

Governance in National Sports Governing Bodies of Nepal: A Study of Current Status

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to evaluate the level of governance structures and practices in national sports governing bodies of Nepal and identify areas for improvement in promoting good governance and minimizing the misconducts.

Methods: The study employs a case study methodology and concentrates on Nepal's seven National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGB's) i.e. Taekwondo, Tennis, Athletics, Swimming, Handball, Fencing, and All Nepal Football Association. The researcher adopted document analysis as a study methodology, carried out desktop research to gather data, and examined the websites, statutes, financial audit reports, multi annual policy plans, internal rules, and any other relevant documents that were available for the federations. For this study, governance status was evaluated using data from the National Sports Governance Observer (NSGO) survey tool. The NSGO indicators are a comprehensive set of 274 indicators for good governance in sports federations that operate at the national or sub-national level, with four dimensions: Transparency, Democratic Process, Internal Accountability and Control, and Societal Responsibility.

Results: With an overall NSGO index of 24%, the study revealed that Nepal's National Sports Governing Bodies' performance on good governance was poor. The NSGO score for the Democratic Process dimension is the highest (33%), while the NSGO index for internal accountability and societal responsibility is the lowest (19%). With 35% transparency, the tennis association is reasonably transparent.

Conclusion: According to the study's findings, Nepal's National Sports Governing Bodies have serious governance issues in all respects, and improving good governance and the long-term sustainability of sports growth is crucial for them going forward.

Keywords: Accountability, Democratic Process, Good Governance, Societal Responsibility, Transparency

1 Introduction

Over recent decades, the emergence of questionable governance practices within sports organizations has sparked significant scrutiny regarding their governance structures (Sterling *et al.*, 2022). Notable corruption scandals involving governing bodies have highlighted the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of the sports organizational landscape (McLeod, Adams, *et al.*, 2020; Dowling *et al.*, 2018). This situation has led to an increased focus on strategic and organizational performance within sports governance (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007). Consequently, sports organizations, particularly federations, face mounting pressure to implement effective governance practices that not only curb dishonest behaviors but also foster sporting success (Chappelet, 2018). Key principles frequently discussed in the literature include accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, sound financial management, anti-corruption measures, and transparency, among others (Geeraert *et al.*, 2013).

The world of sports has undergone a significant shift in recent years, with a growing emphasis on good governance. High-profile cases of corruption and mismanagement have tarnished the reputation of sporting bodies, highlighting the need for robust governance frameworks (Mrkonjic, 2016). Recognizing its importance, most National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs) acknowledge good governance as a core principle. However, translating this acknowledgment into tangible practices poses a multifaceted challenge. Defining good governance remains elusive, measuring its effectiveness presents a complex task, and implementing it within organizational structures can be challenging (Council of Europe, 2018).

The term "governance" has been characterized as vague and ambiguous, with a scoping review by Dowling *et al.* (2018) revealing seven distinct definitions of governance in sports, each differing in various aspects. This multitude of definitions may suggest that the term has become overly complex to be practically useful (Rhodes, 1996). Geeraert *et al.* (2014) noted that the definitions of governance are influenced by the specific research focus of scholars or the phenomena being examined. In categorizing the studies analyzed in their review, Dowling *et al.* (2018) utilized three overarching approaches to governance identified by Henry and Lee (2004) as organizational, systemic, and political. The governance of national sports governing bodies plays a critical role in the development and success of sports within a country. Effective governance ensures that these organizations

operate transparently, ethically, and efficiently, fostering a positive environment for athletes and promoting the overall growth of sports (Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2019).

Good governance within sporting bodies encompasses a broad spectrum of practices. Transparency, accountability, and democratic processes form the bedrock of good governance principles (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2024). Transparent organizations function with clear communication channels leading to open and accessible decision-making processes. Accountability ensures that those in positions of power are held responsible for their actions and decisions. Democratic processes promote inclusivity in decision-making, allowing diverse voices to be heard and represented.

