



Good Sport Governance in Selected Ethiopian Olympic Sports Federations: A mixed-methods Study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article type:

Original article

Article history:

Received: 16 March, 2023

Received in revised form: 17
May, 2023

Accepted: 20 May, 2023

Published online: 16
February, 2024

Keywords:

Governing bodies

Sport federations

Sport governance

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of good sport governance implementation in selected Ethiopian Olympic sports federations. To this end, the convergent mixed method design was employed. Participants of the study included 265 subjects for quantitative data and 18 participants for qualitative interviews. The data were quantitatively analyzed by Descriptives (frequency and means & standard deviations) & One-way ANOVA, and qualitatively by thematic analysis using MAXQDA 20.4.0 version software. The integrated finding reveals that the surveyed Olympic sports federations scored below the moderate level (expected average) in good sport governance with a severely weak level of implementing transparency and public communication and solidarity. The findings also suggest a significant difference in good sport governance implementation among the surveyed sports federations. On this basis, this study has implications for sport managers as it, theoretically, was a significant endeavor in empirically testing the implementation of good sport governance in national sport governing bodies, and has practical implications for policy issues as it explores the actual strengths and deficits of good sport governance that calls for 'walking the talk' of transparency and solidarity.

Introduction

Many sports organizations have historically been positioned as voluntary associations situated within the nonprofit sector (Hoye, Smith, Westerbeek, & Nicholson, 2006; Hoye, Smith, Nicholson, & Stewart, 2009, 2015) and tend to act in self-organizing, hierarchical networks characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, self-ruling, and significant autonomy from the state (Chappelet

How to Cite: Garmamo, M., Haddera, T., Tola, Z., & Jaleta, M. (2024). Good Sport Governance in Selected Ethiopian Olympic Sports Federations: A mixed-methods Study. *Journal of New Studies in Sport Management*, 5(1), 987-1004. doi: 10.22103/jnssm.2023.21248.1176



& Kübler Mabbott, 2008; Siekmann & Soek, 2010, as cited in Lucassen & Bakker, 2016). However, hybridity seems to be a feature that has become more common in many sports federations (Brandsen, van de Donk, & Putters, 2005; Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013; Lucassen & Bakker, 2016; Lucassen & Heijden, 2013).

It is due to this hybrid nature that the sports federations behave like corporations and tend to fall under "the scope of prescriptive approaches of democratic governance and corporate governance" (Chappelet, 2013, as cited in Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013). Despite this unique requirement of good governance by the sports sectors, they have lagged in inculcating it (Pielke Jr., 2016).

However, in the past few decades, the issue of good sport governance has moved toward the top of the agenda for non-governmental organizations and sports organizations (Geeraert, 2022). This is due to factors such as (1) the commercialization and professionalization of sports events and competitions (Geeraert, 2016; Hoye et al., 2015; O'Boyle, 2012); (2) a wide range of governance catastrophes being experienced by sports governing organizations under the authority of the Olympic movement, which has brought the autonomy of sport to a crossroads recently (Chappelet, 2008; O'Boyle, 2012; Pielke et al., 2019).

Hence, its significance has been agreed upon by scholars and organizations, except that it is conceptualized differently but for the same functions. For instance, from the perspective of scholars, Ferkins, Shilbury, and McDonald (2009) conceptualized sport governance as the responsibility for the functioning and overall direction of the governing bodies, that it is an indispensable and long-standing component of all sports codes of the organizations around the world. In the same vein, Hoye and Cuskelly (2007) defined sport governance as the structure and process the sport governing bodies use to develop their strategic goals and direction, monitor performance, and ensure the board's activities are in the best interests of their members. In the near recent, Blanco (2016) defined sports governance as "an act of orchestrating, maneuvering, facilitating, and mobilizing the pool of talents, resources, approaches, and processes in a much broader, fuller, and wider continuum of sports actors, agents, and stakeholders across various sectors of society".

From the perspective of sports organizations, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) is the one with mandatory governance principles and has defined sport governance as the system by which organization is directed and managed (ASC, 2015).

In spite of all the scholarly arguments and the global advocacy on the critical importance of good sport governance, Geeraert (2018) posits that "there is a gap between discourse and practice and between expectations and reality". In this regard, previous studies on good sport governance practice are few in number and are all focused on specific issues, i.e., governing board dynamics (Dowling, Leopkey & Smith, 2018), such as board size, roles, and involvement (Ferkins, Shilbury & McDonald, 2009; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012, 2015; Ferkins, Shilbury & O'Boyle, 2018; Yeh & Taylor, 2008), board structure (Ingram & Boyle, 2017), gender quotas and gender equality (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Sisjord, Fasting & Sand, 2017).

In addition, despite some previous studies (Čingienė, Laskienė & Raipa, 2015; Pielke et al., 2019; Rustiadi et al., 2018) are found to look comprehensive in including the multiple dimensions of good sport governance, they are still very few in number and are mostly quantitative, and almost all investigated the differences in the extent of implementation of sports governance across international and national sports federations that quantified the level of good sport governance, so that they tended to provide a partial view as they fail to incorporate the in-depth perceptions of stakeholders.

Moreover, when we see sport and sport governance in Ethiopia, it has been given a key place starting from the reign of the emperor (Wolde & Gaudin, 2007; Bromber, 2013; Chappell & Seifu, 2000) through the Marxist (Derg) regime (Chappell & Seifu, 2000) and the era of EPRDF (FDRE, 1995) to these days, despite their differences in political ideologies.

Currently, it is in line with the federated system that Ethiopian sport has been governed centrally by the jurisdiction of a ministerial office called the Ministry of Culture and Sport (MSC) and an Ethiopian Sports Commission established in accordance with Council of Ministers Regulation No. 446/2019. Besides, the Ethiopian Olympic Committee and national sports federations are the governing bodies at the central level. The Ethiopian Sports Commission and national federations also have replicas at the provincial or regional levels.

