

Women in Sport Governance

Venue: All England, Birmingham, UK

Date and time: Saturday 15 March 2025, 11:00-13:30 GMT

Session 1: The benefits of female representation in sport governance

For the first discussion, we split into mixed-gender tables to explore the key benefits of ensuring female representation in decision-making roles within sports governance. The discussions highlighted several crucial advantages, which can be grouped into the following key themes:

- **Diversity of decision-making:** Women bring diverse perspectives, leading to a more well-rounded approach to governance. A gender-balanced leadership team is more likely to consider different viewpoints, assess challenges holistically, and foster innovative solutions through deeper, more inclusive discussions.
- **Robust and representative decision-making (overall: better decision making):** Greater diversity of thought results in more balanced and well-informed decisions. A wider range of perspectives and leadership styles helps reduce bias, ensuring governance reflects the interests of the entire badminton community. When governance structures reflect the diversity of the badminton community—players, fans, and stakeholders—they result in more representative and effective decision-making.
- **A more inclusive and supportive governance culture:** A gender-balanced leadership fosters an open and inclusive environment where individuals feel encouraged to voice their opinions. A mix of leadership styles, including a more human-centered approach, enhances organisational culture.
- **Maximizing the Talent Pool & Future Opportunities:** Expanding leadership opportunities to women widens the talent pool, ensuring the best candidates, regardless of gender, have access to decision-making roles. Increased female representation fosters a more forward-thinking approach, driving innovation and progress in sports governance.
- **Increased Visibility and Role Modeling:** Women in leadership serve as visible role models, inspiring others—particularly young women—to step into governance roles, promoting the belief that leadership is an attainable goal. This ultimately creates a continuous pipeline of diverse talent.

During the first discussion, the tables also shared the landscape of women representation in their organisations. This was an informative topic. Overall, very few organisations have achieved gender equity.

Session 2: The barriers and how to bring them down

In the second session, participants split into women-only and men-only discussions to identify the key barriers preventing women from reaching leadership positions in sports governance, as well as the solutions to combat these challenges. This discussion revealed the complexities that prevent women from advancing in leadership roles, as well as practical steps to reduce these barriers. Below is a table that outlines the barriers, and the corresponding solutions, with an emphasis on actions that can be taken to create more inclusive and effective governance structures.

Barrier	Explanation	Solution	Impact	Resources required
RECOGNISING THE VALUE OF GENDER PARITY				
Difficulty in Making People Understand Why Gender Parity is Important	Many male-dominated organisations struggle to see why gender parity matters. As such, they do not see gender parity as a priority. In those environments there is often a misconception that recruitment is based on the "best person for the job" (see next barrier). This belief ignores systematic biases and lack of access to opportunities. Additionally, while some organizations support gender equity in principle, they do not take active steps to implement it.	Educate: Better communication of the benefits of diversity – use data-driven arguments, real-world success stories, and education on how diversity improves governance.	High – A shift in perception can drive long-term commitment to change.	Low: Requires strategic communication and awareness efforts.
		Conscious choice to ensure gender balance at all levels of governance through quotas or "soft quotas" (i.e., recommendations or targets) coupled with making gender representation data within organisations publicly available.	High – Ensures measurable progress and accountability in gender equity.	Medium – Requires policy changes and tracking mechanisms.
EXCLUSIONARY LEADERSHIP CULTURE AND DYNAMICS				
Workplace Culture (Male egos, Competitive, Not Inclusive)	Boardrooms can be unwelcoming for women, leading to exclusion and lack of voice in decision-making. In	Conscious change of culture in boardrooms – Promote respectful and inclusive	High – A more welcoming environment encourages female participation	Low: Requires leadership training and policy enforcement.

