

Participation of girls and women in community sport in Ghana: Barriers and Dilemmas

Authors: Derrick Charway & Åse Strandbu

Affiliated institution: Norwegian School of Sport Sciences/ Norges idrettshøgskole

Abstract

According to the United Nations, gender equality is a right and a key component of the Agenda 2030 for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (The Research and Data section of UN Women, 2014). As with many countries, Ghana's commitment to achieving gender equality has been described in the 2022 UN sustainable development report (Sachs, 2022: 214) as 'moderately improving' based on the ratio of females-to-males participating in social activities when combined with three other indicators like leadership, education, and family planning. The commitment toward gender equality in community sport in Ghana has not gone unnoticed as it is acknowledged in the Sports Act 934 of 2016. Furthermore, the Ministry of Youth and Sport's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) policy outcomes for 2016-2021 highlights the promotion, empowerment, and enhancement of girls and women's participation in community sport. Sadly, these policy outcomes fail to address gender stereotypes and discrimination against women rooted in organisational and cultural practices at the district levels. As an example, there is little to no information or reports concerning girls and women's participation in the activities or programmes of Ghana's district sport units (DSUs).

Sport is a gendered space, specifically, a space where gender is organised, reinforced, and maintained. Typically, these spaces are embedded at the macro (policy or institutional) meso (organisational) and micro (individual) levels. When not thoroughly scrutinized, gendered constructions frequently occur and are often invincible. Claringbould and Knoppers (2012) noted, "the invisibility or seemingly common-sense nature of these gendered constructions often masks how they are sustained and challenged by practices at all levels of an organisation" (p. 405). Gender forms a core part of an organisation and so can influence organisational practices in a way that images, cultures, interactions, and gender-appropriate behaviours are linked to socially constructed masculine or feminine ideals in the administration of the organisation.

Notwithstanding the 'moderately improving' female-to-male participation rate in Ghana, researchers have noted that low female participation in community sport is a result of several factors, including misconceptions about their education, health and social roles (Ofei-Aboagye, 2004; Nkrumah and Domfeh, 2015). Yusif (2021) found that socio-cultural, economic, political, and religious barriers affected female participation in the programmes of community-based organisations in Ghana. Although there is a dearth of research on female participation in sport in Ghana, the aforementioned descriptive studies provide us with a window to critically examine how officials of sport organisations perceive girls and women's participation in community sport as well as how (un)available institutionalised policies encourage organisational stereotypes or discrimination.

The purpose of this article is to find out what factors account for the lower participation of girls and women in Ghanaian community sport. Additionally, we compared gender differences and perceptions in response to the lower participation rate. The research data was collected through focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and data analysis. Semi-structured interviews were collected from both male and female officials of state-funded regional and district sport organisations in Ghana. Additional data were gathered from officials of the Women's Sports Association of Ghana (WOSPAG) through semi-structured interviews. We also audited the gender policies that govern the implementation practices of the aforementioned organisations. The literature review examined the constraints and dilemmas of girls and women's participation in community sport from a socio-ecological perspective.

References:

- Claringbould I and Knoppers A (2012) Paradoxical practices of gender in sport-related organisations. *Journal of Sport Management* 26(5), 404–416.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.26.5.404>
- Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2016). *Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for 2016-2018*. Accra: Ministry of Finance.
- Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2017). *Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for 2017-2019*. Accra: Ministry of Finance.
- Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2018). *Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for 2018-2021*. Accra: Ministry of Finance.
- Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2019). *Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for 2019-2022*. Accra: Ministry of Finance.
- Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2020). *Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for 2020-2023*. Accra: Ministry of Finance.
- Ministry of Youth and Sports. (2021). *Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for 2021-2024*. Accra: Ministry of Finance.
- Nkrumah, A. A. & Domfeh, C. (2015). Factors Influencing Female Teacher Trainees' Non-Participation in Physical Activity and Sports in Colleges of Education in Ashanti Region of Ghana. *Ghana Journal of Education: Issues and Practices (GJE)*, 1(2015), 106–141.
<https://doi.org/10.47963/gje.v1i.468>
- Ofei-Aboagye, E. (2004). Promoting gender sensitivity in local governance in Ghana, *Development in Practice*, 14(6), 753-760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452042000283987>
- Sachs, J. D., Lafortune, g., Kroll, C., Fuller, G., and Woelm, F. (2022). *Sustainable Development Report 2022: From crisis to sustainable development: the SDGs as Roadmap to 2030 and Beyond*. Cambridge University Printing.
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2022/2022-sustainable-development-report.pdf>
- The Research and Data section of UN Women (2014). *World survey on the role of women in development: 2014 gender equality and sustainable development*. United Nations publication. <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/>
- Yussif, A. H. (2021). Barriers to Female Participation in Community-Based Organisations in the Kumbungu District of the Northern Region of Ghana. *Diverse Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, Vol. 3, Issue 7, Pages 19-32.