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**A STRATEGY TO INCREASE WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN SPORTS
LEADERSHIP IN LESOTHO**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANOCA- Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa

AUSC – African Union Sports Council

IOC – International Olympic Committee

LNOC – Lesotho National Olympic Committee

LSRC – Lesotho Sports and Recreation Commission

NF – National Federation

NOC – National Olympic Committee

ABSTRACT

Despite the work that has been done by the various sport organizations towards gender equality, women remain significantly underrepresented in key leadership positions in sports. This project focuses on developing strategies to increase the representation of women in leadership roles within the sports fraternity in Lesotho. The aim is to identify barriers hindering women's advancement to leadership roles within the national federations and develop an action plan to address those barriers. Through different data collection techniques, including Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and Qualitative Questionnaires, information and opinions will be gathered from current women leaders and those aspiring to be in leadership positions; as well as the other NOCs in the region. The findings will be used to formulate targeted initiatives, such as mentorship programs, capacity-building platforms, and recommendations for the development of policies to ensure increased numbers of women in leadership. This project seeks to improve the performance of the sporting organizations through diversified decision-making, to drive cultural change within the sports industry, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and dynamic future for all.

RÉSUMÉ

Malgré les efforts déployés par diverses organisations sportives en faveur de l'égalité des sexes, les femmes restent considérablement sous-représentées dans les postes de direction clés dans le domaine du sport. Ce projet se concentre sur le développement de stratégies visant à accroître la représentation des femmes dans les rôles de leadership au sein du secteur sportif au Lesotho. L'objectif est d'identifier les obstacles qui freinent l'avancement des femmes vers des postes de direction au sein des fédérations nationales et de développer un plan d'action pour surmonter ces obstacles. Diverses méthodes de collecte de données, y compris des entretiens, des groupes de réflexion et des questionnaires qualitatifs, permettront de recueillir des informations et des opinions. Les données proviendront des femmes leaders actuelles, de celles qui aspirent à des postes de direction, ainsi que des autres Comités Nationaux Olympiques (CNO) de la région. Les résultats serviront à formuler des initiatives ciblées, telles que des programmes de mentorat, des plateformes de renforcement des capacités et des recommandations pour le développement de politiques visant à augmenter le nombre de femmes dans des postes clés de direction. Ce projet vise à améliorer la performance des organisations sportives grâce à des prises de décision diversifiées, à promouvoir un changement culturel au sein de l'industrie du sport, et à contribuer à un avenir plus équitable et dynamique pour tous.

CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction:

Gender equality in sports is an important topic to address. There is not just inequality in participation and opportunity but also concerning involvement in leadership. Historically, leadership in sporting activities and organizations has always been filled by men more than women. In recent years, however, the fraternity of sports has worked towards aligning itself with the rest of the world by realizing the need for inclusive and diverse leadership within this domain. While women's participation in sports as athletes has significantly increased over the years, the same cannot be said for their involvement in leadership roles. Despite the potential that women bring to the table, they remain underrepresented in positions of influence and decision-making within the sports fraternity. This ranges from the coaching and technical support level all the way up to the representation of women in executive boards. (Adom-Aboagye and Burnett, 2023).

According to SUE (2020), women continue to be largely marginalized from the decision-making and leadership sphere of sport, including at the grassroots level. Structural barriers through discriminatory norms, values, and institutional practices in how sport is done still limit women's options and opportunities. This research project is not just about promoting gender equality; it's about recognizing that women's involvement in sports leadership is essential for the holistic growth and development of the sports industry. While addressing this topic, this project will first the contributing factors as to why women are few in leadership positions. The research will then examine the compelling reasons why their increased participation in sports leadership is crucial, and finally explore the ways that can help women to be able to ascend to leadership positions within the sports sector.

This research project will address some of the strategies, policies, and initiatives that the Lesotho National Olympic Committee (LNOC) can implement to foster an environment where women are empowered and given the confidence and necessary competencies to assume leadership roles within the LNOC Executive Committee and those of the National Federations (NFs). Addressing these issues will contribute to a more inclusive and equitable sports landscape in Lesotho; where women's voices are heard, their talents are recognized, and their leadership is valued.

1.1 Background of the Study

Many studies have been done internationally; within the continent of Africa; and closer within the Southern African region; about why women are underrepresented in sports leadership. The studies undertaken within the last decade still show the gender disparities in sports leadership.

A few examples of such studies include Honorata, J; et al (2019: 59 – 69) Poland: Underrepresentation and misrecognition of women in sport leadership. The study presented and discussed women's status in Polish sports federations. Data revealed that only 12% of these organisations' board members are women and their status has not changed significantly from the 1990s. However, it was revealed that women play a more important role in winter sports and so-called feminine sports.

Another example of such studies is by Adom-Aboagye and Burnette (2023) The Underrepresentation of Women in Sports Leadership in South Africa. The study indicated a lack of representation of women in sports leadership, despite global movements and policies that have found some traction. There is a persistent, unremitting challenge globally, and especially in South Africa. This study aimed to explore the intersections of gender and sports ideology and its impact on gender (in)equity in the South African context. The results of the study showed minimal traction in changing patriarchally informed cultural beliefs towards women with men as gatekeepers and masculinity framed for leadership attributes in most sports.

Different Scholars and Researchers have analyzed the concept of gender equality or women's underrepresentation in sports leadership and have come up with different ways to look into the matter. According to SUE (2020), the barriers to this can be categorized as follows: a) Structural barriers: discriminatory norms, values, and institutional practices b) Cultural practices: attitudes and gender stereotypes c) Capacity gaps: education, networks/contacts, resources.

Based on the above, this research project will review some of the policies and institutional practices that can improve the representation of women in decision-making positions in sports; and assess some cultural practices that hinder progress. However, the main focus will be on the third category which is the capacity gaps. The research will therefore aim to come up with strategies that can close the gap and result in more women assuming leadership positions in sports. This will include capacity building, networks, and resources.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Olympic Charter states that one of the roles of the IOC is “to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures, with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women” (Chapter 1, Rule 2, paragraph 8). The IOC's commitment extends beyond balancing women's participation in the Olympic Games. The IOC also recognizes that gender equality is a critical component of effective sports administration, and continues to support the promotion of women and girls in sport at all levels and in all structures off the field of play. However, limited progress has been made in appointing women to key decision-making positions within the IOC's administration and its governing bodies. Olympic Agenda 2020+5, the new strategic roadmap for the Olympic Movement, reaffirmed the commitment to and priority of gender equality. Many Olympic Movement stakeholders

(such as the NOCs) have also implemented significant gender equality initiatives, so that girls and women around the world are being given greater access to and the chance to participate (Women in the Olympic Movement / 18 April 2024 / © International Olympic Committee)

While the above-mentioned progress is commendable, a study was undertaken by Burnette (2023), titled *Issues of Gender in Sports Leadership: reflections from Sub-Saharan Africa*. The findings of the study indicated that the fact that approximately a third of executive board members across organizations were women (31%) by 2020 is pivotal for country-level competitive sports systems, despite the increase of 10% since 2014 (up from 21% to 31% in 2020), but it is still relatively low for NOCs and NFs).

