

Good Governance and Ethical Practices in Indian Sports Federations: A Comparative Analysis

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Mismanagement and issues with legitimacy within national and international sports organizations have made 'Governance' an increasingly important subject in the world of sports. Some of the Indian sports federations have had to justify their actions to interested parties due to similar difficulties. With an emphasis on social responsibility, democratic processes, internal accountability, and transparency, this study aims to assess and compare the governance practices of four significant Indian sports federations, namely the All-India Football Federation, the Athletic Federation of India, the Badminton Association of India, and the Boxing Federation of India. The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the level of good governance and ethical practices within these federations using a structured benchmarking approach. The main research question guiding this study is: "To what extent do Indian National Sports Federations comply with key governance principles such as transparency, democracy, accountability, and societal responsibility?" This study utilized the National Sports Governance Observer (NSGO) as a tool for benchmarking and measuring governance principles in the National Sports Federations. The findings show that although the federations largely adhere to the 46 principles of good governance, there are still areas where they fall short, particularly in democracy and accountability. The governance procedures of these federations are consistent with those observed in previous international studies, indicating both their strengths and weaknesses in the global sports environment.

Keyword: Good Governance, Good Governance in Indian Sport Federations, Principles of Good Governance, India

Introduction

The concept of governance has been defined in various ways. Practitioners in the international arena use it to represent an intricate combination of systems and procedures, while some writers consider it synonymous with the government (Chatzigianni 2018). Governance has become increasingly important in the world of sports, especially in recent years, due to problems with mismanagement and legitimacy crises affecting both national and international sports organizations (Chappelet and Mrkonjic 2013; Geeraert 2021; Bayle 2022). As public attention grows and the global sports landscape changes, stakeholders are calling for more accountability, transparency, and ethical decision-making from sports federations (De Kinderen et al. 2023; García and Meier 2022). This change has made good

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governance a major topic in sports policy conversations, leading organizations to review their methods and conform to internationally accepted standards (Deloitte 2022; Geeraert and Alm 2024). Additionally, several cultural, social, and corporate sectors in different countries are either in the process of adopting or have already implemented policies designed to enhance good governance within their national sports federations (Geeraert 2018; Bekkers and Hoekman 2023). Many scholars, governments, sports organizations, and federations have developed criteria and guidelines for good governance to provide direction and motivation for the incorporation of specific governance elements and preserve the integrity of sports (Parnell et al. 2022; Dowling et al. 2022). Therefore, good governance has become a pervasive concept in the realm of sports, with very few federations disputing its importance and relevance (Geeraert 2018; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2022).

The term "sports governance" encompasses the exercise of control and decision-making within sports organizations, focusing on factors such as influence, authority, and the processes by which decisions are made. Effective governance in sports is critical as it shapes the direction and integrity of sports at multiple levels, including local, state, national, and international stages (Hums and MacLean 2017; Henry and Lee 2004; Üstün and Bayraktar 2023).

At the local level, sports governance can involve the management of community sports clubs, particularly in how they engage with underserved youth populations. The governance structures of these clubs determine how resources are allocated, the inclusivity of their programs, and the ways they foster talent development within the community (Ferkins et al. 2005; Anagnostopoulos et al. 2022). These decisions directly impact the accessibility of sports and the opportunities available to young athletes.

State-level governance often involves the relationships between board members and their influence on state athletic associations. The dynamics within these boards can significantly affect how policies are implemented, how funding is distributed, and which sports are prioritized (Shilbury et al. 2013; De Bosscher et al. 2023). Effective governance at this level ensures that the interests of all stakeholders, including athletes, coaches, and local communities, are adequately represented and addressed.

On a national scale, sports governance is reflected in the strategies employed by national sports governing bodies, such as focusing on elite success versus promoting mass participation. The balance between these two objectives often requires careful consideration of resource allocation, talent identification, and the long-term sustainability of sports programs (Houlihan and Green 2009; Henry 2011; Grix and Brannagan 2023). National governance decisions can also influence international competitiveness, as seen in how countries prioritize funding for Olympic athletes or grassroots sports initiatives.

