

Forum: International Olympic Committee (IOC)

Issue: Addressing gender equality in Olympic Sports

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Introduction:

In the panorama of sports, the Olympic Games stand as a testament to human achievement, unity, and sporting excellence. However, amid the triumphs and records set on the world's grandest stage, a poignant disparity lingers in the persistent struggle for gender equality within the framework of Olympic sports.

The pursuit of gender parity in sports transcends the boundaries of competition; it embodies a fundamental quest for fairness, representation, and inclusivity. Ensuring member nations compromise between Equality and Equity with an account of the difference in physical capabilities in gender is essential.

Despite many changes in recent times to improve the number of female athletes, as gains are made on the field of play, the makeup of the overwhelmingly male I.O.C. remains behind. Women make up 33.3% of its executive board, and 37.5% of committee members are female.

The International Olympic Committee presents a nuanced approach, looking to support gender equality in areas that benefit revenue and the prolongment of their presidency and time served on the board. The president of the Tokyo Olympics Organizing Committee was replaced this year after he publicly suggested that women speak too much in meetings. In recent years, much action has been taken, but more is yet to be done for future Olympic events.

Definition of Key Terms:

1. **Gender Equity:** The principle of fairness and justice in the treatment of individuals, regardless of their gender, ensuring that opportunities and resources are equally accessible and distributed.
2. **Gender Equality:** The concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development.
3. **The Olympics:** The Olympics are a series of international athletic contests held in a different country once every four years.
4. **Inclusivity:** Inclusivity in sports refers to creating an environment that welcomes and supports all genders. It involves breaking down barriers and fostering a culture where everyone feels valued.
5. **Parity:** Parity in sports refers to achieving an equal or balanced distribution of resources, opportunities, and representation between male and female athletes.

Background Information

International Olympics Committee

The International Olympic Committee stands as the paramount governing body responsible for overseeing the modern Olympic Games. Established in 1894, the IOC was founded to promote international unity, fair play, and sportsmanship.

Throughout its history, the IOC has undergone evolutionary transformations, adapting to the changing landscape of global sports and societal values. Over time, it has embraced the imperative of inclusivity, striving to address issues of diversity, representation, and gender equality within the realm of Olympic sports.

Memorandum of Understanding

The recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) inked between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and UN Women stands as a pivotal milestone in advancing gender equality through the realm of sports. This landmark agreement, a testament to the continued commitment of both entities, extends a partnership initiated in 2012 and subsequently renewed in 2017. The signing of this MoU by IOC President Thomas Bach and UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous solidifies a collaborative effort aimed at leveraging the transformative power of sports to shape social norms and foster sustainable development outcomes that directly impact the lives of women and girls worldwide.

At the heart of this renewed alliance lies a shared vision—to harness the unparalleled potential of sports in dismantling barriers and catalyzing positive change for women and girls globally. President Bach articulated the significance of this collaboration, emphasizing the unique ability of sports to effectuate meaningful transformations in individuals' lives. He underscored the commitment to ensuring that women and girls have equitable access to the transformative power of sports, heralding this partnership as a catalyst for enhancing initiatives promoting sports participation among girls and advancing gender equality within the sporting sphere.

Echoing this sentiment, UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous highlighted the instrumental role of sports in eradicating discrimination and violence against women and girls, advocating for their full participation in leadership and decision-making processes. She emphasised the overarching goal of the partnership—to harness the force of sports in achieving gender equality and ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics

Tokyo 2020 was heralded as a significant step forward in promoting gender equality within the Olympic movement. It marked the first time in history that all participating National Olympic Committees included female athletes in their delegations. This milestone exemplified a concerted effort toward achieving gender parity in athlete representation, signalling a notable advancement toward equality in sports.

Furthermore, the addition of new events such as women's canoeing, skateboarding, and freestyle BMX to the Olympic program contributed to broadening the spectrum of sports and offering more opportunities for female athletes to compete at the highest level. Occurrences in certain countries highlighted the worldwide changing scope on gender equality in the Olympics.

Afghan Sprinter Kamia Yousufi

The participation of Afghan sprinter Kamia Yousufi stood as a symbol of resilience and courage amid the turmoil in Afghanistan. Her presence highlighted the obstacles that female athletes often face in pursuing their sporting dreams, particularly in regions affected by social and political unrest.

Saudi Arabia

In a significant development, Saudi Arabia sent its largest-ever female contingent to the Olympics, showcasing the kingdom's efforts to support and encourage women's participation in sports. This move reflected gradual progress in a country historically known for stringent restrictions on women's involvement in athletics.

Qatar

The inclusion of Qatar's female athletes in multiple sports disciplines signalled a shift toward greater gender inclusivity. Notably, Mutaz Essa Barshim and Gianmarco Tamberi's shared gold medal celebration in the high jump

exemplified a moment of unity, transcending gender, nationality, and competition, symbolizing camaraderie amid the pursuit of excellence.

Current Situation

Paris 2024 Summer Olympics

The Paris 2024 Summer Olympics will be one of an equal number of men and women athletes, and the same number of events for men and women. Ensuring gender parity — the same number of men and women athletes and men’s and women’s events — is important for gender equality at the Games, but it does not address the conditions of men’s and women’s participation. When men and women compete in the same sports, international federations continue to enforce differences between men’s and women’s events. These differences include the length of races; weight categories; the height, weight, size and spacing of equipment; the size of venues; and differences in judging, rules and uniforms.