According to the Global Gender Gap Index, an index to benchmark 149 countries on their progress towards gender parity, Lesotho ranks 81st, and there is scope for improvement when it comes to economic participation (88th) and political empowerment (86th). Promoting women's leadership in sports and economic opportunities for women and female-driven enterprises are therefore important considerations of this Policy. (Lesotho National Policy on Sports and Recreation, 2020).

During the review of its long-term strategic plan in November 2022, the Lesotho National Olympic Committee (LNOC) came up with a new Key Performance Area of Gender Equality. It specifies that the LNOC and its member NFs will have at least 30% gender representation in their executive boards. While there is this new recommendation, that the LNOC has put for its members, the LNOC has not specified how this aspiration will be realized, in terms of closing the existing gap; and how the 30% representation will be reached.

The LNOC has almost 40% women representation (out of 13 members, 5 are women) in its Executive Board. However, some of its NFs such as the Lesotho Primary Schools Sports Association (LEPSSA) still reported zero women in their executive board after they held elections in 2022, even though it's a multi-sport NF.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research study is to develop strategies that can increase the involvement of women in leadership positions in sports in Lesotho.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives are:

- I. To provide recommendations for capacity building for women in sports in Lesotho, as to prepare them for leadership;
- II. To develop an action plan that will increase the number of NFs that have at least 30% women representation in their Executive Boards.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

2. Introduction

In order to come up with an action plan to build women's capacity and contribute to increasing their interest in assuming leadership roles; it is crucial to first understand the obstacles that prohibit women from assuming leadership roles. Furthermore, it will be important to understand the existing policies or legal documents that aim to increase the number of women in sports leadership. As such, the review of existing literature will be categorized into 3: i) the capacity gaps limiting women from assuming leadership roles in their respective sports; ii) the existing policies and practices around gender equality in sports; as well as iii) the importance of having women in leadership roles.

The existing Literature reviewed for this research project is broad. However; as Adom-Aboagye and Burnette (2023) argue, identified issues presented in "global" women in sport leadership studies are not always transferable, nor relatable to marginalized women from developing contexts such as Africa. There have been scant studies that have identified similar, (albeit at times differing) issues impinging on women in sport leadership from an African perspective from the formal sport sector. However, experiences of patriarchy differ between various societies and often within the same society, as race, culture, religion, and socio-economic status intersect in a myriad of ways. Based on the above argument, much of the focus of the literature was around studies made in Africa although considerations were still made for global research.

2.1 Capacity gap limiting women to assume leadership roles in sports.

According to Burnett (2023), patriarchal ideology has been identified as a main stumbling block in the advancement of women's leadership in strategic documents and action plans. There is a persistent belief that men are more suited to lead because they display valued leadership characteristics representative of masculine traits and often have access to resourceful networks. Many women hold similar views of this male superiority, substantiated by observations that women 'do not take up opportunities', in some cases demonstrating a 'pull-you-down syndrome' (voting for male leaders), and they viewed it as natural that men should lead.

As Adom-Aboagye and Burnett (2023:3) also indicate, various scholars have identified barriers (discrimination, harassment, stereotypes, access, and treatment) to and causes of the global underrepresentation of women in sport leadership positions, relating them to gender biases in recruitment and/or election processes and gendered beliefs of required skillset for success. Subtle, discriminatory practices have also been identified as impeding women's progression within an organization.

2.1.1 Societal Stereotypes

As Vyas-Doorgapersad and Surujlal (2018) put it, 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.

2.1.2 Discrimination and Bias

An Article by Darvin (et al, 2018) indicated that discrimination on the basis of sex within educational activities hosted by federally funded institutions and which subsequently aided in creating additional opportunities for girls and women in interscholastic and intercollegiate sports was visible.

Burton (2015:157) has also argued that the gendering of sports organizations operates as an axis of power whereby men and masculinity are afforded power over and above women, and through the use of this power, women are marginalized from leadership roles or positions that wield such power.

2.1.3 Work-Life Balance

The demanding nature of leadership roles in sports, which often involve extensive travel and irregular hours, can be a deterrent for women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities. Achieving a work-life balance therefore remains a significant challenge. Research by Sotiriadou (et al, 2019) indicated that there was a strong sentiment that it is harder for women with young families to balance their careers and time. However, besides flexible meeting times and convenient locations that suit directors regardless of gender, which in the context of voluntary sports organizations may represent a significant shift, there was no evidence of any measures to lift such burdens or offer an enabling culture.

2.1.4 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is “the set of shared, taken-for-granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about, and reacts to its various environments”. Organizational culture also impacts women’s experiences in sports organizations, as “cultures of similarity that marginalize women are institutionalized within sports organizations”. The institution of sport is a hegemonic masculine system that operates to reinforce masculine dominance. As such, the organizational culture of a majority of sports organizations supports and perpetuates norms, values, and behaviors that reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Though there is empirical support for an “organizational culture that values

diversity and capitalizes on the benefits such differences can bring to the workplace'', there are few sports organizations that embody these characteristics (Burton, 2015:156).

2.1.5 Lack of training opportunities and mentorship support for women

According to Adom-Aboagye and Burnett (2023:3); a lack of role modeling, mentorship, and support (and even respect) has been identified as the norm for African women in leadership positions. The inability to connect and engage with prominent women in sports can also be viewed as discouraging towards women who aspire to sports leadership roles in Africa.

Adom-Aboanyie and Burnett (2023:8) further argue that the lack of women in key decision-making positions and structures has had a snowball effect on how resources are allocated to women and girls in sports. However, it should not be about the gender of the decision-maker, but about their gendermindedness, as men have a significant influence when it comes to ensuring gender-equitable resource allocation and shared leadership. The increased inclusion of women in sports leadership positions is required if actions are to be implemented that truly achieve the intended outcomes of gendered policies including clear guidelines and appropriate rationalizations.

Women are also impacted by treatment discrimination in sports as they are denied access to rewards, resources, or opportunities on the job that they legitimately deserve. (Burton, 2015:161).

2.2 Institutional practices and policies on women's involvement in leadership

According to SUE (2020), leadership and decision-making are the biggest challenges facing sport in its progress towards gender equality. Many policy documents (listed below) report gender equality as a value but progress in practice rarely aligns with what is written in text. If sports organizations want to achieve gender equality, they need the leadership to get there, and they need the governance and decision-making processes that will truly support that journey.