At the international level, sports governance involves complex issues such as corruption and the integrity of the processes used to award major competitions like the Olympics. The exercise of power in these scenarios can have far-reaching consequences, affecting not only the host cities and countries but also the global perception of fairness and transparency in sports (Jennings 2011; Chappelet and Mrkonjic 2013; Darnell and Black, 2022). Corruption scandals and the manipulation

of bidding processes can undermine the credibility of international sports organizations and erode trust among stakeholders.

Sports have always been an integral part of India's identity, not just as a source of entertainment but as a unifying force that brings people together across cultures and communities. From traditional games like kabaddi to globally popular sports like cricket, hockey, football, and badminton, the passion for sports runs deep. Beyond the cultural aspect, sports have also become a massive industry, generating employment, boosting tourism, and contributing significantly to the economy (Chakraborty 2022). However, with this growing importance comes greater responsibility, especially for National Sports Federations (NSFs), which are tasked with managing and promoting sports while ensuring fair play, transparency, and accountability. Over the years, concerns over mismanagement, financial irregularities, and internal conflicts within NSFs have led to increasing scrutiny and calls for reform (Sharma 2023). In response, efforts have been made to introduce governance frameworks that prioritize integrity, athlete welfare, and long-term sports development (Chandrashekar and Gupta 2023). While challenges remain, the push for better governance is crucial to ensuring that Indian sports continue to grow both nationally and on the global stage.

The Government of India has made notable efforts to enhance sports administration in the country, recognizing the necessity to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in National Sports Federations (NSFs). There has been a concern over mismanagement of funds, undemocratic functioning, and several unethical practices in many federations over the years, prompting demands for reforms (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports 2023; Goel 2024). To end this, the government has attempted to create a more organized and accountable governance system for sports administration such as;

The National Sports Development Bill, 2013

The National Sports Development Bill, of 2013 was a legislative proposal aimed at reforming sports governance in India. Spearheaded by Justice (Retd) Mukul Mudgal, the chairman of the Working Group for Drafting of the Bill, the revised draft was submitted to the Sports Minister on July 10, 2013. The Bill sought to enhance transparency, accountability, structured governance, and athlete welfare in Indian sports. It outlined responsibilities for the National Olympic Committee (NOC), including adherence to the Olympic Charter, organizing the National Games, forming an Athletes Commission, and functioning as a public authority under the Right to Information Act (RTI). It also proposed the establishment of an Appellate Sports Tribunal to handle disputes, an Ethics Commission to enforce a Code of Ethics, and a Sports Election Commission to oversee fair elections within sports organizations.

The Bill introduced age and tenure restrictions for office bearers, capping their retirement age at 70 and limiting terms to two consecutive stints, with the President allowing a maximum of three four-year terms. It mandated that at least 25% of the executive body should consist of athlete representatives and ensuring a minimum of 10% gender representation in sports bodies. To receive government funding, federations had to obtain accreditation by meeting governance and ethical standards,

with applications to be decided within 90 days. Additionally, only accredited sports bodies adhering to RTI provisions were permitted to use "India" or "Indian" in their titles or represent the country internationally.

Despite its comprehensive framework, the Bill faced strong opposition, particularly from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), which raised concerns over autonomy and constitutional validity. As a result, the Bill was not enacted into law.

Sports Governance Bill 2024 (Draft);

One of the most important steps in this regard is the Sports Governance Bill 2024 (Draft), which seeks to establish standardized guidelines for the operation of NSFs. The bill stresses good governance principles such as transparency in decision-making, democratic elections, independent audits, and financial accountability. It aims to make federations function in a way that focuses on athletes' welfare, ethical behavior, and fair play. The bill also targets compliance with international best practices, bringing Indian sports administration in line with global standards bodies like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). By imposing stricter controls on administrative procedures, the bill seeks to stem problems like nepotism, corruption, and conflict of interest that have bedeviled Indian sports administration. If executed successfully, the Sports Governance Bill would initiate long-awaited structural reforms and establish a more professional and player-centric sporting culture. Nevertheless, the extent of success depends on how firmly the stakeholders such as federations, policy-makers, and sports administrators adopt and enforce these measures as well as stick to the fundamentals of good governance of sports in India.