Several studies highlight the positive impact of good governance on sports development. Research by Mrkonjic (2016) suggests that strong governance frameworks contribute to increased financial stability, improved resource allocation, and enhanced athlete performance. Additionally, good governance practices foster trust among stakeholders, including athletes, sponsors, and the public (Geeraert, 2022).

However, implementing good governance presents several challenges. Power dynamics within sports organizations can create resistance to change, particularly when it threatens the status quo of established leadership (Geeraert, 2022). Additionally, a lack of awareness and understanding of best practices in governance can hinder implementation efforts. Furthermore, limited resources available to NSGBs can pose a significant barrier, making it difficult to invest in training, infrastructure development, and technology necessary to support efficient governance practices (Mrkonjic, 2016). This study aims to assess the governance frameworks and procedures of Nepal's seven National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs) and pinpoint opportunities for enhancement. The research intends to evaluate governance along four dimensions: Transparency, Democratic Process, Internal Accountability and Control, and Societal Responsibility using the National Sports Governance Observer (NSGO) survey methodology. The goal is to provide suggestions that improve governance procedures, encourage good governance, and reduce misbehavior in Nepali sports.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This research employs a case study methodology, focusing on Nepal's seven National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs) across different categories of sports. These organizations are responsible for overseeing and promoting specific sports within the country. **Sample Selection** The study focuses on the following NSGBs, each representing a different category of sports:

- **Martial Arts:** Nepal Taekwondo Association (NTA-TKD) - Taekwondo
- **Racquet Sports:** Nepal Tennis Association (NTA) - Tennis
- **Track and Field Events:** Nepal Amateur Athletics Association (NAAA) - Athletics
- **Aquatic Sports:** Nepal Swimming Association (NSA) - Swimming
- **Team Sports (5v5):** Nepal Handball Association (NHA) - Handball
- **Combat Sports:** Nepal Fencing Association (NFA) - Fencing
- **Team Sports (11v11):** All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) - Football

2.2 Data Collection:

2.2.1 Document Analysis

The primary method of data collection was document analysis. This involved gathering data from various readily available resources, including:

- Official websites of the NSGBs
- Statutes and constitutions of the NSGBs
- Financial audit reports
- Multi-annual policy plans
- Internal rules and regulations
- Other relevant documents accessible from the respective NSGBs

2.3 Data Analysis

2.3.1 Governance Evaluation

The governance status of each NSGB was evaluated using the NSGO survey tool. Developed by “Play the Game”, the NSGO offers a comprehensive set of 274 indicators for good governance assessment, applicable to national and sub-national level sports federations (Geeraert, 2018). These indicators cover four key dimensions of good governance:

- **Transparency:** Assessment of how open the NSGBs are about their operations, decision-making processes, and financial matters.
- **Democratic Process:** Evaluation of the democratic nature of the organizations, including the election processes, member participation, and representation.
- **Internal Accountability and Control:** Examination of the internal control mechanisms, accountability structures, and compliance with internal rules and regulations.
- **Societal Responsibility:** Analysis of the NSGBs’ engagement with societal issues, community involvement, and contributions to social causes.

2.4 Tools and Techniques

The NSGO survey tool was used as the primary instrument for evaluating the governance status of the NSGBs. This tool provides a structured and comprehensive approach to assess various aspects of good governance within sports organizations.

3 Results

The study’s findings reveal a concerning picture of good governance practices within Nepal’s National Sports Governing Bodies. The overall NSGO index score for all seven NSGBs combined stood at a mere 24%, indicating a pervasive lack of good governance practices. While the NSGO score for the Democratic Process dimension was the highest at 33%, the scores for Internal Accountability and Control and Societal Responsibility remained the lowest at 19% each. The table below shows the scores for four dimensions of good governance: transparency, democracy, accountability, and social responsibility.

