

INCREASING WOMEN ADVANCEMENT IN SPORTS LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA THROUGH MENTORING

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Abstract

The 1975 United Nations international women's year and the 1995 Beijing conference set the stage for equality between women and men in all sphere of life. In Nigeria, women are marginally underrepresented in leadership positions in sports sector despite the 1975 United Nations and 1995 Beijing conference declaration on removal or elimination of all forms of discrimination and obstacles to women active and equal participation in all spheres of life. Full participation of women in key decision making in sports has not been achieved. Very few women in Nigeria serve as directors, coaches, officials, members of Sport boards and at other strategic positions in Sports sector. This paucity of women in leadership position within sports sector are probably attributed to several socio-cultural roles of women like parenting (procreation and care of the children and family), religion, male dominance, and women's poor perception of their abilities. Mentoring strategy need to be adopted as catalyst to encourage women to vigorously pursue careers that will afford them the opportunity of assuming leadership roles in the field of sports. This paper examined factors that negatively influence women leadership and factors that positively influence them. The paper highlighted on mentoring as a tool for facilitating and improving on women leadership development. The paper discussed types of mentoring and reasons for adopting mentoring as a possible solution to dearth of women in sports leadership roles. Some suggested roles of mentors and skills needed for effective mentoring were enumerated. Some recommendations were made to help develop future women leaders in sports.

Keyword: women, advancement, sports leadership, mentoring

Introduction

Sport in contemporary society has established itself as a force to be reckoned with in the world, in realization of its potentialities for gaining national prestige and international recognition. It also strives to dictate the pace for social, political, economic, scientific and technological advancement of a nation over others or superiority of a tribe over others. Over past few decades women have wriggled out of exclusion to inclusion and have made waves in active sports participation. The past few decades have witnessed a growing interest of women in the field of sports. The increasing involvement of women in sports demands that women be equitably represented in the leadership positions in line with the 1975 United Nations international women's year and Beijing platform of action 1995 declaration which was a turning point for rights of women and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women or obstacles to women's advancement in all spheres of life (United Nations Women, 1979 & Purcel, 2000).

Sports in the context of this paper refer to all organized physical activities engaged in outdoors or indoors in which skillful individuals or teams compete under specific rules and regulations for victory over their opponents. Nigerian women like Mary Onyeali-Omagbemi, Falilat Ogunkoya Ocheke, Mary Tombiri, Fatima Yusuf, Bose Kafo, Chioma Ajunwa, Lovelyn Obiji, Oludamola Osayomi, Charity Opara, and Cynthia Uwak among others have participated in sports at various levels. These women have brought significant successes and glory to Nigeria globally, yet despite these successes, women are marginalized at the decision making level in sports. In Nigeria only very few women are directors, coaches or officials or in senior leadership roles like membership of boards at any level in the sport sector. Adeyanju (2005) asserted that the day to day experiences of women at work show that leadership is still dominated by male norms and values. Women are therefore severely under-represented in leadership roles in sports. She stressed that the fewer number of women in leadership positions shows that the decisions of women have only a limited impact on the sports industry as a whole. This under representation of women is attributed to marginalization and discrimination against women. Lucuanan (1995) emphasized that discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages in life and continues unabated throughout life, with sex selection and son

preference of parents. Adeyanju (2005) expressed that pscho-social and cultural factors exert pressure on women through the immediate family, community, religion, media, peer groups and other sources of socialization to reinforce expected behaviour and teaching of gender roles. In line with this Ofili (2010) expressed that in Nigeria women are docile, dutiful, obedient, and considered inferior to men. The traditional mother indoctrinates the daughter accordingly, thus women place their traditional roles topmost in their priorities. Adeyanju stressed further that religion and religious belief are major constraint which dampen women aspiration in sports leadership positions. She pointed out that many religions define women's roles as that of living in complete obedience and subjection to the whims and caprices of their husbands and men in general.

In Nigeria, there are no legal barriers that prevent women from exploring their talent in the field of sports but there are traditional and social sanctions against women which are severe enough to stop women from venturing too far into areas regarded as the prerogative reserve of men (Okonkwo, 1993). Following from above, the under representation of women in sports leadership may probably not be due to lack of interest or not being capable but perhaps due to their upbringing which was highly influenced by long history of direct and indirect systematic form of discrimination and stereotyping as well as other problems. Licuanan (1995) stressed that the girl child today is the woman of tomorrow, that the knowledge, skills and experiences of the girl child are vital for full attainment of the goals of equality.