Yet, despite sports' instrumental role in societal development regardless of the nature of government (Getahun, 2009) and the presence of respective national and regional governing bodies of each Olympic sport (Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Culture (MYSC), 1998), nowadays there is a disparity between rhetoric and the current status of good sport governance in Ethiopia. In this vein, MYSC (1998) underlined that the growth (inclusive of good governance) of modern sport in Ethiopia is still at a lower level because of organizational and attitudinal factors. Besides, the sport seems to face a lack of genuineness as youth projects are deprived of any coaching staff, sports facilities, and adequate support for athletes (Wolde & Gaudin, 2017), and athletics clubs are facing governance challenges (undetermined organizational structure and club strategy, environment, resource, decision-making, and line of communication) (Gebremeskel et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the newly reframed national reform document has boldly underscored the public's questions on the representativeness of general councils and the electoral processes of executive bodies being dominated by government, politicians, and ethnic influences (ESC, 2020).

Despite all the aforesaid empirical gaps in global sport governance and all the drawbacks that call for the investigation of it in the Ethiopian context, the implementation of good sport governance has not been studied in Ethiopian Olympic sports federations.

Hence, the purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate the extent of implementing good sport governance in selected Ethiopian Olympic sports federations. In doing so, the study examined the basic question, "To what extent is good sport governance implemented in some selected Ethiopian Olympic sports federations?" through the quantitative hypotheses: 1/ The level of good sport governance practice in Ethiopian Olympic sports federations is below the expected average; 2/ There was a statistically significant difference in good sport governance implementation between sampled Olympic sports federations, which was then complemented by the qualitative interview on the strengths and deficits of good sport governance.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed method design that is primarily quantitative with a concurrent supplementary in-depth interview, as Dossa and Capitman (2010) argue, and with the core assumption of yielding additional insight beyond the information provided by either of them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Sampling

From the total of 16 Olympic sports federations, we purposively selected six federations (Ethiopian Football Federation (EFF), Ethiopian Athletics Federation (EAF), Ethiopian Basketball Federation (EBF), Ethiopian Volleyball Federation (EVBF), Ethiopian Handball Federation (EHF), and Ethiopian Cycling Federation (ECF)) for their being dominant throughout the country as they have a long history (more than half a century) of establishment with an average age of 66.98 (SD = 8.09), have a number of member clubs, are with the most popular sports events, and have the highest public focus on them.

Then, we selected 265 respondents from the sampled Olympic sports federations (based on Soper (2021)'s a priori sample size calculator for SEM to determine the minimum sample size and in consideration of 20% attrition rates for the main thesis) by proportionate stratified random sampling for quantitative strand, and 18 participants for qualitative semi-structured interview were selected by purposive sampling.

Instruments

Survey Questionnaire

Good sport governance was assessed by using the slightly modified and contextualized version of the Action for Good Governance of International Sport Organizations (AGGIS) sport governance observer tool (Geeraert, 2015). The original 36 indicators were extended to 38 indicators as the four dimensions were kept the same, i.e., transparency and public communication (12 items), democratic processes (10 items), checks and balances (7 items), and solidarity (9 items). Besides, the initial five-

point Likert scale ranging from 'not fulfilled at all' (1) to "state-of-the-art" (5) was modified in the range from 'not fulfilled at all' (1) to 'fulfilled at all' (5) on the assumption that it should reflect measures of perceived level of implementation of good sport governance with some meaning and value to all stakeholders participating in the study. The interpretation of the perceived level of implementation of items in terms of their mean values and their ranks is based on five levels: (1) very low (1.00–1.80); (2) low (1.81–2.60); (3) moderate (2.61–3.40); (4) high (3.41–4.20); and (5) very high (4.21–5.00) for descriptives.

The internal consistency was checked; hence, the coefficients alpha of the scales were found to be: transparency and public communication (.92), democratic processes (.95), checks and balances (.85), and solidarity (.92), which were all above 70, which indicates desirable internal consistency attributes of the subscales (Hair et al., 2014).

Interview

The semi-structured interview was conducted from February to June 2022 to allow participants to freely share and identify as many aspects of their experience on strengths and deficits of good sport governance implementation as possible with a preplanned interview schedule with reasonably focused but open-ended questions about a specific topic asked to participants (Smith & Sparkes, 2016, P.108) that averagely lasted from 30 minutes to 1:05 hours.

Methods of Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed by IBM SPSS 26.0 software, and the level of statistical significance was set at an alpha value less than .05. Descriptive statistics, i.e., frequency and percentage for background information, and means and standard deviations for good sport governance and each dimension of good sport governance across the sampled sports federations, were computed. Inferentially, the group difference in the implementation of good sport governance between the sampled Olympic sports federations was computed by using a one-way ANOVA with a post-hoc test for the level of significance of the mean difference.

Preliminary checks were performed to assess normality and homogeneity of variances so that the data was found to be normally distributed (the normal curve retained the bell-shaped curve), and the Shapiro-Wilk test was found to be non-significant ($P = .116$). But the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not found to be tenable, as Levene's statistic was found to be statistically significant ($P = 0.046$) (Ntoumanis, 2001, p. 73).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews were analyzed through three steps: transcription, coding, and categorization into themes. The interview was made in Amharic and was recorded on audio tape (with the permission of the participants) and handwritten in notes (not permitted by participants) (Skinner, Edwards, & Corbett, 2015, p. 57). The data was transcribed in English by the researcher and a colleague with a sports management background. Finally, the transcribed summary of the interview data was sent to the interviewees for validation before coding the data. Then these valid data were organized, coded, thematized, and analyzed using MAXQDA 20.4.0 software.

Finally, quantitative data sets that were analyzed via descriptive and inferential statistics and qualitative data sets analyzed through a thematic analysis were integrated using contiguous narratives (Fetters et al., 2013) in line with the convergent triangulation (Bradolet et al., 2011; Turner, Cardinal, & Burton, 2015).

