gender diversity in leadership positions to Parliament and stakeholders, which should also encapsulate gendered data to enhance gender mainstreaming. Therefore, going forward, SRSA should collect gender-disaggregated data from service providers to enhance gender equality, with emphasis on improved female participation and representation in the South African sports sector. These recommendations are aligned with the WID approach used as a theoretical framework for this article. The aim of this approach is to empower, integrate, and mainstream WID processes in the sports sector.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored the challenges regarding gender inequalities in the sports sector. The case study of SRSA provided an opportunity to explore gender inequalities at strategic and policy levels, with reference to female representation in sport leadership. The study demands policymakers to incorporate gender in sport management to encourage women to advance their careers in the sports sector. Future studies will focus on gender equality in the sports sector in other African countries, aiming to develop a comparative database of information, to create knowledge in the fields of sports management, public management, and public policy.

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