Increase according to Hornby (2015) is to make greater in quantity or number. In the context of this paper increase means to become larger in number. Advancement as stressed by Merriam (2016) is the process of promoting a course or plan. Hornby emphasized that it is development or improvement of something. In this paper advancement means promoting a person in rank, status or upgrading in position. Increasing advancement of women in sports leadership therefore implies promoting or offering women opportunity of career development in sports leadership.

Leadership according to Wehrich and Koontz (2005) is the act or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement of group goals. Robbins and Coulter (2007) conceptualized leadership as the process of influencing a group towards the achievement of a goal. From their perspective, one need to have managerial authority to be able to influence a group toward attainment of a goal and such authority is normally given by superiors. Leadership as defined by Northouse (2007) is a process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. In this paper, leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Leadership according to Jago (1982) is learned and good leaders develop through a never ending process of self-study, education, training and experience. Jago stressed that the skills and knowledge of the leader can be influenced by beliefs, values, ethics and character which make the person unique. That the cornerstones of leadership include the ability to inspire trust and convey competence. Wehrich and Koontz highlighted important characteristics of an ideal leader as a good listener, a problem solver, a visionary, a role model who has clarity of purpose, charisma, enthusiasm, passion, integrity and credibility. He or she is patience, organized, consistent, trustworthy, persuasive, knowledgeable, a team builder, shows appreciation, attitude of service, leads by example, understands followers, empowers other people and adapts to change. Following from above, leadership therefore is not created by job title but what a person is (qualities), what the person have learned (skills) and what the person can do (action).

Sports provide a training ground to cultivate and practice leadership skills by presenting challenges that help a person develop leadership abilities. Sports coaches and astute sports leaders can facilitate women leadership desires by inviting female participants to sports opportunities that make other people successful as a way of developing enthusiasm in them. An increase in number of females participating in sports definitely will lead to an increase in women aspiration to sports leadership. Robbins and Coulter (2007) emphasized that leading by example and committing 100 percent to an effort in ensuring success by maintaining focus can help the younger females rise up to their potentials in sports leadership. They stressed that anybody who helps someone advance towards his or her highest potential is seen as a leader. Leaders in the field of sports therefore can identify ways for females to succeed in sports leadership whether the person engages in an individual or a team sport, through interaction with other people who have achieved success. For instance, one can mentor those new to a sport, share equipment, point to a safer or more efficient way of doing a move or executing a

play or pass a ball to allow another person to score. At the end of the event or competition the initiator may not shine as the most valuable player”, but will shine as a leader because the person has conveyed competence while extending helping hand of a trustworthy person.

There is no scientific evidence that women are bereft of leadership qualities as enunciated by Blog (2011). It all depends on opportunity and exposure. William (1993) observed only two female directors of sports in the whole of south-east zone. Personal observation of the writer identified two females state acting directors of sports in Imo State and Anambra State in south-east zone of Nigeria and both could not function beyond two years because of antagonism from male colleagues. These women were never confirmed substantive directors by their State Governors simply because they are females. This confirms Adeyanju (2005) emphasis that politics and power use in sports constitute a significant constraint to women advancement in the field of sports. Adeyanju stressed that men constitute a large presence in the field of sports and they wield a great deal of power over the development and management of female sports. She pointed out that the input by women in the formulation of policies for the development of female sports is insignificant and this is also true in the allocation and use of resources to implement policies and programmes designed for the development of women sports.

Besides male dominance, few females who are opportune to climb the leadership position always face challenges posed by family roles. In line with this, Obasi (1992) pointed out that even where women manage to get to top leadership positions in sports, they meet great difficulties especially as the demand of the position will conflict with traditional roles in their families. Some of these challenges have far reaching influence on female pursuit and aspiration to leadership positions in sports. For women to surmount these challenges, mentoring strategy need to be adopted to serve as catalyst to encourage women to vigorously pursue careers that will afford them the opportunity of assuming leadership roles in the field of sports.

Factors Negatively Influencing Women Leadership

The paucity of women in sports leadership roles and the limited opportunities or role models to encourage future female leaders according to Lynn (2011) are caused by the following factors.