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	particular, women may not fit into the "fun dude" atmosphere that surrounds meetings.	discussions, discouraging "old boys' club" dynamics.		
"Dirty Politics" (informal power structures)	Some governance structures involve informal networks and power struggles that disadvantage women.	Lead by example (Top-down approach) – Set clear ethical standards and promote fair processes.	High – Creates a fairer and more professional governance structure.	Low – Primarily requires leadership commitment.
FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES				
Family Responsibilities, traditional gender roles and work-life balance constraints	Women are often primary caregivers, making it difficult to commit to leadership roles that require extensive travel and rigid schedules.	Flexible meeting schedules (hybrid/virtual options) – Allow remote participation to make governance more accessible	Medium: Reduces barriers for women with caregiving responsibilities.	Low: Requires minor adjustments to meeting policies.
		Family-friendly policies (childcare support, allowing carers to attend meetings, normalizing maternity/paternity leave)	High: Encourages more women to take leadership roles without family-related barriers.	Medium-High: Require financial investment and policy adjustments.
		Normalize maternity & paternity leave in governance roles – Establish policies that support both men and women in balancing family and leadership.	Medium-High: Removes stigma around balancing leadership and family life.	Medium: Requires policy changes.
"Work for free": lack of financial recognition for governance roles	It is often difficult for women to justify and prioritise unpaid governance roles due to their	Introduce remuneration for leadership roles – Ensure that governance positions	High: Increases the attractiveness of leadership roles for women.	High: Requires financial investment.

Barrier	Explanation	Solution	Impact	Resources required
	responsibilities as primary caregivers	are recognized as valuable and professional commitments.		
UNFAIR SELECTION PRACTICES				
Gender Bias in Leadership Selection (confusing confidence with competence)	Leadership roles often favor men due to unconscious biases that equate confidence with competence. Where women do break through, it is often because they are significantly overqualified.	1. Implement skills-based recruitment and blind appointment processes to ensure leadership selection is based on ability rather than confidence or traditional stereotypes. Raise awareness of biases in leadership selection. 2. Be conscious of wording in job descriptions – ensure gender neutrality.	High – Ensures a fairer and more effective selection process.	Medium-Low: Requires changes in recruitment processes and training.
Over-Scrutiny of Women	People frequently say it must be the "right" woman with the "right" skills—yet no one applies this standard to men, who can be average and still progress.			
Lack of Transparency and Opportunity of Career Pathways into Governance	Entry into governance roles has often been based on an informal network, favoring those with existing connections. Without such a network, women (and men) are often unaware of how to progress into governance roles due to unclear pathways. This creates a system where	Clear communication on leadership opportunities – Outline pathways to advance in sports governance.	High – Encourages more women to consider leadership roles.	Low – Requires better communication and outreach.
		Develop mentorship/shadow programs: Pair emerging female leaders with experienced mentors for guidance and skill development.	High – Helps bridge the knowledge gap.	Medium – Requires structured mentorship programs.

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	women, who have historically been underrepresented, (as well as men) struggle to access opportunities.			
If You See It, You Can Be It				
Lack of Female Networks and Support Systems	Women often lack access to the informal networks that facilitate leadership progression.	Create women's networks and leadership development groups – Provide a platform for women to support and learn from each other.	High – Builds confidence and increases leadership opportunities.	Medium – Requires organizational effort to establish.
Lack of Women in Leadership to Serve as Role Models	Without visible female leaders, it is difficult for aspiring women to envision themselves in governance roles.	Increase visibility of women in leadership – Feature female leaders in governance communications, panels, and events.	High – Encourages more women to pursue leadership.	Low – Primarily requires media and communication strategies.
		Targeted mentorship programs for future female leaders – Create structured mentoring programs to develop talent.	High – Directly supports women in preparing for leadership roles.	Medium – Requires funding and organisation.
OVERCOMING SELF-DOUBT				
Lack of Confidence in Pursuing Leadership Roles & Imposter Syndrome	Women often hesitate to put themselves forward for leadership roles due to self-doubt, even when they are well-qualified.	Leadership training and mentorship programs: targeted development programs to build confidence and skills.	High – Directly increases the number of women stepping into leadership.	Medium – Requires structured training programs and coaching.