

## **“Women and Sport: Bridging Participation and Leadership”**

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*Check against delivery*

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends of gender equality,

The core aim of this conference is to bridge theory and practice when it comes to sports management. Within this session, we narrow this focus to the role of *women* in sports management. In this overview of the status of women in sports management, I'd like to underscore the importance of the topic, provide some examples of the under-representation of women in the field and present some practical examples of actions that are being undertaken to bridge this gap and also suggest what can be done in the future to increase the leadership role of women in sports management.

I stand in front of you today as a woman in sports management. I also represent the International Working Group on Women and Sport, for which I currently serve as Co-Chair for the period 2010–2014. The International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) is an umbrella network that provides international leadership and coordination for the global women and sport movement. The working group was established in 1994 as an independent coordinating body and consists of representatives of key governmental and non-governmental organisations who are all working towards empowering women across the world to actively participate in all levels of sport. This working group brings together women who have defied the odds and chosen to carve out successful careers for themselves in the field of sport. IWG currently has a network of just over 3,400 individuals, which you can join online by simply registering to receive our quarterly *Catalyst* newsletter. Every four years, IWG organises a World Conference on Women and Sport. This conference brings together hundreds of women and men who are interested in promoting gender equality and involved in the sphere of women and sport. Our next conference is June 12–15, 2014 in Helsinki, so mark your calendars.

While the status of women, especially in positions of power, is an important topic for consideration in many respects, for the purpose of today's forum, I'd like to stress that the need for discussion on the topic of women in positions of power within the context of sport is especially pronounced. While more women than ever before are participating in sport at the local, national and international levels, when it comes to decision-making and leadership in sport bodies and institutions, women are still significantly under-represented (Right to Play, Final Report Chapter 4: Sport and Gender and Empowering Girls and Women).

One reason for this persistent gap between participation and leadership is that gender inequality has been allowed to linger in sport far longer than in many other fields. As Sue Tibballs, Chief Executive of the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation expressed, "In terms of gender equality, sport has simply been left behind." It is hard to imagine that the notion that a woman is just as capable as a man would inspire in this day and age much serious debate within most professions. However, when considering women's professional competence as coaches, referees, officials or commentators the case is remarkably different (John, 2007).

The overall gap that exists between male and female participation levels in sports management has necessitated the establishment of women and sport committees, the drafting of global and regional sport policies and declarations on women and sport, and last but not least the monitoring of the effectiveness of these instruments. Examples which are listed here:

- “ Brighton Declaration (1994)
- “ Beijing platform for action (1995)
- “ IPC Women in Sport Committee (2003)
- “ IOC Women and Sport Commission (2004)
- “ “Women, Leadership and the Olympic Movement” (2004)
- “ The International Year of Sport and Physical Education (UN 2005)
- “ “Women 2000 and Beyond: Women, gender equality and sport” (UN 2007)
- “ EU Commission's “White Paper on Sport” and accompanying “Action Plan” (2007)

I'd like to go in further detail regarding the Brighton Declaration, which was the major outcome of the first World Conference Women and Sport in 1994. One of main impetuses for the declaration was evidence that despite growing participation of women in sport, increased representation of women in decision-making and leadership roles within sport has not followed.

The declaration identifies the lack of gender equality in the sphere of sport and provides reasoning for the increased inclusion of women. With respect to leadership it states the following: “Women are significantly under-represented in management, coaching and officiating, particularly at the higher levels. Without women leaders, decision makers and role models within sport, equal opportunities for women and girls will not be achieved.”

The declaration sets forth a set of ten principles. Here I'd like to focus our attention to the section on Leadership in Sport as it relates specifically to our focus today.