1. **Challenges confronting women:** Lynn expressed three notable challenges that women face when engaging in leadership roles in sports as family conflict, cost, time constraints and a lack of network and mentors. That women still bear the lion's share responsibilities of child rearing thus family conflict is seen as a key issue of consideration when women consider taking on a leadership role. That women often feel guilty of abandoning their responsibilities at home while they pursue leadership goals, Obasi (1992) expressed the same view that even where women manage to get to top leadership positions in sports, they meet great difficulties especially as the demand of the position will conflict with traditional roles in their families. From the foregoing having capabilities to cope with family roles and leadership roles are major determining factors when women want to pursue leadership roles. This is probably why many women in leadership roles have either older children requiring less attention or have not children at all.

Due to family commitments women generally have less available time to commit to extraneous roles. The cost of time away from home often associated with sport including extensive travel and week-end work, combined with the financial cost of petrol, airfares and accommodation to attend events or training courses, means that women are less likely to pursue leadership roles due to high costs.

2. **Inadequate network:** There are few established formal women network that can mentor or help develop women. This means that women in leadership roles often work in isolation. There is also a perceived lack of female mentors or role models for women already in leadership to model their leadership.
3. **Women style of leadership:** Many women in the Sports sector do not see themselves as leaders. Yet if you look at their abilities and accomplishment often with very limited resources, they are obviously leading. Despite the barriers that face many women, there are

still a large number of women taking on leadership roles. According to Brown (2011) most women see themselves as members of a team that work cooperatively with others. They prefer to describe themselves as facilitators or team leaders rather than as leaders. Brown stressed that a transformational style of leadership approach is needed where women can inspire and transform the thinking and behavior of others to create change.

4. **Poor recognition:** Many women do not consider themselves as leaders because they lack specific recognition from within their community or organization. They are often taken for granted due to their more collaborative style of operating, coupled with societal view which relegates women to the background as weaker sex and this probably results in lack of public acknowledgement for their desire and aspiration to leadership position. Lynn (2011) emphasizing on the need to offer women opportunities in sports leadership stated that one of the key characteristics of women in sports is their resilience to overcome barriers in their path. That a few women in leadership are committed to making a difference and regard honesty and trustworthiness as key aspects of their leadership style.

Factors that positively influence women's leadership ability

Researchers have highlighted universal factors that make a real difference in encouraging young women to reach success. It is mostly hard work and perseverance that bring women to the top of their fields. These are the women who never settle for the mediocre, are perpetually restless and striving and who know that real success can only be found by crossing time zone, cultures and cruising through stop signs. Marcus (2011) emphasized that most successful women in the world have grabbed every opportunity afforded to them, and have created opportunities for themselves, harnessing their fears and doubts as rocket fuel instead of rocks in their pockets. Marcus highlighted some of the characteristics of successful people, as motivation, natural curiosity, courage, self-management, enjoying being stretched and rising to a challenge, personal will and fortitude, drive and flexibility may be innate, but there is no doubt that these characteristic also need to be nurtured and encouraged.

The factors that contribute to the development of the next generation of women leaders can be gleaned from their experiences as follows.

1. **Basic skills:** There are certain basic skills that everyone should be given access to beyond standard education. These include public speaking, writing, negotiation, and effective networking. Some people might have natural skills in some of these areas, but if not, seeking out courses and opportunities to practice these worthwhile skills they will not manifest or develop. Also some employers will give women access to courses in these areas through career development opportunities, at least in their mid-career but more valuable and impactful if started earlier. If these are not forthcoming from work, they are worth seeking for independently. We need to ensure that young women have access to building these skills that help them move to success early in their career (Marcus, 2011).
2. **International exposure:** Travel brings on invaluable exposure to other cultures and ways of thinking. It is essential for advancement in any profession. This is very relevant especially as the world becomes increasingly globally interdependent and actions that occur in a place which seem far away, inevitably affect, directly or indirectly every one.

According to Marcus (2011) International experiences challenge thinking in a healthy way. Also skills acquired from living and working in unfamiliar settings are valuable and the opportunity enable one to see how other cultures deal with issues. It forces people to think and challenges them to find and apply solution beyond their comfort zones.