Implementing good governance standards within Indian sports federations is a huge responsibility. Therefore, the goal of this study is to assess the governance systems of some of the biggest sports federations of India, which are, The All-India Football Federation (AIFF), the Athletic Federation of India (AFI), the Badminton Association of India (BAI), and Boxing Federation of India (BFI), by paying particular attention to social responsibility, democratic procedures, internal accountability, and Transparency. Utilizing the National Sports Governance Observer (NSGO) as the main instrument, this study will assess the governance principles of 46 major good governance parameters and offer valuable insights into measures that can augment the legitimacy and efficacy of sports federations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research paper is to examine and evaluate the extent to which good governance principles and ethical practices are implemented within Indian Sports Federations. By conducting a comparative analysis of selected federations, the study aims to identify patterns, strengths, and shortcomings in governance structures, decision-making processes, transparency mechanisms, accountability frameworks, and ethical conduct. The research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on

sports governance in India by offering insights that can inform policy reforms, promote integrity, and enhance the credibility and performance of sports organizations.

Dimension included in the Study

The governance of sports federations is assessed through multiple lenses to ensure a comprehensive understanding of their practices and challenges. In this study, four critical dimensions: Transparency, Democratic Process, Internal Accountability, and Societal Responsibility form the core framework for evaluating the selected Indian National Sports Federations. These dimensions were chosen based on the National Sports Governance Observer (NSGO) framework, which emphasizes essential elements for promoting integrity, trust, and ethical management in sports organizations.

Transparency

Transparency in sports governance refers to the clarity and openness of decision-making processes, financial management, and policy implementation within sports organizations. A transparent system allows stakeholders, including athletes, coaches, sponsors, and the general public, to oversee the internal workings of sports federations, thereby fostering trust and reducing the risk of corruption and mismanagement. Transparency is achieved through mechanisms such as public disclosure of financial reports, open communication channels, and regular audits.

For instance, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has implemented several transparency measures, including publishing financial reports and adhering to strict anti-corruption policies (Geeraert, 2018). In India, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has faced criticism for its lack of transparency, particularly in financial dealings and decision-making processes. Reforms proposed by the Lodha Committee in 2016 sought to improve transparency by recommending financial audits and the establishment of an ombudsman to oversee grievances (Lodha Committee Report, 2016). Despite these efforts, many national and regional sports bodies in India still struggle with transparency, making it a critical area for governance improvement.

Democratic Processes

The democratic process in sports governance ensures that elections are free, fair, and competitive while also allowing stakeholders, including athletes, coaches, and administrators, to have a voice in decision-making. Democratic governance requires that leaders are elected through legitimate and transparent elections rather than through political appointments or personal influence.

The European Commission's White Paper on Sport (2007) emphasizes that democratic structures in sports organizations contribute to the integrity and sustainability of sports institutions. In India, however, many sports federations are criticized for being controlled by a few influential individuals, often politicians or business figures, rather than elected representatives from the sports community.

(Choudhary 2020). The All-India Football Federation (AIFF) underwent a governance overhaul after FIFA temporarily suspended it in 2022 due to third-party interference, highlighting the importance of democratic processes in maintaining international standards of governance (FIFA 2022).

Internal Accountability

Internal accountability refers to the mechanisms within sports federations that ensure officials adhere to governance norms, rules, and ethical standards. This includes the separation of powers, ethical guidelines, performance evaluations, and mechanisms for addressing conflicts of interest and unethical behavior.

A well-structured governance system prevents the concentration of power and ensures that decision-making is collective rather than dominated by a single individual or group. The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), now known as World Athletics, faced severe governance failures when its former president, Lamine Diack, was convicted of corruption in 2020 for covering up doping violations in exchange for bribes (Gibson 2020). This case highlights the dangers of weak internal accountability.

In the Indian context, several state and national sports federations lack clear accountability mechanisms. Sports governance is often influenced by political affiliations and bureaucratic control, limiting the ability of federations to function independently and efficiently. The absence of strict internal accountability has led to issues such as delayed fund disbursement, favoritism in athlete selection, and mismanagement of resources.

Societal Responsibility

Beyond managing internal operations, sports federations have a broader responsibility to contribute positively to society. This includes promoting inclusivity, ensuring equal opportunities for all athletes regardless of gender or socio-economic background, supporting grassroots development programs, and engaging in social causes.