When considering the impact of the Brighton Declaration as a leadership tool, the degree to which it has been endorsed by institutions and organisations is telling. One of the aims of IWG is to keep an ongoing record of Brighton Declaration Signatories and this information is available from our webpage. There are over 250 signatories and we welcome additional groups to follow in their footsteps. 2014 will mark twenty years since the issuing of the Brighton Declaration, and over the next four years the IWG Secretariat is undertaking a monitoring evaluation of the impact of the declaration on the international women and sports movement. The completion of this evaluation will coincide with our 2014 IWG World Conference on Women and Sport – yet another reason to come to Helsinki.

If we would like to quantitatively gauge the participation of women in sports management, one means would be to consider the percentage of women serving on decision-making sport committees. Other methods, including qualitative ones, can be applied to provide a more in depth, human portrait of the situation. At any rate, tabulating the proportion of women in decision-making positions within sports committees internationally is a lofty undertaking. Unfortunately, I might also add, there is a real lack of comparable statistics regarding women in these positions and there is the need for further research on the topic from local, national and international perspectives. This is one reason why IWG at its 2010 Sydney Conference unveiled the Sydney Scoreboard, a monitoring tool that aims to track the number of women serving on sports boards internationally.

Some research regarding women in sports management on the national level has taken place. For example, with regard to Germany, research has shown the degree to which women have been excluded from leadership positions at the national and regional level in the decision-making committees of German Sports Federations. From this data, it was shown that women's participation in executive committees varies from 0 to 20 percent (Pfister & Radtke 2005). As of 2006, twenty-five of the fifty-five national sports federations had no women in leadership positions, and women led only two state sport federations and only two national sports federations (Doll-Tepper, 2006). Across the board there was noted a large disparity between the percentage of female participants in sports organisations versus the percentage of women in leadership positions – as status increases, the participation of women diminishes (Pfister & Ratke, 2005).

According to EU data (2005), the situation is similar across Europe. In the Netherlands, for example, roughly 12 percent of national board members are women and women comprise about 30 percent the boards of local sports clubs. In Czech Republic, only 8 percent of the members of the executive committees in the different Czech sport federations are women. Participation at the regional level is reportedly higher; though not exact statistics are available, it is estimated to be about 30 per cent. As of 2006 in the United Kingdom, women comprised only 26 percent of the members on sports boards and committees, and likewise, for example, the Women's Committee of the UK Football Association has only two female members on its board of twelve members (UK FA, 2010).

Beyond Europe, for example, in Israel women comprised fewer than 10 percent of administrators in sports organisations in 2002 (Israel Women's Network). And in Australia, 83 women (21 percent) currently serve as board directors of Australian national sports organisations (Sydney Scoreboard, pending publication). Sadly, the situation is similar the world over.

If we look to the international level, the IOC has set specific targets for the percentage of women in decision-making positions, particularly in executive and legislative bodies. NOCs, IFs, National Federations and other sporting bodies that belong to the Olympic Movement were instructed to aim to achieve at least 20 percent in their structures by 2005. Data from the IOC regarding the success of this target in its July 2009 "Women in the Olympic Movement" factsheet are presented in the accompanying PowerPoint presentation. The good news is that the number of women in these bodies has increased; the bad news is that they are still significantly under-represented.

In the case of National Olympic Committees, as of November 15, 2009, a majority has reached the 2000 target of 10 percent but have failed to reach the 2005 target of 20 percent. In the case of International Federations of Olympic sports and Recognised International Federations only half have reached the 2000 target and the majority have failed to reach the 2005 target. In the case of all three types of entities, there still existed executive bodies without a single woman member.

According to the "Women, Leadership and the Olympic Movement" (2004) report, from the point of view of the women included the study; the benefits of these targets included the following: increased influence within their NOCs, increased participation of women in leadership training, more frequent appointments of women to other committees, greater profile of women in sport over all. Female Executive Committee members were also considered to be among the most active by NOC Secretaries-General (Ibid.).

Targets have their limitations, and with respect to the IOC, research on the topic has revealed that these targets affect only one part of the sports movement hierarchy, have not been followed by policy initiatives, and have been misinterpreted as the finish line with respect to gender equality in sports leadership.