Results

Quantitative Results

A survey was conducted by distributing questionnaires to 265 respondents from February to June 2022, and upon serious follow-ups, 238 completed questionnaires were collected with an 89.8% response rate. When respondents were seen in their stakes, officials were nearly half (50.4%) of the

respondents, followed by coaches, who covered 35.7% of the respondents. The remaining 2.9% and 10.9% portions were covered by executive committee members and paid staff, respectively.

Regarding the sex and age composition of the study respondents, the vast majorities (87.4%) were male, and the remaining 12.6% were female. The age category above 30 comprised the large majority (83.6%). When the academic level and years of work experience are seen, holders of BA/BSc degrees and MA/MSc degrees together took the highest share (68.5%) of the respondents, and almost half of the respondents (52.1%) were found to have the work experience of 1–10, and 37.4% lie in the experience category of 11–20, which together form 89.5%.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of good sport governance implementation in the sampled federations

Names of the federation	Mean	Std. Dev.
EFF	2.50	.31
EAF	2.54	.40
EHF	2.29	.40
EBF	2.23	.32
EVBF	2.24	.50
ECF	2.16	.28
Total	2.40	.38

Descriptive statistics of good governance implementation in the sampled federations revealed that the surveyed Olympic sport federations have a mean score below the expected average (moderate level) with the actual average score ($M = 2.40$, $SD = .38$), with the lowest mean score in the Ethiopian Cycling Federation and the relatively higher mean score in the Ethiopian Athletics Federation (see Table 1). These indicate that all the surveyed federations were found to be at a low level of implementing good sports governance.

In the descriptive statistics for each dimension of good sports governance in the table above, the democratic processes dimension was found to be the only one moderately implemented, whereas the transparency and public communication dimension was relatively the least implemented. Checks and balances and solidarity dimensions were all found to be poorly implemented (see Table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of factors/ dimensions of good sport governance in the sampled federations

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Transparency and Public communication	2.08	.48
Democratic processes	2.81	.62
Check and Balances	2.53	.44
Solidarity	2.15	.56
Valid N (listwise)		

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the mean difference in the implementation of good sport governance among the surveyed Olympic sports federations (see Table 3). There was a significant difference in the implementation of good sport governance between the sampled Olympic sports federations ($F_{5, 232} = 8.18$, $P < 0.001$), and Tamhane's T2 post hoc test, as the homogeneity variances was not assumed (Hair et al., 2014), revealed that the mean score of implementing good sport governance in the Ethiopian Football Federation was significantly higher than in the Ethiopian Basketball Federation ($P = .010$) and Ethiopian Cycling Federation ($P < .001$). The post hoc test also revealed that the mean score of implementing good sport governance in the Ethiopian Athletics Federation was significantly higher than that of the Ethiopian Basketball Federation ($P = .004$) and

the Ethiopian Cycling Federation ($P < .001$), whereas statistically significant differences were not found between other Olympic sports federations.

Table 3: One-way ANOVA table for mean comparison among the sampled federations

ANOVA					
Good Sport Governance					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.397	5	1.079	8.180	.000
Within Groups	30.615	232	.132		
Total	36.011	237			

Qualitative Results

Results of the Interview

The interview data were collected from a total of 18 participants (three from each sampled federation), with the average age in years ($M = 38.6$, $SD = 8.6$), the average years of experience in sport ($M = 14$, $SD = 5.19$), and 100% male participants who were purposively selected from six Olympic sports federations.

Hence, we transcribed the data by being familiarized with it by rereading it, and then coded and categorized it into deductively refined and named sub-themes (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Hence, good sport governance strengths and deficits of the sampled federations were assigned to codes which finally were labeled deductively into 4 categories/ sub-themes.

Notwithstanding the significance of other non-provided quotes, this section provided relevant quotes from various participants to illustrate the major codes and sub-themes presented. The interview participants in this analysis were divided into three groups in each surveyed federation: 1) executive committee members (P1), coaches (P2), and athlete representatives (P3). For instance, EFPF1 represents an executive committee member interviewee from the Ethiopian Football Federation.

Good Sport Governance Strengths and Deficits

Good Sport Governance Strengths

The perceived strengths of good sport governance were assigned to 12 codes, which were then labeled to deductively set 4 categories or sub-themes (see Table 4).

Sub-theme 1: Checks and Balances Strength

Checks and balances constitute the principles that inform the processes by which authorized bodies are held accountable. The checks and balances strength of the federations was referred to through terms or segments that were highly pronounced by the study participants. In this regard, having a clear governance structure was found to be the top (100%) referred item by the study participants. In line with this, one of the study participants states that:

As an organization, besides the general assembly and the executive committee, we have organizational activities differentiated into some departments so that tasks are performed in their specific categories on a daily basis by full-time employees. In this regard, just to mention a few... (EFPF1; April 14, 2022).

This indicates that the surveyed Ethiopian Olympic sports federations were strong in establishing a clear governance structure. It is through this structure that accountability can only be fully maintained in sports organizations.

Table 4: Distribution of codes and categories/Sub-themes of good sport governance strengths in Ethiopian Olympic Sports Federations

Codes and categories/sub-themes	ECF	EBF	EVBF	EHF	EAF	EFF	Total
Good sport governance strengths							
Transparency and public communication strength							
Posting match programs and results	2	1	0	1	1	0	5
Democratic processes strength							
Term limit of the executive bodies	2	3	3	2	3	1	14
Representation of coaches and officials in decision making processes	0	0	0	0	2	1	3
Representation of athletes in decision making processes	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Checks and balances strength							
Having clear governance structure	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
Guiding organizational activities by statutes and rules & regulations	2	2	3	3	3	3	16
Performances are reported quarterly and annually	2	1	3	2	3	3	14
Sharing roles & responsibilities to organizational committees	2	3	3	2	3	0	13
Having clear procedures for the selection of coaches and athletes	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Solidarity strength							
Relatively good elite development	1	2	3	3	1	3	13
Relatively better involvement in social affairs outside sport	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Engagement in youth development projects	0	0	0	0	3	1	4
SUM	14	15	18	16	25	15	103
N = Documents	3	3	3	3	3	3	18

In addition to this, all the surveyed sports federations, as explained by the large majority (88.9%) of the study participants, were found to be strong in guiding major organizational activities through statutes, rules, and regulations. For instance, one of the study participants affirms the availability of statutes and rules and regulations, saying, "The federation, to govern organizational activities, has a set internal operation manual (statute), and there are some rules and regulations." (April 30, 2022).