Table 1 evaluates various National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs) based on their Overall NSGO Index and status. All the listed NSGBs, including Fencing, Taekwondo, Tennis, Swimming, Handball, Athletics, and Football, are rated as “Weak.” Their Overall NSGO Index scores ranged from 21% to 26%, indicating a generally low performance across all these sports governing bodies. This consistent “Weak” status across the board suggests systemic issues affecting the effectiveness and performance of these organizations.

Table 1: The Overall NSGO Index of Seven different National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGB’s)

(National Sports Governing Bodies) NSGB	Overall NSGO Index	Status
Nepal Fencing Association (NFA)	24%	Weak
Nepal Taekwondo Association (NTA-TKD)	25%	Weak
Nepal Tennis Association (NTA)	25%	Weak
Nepal Swimming Association (NSA)	21%	Weak
Nepal Handball Association (NHA)	23%	Weak
Nepal Athletics Association (NAA)	26%	Weak
All Nepal Football Association (ANFA)	22%	Weak

Table 2 indicates the overall performance of various NSGBs across different dimensions. In terms of Transparency, the organizations scored an average of 23%, with the highest score being 40% for NTA and the lowest 14% for both NAA and NSA. For Democracy, the total score is higher at 33%, showing a more consistent performance across the board, with several organizations (NHA, NAA, NFA, NSA, and NTA-TKD) scoring 37%. Accountability scores are generally low, averaging 19%, with NAA achieving the highest score of 31%. Lastly, in Societal Responsibility, the overall score is also 19%, with ANFA having the highest score of 30%. These results suggest that while there are areas of relative strength, such as Democracy, there are significant weaknesses in Transparency, Accountability, and Societal Responsibility, indicating a need for improvement in these areas across most organizations.

The rating scale for assessing the fulfillment of specific criteria, likely related to governance or performance evaluation. It categorizes performance into five distinct levels. The “Not Fulfilled” category (0-19%), indicates that the criteria are barely met or not met at all. The “Weak” category (20-39%), signifies a poor level of fulfillment with substantial room for improvement. The “Moderate” category (40-59%), reflects an average level of fulfillment, indicating satisfactory performance with potential for enhancement. The “Good” category

(60-79%), denotes a strong level of fulfillment, showing commendable performance. Lastly, the "Very Good" category (80-100%), represents an excellent level of fulfillment, meeting or exceeding the set criteria. This scale helps in categorizing and visualizing the performance of entities under evaluation, such as the governance status of National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs) in your study. The evaluation of the National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs) reveals a generally weak performance across all assessed dimensions (Table 3). Transparency scores an average of 23%, indicating significant room for improvement in openness and information sharing. Democracy has a slightly higher score of 33%, yet it still falls under the weak category, suggesting deficiencies in participatory decision-making processes. Accountability and Societal Responsibility both score 19%, highlighting substantial weaknesses in oversight, ethical conduct, and social engagement. The overall NSGO Index is 24%, underscoring the need for comprehensive reforms and targeted efforts to enhance the governance and operational effectiveness of these sports organizations.

Table 2: Individual NSGO Index of seven National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGB's)

Dimensions	Organizations	Total
Transparency	NTA	40%
	NHA	22%
	NAA	14%
	NFA	23%
	NSA	14%
	ANFA	17%
	NTA-TKD	30%
	Mean	
Democracy	NTA	25%
	NHA	37%
	NAA	37%
	NFA	37%
	NSA	37%
	ANFA	25%
	NTA-TKD	37%
	Mean	
Accountability	NTA	14%
	NHA	18%
	NAA	31%
	NFA	17%
	NSA	18%
	ANFA	16%
	NTA-TKD	18%
	Mean	
Societal Responsibility	NTA	19%
	NHA	16%
	NAA	20%
	NFA	17%
	NSA	16%
	ANFA	30%
	NTA-TKD	15%
	Mean	

Table 3: Overall NSGO Index of seven National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGB's)

Dimensions	Score	Label	Total Indicators	Indicators Used
Transparency	23%	Weak	294	284
Democracy	33%	Weak	385	284
Accountability	19%	Not fulfilled	623	544
Societal Responsibility	19%	Not fulfilled	616	458
NSGO Index	24%	Weak		