Sports organizations have the power to influence societal values and bring about social change. For example, FIFA's "Football for Schools" initiative aims to integrate football into educational curricula worldwide, promoting physical activity and life skills among children (FIFA 2021). Similarly, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has taken steps to promote women's participation in sports, but challenges remain, particularly in Northeast India, where financial and cultural barriers often limit women's involvement in sports.

Study Organisation

This study examines the governance practices of four major Indian National Sports Federations: the Athletic Federation of India (AFI), All India Football Federation (AIFF), Badminton Association of India (BAI), and Boxing Federation of India (BFI). These federations were selected based on their significance and relevance to the study's aim of evaluating transparency, democracy, accountability, and societal responsibility using the NSGO framework.

All India Football Federation (AIFF)

The All-India Football Federation (AIFF) is the governing body for football in India, responsible for organizing national and international competitions, including the Indian Super League (ISL), I-League, and Santosh Trophy. Established in 1937, AIFF is affiliated with FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). Over the years, AIFF has worked towards the development of football through grassroots initiatives, youth leagues, and coaching programs. It also oversees the operations of the Indian national football teams, both men's and women's, and works on improving infrastructure and talent scouting across the country.

Athletics Federation of India (AFI)

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) is the apex body for athletics in India, managing track and field events, road running, and cross-country races. Established in 1946, AFI is affiliated with World Athletics and the Asian Athletics Association. It plays a crucial role in talent identification, athlete training, and conducting national championships like the National Open Athletics Championships. AFI also oversees the participation of Indian athletes in international events such as the Olympics, Asian Games, and World Championships, while working to improve coaching standards and sports science facilities in the country.

Badminton Association of India (BAI)

The Badminton Association of India (BAI) governs the sport of badminton in the country and is responsible for organizing major domestic tournaments like the India Open and Senior National Badminton Championships. Founded in 1934, BAI is affiliated with the Badminton World Federation (BWF) and the Badminton Asia Confederation. It has played a key role in India's rise in international badminton, supporting the careers of players like P.V. Sindhu, Saina Nehwal, and Kidambi Srikanth. The federation focuses on grassroots development, coaching programs, and providing financial and logistical support to emerging shuttlers.

Boxing Federation of India (BFI)

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) is the national governing body for boxing, responsible for selecting and training Indian boxers for international competitions

such as the Olympics, Asian Games, and Commonwealth Games. Established in 2016, BFI is affiliated with the International Boxing Association (IBA) and the Asian Boxing Confederation. It organizes national tournaments and works to promote boxing at the grassroots level. Indian boxing has seen significant growth under BFI's guidance, with boxers like Mary Kom, Amit Panghal, and Lovlina Borgohain achieving international success.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design, based on the theoretical framework of good governance in sports organizations. The aim of the study is to assess and compare the governance practices of four major Indian sports federations: AFI, AIFF, BAI, and BFI by focusing on four key pillars: accountability, democracy, transparency, and social responsibility.

Data Collection

Secondary data was utilized as the primary source for this research. The data was obtained from publicly available reports, official documents, and previous studies related to the governance practices of the selected federations. These sources provided comprehensive information on the governance structures, policies, and operational procedures of the federations.

Methods Applied

A comparative quantitative approach was employed to evaluate the governance practices. The National Sports Governance Observer (NSGO) framework was used to assess each federation's performance according to four governance pillars: accountability, democracy, transparency, and social responsibility. The federations were scored based on NSGO criteria, allowing for standardized comparison. The data was aggregated, categorized, and statistically analyzed to identify patterns, differences, and gaps in governance practices.

By relying exclusively on measurable indicators, this approach ensures objectivity and consistency in evaluating governance structures, while also providing a solid empirical foundation for drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations.