2.2.1 IOC Olympic Agenda

In terms of the structural barriers, the IOC has come up with different commissions such as the gender equality commission that ensure that women have a say in leadership. The IOC has also put in place the policies that the Olympic Charter has made provisions for quotas of women vs men in executive boards. For instance, In December 2016, the IOC Executive Board adopted the Olympic Agenda 2020 which included not only a goal of female athletes comprising 50% of athletes competing in the Olympic Games but also of supporting the leadership of governance structures Sotiriadou (2019). In March 2018, the IOC's Gender Equality Project Working Group declared eight gender equality recommendations that related to governance and organizational culture/communication, including gender equality and diversity in

leadership (IOC 2018). However, despite several initiatives designed to establish more gender-balanced leadership structures in sports, women remain underrepresented in all facets of leadership in sports governance

To support the implementation of the Olympic Agenda 2020+5, the IOC adopted 21 Gender Equality and Inclusion Objectives for 2021-2024 in May 2021. The objectives build on the progress achieved as part of the Olympic Agenda 2020 and the IOC Gender Equality Review Project and set out a roadmap for future progress across five focus areas (Participation, Leadership, Safe Sport, Portrayal, and Resource Allocation) and the IOC's three areas of responsibility: The IOC as an organization, The IOC as the owner of the Olympic Games and the IOC as the leader of the Olympic Movement. (Women in the Olympic Movement / 18 April 2024 / © International Olympic Committee)

2.2.2 The World Bank Gender Strategy

Apart from the IOC, the proposed 2024–2030 World Bank Gender Strategy puts forward an ambition to accelerate gender equality for a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future in alignment with the World Bank Evolution Roadmap. The strategy emphasizes six outcomes across three strategic objectives. Specifically; Outcome 6 aims to “Advance women’s participation, decision-making and leadership” (World Bank, 2024).

2.2.3 ANOCA Zone VI Gender Equality Plan

The plan is structured around five focus areas (Participation, Leadership, Safe Sport, Portrayal, and Resource Allocation) and ensures aligned focus and a coherent strategic guide aimed at leading the zone to transform and transit into a gender-equal and inclusive zone.

Amongst the above 5 focus areas, this research focuses on Area 3, which is Governance and Leadership. Under these focus areas, the Goal is to transform Zone-VI into a gender-balanced and inclusive ANOCA zone at the governing/decision-making body and administrative level. (ANOCA Zone VI, 2021-2024)

The Objectives are to:

- Increase the pipeline of female candidates for governance roles in general as well as for executive board positions across the zone.
- Encourage and call on Zonal sports bodies and NOCs to transition to gender-balanced representation in their decision-making bodies (the target is set at a minimum of 30 percent women’s representation).
- Encourage members to take responsibility for the sustainability of gender equality within their organizations.
- Ensure that the Zone and its member NOCs align with ANOCA gender equality governance standards and practice.
- Display leadership by supporting the UN Women Sport for Generations Equality.

2.2.4 The Lesotho National Olympic Committee Strategic Plan 2017 – 20204

In November 2022, the LNOC invited its different stakeholders to review the eight-year strategic plan which would end in 2024. During this review, three new Key Focus Areas were included in the strategic plan. This was in an effort to align the Strategic Plan with the Olympic Charter, the ANOCA Strategic Plan; and the Lesotho Sports and Recreation Policy. A Key Focus Area around Gender Equality was developed as follows:

| Key Performance Area | Mission Criticality | Key Performance Indicators | Goal |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| Gender Equality | Sport is one of the most powerful platforms for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. LNOC as the leader of the Olympic Movement in Lesotho needs to take ongoing action to advance gender equality. To support the IOC Gender Equality mission, LNOC would need to adopt and ensure the realization of the Gender Equality and Inclusion objectives. | There are a number of KPIs depending on each objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increase in Female participants in games and officiating.▪ Number of Female athletes supported with career transition.▪ Safeguarding Toolkit Implemented.▪ Increase in Portrayal of Women's sport.▪ Increase in women's candidatures for leadership roles.▪ Number of Women developed for leadership roles.▪ Increase in Women on governing boards/committees.▪ Increase in gender equality funding. | Lead a gender-balanced Olympic Organisation and Movement. |

The above-mentioned institutional practices and/or strategies have contributed to an increased number of women in leadership positions in sports overall. The LNOC already aligns itself with all of them. However, the NOC needs to take further action to ensure that the NFs get to the desired gender balance as they currently do not.

2.3 The Importance of having women in leadership roles

It is critical to ask a question, what value do women bring to the leadership positions that makes it an important subject matter?

Evidence from the private sector shows that interventions that enhance gender equality and women's economic contribution can boost company competitiveness, fortify supply chains, improve human capital, and help build an enabling business environment. Companies with gender-balanced teams have generated higher returns on equity than those without. Increasingly, companies realize that they can expand market coverage, enhance productivity, and improve profits by engaging women as business leaders, employees, entrepreneurs, customers, and community stakeholders. In the banking sector, loan portfolios for women-owned small and medium enterprises (WSMEs) have consistently lower shares of nonperforming loans (World Bank, 2024)

According to Brahma et al, (2020), results suggest that firm performance is positively related to gender diversity after controlling for firm characteristics and other factors that have been identified to affect firm performance. Regarding the levels of female board representation, Braham documented an unequivocal positive and significant relationship between gender diversity and firm performance when three or more female directors are appointed to the board compared to lower levels of female board representation. The results are invariant to alternative measures of financial performance and across different estimation approaches. Further analysis shows that post-appointment firm performance is positively significant with female age, higher level of education, and where female board members also hold executive positions.

Women's leadership and participation in decision-making can contribute to a more sustainable and resilient future. Women create and adopt climate change solutions on farms, in businesses, and at home, and they engage in preserving natural assets. Women's leadership is associated with improved sustainability, resource management, and climate resilience. Women's participation in decision-making strengthens communities' resilience to natural disasters. Engaging women in the preparation of contingency and emergency plans not only saves lives but can also have a transformative effect on community gender dynamics. Gender diversity in private sector positions is linked to greener outcomes. For example, banks with more gender-diverse boards provide more credit to greener companies and lend less to firms with high pollution intensity. Thirty percent or more of women on corporate boards have a positive correlation with climate governance and innovation in utilities, oil and gas, and mining sectors. (World Bank, 2024).

A growing body of evidence suggests that the gender composition of leadership is particularly important in establishing the norms that shape an organization's broader gendered character. For example, the increased presence of women in political office can contribute to policies that favor "women's interests". Corporate workplaces with women in decision-making positions tend to be more gender-integrated with a narrower gender wage gap. Leaders are able to shape organizational norms and practices through a variety of tactics, meaning "small wins" can be

made over time when there is a commitment from women leaders to promote change. Sports scholars have similarly demonstrated that gender imbalance in key roles matters to the institution's broader logic, with women's underrepresentation in leadership, coaching, media, and other high-status roles further affirming sport as a male-dominated sphere. (Pape, 2020:85).

2.4 Summary

In order to come up with a strategy to build women's capacity and contribute to increasing their interest in assuming leadership roles; it was important to first understand the obstacles that restrict women from assuming leadership roles. As such, the literature reviewed was that which specific to the context of Africa, so that it is relevant to this research project. Further to that, the literature reviewed was on the existing policies or legal documents that aim to increase the number of women in sports leadership. Lastly, there was a review of the literature that addresses the question of why it is important to have women in leadership roles.