1. **Role models:** Role model according Merton (2016) is any person whose behavior is emulated by others. In this paper role mole is a person looked onto by others as an example to be imitated. Role models are extraordinarily fruitful way to inspire women to aspire to great heights in sports. Price-Mitchell (2010) asserted that a role model should possess qualities

like compassion fearlessness, listening skill and most of all ability to inspire others. Marcus (2011) emphasized two kinds of role models which includes:

- a. Those who help us to think about the kind of people we want to be through examples of kindness, fortitude, courage, bravery, integrity, and other admirable characteristics displayed.
 - b. Role models who help us to aspire to roles that we have not thought of before or encountered personally like political leaders and heads of multinational corporations.
2. **Recognition:** Women need to personally recognize and acknowledge themselves as leaders in order to lead effectively. They need to gain a sense of awareness of their leadership abilities and identify what they want to achieve.
- Sports organizations must also recognize the leadership potentials of women and encourage or support them to take on additional responsibilities or educational opportunities. Clubs and organizations need to recognize women ability, show that they value and appreciate the contributions of the women. This builds confidence in the women and both motivate and encourage them to take more risks. Brown (2011)
3. **Goal setting:** in order to achieve leadership or career ambitions, a woman will need to develop a plan and set a number of goals. This exercise will enable her to identify potential leadership opportunities that she can tap or highlight deficiencies in skills or knowledge that she needs to address in order to improve her leadership capabilities. The goal setting needs to take into consideration, the time-poor status of many women as expressed by Lynn (2011). With so many compelling demands, it is vital that a realistic time frame is set and that there is a balance between work, personal, family and sporting commitments.
4. **Networks:** Access to network and peer support is another area that women can benefit enormously from. Many women tend to work in isolation and lack access to other females in leadership roles. By having the opportunity to share experiences through a network they realize that their situation is not unique. Women can use this type of forum to act as a sounding board to help themselves solve Problems and provide strategic support (Brown, 2011).
5. **Start Early:** we need to start early to make sure girls know they are capable of reaching great heights. It starts in the early years of their schooling with words of encouragement and aspiration. Creating an environment where women can succeed is vital. Public policy that encourages women to be successful, workplaces that offer reward for encouragement and advancing women education systems that educate women to the highest standard are just some of the things that are needed to help create an environment in which women are prepared and encouraged to rise to leadership position. The hallmarks of most senior women and men in leadership positions is being driven and always seeking new experience (Macus, 2011). We must all play a part in helping women succeed as stakeholders to contribute in the country's economy.
6. **Mentoring:** Having a mentor is a very important facet of a women's development as a leader. A mentor can provide guidance or advice when the woman is faced with challenging decisions or barriers. Someone with experience and knowledge of the sporting industry is ideal and often a supportive male can be an excellent adviser. At different points in a person's career, different types of mentoring are needed. The needs for mentoring change from student years. To the first years out of school, to mid-career and to the most senior career position (Eric, 2011).

During student years, meeting and personal exposure to senior figures in the field all help to inspire young women to aspire to something greater. It helps to be able to see what success looks like in any given field, and to get a sense of accessibility. Seeing the fruits of hard work and hearing the stories of career paths can help inspire young women. Access to as many people as possible, in many fields can help to open up the vast horizons of opportunity

that are available. It can spark the imagination of young females about where their paths can take them. University alumnae networks are useful and alumnae returning to speak openly about their experiences can make a real difference by making success accessible. (Marcus, 2011).

The early period in a person's career is a time of exploration, of further learning and discovering of career options, preferences and interest. During this period, it is most useful to have exposure to a wide array of people in a chosen profession and perhaps create a group of people or mentors where young women can seek advice and ideas and begin to champion their ideas on their true career path. These mentors can be professionals in sports who are admired.

During mid-career it is helpful to have networks as a means of meeting people in the field and getting to know like-minded and like-skilled people. It can be very close and familiar individuals who can counsel them directly and specifically about options, direction and concrete ways of achieving goals. This can be a very effective means of creating clear paths for career development. (Marcus, 2011).

Career success is the year when women are at the top of their careers. It is a time of consolidation, solidification and fulfillment. It is a time when women can stretch themselves or get greater depth in areas of interest. At this stage mentoring one another via peer relationship and networks can be very effective and satisfying. Having a close group of trusted friends and peers who can be frank, generous and have passion for each other's success can help bring the goals that seem distant more achievable (Brown, 2011).

What is mentoring?

Mentoring according to Bozeman and Feeney (2007) is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social, capital and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development. Mentoring entails informal communication usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less the (mentee or protégé). Asha (2011) conceptualized mentoring as a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else. Human Resource (2011) defined mentoring as a system of semi-structured guidance whereby one person shares knowledge, skills and experience to assist others to progress in their own lives and careers.