Dimension	Main Principles
Transparency (15 Principles)	- Public disclosure of governance structure, financial statements, and sponsorship details. - Transparent selection criteria for athletes and procurement policies. - Availability of ethics code, gender policies, and disciplinary actions.
Democratic Processes (11 Principles)	- Fair and regular elections with term limits for office bearers. - Athlete and stakeholder representation in governance. - Independent dispute resolution and appeals system.
Financial Integrity & Accountability (9 Principles)	- Independent financial audits and budget disclosures. - Clear policies on external funding, sponsorships, and expenses. - Anti-corruption and bribery prevention mechanisms.
Integrity & Ethical Standards (11 Principles)	- Implementation of ethics codes and conflict of interest policies. - Whistleblower protection and anti-doping regulations. - Harassment prevention and safeguarding policies for athletes.

The survey uses the following scoring scales to measure the results for each indicator.

Not relevant	Not fulfilled	Weak	Moderate	Good	Very good
	0-19 %	20-39 %	40-59 %	60-79 %	80-100 %

Result and Discussion

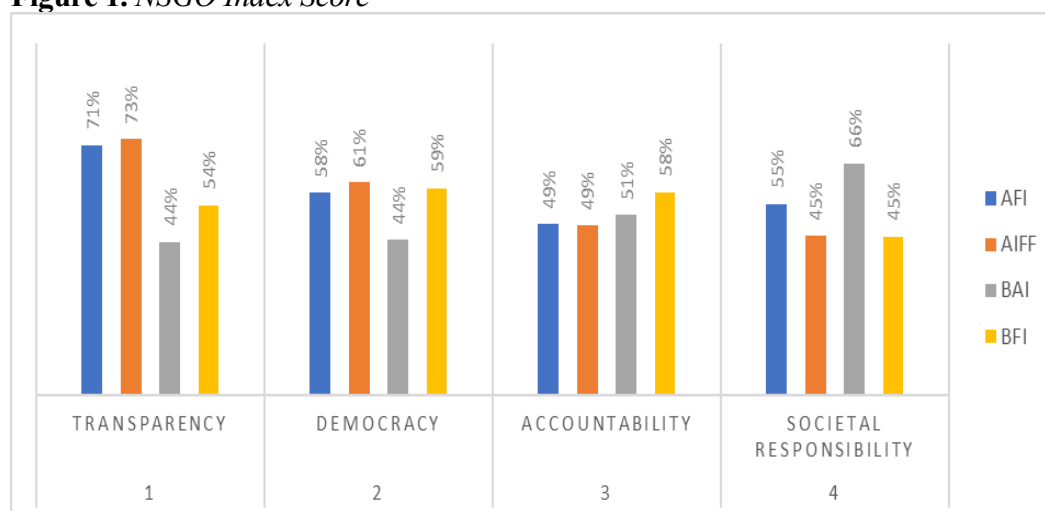
The governance of National Sports Federations (NSFs) in India has been a subject of scrutiny due to recurring administrative lapses, financial mismanagement, and lack of transparency. The National Sports Governance Observer (NSGO) framework, with its four dimensions and 46 principles, provides a structured approach to evaluating governance in sports organizations. Based on these principles, the following table presents the key governance areas assessed in Indian NSFs, focusing on transparency, democratic processes, financial integrity, and ethical standards. The results highlight the strengths and weaknesses in governance practices, identifying areas requiring urgent reforms.

Table 1. NSGO Federation wise Index Score

SL.NO	NSF	DIMENSION (%)				TOTAL
		Transparency	Democracy	Accountability	Societal responsibility	
1	AFI	71	58	49	55	58
2	AIFF	73	61	49	90	68
3	BAI	44	44	51	66	51
4	BFI	54	59	58	45	54

The scores presented in Table 1 offer a comparative profile of governance standards across four major National Sports Federations (NSFs) in India. Transparency scores generally trend higher than other dimensions, indicating a growing emphasis on information disclosure. However, accountability remains a persistent area of weakness across all federations, highlighting gaps in oversight and responsibility mechanisms. Democracy scores suggest partial implementation of fair and participatory governance processes, while societal responsibility varies significantly among federations, reflecting different levels of engagement with broader community and ethical commitments.

To further illustrate these differences and provide a visual interpretation of the data, Figure 1 presents the NSGO Index Scores for each federation across the four governance dimensions.