The Olympic sports federations' good stance on guiding major organizational activities by statutes indicates that there are clearly defined and assigned duties, which hence forces cooperation in completing the tasks of the organizations.

Besides, the majority of the study participants (77.8%) identified reporting performances annually and quarterly as strength. In this regard, EAFp2 stated that "the general assembly also held its meeting once a year so that the annual performance report was presented to it. The organizational performance is also reported quarterly to the sports commission". (May 4, 2022).

This reference generally indicates that the surveyed sports federations were found to be good at reporting their performances quarterly and annually.

Sub-theme 2: Democratic Processes Strength

Democratic processes create an enabling environment for the participation of multiple actors that can contribute specialized knowledge to the decision-making process. Besides, as democratic processes

also involve free and fair elections, there would be fertile ground for the coming of the most potent and responsible officials and executives to sports federations to perform better and solve organizational problems more creatively. In this regard, the sampled sports federations were found to be relatively strong in terms of the term limit of the executive body and the participation of coaches and officials in the decision-making process.

The term limit of the executive body was the top-voiced (77.8%) strength in democratic processes. In this regard, EHFp2 states that "as to my understanding, the election of the executive committee members of the federation is held every four years". (May 9, 2022). The other participant also strengthened this, saying, 'Executive committee members of the federation are elected every four years as indicated in the statute.' (EAFp3; April 12, 2022). These voices indicate that all the surveyed Olympic sports federations have set term limits for the executive bodies in their statutes.

Sub-theme 3: Solidarity Strength

Solidarity involves practices related to actions contributing to a better society and a cleaner environment by integrating social and environmental concerns into operations and interactions with stakeholders. The solidarity strength of the surveyed sports federations was referred to via relatively good elite development voiced by the majority (72.2%) of the participants, engagement in youth development projects voiced by 22.2%, and relatively better involvement in social and environmental affairs outside sport voiced by 5.6% of the study participants. Regarding elite development, one of the study participants elucidated that:

Even though it is not to the extent of its historic position and fame in our country, we are engaging in continental and sub-continental competitions. We also have leagues at the premier, super, and national levels for men and a premier league for women. (EFFp1; 14 April, 2022). In the same way, EVBFp2 has revealed the federation's effort on elite development as "...the federation organizes tournaments at the league level for 7 men's clubs and 5 women's clubs in cooperation with stakeholders every year." (22 June 2022). These expressions indicate that most of the surveyed Olympic sports federations were found to be somehow strong in elite development as they were more or less engaged in periodic competition tournaments. In sum, the findings revealed (see Figure. 1) that the surveyed sports federations were perceived to be relatively strong in the implementation of checks and balances, whereas, precariously, there was no strength referred to in transparency and public communication.

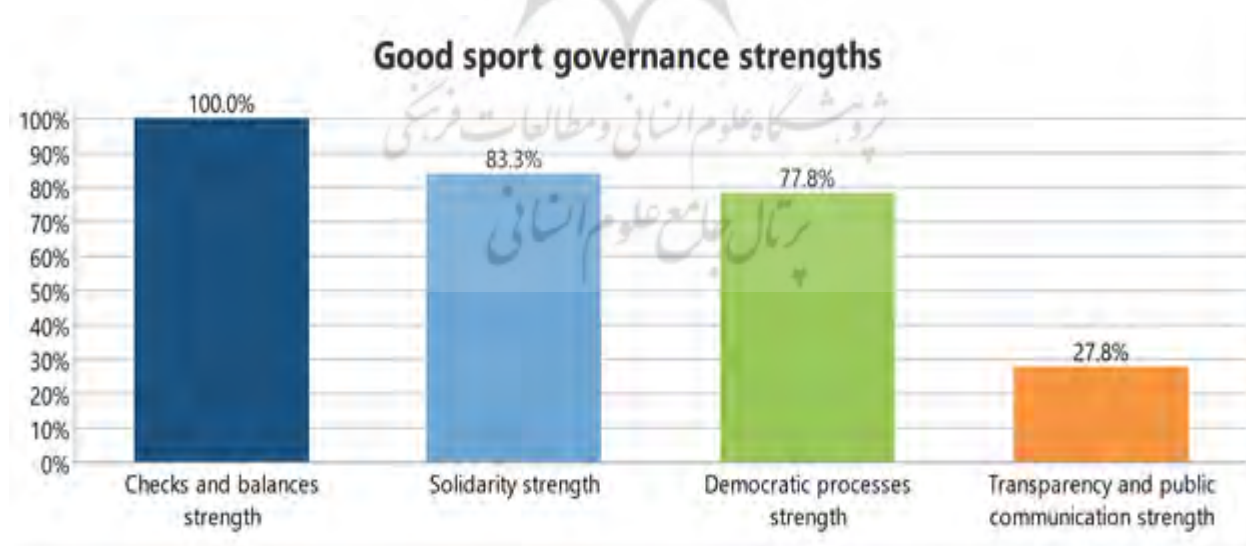


Figure.1. sub-theme statistics of good sport governance strengths

Besides, a glance at Table 4 above reveals that EAF was found to be relatively stronger, whereas ECF was found to be relatively weaker in implementing good sport governance.

Good Sport Governance Deficits

The perceived deficits of good sport governance were assigned into 23 codes, which were finally deductively labeled into 4 relevant categories or sub-themes (see Fig. 2).