All of the literature that was reviewed for this research project indicates a similar pattern – that there has been some work done toward ensuring gender equality in sports, but there is still a long way to get to the level of equality

CHAPTER 3

3. DATA COLLECTION

3.1 Introduction

Qualitative research is variously referred to as an approach or set of approaches, as a practice, or as a paradigm. It is described as an interpretative approach to data collection and analysis that is concerned with the meanings people attach to their experiences of the social world and how people make sense of that world. Qualitative research comprises both qualitative methods of data collection and qualitative methods of analysis; it gathers words and/or visual, descriptive forms of data and explicates these using text-based, interpretative analytical methods. (Mays, N, and Pope, M. 2019).

As indicated, the purpose of this research project is to come up with strategies to increase the number of women who take up leadership positions in sports in Lesotho. To achieve that, the researcher needed to understand why there is a challenge with women getting into leadership positions by collecting data from different sources.

Different methods/techniques of collecting data were therefore used as each method has its advantages and disadvantages. The use of different methods to complement each other was believed to strengthen the quality and richness of the data collected. Each method was used to respond to a specific need or answer specific questions; and from a different group of respondents.

In terms of sampling, Radermaker, and Polush, (2022:56) explain that “Within quantitative research, we use either probability or non-probability sampling. Probability sampling requires that we randomly choose a representative sampling from the population that will sufficiently power our chosen test. This is because probability sampling means that everyone in the population has an equal chance of being selected. Types of probability sampling include simple random sampling and stratified sampling. Non- probability sampling means that you choose your sample out of convenience of who is available, which is most likely what many practitioners and evaluators will need to do due to the program and context at hand”. For this research non-probability sampling technique was used to select the participants. All the respondents had to have certain specific characteristics that would suit the requirements and respond to the required data.

3.2 Data Collection Methodology

The aim was to gather relevant information to understand and address the challenges faced by women in attaining leadership positions within the sports industry. The data collected helped

in formulating effective strategies and initiatives to increase women's representation in sports leadership roles.

Different sets of data were collected in the form of Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and Qualitative Questionnaires.

According to Nyunge, et al (2018), Interviews involve a one-to-one, qualitative, and in-depth discussion where the researcher adopts the role of an “investigator.” This implies the researcher asks questions, controls the dynamics of the discussion, or engages in dialogue with a specific individual at a time. In contrast, in a focus group discussion, researchers adopt the role of a “facilitator” or a “moderator.” In this setting, the researcher facilitates or moderates a group discussion between participants and not between the researcher and the participants. Unlike interviews, the researcher thereby takes a peripheral, rather than a center-stage role in a focus group discussion.

3.2.1 Qualitative Questionnaires

The National Olympic Committees that have successfully increased women's representation in leadership roles to 30% or more, were contacted to investigate their existing policies, initiatives, and leadership development programs that contributed to their success. This also helped extract lessons learned and best practices that can be applied to the Lesotho National Federations.

In terms of sampling, 6 NOCs that fit this criterion were contacted. A focus was on the NOCs that have other similar characteristics to the Lesotho NOC so that the lessons learned can be likely applicable. For this reason, the NOCs that were selected were all from Southern Africa.

Their Secretary Generals were contacted via email to send them the questionnaires; which were semi-structured. They were then given some time and requested to send the responses within a specified time frame.

3.2.2 Focus Group Discussions

As defined by Tritter and Landstad, (2019:58), Focus groups bring 6–12 people together for a discussion on a specific set of topics. Sessions usually last 60–90 minutes and generate qualitative data that are usually audio-recorded, although video cameras are also used in some studies. Focus groups are a type of group interview but one in which the primary aim is to promote interaction between the group members rather than have each participant answer every question. The researcher, therefore, plays the role of ‘facilitator’ or ‘moderator’ rather than ‘interviewer’. The interaction between participants is based on comments and challenges to prior statements within the group, generating deeper and more nuanced understandings, although this rarely leads to consensus.

Furthermore, as Busetto, et al (2020) indicate; Focus Groups are group interviews to explore participants' expertise and experiences, including explorations of how and why people behave in certain ways.

For this research, 2 focus group discussions were initially planned. However, in the end, one was done, while the other turned into one-on-one interviews instead.

The FGDs aimed to gather information by talking to successful women leaders to find out how they made it. The aim was to explore their personal experiences, challenges faced, and successful strategies employed to navigate their careers. Lessons learned from their journey were helpful in the formulation of strategies to assist others.

3.2.3 One-on-one Interviews

In Lesotho some NFs have had women nominated to stand for executive board elections, but refused nomination; as well as those who simply would not volunteer to stand for election. The interviews were therefore to gather information by talking to such women to find out they aren't standing for the election or why they refused the nomination.

To identify these women the National Federations were emailed to provide these lists. Currently, there is an independent electoral body created by the Lesotho NOC and the Lesotho Sports and Recreation Commission, which oversees NF elections. This commission has some of the election documentation such as nominee lists, and election results. However, some of the NFs do not request this commission to facilitate their elections. As such, it was important to write directly to the NFs to request them to go back to their nominee lists for the elections they held this quadrennial and find out

Originally the plan was to arrange an FGD where 6 to 8 of these women would be together in a discussion to find out why they aren't standing for the election or why did refused the nomination. The preference for FGDs was based on its advantage of gathering data from different respondents at once as well as the opportunity for respondents to cross-check or validate each other's views. There was a challenge, however, in getting these women together. Some of them seemed uncomfortable and preferred a one-on-one interview instead. In the end, therefore, the data was collected through five interviews.

As Eros 2014 (page 275) put it, Confidentiality requires particular consideration in the focus group interview context. As several persons are present during the data collection session, and they will all ostensibly hear what each other says, confidentiality will be more difficult to maintain. As such, to this end, for these women who preferred anonymity, focus group discussions were therefore proved not to be the best tool to collect the data. The data collection tool of Interviews was then considered as the best option for this group. In the book about using interviews for qualitative research data collection, Brickman (2023:15) in referencing other researchers unpacks the term interview as follows: "An interview is literally an inter-

view, an interchange of views between two persons, conversing about a subject of mutual interest (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Conversation in its Latin root means “dwelling with someone” or “wandering together with,” and the root sense of dia- logue is that of talk (logos) that goes back and forth (dia-) between persons”.

The time allotted to each interview was one and a half hours, however, the researcher allowed the participant to guide the length of the conversation. Each participant was asked four demographic questions and seven descriptive, open-ended questions. The researcher took notes during the interview (observing pauses, sighs, and other body language) and the interview results were recorded by typing them.

For this research, the Interview Guide was developed in 4 parts to address the following:

1. Biographical questions to understand the composition of the group.
2. Questions to address capacity gaps (*Societal Stereotypes, Discrimination, and bias, Work-life Balance*)
3. Questions to address policies or practices around gender leadership in sports.
4. Questions to address the importance of having women in sports leadership.

The main limitation of this part of data collection was the response rate, which was lower than anticipated. Additionally, some participants showed a reluctance to share their experiences and perceptions.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

As Billup (2022) put it, Ethical considerations in research involve the individuals’ right to understand the boundaries of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, privacy, or confidential treatment of their data, and the obligations of the researcher to safeguard their rights and interests. These considerations are not only safeguarded by the researcher but they are also reviewed and enforced by institutional committees or boards who oversee the application of protections and fair treatment of all research participants at a research site.