A mentor according to Reh (2011) is an individual usually older, always more experienced who help and guides another individual's development without personal gain. A mentor is a guide who can help mentee to develop solutions to career issues. A mentor can be one's boss, father, older sibling or someone that has enough experience to help one succeed in life or in whatever endeavour in mind. A mentor in this paper is someone who inspires, encourages, supports or lends helping hand in another person's early career in the field of sports to ensure success.

Why the need for mentoring?

Mentoring has been shown to have a positive effect on one's career. Kram (1986) discovered that mentoring facilitates the socialization of new hires into the organisation, reduce turnover, minimize mid-career adjustments, enhance transfer of knowledge and values, and facilitates the adjustment of retirement. Research study by Roche (1979) found that of the 63.5% of the 1,250 respondents who had a mentor were on the average better paid, reached their positions faster, were more satisfied with their work and careers than their non-mentor counter-parts. Mentoring thus, has a positive effect on career. Successful women in sports who have attained firm and are stars in their various areas need to establish mentoring relationships to foster ambition of younger women to climb the career ladder.

Types of Mentoring:

- 1 **Informal mentoring:** is a spontaneous, causal relationship where a senior person takes a junior person and provides long term guidance and counsel. Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992)

found that mentees in informal relationship received more career-related advice and had better career outcome.

- 2 **Formal or Structured Mentoring:** Here people can proactively support the development of one another. Mentors are generally matched with mentees to support specific goals such as: leadership development, diversity or retention (Desimone, Werner & Harris, 2002).

Some suggested roles of a mentor as specified by Desimone, Werner and Harris (2000) are:

- 1 **Coaching:** to assist in professional development, carrying out specific tasks or activities.
- 2 **Facilitation:** to create opportunities for the mentee (or learner) to practice their new skills.
- 3 **Counselling:** to help the mentee (learner) to explore the consequences of potential decisions.
- 4 **Networking:** to refer the mentee (learner) to others when the mentor's experience is insufficient.

Skills needed for effective mentoring: Desimone, Werner and Harris highlighted skills needed for mentoring as follows:

- 1 **Building relationship:** relationship that provides backbone to a good mentoring relationship is built on trust and mutual co-operation.
- 2 **Positive and empowering attitudes:** wanting the mentee to succeed requires a positive spirit.
- 3 **Building Confidences:** praise and acknowledge actions and achievements of people doing things right.
- 4 **Effective feedbacks:** giving and receiving feedback skill that can make or break the relationship.
- 5 **Confidentiality:** agreement needs to be established to confidentiality within the relationship. Establishing these agreements from the start will help establish a relationship of trust and facilitates the mentoring process for both parties.

Summary and Conclusion

It is obvious that in Nigeria women are under-represented in sports leadership. Several factors have been identified as potent motivators of women's pursuit in leadership position. Due to a dearth of women in leadership, fewer role models are available and less people are willing to mentor emerging female leaders, hence the number of mentors available does not match demand.

To counteract male dominance in senior leadership in sports, women need to recognize themselves as potential leaders and aspire to attain leadership position in sports'. There is urgent need to develop the future generation of female leaders in sports through mentoring. Women only networking groups need to be developed. A few senior women at the top can provide feedback for junior women working their way to top. There should be plenty of ambition in women. Every woman needs to keep a finger on the pulse of what is happening around the world and be proactive in instituting these changes to live up to the highest standards from around the world.

Recommendations

1. Organisations can assist women in developing quality leadership program for strategic career plan to help more women progress through ranks with sports.
2. Sports organisations should implement a mentoring program and provide mentors from across other organisations for up- coming women leaders in sports.
3. There should be periodic recognition awards of women achievements in sports as source of motivation to younger females to aspire to leadership position in sports.
4. Clubs may need to identify and approach a group of women who have leadership qualities and strategically support and position them on a path to higher coaching, officiating and administrative roles in the field of sports.
5. Organisations can assist women to develop long term plan that formalizes where women want to go in the field of sports and identify path ways and areas of skill development through coaching, officiating, accreditation, training or mentoring.

6. Government, non-governmental organizations and private sectors should take strategic action to ensure equal treatment in sharing of power and decision process at all levels in sports sector.

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