Sub-theme 1: Transparency and Public Communication Deficit

Transparency and public communication deficits are the most frequently referred deficits of the selected Olympic sports federations, with vividly referred indicators by the study participants such as no statutes and rules and regulations accessible on websites (94.4%), no information about the executive committee members is publicized (27.8%), and weak domestic and international communication (22.2%).

The inaccessibility of organizational information through activity reports, rules, and regulations to all stakeholders was found to be the top deficit, as remarked by a coach participant: "It is still very difficult to find organizational information. Except for very few pieces of information, all statutes, rules and regulations, activity reports, and financial reports of the federation are not fully accessible to the stakeholders". (EAFp2; May 4, 2022)

Besides, the surveyed Olympic sports federations were found to be poor at publicizing the basic biographical information that gives the general public insight into senior officials 'or executive committee members' backgrounds, affiliations, and education. In this regard, one of the participants ascertains that: Executive committee members in general are far away from the clubs. Some of the members are even unknown to the clubs, except for three. There is also the problem of disseminating information about the technique committee of the federation (who they are... (EHFp2; May 9, 2022)

These vividly indicate that almost all surveyed sports federations were found to be weak in disseminating organizational information, including performance reports and guiding documents for all stakeholders. Thus, the sports federations are missing public trust and sharing responsibilities with internal stakeholders, and they are vulnerable to individual whistle-blowers.

Sub-theme 2: Solidarity Deficit

Despite some solidarity strengths discussed above, it appears to be the most deficit of all the sports federations judging from the terms extensively referred to by the majority of the study participants, such as lack of training and consultation in the areas of governance (66.7%), no or weak involvement in social and environmental affairs outside sport (61.1%), no or inadequate support to youth development projects (55.6%), and no continuous training and development of coaches and officials (50%). The least referred but not the least significant factors in organizational governance were weak elite development (11.1%) and low respect for the professionals (5.6%).

As referred to by the majority of the study participants, the sampled sports federations were found not to be in the habit of training and capacitating member organizations in the areas of governance. This deficit is highly pronounced, as follows: There is a shortage of consultation and training for member federations and sports organizations, especially clubs, in the areas of governance, such as training in the area of managing clubs and sustainable revenue generation, from which most clubs are currently suffering...(EFFP2; April 18, 2022)

Another study participant from the volleyball federation echoed this: "In my experience, there has been no training and consultation given to the clubs on the areas of management that might have helped them work for sustainable development". (P2; June 22, 2022)

These all imply that almost all the surveyed sports federations were unaware that they were not substantially supporting the member regional federations and clubs in the areas of management.

It is again expected of national sports governing bodies to highly engage in developmental activities (both grassroots and elite-level developments). However, there is a dearth of engagement in youth development projects in the surveyed Olympic sports federations, as underlined by one of the study participants: the development projects are poor as the federation is not fully engaging in talent development. Youth are not being provided with relevant training and equipment. There is also no clear pathway for development. For instance, players who... (EFFp3, April 18, 2022)

Besides, ECFp2 has desperately informed the weakness of the sports federation in engaging in youth development, as "the most serious is that no grassroots level work has been done and that very few clubs are staggering in this sport." (March 25, 2022).

These indicate that almost all the surveyed Olympic sports federations, despite the audaciously framed government's regulation for the number of youth training and development programs of the national sports federations as a criterion to be assessed for the relevance of annual subsidies, have not been adequately engaging in youth development programs.

In terms of weak involvement in social and environmental affairs outside sport, one of the participants elucidated that "the federation has not yet been participating in social affairs, environmental protections, and other socio-political mandates outside sport as these are not known, ignored, or cannot be put into practice because of a shortage of budget". (EVbFP3; March 30, 2022)

The aforementioned perception of the study participants vividly indicates that national sports federations do not immerse themselves in society, though they are expected to increasingly pursue social and environmental missions alongside their sport-related missions.

The other deficit significantly voiced by the study participants under the solidarity dimension was the lack of continuous training and development for coaches and officials. This was referred to by one of the study participants as "training opportunities for coaches are usually rejected. They may rarely happen but are kept closed and sometimes given to those who are affiliated with the federation officers and executive committee members". (ECFp2; March 25, 2022).

This was further strengthened by an athlete participant from EVBF, who said, "...there is a shortage of opportunities to update coaches' and officials' knowledge and skills through international training. Very few opportunities are given for retiring players to hold a coaching license or to develop a coaching career." (30 March 2022). These references in general disclose that the national sports federations were limited in providing continuous and qualified training and development opportunities.

To sum up, the surveyed Olympic sports federations were found to have considerable deficits in solidarity that might lessen trust in or social acceptance of the federations by the general public or reduce their power as social influencers.



	ECF	EBF	EVBF	EHF	EAF	EFF	Total
Good sport governance deficits							
<i>Solidarity deficits</i>							
Lack of training and consultation in the areas of governance	2	1	3	3	1	2	12
No/Inadequate support to youth development projects	3	2	2	1	0	2	10
No continuous training and development of coach&/officials	2	2	2	1	1	1	9
Weak elite development	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
No/Weak involvement in social and environmental affairs	2	3	3	3	0	0	11
Low respect to professionals	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
<i>Checks and balances deficits</i>							
Inconsistency in the implementation of rules and regulations	0	0	2	1	2	3	8
Limited sharing of roles and responsibilities to org.committees	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
No proper evaluation and control of the executives' works	2	1	1	0	0	1	5
Performances are not internally audited	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
No clear rules and regulations for prizes and incentives	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
No clear procedures for the selection of coaches and athletes	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
<i>Democratic process deficits</i>							
Ethnic, political and favor-oriented nomination of executive members	1	2	1	0	0	0	4
No representation of coaches/officials/athletes in decision-making process	2	2	1	2	0	2	9
Unfair treatment of young athletes	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
No manifesto is presented to by nominees of executive committee	0	2	3	1	0	1	7
Exhibition of self interest by executive committee members	1	1	0	0	0	3	5
Weak women representation in decision-making body	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
No immediate response for athletes' grievances	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Ethnic and other affiliation based selection of instructors & coaches	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
<i>Transparency and public communication deficit</i>							
No statutes and rules & regulations are accessible on websites	3	2	3	3	3	3	17
No information about the executive committee is publicised	2	1	0	2	0	0	5
weak domestic and international communication	0	1	2	1	0	0	4
SUM	22	21	28	18	13	20	122
N = Documents	3	3	3	3	3	3	18

Figure 2: distribution of codes and sub-themes of good sport governance deficits in the surveyed sport federations.