4 Discussion

The evaluation of National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs) reveals significant areas for improvement across various dimensions. The lack of transparent procedures and guidelines within many NSGBs is a major concern, contributing to a culture of secrecy and hindering accountability. For instance, a study by Geeraert (2018) on good governance in international sports governing bodies found that many organizations struggle with transparency and accountability, similar to the findings in the Nepalese context. Implementing clear communication channels and making NSGBs' financial records and decision-making processes readily accessible to stakeholders are crucial first steps toward achieving greater transparency. While the NSGO score for the Democratic Process was the highest among the dimensions, it still remains below the desired level, suggesting potential shortcomings in inclusivity within decision-making structures. Additionally, Chappelet and Mrkonjic (2019) emphasize the importance of democratic processes and societal responsibility in sports governance, echoing the need for improved inclusivity and community engagement identified in this research. In comparison to other studies, such as those focusing on European sports federations, the governance issues in Nepal's NSGBs appear to be more pronounced. For example, research by García and Welford (2015) on European football governance highlighted relatively higher levels of transparency and accountability, suggesting that Nepal's NSGBs have a longer journey towards achieving good governance standards. Promoting athlete representation within NSGBs and ensuring fair and democratic election processes for leadership positions are essential steps to strengthen democratic processes. The low score in Internal Accountability and Control indicates a lack of robust mechanisms for holding leadership accountable for their actions. Implementing proper financial management procedures, establishing independent audit committees, and enforcing clear conflict of interest policies are crucial to addressing this issue (Pielke, 2016). The minimal score for Societal Responsibility suggests that NSGBs are not adequately fulfilling their obligations towards the broader community. Promoting anti-doping initiatives, fostering grassroots development programs, and implementing policies that address gender equality within sports are essential steps towards fulfilling societal responsibilities (Kihl, 2021). Insights from English football, as discussed by Constandt (2019) and Brandt (2024), also underline the critical importance of ethics management and the social dynamics within sports governance, further supporting the need for comprehensive governance reforms in Nepal's NSGBs.

The research findings highlight the critical need for significant improvements in good governance practices within Nepal's NSGBs. The low overall NSGO index score across all dimensions indicates a systemic issue requiring multifaceted solutions. Among the NSGBs, the NTA scored the highest in transparency with a score of 40%, suggesting some level of transparency in its operations. However, the remaining six NSGBs demonstrated significantly lower levels of transparency.

This research acknowledges certain limitations. The study relied solely on document analysis and the NSGO survey tool, potentially overlooking the perspectives of key stakeholders such as athletes, coaches, and administrators. Conducting in-depth interviews with these stakeholders could provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of good governance within the Nepalese sporting landscape. Additionally, focusing on seven NSGBs limits the generalizability of the findings to the entirety of Nepalese sports. Further research could explore the governance practices of a broader range of national sports governing bodies.

5 Conclusion

This research has established that Nepal's National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs) face significant challenges in implementing good governance practices. The low NSGO index scores across all dimensions highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to address these shortcomings. The findings reveal substantial deficiencies in Transparency, Democratic Processes, Internal Accountability and Control, and Societal Responsibility, indicating systemic issues that hinder the effectiveness and integrity of these federations. Addressing these governance issues is crucial for fostering a more sustainable and ethical sporting environment that empowers athletes, ensures fairness, and promotes long-term growth for Nepali sports. Improved governance practices will also enhance public trust and international credibility, positioning Nepal as a model for sports governance in the region.

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Authors' contribution

MSS: The research was conceived and designed by the author, who also handled the collection and analysis of data. Results were interpreted, and the manuscript was drafted and revised to ensure accurate representation of the findings. The final version of the manuscript was reviewed and approved, with full accountability for all

aspects of the work assumed by the author.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to this research. The study was conducted with full integrity and transparency, and no financial or personal interests have influenced the design, execution, or reporting of the research. All findings and interpretations are presented objectively and are free from any external biases or influences.

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