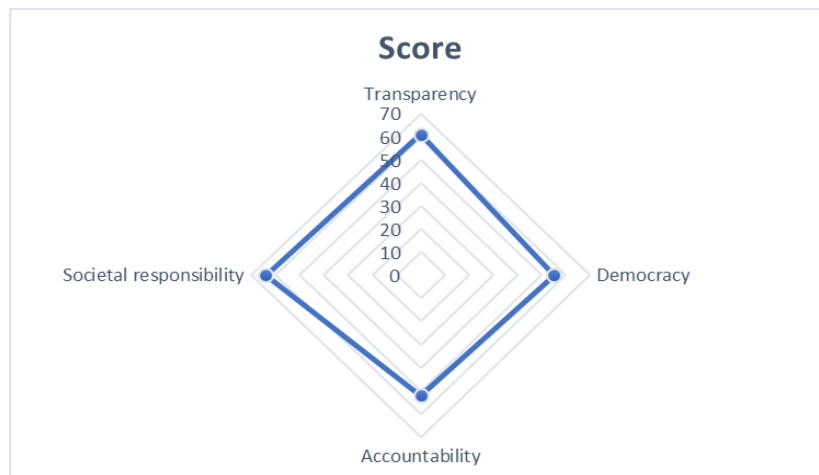
Figure 1. NSGO Index Score

The table and figure above exemplify the assessment of good governance in National Sports Federations (NSFs) based on four key criteria which is Transparency, Democracy, Accountability and Social Responsibility. A percentage score is assigned to each criterion to indicate its level of governance compliance. Hence, the following section elaborates on the outcomes.

1. **Athletic Federation of India (AFI):** The study reveals that the Athletic Federation of India (AFI) demonstrates a high level of transparency, scoring 71%, indicating openness in sharing information with stakeholders. Similar results were observed by Geeraert (2018), who found that federations such as World Athletics showed relatively high transparency compared to other international bodies. However, AFI's democratic governance score stands at a modest 58%, suggesting room for improvement, echoing findings by Piątkowska (2014), who reported that national sports federations in Poland also faced challenges in ensuring democratic participation in governance structures. AFI's accountability rate of 49% indicates partial compliance, aligning with studies highlighting weak accountability mechanisms in emerging sports governance systems (Geeraert, 2018; Piątkowska, 2014).
2. **All India Football Federation (AIFF):** Compared to other NSFs, the AIFF demonstrates a high level of operational transparency (73%). This result mirrors the findings of Bayle and Madella (2002), who emphasized that federations with professionalized management structures tend to perform better in transparency assessments. AIFF's democratic processes score at 61%, similar to the findings of Alm (2013), who studied Swedish sports federations and observed moderate but improvable levels of internal democracy. The AIFF's 90% social responsibility score is notably high, aligning with observations by Dowling, Leopkey, and Smith (2018) on how football federations increasingly prioritize community engagement initiatives worldwide.
3. **Badminton Association of India (BAI):** The Badminton Association of India (BAI) achieved an overall governance score of 51%. The low transparency score of 44% is consistent with Parent and Hoyer's (2018) findings, which show that federations in developing nations often struggle with proactive information dissemination. Similarly, BAI's democracy score of 44% reflects issues of limited participatory governance, as identified by O'Boyle and Hassan (2014) in their study of Middle Eastern sports federations. However, BAI's relatively stronger societal responsibility score (66%) aligns with the broader movement towards corporate social responsibility in sports organizations, as reported by Anagnostopoulos and Shilbury (2013).
4. **Boxing Federation of India (BFI):** The Boxing Federation of India achieved moderate scores across the board, with 54% transparency and 59% democracy. These scores resemble the findings of Henry and Lee (2004), who noted that many national federations exhibit moderate transparency and participatory governance but lack full compliance with international best practices. BFI's accountability score (58%) also corresponds with Chappelet and Mrkonjic's (2013) research, which found that while accountability structures exist within many federations, they are often underdeveloped or inconsistently applied. The relatively low social responsibility score (47%) is comparable to findings from Relvas et al. (2018), who indicated that federations often prioritize elite sport development over societal engagement, particularly in less commercialized sports like boxing.