As such, during the above-mentioned data collection process; the researcher ensured adherence to ethical standards as prescribed, protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Furthermore, informed consent was ensured and where necessary, measures to guarantee the anonymity of respondents will be employed.

The respondents were informed of their freedom to withdraw from the research at any point if they so wished. Two respondents actually called back after their interview and requested to withdraw some of their responses. This unfortunately affected the research as their responses had been critical to provide insights as to why sometimes women are reluctant to stand for elections.

3.4 Data Collection Challenges

The NOC SGs filling out the questionnaires and the Focus Group Discussions formed with women who served on boards were easy groups to work with. They were even eager to share their experiences. The main challenge was the lack of time, especially to gather the Focus Group Discussions because of the conflicting schedules of respondents.

The main challenge faced during this data collection was the accessibility of the Secretary Generals. Being an Olympic year, usually have a lot of work to do as they work with different departments/offices in preparing teams to participate in the games. Furthermore, the ANOCA Zone VI held about three different seminars during the data collection period. The Secretary Generals were part of the delegations attending such seminars.

The group with the women who didn't want to serve on boards despite their nominations was the difficult group to work with. Some of them required complete anonymity when responding to the interview questions.

As Bullip (2022) guides, prolonged engagement in the field is one way that researchers ensure the dominance of participant perspectives; the longer you spend with someone, the more their opinions, their views, and their assertions become established as a "truth" and the less weight your own views rank in your understanding. In other words, the key is to develop a process and instrumentation that allows you, as the researcher, to obtain rich descriptive participant narratives to the extent that those narratives offset your own assumptions about what you think they mean or what you think you already know. It is in this regard that the researcher had planned to spend as much time with the respondents as possible. However, due to people's commitments, it wasn't always easy to gather such time. Some interviews were done over the telephone instead of in person.

CHAPTER 4

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The strategy for analyzing the data in this research project was Content Analysis.

As Zou, P.X,X and Xu, X (2023:33) indicate; Qualitative content analysis aims to systematically describe the meaning of qualitative data. It helps to reduce the volume of material and requires the researcher to focus on selected aspects of meaning, i.e. those that are relevant to the overall research question. The use of the content analysis method usually involves five steps:1) Produce a transcript of the interview.2) Reduce the transcript of the interview to coding categories that should be mutually exclusive.3) Assign codes to the transcript of the interview.4) Check that the codes measure what the research intended to measure and check the consistency of the codes.5) Identify patterns of and detailed information about codes.

4.2 Analysis of data collected through Qualitative Questionnaires

6 NOCs that have at least 30% women's representation in leadership roles were contacted to understand their existing policies, initiatives, and leadership development programs that contributed to their success. They were sent semi-structured questionnaires with 10 questions to respond to. This was done to also help extract lessons learned and best practices that can be applied to the Lesotho National Federations and the Lesotho NOC Executive Board. Out of these, 5 responded.

Open coding is the process of exhaustively combing through text to fragment it into codes. Sometimes researchers use a guiding question to steer their open coding, such as, “How do participants characterize being homeless?” As a result, the researcher would generate codes that comprehensively describe the experience of homelessness as characterized by the participants, not necessarily by past studies. (The Discussion section might compare the experiences of the set of participants with those in past studies.) The researcher would then compare each example, or “incident,” of that code. Hence, the coding is “comparative.” In the process of comparison, the researcher is looking for the similarities of the codes across incidents within and across interviews. (Katz-Buonincontro, J; 2022:122)

The above method was used to group the data so that it could be analyzed. To do the analysis, the results were filtered by creating different sub-groups; and then obtaining multiple response frequencies of each sub-group. About two sub-groups were identified. Firstly, the formation of the executive boards and requirements for gender representation thereof; and secondly, the

challenges that NOCs faced, and strategies they used to respond to ensure gender representation.

Within these sub-groups, the themes coming out of the data were identified in order to draw conclusions. On the first sub-group of formation of the board, the themes were (i) the process through which the boards are formed; (ii) where the 30% women representation emanates from.

On the second sub-group of the challenges faced and strategies used to ensure 30% women representation; the themes were (i) types of strategies employed; (ii) engagement of male leaders to encourage more women in boards; (iii) the types of resources or practices put in place to ensure women involvement.

Regarding the formation of the NOCs' executive boards, all the respondents indicated that their executive boards are elected into office every 4 years.

The NOCs were also asked if it is a requirement for their NOC to have 30% representation. (i.e. is it in the strategic plan for example?). They all responded Yes, it is a requirement, it is in the NOC Constitution. One of the NOCs reported that they are at 50% women representation. On the other theme where they were asked to provide an overview of their NOC's journey towards achieving 30% representation of women in leadership positions; they responded that they adopted the recommendation of the IOC and included this requirement as a clause in their Constitutions. One said they have kept up to date with other organizations that try to promote a balanced framework. Looking at statistics has been vital in ensuring that they too make the right choices in this regard of having higher female representation. One of them said during the last Olympic cycle they organized women's leadership sessions to assist build capacity in the women within the federations to aspire for more decision-making positions.

When it comes to the challenges that the NOCs faced along the way in an effort to reach the 30%, and how they overcame them: One NOC said when they concluded the election of the Board in the last Elective Congress, they discovered that they fall short of the 30%, hence the General Assembly then co-opted an extra woman into the Board. Another key challenge that was mentioned several times by the respondents was the lack of interest by women to take up these decision-making positions, either due to apathy or not enough mature women rising up the ranks. Their efforts to counter this were therefore to constitutionalize the 30% quota and to support capacity-building programs.

They were asked to share any specific strategies or initiatives that have been particularly effective in increasing the representation of women in leadership roles within their NOCs. Key strategies highlighted include targeted training programs, mentorship opportunities, and active recruitment of qualified female candidates for leadership positions. Two of the NOCs recently hosted Gender Equality Forums where they created awareness and advocated for gender equality. One even mentioned that their Board scans around its records to see positions that have been consistently held by men like CDM, CEO etc, and makes deliberate decisions to change the situation and place/recruit women into those positions.

They were asked what ways their NOCs actively address unconscious bias and promote equal opportunities for career advancement. Responses included educating women about the importance of participating in ongoing projects and the value of their contributions. This was mentioned to be achieved through workshops, seminars, and continuous professional development programs ensuring gender balance during delegate registration. Other ways included presenting employment and other opportunities equally; whereby the NOC ensures a balanced gender representation at the board and staff level and establishment of Gender Equality Commissions. One respondent said that they are in the process of implementing a Constitution Review exercise for all National Sports Federations where the 30% threshold will be introduced, and all Federations mandated to include it in their own constitutions.

About the specific resources, tools, or best practices that the NOCs have found helpful in promoting gender diversity and inclusion in leadership. They mentioned that they utilize seminars and forums and even social media platforms as primary tools for promoting gender diversity and inclusion. These platforms allow for the widespread dissemination of information and engagement with a broad audience young and old alike. Also, use the constitutional concept by encouraging federations to include this within their strategic plans.