Sub-theme 3: Democratic Processes Deficit

Despite the strengths of almost all sports federations in setting term limits in their statutes and implementing them and the representation of coaches, officials, and athletes in the decision-making process by a few federations, most of them were found to have deficits in democratic processes that dominantly referred to lack of representation of coaches, officials, and athletes in decision-making processes (50%), no manifesto being presented by nominees of the executive committee (38.9%), the exhibition of self-interest by some executive committee members (27.7%), and ethnic, political, and favor-oriented nomination of executive committee members by member organizations (22.2%).

The deficit in representation of coaches, officials, and athletes is disclosed as "there is no representation of coach and athlete in the decision-making process as the federation does not urge the concerned stakeholders to be organized in associations. In need of representation, players usually ask the federation" (EHFP2, May 9, 2022).

In the same tone, the other participant of the interview echoed this, saying, "In our case, the players' association is found powerless in counteracting any illegal decisions on players' issues as it has no place in the decision-making process" (EFFp3, April 18, 2022).

These voices indicate that most of the surveyed sports federations were too weak or ignorant to represent their key stakeholders (coaches, officials, and athletes) in the decision-making body.

A free and fair election of the executive committee is also an important indicator of the implementation of democratic processes in national sports federations, so that should be based on clear procedures and in consideration of the unique potential of the nominees to fully contribute to the effectiveness of the sports federations. However, the member regional federations usually send the nominees without such scrutiny, and the nominees don't come with a clear agenda to put into practice. One of the study participants discloses it as follows: The member federations mostly nominate individuals based on their affiliations rather than their quality to improve the sport. They are even elected in their absence in the general assembly without presenting what agenda they have to serve the federation. As a result of this ... (EBFp1; April 13, 2022)

These all imply that there is a lack of competitive elections of the executive committees, so the coming of high-quality executive members to the positions is limited and that fresh ideas for solutions to organizational problems are being rejected.

The exhibition of self-interest by some executive committee members is also found to have precariously appeared in the surveyed sports federations. One of the study participants refers to this as: I myself was very happy when he (the president) came to the position, as he could add something to the performance of the federation via his fame and resourcefulness. However, what happened was the complete reverse of our expectations when he was found to be in the position for his own personal interests. (EBFP3; April 5, 2022).

Hence, the references vividly indicate that most surveyed sports federations were found to be weak in proper scrutiny of the election of executive committee members.

Besides, it was identified that the root cause of weak scrutiny in the nomination of the executive committee members was unethical ethnic, political, and favor-oriented nominations by member organizations. This unethical practice in the nomination and selection of executive committee members was worrisomely exposed by a study participant from EBF as follows: the executive committee election by itself is tricky, so they are being elected by a sense of quota (regional or provincial representation), which in reality is highly influenced by political opinion, ethnic affiliation, and above all, personal interests rather than achieving organizational goals (P2; April 30, 2022).

This reveals that there was doubt about the free and fair election of the executive committee members as there was manipulation of electoral systems.

Sub-theme 4: Checks and balances deficit

In the exploration of good sport governance deficits, the checks and balances deficit was the least revealed through inconsistency in the implementation of rules and regulations (44.4%), inability to conduct proper evaluation and take corrective measures in executives' works (27.5%), no clear procedures for the selection of coaches and athletes (16.7%), and the remaining three issues: no clear rules and regulations for prizes and incentives, no internal auditing of performances (including financial), and limited sharing of roles to organizational committees, each referred to by 5.6% of the study participants.

Inconsistency in the implementation of rules and regulations was the dominant limitation in the checks and balances practice of the surveyed sports federations. For instance, the study participant desperately stated as: The decisions made at the national level are not consistently implemented by regional federations and clubs. And even then, we hesitate to take immediate action on the misbehaviors' of the clubs, as they soon associate them with ethnic or regional interests. (EFFp1; April 14, 2022)

However, it is through the consistent implementation of rules and regulations that governing bodies can maintain their relationships with multiple stakeholders with multiple interests or maintain their coercive power.

The federations were also found to be ineffective in conducting proper evaluations and taking corrective measures in executives' work. In this regard, one of the study participants emphasizes that: As to my knowledge, there have not been any corrective measures taken by this supreme body other than simply accepting the reports of the federation. For instance, if the corrective measure is taken, the executive committee members who haven't availed themselves, in any event, would have been replaced. (EVbFp2, June 22, 2022)

This indicates that some Olympic sports federations were weak in evaluating organizational performance.

To sum up, the findings of good sport governance deficits revealed that the deficit of transparency and public communication was relatively the top-referred deficit, whereas the checks and balances deficit was relatively the least-referred deficit in the surveyed Olympic sports federations (see Figure 3).