Table 2. *Overall NSGO Score*

Dimension	Score	Label	Total Indicator	Indicator Used	Overall Score
Transparency	61	Good	168	168	55%
Democracy	55	Moderate	220	207	
Accountability	52	Moderate	356	339	
Societal responsibility	64	Moderate	352	335	
					Moderate



The table and figure above illustrate various performance dimensions, each assigned a score and a corresponding label. The overall Transparency score for NSFs is 61%, categorized as Good. Democracy received a 55% score, classified as Moderate. Similarly, Accountability scored 52%, also marked as Moderate. While Societal Responsibility achieved the highest score of 64%, which still falls within the Moderate category. With an average governance score of 55%, the assessment of the four Indian National Sports Federations (AFI, AIFF, BAI, and BFI) reveals an overall moderate performance. This means that while some federations perform relatively well in certain areas, there is still much space for improvement. The strength of democratic processes and transparency exhibited by AFI and AIFF suggests that these federations are more transparent in their operations and decision-making. BAI demonstrates a strong commitment to civic responsibility by actively participating in various causes. Nonetheless, no organization has been able to achieve outstanding results in accountability, indicating a need for more robust supervision and responsibility procedures. Additionally, only one of the NSFs has attained the greatest levels of governance ("very good" level) in Societal responsibility, even though scores on each dimension vary. This emphasizes how crucial it is to put reforms into place, especially in the areas of accountability, transparency, and social engagement, to improve their governance and carry out their larger roles in the growth of sports and community involvement.

Recommendation

Effective sports governance plays a crucial role in ensuring that National Sports Federations (NSFs) operate with integrity, efficiency, and fairness. By improving governance structures, federations can enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, promoting a stronger and more sustainable sports ecosystem. The following recommendations outline key areas that NSF should focus on to strengthen their governance practices.

Strengthening Democratic Processes

Democracy within sports governance ensures that all stakeholders have a voice in decision-making processes. NSFs must implement transparent and fair election systems to avoid conflicts of interest and external influences. The establishment of independent election commissions can help monitor and regulate elections, ensuring that only qualified individuals are selected for leadership roles. Additionally, federations should include athlete and coach representation in key decision-making bodies. Athletes and coaches possess first-hand knowledge of the challenges and needs within their respective sports, making their participation essential for informed governance. Furthermore, regular stakeholder consultations through open forums or advisory committees can enhance inclusivity by allowing input from athletes, coaches, and affiliated clubs, ultimately leading to better decision-making and policy implementation.

Enhancing Transparency in Operations

Transparency is essential for building trust among athletes, sponsors, and the public. NSFs should publicly disclose financial and operational reports, including budgets, revenue sources, and expenditures. By making such information accessible, federations can demonstrate their commitment to accountability and reduce the risk of financial mismanagement. Additionally, governance documents, selection criteria, and key decisions should be openly shared on official websites to promote clarity in decision-making. Digital platforms, including social media, should be leveraged to communicate important updates and engage with stakeholders effectively. Transparency in selection processes, team formation, and funding distribution ensures fairness and prevents favoritism, strengthening the credibility of the federation.

Strengthening Internal Accountability Measures

Accountability is a critical component of governance, ensuring that officials adhere to ethical and professional standards. NSFs should establish independent ethics and compliance committees to oversee governance issues, prevent conflicts of interest, and address any irregularities. These committees should be empowered to investigate and take action against misconduct within the organization. Additionally, a robust whistleblower policy must be implemented to protect individuals who report unethical practices. Encouraging whistleblowing without fear of retaliation can help

expose corruption and governance failures. Regular external audits and performance reviews should be conducted to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of governance structures. An independent third-party review of financial statements and operational procedures can further strengthen accountability, ensuring that resources are used appropriately.

Expanding Societal Responsibility Initiatives

Sports organizations have a significant social impact beyond competition. NSFs should actively engage in grassroots sports development programs to ensure widespread participation, especially in rural and underprivileged areas. Many children lack access to quality sports training, and federations should collaborate with local authorities to bridge this gap. Gender inclusivity is another critical aspect of societal responsibility. NSFs should implement policies that create equal opportunities for women in sports administration, coaching, and athlete development. Initiatives such as scholarships, leadership training, and mentorship programs can empower women to take on influential roles in sports. Additionally, integrating sports into the educational system can foster a culture of physical activity from a young age. By partnering with schools and universities, NSFs can encourage structured sports programs that contribute to overall youth development.