A question on how NOCs measure the impact of having a more diverse leadership team on business performance and organizational culture. The respondents said observed organizational results in terms of revenue generated, programs implemented, and generally positive feedback from our stakeholders. The organizational culture has also improved, where female staff members have gained confidence and displayed exceptional leadership qualities.

Finally, the NOC representatives were asked what advice they give to Lesotho NOC as it is looking to increase the representation of women in its structures. Some of the advice was to identify institutions running gender activities in the country and either partner with them or participate in their activities even if they are not sports-specific. Another was to host a Gender Equality Forum in which awareness will be raised for women to understand the contribution they can make to the sports industry by participating in the leadership and decision-making platforms. Furthermore, the LNOC was advised to adhere to the IOC recommendation of the minimum 30% representation by ensuring that this is not only put in the LNOC Constitution but in the Federations' too.

The conclusion drawn from the questionnaires:

The NOCs have been intentional about reaching 30% gender representation. They have put different strategies in place and set deliberate guidelines to create gender inclusiveness in the strategic plans and constitutions.

4.3 Analysis of data collected through Focus Group Discussions

The purpose of the FGD was to gather information by talking to 7 successful women leaders to find out how they became members of boards. The aim was to explore their personal experiences, challenges faced, and successful strategies employed to navigate their careers. Lessons learned from their journey will be helpful in the formulation of strategies to assist others.

The participants discussed their experiences, expressed opinions and feelings, and elaborated on the challenges that they encountered as they navigated through their journey in the sports industry. They were asked to provide general information including their current role within the sporting fraternity, and the length of their participation in sports from when they were athletes till their current involvement in the executive boards as well as the positions that they have held. Following the demographic questions, the researcher had prepared nine open-ended, semi-structured questions to guide the discussion. These were to draw out deeper and richer responses. Their responses allowed for themes to emerge and evolve.

To analyze this data, first, a table was drawn, with the response from each group member (where members responded). Then the data was analyzed by the number of times each response/view came up and similar responses were grouped and summarized. As Onwuegbuzie, Slate, Leech, & Collins (2009) put it, the inclusion of frequency data helps the researcher to disaggregate focus group data, which is consistent with the qualitative researcher's notion of treating each focus group member as a unique and important study participant.

General Questions to understand the composition of the participating group

1. What is your current role(s) within the sporting fraternity?

All participants were President or Secretary General of the National Federation. 5 of the 7 were also from the LNOC board. Out of those, one was an IOC Member and served in ANOCA Zone VI and ANOCA Executive Boards.

2. How long have you been in sports? (including your time as an athlete)

All the participants indicated to have started sports as athletes. The number of years they have been in sports are indicated below:

| LENGTH OF INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT | NUMBER OF PEOPLE |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| 50+ years | 1 |
| 40 – 49 years | 1 |
| 30 – 39 years | 3 |
| 20 – 29 years | 2 |
| 10 – 19 years | |
| Below 10 years | |

3. Which positions do/did you hold on the executive board? And for how long were you serving on boards in sports?

There was a wide range from serving in a role for 3 years to serving for 20 years. Each of the participants has held several roles over the years and had been a President, Secretary General, or Treasurer of a National Federation at some point.

Narrative Data presented from the specific questions about the participants’ leadership experiences

The data was analyzed using the dominant themes that emerged from the participants’ narratives:

Motivation and role-models

The participants were asked what motivated them to serve in leadership roles and were asked if they had any role models and what qualities those role models possessed. All participants indicated they were motivated by their passion for sports and wanting to make a difference. Others also mentioned apart from their own passion, they had seen the need for diversity in gender and wanted to be part of the transformation. In terms of role models, one participant indicated they didn’t have a particular role model. All the others mentioned they had role models who possessed good leadership qualities. Words used to describe the role models included Visionary, Integrity, Innovative, Passion, and Resilience.

Barriers to women’s involvement

Culture: The main barrier that participants mentioned is the culture of sports. It was said that Basotho believes that Sports is only for entertainment or recreation and that it needs male

physic. The opportunities to participate in sports are more given to boy child than girl child. In schools, for example, the football pitch will be the biggest but the other sports such as Netball will be smaller.

Gender stereotype: It was said that there is a belief among Africans that women are supposed to perform certain roles, leading and taking part in sports is believed as men's tasks. Men are leaders while women are followers. Also, the myths that women may have difficulty bearing kids if they participate in sport

Sexual Harassment: the involvement of women is Less because most of the time they experience harassment that lead to their dropping out from Sports.

Lack of competence: women have lost self-esteem when it comes to the issue of leading. They are not competent enough to hold high positions in leadership.

Inequality in compensation and opportunities: women continue to encounter considerable inequities in resource allocation and assistance, which can impede their advancement and effectiveness in leadership roles. Furthermore, disparities in opportunity and compensation continue. Women in sports leadership positions typically face disparities in opportunity and income when compared to their male colleagues. These difficulties underline the continued need for structural reform in the sports business.

Support to women leaders

The general view was that the NFs should be intentional in their efforts to develop women and empower women with the necessary leadership skills and also in the field of play. Secondly, mother bodies should implement gender-specific budgets to ensure that all their affiliates institute affirmative action that provides experiential learning. They should also seek partnerships with seasoned women leaders in the country and establish mentoring programs.

Education is a key resource needed to shift the mindset of women who fear assuming leadership positions. Intentional support by our male counterparts is also paramount to see women being recruited and mentored in the journey of leadership.

Women interested in assuming leadership roles within sports organizations should be given leadership workshops to be equipped with all the necessary skills to help them pursue leadership roles competently.

To the question about whether or not the participants support the ideology of reserving specific seats for women in executive boards, there were mixed feelings. Some felt it was not a sustainable approach. It gives a bad precedence as people just feel comfortable, with the reserved seat and don't fight for growth. Respondents indicated that what's important is to have clear policies to sustain this. They said even the person in the position doesn't feel important.

Others, however, said that they support the idea of specific seat reservations for women with clear required skills that will enable them to portray their competencies. They further said that this can be included in the policies developed for emerging women leaders in sports.

Importance of having women in leadership

The participants indicated that women will bring a different perspective that is also inclusive as opposed to just having men in the decision-making roles. Women are representative of half of the population, and this brings change in society as a whole. Women are natural caretakers, and this can make them the best-suited candidates to see sports nurtured to prosperity.

Conclusions drawn from the FGDs

Out of the FGDs conclusions drawn were that women have the potential to make a good impact on the improvement of the NOCs. They are just as capable as men (individually) because leadership traits aren't necessarily gender-based.

Women should be equipped with the necessary tools to promote themselves to leadership positions traditionally held by men. An additional advantage would be the inclusion of female individuals who bring diverse skill sets, enabling the team to achieve optimal outcomes by leveraging their combined expertise on various projects.

4.4 Analysis of data collected through Interviews with women who do not want to stand for; or rejected nomination to compete for elections into executive boards.