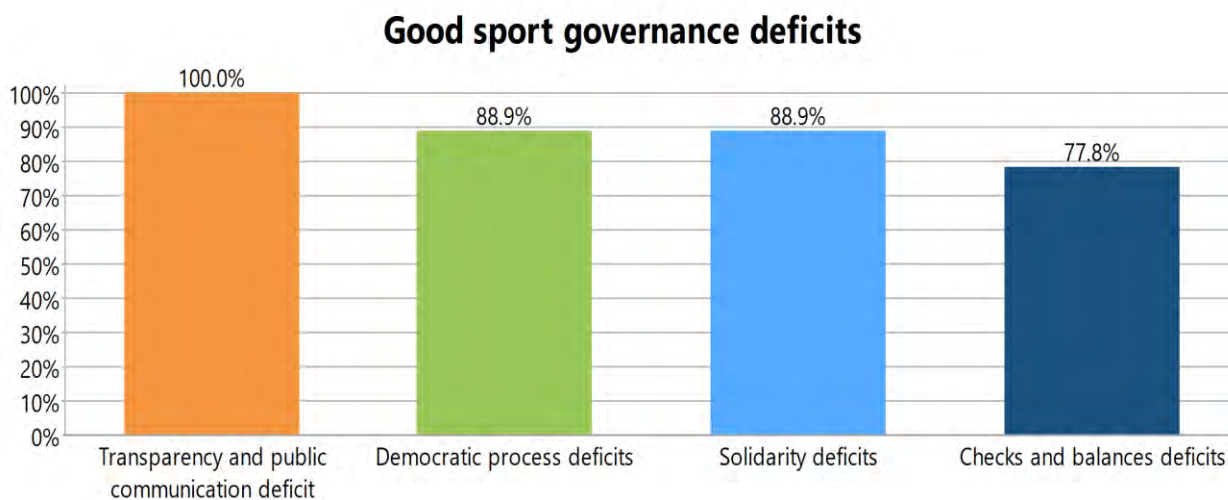


Figure.3. sub-theme statistics of good sport governance deficits

Besides, the findings across the surveyed sports federations revealed that the Ethiopian Volleyball Federation was found to have more perceived deficits, followed by the Ethiopian Cycling Federation, and the Ethiopian Athletics Federation was found to have fewer perceived deficits (see Figure 2).

Hence, the overall qualitative findings indicate that deficits (except in checks and balances) exceed the strengths of good sport governance in the surveyed Olympic sports federations (except in EAF) and that there was a low level of good sport governance implementation with a relatively better practice in checks and balances and an extremely weaker practice in transparency and public communication. Moreover, when we see the overall findings across the surveyed sports federations, EAF was perceived as relatively better, whereas ECF and EVBF were perceived as relatively weaker in implementing good sport governance.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was intended to investigate the extent of implementing good sport governance in selected Ethiopian Olympic sports federations. Hence, the quantitative finding for the first hypothesis revealed that the implementation of good sports governance was below the expected average ($M = 2.40$, $SD = .39$). In the meantime, the qualitative findings disclosed that the surveyed sport federations were found to be relatively weak in the implementation of good sport governance, as deficits exceeded strengths in all dimensions except checks and balances and in all federations except EAF. Hence, the qualitative strand complemented the quantitative well.

This finding is in congruence with the findings of Geeraert's (2015) study, where all the surveyed 35 Olympic international federations generally achieved modest to weak scores ($P.76$), and Rustiadi et al.'s (2018) findings that the level of good governance of sports organizations in Central Java (Indonesia) is only weak.

For explicitness, this study attempted to analyze the implementation of each dimension in the surveyed Olympic sports federations. Hence, the quantitative findings revealed that they were found to be relatively better at implementing democratic processes, whereas they were found to be weaker at implementing transparency and public communication. Meanwhile, the qualitative findings disclosed that the surveyed sports federations were found to be relatively better at the implementation

of checks and balances, whereas they were severely weak at implementing transparency and public communication.

Hence, except for the introduction of checks and balances in place of democratic processes as strength, the qualitative strand still complemented the quantitative strand and indicated that checks and balances and democratic processes were found to be moderately implemented, whereas transparency & public communication, and solidarity were found to be less implemented. The findings were in congruence with the findings of Pielke et al. (2019), where national governing bodies of sports in the USA were found to be better at implementing democratic processes and checks and balances than transparency and solidarity (P. 9). Except for the contextual difference, the lowest score findings in both transparency and solidarity were also in correspondence with Geeraert's (2018) findings, where transparency and societal responsibility were the least implemented dimensions of good sport governance by the five surveyed international federations (P. 25). The low score in transparency and public communication was also consistent with the findings of Rustiadi et al. (2018) of sports organizations in central Java (Indonesia), where they underscored the lack of a website or social media in the studied organizations.

The group comparison among the surveyed Olympic sports federations (hypothesis II) also revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in scores in implementing good sport governance, where the mean scores of implementing good sport governance in EAF and EFF were similarly significantly higher than the mean scores in EBF and ECF. The qualitative findings in this regard also revealed that EAF was relatively stronger, whereas ECF and EVBF were relatively weaker in implementing good sport governance. Hence, the qualitative strand still complemented the quantitative strand and slightly indicated that large-sized Olympic sports federations were relatively better at implementing good sport governance. But the difference in implementation between large and small-sized federations seeks further statistical scrutiny.

Although the checks and balances dimension was found to be moderately implemented by the surveyed Olympic sports federations, this study also found precarious deficits such as inconsistency in the implementation of rules and regulations and lack of proper evaluation and control of the executives' work. The statutes, rules, and regulations, as they enable the sports organizations to monitor the behaviors of the actors (Scott, 2001), should be consistently implemented. Besides, the proper evaluation and monitoring of the executive body's performance should be given a key focus as King (2017) emphasizes that "board evaluation is an action for national governing bodies to take at the early stages of any reform process and an annual evaluation of board performance (with an appraisal procedure for individual board members) is also considered 'best practice'" (P. 67). Despite the moderate quantitative score of most surveyed federations on democratic processes, there are still critical deficits such as a weak representation of coaches and/or athletes in the decision-making process, no presentation of a manifesto by nominees of the executive committee, and exhibition of self-interest by executive members. Scholars argue that the lack of representation of coaches and athletes in the decision-making process decreases the likelihood of experiencing a sense of ownership by stakeholders, which means seeing the decisions of the sports federation as their own decisions (Eimontas, 2017; King, 2017), whereas their representation in decisions reduces the challenges in its implementation as they perceive their representatives in the policy process as legitimate (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009).