Higher levels of participation by women in sports management would benefit the sports movement and society at large. For one, an increase in the number of women at the top makes for a more diverse and well-balanced management team (Hannan 2006). Research has also shown that groups made up of even proportions of men and women are the most innovative and that group performance goes up with increased female participation (Ward L. and J. Carvel 2007; *NPR* 30.9.2010). Including women at the decision-making level also sets a powerful precedent to the community at large and other organisations – sending the dual message that women can make valuable contributions to the sports movement and that women can be effective leaders (Right to Play, Final Report Chapter 4: Sport and Gender and Empowering Girls and Women). These women also serve as important role models and mentors to other women and girls.

Mentoring has a very important role to play within the process of bridging women's participation in sport and their leadership potential. The Women's International Leadership Development (WILD) is one such mentoring initiative and is managed by the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO) with European Women and Sport (EWS) as a supporting partner. As the Chair of European Women and Sport (EWS), Amanda Bennett, describes, WILD increases the confidence and the competence of women leaders so that they can enter sport organisations at the national level, becoming more skilled, better able and more confident, allowing them to then, in turn, add value to these organisations.

Another valuable resource is one of the legacies of the 2002 IWG World Conference on Women and Sport in Montreal, the Montreal Tool Kit. This tool kit contains a wealth of resources for increasing the participation and leadership opportunities for girls and women in sport and physical activity. Due to our limited time, I can only refer to the four titles (A,B,C,D) of the package of tools that are recommended. For today's discussion, sections B and C provide especially useful, practical tools for organisational change and individual development. You can find more information about the Montreal Took Kit from our IWG website.

The IPC Women in Sport Leadership Toolkit (2010), released just last month, represents another practical resource for those looking to empower women and support women's leadership potential in sports organisations, especially when it comes to the paralympic sports movement.

Some of the suggested activities for individuals include: get involved in the national, regional or international Women in Sport Committee(s); identify and mentor women in your sport/country to promote for high level competition, coaching and leadership positions; lead by example, get more people involved at the leadership level; and conduct clinics or workshops focusing on training females to develop coaching or officiating skills and techniques.

The suggested activities for organisations to increase the quantity and quality of women in leadership positions include the following: promote positive images of women in leadership positions; inform and educate women about the types of opportunities that exist for leadership; provide opportunities for women to attend leadership trainings and workshops; adopt a Diversity Policy or Code of Ethics; and connect with international networks. This last suggestion, "connect with international networks", is worth expanding upon. International networks, along with their national and regional counterparts, create the space for the needed forums for discussion, debate, exchange of experiences and practices and advocacy. It is important that these forums should be multidisciplinary, transparent and inclusive.

We live in an age of increasing social networking and virtual interaction. During the periods between conferences, networks should serve as platforms for ongoing interaction, dialogue and information exchange. For example, during the next four years leading up to our 2014 World Conference in Helsinki, the IWG Secretariat is working to make the IWG webpage, our quarterly *Catalyst* newsletter and social networking tools (you can find us on both Facebook and Twitter, by the way) as interactive as possible in the hope that IWG can serve as a

platform for interaction, exchange, support and advocacy in the years leading up to our 2014 World Conference on Women and Sport.

Besides the already mentioned need for further research, monitoring is also highly important. We need to continually evaluate what has been done and understand the impacts of these “advances”, asking, for example, what policies are then enacted and what are their impacts on women’s leadership in the sports movement? We must establish what qualifies as success and continually reconsider if this definition is in line with our current expectations and aims. While today’s goal might be seeing more women in leadership positions in sports bodies at the local, national and international level, studies have, however, shown that despite men and women having the same qualifications and similar positions in professional life, women do not have the same status as men on the executive boards of sport organisations. Therefore, the finish line is not an increased or even equal presence in high-ranking positions but the pursuit of overall gender equality in sport management and the sports movement at large.

Thank you for your attention, and I welcome your questions and comments.

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