As it was already mentioned, the participants did not necessarily freely offer to share their stories. In fact, in some cases, it took some negotiating and convincing from the researcher to get the participants to be comfortable to participate in the study. That said, some of the participants did want to talk, and the researcher encouraged them to elaborate on their initial responses. The interview contained four parts; each with specific research questions, some with sub-questions.

To analyze the data collected through these interviews; firstly, codes were assigned to describe the content. The next step was to search for patterns or themes in the codes across the different interviews. After that, the themes were also be reviewed and defined to come up with conclusions.

PART A - General question

1. What is your current role within the sporting fraternity?

In terms of the roles, they currently hold, only one of the respondents indicated to be currently serving on the executive board of the National Federation; the others are at the club level and other levels of the NFs which don't necessarily hold the senior or decision-making role.

2. How long have you been in sports? (either as an athlete, entourage, or administrator)

| LENGTH OF INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT | NUMBER OF PEOPLE |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Over 50 years | |
| 40 – 49 years | |
| 30 – 39 years | 1 |
| 20 – 29 years | 2 |
| 10 – 19 years | 2 |
| Below 10 years | |

PART B - Questions to address capacity gaps (Societal Stereotypes, Discrimination and bias, Work-life Balance)

When asked how they perceive the culture surrounding leadership in sports. All participants said they feel it is not inclusive enough for women. They indicated they have realized that in almost all National Federations, leadership positions are occupied by a great majority of men, and in some instances, no females at all.

The participants were asked to identify any specific challenges or barriers that have discouraged them from seeking leadership positions in sports. They were further asked if they had ever experienced or witnessed instances of discrimination or unequal treatment within sports environments that have influenced their views on leadership roles. Their responses included a lack of support for women in leadership by other women. They said during elections, even when a woman toughens up and becomes brave enough to campaign, a male figure will be elected albeit, by other women. Safeguarding was also cited as a concern.

When asked if there are any personal or societal expectations that the participants feel influence their decision-making regarding leadership roles in sports. The work-life balance came up in most of the responses; where the participants indicated this is especially because sports are about volunteerism. One said she refused to get involved in leadership because she works far from the capital city of Maseru. And the requirements to have to travel back and forth for executive meetings.

A question that sparked some noticeable emotion from the participants was their perceptions of leadership roles within the realm of sports and how they think they differ from leadership roles in other areas of life. Participants said in sports it is not about individual capacity but groups of people who campaign together; and they referred to these as “camps”. They said these camps’ strength is in the group that will lead the executive committee together and not necessarily on whether or not as individuals they possess the required capabilities.

PART C - Questions to address policies or practices around gender leadership in sports.

The participants were asked what kind of support or resources they thought would be beneficial for women interested in assuming leadership roles within sports organizations or teams. Responses included Mentorship programs to help build their confidence; Advocacy and education are a key resources needed to shift the mindset of women who fear assuming leadership positions; Intentional support by their male counterparts is also paramount to see women being recruited and mentored in the journey of leadership.

The interview question about whether the participants think that there must be specific seats reserved for women within the executive boards was one also received mixed responses by this group. Some responded that this concept makes women feel like they are ‘charity cases and handed a role on a silver platter without working hard for it’. Others felt this was a good way to motivate women to step up to the role.

PART D - Questions to address the importance of having women in sports leadership

The participants were asked what they think are the potential benefits of having more women in leadership positions within sports; as well as how they think it could impact the sports community as a whole. Their responses were that mixed genders result in stronger leading teams. They also said that if more women are in power they can put forth policies that protect young girls who are athletes and who face discrimination or harassment by older male coaches.

The conclusion drawn from the Interviews

The conclusion drawn from the one-on-one interviews is that a safe and inviting environment is critical for both genders to play a role in the development of sports. Generally, females do not feel confident enough that they can make a difference. That said, some women feel it is not necessarily about their own capacity but the “playing field is not leveled” when it comes to campaigning and holding positions on the boards.

CHAPTER 5

5. SUMMARY

Different studies have been undertaken over the years regarding the involvement of women in leadership. Burton (2015) did a research study to indicate that a multi-level perspective can help to better understand the underrepresentation of women in sports leadership, as “sports organizations are multilevel entities that both shape and are shaped by myriad factors” From a macro-level perspective, examining the institutionalized practices of gender in sport. The meso-level review includes stereotyping of leaders, issues of discrimination, and gendered organizational cultures. Finally, the micro-level which explores women’s expectations in leadership positions, occupational turnover intentions, and the influence of symbolic interactionism on women’s career advancement.

Progress has also been made over time. According to Brahma et al (2020) at the country level, governments have responded to women's under-representation on corporate boards by reforming board composition to increase female representation in the boardrooms. To increase female representation at the board level, other countries including Germany, Norway, Spain, France, Iceland, Italy, Belgium, Finland, and Kenya have introduced a legislative quota requiring firms to appoint between 30 and 40% of women to corporate boards. Research evidence indicates that the gender quota has led to a large number of inexperienced women being appointed to the boards, thereby damaging the firm financial performance

Based on the above, it is evident that simply setting quotas without proper training or growth opportunities will not yield the required results. From the data collected in this research study, there were mixed feelings about whether quota alone would be enough.

Based on the objectives of this research, the following strategies are recommended, from training and mentorship to having both male and female members on the commissions and different decision-making bodies; thereby creating a gender-balanced environment that fosters mutual education and support for gender diversity. Male leaders’ active involvement in gender diversity initiatives also serves as advocates for the advancement of women in sports. Given that the LNOC has already given itself a mandate to ensure 30% gender representation, a clear policy can be developed for the NFs in this regard, and also be enforced.

CHAPTER 6

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations to the LNOC leadership made in consideration of the literature reviewed and the data collected and analysed in this research project:

1. The LNOC started to implement the Emerging Women Leaders Program in 2024. This is a capacity-building program in which each NF was requested to nominate one young woman to join a year-long leadership training facilitated by an external consultant every weekend. At the end of this training, each young woman will be “attached” to their NF’s Executive Board to practice the leadership skills that she learned. **The recommendation in this regard is to have regular monitoring of this program to ensure that indeed the NFs have adopted these women and are giving them space to practice.** This is one of the programs that respond to the challenge of not having enough competent and confident women to stand for election into executive boards.
2. A Mentorship Program. - Other than the currently ongoing EWLP, the NOC should **implement a structured mentorship program** in which women who have more experience will be paired with younger less experienced women to be their mentors and provide them with advice and support, as well as set goals for them to achieve, in their journey to building capacity and confidence to join leadership positions. A mentorship toolkit should be developed to guide the program and ensure that all mentors and mentees follow the same guidelines
3. Under the Gender Equality Commission, **host the Annual Gender Equality Forums** which will help the LNOC to advocate for women’s involvement and to enlighten sportsmen and women about the importance of having women in leadership. These forums will also address the social and cultural stereotypes that currently restrict women from holding leadership roles in sports.
4. The LNOC should **develop a Gender Equality Policy** to align with its objective of having the 30% quota which is in its strategic plan, the LNOC should also ensure that the NFs do the same; as this will be one way to realize the strategic objective. To ensure In enforcing this policy, annually the NOC must send out a form to the NFs to fill out the numbers on their executive boards, indicating what steps they will be taking to increase the number of women where the numbers are below the quota. If the NF indicates the need for support or capacity building for their female candidates, the NOC can provide such support.
5. The LNOC should **introduce and implement a targeted program financing model** where the NFs that have reached the quota receive more financial support for their annual programs. This will motivate NFs to ensure that they have the required balanced genders in their executive committees.