For example, in artistic gymnastics, the differences between the men’s and women’s competitions include age requirements (18 years old for men and 16 for women); different apparatus (e.g., parallel bars for men and uneven parallel bars for women); the number of apparatus (six for men and four for women); and uniform requirements (long or short pants for men, leotards or unitards for women).

In cases where sports are gender-differentiated, women’s sports are designed to be a lesser version than men’s. Women’s races are shorter, there are fewer weight categories, equipment and venues are lighter and smaller and women wear more revealing uniforms.

Differences in men’s and women’s conditions of participation are the result of decisions made by those who control Olympic sports — decision-makers who continue to be predominantly men. The differences are not naturally occurring, nor are they universal.

The question of whether sports should be gender differentiated or not is nuanced but the agreement is that the decision should reflect on all sports. There are several sports and events on the Olympic programme that are not gender-differentiated. For example, men and women athletes competing in archery and badminton use the same venue, equipment and rules. This is evidence of internal contradictions in the Olympic programme; some events are constructed to be different for men and women athletes, while others are not. This reinforces the need to identify and explain the remaining examples of gender-based differences. These internal contradictions also require further attention from the IOC and the adoption of a **more complete definition of gender equality — one that includes opportunity and status**. The IOC needs to look beyond the numbers and **work with international federations to address athletes' conditions of participation in the same sports**. Crucially, embracing and enforcing gender equality **should not mean using men's sports as the standard** (e.g., increasing the length of women's races to be the same as the men's distance). Rather, this is an opportunity for international federations to determine the best possible conditions for all athletes in their sports.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

National Olympic Committees (NOCs)

NOCs from different countries form an integral part of promoting gender equality within their respective sporting communities. They are responsible for implementing policies and programs aimed at supporting female athletes, ensuring equal opportunities, and encouraging participation and representation across various sports.

International Sports Federations (IFs)

IFs oversee specific sports disciplines and play a significant role in shaping policies related to gender equality within their respective sports. They determine

competition formats, rules, and prize structures, influencing gender equity measures in sports events.

UN Women

UN Women asserts its prominence in advancing gender equality within sports through policy advocacy, partnerships, research-driven insights, capacity building, awareness campaigns, and targeted programs, shaping inclusive sporting landscapes and advocating for equal opportunities globally.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

This resolution emphasizes the importance of women's participation in peace processes and decision-making roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It calls for the protection of women and girls during conflict and the prevention of gender-based violence.

- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)
 - This resolution was rendered ineffective due to this resolution separating the pursuit of gender equality from the integration of gender, specifically, this resolution separated the inclusion of women in peace and security from that of gender equality.
- Declaration on the Critical Economic Situation in Africa, 3 December 1984 (**A/RES/39/29**)

This resolution encompasses the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with Goal 5 specifically targeting gender equality and empowering all women and girls. It aims to eliminate discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against women and promote equal access to opportunities and leadership roles.

- UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (2015) - Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDG Goals)
 - The General Assembly's resolutions are recommendations and not legally binding, however, there is a consensus on these goals ensuring the widest

possible implementation. Furthermore, there has been a widespread agreement that some of the SDG goals were achieved on a global level, specifically “halving poverty, halving the number of people who lack access to clean water, halving the likelihood of childhood mortality under five, and achieving accessible education for 90% of children in developing regions” (Social Science Research Network)

UN Women in Sport Strategy

- o The United Nations Women has existed for a decade, achieving significant results in aiding and abiding member states in their quest to strengthen gender standards. The UN Women has also added a focus to gender equality in sports publishing many frameworks and guidelines, also partnering with the IOC to launch a joint initiative that will use sports as a tool for the advancement of gender equality.

Possible Solutions

- Adopting a more complete definition of gender equality that includes non-binary inclusivity, equal opportunities, fair recognition, intersectional approaches, and continual adaptability
- Partnering with international federations to address athletes’ conditions of participation in the same sports
- Establish a whistle-blower program. An easy-to-use, secure and anonymous whistleblowing platform can capture discrimination and harassment complaints in your sports organization. Coming forward to expose unfair practices can be daunting, so maintaining whistleblowers' security and privacy is key
- Hire more female sports executives. Encouraging women to pursue careers as players, coaches, trainers, executives and journalists can push sports towards gender equity.
- Suggesting a comprehensive review of policies within the Continental Associations of National Olympic Committees, with an emphasis on fostering an

environment that encourages women's participation in decision-making processes and the establishment of Women's Commissions where applicable.

- Recognizing the influence of organizational cultures on gender equity, it recommends that the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and International Sport Federations (IFs) actively work towards fostering inclusive and gender-equitable organizational cultures, leveraging both formal policies and conscious efforts to challenge ingrained attitudes.
- Urges IFs and NOCs to emulate the International Triathlon Union's commitment to equal prize money and media exposure for men's and women's events, ensuring that gender equity is embedded in contracts and policies governing financial incentives and media coverage.
- Mandating more frequent National Olympic Committee meetings allows countries to come to a consensus on the ultimate goal, furthermore, regular updates about progress and knowledge sharing helps a global push towards gender equality in sports.

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Useful Links

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