Strengthening Talent Development and Athlete Welfare

For a sports ecosystem to thrive, it is essential to invest in athlete development and welfare. Federations should allocate adequate resources to coaching programs, ensuring that athletes receive high-quality training. Regular coaching certification programs can enhance the capabilities of trainers and mentors, ultimately benefiting athlete performance. Moreover, NSFs must prioritize athlete welfare by providing access to proper medical and psychological support. Many athletes face mental health challenges, injuries, and career uncertainties, making it essential to offer structured support systems, including counseling, financial aid, and career transition planning. Additionally, investments in modern training facilities and infrastructure will provide athletes with the best possible environment to hone their skills and compete at international standards.

Implementing Data-Driven Decision-Making

Leveraging technology and data analytics can significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of sports governance. NSFs should integrate data-driven decision-making processes to improve talent scouting, performance analysis, and resource allocation. By collecting and analyzing data on athlete performance, injury trends, and competition outcomes, federations can make informed decisions that benefit athletes and the overall sports ecosystem. Additionally, digital platforms can be utilized to streamline administrative processes, ensuring better record-keeping, athlete tracking, and transparent communication with stakeholders. Investing in advanced sports technology, such as video analysis tools and wearable performance

trackers, can further aid in identifying promising talent and refining training programs. Emphasizing a data-driven approach will enable NSFs to adopt a more strategic, evidence-based governance model that enhances competitiveness on the global stage.

Conclusion

Sports governance is a critical factor in the efficiency, credibility, and overall impact of National Sports Federations (NSFs) as it directly influences athlete development, institutional integrity, and public trust. This research identifies the necessity for greater transparency, more robust democratic involvement, and more stringent accountability measures within all federations based on four core pillars: transparency, democracy, accountability, and social responsibility. The analysis, using a quantitative comparative approach and the NSGO evaluation tool, reveals that overall governance performance across these federations is moderate, with an average score of 55%.

Among the federations, the All-India Football Federation (AIFF) recorded the highest overall score (68%), particularly excelling in transparency and social responsibility. The Athletic Federation of India (AFI) also showed relatively strong performance in transparency but exhibited gaps in accountability and democratic processes. The Badminton Association of India (BAI) had the lowest overall score (51%), with weak performance in transparency and democracy, but showed comparatively better engagement in societal responsibilities. The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) maintained a balanced performance across all dimensions, though none of its scores reached high levels.

When aggregated, the overall dimension scores across federations were:

- **Transparency:** 61% (Good)
- **Democracy:** 55% (Moderate)
- **Accountability:** 52% (Moderate)
- **Social Responsibility:** 64% (Moderate)

These results indicate that while some federations have made progress, especially in terms of transparency and community engagement, no federation has achieved strong outcomes across all dimensions. The consistent weakness in accountability suggests a systemic need for stronger oversight and clearer responsibility mechanisms. Furthermore, the moderate performance in democracy highlights the importance of enhancing internal decision-making processes and stakeholder participation.

In conclusion, the findings underline the urgent need for targeted and strategic reforms in governance practices across Indian sports federations, particularly in the areas of accountability, democratic functioning, and transparency. The consistently low performance in accountability reveals systemic gaps in oversight, clarity of roles, and enforcement mechanisms, while moderate scores in democratic processes highlight the need for more inclusive, transparent, and participatory decision-making structures. Although some federations perform relatively well in transparency and

social responsibility, no federation demonstrates consistently high standards across all governance dimensions. Strengthening these core areas is not only essential for improving internal organizational effectiveness but also for reinforcing the credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical standing of sports governance in India. As sports continue to play a vital role in shaping national identity, youth engagement, and international representation, robust governance is fundamental to ensuring integrity, fairness, and long-term sustainability in the administration of Indian sport.

Research Limitations

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, which may not reflect the most current governance practices or internal reforms. The analysis is confined to only four federations, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to all Indian sports federations.

Future Directions

Future research could incorporate primary data, such as surveys or interviews with federation officials and stakeholders, to offer a more nuanced understanding of governance practices. Additionally, expanding the study to include a broader range of federations across different sports could provide more comprehensive insights into the state of governance in Indian sports.

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