ACTION PLAN

| Priority | Recommendation | Action | Lead | Resources | Time-scales | Critical success factors |
|----------|--|---|--|-------------------------------|------------------|--|
| 1 | Increase the pool of female candidates through the current Emerging Women Leaders Program (EWLP) | Monitoring of the Program by the Secretary General, through quarterly reports submitted by the young women who are beneficiaries of the EWLP and the NFs in which they are attached. | Sec Gen | Time, | January 2025 | Commitment of the National Federations Executive Boards to provide the candidates of the program with support to learn from them |
| 2 | Implement a Mentorship Program | Other than the currently ongoing EWLP, the NOC should implement a mentorship program in which women who have more experience will be paired with younger less experienced women to be their mentors and provide them with advice and support, as well as set goals for them to achieve, in their journey to building capacity and confidence to join leadership positions | Director of Gender Equality Commission | Time, Finance for the program | Ongoing | Compartibility in mentor-mentee eg those that share similar interests or come from similar sporting codes |
| 3 | Host Annual Gender | Organise the Forums every | Director of Gender | Time, | First one before | Support and commitment |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|--|--|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| | Equality Forums | year, as they will contribute to on improving the women's leadership skills, and creating partnerships and networking opportunities for women | Equality Commission | Travel & Meeting Expenses | December 2025 | from influential sports leaders (both male and female) including representation from government level |
| 4 | Develop a Gender Equality Policy and monitor its enforcement by ensuring that NFs put 30% quota in their own strategic plans | First a clear Gender Equality Policy must be developed. Then, it's enforcement must be ensured by cascading to the NFs to also include the 30% in their strategic plans | LNOC President/ SG | Gender Equality Policy | Before end March 2025 | Inclusivity of all relevant stakeholders to develop the policy and implementation strategy: the LNOC, LSRC, NF Presidents SGs |
| 5 | Implement Targeted program financing or NF support | In order to motivate the NFs to have more women in their boards, the NOC can categorize the NFs so that those who have larger % of women in their boards get more funding the NOC annual financial allocations | Secretary General | NFs executive boards database | January 2025 | Clear detailed Annual plans from NFs |

CHAPTER 7

7. LIMITATIONS

This research focussed on developing an Action Plan to increase the number of women at the leadership level. The data has indicated that the challenge emerges from the athletic level where girls partake in sports in fewer numbers than boys. There is therefore need for further study, which will aim to develop strategies to increase the number of female athletes.

Actions that were recommended for this study can likely be applied at the level of young female athletes; where they also lack the motivation and confidence to join the sports as well as applied to the NFs in order to push them to ensure increased numbers of female athletes join their sportig codes. However, a thorough study will be needed to confirm that the assumption is valid.

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9. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR THE NOCS THAT HAVE +30% REPRESENTATION IN THEIR EXECUTIVE BOARDS

NAME AND TITLE/ROLE OF THE PERSON BEING INTERVIEWED

DATE OF THE INTERVIEW: _____

1. How are your NOC and NFs executive boards formed?

- i. Election
- ii. Co-option
- iii. Combination of both
- iv. Other

Please elaborate _____

2. Is it a requirement for your NOC to have 30% representation? (i.e. is it in the strategic plan for example?)
3. Can you provide an overview of your NOC's journey towards achieving 30% representation of women in leadership positions?
4. What challenges did your NOC face along the way, and how did you overcome them?
5. Can you share any specific strategies or initiatives that have been particularly effective in increasing the representation of women in leadership roles within your NOC?
6. In what ways does your NOC actively address unconscious bias and promote equal opportunities for career advancement?
7. How do you engage male leaders within your NCO or NFs in promoting gender diversity and supporting the advancement of women leaders?
8. Are there any specific resources, tools, or best practices that your NOC has found particularly helpful in promoting gender diversity and inclusion in leadership?
9. How does your NOC measure the impact of having a more diverse leadership team on business performance and organizational culture?

10. What advice would you give to Lesotho NOC as it is looking to increase the representation of women in its structures?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE WOMEN WHO DO NOT WANT TO BE IN EXECUTIVE BOARDS

PART A - General question

1. What is your current role within the sporting fraternity?
2. How long have you been in sports? (either as an athlete, entourage, or administrator)

PART B - Questions to address capacity gaps (Societal Stereotypes, Discrimination and bias, Work-life Balance)

3. How do you perceive the culture surrounding leadership in sports? Do you think it's inclusive or exclusive, particularly for women?
4. Can you identify any specific challenges or barriers that have discouraged you from seeking leadership positions in sports?
5. Are there any personal or societal expectations that you feel influence your decision-making regarding leadership roles in sports? If so, can you elaborate on them?
6. Have you ever experienced or witnessed instances of discrimination or unequal treatment within sports environments that have influenced your views on leadership roles?
7. What are your perceptions of leadership roles within the realm of sports? How do you think they differ from leadership roles in other areas of life?

PART C - Questions to address policies or practices around gender leadership in sports.

8. What kind of support or resources do you think would be beneficial for women interested in assuming leadership roles within sports organizations or teams?
9. How do you think sports organizations could better support and encourage women to pursue leadership positions?
10. Do you think that there must be specific seats reserved for women? Why/why not?

PART D - Questions to address the importance of having women in sports leadership

11. What do you think are the potential benefits of having more women in leadership positions within sports? How do you think it could impact the sports community as a whole

APPENDIX C

GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION - THE WOMEN WHO HAVE SERVED IN BOARDS

General Questions to understand the composition of the participating group

1. What are your current role(s) within the sporting fraternity?
2. How long have you been in sports? (including your time as an athlete)
3. Which positions do/did you hold on the executive board? And for how long were you serving on boards in sports?

Specific questions about their leadership experiences

4. What motivated you to serve on executive boards?
5. Are there any role models or individuals who have inspired you to reconsider or pursue leadership roles in sports? If so, what qualities do they possess that you find inspiring?
6. How do you perceive the culture surrounding leadership in sports? Do you think it's inclusive or exclusive, particularly for women?
7. In your opinion, what are the barriers preventing women from assuming leadership roles in sports?
8. What advice would you give to women who may be hesitant about pursuing leadership roles in sports?
9. What kind of support or resources do you think would be beneficial for women interested in assuming leadership roles within sports organizations or teams?
10. How do you think our sports organizations could better support and encourage women to pursue leadership positions? eg
 - a. Education/training/building confidence of women?

- b. Policies/regulations/enforcement?
- c. Programs (eg mentorship programs?)

11. Do you think that there must be specific seats reserved for women? Why/why not?
12. What do you think are the potential benefits of having more women in leadership positions within sports? How do you think it could have a positive impact on the sports community as a whole?