As Ethiopia follows a federated governance structure, the nomination of prospective candidates is guided by the representation of regional entities. Keeping the pros and cons of the federal model of governance beyond the scope of this study, what is generally accepted is that the nomination should be based on the competence of the nominees to strategize organizational activities, as King (2017) underlines: "The nomination process involves identifying organizational needs and objectives identifiable in the strategy and matching them with the competencies of prospective candidates" (p. 63).

However, it was indicated in this study that the root cause of weak scrutiny in the nomination was the immoral ethnic, political, and favor-oriented nomination of the prospective members by member organizations. Hence, the manipulation of the electoral systems via the above-mentioned approaches ensures "the repetition of mandates without any tangible debates held democratically" (Bayle & Robinson, 2007, P. 265), which gives room for the coming of undemocratic (self-interest-ridden)

personalities in the governance positions who can easily build oligarchy in the sports federations (O'Boyle, 2012, p. 336) and paves the way for the corruption of the process/system and the governance (Minikin, 2015) in Olympic sports federations.

This study also revealed that the surveyed sports federations were severely weak in implementing transparency and public communication, and solidarity. Inaccessibility of statutes and rules and regulations to the stakeholders via websites was the top-credited deficit, and to some extent, there has been no information about the executive committee member publicized. This severe weakness of the federations in publishing the statutes, rules, and regulations in their hands on their websites is just like 'lighting a candle and putting it under a bushel'. However, Lam (2014) underscores the critical need for informing stakeholders, as "members should be regularly informed of the governing body's activities, financial condition, policy decisions, elections, approach to governance, and other business" (P. 26).

Scholars, in this regard, also argue that sports organizations should keep their doors open to stakeholders as "the inner workings should as far as possible be open to public scrutiny" (Henry & Lee, 2004, p. 31) and "it is no longer possible for sports organizations to be run as a 'closed book'" (Robinson cited in Alm, 2013) as openness enhances the organizations' ability to gain the public's trust (BoardSource, 2010, p. 319).

Furthermore, regarding the solidarity deficits, lack of training and consultation in the area of governance, lack of adequate support to youth development projects, weak involvement in the social and environmental affairs outside sport, and lack of continuous training and development of coaches and officials were the highly echoed deficits in the surveyed sports federations. Except for a handful of activities in developing elite sports, most sports federations were weak in youth development practices. Coaches and officials were not continuously and sufficiently upgraded. Adequate (fit to the level) training and equipment were not provided.

However, from the viewpoint of the researchers (e.g., Chelladurai & Zintz, 2015; Pedras, 2017; Pedras, Taylor & Frawley, 2020), among many governance services, the national sports federations are expected to execute, enhancing member capacity to generate revenues, and facilitating effective management of member organizations are worth mentioning. Moreover, national sports governing bodies are expected to widen their services to the wider community (King, 2017), and they are highly demanded by the community for social, ethical, and environmental actions (Babiak, 2010, cited in Alm, 2013).

In sum, the weak score in good sport governance signifies the critical need for implementing transparency and public communication, solidarity, and, to some extent, democratic processes to better adapt to the changing environment and not lose their legitimacy, as Freeburn (2010) warns that the severity of poor sport governance is accompanied by the obvious possibility of catastrophic collapse for mismanaged national sport organizations, besides the more relevant consequences such as the loss of sponsorship, weakening in association numbers and participation, and defenselessness of organizations to possible interventions from government funding agencies against autonomy (p. 48).

Management Implications

The current study has several theoretical and practical implications for sports managers. In terms of theory, (1) it was a significant endeavor to empirically test the implementation of good sport governance in Ethiopian national sports governing bodies; (2) the study utilized a mixed-methods approach to examine the phenomenon that this rigorous methodology not only increased the convergent validity and reliability of the findings but also demonstrated a convenient method that sport governance researchers could use.

From a practical perspective, this study (a) implies policy issues as it explores the actual strengths and deficits of good sport governance in the surveyed federations and calls for "walking the talk" of transparency and solidarity, and (b) cautions the national sport governing bodies to insist on the competence-based nomination and election of the executive committee members.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

As with any research investigation, this study is not without limitations. First, despite the effort made to complement the quantitative findings with qualitative findings and achieve the desirable internal consistency attributes for all of the subscales, the lack of universally agreed-upon indicators of good governance in general and the inconsistency of SGO indicators and their limited application in national contexts specifically may shadow the findings of this study. Hence, future studies using this tool should further engage in national contexts to validate the instrument.

Secondly, this study had to better analyze documents (either electronic or printed) to have a well-triangulated finding on the implementation of good sport governance. However, their inaccessibility in either form inhibited the researchers from including them in the study. Hence, this may shadow the findings of this study.

Finally, the current investigation focused only on the Olympic sports federations, which are the most popular sports federations in Ethiopia. However, future investigations should better examine all national sports federations to enhance the generalizability of these findings and also take further statistical scrutiny of the difference in implementation between large and small federations.

This study used a convergent mixed-methods design to investigate the extent of implementing good sport governance in selected Ethiopian Olympic sports federations. Four conclusions emerged from this study. First, this study reveals that the surveyed sports federations scored below the average in good sport governance. Second, they were relatively better at implementing checks and balances, whereas they were severely weak at implementing transparency and solidarity. Third, a significant difference in the implementation of good sport governance was revealed among the surveyed federations. Finally, the study advances the operationalization of the AGGIS Sport Governance Observer tool in the context of national sport governing bodies.

Consent for Publication

All authors have agreed to publish the manuscript.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Acknowledgment

We are grateful to all who contributed a lot during the data collection process, in language translation, and in interview transcription. Deep gratitude also goes to the study participants from all six Olympic sports federations.

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